



Towards Our Own Image i

An Alternative Philippine Report on
Women and Media

PHILIPPINE
WOMEN'S
RESEARCH
COLLECTIVE

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Part Two

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For Esperanza Acuña Sioson

Wilhelmina S. Orozco

• 1985 •

Introduction

The cinema was introduced in this country in Manila on January 1, 1897. Six movies entitled *Espectaculo Cientifico de Periferia* were shown on a 60mm Gaumont Chronophotograph projector at the Salon Periferia on No. 12 Interior, Escolta, Manila.

This began the history of Philippine cinema. Thereafter, foreign (mostly American) filmmakers made documentaries for consumption of the American people. They dominated also the distribution of films in the Philippines since the country was under their colonial rule. The films were used as a vehicle for propaganda about what the Americans were doing in the Philippines and what things they could "improve on" with regards to the environment and lives of the Filipino people. To show the tie-up of the film industry with the American politico-economic set-up, one event shows that funds were raised in 1917 through cinema advertising "to buy one submarine for the American war effort during the First World War."

By 1919, the Americans concentrated on distributing imported films and left the production field to Filipino film producers. The types of films produced by the Filipinos incorporated nationalistic sentiments revealing aspirations for independence by the producers and filmmakers. By 1937, many film corporations churned out feature films every week. "Among these were LVN and Sampaguita studies - which are still part of the film scene today. By 1914 there were four major film production companies in the Manila area, each one owning its own studio lot, soundstage and basic production facilities, making three or four films at a time," notes film archivist Ernie de Pedro. The Second World War brought the Japanese to Philippine shores and stopped the film production except for "two feature films heavily loaded with propaganda."

The Philippines is said to be the seventh largest film producer in the world. Estimates are made that since 1950, about 160 feature films are produced every year. About 1,626,000 cinemagoers in over 1,200 theaters all over the Philippines crowd cinemahouses everyday except Good Friday when theaters are closed. "As of 1981, there (were) 38 members accounted for 110 of the total 172 features produced in 1980. The other 64 features were produced by 10 independent film producers. During the same 1981 period, the Philippines imported 306 foreign pictures."

From 1978 to 1982, an average of forty-seven per cent (47%) of the total output of the industry were action films and 83% of these were fiction. The rest of the films fell into the following categories and percentages: drama - 32.8%; and comedy - 20.2%. From 1979 to 1982, the average film industry output was 166 films. The trend of

production was increasing until year 1982 when it dropped by 3%, (due to the devaluation of the peso against the dollar.) For the first 9 months of the year 1984, (January to September) the trend was towards the action-drama type of film constituting 44.55% of the total number of 101 releases. "The seven action dramas that garnered ratings from the Film Ratings Board were: *Magtago Ka na sa Pinanggalingan Mo* (Day Films), *Tatak Magnum* (Solar Films), *Sigaw ng Katarungan* (Cine Suerte, Inc.), *Atlantis Interceptors* (Movierama International) *Uhaw sa Pag-ibig* (Regal Films), *Pasukuin si Waway* (Vanguard Films), and *Kriminal* (Seiko Films)", majority of which depict macho men, with women as their objects or decor. The next trend in production were dramas, 25 out of 101, or 24.75%, followed by comedies numbering 16 or 15.84%. "Most of the comedies rely on slapstick or toilethumor. Comedies are followed by sex as the main element numbering 9 or 8.9%. No such film managed to get an FRB rating, to be considered for rebates. Youth-oriented films, 6 out of 101 or 5.9% were produced showcasing young talents aping Michael Jackson, the black American singer and dancer, and other western punk styles.

The average budget for film production is about a million pesos as of 1983. Shooting time runs from 20 shooting days to 60 shooting days. Ninety-nine percent of produced films are for the domestic market. Foreign sales are mostly in the Filipino communities in the United States. Others are the West Indies, Germany, South America, Guam and Asia.

It is claimed that Filipinos spend 20% of their disposable income on movies. Screening time in Metro Manila moviehouses as well as key cities which start at 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. will find more men though queuing up to watch a movie. The prices, although prohibitive, costing between P8 and P10 do not deter them from entering (prices are lower in the provinces) and from watching the movie especially if it is an action or a sex-laden movie.

Exhibition taxes comprise 30% of amusement taxes per ticket throughout the country. In Metro Manila there is an additional P0.25 (U.S. \$0.03) for Flood Control Tax. However, this tax is hardly felt to benefit the people of Manila. In the provinces, there are additional fees for government projects.

