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NatDem Fictions: Revolutionary Experiences in Contemporary Film and Literature in the Philippines

Laurence Marvin S. Castillo
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4695-2624>

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Asia Institute, Faculty of Arts
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Dedicated to the memory of fallen freedom fighters

John Carlo Alberto,

Parts Bagani, Rjei Manalo,

Jorge Madlos and Kerima Tariman;

and radical intellectuals

Edel Garcellano, Alice and Gelacio Guillermo,

Bienvenido Lumbera and Edberto Villegas.

ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia's longest-running communist armed revolution -- the national democratic (NatDem) revolution led by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) -- is the subject of fiction films and novels produced aboveground decades after the Marcos dictatorship, a period that covers the post-Cold War global ascendancy of neoliberal capitalism, the country's democratic transition, and the crises and recovery of the NatDem movement. These works examine the complex history of, and experiences in, the political struggle, and engage with the question of the relevance of the revolution as a project of national liberation. I refer to these works as NatDem fictions -- fictional narratives that sympathetically portray the struggle, and affirm the legitimacy of its agenda for social transformation.

This thesis studies a selection of these films and novels, reflecting on their construction of revolutionary experiences. Informed by a range of theoretical resources such as Raymond Williams' notion of structures of feeling, Neferti Tadiar's conceptualisation of experience, and the writings on Party politics by scholars like Jodi Dean and J. Moufawad-Paul, I conceptualise revolutionary experiences as an emergent and transformative ensemble of social relations and practices of revolutionary subjects in the struggle against the Philippine government to transform the country's semi-colonial, semi-feudal order. Through this conceptualisation, I closely read these filmic and novelistic fictions, as they deal with a range of themes and issues such as the construction of Martial Law memory, post-EDSA revolutionary errors, Left melancholia, and contemporary neoliberal violence. My analyses position

these works in dialogue with their creators, who navigate the democratic openings and counterinsurgent mechanisms that complicate cultural work in the country, as well as with an engaged public who generate their critical interpretation of these works.

The thesis argues that these selected NatDem fictions mobilise a dynamic view of revolutionary experiences to foreground how revolutionary subjects overcome political crises, setbacks, and challenges, and configure their socio-political practices in ways that interact with, and address, the socio-historical developments in the Philippines in the past few decades. These imaginative articulations of the complex experiences in the struggle function to argue for the enduring legitimacy of the revolution, and serve as important oppositional culture against widespread state anti-communism. This study therefore offers an account of how filmmakers and novelists engage in political contestations about the ongoing struggle through their aboveground figurations of the transformative and emergent makings of an alternative social order in the Philippines.

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Due acknowledgment has also been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of bibliography, and figures.

Laurence Marvin S. Castillo

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I acknowledge the Peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Land on which this thesis is written, and pay my respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging.

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ACRONYMS

ABB - Alex Boncayao Brigade

AFP - Armed Forces of the Philippines

ALPA - Advanced League of Peoples' Artists

BAYAN - Bagong Alyansang Makabayan [New Nationalist Alliance]

CARP - Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program

CPP - Communist Party of the Philippines (re-established in 1968)

CPR - calibrated pre-emptive response

CTG - communist terrorist group

EDSA - Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue

FACINE - Filipino Arts & Cinema International

FDCP - Film Development Council of the Philippines

FQS - First Quarter Storm

GAT - Galian sa Arte at Tula [Struggle in Art and Poetry]

IPRA - Indigenous Peoples Rights Act

KALAYAAN - Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan [Women's Collective for Freedom]

KDP - Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino [Union of Democratic Filipinos]

LGBT - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

MAKIBAKA - Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan [Free Movement of New Women]

MASAPA - Makabayang Samahang Pangkalusugan [Patriotic Health Organisation]

MILF - Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MNLF - Moro National Liberation Front

MRRC - Manila-Rizal Regional Committee

MTRCB - Movie and Television Review and Classification Board

NDFP (or NDF) - National Democratic Front of the Philippines

NPA - New People's Army

NPAA - Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista-Arkitekto [United Progressive Artists and Architects]

NTF-ELCAC - National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict

OFW - overseas Filipino worker

OPRS - On the Proletarian Relationship of the Sexes

ORS - On the Relation of Sexes

PAKSA - Panulat para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan [Literature for People's Progress]

PASG - Philippine Action Support Group

PCGG - Presidential Commission on Good Government

PCW - Philippine Commission on Women

POWs - prisoners of war

PILIPINA - Kilusan ng Kababaihang Pilipina [Philippine Women's Movement]

PKP - The older Communist Party of the Philippines (established in 1930)

PMA - Philippine Military Academy

PNP - Philippine National Police

PROGAY - Progressive Organization of Gays

RA - Reaffirmist

RAM - Reform the Armed Forces Movement

RJ - Rejectionist

ROL - Revolutionary Organization of Lumad

RPA - Revolutionary Proletarian Army

SPARU - special partisan unit

UP - University of the Philippines

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION

I have translated all Filipino passages and quotations -- film dialogues, passages from novels, and excerpts from critical and popular reviews -- into English. All translations are my own, except for the dialogues from *Sigwa* and *Alma-ata*, in which cases I use the translations provided in the embedded subtitles.

INTRODUCTION

Over five decades since its beginnings in the late 1960s, Southeast Asia's longest-running communist revolution, waged by the national democratic (NatDem) movement in the Philippines under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), continues to capture the imagination of Filipino filmmakers and novelists.¹ Images of revolutionaries have appeared on the movie screens, and entered the pages of novels in the open terrain of the Philippine cultural sphere. These cultural works render visible to the public the lives of political subjects in the clandestine spaces of the revolutionary underground, as they challenge the elite-dominated, and neo-colonial Philippine state to transform Philippine society. These works are engendered by the engagements of middle-class, professional artists -- some of whom became members of the revolutionary underground during the Marcos dictatorship -- with the country's cultural politics and political culture that cast a shaping force on the creation and circulation of politically committed artistic work in the contemporary public sphere.

This thesis examines a selection of these works -- films and novels about the NatDem revolution produced in the 2000s, over two decades after the first EDSA (Epifanio delos Santos Avenue) People Power in 1986, the popular uprising that ended the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos and ushered

¹ Throughout this thesis, I also frequently refer to the NatDem movement as the revolutionary movement.

in the country's neoliberal democratisation.² I aim to foreground how these fictional works, which I refer to as NatDem fictions or fictions about the NatDem revolution, provide important insights about the revolution, its theory and practice. These fictions do so by conveying how the experiences in the struggle take shape in relation to the historical realities of the Philippines in the recent half a century.

Chronicled in these fictional narratives is the NatDem revolution's complex history of rise, setbacks, errors, and rectifications. The revolution is led by the CPP, which was re-established in 1968 under the leadership of poet and literature professor Jose Maria Sison³ in a split from the older Communist Party (identified by its Filipino name Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas or PKP, which was established in 1930).⁴ The CPP has since adopted the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought (later Maoism), formulating a comprehensive analysis of the Philippines as a “semi-colonial and semi-feudal” society beset by the forces of “[American] imperialism, feudalism and

² The first EDSA People Power was a popular uprising that took place in February 22-25, 1986, resulting in the installation of Corazon Aquino to the Presidency. In this thesis, I refer to the period following this event as either post-Marcos or post-EDSA.

³ Jose Maria Sison (1939-) is a leading figure in the national democratic movement. A literature teacher at the state-run University of the Philippines (UP) who became actively involved in the radical nationalist movement of the 1960s, he went on to join the PKP as head of its youth section, before bolting out to re-establish the CPP after embarking on a critique of the old Party. He is currently in exile at the Netherlands, while continuing to produce commentaries on Philippine politics and society and serving as the NDFP's adviser. See Jose Maria Sison and Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View* (New York: Crane Russak, 1989); Jose Maria Sison and Ninotchka Rosca, *Jose Maria Sison: At Home in the World: Portrait of a Revolutionary* (Open Hand Publishing, LLC, 2004).

⁴ The First Great Rectification Movement was waged through the initiative of Sison. As part of the youth section of PKP, Sison drafted a document that aimed to sum up the PKP's history and criticise the errors of the Party leadership, leading to a split between Sison's group, and the PKP leadership. The document would soon be revised and ratified by the re-establishment congress as “Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party!” The document also formalised the adoption of Mao Tse-tung thought in the ideological framework of the CPP-led revolution. See Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party’, in *Foundation for Resuming the Philippine Revolution: Selected Writings, 1968 to 1972*, by Jose Maria Sison (1968; repr., The Netherlands and the Philippines: International Network for Philippine Studies (INPS) and Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2013), 5–58.

bureaucrat capitalism.”⁵ As the first stage towards the country’s socialist transformation, the CPP developed a programme for a “people’s democratic revolution” -- a rural-based protracted war centred on national liberation, and the peasant struggle for land.⁶ This stage is known as the national democratic (NatDem) revolution. Thereafter, the CPP established its armed force, the New People’s Army (NPA) in 1969, and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), a formation of CPP-led and allied organisations, in 1973.

The revolutionary movement reached the height of its political influence during the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986), drawing to the revolutionary underground many Filipinos indignant at the regime’s violence and corruption. By the 1980s, the NPA seized control of about 20 percent of the country’s rural and urban areas.⁷ The movement eventually played an important role in shaping up the broad anti-dictatorship movement that culminated in the 1986 EDSA People Power, installing Corazon Aquino to the presidency. Following the democratic transition in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, revolutionaries faced a series of setbacks. The United States (US)-backed counterinsurgency by the Philippine government, compounded with intra-party debates on various issues such as political tactics and strategies, and revolutionary errors, propelled the movement into a period of crises. The Party leadership consequently held a rectification process, known as the Second Great Rectification Movement, in the 1990s to assess and correct the errors during the years of crises, and ultimately reaffirm the

⁵ Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1970; repr., Manila: Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2005), 65–66.

⁶ Guerrero, 129–31.

⁷ Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, ‘Contemporary Philippine Leftist Politics in Historical Perspective’, in *The Revolution Falters*, 1st ed., *The Left in Philippine Politics after 1986* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1996), 9.

movement's Maoist principle. The process caused the membership to splinter, but it consolidated remaining adherents to the Maoist framework, and paved the way to the reassertion of its political vision that persists until today.⁸

Decades after these crises, the revolution continues to draw popular support from a broad segment of the Philippine population, largely because of the enduring social discontent caused by the country's subservience to US-dictated neoliberal imperatives. Apart from the likewise protracted Moro liberation struggle waged by Muslims in Mindanao in Southern Philippines, the NatDem revolution poses the most serious challenge to the Philippine government today. According to Sison, as of 2018, the NPA “operates in more than 110 guerrilla fronts covering substantial parts of 73 out of the 81 Philippine provinces in 17 regions outside of the national capital region.”⁹ Various attempts have been enacted between the Philippine government and the movement to mount dialogues about addressing the armed struggle, but these peace negotiations, the latest of which was conducted under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, have broken down, even while providing a considerable opportunity for the movement to claim a space in the aboveground public sphere to communicate its agenda for social transformation.¹⁰

⁸For accounts of the NatDem movement's crises and errors towards the end of the Marcos dictatorship and the democratic transition after EDSA, see the following: Patricio N. Abinales, ed., *The Revolution Falts: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1996); Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001).

⁹ Jose Maria Sison, ‘Great Achievements of the CPP in 50 Years of Waging Revolution’, Philippine Revolution Web Central, 23 August 2018, <https://cpp.ph/2018/08/23/great-achievements-of-the-cpp-in-50-years-of-waging-revolution/>.

¹⁰ Maria Karina Africa Bolasco, ‘The GRP-NDFP Peace Talks: Tactical Discontinuities in a Shared Narrative’, *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 1 October 2019, <https://kyotoreview.org/trendsetters/grp-ndfp-peace-talks/>.

In this study, I argue that fictions, particularly in the aboveground public sphere, play an important role in examining the movement's legitimacy as an oppositional force that offers an emancipatory vision for Philippine social transformation. While the revolutionary underground continues to be an important terrain for cultural work and production, my focus on aboveground works points to the need to document the ways through which filmmakers and novelists, in communicating publicly their reflections on the revolution, openly engage with the democratic openings in the Philippine cultural sphere, and confront the counterinsurgency threats enacted by the government.

Navigating the country's cultural politics and political culture, filmmakers and novelists position their narrative constructions of revolutionary experiences in relation to the historical developments of the post-Marcos years. This historical milieu encompasses various developments such as the end of the Cold War, the crises and rectification of the NatDem movement, the emergence of social movement alternatives that diverge from the NatDem movement's framework for socio-political change, the political rehabilitation of the Marcoses, the intensified labour diaspora, and the social crises and violence caused by neoliberal policies in the country. Some of these developments have not yet been considered in existing studies of NatDem fictions, many of which have focussed on texts produced during the Martial Law era. Most scholarly writings on the novel form have studied those produced in the revolutionary underground, especially during the Martial Law years and the years immediately following the first EDSA People Power.¹¹ In terms of political cinema, most studies have centred upon

¹¹Caroline S. Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2000); Edel E. Garcellano, *Knife's Edge: Selected Essays* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); Neferti X. M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away:*

Marcos-era films, particularly those created by the auteur Lino Brocka.¹² This present study aims to continue these earlier studies, while also opening up new areas of critique and inquiry generated by writers and filmmakers themselves through their fictional creations.

While the story of the NatDem revolution has already been conveyed in many non-fictional -- historical, journalistic, and documentary -- accounts, fictions offer a distinct way of conveying and even interpreting historical and political reality. My study is concerned with what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls the “productive reference” in these fictions -- that is, their capacity to make truth claims that present “an expanded vision of reality.”¹³ Through specific storytelling strategies and narrative interventions, fictions exceed the constraining demands of verisimilitude and historical accuracy in their representational and interpretive aims. Such inventive features embody ways of thinking about, and engaging with, historical reality. This is even more evident in feature films and novels, which allow greater room for expansive historical constructions and narrative developments compared to that afforded in shorter fictional forms like short stories and short films.

This study thus contributes to a broader understanding of fiction as both a representational and analytical apparatus in examining historical and political realities. “In ‘postcolonial’ Philippines (although it can be argued that the Philippines is actually neocolonial in its relationship to the United States),”

Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹² Some works include the following: José B. Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama: Lino Brocka's Cinema Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020); Rolando B. Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space: Cinema, Cultural Politics, and Transnationalism in the Marcos-Brocka Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014); Talitha Espiritu, *Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017).

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality’, in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (University of Toronto Press, 1991), 121, 123.

Jacqueline Siapno writes, “the cutting edge of political theory and analysis is not so much in the writings of social scientists as in the narrative fiction of writers, poets, and artists.”¹⁴ In particular, works about political resistance are preoccupied with formulating and examining visions for historical change. Barbara Harlow, in her work on resistance literature, observed that the narrative form “analyses the past, including the symbolic heritage, in order to open up possibilities of the future.”¹⁵ In dramatizing stories of the struggle, fictions generate important reflections about the people’s capacity to change and steer their historical destiny.

A crucial element to consider in these fictions about the revolution is the idea of revolutionary experiences. If, following Fredric Jameson, “it is in the revolutionary struggle itself that new social relationships and a new consciousness is developed,”¹⁶ revolutionary experiences then could be understood in terms of how revolutionaries build revolutionary lifeways on, and often against, dominant and existing social practices and relations. As I elaborate later, Raymond Williams’ concept of “structures of feeling” usefully illuminates the complex processual dynamics of social experiences in the political struggle, which could be conveyed and gleaned in fiction films and novels.¹⁷ In these narrative works, revolutionaries experience difficulties and challenges in embracing and sustaining political commitment amidst the various contradictions of Philippine society that pose enabling as well as disabling conditions for revolutionary relations and practices. In chronicling the personal experiences and struggles of these characters, these works also

¹⁴ Jacqueline Siapno, ‘Alternative Filipina Heroines: Contested Tropes in Leftist Feminisms’, in *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 219.

¹⁵ Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 82.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986): 81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466493>.

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

register some of the issues connected to the well-documented history of the NatDem movement's errors and crises, and consequently raise some crucial concerns about the viability of the NatDem revolutionary project in transforming Philippine society, and Marxist liberation project in general.

In this study, I am therefore concerned with the complex workings of fictional storytelling in representing revolutionary experiences and reflecting on the relevance of the NatDem revolution. How do these NatDem fictions conceptualise revolutionary experiences in relation to the revolution's complex history, and more broadly, to recent historical developments in Philippine politics and society? How do these works examine the experiences of resistance, errors, political disenchantment, state-sponsored violence, and other issues that shape the political subjectivities of participants in the struggle? How do these fictional narratives mobilise revolutionary experiences to argue for the enduring legitimacy of the revolutionary struggle as a political project for social transformation and national liberation?

To set the conceptual and theoretical groundwork on which I address these questions, the rest of this introduction elaborates on my study's engagement with existing scholarly work on revolutionary and protest cultural work in the Philippines, as well as on my theoretical formulation of revolutionary experiences.

NatDem fictions

In this study, I coin the term NatDem fictions to refer to fictional texts, in literary, theatrical, or filmic forms, that portray revolutionary experiences. NatDem fictions are not only distinguished by their thematic focus on the NatDem struggle; they also communicate an optimistic view of, and fidelity to, the revolution, and posit the imperative to continue its waging. This

assertion is often related to the fact that some of the authors of these texts participated in the struggle, especially during the Martial Law period, and have retained a measure of conviction about the need for the revolutionary transformation of Philippine society.

In coining this term, I use the term NatDem fictions to retrospectively name fictional works on the revolution produced as part of the cultural revolution of the NatDem movement since the late 1960s. This cultural revolution, which derived its inspiration from Mao, particularly his 1942 speech entitled “Talks at the Yen-an Forum,” is part of the second propaganda movement – an “educational movement with a political aim” that had its genesis in the nationalist ferment -- particularly the student activism -- of the 1960s and 1970s, and sought to continue the first propaganda movement, a cultural nationalist movement waged by Filipino intellectuals (known as the *ilustrados* or the enlightened ones) against Spanish colonialism in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ In the NatDem movement's landmark treatise, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the CPP founding chair Sison, writing as Amado Guerrero, called for the propagation of a “culture that truly belongs to the broad masses of people, because it is anti-imperialist and anti-feudal.”¹⁹ Such “revolutionary and democratic culture,” he continued, “is expressive of the heroic struggles and aspirations of the toiling masses,” and derives from “the experience of the masses,” adding that “revolutionary workers, peasants and fighters should be the heroes of this mass culture.”²⁰ In constructing positive and heroic figurations of revolutionaries in cultural texts like fiction,

¹⁸ Mao Tse-tung, ‘Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art’, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. III (1942; repr., Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 69–98; Jose Maria Sison, ‘The Tasks of the Second Propaganda Movement’ (Speech, St. Louis University, Baguio City, 12 October 1966).

¹⁹ Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 164.

²⁰ Guerrero, 164.

revolutionary and progressive cultural workers and artists sought to challenge the anti-communism of the Philippine neo-colonial state, particularly during the time of Marcos.

Some of the earliest examples of NatDem fiction were documented in the pioneering writings by activist-scholar Gelacio Guillermo, who examined revolutionary literature produced and circulated in politicised spheres, such as the guerrilla zones in the countryside, and the clandestine circuits of the revolutionary underground in rural and urban areas.²¹ Guillermo, writing using the pseudonym Kris Montañez, explained that the value of fiction, and NatDem cultural production more broadly, lies in its portrayal and foregrounding of the masses' "collective strength through the revolutionary mass movements and armed struggle in the countryside and cities."²²

Revolutionary experiences provide, and serve as important narrative content for NatDem fictions, as the immersive experiences and direct involvement of writers in the struggle inform their creative process. Examining examples of underground literary fictions in both the short story and novel forms, Guillermo noted how they chronicled the process of political awakening and radicalisation of ordinary people, as well as the everyday experiences and sacrifices of revolutionaries in the struggle, with the aim of conveying the "ideological and moral superiority of these subjective forces over the enemy."²³

²¹ Kris Montañez, *The New Mass Art and Literature and Other Related Essays (1974-1987)* (Manila: Kalikasan Press, 1988); Gelacio Guillermo, *Ang Panitikan Ng Pambansang Demokrasya* (Manila: Kalikasan Press, 1990); Alice Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); Gelacio Guillermo, ed., *Muog: Ang Naratibo ng Kanayunan sa Matagalang Digmang Bayan sa Pilipinas* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998).

²² Montañez, *The New Mass Art and Literature and Other Related Essays (1974-1987)*, 11.

²³ Montañez, 21.

The complex relationship of literary practice to revolutionary experiences has also been examined by other scholars. Underground cultural production, as Caroline Hau notes in her study of the first novel published underground, *Hulagpos* [Breaking Free] (1980), draws on the experiential dynamics of revolutionary theory and practice -- particularly that concerning criticism and rectification -- in the clandestine and liberated terrains of the struggle.²⁴ In his essay on underground literature, Rolando Tolentino points out the dialectical relationship between the underground and the aboveground. The underground, writes Tolentino, "challenges the very structures that make the aboveground...dominant," opposing it "both in terms of ideology and mode of production."²⁵ At the same time, Tolentino notes how aboveground avenues like the academe and legal mass organisations have broadened the visibility and reach of underground revolutionary culture, bringing them to the attention and readership of publics beyond the underground zones of the revolution.²⁶ Middle-class academics, as Edel Garcellano critically tracked, have in fact enacted their own critical engagements with works of underground NatDem fiction, with university-based literary critics turning their attention to texts like Ruth Firmeza's underground novel *Gera* [War] (1991).²⁷

My study however turns to the aboveground cultural sphere as a site, not merely for the circulation, but also the production of NatDem fictions. Here, I pay attention to how artists have expressed support for the revolution, and conveyed the politics of the underground in their creative works in the

²⁴ Hau, *Necessary Fictions*, 243–70; Mano de Verdades Posadas, *Hulagpos* (Palimbagang Kubli, 1980).

²⁵ Rolando B. Tolentino, 'Philippine Underground Literature: Backgrounding Marginality, Foregrounding Identity', *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 16, no. 2 (2001): 109.

²⁶ Tolentino, 109.

²⁷ Garcellano, *Knife's Edge*, 191–203.

aboveground terrain. More exposed to the structures of political repression and cultural regulation, these creative productions embody the political initiatives of artists to convey imaginations of the revolution in ways that call for complex forms of negotiations with, and circumventions of, dominant state and market formations.

Various scholarly accounts on cultural work during the Marcos dictatorship have illustrated how artists persisted in carving a space for creative political expression in a highly repressive public sphere. Middle-class, professional artists participated in the cultural revolution through aboveground artistic endeavours; they ventured to bring “their art in the midst of urban mass struggles, circumvent restrictive state and institutional laws and rules on cultural work or fight for their liberalization.”²⁸

In the 1970s and 1980s, progressive legal artists’ organisations like Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista-Arkitecto [United Progressive Artists and Architects] (NPAA), Galian sa Arte at Tula [Struggle in Art and Poetry] (GAT), Kaisahan (Solidarity) and Panulat para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan [Literature for People’s Progress] (PAKSA) emerged, expressing dissent and even endorsing revolutionary politics in their work in aboveground, legal channels.²⁹ Writers based in the cities, particularly in universities, shifted from social realism to socialist realism and expressed their support for the revolution in their short stories and novels, some even gaining accolades from literary institutions.³⁰ Filmmakers took advantage of the dictatorship’s

²⁸ Montañez, *The New Mass Art and Literature and Other Related Essays (1974-1987)*, 52.

²⁹ Elmer A. Ordoñez, ed., *Nationalist Literature: A Centennial Forum* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press and PANULAT, Philippine Writers Academy, 1996); Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*; Bienvenido Lumbera, *Writing the Nation/Pag-Akda Ng Bansa* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2000).

³⁰ Edgardo B. Maranan, ‘The Perception of Neocolonial Relations with the United States: Nationalism in Filipino Literature since 1960’s,’ *Asian Studies* 5, no. 19 (1981): 109–28; Ordoñez, *Nationalist Literature*.

projects in culture and the arts to produce filmic fictions that bore aesthetic innovations and dissident political commentary, ushering in the New Cinema movement of the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema.³¹ Some of these fictions, which cast a favourable light on the NatDem struggle, particularly through their construction of the heroic figures of communist organisers and even the NPA, however earned the ire of the Marcos dictatorship. For instance, Behn Cervantes's *Sakada* [Sugarcane Worker] (1976) was confiscated by the military, while Lino Brocka's *Bayan ko, Kapit sa Patalim* [My Own Country] (1984) faced hurdles from the regime's censors.³²

NatDem fictions continue to be produced vibrantly -- both aboveground and underground -- after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, conveying the enduring validity of the revolutionary struggle, especially under a formally democratic government that continue to be elite-dominated and subservient to foreign political and economic interests. Writing two years after the fall of Marcos, Gelacio Guillermo took note of how writers, including those aboveground, continued to produce NatDem fictions to contribute to the broadening of aboveground support for the revolution in the public sphere.³³ In cinema, one of the most notable examples of aboveground NatDem fictions after the Marcos dictatorship is Lino Brocka's censored film *Orapronobis* [Fight for Us] (1989), which endorsed the continuation of revolutionary struggle in the context of the Aquino administration's low-intensity counterinsurgency. As I examine in later chapters, recent NatDem

³¹ Joel David, 'A Second Golden Age: An Informal History', in *The National Pastime* (Manila: Anvil, 1990), 1–17; Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*; Espiritu, *Passionate Revolutions*; Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*.

³² Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 146–48; Espiritu, *Passionate Revolutions*, 116–43.

³³ Guillermo, *Ang Panitikan Ng Pambansang Demokrasya*, 25–40.

fictions would also be rife with portrayals of socio-political violence under the nominally democratic regimes after Marcos.

Crisis and its narratives

The present study aims to highlight how NatDem fictions portray revolutionary experiences to legitimise the continuing necessity for the revolution. Advancing this aim requires contextualising these works in relation to contemporary political and ideological discourses about Marxist liberation. Interlinked global developments such as the end of the Cold War, marked by the collapse of actually existing socialisms and the ascendancy of neoliberal capitalism, as well as local developments like the crises of the NatDem movement, the emergence of newer social movements suspicious of Marxist politics, the neoliberal democratisation initiated under the Corazon Aquino administration, and the implementation of new forms of counterinsurgency cast a shaping force on the political and ideological contours of the post-Marcos years. These developments contribute to what Edel Garcellano noted as the dominant suspicion towards Marxist politics, marked by the widespread tendency to "deconstruct the whole enterprise of the CPP-NPA historicizing" in the post-Marcos public sphere.³⁴

Part of my study's aim is to consider how contemporary NatDem fictions address the ideological suspicion towards Marxist liberation in general, and the NatDem struggle in particular. The critical engagements of scholars like Gelacio Guillermo, Caroline Hau, and Neferti Tadiar serve as important precedents in examining NatDem fictions -- and more broadly, NatDem cultural work -- in relation to this prevalent stance towards Marxism,

³⁴ Garcellano, *Knife's Edge*, 43.

particularly in light of the well-documented crises and errors of the revolutionary movement.