At present, a board called the Film Ratings Board hands out rebates to film producers depending on the classification given to a film: a Class "A" rating entitles a film producer to a 50% rebate, a Class "B" rating, to 25%, while a Class "C" gets no rebate at all. The FRB rates the films on the basis of artistic excellence (40%), technical excellence (40%), and scope of the film (20%). Counting on a multi-sectoral repre-

sentation, the 27-man Board is composed of film critics, and other artisans. Producers however complain about the delay over the giving of rebates sometimes lasting for months.

Under this kind of set-up, in order to produce a profitable film, the filmmaker or producer has to use certain formulas, appeal to the level of understanding of the majority of Filipino audience, the paying ones at least who are mostly male, and cater to their interests for action, drama, and sex.

ALTERNATIVE CINEMA

Against the commercial film ventures in the country are the short films which find an audience in free screenings in universities and foreign cultural institutions, like the German Cultural Center. (Short films are defined as those lasting at least 6 minutes up to 60 minutes in formats of Super 8mm or 16mm. They consist of stories or documentaries about sensitive or social topics for promotions or propaganda purposes.) As early as the 1900's, American and foreign filmmakers came to the Philippines to produce short films about the country for screening to foreign audience abroad and for propaganda about their colonization of the country, in a way to justify their presence here. At present, short films are being produced by young filmmakers whose aspirations run deeper than extracting profits out of their filmic efforts. They may also aspire to be discovered by some generous film producers who would take a crack at investing on an unknown filmmaker.

The years 1975-1985 have been very difficult times for short filmmakers. The more established ones make propaganda films for the National Media Production Center, churning out pro-Marcos products and for commercial companies who want to publicize their products.

However, sometime in 1978-1981, an attempt was made to create a film group that would provide alternative films for use in conscientization seminars to raise the consciousness of the more disadvantaged sectors of Philippine society. The formats used were slides and super 8mm depicting the struggles of Filipino farmers, ethnic groups, workers and other disadvantaged sectors against government programs and politico-economic structural forces that sought to exploit and oppress them. The products of this period were heavily radical and dogmatic. Reeling under the Martial Law regime, the filmmakers produced films under adverse conditions, like using disguises as workers at nearby factories, using aliases to interview workers, hiding their cameras in small bags or inside their jackets to avoid detection by factory guards or plainclothesmen protecting the interests of the multinational companies, and many other such forms of undercover filming.

The alternative filmmakers sought to create committed films under very harsh conditions. They produced materials "low cost in budget and heavy in political themes. . . (N)ecessity dictated that they became creative under all kinds of conditions. . . (Their) screens showed women, men and children coming from the countryside, working to earn a living in the cities. They were bedraggled and hardly photogenic, in sharp contrast to the commercial movies' young, heavily made-up and mestiza type of bomba stars. (The subjects) were the real masses — not acting out a role but acting their lives. Documentary filmmaking became the vehicle in order to show those characters more nobly, although their looks were dehumanized. . . On the aural side of these cinematic products, the economic and social if not cultural alienation of the people were depicted. The texts bore heavy references to the low salaries of the people, the profits of multinational companies employing them, the repressive military machinery that sought to silence protesters of the status quo. The artists also learned to use original if not ethnic music which sang in very sad notes the longings and aspirations of the people for a decent livelihood and all the other basic needs for a humanized life."

Obvious in these film productions was the lack of particular attention paid to women's problems. Somehow, the thrust of the artistic products as to put either the imperialist companies in a bad light, to make the landlords appear as villains, or to show the connivance of the government with those alien powers in order to oppress and exploit the Filipino masses. The filmmakers got their funding from religious groups and some private foundations which were less meticulous about the uses of the funds. One documentary film which was produced in 1980 was "Coconut, Our Crop in the Philippines, Their Food Overseas," tackling coconut production by the workers from the farm to the factories owned by American multinational companies, (45 minutes, Super 8mm, color with sound). The film was shown together with "Ye Bintu, T'boli Woman Brassmaker," and "Vochong" presented at the First International Conference of Women on Film and Video in Amsterdam, Holland in 1981. The films presented the problems of the workers, the ethnic woman's art and view about a dam problem that besets her tribe, and the Kalinga people's resistance to the Chico Dam River Project which seeks to displace them to give way to electrification projects for the Northern Luzon provinces. The films presented the people's problems; there was no focus on the problems faced by women specifically. At the time that the films were made, the country was still under Martial Law. Perhaps somehow this filmmaker deemed it more necessary to focus on the general situation rather than women's plight. Criticisms were easily and heavily levelled at that time against an emphasis on the feminist viewpoint, as the men who were a part of the decision-making processes for film production considered it a "divisive" stance.

There were other materials like "Saging" (Banana) produced by a woman in slide format. The visuals depicted women in the banana industry working with men, washing and packing the products for a multinational company in Davao province in Mindanao. Again the texts treated equally the exploitation of both men and women workers in the plantation and the packing multinational factory.

"Clearly the point of view taken by alternative cinema artists (was) that of the majority of the Philippine population. The interests of the people (were) articulated and given prominence and visual and aural terms: how they viewed their life, their past, present, and future (were) laid out for the viewers who were invited to be self and socially critical as well."

Alternative filmmakers filled up the need of the masses for meaningful cinema products that could raise their political-economic consciousness and make them involve themselves in the struggle for national liberation.

Sometime in the eighties, a few films tackling the problems of Filipino women have been produced, namely: "Si Malakas at si Maganda," a video documentary program by Malou Jacob, (1982) projecting the problems of Filipino women — the workers and the prostitutes. Two others are soundslide presentations depicting the same theme but showing the organizing capabilities of women to overcome their problems. These two products were made in answer to the need for educational materials of women's organizations. The first did not present that particular aspect of the organized force of women because of censorship rules. It was made for broadcasting on television which is under the regulation of the Bureau of Movie Censors for Motion Pictures and Television (BRMPT). It is apparent here that those cinematic-video products that seek to be distributed in public are strictly controlled not only in terms of public distribution but from its very creation up to production. Thus, dealing with women's problems on screen in itself is already a creative and political issue because the political powers seek to maintain the status quo — make the public remain uncritical and subservient to the ruling regime.

The thrust of alternative filmmakers is towards an understanding of political ideas, more specifically feminist ideas. It presents the contradictions that Filipino women find themselves in — politically, economically, socially, culturally. Therefore, the documentary style of presentation lends itself more advantageous for clarification and absorption of ideas so necessary for shaping an enlightened citizenry. In contrast to this, the commercial movie industry's thrust is to make profits first, and secondarily, to put creative and significant ideas on screen. Under the latter scheme, the options for a filmmaker may be

very little — compromise: be the rule more than an assertion to create an artistic film that will showcase our national identity.

Moreover, the commercial movie industry, influenced by a Hollywood style of filmmaking, has limited possibilities for innovation in terms of form and content. The country, bombarded by imported films (for example, in 1981, while the Philippine movie industry produced 172 features, the country imported 306) cannot but be drowned under foreign value systems apart from commercial foreign film art serving the interests of foreign powers. Given such conditions, therefore, the images of women on Philippine commercial movie screens can hardly be called ideal to and appropriate for raising the awareness of Filipino women with regards to our possibilities for a fully humanized existence and development of our potentialities for a more vigorous participation in the political processes of the country. The films exhibited during the last ten years is given in the following report.

CRITIQUE

To criticize films from a feminist perspective is to start from the premise that women must control their images on screen. It means dissecting the types of characters women portray on screen and being able to analyze if such produce positive reactions on the part of the viewers, i.e., make them participate more actively in the socio-political process of the country. This perspective is important inasmuch as we view a country's projection of its cultural consciousness. Films are an important vehicle for shaping the national identity of a country. And women's portrayal on screen reflects the regard of the people, first for their own citizens who bear the generations that will carry on the life of the nation, and second, for their country, the cradle of their own human existence.

In the past decade of the history of Philippine movies, the images reflected of Filipino women on screen are not necessarily the images they have chosen for themselves. Rather they are images shaped by neo-colonizers who are chauvinist, paternalistic, and "objectivistic" of women's lives. Certain stereotypes are revealed in the portrayal of women. Women are: (1) weak, dependent, emotional; (2) villainous or shrewd with a penchant for scheming and manipulation; (3) physically handicapped or mentally retarded; (4) prostitute, adulteress, or sex starved.