In his introduction to a collection of non-fictional and fictional narratives about the revolution written from the 1980s to the 1990s, Gelacio Guillermo wrote that narratives serve as important sources of lessons about the errors committed in the struggle. Citing the narrative representations of experiences of “counterrevolution in the mountains” or activities that constitute political deviations from official Party doctrines, Guillermo explained how narratives allow an understanding of the errors of revolutionaries during the movement's crises in the post-Marcos years.³⁵ Narratives, in this view, are crucial in identifying and criticising the shortcomings of revolutionaries, as well as acknowledging their capacity to transform and rectify problematic, and even counterrevolutionary behaviours and practices.

The errors committed by revolutionaries, especially during the movement's period of crises, have generated theoretical concerns about the subjective dimensions of the political struggle. In the works of scholars Neferti Tadiar and Caroline Hau, literary -- and more broadly, cultural -- texts serve as important theoretical artifacts that bring to light the fraught issue of revolutionary subjectivity, particularly regarding how individuals and collectives develop, and exercise revolutionary agency amidst, and in relation to the complex and challenging socio-historical conditions of the struggle.

In her book *Things Fall Away*, Tadiar examined revolutionary literature -- short stories, novels, and poetry -- of the 1980s and the 1990s as “figural enactments” of historical experiences. According to Tadiar, literature

³⁵Guillermo, *Muog*, xxiv, il–lii.

registers the enduring presence and importance of seemingly regressive and feudal practices like grief, personality cult, religious sacrifice -- “surplus cultural resources invented within the course of revolutionary struggle whose political possibilities remain unexhausted by progressive political organization and strategy.”³⁶

In Tadiar’s view, these tangential experiences are instructive in understanding the revolutionary failures and errors committed during the period of the NatDem movement’s crises, while also serving as potential resources for subaltern agency in continuing the struggle.³⁷ Literary works, in her analyses, are revealing of how subaltern subjects harness and transform non-revolutionary lifeways and affective practices towards revolutionary ends -- dynamic forms of social practice that remain beyond the grasp of the movement’s dominant, frequently rationalist, conceptions of political subjectivity. These lifeways and practices, while often serving as important conditions of support for the revolution, are prone to be misapprehended by revolutionaries as forms of deviations and errors. Tadiar's complex view of the interactions between revolutionary and devalued non-revolutionary social practices in the struggle informs my study's conceptualisation of revolutionary experiences. Retrograde social relations, such as those associated with feudal femininity, could serve as supportive social infrastructures for the struggle, as exemplified in the film *Barber's Tales*, which I examine in Chapter 1.

In her book *On the Subject of the Nation*, Hau embarks on a critical examination of personal narratives, novels, and poems produced in the period between the final years of the Marcos dictatorship and the early 2000s. Hau explicitly

³⁶ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 15.

³⁷ Tadiar, 333–39.

positions these narratives in relation to the global crises of Marxism, the crises of the NatDem movement, the accelerated implementation of neoliberalism in the Philippines and the intensified phenomenon of the state's policy of exporting Filipino labourers abroad. According to Hau, these developments shaped the "complex, lived dimension of nationness," including the crisis-ridden experiences in the revolutionary nationalist project, which are portrayed in some of the literary works she examined.³⁸ Through close readings of literary narratives, Hau examines the tensions and contradictions between the personal and the political, revealing how individuals produce and shape the self as part of a political community of struggle. These tensions are embedded in the dynamic interaction of global capitalism and oppositional, nationalist projects like the NatDem revolution, which are now broadly dismissed by the ideological currents of the post-Cold War period. Hau raised some analytical concerns in her book that I also take up in this study; for instance, the question of revolutionary errors and their representational visibility in the public sphere, which she discusses in her illuminating analysis of a memoir of political violence written by a former cadre, would be the key theme in my close readings of novelistic NatDem fictions in Chapter 2.³⁹ Her book's overall analytic framework, which links Philippine nationhood to labour migration and the NatDem revolution, also underpins my discussion of nationalism and migrant activism in Chapter 4.

My debts to the analytic and methodological precedents set by these scholars can be further traced in my discussions in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. At the same time, my analyses represent efforts to foray into emergent zones of interpretive engagements. This is warranted particularly

³⁸ Caroline S. Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation: Filipino Writings from the Margins, 1981-2004* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2004), 7.

³⁹ Hau, 63–106.

because recent NatDem fictions bring up contemporary concerns and issues about the struggle that have not yet been explored and discussed adequately. In Chapter 1, for example, I expand discussions about gender and sexuality in the revolutionary movement, which have previously centred on the experiences of women, by focussing on the issue of homosexuality in the film *Lihis*, one of the first full-length films to portray the experiences of gay NPA guerrillas. In Chapter 5, I build on earlier discussions about nationalism and migration by examining how indigenous struggles and lifeways interact with revolutionaries and activists in the diaspora. In exploring these issues, I develop a theoretical framework for analysing revolutionary experience in fictions in the context of the post-Cold War. This is the subject of the next section.

Revolutionary experiences

One objective that informs this study is the elaboration of the role of narrative fictions in portraying revolutionary experiences. As Eric Selbin has noted, “the crucial factor in explaining how and why revolution persists is the stories of revolution, rebellion, and resistance we tell.”⁴⁰ Narrative fictions recount, and make visible political struggles in the public sphere, as well as advance certain ways of interpreting and understanding their root causes and relevance. Cultural practices have played an important role in the waging of Marxist revolutions, particularly during the wave of Third World post-independence liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the mid to late twentieth century -- the same global milieu of political radicalism in which the NatDem revolution in the Philippines emerged. Inspired by Marxist theories, these nationalist, anti-imperialist struggles sought to seize state power from the native elites who remained beholden to

⁴⁰ Eric Selbin, *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story* (London: Zed Books, 2009), 3.

foreign powers and became accomplices to the exploitation of the native population, and to install an egalitarian, socialist order. These post-independence struggles intended to continue the “revolution that does not finish at the moment when the national flag is raised, and the national anthem played.”⁴¹

In various manifestoes and writings about Third World or resistance literature, and Third Cinema, scholars and activists have acknowledged the importance of cultural texts such as film and literature in portraying, through a variety of aesthetic innovations and representational strategies, the experiences of people, as they enact transformative practices that often professed fidelity to Marxism in overturning oppressive post-colonial/neo-colonial systems and structures.⁴² These texts contributed to the production of decolonising, oppositional imaginations that mounted critiques of the system through stirring images and stories of oppression and social violence and also addressed the question of the armed revolution as a solution to the social ills hounding Third World nations. Echoing the works of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral about revolutionary cultural nationalism, Teshome Gabriel explained that these works were envisioned as part of a “national cultural force that is able to undergird and condition the development of national consciousness towards liberation.”⁴³

Upon the collapse of Marxist projects in many countries and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the political tenor of studies about cultural work

⁴¹ Amilcar Cabral, ‘The Weapon of Theory’ (Speech, first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Havana, January 1966), <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/cabral/1966/weapon-theory.htm>.

⁴² Teshome Habte Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Harlow, *Resistance Literature*; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World*, 12–13.

in socialist and national liberation struggles changed. Scholars have examined cultural texts about the revolution to reflect on the achievements, as well as the errors and failures of these transformative projects. In some of these works, scholars, while claiming a measure of sympathy for Leftist projects, have studied literary narratives as archives of defeats and failed bids for liberation, examining how revolutionary movements created their own regimes of subjection and marginalised the constituencies that revolutionaries purported to liberate.⁴⁴ Shaped by the post-Cold War post/anti-Marxist hegemony, these scholarly works demonstrate the role of narratives about the revolutions in articulating the various contradictions and failures of these projects. Narratives, in these studies, offer an important lens to interpret, and contemplate, the cost and tragedies of twentieth century Marxist experiments in social transformation.

The critical orientation of many post-revolutionary/post-socialist scholarly works prove instructive in this project's engagement with imaginations of the NatDem revolution in the decades that followed its crises. While the movement has declared its rectification of the tragic errors during this period and its subsequent recovery, these crises -- along with the hegemonic influence of neoliberal, post-Cold War anti-communist discourse in the Philippines that perpetuates the idea of the revolution's putative failure -- continue to haunt public understandings of the revolution in the Philippines.

In this study, I examine how selected NatDem fictions register the resonance of these errors and crises, while also inscribing the movement's transformative capacity to correct errors and address emergent imperatives,

⁴⁴ For instance, in the context of Latin America, see, for instance, Ileana Rodríguez, *Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

challenges, and conditions in the socio-political terrain of the struggle. These works convey the story of the NatDem movement as an affirmation of how revolutionary crises do not necessarily annul the possibility of continuing the struggle, but instead provide important reflections about the complex and perpetually surfacing issues that impact on ongoing attempts to transform society. I therefore follow historian Dominic Caouette's assertion that the persistence of the NatDem movement attests to its "capacity to learn from the past, while remaining clear about the strategic line of revolution at the rhetorical level, a capacity to deploy and use a range of unorthodox tactics."⁴⁵

I am therefore wary of the pessimism that underpins not only many scholarly engagements in failed revolutionary contexts, but also even contemporary discussions about the NatDem revolution in the Philippines. "Resistance organizations and national liberation movements," wrote Barbara Harlow, bear "their own internal contradictions and debates." She continued that "it is precisely these self-critical controversies that sustain the movements' active agency in the historical arena of world politics and the struggle for culture which need to be theoretically elaborated and given their full 'historical and sociological weight.'"⁴⁶

In this study, I argue that fictional narratives offer these self-critical engagements by articulating a complex conceptualisation of the revolution as human experience. Tadiar defines experience as "this human *activity* of mediation between self and social reality, that is to say, the cognitive, semiotic, affective, visceral, and social practices of relating to the world that

⁴⁵ Dominique Caouette, 'Ups and Downs of a Contemporary Maoist Movement: Shifting Tactics, Moving Targets and (Un)Orthodox Strategy, the Philippine Revolution in Perspective', in *Emancipatory Politics: A Critique*, ed. Stephan Feuchtwang and Alpa Shah (St. Andrews: Open Anthropology Cooperative Press, 2015), 155, <http://openanthcoop.net/press/emancipatory-politics-a-critique/>.

⁴⁶ Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 29.

individuals engage in as part of the process of producing themselves.”⁴⁷ This conceptualisation captures the various subjective processes, engagements and relations that humans enter into in their various endeavours like revolutionary struggle, which NatDem fictions are concerned in “depicting, decoding, and ultimately deconstructing.”⁴⁸ Elaborating on how experience involves the production of selves, Tadiar’s definition of experience also takes into account “the coming into being of new social actors who would change the material conditions in which they find themselves.”⁴⁹ This aptly informs how I approach revolutionary experience as a process involving the emergence of new subjectivities and relations, and the formation of a different political community. If the revolutionary project towards socialism is, to borrow from Constantin Parvulescu, conceived of as a “process, a temporary and dynamic arrangement intended to secure the transition from capitalism (at various stages of its development) to communism,” its aim is not only “to take apart the previous one, with its alienating political, economic, and social bonds,” but also “to build a new order.”⁵⁰ In the Philippine context, as Rolando Tolentino writes, revolutionary subjects are “simultaneously positioned in the tasks of toppling the ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’ Philippines and building a national democratic society in its place.”⁵¹

The conception of socialist politics as the dismantling of the old order and the building of a new one, with its constitutive social relations and dynamics, resonates with theorisations about the creation of new forms of social agency found in the revolutionary discourses in other contexts. As Ana Serra

⁴⁷ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 10. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁸ Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation*, 7.

⁴⁹ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 10.

⁵⁰ Constantin Parvulescu, *Orphans of the East: Postwar Eastern European Cinema and the Revolutionary Subject* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 2.

⁵¹ Tolentino, ‘Philippine Underground Literature’, 113.

demonstrates in her study of Cuban literary discourse, the production and emergence of new subjectivities occupy significance in socialist discourse.⁵² These processes of producing social relations and identities are simultaneously processes of transformation. As Harlow, synthesising the anti-colonial and revolutionary writings of Amilcar Cabral and Ghassan Kanafani, asserted, the “resistance movement and armed struggle for national liberation were to accomplish the political and economic liberation of the people from the thrall of imperialism...[but] were also expected to bring about, in that process, a revolutionary transformation of existing social structures.”⁵³ Therefore, I conceptualise the experience of waging the revolutionary struggle as simultaneously an emergent and transformative social practice.

The transformative emergence of revolutionary consciousness and lifeways is deeply embedded in, and shaped by, existent, and even dominant social conditions of the people. Marx's famous passage in *The German Ideology* stated that “[t]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse” of people.⁵⁴ Thus, in forging and sustaining revolutionary relations, revolutionaries find themselves entangled in well-entrenched and persisting socio-economic conditions, political structures, and social relations. As revolutions consist of moments of creative possibilities and newer modes of experiences that seek to transform, overturn, and advance from, oppressive lifeways, then the waging of struggles is essentially rife with the collisions of emergent practices and habits with older, entrenched ones. I thus argue that

⁵² Ana Serra, *The 'New Man' in Cuba: Culture and Identity in the Revolution* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

⁵³ Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 11.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘The German Ideology: Part I’, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (1932; repr., New York and London: Norton, 1978), 154.

revolutionary experiences are forms of social practices that emerge from, interact with, and even transform, existing and entrenched ones.

In my theorisation of the relational dynamics and complexities of revolutionary experience, Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" proves illuminating. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams defined structures of feeling as "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available."⁵⁵ This idea encapsulates the transitional and processual dynamics of lived experiences, as represented in and through cultural works, particularly literature. Daniel Hartley describes this concept as Williams' attempt "to produce a theory adequate to the discontinuities and potentialities of the *present* with a view to intervening into it towards a complex, common future."⁵⁶ This concept usefully captures my own understanding of the revolution as an activity that involves locating sites of ruptures -- social crises, politicising moments -- in the present to steer towards an emancipatory future.

By conceptualising revolutionary experiences through Williams' framework of structure of feeling, I aim to pay attention to how humans exercise agency to transform the dominant order, and participate in emergent forms of social practices in the struggle against the ruling system. Williams explained that "no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention."⁵⁷ This insight points to how human agency can exceed the stabilising totality of the dominant order. At

⁵⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 134. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ Daniel Hartley, 'On Raymond Williams: Complexity, Immanence, and the Long Revolution', *Mediations* 30, no. 1 (2016): 41. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁷ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 125.

the same time, I consider that the dominant social order interacts with, and gives shape to, emergent social practices from, in, and against it. This concept also corresponds to my understanding of the revolution as an active process of political struggle in which new social relations, modes of community-making, and subjective practices emerge, and take shape, but always in relation to other existing, entrenched, or even residual social processes, formations, and practices, especially those that dominate or continue to shape lifeworlds in a particular society. Revolutionary relations grow out of, and draw on, dominant ones. The dynamic relationship of revolutionary experiences with entrenched non-revolutionary ones is “in a living, interrelated continuity.”⁵⁸

In this view, revolutionary experiences emerge, develop, and evolve in contact with non-revolutionary ones in a complex process of interaction that fictions seek to capture. Social relations, Bertell Ollman writes, “do not only intersect in mutually supportive ways but are constantly blocking, undermining, otherwise interfering with, and in due course transforming one another.”⁵⁹ The fictions I examine feature revolutionaries who navigate non-revolutionary, and even dominant social formations, and relations that variedly support, hinder, and even become transformed by, the struggle. These works illustrate specific moments, in which feudal relations could become forms of social support for revolutionaries; in other occasions, such relations could create subjective barriers to Party discipline and other related political goals.

Williams’ concept of structures of feeling has been influential in the affective turn in cultural and sociological analysis, offering a way to consider, if not

⁵⁸ Williams, 132.

⁵⁹ Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx’s Method* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17.

foreground, the non-cognitive or non-rational dimensions of human agency. In adopting this concept as a framework to characterise revolutionary experiences in NatDem fictions, my study bears some analytic affinities with the affective turn. As the following chapters demonstrate, my close readings consider the emotional intimacies and affective attachments -- embodied, for example, in friendships, romance, and family relations -- that undergird and shape the waging of revolutionary experiences. In some of the NatDem fictions I examine, the use of melodramatic episodes also serves to express the affective dimensions of revolutionary experiences.

It is however important to emphasise that I diverge from some of the theoretical preoccupations and interpretive routes taken in some scholarship on affect. Rather than focusing principally on affective practices in revolutionary literature, as Tadiar did in her study, my approach aims to highlight the interrelated dynamics of cognition and affect or emotion in fictions about revolutionary experiences. Relevant in this regard is Williams' description of structure of feeling as "thought as felt and feeling as thought,"⁶⁰ which underlines the complex, often messy, relations of the cognitive and affective dimensions of human agency in social practices. This idea is instructive when understanding the difficult and complex interaction between revolutionary theory -- frequently associated with rationality, political knowledge, and ideological education -- and lived practice -- the ensemble of social relations, emotions, and other non-rational dimensions of human engagements, which shape the making of revolutionary experiences, and often exceed, unsettle, and complicate the application and formulation of revolutionary theory. In the fictions that I examine, revolutionaries struggle to negotiate, and reconcile their personal feelings and thoughts with the

⁶⁰ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

ideological imperatives and political workings of the revolution. As they struggle to abide by revolutionary rationality, these characters face difficulties in embodying the theory and practice of the revolution, as mediated through the workings of the political organisation.

Organised political experiences

My conceptualisation of revolutionary experiences considers the complex character of the NatDem movement as the organisational form embodying the dynamics between theory and practice. The structural features and complexities of political organisation, and the internal struggles and contradictions that political subjects inevitably face in the process of joining, and remaining committed to, the movement are the conditions of possibility for revolutionary experiences.

“Organisation,” wrote Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, “is the form of mediation between theory and practice. And, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness and reality in and by virtue of this mediation.”⁶¹ Central to this mediating process is the vanguard party, which as Benita Parry observed, has been a necessary component in “[t]he pursuit of revolutionary goals by liberation movements” in postcolonial contexts.⁶² As outlined by Lenin in his work *What Is To Be Done?*, the party provides theoretical guidance, spearheads the organisational structure in the waging of the struggle, and consolidates and mobilises the masses’ spontaneous energies towards the cause of liberation.⁶³ “The Party,”

⁶¹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 299.

⁶² Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), 84.

⁶³ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, ‘What Is To Be Done’, in *Essential Works of Lenin: ‘What Is to Be Done?’ And Other Writings*, ed. Henry Christiman (1902; repr., New York: Dover, 2012), 53–175.

wrote philosopher Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez, "establishes an organic link between theory and practice"⁶⁴

Many contemporary discussions about Left politics, both in the global and Philippine Left, have offered critiques of the party-form as the structure of revolutionary politics. Declarations that denounce this political form have been issued even by Leftist thinkers. For instance, invoking the negative association of the party with events like the Cultural Revolution in China, philosopher Alain Badiou wrote that the "party-form...is no longer suitable for providing real support for the Idea [of communism]."⁶⁵ Critiques of the party-form have frequently revolved around how this political formation has subordinated and downplayed "political feelings, experiences, and relations failing to contribute directly to the conquest of state power."⁶⁶ The accusation of instrumentalism and suppression hurled towards the party is also amplified in critiques of the CPP in the years following the crises of the NatDem movement. Scholars studying the revolution in the Philippines have characterised the revolutionary party, particularly the CPP, as a totalitarian, instrumentalist apparatus, and expressed preferences for social movement formations outside of the NatDem movement that emerged after the movement's crises and constituted what would be known as the broad Philippine Left in the post-Marcos years.⁶⁷

It is not within the scope of this study to engage at length with the debates generated by these critiques. It is however important to mention that some

⁶⁴ Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez, *Philosophy of Praxis* (London: Merlin Press, 1977), 135.

⁶⁵ Badiou, 'The Idea of Communism', in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 13.

⁶⁶ Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 201.

⁶⁷ See for instance Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines after Marcos* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2008); Joel Rocamora, *Breaking through : The Struggle within the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Manila: Anvil, 2001).

of the fictions I examine in the next chapters touch on some related concerns about the party including the need for revolutionary discipline, the implementation of revolutionary justice, and the question of individual agency in the collective. Some of these works even lay bare some of the ethico-political complexities of the revolutionary organisation's processes. In recognising the need to continue waging the NatDem struggle, these fictions nevertheless presume the indispensability of the party in the revolutionary struggle.

Contemporary thinkers on the Left like Jodi Dean and J. Moufawad-Paul have theorised on the crucial importance of the party-form, challenging how it is negatively depicted in New Left thought. The vanguard party is necessary, writes Dean, because “[t]he actuality of revolution requires discipline and preparation,” which “enable the party to adapt to circumstances rather than be completely molded or determined by them. The party has to be consistent and flexible because revolution is chaotic.”⁶⁸ Apart from providing discipline, preparedness and organisation, the party also embodies and articulates the people’s revolutionary aspirations. “As it learns from the struggling masses,” Dean continues, “the party provides a vehicle through which they can understand their actions and express their collective will.”⁶⁹

Dean’s description recalls an important guiding principle of the NatDem revolutionary movement, the Maoist framework of the mass line, or the principle of learning from the masses and teaching them.⁷⁰ This principle emphasises the indispensable role played by the party in forming revolutionary subjects among the exploited and oppressed classes, through

⁶⁸ Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 241.

⁶⁹ Dean, 243.

⁷⁰ Mao Tse-tung, ‘Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership’, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. III (1942; repr., Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 117–22.

the experiential resources drawn from them. This view also considers that while the masses may become critical of the prevailing social order because of the exploitative character of their material conditions, they cannot be expected to acknowledge and embrace the necessity of revolution automatically or spontaneously, therefore requiring the political guidance and direction of the party. Thus, as philosopher J. Moufawad-Paul writes, the party's necessity is warranted by its role as “an organization theoretically unified that brings proletarian politics to the proletariat.”⁷¹

Through the vanguard party's leadership, the revolutionary movement provides the political form that organises people's lifeways within the ambit, and towards the aims, of the struggle. It is an emergent social formation that organises, and mediates on, what I have just described as the revolutionary structure of feeling. At the same time, as Ernest Mandel has pointed out, the organisation serves to "assure a continuity of lessons drawn from accumulated historical experience," through which revolutionaries are able to "constantly assess that sum total of historical and current experience of class struggle and revolution, to enrich it by new lessons coming out of new revolutions, to make it more and more adequate to the needs of class struggles and revolutions going on right at this time."⁷² Within and through the revolutionary movement, revolutionaries learn from past experiences, work together towards a singular social vision, forge, and consolidate comradely relations, debate about tactics and strategies, and formulate concrete programmes and plans of action to carry the revolution forward.

The NatDem fictions I examine in this study actualise the difficulties and complexities that revolutionaries encounter as members of the movement

⁷¹ J. Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture: Philosophy in the Maoist Terrain* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2016), 115.

⁷² Ernest Mandel, 'Vanguard Parties', *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1983): 6.

who commit, and are expected, to place themselves under the guidance of the Party. These works therefore illuminate how, as Lukacs pointed out, “[e]very organised action is — in and for itself — a tangle of individual deeds on the part of individuals and groups.”⁷³ Human relations and practices do not always fit neatly within the imperatives and organising theory and practice of the movement. These experiences are part of the active processes that define, and give shape to, the revolution in ways that are borne out of the interactional dynamics of contingencies, subjective factors, and structural conditions.

NatDem fictions therefore portray and examine the complex experiences of individuals and collectives -- their subjective practices and relations -- in the task of forging and sustaining an organised political community of struggle, which interact with the structural and contingent conditions of Philippine social life. These fictions figure, in the words of Mike Wayne, “individuals and collectives operating within conflictual and contradictory relationships that shape what can be thought and what can be done at any particular point in time and space.”⁷⁴ In examining the various ways in which NatDem fictions examine such dynamics, this study serves as a contribution to scholarly interventions into the messy relationship between the personal and the political, as well as theory and practice, in the historical experience of making and doing revolution.

Cultural politics and political culture

I argue in this study that the portrayal of revolutionary experiences in aboveground NatDem fictions registers important historical experiences in the past few decades of Philippine history. These historical experiences also

⁷³ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 299.

⁷⁴ Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 64.

constitute the very conditions of possibility for, as well as barriers to, the production and circulation of these narrative fictions. Thus, part of this study's objective is to provide an account of the cultural politics and the political culture in the decades after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, and their capacities to enable and constrain the sympathetic articulation and foregrounding of revolutionary politics in aboveground film and literature.

In this study, I examine four films, all independently made, and three novels, one published by a commercial press, and the other two released through independent/small press initiatives. These works, selected based on their explicit narrative focus on the NatDem revolution, were produced and circulated over fifteen years after the first EDSA People Power. In examining these works, this study provides a much-needed discussion on the possibilities for, and limits of, political creative practices, particularly by progressive segments of professional, middle-class artists, in the post-Marcos public sphere.

The end of the dictatorship heralded the opening of a democratic space that allowed a greater degree of freedom, especially for political expression and creative practices. Crucial to this is the revision of the Philippine constitution in 1987 under the presidency of Corazon Aquino, which enshrined formal guarantees for free speech and political ideology. Media companies that were seized by the Marcos dictatorship became liberated from state control, expanding press liberties despite the retention of some Marcos-era policies on broadcast media censorship and the continuation of armed violence against media practitioners. The cultural sphere was liberalised, allowing the flourishing of private initiatives in cultural production, as evinced in the vibrant activities of publishing presses and filmmaking companies. Non-government and civil society organisations, some of which emerged in the

wake of the NatDem movement's crises, were established, amplifying a plurality of social issues and discourses. Certain political developments have also allowed broader visibility for the NatDem movement such as the holding of peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the NDFP, which has generated substantial media coverage for the movement's spokespersons.⁷⁵ In 1992, the anti-subversion law that outlawed the CPP was repealed under the presidency of Fidel Ramos, formally giving the Party a legal status.⁷⁶ Civil liberties expanded significantly from the restrictions imposed under Marcos, even though various repressive mechanisms continue to be deployed by the state against political activism and dissent.

The opening of the democratic space has allowed Martial Law-era activists, some of whom were imprisoned by the Marcos military for their involvement in the revolutionary underground, to pursue their political commitments through open creative work. One example is the case of Edberto Villegas, who was a political detainee during the Martial Law period. After the first EDSA People Power, he received immunity from state arrest by virtue of his designation as panel member in the peace negotiations that was jumpstarted between the NatDem movement and the administration of Corazon Aquino. Villegas saw in the democratic openings during this period an opportunity to continue his literary endeavour aboveground.⁷⁷ Villegas earlier published his first novel, the NatDem fiction *Sebyo* (1990), in the revolutionary underground, using the pseudonym Carlos Humberto as a security measure. In 2013, he published his second novel *Barikada* [Barricade] (2013), which I

⁷⁵ For accounts of the various developments in Philippine society after the first EDSA People Power, see JPaul S. Manzanilla and Caroline S. Hau, *Remembering/Rethinking EDSA* (Manila: Anvil, 2016).

⁷⁶ Tetch Torres-Tupas, 'DOJ Chief: Mere Affiliation to Communist Movement Not a Crime', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 13 August 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1153283/doj-chief-mere-affiliation-to-communist-movement-not-a-crime>.

⁷⁷ Edberto M. Villegas, Interview by the author, Manila, 3 May 2019.

analyse in Chapter 2, using his real name. The back cover of the novel explicitly states the previously concealed fact of Villegas' authorship of the earlier underground novel. Aside from Villegas, artists like Joel Lamangan, Bonifacio "Boni" Ilagan, and Ricardo "Ricky" Lee, who engaged in cultural work openly during the Martial Law years while also being imprisoned for their underground revolutionary involvement, have continued to do open cultural work in the post-Marcos years. Lamangan, who enjoys a successful career as a mainstream filmmaker, directed two of the films I examine in this study: *Lihis* [Wayward] (2013), which was penned by Lee, and *Sigwa* [Rage of Perils and Hopes] (2010), which was written by Ilagan.

Most of the NatDem fictions analysed here are products of the independent or "indie" cultural initiatives that have flourished in the Philippine cultural scene in the past two decades. These initiatives have emerged in response to the constraints posed to creative practice by entities of taste and gatekeeping like big commercial studios (in the case of films), and commercial publishers, and universities (in the case of literature). The indie circuits, both in film and literature, have opened and broadened spaces in which politically committed artists could craft and circulate their narratives, largely with the aid of new media technologies and novel forms of production and circulation.

Independent cinema emerged after the 1990s Asian economic crisis that left Philippine cinema in a state of decline.⁷⁸ This cultural movement has broadened the possibilities of representation, and offered ways to render visible some discourses and issues that mainstream cinema's more market-oriented practices have not adequately accommodated.⁷⁹ Some of the filmmakers in this study like Joel Lamangan and Jun Lana, who have worked

⁷⁸ Michael Kho Lim, *Philippine Cinema and the Cultural Economy of Distribution* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 50–51.

⁷⁹ Patrick F. Campos, *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016), 217.

in big studios, have turned to independent filmmaking in order to pursue “passion projects” that include NatDem filmic fictions.⁸⁰ The indie film movement has likewise spurred regional filmmaking, expanding the representation of marginal experiences in non-Tagalog speaking regions in the Philippines. *Alma-ata* (2018), which I examine in Chapter 4, exemplifies the portrayal of revolutionary experiences in the regions. These films reach the public through theatrical screenings, mostly in local film festivals, as well as informal, even illicit means like piracy. Online streaming, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has also figured prominently as an important way to circulate these films to the broader public.

The indie publishing movement -- through small presses and self-publishing efforts -- has also increased opportunities for literary production, and by consequence, the discursive possibilities in literary practices. While the presence of works like Lualhati Bautista's novel *Desaparecidos* [The Disappeared] (2007) points to how politically-themed fiction continues to claim some space in mainstream, commercial publishing, NatDem fictions have found an outlet in indie publishing. I have already mentioned Villegas' *Barikada* which was published independently by the Popular Bookstore. Norman Wilwayco's *Gerilya* [Guerrilla] (2008), which I examine in Chapter 2, also represents a unique case of an indie publishing initiative. Out of his adamant refusal to transact with literary agents and commercial publishers, his novel was released in 2008 through the independent initiatives of his friends who decided to pool money for its pay-per-demand release.⁸¹ Wilwayco also made a digital copy of his novel downloadable for free, securing wider readership beyond those who availed of its earlier paperback

⁸⁰ Jun Lana, Interview by the author, Quezon City, 17 April 2019; Joel Lamangan, Interview by the author, Quezon City, 2 May 2019.

⁸¹ Norman Wilwayco, Interview by the author, Online, 19 May 2020.

release. It is important to mention that the demand for the novel is also significantly spurred by his novel's status as the 2008 recipient of the Grand Prize for Novel in Filipino from the foremost national literary award-giving institution in the country, the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. Cultural capital gained from institutional recognition is inscribed in the novel's paperback's cover, which states the novel's award.

Wilwayco's case is an illustration of how the broadening of spaces for political articulations in indie initiatives also involves certain forms of engagements with institutions such as award-giving bodies, and even state funders. Many indie films have in fact been funded through state grants. For instance, *Alma-ata*, *Lihis* and *Sigwa* all received funding from the government agency Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP). Amidst these negotiations, filmmakers generally retain a considerable amount of freedom in their creative process, although there have also been cases in which state entities pose limits to artistic practice. Engagements with the state have also allowed these NatDem fictions to reach the public. As I detail later, some of the filmic NatDem fictions I examine have been shown in state-funded film festivals and even screenings held by state agencies. NatDem literary fictions have also been included in the reading list in schools, including public ones.

It is important to take note that many of the aboveground NatDem fictions I examine have been distributed in spaces, particularly in the indie circuits, accessible mostly to the middle-class public. However, through educational institutions, many of these works have reached the broader public, indicating the pedagogical value that they bear in the public sphere. In addition to the inclusion of some NatDem fictions in the curriculum, schools, colleges, and universities have organised screenings of NatDem fiction films, usually in cooperation with legal activist organisations. These opportunities for broader

circulation offered by educational institutions to NatDem fictions have also made them targets of military intimidation and harassment. For instance, in 2018, Brigadier General Antonio Parlade, a high-ranking military general, spoke out against the screenings of Martial Law-themed films -- some of which are NatDem filmic fictions -- in colleges and universities, accusing them of being held to recruit for the revolutionary underground.⁸²

It is thus important to point out the politically repressive conditions that pose difficulties to the creation and circulation of NatDem fictions in the post-EDSA years. While inaugurating the country's democratisation, the fall of the Marcos dictatorship signalled the Philippine government's adoption of the US-promoted low-intensity counterinsurgency, which involves a combination of military and civilian techniques to contain the revolutionary movement without recourse to direct American military intervention and authoritarian rule.⁸³ These mechanisms affirm Heonik Kwon's characterisation of the end of the Cold War as inaugurating a "new age of aggression" for peripheral countries like the Philippines that are primed for further integration into the ascendant neoliberal system.⁸⁴ Thus, in spite of the democratic openings and formal guarantees for free speech and human rights, state counterinsurgency continues to limit political activities, even those that are channelled and conducted through creative means.

All post-EDSA presidencies have implemented their own counterinsurgency programmes that have resulted in massive human rights violations that

⁸² Zhander Cayabyab and Maan Macapagal, 'AFP Bares Metro Manila Schools Linked to "Red October"', *ABS-CBN News*, 23 October 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/03/18/afp-bares-metro-manila-schools-linked-to-red-october>.

⁸³ Alice Guillermo, *The Covert Presence and Other Essays on Politics and Culture* (Manila: Kalikasan Press, 1989); Ivan Molloy, *Rolling Back Revolution: The Emergence of Low Intensity Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 127–42.

⁸⁴ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 155.

include political detention, torture, extrajudicial killings, and forced disappearances of those suspected of being associated with the NatDem movement. The presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001-2010), in particular, earned the label Marcosian from media and activist groups for the dismal human rights violations resulting from its counterinsurgency programme against the NatDem armed revolution, the Oplan Bantay Laya [Operation Guard Freedom].⁸⁵ In the aftermath of the 9/11, the US government announced in 2002 the inclusion of the CPP-NPA in the terrorist list, leading the Arroyo government to step up in its campaign against the movement.⁸⁶ Some of the texts that I examine in this study like *Sigwa* and *Desaparesidos*, which were made and released during Arroyo's term, contained narrative references to the political violence of her presidency.

Censorship has not been effaced even with the country's democratic transition from dictatorial rule, remaining a potent mechanism to constrict, if not altogether ban, cultural works from public dissemination on the basis of politics. As scholars have pointed out, the censorship of Brocka's NatDem fiction film *Orapronobis* in 1989 under the administration of Corazon Aquino evinces how political repression reminiscent of the civil suppression during the time of Marcos has continued even in the nominally democratic order.⁸⁷ Indeed, post-Marcos presidencies have retained some of the rules on cultural

⁸⁵ See for instance the following articles which labelled Arroyo as Marcosian: Cheryll D. Fiel, "Worse Than Martial Law", *Bulatlat*, 26 October 2004, <https://www.bulatlat.com/news/4-34/4-34-worse.html>; Booma Cruz and Probe Productions, 'Hunt for Arroyos' Alleged Ill-Gotten Wealth Starts', *ABS-CBN News*, 22 August 2010, sec. Focus, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/-depth/08/20/10/hunt-arroyos-alleged-ill-gotten-wealth-starts>; John Aglionby, 'Manila Stifles People Power', *The Observer*, 26 February 2006, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/26/johnaglionby.theobserver>.

⁸⁶ Karapatan, 'Oplan Bantay Laya: Blueprint for Terror and Impunity', Year-end Report on the Human Rights Situation in the Philippines (Quezon City: Karapatan, 2009).

⁸⁷ Jonathan Beller, *Acquiring Eyes: Philippine Visuality, Nationalist Struggle, and the World-Media System* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2006); Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*; Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*.

regulation put in place by the Marcos dictatorship, some of which have continued to be integrated in the policies and practices of the state's premier censorship body for broadcast media, the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB).⁸⁸

The MTRCB has indeed intervened in the making of politically-committed creative works. Joel Lamangan shared, for instance, that as per MTRCB advice, one of his political films had to be recut to remove an image of then President Arroyo in one of the scenes.⁸⁹ An interesting case involves Jet Leyco's experimental film about the Martial Law, *Bukas na lang sapagkat gabi na* [Leave it for tomorrow for night has fallen] (2013), which Norman Wilwayco also penned. While the film is explicitly political in content, moral grounds served as the basis for the X-rating it received from the MTRCB. State censors took issue with the scenes in the film that depicted "[m]asturbation with genitalia, frontal nudity, animal cruelty," as well as "a sex scene with a tortured victim."⁹⁰ After some compromises between the MTRCB and the filmmaker, it finally received R-18 and was approved for public exhibition.⁹¹

The negotiations and compromises of filmmakers with the MTRCB reveal how the workings of censorship are not just limited to the direct banning of works from public exhibition, but also manifested in the bureaucratic hurdles that filmmakers go through in the process of gaining permit to screen their works commercially. Filmmakers have shared how the MTRCB has created a

⁸⁸ Danilo Araña Arao, 'Macapagal-Arroyo Administration Resorts to `Soft' Media Censorship', *Bulatlat*, 17 September 2006, <https://www.bulatlat.com/news/6-32/6-32-media.htm>.

⁸⁹ Lamangan, Interview by the author.

⁹⁰ Mell T. Navarro and Jocelyn Dimaculangan, 'Two Cinema One Entries Get Initial X Rating from MTRCB; Directors Compromise to Get R-18 Ratings', *PEP.Ph*, 14 November 2013, <https://www.pep.ph/guide/movies/12868/two-cinema-one-entries-get-initial-x-rating-from-mtrcb-directors-compromise-to-get-r-18-ratings>.

⁹¹ Armando Dela Cruz, 'MTRCB's Rating System Isn't Broken—MTRCB Is', *Unreel.Ph*, 6 November 2019, <https://unreel.ph/feature/opinions/mtrcb-is-broken/>.

chilling effect on their practices. For instance, Jun Lana, the director of the Martial Law-themed NatDem fiction film *Barber's Tales* (2013), shares how the MTRCB rating system poses an important concern among the filmmaking community and becomes a tool to make filmmakers acquiesce to political pressure. “When one makes a film about the revolution, critical of governance or questioning the competence of government,” he says, “one can definitely feel pressure, or at least the feeling of effectively being barred from getting the rating you deserve.”⁹² Censors also exert political pressures in covert ways, for instance, by questioning filmmakers and posing bureaucratic hurdles.⁹³ In recent years, under the Duterte government, Lana observes a general feeling of fear among fellow filmmakers, often discouraging them from embarking on creative work that might earn the unwanted attention of state censors. “It’s becoming worse now; I can sense that my fellow filmmakers are having second thoughts in their projects,”⁹⁴ he adds, referring to the phenomenon of self-censorship. These conditions, particularly in the context of the Duterte administration's mobilisation of civilian agencies in its anti-communist campaign, also convinced film director Arnel Mardoquio not to submit a copy of his film *Alma-ata* to the MTRCB, even though this meant that the film would have more limited opportunities to be screened publicly.⁹⁵

The MTRCB constitutes just one among the many hurdles that bar the public exhibition of explicitly political films. Filmmakers have also experienced forms of regulation from local festivals. A recent incident involved Joselito Altajeros’s *Walang Kasarian ang Digmang Bayan* [The Revolution Knows No Gender] (2020), which explores homosexual relations in the revolutionary

⁹² Lana, Interview by the author.

⁹³ Lana.

⁹⁴ Lana.

⁹⁵ Arnel Mardoquio, Interview by the author, Melbourne, 3 August 2020.

struggle in the time of Duterte's brutal drug war and counterinsurgency operations. After the release of the film's trailer, the film was suddenly announced disqualified from Sinag Maynila, a state-run film festival that originally accepted it as part of the festival line-up, allegedly because of the film's deviation from the approved screenplay.⁹⁶ As the film trailer included a scene in which the character played by the actress Rita Aguila uttered the line “If I were braver, I'd kill Duterte myself,” there were speculations that the disqualification was politically motivated.⁹⁷ The director also cited that the presence of military uniforms in the film bothered the festival co-founder, Brillante Mendoza, a film director known for being a supporter of Duterte.⁹⁸

Aside from these forms of abridgment to creative expression, forms of security threats also hound artistic practices, especially in many cases when military and police officers accuse artists of being associated with the communist movement. For instance, during the presidency of Arroyo, creative writing professor Jun Cruz Reyes, whose body of work includes creative essays and fiction about revolutionaries, reported that he experienced surveillance by suspected intelligence agents as early as 2006. Also known for his involvement with Leftist teachers and cultural organisations as well as his protest creative works, the late National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera, a former political detainee during the

⁹⁶ ‘Rita Avila on “Walang Kasarian Ang Digmaang Bayan”’: Understand Why My Character Said the Line’, *Rappler*, 23 February 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/rita-avila-reaction-accusation-walang-kasarian-ang-digmaang-bayan>.

⁹⁷ Rysa Antonio, ‘Sinag Maynila Just Pulled out Finalist “Walang Kasarian Ang Digmaang Bayan”’, *Scout Magazine*, 22 February 2020, <https://www.scoutmag.ph/55752/sinag-maynila-just-pulled-out-finalist-walang-kasarian-ang-digmaang-bayan/>.

⁹⁸ Gil Perez, ‘Director Jay Altarejos on His Sinag Maynila Disqualification’, *CNN Philippines*, 26 February 2020, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/entertainment/Film/2020/2/26/jay-altarejos-interview.html>.

Martial Law period and an eminent figure in Philippine literary and cultural studies, was also reportedly tailed by a military official in 2009.⁹⁹

Recently, under the Duterte administration, filmmakers have also reported experiences of red-tagging and political harassment because of their works. In 2018, filmmaker Arbi Barbarona was accused by an anonymous Facebook page of having links with the CPP-NPA-NDF, with his film *Tu Pug Imatuy* [The Right to Kill] (2019), which highlights military violence in Lumad indigenous communities, being labeled as “a deceptive indie film.”¹⁰⁰ During the production of *Alma-ata* in 2018 in the province of Laguna in Southern Luzon, director Arnel Mardoquio, who wrote the screenplay of Barbarona’s mentioned film, shared that the production team experienced being tailed by suspected state agents.¹⁰¹ The presence of the police in the location also posed some difficulty to the production. Mardoquio shared an incident in which they had to shoot a scene that showed the CPP flag hurriedly to evade the attention of state forces deployed in the area.¹⁰² Moreover, the various security concerns that plagued the production prompted him to conceal the identity of some of the film’s actors through screen names.¹⁰³ Duterte’s signing of the Republic Act No. 11479, also known as the Terror Law, in 2020, also caused widespread alarm among various sectors in the Philippines, including cultural workers and media practitioners because of its broad

⁹⁹ CMFR Philippines, ‘Writers Allege Being Spied on by Philippine Military’, *Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility*, 25 September 2009, <https://cmfr-phil.org/uncategorized/writers-allege-being-spied-on-by-philippine-military/>.

¹⁰⁰ Bea Cupin, ‘AFP’s Red-Tagging a Threat to Freedom of Expression – Artists, Directors’, *Rappler*, 6 October 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/news/213611-artists-directors-reaction-afp-tag-red-october-plot>.

¹⁰¹ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

¹⁰² Mardoquio.

¹⁰³ Mardoquio.

definition of terrorism that can impinge on the exercise of civil, including artistic, liberties.¹⁰⁴

These experiences of political harassment by artists index the constraints on political freedoms that remain in place, and even become intensified after the fall of the dictatorship. As registered in the NatDem fictions I examine, these experiences of political violence, which give lie to official pronouncements about democracy and freedom, also lead people to support, and participate in, the revolutionary struggle. How artists articulate reflections on this struggle within, and amidst, the complex conditions of counterinsurgency in the context of nominal democracy is part of this study's preoccupation.

Organisation of the study

This study primarily argues that NatDem fictions produced aboveground present an important opportunity to examine revolutionary experiences in relation to the country's recent history of dictatorial trauma, troubled democratisation, and the crisis-ridden experiences of the revolutionary Left. The previous sections of this chapter have established the background to this argument, providing a brief historical overview of the NatDem revolution, and explaining the theorisations on revolutionary experiences informing this study. An important concern that I have highlighted so far is the importance of NatDem fictions in imagining and examining revolutionary experiences alongside the purpose of edifying an oppositional culture against state anti-communism. In my discussion of the experiences of filmmakers and writers in producing NatDem fictions from the Martial Law period to the recent democratic dispensation, I have examined how the production of this

¹⁰⁴ Kiko Mendoza, 'Media, Artists Say Dissent Necessary for Democracy to Thrive', *Rappler*, 8 August 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/media-artists-say-dissent-necessary-for-philippine-democracy>.

oppositional culture entails complex, even dangerous negotiations, with the country's complex cultural politics and political culture.

Chapters 1 to 4 feature close readings of selected NatDem fictions. Each of these chapters foregrounds a specific issue about revolutionary experiences in recent Philippine history -- from gendered resistance during the Marcos years, the revolutionary errors during the post-Marcos years, the political disenchantment of former revolutionaries to ongoing nationalist claims against the neoliberal violence of the nation-state. These chapters are arranged based on the chronology of events portrayed in the narratives. I begin with narratives that are predominantly set during the Martial Law, and end with a chapter on a film set in the 2010s. These fictions bear historical confluences, continuities and overlaps; for instance, some narratives in Chapters 1 and 3 are set in the 2000s but contain flashbacks of events that happened in the Martial Law-era. These temporal features are addressed in relation to the political dynamics of memory-making as well as the question of the revolution's historic significance in the past, present, and future of the nation.

Using theoretical and empirical resources on areas ranging from gender and sexuality, social movements, political memory, film, and literary studies to nationalism, I explore salient questions about revolutionary experiences from the Martial Law period to the present, commenting on the historical, discursive, and formal/aesthetic dimensions of these texts. These chapters also consider the production contexts of these fictions, and engage in a dialogue with their creators, and critics and reviewers who generate their own interpretations and participate in the discursive exchanges about the NatDem struggle.

The subject of Chapter 1 is the question of gender and sexuality in the NatDem movement -- an issue that has given rise to contentions about the limits of Marxist politics, especially in the context of post-EDSA identity-based social movements. I focus on the production of what I call “imagined gendered memory” in two films about the revolutionary struggle during the Martial Law period. These films construct the memories of the anti-Marcos resistance in a way that foregrounds the political agency of gender and sexual minorities, particularly rural women, and male homosexuals. Jun Lana’s *Barber’s Tales* features the struggles of rural women against small-town patriarchy and the Marcos dictatorship. This film illustrates how feminine modes of social relations transform into collective forms of solidarity in support of the revolution. Joel Lamangan’s *Lihis* centres on two gay guerrillas experiencing discrimination from their comrades in the movement. *Lihis* reveals the presence of military masculinity in the revolution, while also recounting the movement’s eventual rectification of its problematic treatment of homosexuals. I examine these texts in terms of their emphasis on the important role of rural women and gays in challenging the Marcos dictatorship, and by extension, the gender and sexual regime that it enforced on Philippine society. Despite their portrayal of revolutionaries as entrenched in certain patriarchal/heteronormative attitudes and habits, I argue that both films ultimately point towards the revolutionary movement’s efforts to provide an empowering political space for gender and sexual struggles.

In Chapter 2, I examine narratives of revolutionary errors. Here, I focus on two novelistic NatDem fictions set in the post-EDSA years, a time when the Second Great Rectification Movement was still underway and yet to bear fruition. These novels portray flawed revolutionaries who commit errors in political analyses, and fall short in adhering to the imperatives and demands of proper revolutionary behaviour. I discuss the spatio-political domains of

rurality and urbanity to examine how such errors and failures are linked to the spatialised constructions of subjectivity articulated in NatDem revolutionary discourse. Emphasising the dangers of revolutionary activities and engagements in the city, Edberto Villegas' *Barikada* focusses on the errors of urban-based cadres. Through a counterfactual episode of insurrection in the city, the novel examines the tragic costs of urban adventurism. In Norman Wilwayco's *Gerilya*, urban-bred petty bourgeois revolutionaries deployed in the countryside encounter difficulties in forging comradely relations with peasant guerrillas. Such difficulties stem from the revolutionaries' varied attitudes, temperaments, and dispositions, unflatteringly depicted in scenes of reckless violence and combative encounters. Both novels affirm the revolutionary project by emphasising the pedagogical value of errors in guiding revolutionaries in their daily grind in the struggle.

Chapter 3 centres on narrative engagements with "Left melancholia," or the affective regime of disenchantment and disillusionment with the revolutionary project. Informed by theoretical reflections on Left melancholia by intellectuals like Walter Benjamin, Wendy Brown, and Enzo Traverso, I analyse novelistic and filmic narratives about former revolutionaries who struggle with the trauma of their revolutionary experiences during the Marcos dictatorship. Set in the 2000s during Arroyo's Marcosian presidency, these fictions use the melodramatic narrative of the search for the lost daughter to situate former revolutionaries in the process of remembering their violent yet courageous revolutionary past and contemplate on its meaning for the country's present and future. Lualhati Bautista's novel *Desaparecidos* turns this commemorative endeavour into a sentimental reflection of the conflictive dynamics between, and intertwining of, family and comradely relations in the revolution. In Joel Lamangan's *Sigwa*, the

search for the lost daughter becomes a way for former comrades to invoke the memory of their generation's revolutionary legacies. These two texts portray how political subjects deal with concerns related to trauma, political commitment, and comradely relations in examining the legacies of the revolution. Through reflections on the sacrifices in the struggle, they ultimately affirm the need to continue the revolution at a time when the state replicates the atrocities perpetrated during the Marcos dictatorship.

Chapter 4 focusses on an independent film about migrants and indigenous peoples in the revolution. As an example of an accented regional cinema, Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata* explores the discourses of nationalism and revolutionary modernity through the figures of overseas Filipinos, and indigenous peoples in regional Philippines. In a journey to retrieve the bodies of her parents killed by state-sponsored paramilitary groups while serving the revolutionary movement in Mindanao, a younger-generation Filipino-Australian doctor develops a deeper understanding of the revolution's reconfiguration of nationalist politics. Invoking the theoretical reflections on nationalism and spectrality by Pheng Cheah, I examine how the film portrays the spectral nationalism embraced by migrants and indigenous peoples who experience varied forms of displacement from their homelands due to the nation-state's collusion with capitalist modernity. In this chapter, I argue that *Alma-ata* is concerned with how the revolution draws on, and mobilises the potentials of international and indigenous communities of struggle in actualising an emancipatory form of modernity.

This study concludes with a synthesis of analytic insights from these close readings of selected NatDem fictions. I reflect on the salience of these insights in the context of the anti-communist campaign of the administration of Rodrigo Duterte. At a time when the state further constricts spaces for

cultural freedom, artistic works that portray, and argue for, the legitimacy of, the revolution continue to be produced and circulated, opening up more areas of inquiry and reflection. The presence of NatDem fictions therefore serves as a powerful assertion of the persistence of cultural workers to convey openly in, and through, their artistic practices the enduring relevance and vision of the revolutionary struggle in transforming Philippine society.

CHAPTER 1

Imagined gendered memory in *Barber's Tales* and *Lihis*

In the post-Marcos years, films have served an important function in commemorating the role played by the revolutionary movement in the anti-dictatorship struggle. These films chronicle how the movement mobilised people from various sectors of the Philippine society, including elite and moderate elements, to resist the dictatorship.¹ During the Martial Law years, the movement, with its underground and armed political resistance that circumvented the militarised constriction of the public sphere, emerged as “the most organised and sustained extra-electoral opposition to the dictatorship,”² as well as the “most consistently daring, the most vocal and the most visible of the regime’s opposition.”³

In this chapter, I examine two films that highlight the experiences of revolutionary resistance to the dictatorship, as enacted by two sexually marginalised figures in Philippine society -- rural women and gays. *Barber's Tales* (2013) chronicles the radical awakening of a middle-aged widow from a small village against the backdrop of rural patriarchy. *Lihis* (2013) centres on gay members of the NPA who pursue a romantic relationship amidst the military violence of the Marcos dictatorship and the homophobia within the revolutionary movement. These films, written and directed by openly gay

¹ Vincent Boudreau, ‘Repression and the Making of Underground Resistance’, in *Brokering a Revolution: Cadres in a Philippine Insurgency*, ed. Rosanne Rutten (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 37.