It can be surmised that the films produced during the decade have been oriented towards the taste of a preponderantly male audience. The inference here is that producers and directors mainly cater to men or male viewers' perspectives since they are presumably employed and

can afford to pay their way to the moviehouse. Such a state of audience certainly fits well into the grand scheme of imperialist powers who themselves are male chauvinistic, and who prefer to keep half of the population, the women, ignorant, illiterate in order for them not to question nor to teach their children to be critical towards the prevailing social and economic order of the country.

Weak, Dependent, Emotional Character

The martyr. One image of the women brought by the Spaniards to the Philippines is that of the Blessed Virgin. The common characteristics of a film woman character of this type are (1) her being easily moved to tears; (2) helpless; (3) dependent on men for decision-making; and (4) emotional, incapable of rational judgement or even discussion. In most Filipino films shown, a woman is always behind a strong man, a supportive, caring presence. Nora Aunor as *Bona* in the film with the same title exemplifies the complete martyr depicted above. She appears as an assistant of an aspiring actor — taking care of his needs down to the minutest detail. She fetches water for him, bathes him, works to earn money to feed him inasmuch as his employment is irregular, fixes the roof of their home to prevent leaking, feeds him and his women, accompanies him to an abortionist to have his woman undergo abortion, and on top of it all, has sex with him. No other film has depicted this masochistic character in more blatant terms than this one. (*Bona*, 1980, directed by Lino Brocka).

Another martyr created on screen was Hilda Koronel's character, Ligaya Paraiso in *Maynila: Sa Mula sa Kuko ng Lewanag*, known for its poetic realism depicting the seamy, poverty-ridden world of Manila. However, the character of Ligaya, (her name translated as Happiness Paradise) repeats this stereotypic, all-suffering image of women in the Philippines. She suffers meekly in the face of sexual opportunism committed by men. She weeps in the face of difficulties. Her name in itself is reflective of the Christian qualities that the scriptwriter (the novelist Edgardo Reyes) wants to project on screen. Ligaya has to find her own salvation through a man, Julio Madiaga, who appears like a knight in shining armour seeking her in the dim and evil world of Manila in order to save her.

Brutal (1980), a film directed by a woman, Marilou Diaz Abaya, combines characteristics of masochism and criminality in one character played by Amy Austria. The film won the best director, best actress, best supporting actress, best film editing awards at the Metro Manila Film Festival in 1980. However, the bulk of the film depicts the servile relationship of the woman to her husband and her husband's friends.

The films of Fernando Poe, Jr. contain typically virginal, virtuous

characters who cannot fathom nor interpret the events happening before their own eyes. The typical woman's reaction to phenomena, as in *Panday IV* (1984), a block-buster film of the year, is to appear afraid, to flee, to hide behind the strong man and be protected from the troubles or honors. Hardly is this character capable of rearing children who can later on be called pillars of the nation. In that movie, the role of Marianne de la Riva is one silently in love with (FPJ) Panday. When confronted with the alien creatures who want to capture her, she cries, "Natatakot ako," whereas the men boldly dare the creatures to a fight with their boloes.

How much of this image is a concoction of the scriptwriter, the director, or the producer? Is this picture of the martyr woman really typical of the Filipino woman in the decade? Are Filipino women, really self-sacrificing for the men, timid and submissive regardless of the hardships they suffer? Is she a typical Filipina? Or is that image merely being reinforced or perpetuated by the media for women to imitate?

Witchness, Shrewd, Scheming, Manipulator

Evil incarnate is the woman character who possesses all the qualities of the devil. Filipino films frequently incorporate this woman who personifies evil herself which stems from the Biblical tenet saying that we was the temptress of Adam. In the film, *Pano Ba Ang Mangwap?*, Amida Siguion Reyna portrays the bad grandmother of Vilma Santos' child. She plots his kidnapping to take him with her to the United States and separates him totally from the unwed mother. In one scene, the grandmother even wears a black cape and appears like the devil with fangs and reddened eyes, or bloodshot eyes. The character of the business woman also possesses materialistic values, seemingly an indictment of the capitalist system but reducing all arguments to black and white. In *Himala*, (MMFF 1982 best picture directed by Ishmael Bernal) with Nora Aunor, the faith healer is surrounded by women who take advantage of her powers and makes money on the side by selling fake water or "curing" illnesses. In *Insiang* (1976, directed by Lino Brocka), the other of the major character, Insiang is depicted as a possessive woman who will go to extremes to cuddle and isolate her lover from the "temptations" of other women. She berates, slaps and oppresses her daughter although Insiang meekly does her duties. One thing this movie is noted for is its setting in the urban poor area of Tondo. Somewhat, the images of women are hardly worth emulating inasmuch as they are depicted in their rawest forms as capable of the most inhuman or dehumanized relationships with each others. A question is worth posing: is this view of urban poor women representative or is it merely another concoction of the producers to strike at the tills?