² Hedman, Eva-Lotta E. and John T. Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century Colonial Legacies, Post-Colonial Trajectories* (London: Routledge, 2000), 27.

³ Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 1.

filmmakers, interrogate how the Marcos dictatorship organised Philippine social life through a sexual and gender regime figured through rural patriarchy and military masculinity. This regime also shaped the participation of individuals in the socio-political contestations between the dictatorship and the revolution, which these films both portray and examine.

These filmic NatDem fictions also prompt reflections about how contemporary discourses, such as those that emerge in post-EDSA social movements, influence and shape the remembrance of the past. I thus explore these texts as forms of imagined gendered memory of the revolution. My use of the notion of imagined gendered memory is informed by Andreas Huyssen's idea of "imagined memory,"⁴ which refers to memory conjured, not from lived experiences, but from cultural and media texts like film. In adopting this concept, I emphasise how filmmakers employ strategies of fictional narration and invent dramatic narratives to construct political and historical memory. In the case of films examined in this chapter, imagined memory lays bare the gendered and sexual dimension of historical experiences through narrative emphasis on the oft-silenced Marcos-era experiences of sexually minoritized sectors and the gendered and sexualised dimension of political violence and resistance in private and public domains. As I elaborate later, this gendered figuration is significantly influenced by later post-EDSA discourses and activisms centring on gender and sexuality.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of these films as forms of cultural memory that participate in the long-standing search for justice for the crimes of the Marcos dictatorship, and bear the legacies of Martial Law-era filmmaking. I then discuss how these forms of cultural memory engage with

⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

recent social movement discourses on gender and sexuality that emerged in the post-EDSA years. I build on these discussions in my close readings of these films. By paying attention to their representations of sexual minorities like rural women and gay guerrillas, I focus on how gender and sexual politics figure in these filmic memories of the revolution in the anti-dictatorship struggle.

Cinematic remembrance

Both *Barber's Tales* and *Lihis* were released in 2013, almost three decades after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship. *Barber's Tales* director Jun Lana developed the film from an earlier screenplay that he co-wrote with Peter Ong Lim, and won second prize in the Filipino screenplay category of the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 1997. *Lihis* director Joel Lamangan, and screenwriter Ricardo Lee started conceptualising the film as early as 2001.

These films were conceptualised and produced in a period marked by political tensions surrounding the ongoing search for justice for the crimes committed by Marcos dictatorship. Certain efforts have been made to hold the Marcoses accountable and prevent the revival of dictatorial rule such as the promulgation of the 1987 Philippine constitution that contained provisions restricting the potential re-imposition of the Martial Law, the establishment of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), a body mandated to recover the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth, domestic and foreign juridical successes that affirmed Marcosian atrocities in

jurisprudence, and the passage of legislation to secure reparation for victims of human rights abuses.⁵

At the same time, these advances were undermined by parliamentary and legal setbacks, caused by the presence and influence of Marcos allies and supporters in the government. Under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, the rehabilitation of the Marcoses has sped up, with the remains of the former dictator given state burial in the heroes' cemetery in 2016 amidst protests from Martial Law-era activists and human rights groups.⁶ Largely through her close ties with top government politicians and bureaucrats, former first lady Imelda Marcos, who was even elected to the Philippine congress a number of times, remains free despite being found guilty of corruption charges in 2018.⁷ Some remaining immediate members of the Marcos family have also returned to public office. The dictator's son and namesake Ferdinand Jr. and daughter Imee, both of whom held positions in the local government, have been elected to the Philippine senate. After being narrowly defeated in his electoral bid for the vice presidency in 2016, Ferdinand Jr. has declared that he is vying for the presidency in the May 2022 national elections.⁸ In the public sphere, they continue to enjoy popular support,

⁵ Raphael Lorenzo A. Pangalangan, Gemmo Bautista Fernandez, and Ruby Rosselle L. Tugade, 'Marcosian Atrocities: Historical Revisionism and the Legal Constraints on Forgetting', *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 19, no. 2 (18 December 2018): 142, 159, 173–74, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718158-01902003>.

⁶ Pia Rañada, 'Duterte on Marcos Burial: Let History Judge, I Followed Law', *Rappler*, 18 November 2016, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/152854-duterte-marcos-burial-history-judge>; Lian Buan, 'Supreme Court Upholds Hero's Burial for Marcos', *Rappler*, 8 August 2017, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/178110-supreme-court-upholds-marcos-burial-libingan-ng-mga-bayani>.

⁷ Gaea Katreena Cabico, 'Whatever Happened to: Graft Conviction of Imelda Marcos', *Philippine Star*, 10 November 2020, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/11/09/2055672/whatever-happened-to-graft-conviction-imelda-marcos>.

⁸ Lian Buan, 'Dictator's Son Bongbong Marcos to Run for President in 2022', *Rappler*, 5 October 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/bongbong-marcos-to-run-president-2022>.

largely through the machinations of historical revisionism that celebrates dictatorial legacies and deemphasises, if not denies, Martial Law-era violence and corruption.⁹

In the context of gradual Marcosian rehabilitation, films about the Martial Law perform an important role as forms of cultural memory that support justice claims and contest the glorification of the dictatorship. As Huyssen writes, “[c]ultures of memory are intimately linked in many parts of the world to processes of democratization and struggles for human rights, to expanding and strengthening the public spheres of civil society.”¹⁰

Filmmakers are motivated by issues of social justice, human rights, and democratic aspirations in creating films about the Martial Law, holding on to the belief in the power of filmic memory to draw the public to these causes. The state has demonstrated political anxiety over this power of cultural memory, and sought to contain it. This is evident in the account I mentioned in the Introduction about the widely-denounced allegation of a military general that screenings of films about the Martial Law are part of the recruitment strategy of the CPP-NPA.

Lana recounted that when he was making *Barber's Tales*, some of his friends asked him why he was doing a film about the Martial Law decades after the fall of the dictatorship. Growing up hearing stories about the dictatorship and armed resistance in a region known for having a strong NPA presence,

⁹ Textbooks, social media posts (particularly on Youtube) and oral narratives are among the most popular forms through which the Marcoses and the dictatorship are rehabilitated in the public imagination. At the time of this writing, the candidacy of Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. has generated an even more aggressive dissemination of historical revisionism. The rehabilitation of the Marcos family image has also been linked to the Cambridge Analytica scandal. See Sofia Tomacruz, ‘Bongbong Marcos Asked Cambridge Analytica to “Rebrand” Family Image’, *Rappler*, 15 July 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/bongbong-marcos-cambridge-analytica-rebrand-family-image>.

¹⁰ Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 166.

he explained that he had always wanted to explore “if something happened during our liberation from what we call the Martial Law.” Reflecting in retrospect, he observed that “the problems that my characters faced in the film are still the problems we’re facing right now -- problems of insurgency, even the problem of population, even the way the government manipulates the public, [and] the use of fake news in public releases.”¹¹ The film has become more popular in the time of Duterte, who has made repeated threats of reviving dictatorial rule, and gone on to implement Martial Law in Mindanao in 2017 in response to the operations of an armed group allegedly linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).¹² Lana shared that under this presidency, the film has been screened many times, and he was invited to these screenings to talk about the Martial Law.¹³

In the case of *Lihis*, the motivation was both personal and political. Lamangan and Lee were both Martial Law-era activists who were affiliated then with the revolutionary movement and imprisoned during the dictatorship. After the dictatorship, Lamangan joined the filing of a class suit against the Marcoses.¹⁴ In addition to the film’s personal significance for the two of them, Lamangan stated that the film aimed to recount silenced narratives. He described the film as “a story of people who did not have any voice before, [those] who were long forgotten.’ It is now time for them to be known by the very people to whom they dedicated their lives in pursuit of democracy.”¹⁵

¹¹ Lana, Interview by the author.

¹² Yvette Morales, ‘Duterte Declares Martial Law in Mindanao’, *CNN Philippines*, 24 May 2017, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/05/24/Duterte-declares-martial-law-in-Mindanao.html>.

¹³ Lana, Interview by the author.

¹⁴ Lamangan, Interview by the author.

¹⁵ Dolly Anne Carvajal, ‘A Different Gay Story’, *Inquirer.Net*, 9 September 2013, sec. Dollywood, <https://entertainment.inquirer.net/111907/a-different-gay-story>.

It is worth noting that these filmic fictionalisations of the Martial Law embody the afterlives of the cultural politics under the dictatorship. Film scholar Talitha Espiritu links “Philippine cinema’s continuing fascination with the Marcos years” to “the persistence of modern institutional memory.”¹⁶ Such institutional memory bears the traces of filmmaking under the watch of an ambivalent cultural politics engineered by the Marcos regime. Marked on the one hand, by militarised film censorship and other prohibitive policies, and, on the other, by active state intervention in artistic production through patronage and sponsorships, this cultural order provided the conditions for what is known as the second golden age of Philippine cinema, or the New Cinema movement.¹⁷ Critically acclaimed and politically committed works were produced by auteurs whose “aesthetic awakening was closely bound up with the emergence of a radical student movement during the early 1970s.”¹⁸ These filmmakers took advantage of the resources and opportunities presented by state intervention in culture and the arts, while enacting both covert and overt expressions of anti-dictatorial resistance. They helped in sustaining a “critical public sphere” for democratic demands and visions, and circumventing authoritarian repression in varied ways.¹⁹ In developing aesthetic-political practices in encoding Philippine political realities in the filmic medium, they have, in the words of film scholar José Capino, “enhanced Philippine cinema’s sensitivity for registering politics,”²⁰ influencing post-dictatorial mainstream and independent film practice.

¹⁶ Talitha Espiritu, ‘National Allegory, Modernization, and the Cinematic Patrimony of the Marcos Regime’, in *Popular Culture in Asia: Memory, City, Celebrity*, ed. Lorna Fitzsimmons and John A. Lent (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 43, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137270207_3.

¹⁷ David, ‘A Second Golden Age: An Informal History’; Espiritu, *Passionate Revolutions*.

¹⁸ Espiritu, ‘National Allegory, Modernization, and the Cinematic Patrimony of the Marcos Regime’, 43.

¹⁹ Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*, 5.

²⁰ Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 245.

Lamangan, Lee, and the younger Lana are linked in one way or another with the New Cinema movement. A prominent figure of New Cinema, Lee penned some of the canonical works of the period like Ishmael Bernal's *Himala* [Miracle] (1982), and Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (1982). Lamangan acted and served as production staff member in some films by New Cinema directors Lino Brocka, Mario O'Hara, and Ishmael Bernal. Lana started his film career in the post-EDSA years, writing screenplays for New Cinema auteur Diaz-Abaya, to whom he dedicated *Barber's Tales*, and after whom he named the film's protagonist.²¹ Lamangan, and Lana were also both involved with the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), an independent theatre guild that became an important venue for progressive cultural work during the Marcos dictatorship and housed some figures of that filmmaking era like Brocka.²²

Barber's Tales, and *Lihis* bear some narrative and thematic affinities with the works of New Cinema filmmakers, especially in their figurations of gender and sexual politics. José Capino, for instance, attributes the presence of contemporary romances that deal with socio-political issues such as the "Communist Party's stance towards gay couples" -- perhaps an allusion to *Lihis* -- to the influence of Brocka, who figured both queer and radical politics in his films.²³ The same observation could be made in relation to the influence of Lana's mentor Diaz-Abaya on *Barber's Tales*. As film scholar Rolando Tolentino explained, Diaz-Abaya's works exemplified filmic efforts in the New Cinema movement that foregrounded "the women's agenda [that] provided another level of critique of the Marcos dictatorship -- directed

²¹ Lana, Interview by the author.

²² Lamangan, Interview by the author; Lana, Interview by the author.

²³ Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 245.

towards its gender and sexual politics.”²⁴ The exploration of female solidarity in Lana’s film recalls Diaz-Abaya’s ensemble drama *Moral* (1982), which was penned by *Lihis* writer Lee. The presence of a female storyteller, who narrates the filmic events and offers a redemptive resolution for the tragedy-stricken female protagonist, and the thematic exploration of the violence of rural patriarchy in Lana’s film also recalls the narrative framing and theme of another Diaz-Abaya and Lee collaboration, *Karnal* [Of the Flesh] (1982).

These legacies of New Cinema, with their portrayals of empowered female and queer characters, dialogue with the discourses on gender and sexuality that emerge in the post-EDSA public sphere, shaping the (en)gendering of political subjectivity in these films. This is the subject of the next section.

Gender and sexuality in the social movements

Barber’s Tales and *Lihis* belong to a set of post-EDSA films about the revolution that deal with female and queer identities in the context of the Martial Law. The mainstream film *Dekada ’70* [The ‘70s] (2002) directed by Chito Roño, and the independent production *Liway* (2018), directed by Kip Oebanda, for instance, illustrate the constraints on, and potentials of, motherhood in the context of Marcos-era militarisation and revolutionary resistance. Also set in the Martial Law period, Adolf Alix’s independent movie *Muli* [The Affair] (2010) is a gay romance involving a CPP member, who encounters homophobia within the movement. These examples unsettle the predominantly masculine figuration of revolutionaries constructed in earlier post-EDSA mainstream action biopics like *Balweg: The Rebel Priest* (1986), *Kumander Dante* [Commander Dante] (1989), and *Ka Hector* [Comrade

²⁴ Rolando B. Tolentino, ‘Globalizing National Domesticity Female Work and Representation in Contemporary Women’s Films’, *Philippine Studies* 57, no. 3 (2009): 427.

Hector] (1994), as well as in the skin flick *Walang Panginoon* [No Master] (1989).

The (en)gendering of revolutionary subjectivity in these films is part of the emergence and multiplication of women's/feminist and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) movements after the first EDSA People Power. While women's organisations emerged during the dictatorial period to rally against Marcos, feminist scholar Mina Roces notes that "it was only after democratic institutions were restored in 1986 that women's activism gained momentum."²⁶ The democratisation of the post-EDSA years proved to be hospitable to civil society formations and newer social movements, some of which focussed on identity politics and diverged from the socio-economic concerns of the NatDem movement's Marxist politics. This turn towards identity-based concerns was also a significant factor in the active building of various LGBT organisations.²⁷

The NatDem movement's handling of women's and LGBT issues has been the subject of internal and external critiques, largely concerning its conceptualisation of how the personal -- particularly in relation to gender and sexuality -- relates to the political agenda of the struggle. During the early years of its establishment, the revolutionary movement already recognised the need to address the issue of women's liberation. The movement's writings and educational work explained women's oppression as rooted in the systemic ills of "class exploitation and national oppression."²⁸

²⁶ Mina Roces, *Women's Movements and the Filipina, 1986-2008* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 6–8.

²⁷ John Andrew G. Evangelista, 'Mula Sa Kinaroroonang Ideolohiya: Kontrobersya Tungkol Sa "Unang" Pride March Sa Pilipinas', *Saliksik E-Journal* 6, no. 2 (2017): 265–96.

²⁸ Patricio N. Abinales, *Love, Sex, and the Filipino Communist: (Or Hinggil Sa Pagpipigil Ng Panggigigil)* (Manila: Anvil, 2004), 47–48.

In 1970, the movement established the women's organisation Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan [Free Movement of New Women] (MAKIBAKA). Prior to being forced underground during the Martial Law period, MAKIBAKA was the first to openly and systematically articulate women's liberation agenda as part of this revolutionary politics, tracing the oppression of women to the patriarchal system shaped by feudalism and imperialism.²⁹ This ideological framework of the movement, which criticised the systemic feudal subjugation and bourgeois dehumanisation experienced by Filipino women, was complemented in practice by the expansion of women's roles in important combatant and non-combatant functions in the revolution.³⁰ An emphasis on class underpins this framework, as clearly articulated in the 1974 document "On the Relation of Sexes," (ORS), which expressed the view of "sexual relations as fundamentally a class question."³¹ This document, which contained policy guidelines on sexual relations including the processes of building relationship, marriage, and divorce in the movement, as well as the Party line on gender and sexuality, traced the roots of gender and sexual discrimination to the enduring influences of feudal and bourgeois behaviours and morality on revolutionaries themselves, and called for a proletarian view of the relation of the sexes -- one that is "guided by the principle of the equality between the sexes and the principle of subordinating

²⁹ Delia Aguilar-San Juan, 'Feminism and the National Liberation Struggle in the Philippines', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Special Issue Women and Men's Wars, 5, no. 3 (1 January 1982): 256, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90034-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90034-6); Pauline Mari Hernando, *Lorena: isang tulambuhay* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2018), 48–64; Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, 'Marxist Feminism for a Global Women's Movement against Capitalism', in *Marxist-Feminist Theories and Struggles Today: Essential Writings on Intersectionality, Postcolonialism and Ecofeminism*, ed. Khayaat Fakier, Diana Mulinari, and Nora Räthzel (London: Zed Books, 2020), 306–26.

³⁰ Anne-Marie Hilsdon, *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and Violence in the Philippines*, Women in Asia Publication (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 73.

³¹ 'Appendix I: On the Relation of Sexes (Internal Paper from the Women's Bureau)', in *Love, Sex, and the Filipino Communist: (Or Hinggil Sa Pagpipigil Ng Panggigigil)*, by Abinales, Patricio N. (Manila: Anvil, 2004), 131.

the couple's personal interest to the interest of the people."³² At the same time, the document offered a modest view of the movement's capacity to address the issues of discrimination that perpetually afflict revolutionary relations. As the ORS stated:

In the course of developing a revolutionary relation of the sexes, there are bound to be shortcomings. At this stage, we do not claim the perfection of proletarian relations nor the smooth transformation of the feudal and bourgeois relation of the sexes to a proletarian one.³³

Despite these advances in the movement's policies and practices on gender and sexual politics, some female Party members put forward criticisms of the CPP's position on these issues based on their experiences of sexist norms and practices persisting among revolutionaries, and their claim that women's issues were subordinated to the national liberation programme.³⁴ They began to form feminist organisations bearing a leftist orientation that operated outside the NatDem movement, like *Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan* [Women's Collective for Freedom] (KALAYAAN) and *Kilusan ng Kababaihang Pilipina* [Philippine Women's Movement] (PILIPINA) in the early 1980s.³⁵ These organisations would become forerunners of the vibrant women's movements to emerge in the post-Marcos years.

The tension between homosexuality and the revolutionary movement is also an area of debate in post-EDSA LGBT activism. Gay studies scholar J. Neil Garcia recounts a seminar "Homophobia in the Philippine Popular

³² 'Appendix I: On the Relation of Sexes (Internal Paper from the Women's Bureau)', 132.

³³ 'Appendix I: On the Relation of Sexes (Internal Paper from the Women's Bureau)', 135.

³⁴ Abinales, *Love, Sex, and the Filipino Communist*.

³⁵ Abinales, 54–57; Roces, *Women's Movements and the Filipina, 1986-2008*, 7.

Movement” at the University of the Philippines in 1993, in which “male and female homosexuals who used to belong to the many ‘collectives’ comprising the ‘Philippine Left’ bewailed the homophobia to which they were subjected for so many years,” drawing contrast between the Philippine revolutionary experience and “gay progressivism in other Third World nations,” which “was intimately linked to revolutionary-socialist thought.”³⁶ One of the glaring indications of the presence of homophobia is the absence of homosexual relations in the 1974 ORS document. According to Alburo, the CPP founding chair Sison observed that gays in the movement were “tolerated, respected and credited,” primarily for their role in the movement’s cultural work.³⁷ However, there were also accounts of gay members experiencing discrimination, some of them perceived as “weak” and posing a “security risk.”³⁸ Issues surrounding the movement’s stance on homosexuality also appeared in the contestations in aboveground spheres of social movement organising. This was evident in the debates over the 1994 Pride March held by the Progressive Organizations of Gays (PROGAY), a now-defunct LGBT organisation that carried the ideological and political line of the NatDem movement. In these debates, there were claims that the NatDem-allied activists of PROGAY deemphasised queer advocacies in their

³⁶ J. Neil C. Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM* (UP Press, 2008), 26. It is important to mention however that countries governed with socialist principles have different policies on homosexuality. Under Lenin, for instance, the USSR maintained a progressive stance on homosexuality, which Stalin eventually reversed. In Cuba, homosexuals experienced state persecution. For theorisations about Marxism and homosexuality, see Mario Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Sherry Wolf, *Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017).

³⁷ Kaira Zoe K. Alburo, ‘Brothers, Lovers, and Revolution: Negotiating Military Masculinity and Homosexual Identity in a Revolutionary Movement in the Philippines’, *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 11, no. 2 (2011): 30, <https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=5959>.

³⁸ Markus del Pilar and Pat Gamboa, ‘The Revolution Has No Gender’, *Liberation*, 29 June 2018, <https://liberation.ndfp.org/main-stream/the-revolution-has-no-gender/>.

amplification of broader national and economic demands in the said Pride March.⁴⁰

Far from being unresponsive to critiques of its stance, policies and practices related to issues of gender and sexuality, the revolutionary movement was moved by internal debates, as well as developments in women's and LGBT movements external to it. The Second Great Rectification Movement waged by the movement to address the ideological, political, and organisational crises it experienced from the late 1980s to the early 1990s opened an opportunity for the Party to modify and refine its position on gender and sexuality. In 1997, the Party's National Women's Bureau held discussions on gender and sexual relations, and queer politics. A year later, the Party released "On the Proletarian Relationship of the Sexes," (OPRS) which revised and amended the ORS. The OPRS notably sanctioned same sex marriages, a policy which was absent in the previously existing guidelines on sexual relations, in the movement.⁴¹ In 2005, news of the CPP-officiated same-sex marriage -- between two gay male NPA guerrillas -- appeared in a national broadsheet.⁴² This milestone event puts the movement at the forefront of advancing LGBT rights in the country, where the government has not yet even passed an anti-discrimination bill that both feminist and LGBT activists continue to rally behind.

These developments in gender and sexuality-oriented activisms construct the discursive context in which the imagined memories of the revolution in *Barber's Tales* and *Lihis* are produced. As I later show in my analyses, *Barber's*

⁴⁰ John Andrew G. Evangelista, 'Mula Sa Kinaroroonang Ideolohiya: Kontrobersya Tungkol Sa "Unang" Pride March Sa Pilipinas', *Saliksik E-Journal* 6, no. 2 (2017): 265–96.

⁴¹ Albuero, 'Brothers, Lovers, and Revolution', 31–34.

⁴² Rolando B. Pinsoy, 'Reds Officiate First Gay Marriage in NPA', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 February 2005.

Tales portrays how women's support for, and participation in, the revolution allow them to free themselves from the constraints of wifhood and motherhood. *Lihis* portrays the homophobia experienced by male homosexual NPA guerrillas in the revolution.⁴³ The presence of these issues in memory cinema attests to how Philippine cinema has become an important vehicle in articulating women's and LGBT issues across various genres like women's melodrama, and pink film.

Both *Barber's Tales* and *Lihis* found an audience in filmic events centred on feminist and LGBT advocacies. The state agency Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) endorsed *Barber's Tales* and included it in its 2015 CineJuana Film Festival, a free film festival held to focus on violence against women.⁴⁴ PCW also named it "Most Gender-Fair Film" that same year.⁴⁵ *Lihis* was also shown in state-sponsored LGBT-themed film festivals. It was screened in the first Quezon City International Pink Film Festival organised by the local government of Quezon City in 2014.⁴⁶ The film was also part of PelikuLAYA sa Cine Lokal [Film Freedom in Local Cinema]: An LGBT Film Festival in June 2018, a film festival organised by another government agency, the FDCP, also the film's sponsor. This festival was co-presented by other non-government LGBT organisations as part of the celebration of the Pride Month.⁴⁷

⁴³ As of this writing, there is yet no film made about lesbian NPA guerrillas.

⁴⁴ '2015 CineJuana Film Festival', *Philippine Commission on Women*, 6 March 2020, <https://www.pcw.gov.ph/event/2015-cinejuana-film-festival>.

⁴⁵ Lester Babiera, 'Women's Mag, Other Media Agencies given "Gender-Equality" Awards', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 June 2015, <https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/195858/womens-mag-other-media-agencies-given-gender-equality-awards/>.

⁴⁶ Yugel Losorata, 'Q.C. Goes "Pink"', *Philippine Star*, 11 December 2014, <https://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2014/12/11/1401365/qc-goes-pink>.

⁴⁷ 'FDCP's Cine Lokal Celebrates LGBT Pride Month with PelikuLAYA', Film Development Council of the Philippines, 7 June 2018, <http://fdcp.ph/media/fdcp%E2%80%99s-cine-lokal-celebrates-lgbt-pride-month-pelikulaya>.

It is also worth noting that these two films were marketed in ways that highlighted the theme of gender and sexuality in their respective narratives. The trailer of *Barber's Tales* featured a brief kissing scene between the female protagonist and another woman, suggesting a homosocial, if not, a lesbian angle (which the film does not really pursue).⁴⁸ Aside from highlighting the gay romance aspect, *Lihis* also relies on the sensational aspect of the sex scenes involving two straight matinee idols, as gleaned in some promotional interviews.⁴⁹ These marketing strategies have the effect of deemphasising the political narrative of the revolution that is at the centre of both films – a gesture that could be interpreted as a tactical way to evade censors, pacify the suspicion of government officials, and broaden their appeal to audiences who may be drawn to “non-political” films. But as my analyses in the following sections show, these films are centrally concerned with the memory of revolutionary resistance to the dictatorship and the question of gender and sexuality that figure in this struggle.

Barber's Tales

Barber's Tales was produced by independent film outfits APT Entertainment and Octobertrain Films. It had its international premiere at the 2013 Tokyo International Film Festival, where its lead actress Eugene Domingo received the Best Actress award. It was also shown in international film festivals in Madrid, Hongkong, Abu Dhabi, and Udine.⁵⁰ In 2014, it went on to have a

⁴⁸ Jun Robles Lana, *Barber's Tales Trailer*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6BNuVMrljY>.

⁴⁹ Rey Pumaloy, 'Joem Bascon on Love Scenes with Jake Cuenca in Lihis: "Yes, Napagdudahan Ko Yung Sexuality Ko Nung Ginagawa Namin Yung Movie."', *PEP.Ph*, 2 September 2013, <https://www.pep.ph/news/40187/joem-bascon-on-love-scenes-with-jake-cuenca-in-lihis-yes-napagdudahan-ko-yung-sexuality-ko-nung-gina>.