Haven't women been used again as objects for commercial interests rather than purely artistic? A seeming anti-women stance can be gleaned in the depiction of their characters rather than one that brings out the more humane side of their existence. The feeling evoked by this movie is more of anger than sympathy for the poor.

Woman: Physically or Mentally Handicapped or Brainless Creature

Various forms of stupidity are also attributed to women in most Philippine movies. Matutina would exemplify this character as she appears in *John and Marsha*, a popular TV program which has been adapted into films several times. The typical brainless woman is not logical and is prone to committing mistakes. The implication here is that the woman cannot be relied upon to handle responsibilities in actual life, most especially political affairs.

In *Nunal* (1976, directed by Ishmael Bernal) Ella Luansing portrays the role of a mute who has lost her mental connection with the people in a fishing community. In *Tatlo, Dakawa, Isa*, one of the segments in this trilogy, entitled, "Bukas Madlim Bukas" (Lino Brocka), Lolita Rodriguez plays the role of a woman who loses her mind over a man. Housemaids as minor characters in films (as in *Matutina*) are invariably portrayed as stupid and illiterate. They seldom outwit their masters or mistresses. They are always depicted as either very subservient or mentally ill-equipped. Moreover, housemaids are always presented as Visayan-speaking, a subtle regionalistic discrimination of the people from that part of the country, the Visayas.

Prostitute, Adulteress, Easy-Going

This character in Philippine movies is an elaboration of Mary Magdalene's qualities. She is not an entirely evil person. Rather, she is presented as a woman who turned prostitute due to poverty. She typically has no qualms at all about going to bed with men even outside of matrimony.

(Many movie columnists gloat on news or reports about stars as sex symbols, as these are very sellable to their readers. The media, especially movie magazines, thrive very well on sensationalized stories about sex stars. No less than the actresses themselves delight in performing decadent sex roles in Philippine movies. Such are their passports to wealth and popularity. When the *Bomba Queen*, as sex film was booted at Gotesco Theatre, Sari Emmanuel, a bomba star said, "I'm part of that picture, so I'm mightily proud of it. . . If the crowd only saw its ECP (Experimental Cinema of the Philippines) version, they would have applauded.")

Several Philippine movies during the decade contain those women characters who are ready to drop their clothing any minute. In *Oro*,

Plata, Mata, a Manila International Film Festival awardee in 1982 portrayed women as nymphomaniacs, especially the characters of Maya Valdez and Cherie Gil. In *Jaguar*, Amy Austria is a prostitute-turned-actress with a golden heart. She hides her lover, Philip Salvador from the authorities as she believes that he is innocent of the crime he is accused of. In *Batch '81*, Miss Estrada played by Chanda Romero teaches a neophyte how to make love while a video camera records their scene for the delectation of the masters of the fraternity. In *Hinale* (1982), a prostitute sets up a cabaret right beside the healing clinic of a faith healer.

In other words, the prostitute is a regular "ingredient" in most Philippine movies as this gives the director/producer an excuse to show women's flesh on screen and thereby attract viewers, especially the men.

women

Despite the use of stereotypic images of women on screen, various films manage to come out with characters that are or appear strong. Woman's strength per se on screen however is deceptive. A strong woman may be the strong criminal or strong murderer in the story. So for purposes of our study and in line with the objectives of this Alternative Report, our parameter for a strong woman on screen is as a feminist, conscious of the need for women to overcome their socio-political, cultural and economic problems in the end to serve our national liberation objectives.

During the past decade some strong women seem to have hugged the screen. Certain trends appear however as to the bases of their strength, namely: (1) strength based on rebellion against established conservative sexual mores or against passive sexual responsiveness of Filipino women (as in films by Laurice Guillen in *Init Sa Magdamag*, and Ishmael Bernal's *Nunal Sa Tubig*; including films by Mauro Gia Samonte with the late suicide-victim Stella Strada as star (a bomba or sex symbol); (2) strength founded on rebellion against woman's traditional role of being subordinate to society (as in Chanda Romero's character in *Soltero*, a film produced by Experimental Cinema of the Philippines; and some of Lino Brocka's films like *Insiang*, and (3) strength based on an awareness of the country's or a sector's oppression as workers, peasants, etc. (*Sr. Stella L.*, directed by Mike de Leon; *Dung-Aw* by Lino Brocka; and *Sakada* by Behn Cervantes.) The first type of women characters derive their strength from going against the Maria Clara model — pure, chaste, and virginal. The film directors, scriptwriters and producers, aware of the suppression of sexual expression in this Catholic country, exploits sex in many films.