⁵⁰ Tessa Mauricio-Arriola, 'The Uncertain Homecoming of "Barbers Tales"', *The Manila Times*, 6 August 2014, sec. lifestyle-entertainment, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2014/08/06/lifestyle-entertainment/show-times/uncertain-homecoming-barbers-ales/116941>.

limited commercial run in Philippine cinemas. In the Philippines, the film received critical acclaim, garnering nominations from local award-giving bodies like the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino [Filipino Film Critics]. It has since been invited for screenings in various schools and universities, and, as I have mentioned, by government offices as well, as part of Martial Law film screenings, or Women's Month celebrations.⁵¹

The film received warm reviews, most of which centred on the film's theme of women's empowerment. Such critical reception, which foregrounded the film's feminist politics, often occludes the revolutionary politics that also lies at the heart of its narrative. This is evident, for instance, in the review by Hong Kong film critic Clarence Tsui, who notes how the film "combines the political and personal with the story of the emancipation of a rural female barber under the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s," and compares its chronicle of the "political emancipation of a meek widow" to the rise of Corazon Aquino, herself a widow who succeeded Marcos.⁵² I take caution in accepting this observation, given that Aquino's elite anti-dictatorial politics would eventually translate to the anti-communism of her presidency, during which she implemented counterinsurgency operations against the grassroots movement which the fictional Marilou supported and joined. More sensitive to these particularities, local critic Oggs Cruz situates the film's chronicle of female empowerment in relation to the revolutionary movement's struggle against the dictatorship, describing how "Lana plots Marilou's escape from

⁵¹ Lana, Interview by the author.

⁵² Clarence Tsui, 'Barber's Tales (Mga Kuwentong Barbero): Tokyo Review', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 18 October 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/barbers-tales-mga-kuwentong-barbero-649581>.

the clutches of traditional machismo alongside a country's struggle for revolution."⁵³

Extending these observations about the intertwining of the personal and the political, I focus on the oft-occluded intertwining of revolutionary politics and rural womanhood. As feminist scholar Jacqueline Siapno points out, the image of the underclass revolutionary woman has occupied marginal presence even in progressive works of fictions like Lualhati Bautista's novel about middle-class motherhood, *Dekada '70* [and by extension, its 2002 film adaptation].⁵⁴ Departing from this largely middle-class optic, *Barber's Tales* brings underclass women, particularly those based in the countryside, to the fore. Cast in the spatio-temporal peripheries of modernisation, rural women are subjected to domestic labour and sexual violence propped up by semi-feudal structures of patriarchal domination like marriage and religion, and normatively disallowed from the realm of the political. They also experience the violence of state masculinity through waves of militarisation designed to target revolutionaries in the countryside. Neferti Tadiar explains that within these oppressive conditions and structures, these subaltern subjects enact "liberatory practices intricately intertwined with...social practices that appear to support the material conditions of prostitution, crony capitalism, and semifeudal social relations."⁵⁵ Following this insight, I contend that, in *Barber's Tales*, rural women circumvent dictatorial rule to support the revolution through feminine practices like religious sociality that subsist within structures and practices of domination.

⁵³ Oggs Cruz, 'Barber's Tales' Review: Emergence from Anonymity', *Rappler*, 17 August 2014, <http://www.rappler.com/entertainment/movies/66468-barbers-ales-review-eugene-domingo>.

⁵⁴ Siapno, 'Alternative Filipina Heroines: Contested Tropes in Leftist Feminisms', 230–36. Bracketed comment added.

⁵⁵ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 22.

Women inside and outside the house

I begin by considering the barber shop as a space of the personal and the political. The barber shop -- a two-storey wooden structure -- is where the town barber Jose (Daniel Fernando) and his wife Marilou (Eugene Domingo) live, and where he meets and serves his customers; it is a space of both domestic privacy and social encounter. The film opens with a montage of still images of the shop's exterior and interior. One image shows a close-up of a dusty issue of the broadsheet *Bulletin Today* bearing the headline "FM [Ferdinand Marcos] won't lift Martial Law" near a transistor radio atop a table. This image telegraphs the dictator's communicative strategies to control the people's political imagination, while conjuring the tension between the state's monologic discourse and the people's resistance to this discourse.

In the Filipino community, the barber shop assumes the role of what Mikhail Bakhtin would regard as a dialogic space, characterised by the active interaction of multiple voices constrained by, while exceeding, the oppressive hierarchies of the social world.⁵⁶ It is an important communicative space, where informal social encounters take place, and where people hear, share, and interrogate news, rumours, and gossip, not only from state-controlled media, but also from the barber, patrons, and bystanders. Here people discuss and debate on topics both intimate and public. The film's title in Tagalog, "mga kuwentong barbero," is a slang for gossips, rumours, and tall tales, signifying how, in the communicative sphere of the barber shop, narrative hierarchies are unsettled through the grapevine. This title aptly relates to the film's depiction of gossip and rumours as what anthropologist

⁵⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

James C. Scott calls “infrapolitics of subordinate groups,” which here refers to “a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance” enacted under the noses of the authority.⁵⁷ Of significance is the fact that during the period depicted in the film, Marcos passed a presidential decree that outlawed “rumors, false news and gossip,” which he viewed as a threat to the stability of the government’s “New Society” project.⁵⁸ As film scholar Rolando Tolentino explained, gossiping allowed “people to listen attentively to the dictatorship while at the same time undermining from behind what the regime has said.”⁵⁹ The film lays bare these forms of resistance, tracing them as they emerge in, and from, traditional, feudal lifeways of rural subjects, particularly women.

The opening montage is accompanied by a voice-over narration by Marilou’s friend Susan (Gladys Reyes), who describes the barber shop as “a small and self-contained world,” and compares Marilou’s fate to a man: “if her fate has a gender, I think it is male.” In the next scene, the film establishes this “male fate” by introducing Marilou as a subservient wife to Jose, as well as a docile subject of dictatorial rule. While Jose is giving the town priest a haircut, a military officer enters the shop to ask about wounded NPA guerrillas suspected of hiding in the village. Dictatorial gaze, conveyed through the male soldier’s point of view shot, frames the male figures -- Jose and his customer Father Arturo (Eddie Garcia) -- in the foreground, relegating Marilou to the background. This blocking, which sets up Marilou’s peripheral position in the public and private spheres, is also executed in scenes of

⁵⁷ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

⁵⁸ Lian Buan, ‘How Marcos Treated Dissent: Punishing Rumors and Summoning Reporters’, *Rappler*, 24 February 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/marcos-dissent-martial-law-free-press>.

⁵⁹ Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*, 133.

Marilou performing her wifely duties like preparing Jose's clothes and cutting his hair. One scene shows Marilou giving Jose a bath inside their cramped bathroom, recalling a New Cinema work that also centres on the theme of female subservience, Brocka's *Bona* (1980). Within the barber shop, the revolution occasionally punctures the couple's domestic affairs through offscreen suggestions. For instance, the yet to be seen presence of revolutionaries is indexed in the dialogue in the mentioned scene of the soldier making an inquiry at the barber shop, as well as in auditory cues of an armed encounter that Marilou and Jose hear while she is giving him a bath.

Beyond the "small and self-contained world" of the barber shop, the film shows Marilou attending the block rosary with her Catholic prayer group, and visiting her son, who died at a young age, in the local cemetery. These scenes of religious piety and maternal devotion also demonstrate Marilou's adherence to the feminine norms of Catholicism, which since the Spanish colonial era, has remained a powerful force in Philippine society especially in rural communities. Catholicism has shaped Filipino womanhood according to the "impossible model" of the Virgin Mary.⁶⁰ This edification of the "traditional Catholic madonna-Filipina" as paradigm of moral purity and martyrdom has also been instrumental in stigmatising women whose sexual practices lie outside marital bounds, engendering and sustaining what is known as the "Madonna-whore" dichotomy.⁶¹ This dichotomy is set up in one sequence showing Marilou and her friends attending the block rosary in Susan's house, and Jose visiting the town casa [brothel] where he is serviced by a prostitute, Rosa (Sue Prado). Scenes of village women praying the rosary in Susan's house are intercut with scenes of drinking patrons and prostitutes in the casa. In this sequence, rural forms of female sociability -- one premised

⁶⁰ Roces, *Women's Movements and the Filipina, 1986-2008*, 21.

⁶¹ Hilsdon, *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and Violence in the Philippines*, 104-5.

on domestic servitude and religious piety, and the other, on male sexual satisfaction -- are organised, segregated, and circumscribed by patriarchy, personified by Jose, who traverses the “Madonna-whore dichotomy” as Marilou’s husband and Rosa’s patron.

It is important to mention that sex and domesticity were implicated in the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand and Imelda. What is known as the “conjugal dictatorship”⁶² sought to construct the nation as a family, transforming governance into a family affair through Ferdinand's macho image, Imelda’s maternal figuring and the involvement of the Marcos children in politics.⁶³ Sexual policing also translated to the dictator’s censorship of sex-oriented films called *bomba* as part of the regime's brand of moral leadership.⁶⁴ Veronica Garibotto’s observation about dictatorial notions of domesticity is relevant in this regard:

Censorship, forced exile, imprisonment, and death went hand in hand with an official discourse that emphasized private notions like *home* and *family*. *Domesticity* became the leading military ideologeme, creating a rift between the private and public fields and between the individual and collective realms.⁶⁵

⁶² This phrase is derived from the book *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and Imelda Marcos* (1976) written by former Marcos publicist Primitivo Mijares, who disappeared after testifying against Marcos in the US. “‘Conjugal Dictatorship’ to Be Relaunched in Time for EDSA Anniversary’, *Rappler*, 8 February 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/bulletin-board/conjugal-dictatorship-new-edition-primitivo-mijares>.

⁶³ Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*, 123–24.

⁶⁴ Rolando B. Tolentino, “Vaginal Economy: Cinema and Globalization in the Post-Marcos Post-Brocka Era,” *Humanities Diliman: A Philippine Journal of Humanities* 7, no. 2 (December 21, 2010): 97.

⁶⁵ Veronica Garibotto, *Rethinking Testimonial Cinema in Postdictatorship Argentina: Beyond Memory Fatigue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 13. Emphasis in the original.

In the morning after the events of this sequence, Jose dies in his sleep. His death enables an oblique encounter between the binary groups of rural “Madonnas” and “whores.” In the funeral scene, Rosa and a fellow prostitute watch his funeral parade from outside the *casa* in the hilltop. An elevated shot from Rosa’s perspective shows the grieving Marilou carrying Jose’s picture, before cutting to Rosa, who realises that the confined body is of her regular client. The death of the patriarchal figure to whom Marilou and Rosa devote their domestic and sexual labours suggests the subsequent suturing of the cleave between the “Madonna” and the “whore.”

The two women reconcile through Marilou’s encounter with the revolution. One night, Marilou discovers Edmond (Nicco Manalo) and a wounded comrade, Renan (Jess Mendoza) hiding in the barber shop, narrowly evading military capture. Edmond, a student in Manila who eventually joins the revolutionary movement, is Marilou’s baptismal godson, and the nephew of her friend Tess (Shamaine Buencamino). Renan, as it turns out, is the younger brother of the prostitute Rosa. At the request of Renan, Marilou fetches Rosa to the barber shop. As prefigured in the funeral scene, Marilou catches Rosa looking at Jose’s picture in the shop, subtly registering that the women are aware of their distinct ties with the dead man. The cleave between “Madonna” and “whore” is sutured, as these two women are unified by the shared aim of protecting the revolutionaries on the basis, not yet of political and ideological unity, but of traditional social ties such as baptismal commitment and siblinghood.

To assist the two rebels in evading the military checkpoint, Marilou cuts Renan’s hair to make him look less suspicious. Rosa then offers to accompany the rebels to the checkpoint, explaining that “you will not be suspected of being rebels if you’re seen with a woman.” Here, the film

suggests that dictatorial gaze -- through military surveillance -- views the revolution as a masculine enterprise, in which women are not conventionally seen, much less suspected, as participants. As feminist scholar Delia Aguilar-San Juan notes, even in areas of political mobilisation, women's presence is deployed more prominently, as it "is less noted by the military."⁶⁶ Cast outside the realm of the political by the patriarchal imagination of the state, womanhood becomes a means to circumvent a masculinised political regime.

An interesting detail in this scene brings to the fore how the film teases out the radical possibilities underlying certain norms in rural societies. Seeing Renan's new haircut, Edmond remarks, "you could easily be mistaken for a priest," suggesting that these religious figures are also somehow immune to military suspicion. Due to Catholicism's historic association with anti-communism in the Philippines before and during the Marcos dictatorship,⁶⁷ priests are imagined as conservative social figures. The film however unsettles this archetypal image through the figure of Father Arturo. A long-time customer of Jose, the priest seeks Marilou's haircutting services after her husband's death and encourages her to reopen her barber shop by endorsing her to churchgoers. Father Arturo is politically vocal, sharing his sentiments with Marilou about some of the Mayor's dark secrets: his philandering and the mysterious disappearances of his political opponents. On one occasion, he gives Marilou a red book. While visually evocative of revolutionary books like Amado Guerrero's *Philippine Society and Revolution* or, as pointed out by an audience member in a screening I attended in 2014, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848), the book is actually

⁶⁶ Aguilar-San Juan, 'Feminism and the National Liberation Struggle in the Philippines', 260.

⁶⁷ Leonard Davis, *Revolutionary Struggle in the Philippines* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 162–65.

Jose Rizal's classic anti-colonial, nationalist novel *Noli Me Tangere* [Touch Me Not] (1887).

According to Lana, Rizal's fiction, foundational to Philippine nationalism, inspired the narrative structure of *Barber's Tales*.⁶⁸ Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere*, and its sequel *El Filibusterismo* [The Subversive] (1891) allegorised socio-political issues during the Spanish colonial era through character types that have informed models of Filipino social behaviour, as in the case of the Catholic Filipina-Hispanic character of Maria Clara who has become problematically idealised in popular consciousness as the image of virtuous femininity.⁶⁹ This allegorical style is adapted in New Cinema works like Brocka's small-town drama *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* [Weighed but Found Wanting] (1974),⁷⁰ to which critic Pablo Tariman compares *Barber's Tales* in his review.⁷¹ In *Barber's Tales*, the fictional town is populated with village archetypes like the barber, the priest, the prostitute, devout women, and rebels.

Father Arturo reminds Marilou that reading *Noli* is important "to know who we are." Here, he suggests how the social ills depicted in the novel resonate with the dictatorial violence that has crept through Marilou's town. There are however stark differences between the film and the novel it references. While Rizal's novel depicts abusive Spanish friars, *Barber's Tales* offers a redemptive image of Catholicism in Father Arturo. During the dictatorship, the progressive segments of the Catholic church -- priests, nuns, and lay people - - mobilised Basic Christian Communities in poor communities, joined the

⁶⁸ Lana, Interview by the author.

⁶⁹ Roces, *Women's Movements and the Filipina, 1986-2008*, 22-23.

⁷⁰ Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 5-7.

⁷¹ Pablo Tariman, 'A Quiet, If Explosive Film on Women Empowerment', *Philstar.Com*, 4 August 2014, <https://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2014/08/14/1357336/quiet-if-explosive-film-women-empowerment>.

anti-dictatorship movement and even embraced the revolutionary struggle.⁷² Father Arturo represents these members of the clergy who upheld the tenets of liberation theology that articulated the revolutionary project of socio-political transformation through the theological vocabulary of Christianity. These progressives in the Church attested to the radical potential inhering in members of an institution associated with oppressive politics. The refashioning of religious beliefs towards radical ends is particularly attractive in peasant communities, where, as Scott points out, “the growth of oppression dialectically produces its own negation in the symbolic and religious life of the oppressed,” with religion becoming an embodiment of the “normative basis for rebellion and revolution.”⁷³

Catholicism’s radical potential is also evident in the sphere of gender relations. Religiosity forges female solidarity towards not only pious ends, but also ways of life that exceed the conservative norms of womanhood embedded in Catholic teachings. Aside from the block rosary scene in Susan’s house, the scenes in the town’s wooden makeshift church show Marilou and her friends attending mass or a rosary vigil, while exchanging gossip about local politics. The church figures as an important communal avenue where rural women informally or clandestinely participate in the political sphere. In a scene when Marilou stumbles upon the Mayor’s battered wife Cecilia (Iza Calzado) taking refuge in the confessional box, the church is also shown as a symbolic retreat from the violence of domestic and dictatorial patriarchy.

⁷² Robert L. Youngblood, *Marcos Against the Church: Economic Development and Political Repression in the Philippines* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Davis, *Revolutionary Struggle in the Philippines*, 156–73.

⁷³ James C. Scott, *Decoding Subaltern Politics: Ideology, Disguise, and Resistance in Agrarian Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 61.

The church is also where the film stages the most violent incident of dictatorial repression in the village. In this scene, villagers rush to the church in shock to see the bullet-ridden corpses of Father Arturo and other suspected revolutionaries laid out before the entrance to instil fear among the people. Interrupting the commotion of the weeping crowd, the Mayor (Noni Buencamino) fires a rifle skyward, and announces that the priest is in cahoots with the rebels and killed in an armed encounter with the military. Close-ups of the Mayor are intercut with those of village women grieving, their faces performing affective displays of defiance of the Mayor's version of the encounter, and by extension, dictatorial narration. In the next scene, Edmond explains that, while Father Arturo supports the movement by sending medicine and food supplies, the Mayor's account of the armed encounter is a lie. Enraged at the massacre and the Mayor's lie, Marilou allows the revolutionaries to meet in her barber shop.

The scene of revolutionaries around the lamp-lit table inside the shop imagines the movement as masculine. Tracking shots show the all-male composition of Edmond's revolutionary collective, while Marilou, quietly and yet intently listening to their discussions about the armed revolution, sits outside the meeting table, and performs feminine domestic tasks like serving drinks and clearing the table. This masculine figuration -- also embodied in male radical characters like Father Arturo, Edmond, and Renan -- affirms Tsui's observation in his review that patriarchy "props up the behavior" of even "well-meaning revolutionaries fighting for a good cause."⁷⁴ This portrayal of the revolution as masculine further points to how people engaged in the political struggle do not immediately break with deeply-ingrained social -- in this case, patriarchal -- relations and norms. Normative

⁷⁴ Tsui, 'Barber's Tales (Mga Kuwentong Barbero)'.

and progressive tendencies coexist and interplay in the act of waging the struggle.

In the film, Marilou's political radicalisation is marked by encounters between dominant behaviours and practices like religiosity and feminine servitude, and progressive, emergent ones geared towards the assertion of female agency and revolutionary participation. As I have mentioned already, religious sociality allows rural women to stake a claim in the community's political life. Rosa's public display of femininity aids revolutionaries in evading military surveillance in the checkpoint. Other scenes further attest to how tactical and strategic possibilities in developing liberatory practices build, and rely on dominant ones. Female solidarity enables Marilou to challenge and overcome rural sexism that manifests in the villagers' suspicion towards, and questioning of, her ability to replace her deceased husband as the town barber (see Figure 1). Susan offers snacks to the barber shop's customers, while Rosa endorses the barber shop to her patrons in the brothel. Domestic resistance is exemplified in Susan's struggle against her husband's sexual demands. Perennially pregnant, Susan sprinkles chili on her husband's genitals, challenging the reproductive mandate of marriage instituted by Catholicism. Susan's pregnancy also exemplifies the tactical deployment of femininity -- in this case, of maternity -- as a form of revolutionary support. In one scene, she uses her pregnancy by feigning labour pains to distract soldiers from capturing the wounded Edmond who is hiding in the barber shop. The women's deployment of femininity thus proves to be useful in resisting the interlinked yet distinct structures of patriarchy and dictatorship in the small town.



Figure 1. Rural women and the barber shop -- Marilou (Eugene Domingo), Tess (Shamaine Buencamino), and Susan (Gladys Reyes) -- in Jun Lana's *Barber's Tales* (APT Entertainment & Octobertrain Films, 2013).

Dictatorship, patriarchy, and resistance

To illustrate women's resistance to the intertwined structures of patriarchy and dictatorship, I now turn to the film's Marcosian figure, Mayor Bartolome. After Jose's death, the Mayor entrusts Marilou with the duty of cutting his hair, summoning her to his mansion. Marilou's labour takes on an overtly political character, as it involves managing the Mayor's appearance in his performance of public duties. The Mayor's reliance on Marilou's labour is premised on the narcissism of Marcosian politics; in one scene, a portrait of Ferdinand Marcos is visible in the shelf behind the Mayor's seat, explicitly visualising dictatorial presence. As film scholar Rolando Tolentino observes, "Marcos's image continued to haunt the everyday lives of national bodies,"⁷⁵ governing the behaviour of ordinary citizens. In the film, the Marcosian image resonates in the way Mayor Bartolome performs reiterations of the

⁷⁵ Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*, 161.

national dictator and reproduces the violence of dictatorial politics in the domestic and public domains.

Marilou becomes privy to the intertwined private and public exercises of dictatorial patriarchy. She befriends the Mayor's wife, Cecilia. Prior to her duty-bound visits to the Mayor's residence, gossips have been circulating about Cecilia's confinement in a mental institution, her misery over her husband's marital indiscretions, and her faded beauty. Marilou's access to the domestic privacies of the couple's home allows her to uncover the truth underneath these "barber's tales." In one scene, she notices Cecilia's face covered with bruises caused by the Mayor's domestic abuse. Cecilia's plight illustrates how private domestic violence resonates with the political violence that marks the Mayor's governance. As in the case of Marcosian figures in New Cinema texts like the town mayors in Brocka's *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* and *Miguelito: Batang Rebelde* [Miguelito: Boy Rebel] (1985), the Mayor mirrors the dictator Marcos's marital infidelity⁷⁶ and political brutality, figuring the intertwining of domestic and state violence. The Mayor manages to conceal these dark secrets through his exercises of Marcosian narcissism; underneath his well-ironed uniform, Cecilia tells Marilou, the Mayor's body bears scratch marks inflicted by the tormented wife in her desperation to fight back.

In contrast to Marilou, who experiences personal and political emancipation after Jose's death, Cecilia desperately clings to her marriage, surrendering to a life of marital abuse and subjugation. In one of the film's dramatic highlights, she takes Marilou to her favourite spot in the town -- a rocky cliff

⁷⁶ See Caroline S. Hau, 'Dovie Beams and Philippine Politics: A President's Scandalous Affair and First Lady Power on the Eve of Martial Law', *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 67, no. 3-4 (2019): 595-634, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2019.0027>.

that overlooks the river. The rocky cliff is set against the mountains surrounding the village like a fortress -- a scenic backdrop conveyed in panoramic shots that occasionally appear in the film's scene transitions. Against this picturesque vista, Cecilia turns hopeful, her face wistful and dreamy as she tells Marilou the name she chooses for the baby that unfortunately she has never brought forth -- Luz, which means "light" (see Figure 2). In the scene that, as I mentioned earlier, was featured in the film's teaser video, Cecilia gently kisses Marilou in the lips, a gesture which appears to be more of a homosocial -- rather than homosexual -- expression of gratitude and appreciation. Right after this kiss, Cecilia jumps to her death.



Figure 2. Figures of emancipation and submission: Marilou (Eugene Domingo) and Cecilia (Iza Calzado) in Jun Lana's *Barber's Tales* (APT Entertainment & Octobertrain Films, 2013).

The Mayor intervenes in framing the story of Cecilia's suicide, illustrating how even in death, women continue to be subjugated and instrumentalised by the patriarchal order through the violent practices of narration. He refrains the police from talking to the press, and advises Marilou to keep mum about Cecilia's death. In succeeding scenes, Marilou learns that dictatorial narration mobilises Cecilia's death for counterinsurgency, disseminated through state-controlled media, and circulated through gossip.

Susan tells her that radio broadcasts are spreading the news that Cecilia is killed in an ambush staged by the NPA. At Cecilia's wake, Marilou overhears a fellow villager saying that the rebels, accused of staging the ambush a few days before the Lenten season, "show no fear of God," indicating how some religious villagers accept the Mayor's deception. Gossip and rumours, in this case, show their ambivalent potential, as they become transmission belts for dictatorial narration that taps into the religious sentiments of the villagers to advance its anti-communist agenda. In a later scene, Marilou watches, with fellow villagers before the sari-sari [retail] store, a television broadcast announcing that the dictator is attending Cecilia's funeral, heralding the encounter between national and local dictatorial figures in the small town.

In preparation for the funeral, the Mayor summons Marilou to cut his hair. The Marcosian narcissism that underpins Marilou's haircutting duties for the Mayor is visualised in t-shirts, a flag, and a banner bearing Marcos' face that greet Marilou upon her arrival in the Mayor's residence. The film reaches its climax in the haircutting scene (see Figure 3). Here, the Mayor expresses his gratitude to Marilou, crediting her silence for how the fictitious ambush has turned public opinion against the revolutionaries, and enticed even the President's attendance in the funeral. He promises to reward her for "her friendship." Rage subtly registers in Marilou's face. She grabs a pair of scissors, and fatally stabs the Mayor in the neck, angrily whispering, "I'm not your friend."



Figure 3. Marilou's (Eugene Domingo) giving the the Mayor (Noni Buencamino) his final haircut in Jun Lana's *Barber's Tales* (APT Entertainment & Octobertrain Films, 2013).

Marilou's killing of the Mayor exemplifies a form of what Wessels would describe, following Žižek's reading of Walter Benjamin, as "divine violence" – "a spontaneous counter-violence enacted by the oppressed when it spontaneously disrupts the order imposed by the law, usually as a retributive act of self-defence, rather than resulting from planned, ideologically driven revolutionary action."⁷⁷ This act of killing, while enacted outside revolutionary mandate, could also be interpreted as an instance of extra-legal violence tangential to the extra-legal armed resistance pursued by NatDem revolutionaries. It particularly invites parallels to the armed partisan units deployed by the movement in towns and cities to assassinate corrupt politicians in the years following the film's fictional events.⁷⁸ As Cruz states in his review, this act "signifies both her assertion of her power as a woman and her oneness with all the other rebels."⁷⁹ Silently leaving the Mayor's

⁷⁷ Michael Wessels, 'Representations of Revolutionary Violence in Recent Indian and South African Fiction', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 5 (3 September 2017): 1033, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1337361>.

⁷⁸ Davis, *Revolutionary Struggle in the Philippines*, 63–66.

⁷⁹ Cruz, 'Barber's Tales' Review'.

house, she returns to the barber shop, and the scene suggests, cuts her hair. The next scene shows soldiers entering the empty barber shop, taking with them a photograph of Marilou with her deceased son to identify her in their hunt. The military's use of this image of maternity signifies how femininity, previously excluded from the realm of politics by the dictatorial gaze, is now politicised and marked for subversion.