In their scenarios, they use women as vehicles for explicating on the subject. More than using women as objects, these people also downgrade the medium itself by "reducing (sex) to a mere biological function" (as in *Virgin People*) or assigning it a self-degrading position within a spurious human situation (as in *Brown Emmanuel*). Worse, "sex is used as in implement of punishment, as in the case of *Sakme*, when Johnny Delgado subjected his wife Gina Alajar to sexual abuse to punish her."

In *Init Sa Magdamag*, Laurice Guillen shows a girl acted out by Lorna Tolentino who uses several names as she transfers from one man to the next in a seeming search for her own "femaleness." In the end, her boyfriend finding her in the arms of an aging lover, kills her. This girl (as differentiated from a woman) is not and does not appear to be a typical Filipina but one with a westernized outlook — carefree, rootless, without any family, as enigmatic as any pedestrian one meets on the street. The film hardly situates the character in a certain historical context. In it, the girl appears to be under the manipulation of the scriptwriter if not the director in terms of behavior and thinking.

In *Nunal sa Tubig*, Bernal's portrayal of Daria Ramirez's role of Chedeng, who comes to the life of a couple as the man's lover is bereft of angst or guilt which may be an uncommon reaction among Filipino women faced with the same situation. Her character is justified by way of presenting her as more involved in her work than in living with a man, which again has western tinges in its formulation. Bernal's film hardly qualifies as a Filipino film except for the presentation of local trades in the film. The outlook of the woman character has a kind of abstractness in it. She seems to flit through the events in her fishing village with great equanimity as if she is contemplating it; yet could this be the outlook of an ordinary fishing village woman in the Philippines?

Because of the current laxity in censorship rules, there is a current hey-day of blue films in the country. This trend signifies two things: (1) the film producers are running out of themes that can make moviegoers part with their money during these belt-tightening days; (2) there is deliberate attempt to use sex or women's bodies on films to make the public forget the realities around them; and (3) women's bodies serve to make the male audience (who fill up the moviehouses queues) delight in seeing women's flesh on screen, peering through the most private parts of "liberated" women freely gyrating or swooning — perhaps so unlike the conservative characters of their girlfriends or wives. *Digresyada*, *Kipot*, *Shame*, are prime examples of films that have managed to depict women whose sexual expressiveness are uninhibited during the act itself. However, the men who deal with the

women treat such expressiveness as perversity. By implication, women fully engaged in the sex act itself are sinful. Hardly is this what one might call a real feminist objective. Sex with a man or sexual authenticity means engaging in the act with a man who treats a woman as a subject and not as an object — who can share with her his total person, his strengths and weaknesses, his dreams and passions. The perversion of man-woman relationships in such films on the other hand signifies a reactionary, not a liberating view of women.

Women's assuming strong personalities within their milieu or towards other people have also been tackled by several Filipino filmmakers during the last ten years. In one film, *Soltero* (1984) (played by Chanda Romero) a woman has been portrayed as a manager of a computer co. Having been educated in the United States, she exudes the confidence of a professional, capable of teaching fumbling male assistant managers.

The assistant professes love for the woman, but he gets rejected. As if to justify his rejection though, the film director (Pio de Castro III) or the scriptwriter, reshapes the woman into a lesbian who even goes to the extent of physically making love with a female torch singer.

The implication of the story is that for a woman to gain equality with or even surpass a man, she has to lose her own interest in men, and in the long run, "become" a man herself.

The capitalist world of computer businesses may breed such kinds of women, especially since the technology is western. However, the question to be posed is: will this kind of film advance women's understanding of equality with men or will it only discourage them from knowing what women's liberation is all about? The responsibility of the filmmaker or director towards the audience cannot be discounted at this point. Given the low educational attainment of the majority of women in Philippine society, will they understand the implications of presenting such a distorted image of the career woman?