Susan's narration takes over the narrative, recounting that Marilou is still in town, hiding from authorities and villagers. The next scene shows the village women planning to help Marilou escape. This scene is filmed in a manner that visually evokes the lighting and blocking in the scene of male revolutionaries meeting in Marilou's shop. As the women congregate around the lamp-lit table, they enact a reclaiming of collective action in the name of female solidarity.

Reiterating the political valence of female solidarity within Catholic feudal sociality, the women stage Marilou's escape through a religious ritual -- the Lenten procession. In the procession scene, dictatorial masculinity is embodied in soldiers stationed to look for Marilou. Assuming the gaze of the Marcos military, the camera surveys the procession, especially the veiled village women. A brief shot, also assuming the perspective of the soldier, captures a woman, her back to the camera, accidentally revealing her short hair that resembles Marilou's. A military officer wades through the crowd to seize the woman; after he removes her veil, she turns out not to be Marilou. In the background, Susan, Tess, Rosa, and the other village women remove their veils, revealing that they all sport the same haircut. They all become Marilou, embodying what Tadiar calls "a gendered subjective form of 'syncretic sociability'...which implies a co-extensivity of being between self

and other.”⁸⁰ Female solidarity constructs and edifies a shared subjectivity, shaped not just by experiences of sexual and gender violence and political victimisation, but also by the liberating practice of radical collective action.

The shot cuts to Marilou -- presumably already disengaged from the procession crowd -- facing back, slowly removing her black veil to reveal her short hair. She turns around, looks at her friends outside the frame, before putting on her veil, and ascending to a forested area, the last moment, Susan narrates, that she sees Marilou.

Susan’s voice-over narration drives the film’s epilogue. In the absence of certainty about Marilou’s fate, Susan recounts the “barber’s tales” that seek to fill in the narrative gaps and offer different scenarios. One scene shows Marilou in a bus headed for Manila where she presumably finds work as a maid; another shows her lying down inside a prison cell, captured by government forces, presumably tortured, and forcibly disappeared; another echoes the fate of Cecilia, showing her jumping from a rocky cliff. These re-enacted rumours allegorise some of the bleak destinies of women subjugated to what the film introduces in the opening montage as “male fate” -- slavery, death, or madness.

But Susan refuses to accept any of these “barber’s tales,” and expresses her belief that Marilou’s story has a hopeful ending. This ending begins with a panoramic shot of the mountain, imposing like a gigantic fortress surrounding the small town. This scenic image, which I mention appearing in the film’s scene transitions, cuts to a scene inside a guerrilla zone presumably nestled in this mountain, suggesting the revolution’s towering presence over Marilou’s village. A female revolutionary presides over an

⁸⁰ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 347.

initiation ritual of new members of the movement, who stand facing the red flag of the NPA. This female revolutionary is portrayed, in a cameo role, by Philippine cinema's "superstar" Nora Aunor, acclaimed for her filmic portrayals of lower-class, martyred woman in Martial Law-era films, a figure that Domingo's own Marilou also incarnates. She asks each new member to choose a nom de guerre -- "a new name to signify a new life." The film ends with a shot of Marilou's face, who says "Luz. Call me, Luz," invoking the memory of Cecilia and the daughter she never had, as well as the prominent visual motif of light, embodied by the oil lamp that appears in scenes that track her radicalisation, as in her encounter with Edmond and Renan, the revolutionaries' meeting in the barber shop, as well as the women's meeting to plan her escape.

The ending therefore portrays Marilou's political awakening and new life as the symbolic child of Cecilia, conceived out of not only the circumstances of patriarchal and dictatorial violence, but also the unfulfilled dreams and hopes of those victimised by such violence. It mirrors how the revolution is engendered, not only by social crises and violence, but also by the dreams and hopes of the vanquished. Aunor's presence as the cinematic index of subaltern women, and *Barber's Tales'* revolutionary leader reinforces this dialectic of victimisation and resistance. In the end, Luz embodies not only the experiences of victimisation inside and outside the home that both Cecilia and Marilou have gone through, but also the capacity of women to exercise agency through revolutionary politics. In embracing the revolution, Marilou's transformation into Luz allows her to overcome her "male fate."

Lihis

The critical interrogation of dictatorial machismo and patriarchy is also performed in *Lihis*. In this film, the focus is on the question of

heteronormativity and masculinity. This film is inspired by the experiences of gay revolutionaries who, in the words of Lamangan, “were not free, but [they] were fighting for freedom.”⁸¹ Funded by the government agency FDCP with BG Productions International, the film premiered as part of the 2013 Sineng Pambansa [National Film] Festival All-Masters Series.

Reviews of the film lauded Lee’s script, while offering different reactions to Lamangan’s direction. For instance, Skilty Labastilla of the critics’ group Young Critics’ Circle, criticises Lamangan for turning the film into a “predictable melodrama generated out of Lihis’ controversial topic,” adding that “Ricky Lee’s script has the potential to traverse junctures between private and public, personal and political, and show the irony of the Left’s rejection of the dominant political ideology while repressing sexualities that deviate from the dominant sexual regime.”⁸² Film reviewer Philbert Ortiz Dy claims however that the film achieves a “level of craftsmanship” unseen in previous Lamangan productions.⁸³ Film scholar Joel David also notes that Lamangan’s direction “walks a tightrope in bypassing the generic excesses of commercial practice while acknowledging its audience’s entertainment expectations,” and lauds its “capable storytelling and strong performances,” singling out Jake Cuenca’s performance, and comparing him to the performance of Eddie Garcia, who played Father Arturo in *Barber’s Tales*, as a closeted family man in Brocka’s film *Tubog sa Ginto* [Gold-Plated] (1970).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Jocelyn Dimaculangan, ‘Joel Lamangan Says Jake Cuenca and Joem Bascon Were “Professional” While Shooting Sex Scenes for Lihis’, *PEP.Ph*, 27 August 2013, <https://www.pep.ph/guide/movies/12450/joel-lamangan-says-jake-cuenca-and-joem-bascon-were-professional-while-shooting-sex-scenes-for-lihis>.

⁸² Skilty Labastilla, ‘The Way of All Flash’, *Young Critics Circle Film Desk* (blog), 13 September 2013, <https://yccfilmdesk.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/the-way-of-all-flash-lihis-review/>.

⁸³ Philbert Ortiz Dy, ‘Newfound Passion’, *ClickTheCity Movies*, 2014, <https://www.clickthecity.com/movies/a/20103/lihis-movie-review-newfound-passion>.

⁸⁴ Joel David, ‘Millennial Traversals: Outliers, Juvenilia, & Quondam Popcult Blabbery (Part I: Traversals within Cinema)’, *Unitas* 89, no. 1 (2015): 36–37.

These diverging opinions relate to the tension between the conventions associated with political cinema, and the more discredited parameters of commercial filmmaking, into which Lamangan has successfully ventured. David situates the film in what he calls Lamangan's "progressive film series," here referring to his independent political films about activism and the revolution like the political thriller *Dukot* [Desaparecidos] (2010), and the political drama *Sigwa* (see Chapter 3). It is however worthy of mention that Lamangan has directed some LGBT-themed films previously, like *Pusong Mamon* [Muffinheart] (1999), an earlier collaboration with Lee, as well as more sensational sex-oriented "pink films" like *Walang Kawala* [No Way Out] (2008) and *Heavenly Touch* (2009). *Lihis* bears the generic traces of these films such as the foregrounding of gay romance and frank staging of, and sensual camerawork in, sex scenes, intended primarily for titillating effects.

As mentioned earlier, the promotional releases for the film also invoked its generic affinity with gay cinema, from its extended trailer that features some of the film's sex scenes to promotional interviews with Lee and Lamangan who commented on comparisons made between *Lihis* and the Hollywood gay romance, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).⁸⁵ This affinity between *Lihis* and *Brokeback Mountain* resides largely in their representations of masculine gays. This in turn represents a particular shift in the cinematic imaging of gays in the Philippines, where films commonly portray the "dominant Filipino male homosexual identity" or bakla as someone "effeminate and woman-hearted, who may cross-dress, and who desires a masculine man, the lalake."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dimaculangan, 'Joel Lamangan Says Jake Cuenca and Joem Bascon Were "Professional" While Shooting Sex Scenes for *Lihis*'.

⁸⁶ Ronald Baytan, 'Bading Na Bading: Evolving Identities in Philippine Cinema', in *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities*, ed. Fran Martin et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 181.

In recent years, the notion of kabaklaan has become a more complex one, departing from the image of the effeminate male (perhaps encompassing what can now be identified as the transgender woman) that has come to be conventionally, even predominantly, conflated with the bakla. As cultural studies scholar Ronald Baytan notes in his essay on 1990s-2000s gay cinema, Philippine cinema has recently begun to produce images of masculine-acting gays, which is indicative of the plurality of gay/bakla subjectivities, beyond the effeminate, even transgender figures frequently cast as sources of comic entertainment in earlier Filipino films. The bakla in the 1990s-2000s, Baytan writes, “no longer thinks of himself as an incomplete man or woman; he may even be masculine and nontransvestic, and he can claim that he is lalake, too.”⁸⁷ *Lihis*, with its figuration of masculine gays (one of whom eventually becomes married and can even be considered a silahis or bisexual male), is produced at a time when images of male homosexuality are already becoming more diversified. As I discuss in the later sections, this representation of masculine gays is situated in relation to the military masculinities of the dictatorship’s armed forces, and the revolutionary movement.

Post-memory

Two narratives converge in *Lihis*. The first narrative is set in post-EDSA Philippines under the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who, as I have mentioned earlier, has been labelled Marcosian for the violence and corruption of her administration. Ada (Isabelle Daza) is a progressive teacher and journalist making a documentary film about the little-known massacre that took place during the Martial Law period in the rural barrio [town district] of Acacia. She belongs to what Marianne Hirsch calls the “generation of postmemory” -- those who are born after the generation who witnessed

⁸⁷ Baytan, 193.

and underwent traumatic experiences. The post-memory generation develop their own memory of the traumatic experiences faced by their parents or older generations through “the stories, images, and behaviors” to which they were exposed growing up.⁸⁸ Ada’s documentary project aims to recover this traumatic past that her elders and their contemporaries have gone through (see Figure 4). The opening scene shows how she enacts this post-memorial agenda in her teaching. In her history class, she discusses before her students how the government erases portions of history to construct memory in the service of certain political interests.



Figure 4. Ada (Isabelle Daza) and her documentary project in Joel Lamangan's *Lihis* (Film Development Council of the Philippines & BG Productions International, 2013).

Ada’s personal life is also haunted by the impulse to recover a deliberately obliterated past. An early scene in the movie shows her looking at an old photograph taken during her baptism, her godfather’s face torn off. Her mother Cecilia, a former activist and human rights worker who becomes disillusioned with the movement because of a yet to be revealed falling-out

⁸⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

with Ada's now-deceased father, refuses to explain this. Cecilia (played in the Martial Law years by Lovi Poe, and in the post-EDSA years by Gloria Diaz) harbours rancour for radical politics; she persuades Ada to join her in migrating to the US, begrudgingly attributing the political turmoil in the Philippines to the political activities of activists. Cecilia cultivates a sense of political disenchantment and conservatism characteristic of some former radicals in the texts I examine in Chapter 3.

The second narrative revolves around two revolutionaries Ador (Joem Bascon) and Cesar (Jake Cuenca), identified respectively by their noms de guerre, Felix, and Jimmy. Felix is an activist writer, who along with some comrades, enters a guerrilla base in 1972 to join the NPA. Here, he meets Jimmy, who upon their first encounter taunts him, "Comrade, you look exhausted. You're not used to climbing, eh?" This remark signifies the presence of a normative gender regime in the guerrilla zone that counts physical strength as an index of valorised masculinity. As Joshua Goldstein points out in his work on war and gender, combatant contexts, such as armed revolutions, construct and privilege a form of "militarized masculinity" that socialises men to war-making capacities.⁸⁹ While the NPA does not embark on purely military functions, with guerrillas participating in other non-combatant activities like political organisation and agricultural work, Jimmy's comment indicates that militarised gender ideals persist as the basis for policing men -- especially gays -- for failing to adhere to such standards of masculinity. As Tadiar notes, these "homosocial masculinist forms in no small part" are "a result of the revolutionary forces' dialectical opposition to the Philippine military and the sovereign power of the state."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 251–52.

⁹⁰ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 353.

The film's title *Lihis* resonates with the movement's adherence to such heteronormative ideals. This word translates in Tagalog to either "not straight" or "transgressive," connoting both sexual orientation and ideological transgression. The interplay between ideology and sexuality appears in the debates between Jimmy and Felix. In a meeting held by their revolutionary collective, the two cadres argue about the relationship between the individual and the political and ideological imperatives in the revolutionary organisation. Jimmy asserts that there should be a way to acknowledge individual differences and concerns. "We are dealing with human beings," he argues, "not only with ideology." Felix, however, espouses strict adherence to organisational regulations and ideological correctness. "The correct perspective is necessary at all times," he insists. "You cannot just switch perspectives."

The debate is not resolved, and in a later scene outside the meeting of the collective, the two start to accuse each other of committing ideological errors. Jimmy calls Felix "dogmatic," while Felix retorts that Jimmy is "adventurist." As they shout past each other, snippets of dialogue register that they are arguing about women's rights, indexing the movement's struggle to address issues related to gender and sexuality. At one point, Jimmy tauntingly retorts "you still have a dick," charging the heated exchange with a sexual tone. The camera tightly frames their visibly agitated profiles facing each other, evoking sexual tension. The shouting match ends when they both lose patience and point their rifles at each other, a behaviour that evinces both a transgression of Party discipline concerning the resolution of conflict, and the normative association of masculinity with violence. At the same time, this moment visualizes homoeroticism through their weapons' phallic imagery.

This homoeroticism explodes in the next scene. Isolated from their comrades one evening, the two escalate their debate into an exchange of blows. As the brawl intensifies, their acts of masculine aggression give way to a sexually-charged moment when Felix suddenly kisses Jimmy. While distractingly and sensationally intercut with the present-day scene of Ada and her boyfriend's lovemaking accompanied with a tender musical score that spills through the past and the present, the scene continues in slow-motion, the lingering kiss shared by Jimmy and Felix progressing to sexual intercourse.

The gay sex scene comes before the film's first scene of military combat, creating a queering gloss on this filmic display of military masculinity. In this scene, which follows the conventions of action cinema, the NPA guerrillas ambush a government military vehicle, staging a clash between state masculinity and the revolution's own military masculinity. While the scene spectacularises Jimmy's masculine display of military prowess by framing him in the foreground, brief close-ups capture Felix gazing admiringly at him, subjecting the fighting NPA rebel to a diegetic homoerotic gaze. The romantic development between the two is also suggested in the next scene, when Jimmy receives a pair of shoes from an ally, and gives his own pair to Felix, who wears it in their trek to the guerrilla zone. Brief close-ups also show the exchange of glances between these two guerrillas, hinting at the blossoming of their secret affair.

The entry of Cecilia (Lovi Poe), who goes by the nom de guerre Jasmine, as a volunteer for a medical mission in the guerrilla zone in 1975 disrupts the developing romance between Felix and Jimmy. She becomes attracted to Felix, and attempts to seduce him. In one scene, she asks Felix if, instead of waging an armed struggle, class enemies can "just kiss and make up." This recoding of flirtation in political language suggests Jasmine's own

ambivalence towards revolutionary politics which becomes more explicit later.

Meanwhile, Jimmy grows exasperated over the lack of clarity of his relationship with Felix. During the former's attempt to talk to the latter, Jasmine interrupts their conversation. She tells them that she is leaving the guerrilla zone in a few days, and kisses Felix. Jimmy persists in reaching out to the increasingly evasive Felix. In one scene, he follows Felix on his way to the river to wash his clothes. After a brief row, the two have sex in the river in broad daylight (see Figure 5). This sex scene, perhaps the most explicit and graphic in the movie, substantiates the film's generic link to pink films. Camerawork vividly captures their lovemaking, employing a spectacularised and sexualised focus on the actors' bodies.



Figure 5. The lovemaking of Felix (Joem Bascon) and Jimmy (Jake Cuenca) in Joel Lamangan's *Lihis* (Film Development Council of the Philippines & BG Productions International, 2013).

As later revealed, Jasmine, from the riverbank, catches an eyeful of the two having sex, but pretends not to have seen anything. She approaches them just as they finish, and takes Felix to a hut in the guerrilla zone, initiating her

own seduction. Jasmine and Felix later enter into a relationship, prompting Felix to request that he be transferred to a group away from Jimmy. The distraught Jimmy tries to convince Felix, in vain, to pursue a relationship with him despite the prohibition in the movement, “as long as we desire it.”

In his review, Dy observes that “the characters keep talking about how the love is forbidden but face no real consequences from the institution.”⁹¹

Indeed in *Lihis*, their comrades passively acknowledge and tolerate whatever is going on between Felix and Jimmy. When advised by a comrade to give up on Felix, Jasmine even retorts, “it’s forbidden, yet you let them both.” In comparison, the film *Muli* (2010) depicts the effect of such prohibition, when the protagonist is sanctioned by his comrades for entering a same-sex relationship during the Martial Law period.

It is instructive to mention Kaira Albuero’s observation that, referring to the ORS document released in 1974, “same-sex relationships are not addressed in the guidelines thereby erasing homosexual partnerships from the Party discourses.”⁹² The absence of any document about homosexuality from the CPP’s reestablishment in 1968 to the rectification campaign in the 1990s however translated to a de facto prohibition, even as local formations of the revolutionary movement “were given the autonomy to interpret the Party’s position on homosexuality,” most of them taking other communist parties that outlawed homosexuality as their models.⁹³ Moreover, since the guidelines on sexual relations suggested that all relationships among comrades required the movement’s collective intervention and recognition,

⁹¹ Dy, ‘Newfound Passion’.

⁹² Albuero, ‘Brothers, Lovers, and Revolution’, 30.

⁹³ Marlon Lacsamana, ‘Rainbow Warriors: Strategies of War in the Inclusion of Persons of Diverse SOGIE in the Maoist Insurgency in the Philippines’ (MA Thesis, Budapest, Hungary, Central European University, 2015), 39.

homosexual relations were considered forbidden by default through the institutional exercise of queer erasure; in other words, these relations were forbidden simply because they did not even exist within official revolutionary discourse. Judith Butler's comment on queer erasure in cultural norms and regulations is relevant in this regard:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality.⁹⁴

In addition to the absence of homosexuality in the movement's policy, the movement's problematic handling of homosexual relations is also evident in how cadres respond to the complex issue of romantic and sexual desire. Jimmy, devastated over Felix's departure from their collective, and his marriage to Jasmine, registers his desire to take a break from revolutionary work. His comrades, while well-meaning and encouraging, sympathetically tell him to "strengthen his ideological disposition." This advice renders homosexual desire intelligible within the domain of revolutionary framework by linking it to ideological weakness. As Butler states, "precisely because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain."⁹⁵ This issue also relates to the question of how individuals negotiate their own desires and needs with the

⁹⁴ Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 24.

⁹⁵ Butler, 24.

collective imperatives of the political struggle. Political commitment calls on revolutionaries to overcome personal desires and limitations, and submit to the requisites of discipline, sacrifice, and duty. But these individual, personal concerns cast a shaping force on one's political work; here, Jimmy's earlier retort -- "we are dealing with human beings, not only ideology" -- is relevant. *Lihis* thus foregrounds the need to understand how certain dimensions of revolutionary subjectivity, such as romantic desire, cannot be reduced to the question of one's ideological conviction. At the same time, these frequently occluded subjective dimensions complicate the way revolutionaries like Jimmy respond to, and address, the political demands of the struggle.

Jimmy lies low from the movement and succumbs to a series of personal crises. At one point, he is arrested and tortured by the Marcos military, in a brief yet graphic scene in which he is beaten to pulp by figures of the state's military masculinity. The episodes of Jimmy's descent to crises are intercut with scenes chronicling Felix's marriage to Jasmine under the movement's flag. While Felix actively struggles to repress his homosexuality and hinders Jimmy's attempts to reach out to him by burning his letters, his attempts to settle down with Cecilia and submit to the heteronormative demands of the family are unsettled by the memory of Jimmy. One scene shows Felix looking lovingly at his wife sleeping with their baby, Ada. Felix's subjective shot then moves from the sleeping mother and child to the pair of shoes that Jimmy gave him, pitting the image of heterosexual motherhood against homosexual desire. Eventually, Felix stumbles upon the drunken Jimmy in their village. He brings his former comrade home, where he lives with Jasmine and their daughter as a family. Upon seeing Felix's family home, Jimmy's face registers the mixture of sadness and fear, captured in close-ups.

The struggle between wife and gay lover takes place anew in the family home. Parallel to the sequence of the gay lovers' tryst in the river and Jasmine's subsequent seduction of Felix, sex is weaponised in this struggle. In one scene, Jimmy, passing by the couple's room, overhears the moans of Felix and Jasmine. This situation is reversed when later, Jasmine, arriving home from some errand, catches Jimmy and Felix having sex. The rekindling of this gay romance results in the dissolution of the heterosexual marriage. In retaliation, Jasmine warns Felix that he will never see their daughter Ada again. This threat makes use of motherhood to punish Felix not just for being unfaithful, but also for submitting again to his homosexual desire.

Joel David opines that Jasmine/Cecilia is key to the film's "feminist advocacy," which enables the film to build "a connection with unaffiliated viewers."⁹⁶ This resonates with Ronald Baytan's observation that, "positive gay films usually involved a strong heterosexual woman."⁹⁷ While David's comment raises an important point about the film's potential appeal to those less interested in its portrayal and exploration of revolutionary politics, it is necessary to point out the pitfalls of recuperating Cecilia's feminism, especially when her character problematically privileges individualist concerns to sidestep the no less important agenda of the Marxist-oriented project of the revolution. In one scene, Jasmine, upon witnessing Jimmy and Felix's sexual tryst in the river, remarks that converting Felix from homosexuality is "her real fight, not imperialism and other '-isms' they taught me." Out of her desire to claim Felix for herself, Jasmine becomes a

⁹⁶ David, 'Millennial Traversals: Outliers, Juvenilia, & Quondam Popcult Blabbery (Part I: Traversals within Cinema)', 37.

⁹⁷ Baytan, 'AsiaPacifiQueer', 183.

figure of “corrective heterosexuality,” a role played by characters from the opposite sex to disrupt same-sex relations in films.⁹⁸

Jasmine’s individualist motive demands to be interrogated. In addition to driving her rejection of revolutionary aims, it also propels her wilful participation in the erasure of the Barrio Acacia massacre. David locates Cecilia’s rancour “not in her eventually divorced husband’s preference but in the hypocrisy of the movement’s leadership in declaring the relationship wrong but condoning it anyway for militaristic reasons.”⁹⁹ However, her dismay with the movement cannot be separated from her disappointment with Felix’s homosexuality. Certain suggestions of Cecilia’s homophobia appear in the film. Her accosting of the comrades’ tolerance for, and failure to censure, the homosexual relations also suggest her endorsement of the movement’s heterosexist prohibition out of self-interest. Moreover in her confrontation with Felix, Cecilia even makes a mocking gesture of gayness, insultingly yelling at Felix “you’re gay!,” before slapping him.

After Felix’s separation from Cecilia, the gay couple, who now use their real names Cesar and Ador, strive to build an alternative family, while continuing their revolutionary work. Cesar’s mother Luisa (Racquel Villavicencio) welcomes them into her home and supports them in their political involvement. In contrast to Jasmine’s homophobic maternity, Luisa performs a mothering role for the gay lovers, and forges a heterosocial bond with them. Stephen Maddison reads this kind of bond as a “form of political

⁹⁸ Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 228; Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19.

⁹⁹ David, ‘Millennial Traversals: Outliers, Juvenilia, & Quondam Popcult Blabbery (Part I: Traversals within Cinema)’, 37.

resistance” that illustrates the shared experiences of oppression of, as well as of solidarity between, gays and women.¹⁰⁰

As a figure of Martial Law-era patriarchal victimisation, Luisa also invites comparison to the rural women in *Barber's Tales*; she is also a victim of both domestic abuse from her husband, and state violence. Her husband and son were both killed in the Barrio Acacia massacre. Luisa therefore becomes the key figure in the transmission of post-memory. Through her, Ada discovers and recovers both the secret lives of Cesar and Ador, and the erased history of the massacre.

Historical erasures

At this point, I turn to the film's chronicle of the Barrio Acacia massacre, which I consider to be crucial to *Lihis'* thematic exploration of the gendered dimension of historical erasure. While fictional, this massacre dramatizes real-life accounts of military violence during the dictatorship, drawing parallels for instance with the 1981 Las Navas massacre¹⁰¹ in Central Philippines, which also involved the execution of a counterinsurgency operation called “zoning.” As journalist William Chapman describes it, zoning involves the deployment of government forces who “surrounded a neighbourhood, roused residents from their homes, and made house-to-house searches, hauling suspects before a hooded informer for identification.”¹⁰² The gendered aspect of this operation is visualised in the film's staging of the massacre, which conveys the aggression of government soldiers through shaky camerawork and a tense musical score. Military forces

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Maddison, *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters: Gender Dissent and Heterosocial Bonding in Gay Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 10.

¹⁰¹ Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, ‘Martial Law Massacres’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 September 2016, sec. Opinion, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/97552/martial-law-massacres>.

¹⁰² William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 170.

coerce villagers out of their houses in the dead of the night, gathering them in an open area in the village. The camera, positioned behind the scared villagers cowering and feminised in submission, looks at the all-male functionary of state masculinity who, standing erect in the filmic foreground, eventually rake them with gunfire (see Figure 6). Zoning takes on a more overtly gendered form in a later scene when villagers hurriedly report to Felix and Jimmy that the military threatens to weed out suspected allies and members of the revolutionary movement by interrogating the village males. In this scene, zoning emphasises how the dictatorship associates political subversion with masculinity in a manner comparable to how dictatorial gaze functions in *Barber's Tales*.



Figure 6. The Barrio Acacia massacre in Joel Lamangan's *Lihis* (Film Development Council of the Philippines & BG Productions International, 2013).

Cecilia, who helps in the fact-finding committee that probes the massacre, and the gay lovers work together to investigate the massacre. In a conversation between former husband and wife, Ador tells Cecilia that he and Cesar plan to appeal their case to the movement, hoping that it would

make the Party change its policy on sexual relations and recognise homosexual relationships.

The film shows that even before the formal revision of Party policies on sexual relations, cadres gradually learn to become more accepting of homosexual relations, primarily on account of the contribution of gay cadres to the struggle. Interviewed by Ada, one of their former comrades Esteban (Jaime Pebanco) admits that he used to disapprove of the couple's relationship, but muses in retrospect: "Who am I to judge? They became good cadres because of their love for each other." Esteban's sentiment may be accused of veering towards an instrumentalist view of homosexual love, but it demonstrates the capacity of revolutionaries to recognise and accept non-normative sexualities based on revolutionary action. In accounts of homosexual acceptance within the revolutionary movement even in the years when homosexual relations are already officially recognised in Party policy, comrades begin to reconsider their views on homosexuality after seeing the revolutionary zeal of gay comrades.¹⁰³ These experiences point to the difficulties encountered even by revolutionaries themselves to overcome deeply entrenched reactionary attitudes and beliefs like homophobia. The revolution however presents various opportunities to correct them, allowing homophobic cadres to learn from, and understand, the experiences of their gay comrades.

In the final action scene, Ador and Cesar embark on a suicide mission to divert government soldiers planning to implement zoning in a civilian

¹⁰³ Lacsamana, 'Rainbow Warriors: Strategies of War in the Inclusion of Persons of Diverse SOGIE in the Maoist Insurgency in the Philippines'; Rowell D. Madula, 'Pakikibak(l)a: Pagsasakasaysayan Ng Communist Party of the Philippines at Ng Pakikibakang Pangkasarian/Pakikibak(l)a: The History of the Communist Party of the Philippines and Its Sexual Struggle', *Malay* 25, no. 1 (2012): 35–51.

community. In this scene, the guerrilla lovers, overpowered and outnumbered by the Marcos military, exchange fire with the soldiers. The kinetic pace of this scene, accompanied with a tension-inducing action score, dramatically transitions to slow motion, as Ador and Cesar each get hit by bullets from the enemy. The dramatic transition dislodges the characters from the gender regime of military masculinity conveyed through the conventions of action films, and conveys the affect of romantic sacrifice. The scene ends on a melodramatic note, with Ador and Cesar dying in each other's embrace, an image that fuses revolutionary heroism with homosexual romance.

Upon finding the dead bodies of Cesar and Ador, Cecilia is overcome with rage. She aggressively disentangles her former husband's body from his lover's embrace. Her rejection of the gay lovers also informs her decision to cut off Cesar's face in the baptismal picture. In another scene, Cecilia burns the documents collated by the fact-finding committee about the Barrio Acacia massacre, her rage inexplicably driving her to the lamentable act of historical erasure. Later, the older Cecilia would justify her actions to Ada, blaming the lovers and even the movement for causing her pain.

While Ada is sympathetic to her mother's emotional ordeal, her documentary film accomplishes the important task of rectifying the errors that the latter has committed. In addition to documenting the erased history of the massacre, Ada's project also recovers the memory of the gay lovers.

Remembering their story becomes an act of justice, especially since they did not live to see the changes in the movement that would have granted them their desired recognition and acceptance. Ada also registers the effort of the movement to correct its stance on homosexuality. She states in her documentary film that homosexuality "is no longer forbidden in the

movement. They now have a different view on gender issues,” referring to the recognition of same sex relations and marriage in the revised policy in the 1990s, years after the death of the fictional couple.

The film’s last scene symbolically bridges the erased past, embodied by Luisa who plays witness to the gay romance and survives Martial Law violence, and its recovery by the post-memory generation, represented by Ada. The two women stand in front of the Wall of Remembrance in the Bantayog ng mga Bayani (Heroes Memorial), a memorial complex dedicated to commemorating the heroism of Marcos-era activists and revolutionaries. They both look at the names of Cesar and Dominador (Ador’s full first name) etched in the Wall, later magnified in a close-up shot that symbolically foregrounds their heroism and visually integrates gay revolutionaries in the memory of revolutionary anti-Marcos resistance.

Conclusion

In his discussion of the heteronormative politics of the Marcos dictatorship, Tolentino argues that Marcosian dictatorial power relied partly on the national proliferation of the gendered imaginary of the “conjugal dictatorship” as an ideal to regulate Filipino gender and sexuality. Through public rituals and spectacles of political iconography, this imaginary depicted the dictator Ferdinand as the virile masculine ideal and the First Lady Imelda as the sublime feminine ideal. State policies participated in these heteronormative figurations, as embodied, for instance, in the conveyance of statist masculinity through military and police visibility.¹⁰⁴ As the foregoing analyses demonstrate, *Barber’s Tales* and *Lihis* are imagined gendered memories that conjure dictatorial masculinity through images of

¹⁰⁴ Tolentino, *Contestable Nation-Space*, 158–67.

militarisation, as well as through sexual and gendered configurations of political violence cutting across private and public realms.

These films also relate how ordinary citizens disengage from Marcosian gender politics in, and through, the revolution. However, they also grapple with the revolutionary movement's own entrenchment in normative gender relations and practices. As Tolentino states, "[t]he site of hegemonic construction of national bodies becomes the site of locating reiterative performances of its subversion."¹⁰⁵ This means that subversion takes place within the grain of containment and regulation. Thus, the film depicts Marilou and her friends embodying normative feminine behaviour, and Ador and Cesar performing military masculinity, in their revolutionary struggle against the dictatorial regime that relies on, and promotes, such gender conventions. Ultimately, as the preceding examinations of the filmic figurations of subversive rural women and homosexual guerrillas show, these imagined memories of the revolution show how gender and sexual struggles figure in revolutionary politics. These films emphasise the important role played by sexual minorities in the revolutionary struggle against the Marcos dictatorship, as well as the need for the movement to correct, and overcome patriarchal and heteronormative practices that persist among revolutionary subjects.

In imagining the memory of anti-dictatorship resistance, these films speak to the present not only by engaging with contemporary social movement discourses critical of the revolution's earlier policies and practices on gender and sexuality, but also by illustrating the relevance of past experiences of revolutionary resistance as models for present and even future political action. Both films use narrative devices such as Susan's retrospective voice-

¹⁰⁵ Tolentino, 159.

over narration and Ada's documentary filmic research to bridge these temporalities of radicalism. These temporal traversals also allow the portrayal of the changes in the revolutionary movement. In capturing these changes, these imagined gendered memories point to how the movement and its members respond to the need to develop social practices that correct previously problematic policies, and align with the revolution's vision of social liberation. In the next chapter, I explore this issue further by focussing on the reality of setbacks and errors that complicate the accomplishment of this vision.

CHAPTER 2**Pedagogies of errors in *Barikada* and *Gerilya***

The Marcos dictatorship spurred the growth and expansion of the NatDem movement. As chronicled in the NatDem fictions analysed in the previous chapter, the repressive and brutal political conditions during this period encouraged many to go underground and join the armed struggle. In 1986, the Marcos dictatorship was toppled, and the country transitioned to formal democracy. The period leading to, and following, this transition was marked by a series of volatile developments in Philippine political life that posed various challenges to the revolutionary movement. Striving to address these developments, revolutionaries faced setbacks and crises, forcing the Party leadership to conduct a rectification process in the 1990s. During what would be known as the Second Great Rectification Movement, certain tactics and strategies formulated and implemented during the period -- particularly those that deviated from the protracted guerrilla war framework -- would be identified, assessed, and criticised as revolutionary errors. This process divided the movement while consolidating the revolution's ideological framework.

Years after this crisis-ridden period, contemporary understandings of the revolution are haunted by revolutionary errors. The representation of errors remains a very sensitive issue for the movement, given how public circulation and discussion of the movement's errors could undermine its political agenda and its "epistemic reliability" -- the "ability to obtain reliable knowledge

about the world, and accurately and effectively register, articulate, and generalize the people's visions and aspirations.¹

In this chapter, I focus on how literary NatDem fictions -- novels set in the crises-ridden years of the 1980s and the 1990s -- represent revolutionary errors as part of the political reality of the struggle. Novelist Norman Wilwayco claims that his novel *Gerilya* [Guerrilla] (2008) is based on his experiences in the 1990s. Also inspired by the author's experiences in the revolutionary movement, Edberto Villegas's *Barikada* [Barricade] (2013) covers the late 1980s, 1990s up to the early 2000s. These narratives portray the difficulties experienced by revolutionaries in mastering the revolutionary field of struggle, forging comradely relations, and applying the revolutionary framework on the ground, causing them to commit analytical and behavioural errors. I argue that these two novels examine revolutionary experiences as occasions to reflect on the inevitability of errors in the struggle, and the need to correct, and learn from, them. I therefore consider these NatDem fictions as pedagogies of errors -- narratives that convey important lessons in the struggle through unflinching yet cautionary representations of mistakes, deviations, and miscalculations.

In the following sections, I discuss the issues of errors and rectifications in the revolutionary movement, particularly in relation to the crises of the 1980s and 1990s. I then discuss how certain conceptualisations of the city and the countryside cultivate erroneous political tendencies and actions, elaborating on the significance of space in the movement's formulation of its political strategy and configuration of political subjectivity. Building on these discussions about space, revolutionary subjectivity, and errors, I perform

¹ Hau, *Necessary Fictions*, 243.

close readings of the two novels as portrayals of errors and rectification set respectively in urban and rural terrains of the struggle.

Error and rectification

Both *Gerilya* and *Barikada* chronicle post-EDSA experiences of revolutionaries who commit errors in analyses and practices -- from collective insurrectionist undertakings to individual lapses like irresponsibility, bad temper, and indiscriminate violence. Both contain narrative details that their authors claim to be derived from actual historical events. *Barikada* carries a disclaimer that the insurrection at its climax is fictional. Nevertheless, the novel, according to Villegas, is informed by his involvement in the movement through underground political work during the Martial Law years, and by his later experiences as a member of the NDFP panel for peace negotiations with the post-EDSA Philippine government.² As I elaborate later, the novel also contains characters based on actual people, and also makes reference to some real-life incidents during and after the movement's period of crises. *Gerilya* also opens with a disclaimer that the events and characters depicted are fictional. Its author Wilwayco however claims that the novel is based on his own experiences. A novelist, musician, web designer, and writer for film and television, Wilwayco, who is now based in Australia, claimed to have been exposed to political activism during his undergraduate years, leading to his foray in the countryside in the 1990s.³ These two novels' correspondence with, and fictionalisation of, historical incidents and personages are conveyed through realist narrative techniques that illustrate the relational dynamics among revolutionaries. They both offer an inside view of the revolution by dramatizing the (inter)personal

² Villegas, Interview by the author.

³ Wilwayco, Interview by the author.

contradictions and struggles of revolutionaries, as they strive to embody, usually in vain, the principles and behavioural imperatives called for by the revolutionary movement.

At the core of these two literary works lie the concept and practice of rectifying errors. The process of rectification has an important place in the revolution's history. The movement itself was founded through the First Great Rectification Movement, which sought to expose, criticise, and correct the errors of the leaders of the older party, and led the way for the re-establishment of the CPP. The re-establishment document "Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party," which was drafted by the CPP founding chair Sison, stated how the principle of rectification owes to Mao, quoting his formulation: "[w]hen we criticize errors and weaknesses, it is 'to learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones' and 'to cure sickness to save the patient.'"⁴ In the Party's view, Mao has provided an important guide to rectify errors, especially in the context of "modern revisionism," manifested in the ideological deviations committed by communist parties in many parts of the world, particularly in the Soviet Union, resulting in their failure to sustain a proletarian-led socialist order.⁵ The Party thus called on cadres "to make self-criticism in order to improve their political work constantly."⁶

A central imperative among revolutionaries is the process of subjective transformation also known as revolutionary remoulding. "To remold oneself into a proletarian revolutionary," Sison explains, "one does not only study

⁴ Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party', 6; Mao Tse-tung, *Combat Liberalism* (1937; repr., Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954).

⁵ Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party'; Armando Liwanag, *Stand for Socialism Against Modern Revisionism* (1992; repr., Utrecht: Foreign Languages Press, 2017).

⁶ Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party'. Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party'.

and learn Marxist theory from books but must also engage in revolutionary practice.”⁷ As stated in the CPP's Constitution first ratified in 1968, the Party enforces a regime of activities intended to cultivate proper revolutionary behaviour. One such activity is the practice of criticism and self-criticism among its members.⁸ Members hold sessions in which they point out each other's errors and weaknesses, and when necessary, resolve to submit to corresponding disciplinary actions. These sessions are an essential part of revolutionary life, belonging to a range of activities intended to shape a revolutionary towards proper political subjectivity. As social scientist Rosanne Rutten observes, “[a] ‘good revolutionary’ served as a model for the masa [masses] and the comrades, was always open to criticism and self-improvement, and practiced ‘simple living’ (adjusting to the lifestyle of the masa). Although few activists fully matched the ideal, many made a sincere effort to do so.”⁹

The process of revolutionary remoulding is however a fraught one. Individuals encounter internal -- or personal -- and external barriers in the difficult process of developing proper revolutionary subjectivity. Both *Barikada* and *Gerilya* chronicle the failures and errors of revolutionaries in their attempts to become “good revolutionaries.” The emphasis on the errors of revolutionaries in these works construct a particular image of the movement not as an infallible formation, but as one made up of members prone to errors that impact on broader, collective practices and aims.

⁷ Sison and Werning, *The Philippine Revolution*, 56.

⁸ Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Constitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines’, in *Foundation for Resuming the Philippine Revolution: Selected Writings, 1968 to 1972*, by Jose Maria Sison (1968; repr., The Netherlands and the Philippines: International Network for Philippine Studies (INPS) and Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2013), 79–93. In 2016, a new CPP Constitution was approved.

⁹ Rosanne Rutten, ‘Changing “We-Feelings” in a Period of Revolutionary Mobilization’, *Philippine Studies* 51, no. 3 (2003): 421–22.

Barikada and *Gerilya* are published in the 2000s, in the aftermath of the Second Great Rectification Movement -- a comprehensive campaign conducted by the Party leadership to address the crises that the movement went through in the 1980s and 1990s. Cast in the shadows of this complex chapter in the movement's history, these novels touch on the question of how the revolution deals with errors, and register some of the issues that have haunted the movement, particularly after its crises-ridden years.

As documented in a sizeable body of scholarly and journalistic accounts, the movement's crises-ridden chapter in the 1980s and the 1990s was a period of debates around important theoretical and practical issues such as revolutionary tactics and strategy, particularly the relationship between urban and rural political work, armed and parliamentary struggles, as well as the question of democratic governance within the Party.¹⁰ These debates within the movement became more apparent in 1986, when the revolutionary movement issued a controversial stance directing the public to boycott the snap elections that Marcos called for under US pressure. The public ignored the boycott call, and went on to support the electoral bid of opposition candidate Corazon Aquino. During the first EDSA People Power that ousted Marcos and installed Aquino to the presidency, the revolutionary movement was marginalised by reformist and moderate elements like the Catholic Church and business elites. This experience prompted the Party leadership to assess and criticise the failed boycott call as a tactical error that failed to, among others, recognise the significance of electoral struggles.¹¹

¹⁰ Abinales, *The Revolution Falters*; Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*; Caouette, 'Emancipatory Politics'.

¹¹ Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 135-38.

In the aftermath of this error, some Party members began “to raise questions related to but not limited by the erroneous boycott decision,” and even went on to question the revolutionary strategy of protracted people’s war.¹² These contentions intensified during the democratic transition under Aquino. For some cadres, the political opportunities under Aquino such as the opening of democratic spaces warranted the formulation of policies aligned with a fast-tracked urban insurrectionary strategy -- an issue which *Barikada* would explore. They proposed these policies with the agenda of enhancing, if not replacing, the protracted rural guerrilla warfare.¹³ In the late 1980s, the crises deepened when after a series of setbacks and arrests of many Party leaders, regional branches of the movement conducted a series of anti-infiltration campaigns, known as the “purges,” to weed out suspected government spies. These campaigns led to the detention, torture, and execution of over a thousand cadres by their own comrades in various guerrilla zones, with utter disregard of due process, causing widespread demoralisation among, and demobilisation of, many revolutionaries.¹⁴

The Party leadership launched the Second Great Rectification Movement with the express aim to assess, repudiate, and correct errors during this period of crises. The rectification document entitled “Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors” summarised these errors as related to strategic deviations, which deprioritised mass base organising, especially in the

¹² Weekley, 146–47, 158–62.

¹³ Weekley, 144–257.

¹⁴ Laurence Marvin S. Castillo, *Digmaan Ng Mga Alaala: Rebolusyon at Pagkakamali Sa Mga Talang-Gunita* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2021); Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 171–72; Patricio N. Abinales, ‘When a Revolution Devours Its Children Before Victory: Operasyon Kampanyang Ahas and the Tragedy of Mindanao Communism’, in *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics after 1986*, ed. Patricio N. Abinales (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1996), 154–79; Patricio N. Abinales, ‘Kahos Revisited: The Mindanao Commission and Its Narrative of a Tragedy’, in *Brokering a Revolution: Cadres in a Philippine Insurgency*, ed. Rosanne Rutten (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2008), 144–87.

countryside, in favour of “military adventurism” designed for insurrection. These errors, according to the Party leadership, resulted in lax security, mass arrests, and infiltration hysteria.¹⁵

As its title indicates, this document sought to reaffirm the Maoist strategy of rural-based protracted guerrilla warfare as the appropriate one for transforming Philippine society.¹⁶ This reaffirmation divided the movement’s membership. Those who opted to accept the resolution to reaffirm the Maoist strategy, known as the reaffirmists (RAs), welcomed it as a triumph over modern revisionism. Those who rejected the campaign’s reaffirmation -- identified broadly as the rejectionists (RJs) -- disputed the applicability of the Maoist strategy on various, often contending, theoretical and practical grounds, and left the movement.¹⁷

The crises of the movement in the late 1980s to the early 1990s coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of socialisms in Europe. Public revelation of the errors of the NatDem movement, particularly the tragic anti-infiltration campaigns, fuelled an emergent imagination of the failure of Marxism in the Philippines. Narratives, both fictional and non-fictional, have played a crucial role in broadening public awareness of these errors, and even promoting rejection of the revolution. In 2001, former NPA guerrilla Robert Francis Garcia released his memoir *To Suffer thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated its Own*, which recounted his experience as a victim of the anti-infiltration campaign in a region in Luzon, and expressed his rejection of the revolution.¹⁸ Mario Miclat’s autobiographical fiction

¹⁵ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors’, *Rebolusyon*, no. Special Issue 1 (July 1992): 1–80.

¹⁶ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines.

¹⁷ Kerkvliet, ‘Contemporary Philippine Leftist Politics in Historical Perspective’, 10.

¹⁸ Robert Francis B. Garcia, *To Suffer Thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated Its Own* (Manila: Anvil, 2001).

Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions (2010) centres on the author's experiences in the ill-fated China trip, in which the Party leadership ordered him to procure firearms. The novel also dwelt on the errors and schemes of revolutionaries, constructing an image of the CPP leaders and even cadres as deceptive and unreliable.¹⁹ In 2014, the Quimpo siblings, many of whom became part of the revolutionary movement, published their memoir *Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years*, which also offered a critical view of the revolution's leadership.²⁰ Another example is a film about the anti-infiltration campaign entitled *Huwad na Pangarap* (Fake Dream) produced by Sinagtala Productions, which was uploaded on Youtube.²¹

While narrative representations of errors can cause damage to the public image of the NatDem movement, some examples strive to produce the opposite effect. In his foreword to an anthology of revolutionary writings, Gelacio Guillermo stated that the importance of narratives about the struggle “derives from not only their documentation of the past, but their capacity to provide lessons for the continuing waging of the people's war, even in its present stage of development.”²² I have also written elsewhere about how narratives portray experiences of errors to emphasise the difficulties in the struggle, as well as highlight the need to rectify shortcomings and excesses.²³ An example is Lualhati Abreu's memoir, *Agaw-dilim. Agaw-liwanag* [Dusking, Dawning] (2009), which was written as a response to Garcia's memoir. Abreu, also a victim of a regional anti-infiltration campaign in which Garcia also suffered torture, wrote about her experiences as a CPP cadre, recounting

¹⁹ Mario Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions* (Mandaluyong: Anvil, 2010).

²⁰ Susan F. Quimpo and Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years* (Manila: Anvil, 2012).

²¹ *Huwad Na Pangarap* (Sinagtala Productions, nd).

²² Guillermo, *Muog*, xxiv.

²³ Castillo, *Digmaan Ng Mga Alaala: Rebolusyon at Pagkakamali Sa Mga Talang-Gunita*.

the various errors of revolutionaries that culminated in these violent "purges." Instead of pursuing the same conclusion advanced by her former comrade Garcia, Abreu emphasised the significance of the rectification movement, and her continued belief in the NatDem revolution.²⁴ In this example, the revolutionary movement's capacity to acknowledge and correct the errors committed in the struggle is viewed as a potent proof of its ethico-political ascendancy.

The two literary NatDem fictions that I analyse in this chapter establish how errors are an inevitable part of the struggle, which should and could be overcome and corrected. While *Barikada* and *Gerilya* tread on risky, dangerous grounds in portraying the often-tragic consequences of the errors of revolutionaries, their narratives explain the necessity of understanding and reflecting on errors in ways that do not annul the necessity of continuing the revolution. One issue that these narrative representations of errors touch on became an important point of contestation during the movement's crises-ridden years in the 1980s to the 1990s. This concerns the dynamics of urban and rural struggles, which generates questions about how errors in political tactics and strategies are linked to the politics of space. I discuss this in the next section.

Urban and rural

Literary works about the revolution construct imaginations of the terrains of the struggle. Gelacio Guillermo pointed out that through revolutionary literature, writers consolidate and render coherent their experiences in the rural and urban terrains of the struggle.²⁵ The dominant tradition of social

²⁴ Lualhati M. Abreu, *Agaw-dilim, Agaw-liwanag* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009).

²⁵ Guillermo, *Ang Panitikan Ng Pambansang Demokrasya*, 14.

realism in revolutionary literature, as Tadiar explains, also engenders the tendency to articulate subjectivity in relation to landscape, as illustrated in her analysis of how Martial Law-era revolutionary poetry and prose symbolised the masses as land.²⁶ *Gerilya* and *Barikada* show that the rural and urban terrains play an important role in shaping the political subjectivities of the CPP cadres and the NPA guerrillas, influencing how they formulate, implement, and even contest, revolutionary strategy.

The CPP's political strategy is indicative of a particular understanding of the relational dynamics between rural and urban spaces. During its re-establishment in 1968, the Party officially adopted the strategy of a protracted people's war based in the countryside. First blueprinted in the document "Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party," this strategy is in line with the Party's analysis of Philippine society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, in which "the peasant problem" -- principally the struggle for land -- "constitutes the main problem both politically and economically."²⁷ Since there are few industrial workers in a country where industrialisation has failed to take off, the peasantry, according to this document, is the main force of the revolution, making the countryside the main arena of the revolutionary struggle.²⁸

The Party made it clear that this analysis calls for ascribing primacy to the rural areas, a corrective to the predominantly urban political strategy of the older PKP leaders, which it criticised at length. Under CPP's political strategy, cities, where government forces are most powerfully concentrated, take on secondary importance, and assume defensive mode, whereas the countryside is primed as the space where "the people's armed forces can take

²⁶ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 269–73.

²⁷ Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party', 47.

²⁸ Communist Party of the Philippines, 47.

the offensive against the enemy.”²⁹ Inspired by Mao’s policy of “encircling the cities from the countryside,” the Party thus blueprinted in its ratified "Program for the People's Democratic Revolution" that the countryside would serve as the terrain where “the people's army can accumulate strength among the peasants by combining armed struggle, agrarian revolution and the building of revolutionary base areas.”³⁰

In 1974, the Party released a document called “Specific Characteristics of our People’s War” which reconfigured the Maoist strategy according to the geographical and social features of the Philippine archipelago. Reportedly drawing on the lessons that the NPA learned from failed attempts to build stable bases in Northern Luzon, the document contained a systematic plan to take advantage of the country’s mountainous and archipelagic features and transform the countryside into a terrain for revolutionary struggle. To bring about the nationwide spread of revolutionary forces, it stipulated the policy of “centralized leadership and decentralized operations” in the building of self-reliant guerrilla bases and zones in various strategic points across the country. This policy called for revolutionaries to develop self-reliance -- that is, to build and sustain revolutionary strongholds by organising and deepening a mass base of recruits and supporters in their assigned territories.³¹

This call for self-reliance demands that revolutionaries master the limits and potentials of the countryside for political and military work. As “Specific

²⁹ Communist Party of the Philippines, 50.

³⁰ ‘Program for a People’s Democratic Revolution’, in *Foundation for Resuming the Philippine Revolution: Selected Writings, 1968 to 1972*, by Jose Maria Sison (1968; repr., The Netherlands and the Philippines: International Network for Philippine Studies (INPS) and Aklat ng Bayan, Inc, 2013), 62.

³¹ Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 95–97.

Characteristics” detailed, the countryside is where “[t]he worst of oppression and exploitation is carried out among the peasant masses by the reactionaries,” making the peasantry particularly receptive to radical politics.³² It is also “far from the enemy’s center and main lines of communications” and can provide “wider and better area for maneuver” for the NPA.³³ The document also reiterated the secondary role assigned to urban areas, and emphasised how the mass movement and revolutionary activities in the urban area can contribute to the expansion of the revolution in the rural areas.³⁴ This indicates that the Party’s view of urban political work is always oriented towards supporting rural guerrilla warfare.

In the 1970s and 1980s, some cadres began to question the secondary importance given to urban political work. This questioning was spurred by many factors like the political developments from the end of the dictatorship to the democratic transition (including the boycott error), as well as the cadres’ readings about experiences in insurrection in other countries like Nicaragua and Vietnam. Cities, particularly Manila, were the principal terrain for legal or parliamentary struggles especially in the 1980s, taking on focal importance for some revolutionaries. They began formulating political tactics and strategies that privileged urban political work such as mainstream alliance-buildings, mass mobilisations, and tactical operations, while others entertained the strategic shift to insurrectionism.³⁵ Among the most active advocates of urban strategies and tactics were the members of the Party's

³² Jose Maria Sison, ‘Specific Characteristics of Our People’s War’, in *Building Strength Through Struggle: Selected Writings, 1972 to 1977*, by Jose Maria Sison (1974; repr., The Netherlands and the Philippines: International Network for Philippine Studies (INPS) and Aklat ng Bayan, Inc, 2013), 184.

³³ Sison, 184.

³⁴ Sison, 185.

³⁵ Kerkvliet, ‘Contemporary Philippine Leftist Politics in Historical Perspective’; Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 145–223.