Brutal directed by Manilou Diaz Abaya projects a woman easily manipulated by men, subservient to their needs. She is subjected to all forms of torture and rape. In the end she kills the men with a seeming callousness and with a triumphant feeling that justice is hers in the final analysis. But we can ask: can women earn justice only when they use force or through their own individualistic, anarchistic acts?

Lino Brocka's films have also been bandied about as containing strong women. Analyzing their characters, though, we will notice that they are prone to be manipulators, scheming and shrewd. Hardly do these women seem capable of self-introspection. They seem to be

thrown into a series of actions instigated by men, as created by script-writers. They seem to be robots manipulated by events encompassing them. Or, because of the injustice wrought by society to them (as Amy Austria's character in *Jaguar*, who aspires to be an actress so she allows herself to be used by directors as a mistress) or by their immediate environment as the family of the community they live in (as Hilda Koronel's role in *Isiung* who schemes to make her mother kill her lover as this lover also gets drawn to the seduction of Isiung) or even by the man himself (as in Nora Aunor's portrayal of Bona, who throws a bucket of boiling water on Philip Salvador's character in the movie of the same title, *Bona*) women become criminals. Instead of confronting their problems in a logical, rational or humanistic manner, women resort to the same individual anarchic actions. The implication here is that women can only achieve justice for themselves by taking the law into their own hands.

The parameters we have set forth at the beginning of this section points towards the conclusion that the real strength of women lies in being able to offer themselves to the larger society around them — to the more disadvantaged sectors of society. In some films shown during the Decade, these qualities surfaced in women characters who respond to the needs of workers, as that of Sr. Stella L.; to the needs of the Filipino people rising against Spanish rule as in Gabriela Silang, portrayed by Armida Sigala Reyna, in *Diag-Aw*; and those of the sugarcane women planters, in *Sakala*, directed by Benjamin Cervantes. The real heroines of these films though are the letter Sr. Stella L., somehow lacks some given premises for embracing the cause of the workers.

"What is the basic premise for the (two nuns') commitment in the movie? (They) are (both) supported by a well-funded institution, the religious, which allows them to freely undertake activities in support of the workers' strike. The ex-boyfriend of Sr. Stella L. puts it in blunt terms to her: "Aren't you engaging yourself in these political activities simply because you know yourself that you can go back to the soft comforts of your Church?"

"The film concentrates on the nun and her clashes with her ex-boyfriend who seems to have pulled her to political activities and with the religious institution that prescribes the geographical mobility of its flock. As to the validity of the premises for committing herself to liberation, the film dismisses any further argumentation and instead, concentrates on the praxis of the workers — the strike and how they carry it out. In other words, the film treads on empiricistic grounds denying validation of the workers' struggle but justifying the nun's commitment to such a struggle."

In *Bangkang Papel sa Dagat na Apoy* written and directed by Edgardo

For, "the women (workers) bear the firmness and determination characteristic of workers. The film shows them taken advantage of daily by the personnel manager who would dangle promotions or rewards in exchange for sex. Reflected in their hardened faces their responses. A subordinate character in Sr. Stella L. is "the wife the labor leader (who) is commendable insofar as she desires the men's struggle to continue despite her husband's death. Not a dear herself, her role inspires workers' wives to take up the commitment of their husbands."

In the film also, "(Love) is depicted as having achieved a higher emotion when it is deepened as in the journalist as Sr. Stella L. engages self in the workers' strike. However, the emotion is thwarted because sticks to being a nun and therefore a celibate.) Now why should emotions be denied people with political involvements? Unfortunately with the Left, which has been a territory of male leaders bred male chauvinistic societies before the advent of women's liberation, emotions are not recognized as valid predispositions when engaging in politics. In fact, they are even considered effeminate propositions thus deriding those feelings which feminist movements over the world are now trying to redefine as sources of strength women. (Could this be a reason also why Sr. Stella L., turns her back on the pleas of Gigi, the unwed pregnant woman, for moral support? Did her political experience make her indifferent to such human situations in favor of the more "profound" contradictions between the workers and the capitalists? Is this manifesto saying that the ultimate goal of liberation for any individual is engagement in these "higher struggles"? Display of emotions is also considered a sign of weakness which becomes useless baggage in the actual conduct of politics or even combat.")

Another film which more subtly depicted the victimization of the country under imperialist rule is *Minsay May Isang Gamu-gamo.* "Aunor who played the major character acted out her growing disenchantment over the system of justice in the country, highly favorable to the neocolonial American powers. At the end of the film she accuses the Americans' total disregard for Filipino lives, her own mother's in particular, who was shot dead by an American soldier who mistook the boy for a pig. Her reaction is to remain callous to the plight of another American soldier who meets a motorcycle accident. The understated rebellion within her revealed the growing consciousness of the Filipino people towards the fact that the enemy is a sign neocolonial interest. No other kind of ending summarizes the nature of Philippine struggle better than in this film directed by a woman filmmaker, Lupita Aquino-Concio.

Conclusions and Recommendations

What then is the future of Filipino women's images on Philippine screens? The decade produced a wide panorama of roles open to women with more denigrating ones being overused to serve profit-oriented and opportunistic forces in movie production and the prevailing powers in the country. The Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television, regardless of its pronouncements over guarding public morals has abetted the proliferation of such films. It has become, moreover, impotent or barren several times during those instances when the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, the so-called harbinger of "novo-cinema" presented several out and out sex films at the Manila Film Center (*Isla, Boatman, etc.*) for the delectation of sex-hungry male and female audiences. (Incidentally or maybe on purpose, the director-general of ECP is the daughter of the First Lady, who is the honorary chairwoman of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women.)

Cinema has to be seen and regarded as a medium for raising not just the women's consciousness, but the Filipino masses' in general of the necessity to bring about socio-political, cultural, and economic justice in the country. It should not be a vehicle for bankrupt male attitudes and perspectives depicting women as passive, sex pots or other such dehumanized roles. (Neither the presence of women film directors in the commercial movie industry bolsters the cause of the women as they invariably fall into using the same formulas and male perspectives of viewing women with negative qualities.) Cinema has to depict themes that reflect the struggles and aspirations of the masses of Filipino women and men for a better, more decent and human existence. It has to be a purveyor of values through women characters who carry the torch of our nationalistic aspirations. Both filmmakers and audience cannot remain idle and passive to the profiteering interests of big film producers and foreign big businesses and structures. Our films have to contain the contradictions of our times for it is only then that we can say we are leaving the proper legacy to future generations of Filipino filmmakers and audiences — especially the masses who have been laboring and suffering under the iniquitous social order of the U.S. — Marcos era. Thence we can say that we have broken the pattern of neo-colonial imposition of their own images on our screen, and as women, have shaped our own real selves.

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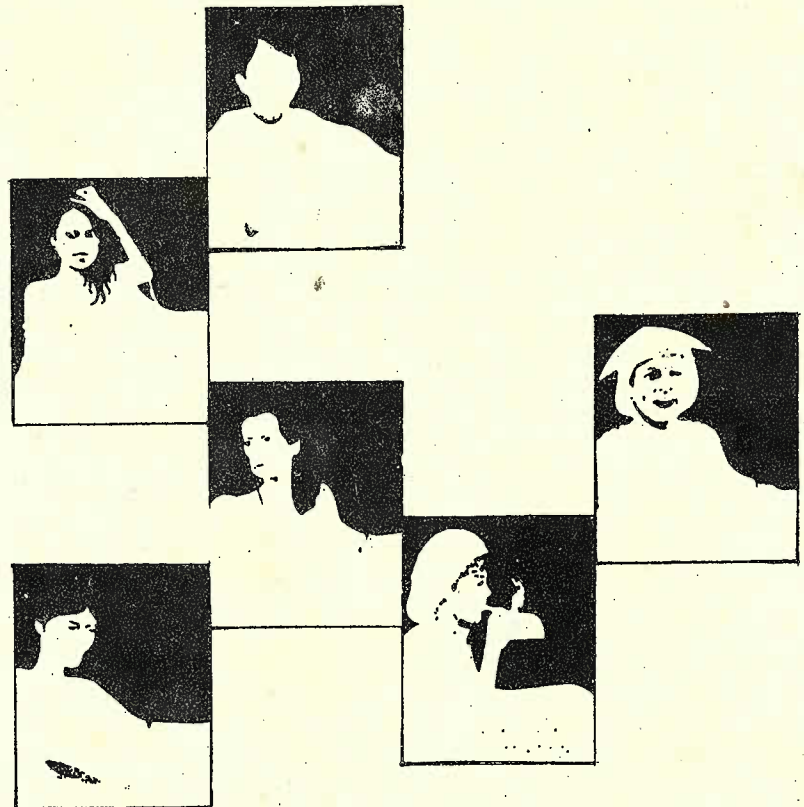
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