Manila-Rizal Regional Committee (MRRC), fictionalised in *Barikada*.³⁶ The formulations of these cadres, who were based in the country's urban centre, were reviewed and criticised during the Second Great Rectification Movement, which, as I have mentioned, broadly countered the shift to insurrection and reasserted the Maoist strategy as the official Party framework.

Key assessments of the crisis period, such as in the document “Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors, invoked space to explain what the Party leadership criticised as errors of subjectivism by the city-based cadres -- the failure to develop “a comprehensive, complete and all-sided view of things and theoretical development from a proletarian revolutionary stand.”³⁷ According to the Party, the cadres’ stay in the city encouraged “petty bourgeois impatience and subjectivism.”³⁸ Detached from the issues and concerns in the primary terrain of the struggle in the countryside, urban-based cadres were thus characterised in Party documents as “urban petty bourgeoisie [who] wants to decide the course of the Philippines from the convenience, if not comfort, of the urban areas,”³⁹ in ways that tended to “exaggerate the current role of their urban area of work...[and] insist the ‘autonomous/specific dynamism of urban struggle.’”⁴⁰ The Party thus urged revolutionaries to “be disabused of whatever conveniences, habits, thoughts and illusions that have kept them in the urban areas.”⁴¹ It recommended

³⁶ Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 220–21.

³⁷ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors’, 6.

³⁸ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 14.

³⁹ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Five Kinds of Insurrectionism’, 24 February 1992.

⁴⁰ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors’, 6–7, 29.

⁴¹ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 78.

revolutionaries from the cities to be assigned to the countryside where they are most needed. The “Reaffirm” document synthesised the interrelations among cadres organised in the urban areas and the rural masses whom they are expected to mobilise in the countryside:

The peasant masses and the countryside do not by themselves produce these cadres. If these cadres are not provided by the urban areas, then the people’s war and the people’s army will decline and collapse; and the legal progressive mass organizations and the armed city partisans become easy prey for the enemy...Without the guerrilla fronts and the rural mass base, where will our city-bred comrades go to pursue revolutionary work if they can no longer work effectively in the urban areas?⁴²

These assessments from the Second Great Rectification Movement offer a view of how space plays a role in shaping revolutionary subjectivity. A cautious understanding of the urban terrain pervades these assessments. As the above passage suggested, cities are the areas of educational, cultural, and other modern(ising) institutions that equip potential cadres and revolutionaries -- particularly those from the petty bourgeoisie -- with intellectual and technical capacities useful in organising the masses in the countryside. At the same time, the “Reaffirm” document also warned that these areas cultivate both parliamentary or reformist, and adventurist or insurrectionist tendencies that deviate from the rural-based revolutionary strategy. Both *Barikada* and *Gerilya* register this link between space and political consciousness, as these novels portray urban-bred cadres who commit errors in political analyses and behaviours partly because of the

⁴² Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 65.

mentalities and behaviours cultivated in the city. As I explore in the following sections, such errors issue from their uneasy encounters with the social and subjective terrains of the city and the countryside.

Barikada

Villegas' *Barikada* centres on how revolutionaries imagine the space of the city as an arena to stage an insurrection, a political strategy that appeared as a pivotal topic in debates during the movement's period of crisis. As I have mentioned earlier, *Barikada* is Villegas' second novel. His first novel *Sebyo* was written during his imprisonment by the Marcos dictatorship, and was published in 1990 by the revolutionary publishing bureau under the nom de plume Carlos Humberto. This earlier novel centres on the political awakening and revolutionary transformation of the titular character during the Martial Law years. *Sebyo's* titular protagonist makes an appearance as a veteran NPA guerrilla in *Barikada*, which covers the years between the administrations of Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

As an example of a revisionist historical fiction, *Barikada* concocts a counterfactual scenario of revolutionary insurrection during the Arroyo administration. This "ill-advised armed uprising (not sanctioned by the central leadership)," writes literary scholar Elmer Ordoñez in his blurb for the book, "never takes place at all in reality." As mentioned earlier, proposals for insurrection entered, and was rejected in, Party debates during the presidency of Corazon Aquino. Placing the insurrection under the tumultuous period of the Arroyo regime effectively invokes how the urban space is imagined by various political factions as a terrain of political struggle at a time of intense political repression. It is worth noting that Arroyo's presidency was marked by political disruptions in the urban terrain. She was installed to the presidency through another urban uprising, the second EDSA

People Power in 2001, which ousted her predecessor Joseph Estrada for allegations of corruption. Like Corazon Aquino, Arroyo was also the target of military discontent, leading to a coup d'état mounted by a group of disgruntled military officers in 2003. Moreover, her presidency was also unpopular, with urban protest movements escalating while falling short of successfully removing her from power. In response to these protest activities, Arroyo sought to repress dissident claims to the urban space, as evident in her enforcement of the calibrated pre-emptive response (CPR), which is also mentioned in the novel.

While the urban uprising in the novel's climactic finale never took place in real life, *Barikada* adopts some of the conventions of the roman-à-clef, evident in how some of its characters are modelled after real life activists and personalities. For example, the character of Marita resembles the beauty queen-turned-revolutionary Margarita "Maita" Gomez (1947-2012);⁴³ another character, Danny, the military student, appears to be patterned after Danilo Lim (1955-2021), a former military general who, disappointed with government corruption and incompetence, participated in the coup d'état against both the Aquino and the Arroyo administrations.⁴⁴ Literary scholar Bomen Guillermo explains in his review of the novel that these references to

⁴³ Gomez was a fashion model, socialite and beauty queen who joined the revolutionary underground during the Marcos dictatorship. She became a women's movement activist after the fall of Marcos, and continued to become active in political activism until her death due to a heart attack in 2012. 'GOMEZ, Margarita F.', *Bantayog Ng Mga Bayani*, 29 November 2016, <https://www.bantayog.org/gomez-margarita-f/>.

⁴⁴ Lim, who died in 2019 as a government official in Metro Manila, would also harbor sentiments about American control of Philippine polity, which resonates with the construction of Danny's character in the novel. Glenda M. Gloria, 'Danny Lim: The West Pointer Who Rebelled against a System, Then Embraced It', *Rappler*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/obituary-danilo-lim-west-pointer-who-rebelled-against-system>.

actual personalities index a “kind of ‘high context culture’” that contributes to “[t]he apparent fullness of the characters sketched in the novel.”⁴⁵

In addition to being a roman-á-clef narrative, the novel also bears the generic attributes of a proletarian social novel, with its multi-character narrative structure that allows multiple perspectives into the dynamics of radicalisation across class divides. In her study of American proletarian novels, Barbara Foley provides a useful description of this genre, which applies to *Barikada*:

...a multiple-protagonist work of fiction using traditionally realistic techniques of representation. The characters are generally drawn from a range of social classes; through their juxtaposition and interaction they delineate significant patterns and forces in the class struggle. There may be relatively few important characters, or a dozen or more; all, however, are correlated with one another through a plot indicating their interconnectedness, and all are subjected to a controlling narratorial point of view. Although it contains a bildungsroman component -- characters learn and change -- the social novel routinely focuses upon a strike or some other event in the class struggle and stresses confrontation over apprenticeship.⁴⁶

This “event in the class struggle” in *Barikada* is the fictional insurrection spearheaded by a group of urban revolutionaries. It is the topic which the characters in the novel -- mostly Party members -- speak about, and debate

⁴⁵ Bomen Guillermo, ‘Repeating Insurrection as Fiction’, *The Manila Review*, September 2013, <http://themanilareview.com/issues/view/repeating-insurrection-as-fiction>.

⁴⁶ Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 362.

on. Moreover, true to Foley's description, the novel portrays the interrelated individual and collective experiences of these characters, as they undergo transformation in the course of their participation in the revolution.

In the city

The novel opens on a suspenseful note in 1989. A three-member special partisan unit (SPARU) of revolutionaries known as "sparrows" spies upon, and kills their target, Colonel Abad, a brutal police officer responsible for the murder of five labour unionists from the Nestlé corporation and the disappearance of a female journalist. This violent opening scene situates the reader in a political context when urban assassination squads were deployed by the revolutionary movement to cities and towns to execute abusive and corrupt military, police and other government officials and spies adjudged guilty by the revolution's judiciary. The frequency and intensity of urban operations during this period created an impression of the revolution's strong presence in the cities, paving the ground for the formulation of the insurrectionist strategy. At the same time, as one NPA Manila commander pointed out, the killings also aimed to "open a new front in the war effort and to organize residents of Manila, 'especially the workers in the city, into higher revolutionary forms of struggle,'" a detail portrayed in *Barikada's* chronicle of urban proletarian activities by the MRRC cadres.⁴⁷ During the Second Great Rectification Movement, the Party leadership assessed the escalated deployment of sparrows "at a rate that tended to prejudice the legal and defensive character of the struggle in these urban areas" as an error that veered towards insurrection.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Jones, *Red Revolution*, 248.

⁴⁸ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors', 36.

Some details in this opening scene further index some of the tendencies and practices criticised by the Party leadership during the Second Great Rectification Movement. For instance, the novel explicitly mentions that Ben, one of the assassins, is an NPA guerrilla deployed to the urban area to carry out this operation. This detail evokes the practice of assigning “Party cadres and mass activists who otherwise would be encouraged to do work for the mass movement or join the people’s army in the countryside” to urban warfare, which Party leadership criticised for depriving the rural areas of many reliable revolutionaries.⁴⁹ Another detail is the explicit identification of the urban squad deployed to kill Abad as the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB). The ABB is a guerrilla unit formed by the NPA in Manila in 1984 and named after a labour leader who died as an NPA guerrilla in an armed encounter with the military. This unit, true to its representation in the novel, served as an urban assassination unit that targeted soldiers and cops, before acquiring notoriety. During the Second Great Rectification Movement, the CPP ordered its disbanding in the 1990s as part of the movement’s broader rejection of urban-centred tactics and strategies. Instead of accepting the CPP’s order, the group decided to leave the movement, and ally with another break-away group, the Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPA). Later they entered into a settlement with the Philippine government, before becoming integrated into the AFP’s paramilitary brigades.⁵⁰ The representation of the presently discredited ABB prior to its period of notoriety serves the novel’s project of dramatizing retrospectively some of the errors related to urban political work committed by some revolutionaries.

⁴⁹ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, ‘Five Kinds of Insurrectionism’.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Revolutionary Struggle in the Philippines*, 63–66; Janess Ann J. Ellao, ‘Negros Farmers Suffer Atrocities from “Landlord-Hired Bandit Group”’, *Bulatlat*, 24 May 2012, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2012/05/24/negros-farmers-suffer-atrocities-from-landlord-hired-bandit-group/>.

From this early scene of political violence, the next chapter follows Ben, the NPA-turned-urban assassin, recounting his family background, his beginnings as a student-activist, and his eventual recruitment to the NPA. This foregrounding of the individual reflects how *Barikada* examines the dynamics of individual participation in relation to the broader collective endeavour of the struggle, a question also central to Villegas' theorisation of his own literary practice which I explain later. Ben's political life is complicated by his close attachment to his older brother Danny, a lieutenant in a company of the Philippine Marines. A member of the state's armed forces, Danny is also disenchanted with the government. He joins the group of disgruntled military officers who organise the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) -- a clandestine organisation inside the AFP that emerged out of the discontent of military officers over the corruption inside the military institution -- to stage another coup d'état in Manila against the Aquino administration.⁵¹

While both the NatDem movement and the RAM are united in their stance against the corruption in the government, these groups differ significantly in their visions of nationalism and democracy. As representatives of these two political blocs, Ben and Danny discuss, and debate on, these different visions during their conversation in a restaurant. Ben criticises the military's plan to set up a junta once the planned coup d'état succeeds. Danny explains that like the NatDems, the RAM also believes in nationalism and democracy, but the younger brother is quick to argue that the military organisation's conviction is influenced by the imperialism of the US, and adheres to free market policies favoured by the US multinationals. Danny then challenges Ben to explain the NDF's policies. Ben ventures that the NDF's economic

⁵¹ Hedman, Eva-Lotta E. and Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century Colonial Legacies, Post-Colonial Trajectories*, 48–50.

programme aims to “nationalise the banks and strategic industries in the economy like oil, steel and transportation”⁵² to be funded not by American imperialists, by the people and through means that do not follow the one-sided dictates of multilateral financial institutions. The dialogues in this exchange assume a didactic, explanatory register to simplify complex political discourses for the reader. This expository register is also apparent in many parts of the novel that I discuss later. *Barikada* firmly situates these discursive portions in relation to the personal interactions of the characters. Before the debate escalates into a heated argument between Ben and Danny, the two drink their beers to “nationalism and democracy,” evincing the persistence of familial ties in the face of political differences.

Mirroring real-life developments in post-EDSA politics, the novel recounts the failure of the RAM’s 1989 coup. After two weeks of siege by the dissenters, the US sends fighter jets to bomb the RAM headquarters. Witnessing firsthand the American imperialist intervention mentioned by Ben, Danny becomes disillusioned, and decides to embrace left-wing politics. He helps form the Young Officers Union (YOU), a clandestine nationalist organisation of military cadets that, unlike RAM, espouses an anti-imperialist perspective. Like his brother Ben, he gets a taste of life in the underground. Danny’s left-wing shift vindicates Ben’s (and the NDF’s) conceptualisation of anti-imperialist nationalism and recalls the real-life efforts within the factions in the military to forge alliances with the revolutionary movement in an express aim to advance progressive politics.⁵³ It also recalls the fate of

⁵² Edberto M. Villegas, *Barikada: Nobela* (Quezon City: Popular Bookstore, 2013), 9.

⁵³ Sonny Melencio, ‘The Philippine Left’s Alliance with the Military’, *Links:International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, no. 30, accessed 13 July 2020, <http://links.org.au/node/213>.

prominent military officers who defected to the underground like Victor Corpus.⁵⁴

The failure of the coup d'état prefigures the disastrous insurrection that Party cadres would stage in the novel's climactic conclusion. While the military and revolutionary forces have divergent ideological and political bases for planning and staging the coup d'état and the insurrection respectively, these two political blocs share the common view of Manila, the urban capital, as the decisive, if not primary, arena to contest and capture political power. In the history of the NatDem movement, the MRRC would also put premium on the political developments and possibilities in the urban capital in formulating tactics and strategies deviating from the Maoist rural guerrilla framework. As mentioned previously, the MRRC cadres would adhere to a political-military strategy that revolved around insurrection, out of the strong belief in "the capacity of the revolutionary forces in the capital city to create decisive political moments regardless of what was happening in the rest of the country."⁵⁵ Rejecting the Second Great Rectification Movement that criticised this urban strategy, the MRRC, along with other regional branches of the Party, would declare its autonomy from the CPP leadership.⁵⁶

As a multi-character proletarian social novel, *Barikada* traces the lives and destinies of fictional characters who would become part of this controversial

⁵⁴ Victor Corpus was a military officer and instructor at the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) who joined the NPA in the 1970s, raiding the PMA's armory to get weapons for the guerrillas. After six years, he surrendered to the Philippine government and became reinstated to the Philippine military, turning into a fierce critic of the NatDem movement. He is the subject of a biopic entitled *Operation: Get Victor Corpus: The Rebel Soldier* (1987). Seth Mydans, 'The Rebel Soldier Who's Never Without a Cause', *The New York Times*, 16 January 1987, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/16/world/manila-journal-the-rebel-soldier-who-s-never-without-a-cause.html>.

⁵⁵ Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 220.

⁵⁶ Weekley, 252.

regional committee. These characters hail from both subaltern and privileged classes in the city. They include the urban proletariat (the sex worker Helen, and labour activists Caesar, Blas, and Ramon), and upper and middle-class, university-educated intellectuals (the state university professor David, his student Rosa, and the beauty queen Marita). These characters intersect in the spaces of the city where they live and work, and are eventually brought together by the revolution.

Barikada explores the lives and destinies of these revolutionaries in relation to the country's socio-political conditions in the 1980s and the 1990s. This is in line with what Villegas coins as "dialectical realism," a representational principle that tracks the interior, subjective development of individuals in relation to social conditions and realities.⁵⁷ A literature major during his undergraduate years, Villegas explained that his exposure to, and synthesis of, the introspective narratives of existentialists, as exemplified by the writings of the early Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, the realism of writers like Gustave Flaubert, and the Marxist dialectical framework that explains the dynamics of socio-subjective relations influenced his formulation of this principle. His theory of literature could be gleaned in the narrative techniques he used in *Barikada*, which, in his words, sought to reveal the dynamism of human subjects whose inner subjectivities and introspective reflections interact with the external social conditions in the milieu that they inhabit and also help shape.⁵⁸

A range of narrative registers evinces Villegas' employment of "dialectical realism." Some chapters in the novel assume an essayistic register in conveying the broader socio-political developments during the country's

⁵⁷ Villegas, Interview by the author.

⁵⁸ Villegas.

tumultuous years of democratisation. One chapter features a chronicle of real-life political upheavals in the early 1990s like the historic Congressional vote against the renewal of American bases in the country, the change in administration that enables the return to power of Marcos cronies and allies, and the accelerated implementation of policies that favour foreign capitalists at the expense of Filipinos. The chapter locates the social impacts of these policies, as experienced by people in cities like Manila: “Thousands of those who lost their jobs flocked to the cities. Squatter families increase in the crowded spots in the cities, especially in Metro Manila. Beggars increase, and crimes and the number of prostitutes surge.”⁵⁹

In other chapters, the novel’s omniscient narrator turns introspective and character-oriented, portraying the characters’ thoughts and feelings. This focus on subjectivity reveals the characters’ various personal and political motivations for joining the revolution. For instance, Helen, who is forced to work in the night club to provide for her siblings, agrees to learn about, and join the movement initially because she wants to be closer to Caesar, a cadre who frequents the night club where she works. Blas, who grows up exposed to the miserable realities of slum life in the city, and struggles with his closeted identity as a gay man, becomes drawn to the revolution partly because of his attraction to Ramon. The wealthy socialite and beauty queen Marita yearns for independence, and refuses to be confined in the domestic sphere; she eventually leaves her privileged married life, and joins an activist women’s organisation. The university professor David, who sees the limits of his job as a teacher of politics and philosophy in effecting social change, becomes exposed to activism through the influence of his student, the youth activist Rosa. The latter drops out of college, abandoning her ambition to

⁵⁹ Villegas, *Barikada*, 79.

become a medical doctor to pursue full-time political work. These character-oriented portions also chronicle how interpersonal relationships develop inside the revolution: Rosa and David get married; Caesar enters into a relationship with Marita; Marita forges a bond with Helen; Helen befriends Blas, whose struggles as a closeted man speaks to her own as a hostess stigmatised by society.

In portraying these characters, *Barikada* often turns them into “mouthpiece characters” who articulate and address political and ideological issues and discourses. As Foley writes, “[u]tterances by ‘mouthpiece’ characters and mentors, coupled with debates and dialogues between these characters and the protagonist(s) furnish one of the principal means by which characters and readers alike are exposed to left-wing political ideas,” and offers a way to integrate political discourse within the novel’s “ontological domain,” that is, as an organic part of the story, and not a discursive intrusion by the narratorial voice.⁶⁰

Like the earlier conversation between Ben and Danny, the dialogues express the political claims and principles held by the characters, and by extension, the politico-ideological factions to which they belong. Conversations among the characters explain various aspects and dimensions of the revolutionary movement’s principles and visions. These passages are also unprecedented in recent Philippine fiction in their descriptions of some features of the socialist order that the NatDem struggle aims to put in place. In one chapter, Blas explains to Helen the socialist vision of the movement in relation to her personal experience: “In the socialist society I am telling you, Helen, everyone will be given work; discos, sauna baths, casas and other places where poor women like you are exploited will gradually disappear.” Blas

⁶⁰ Foley, *Radical Representations*, 272–74.

continues, “the valuation of people based on their class origins will gradually disappear. Love will be the genuine consideration of an individual’s personhood. In this socialist society, those like me will freely live according to our inclinations and wants.”⁶¹ Discussions like this abound the interactions among the novel’s characters, framed in the context of educating non-revolutionary characters and even the reader about the necessity of the revolution and the salience of its social vision. Some of these exchanges also take on a polemical tone, asserting the strength of the revolutionary framework over other social beliefs and practices. In another exchange, Romy debunks his wife Lorna’s belief in the power of prayer and faith to change society, saying that “[n]o miracle can save this nation. It is the hopeless people in the society who need to act.”⁶²

In his review of *Barikada*, Bomen Guillermo points out that these discussions are a “kind of educational device embedded in literary prose” that is “reminiscent of Lope K. Santos’ *Banaag at Sikat* (1906),” one of the earliest socialist-themed novels in the Philippines. This device, which “Villegas does a service by resurrecting” however has “fallen into relative disuse” in later works by writers-activists whose “literary education in the universities” taught them to “shun ‘wordiness’ in literary texts.”⁶³ Guillermo adds that *Barikada* “can be used for educational purposes, above all, due to the very interesting extended discussions it contains on revolutionary and socialist theory.”⁶⁴ Guillermo particularly cites the scene in which Ramon serves as an instructor in a discussion among workers about the contradictions within capitalism as an example of this pedagogical device. The pedagogical register

⁶¹ Villegas, *Barikada*, 20.

⁶² Villegas, 71.

⁶³ Guillermo, ‘Repeating Insurrection as Fiction’.

⁶⁴ Guillermo.

in this chapter takes on a question-and-answer format, similar to a typical political primer, as in the passage below:

“In a socialist society, will these contradictions you mentioned disappear,” the one wearing yellow wants to know.

In socialism, the production for the entire society is planned. If there are private capitalists in some sectors of the economy to be allowed, their production will adhere to the overall plan for the economy. The pricing of products of these capitalists will be regulated. Because there is planning for one to five years, overproduction will be avoided.⁶⁵

These explanatory dialogues also function in relation to *Barikada*'s broader critique of insurrection. They allow the reader a glimpse into the line of thinking that the urban cadres adopt in formulating analyses and interpreting the movement's framework in order to advocate for the urban uprising. In one chapter, a supervisor in the factory challenges Ramon's arguments about the character of class relations in a revolutionary juncture. He asks Ramon why the working class takes the role of leadership in the revolution, instead of the peasants who number the most in the Philippines. The latter responds that “among all the classes, it can be said that the working class has more potential to be the most revolutionary, thus, they have to lead the peasant class.”⁶⁶

Ramon's response condenses the NatDem movement's view of class alignments in the revolution. As expressed in the *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the proletariat is the primary force of the revolution, while the

⁶⁵ Villegas, *Barikada*, 25–26.

⁶⁶ Villegas, 59.

peasantry, being the majority, is the main one.⁶⁷ Ramon's view of working-class leadership is however inclined towards justifying the urban uprising that the cadres would wage disastrously. The fictional Ramon, in fact, mirrors real-life MRRC members, who, in the late 1990s, invoked the centrality of the working class in adopting the framework described as "workerist-Leninist,"⁶⁸ and deviating from the official rural-based peasant war doctrine. It is also noteworthy that the growth of progressive unions in the cities, such as the one fictionalised in *Barikada*, also spurred insurrectionist proposals among urban-based cadres. In this novel, the "workerist" perspective adopted by the MRRC entails a spatial dimension that privileges the experiences of the urban working class as a decisive factor in staging the insurrection.

Urban cadres like Ramon are attuned to the developments in the urban capital, interpreting them as favourable conditions for insurrection. The novel features how Arroyo, in response to the coup d'état, implements a state of national emergency to go after dissidents and consolidate state armed forces.⁶⁹ In a discussion with fellow workers, Ramon describes the conditions in the city in the context of Arroyo's counterinsurgency move: "the time is ripe to wage insurrection in the city. Poverty among the people is widespread, especially after the proclamation of national emergency...The people's trust in the president is virtually lost. More than seventy percent

⁶⁷ Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 156–58.

⁶⁸ Saturnino Borras, *Pro-Poor Land Reform: A Critique* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 228.

⁶⁹This is a direct reference to Arroyo's Presidential Proclamation 1017 in 2006, which placed the country under "a state of national emergency" to contain a planned military coup d'état. The proclamation earned condemnation for human rights violations that included the arrests of activists and government critics and raids of media offices. International Federation of Journalists, 'Media Clampdown Amidst Political Chaos in the Philippines / FIP', 1 March 2006, <https://www.ifj.org/es/centro-de-medios/noticias/detalle/article/media-clampdown-amidst-political-chaos-in-the-philippines.html>.

wants her out of office.⁷⁰ Ramon's statement foregrounds the political potential of poverty and Arroyo's unpopularity in generating political resistance. But this optimistic projection of the people's radical capacity does not consider the level of political consciousness and preparedness that the people must develop in order to go beyond the agenda of ousting Arroyo, and participate in an urban insurrection to replace the political order and install a national democratic state.

Barikada takes some of its urban cadres to the countryside where the limits of the insurrectionist vision become visible to them. The countryside, where the rural guerrilla warfare unfolds, is constructed as a space where revolutionaries gain political clarity and a comprehensive view of the social totality. In one subplot, the MRRC deploys Caesar to the countryside to undergo re-education as his disciplinary action for abandoning his duties after being occupied by his relationship with Marita. Here, the countryside serves as the space of rectification, where living with the peasant class, the main revolutionary force, would remind cadres of their urgent tasks in the revolution. The novel also portrays the countryside as a radicalising space for activists who hail from the cities; for instance, the urban student-activist Rosa is convinced to become a full-time revolutionary after being immersed in the realities of social injustice and poverty in the rural territory.

The countryside is where the Party holds its official plenum to discuss the insurrectionist suggestion by the MRRC. Ben attends this plenum in the mountainous region of Cordillera in northern Philippines. The participants discuss the document "Itaguyod ang Ating Estratehiya at Taktika sa Paglulunsad ng Rebolusyong Pilipino" [Uphold our Strategy and Tactic in Waging the Philippine Revolution], which criticises the errors of the MRRC's

⁷⁰ Villegas, *Barikada*, 114–15.

suggestion to intensify partisan actions -- portrayed in the urban assassination that opens the novel -- to advance the strategy of insurrection. The document fictionally invokes some of the criticisms during the Second Great Rectification Movement concerning the tendencies of cadres to deviate from rural political work and instead focus on staging urban actions. Later, Ben encounters the veteran NPA guerrilla Sebyo, the titular character of Villegas'/Humberto's first novel, who tells him that it is premature to wage an insurrection. Sebyo tells Ben that the urban cadres, in their impatience about the protracted armed revolution, uncritically hold up the first EDSA People Power's ouster of Marcos as proof that "political power in the city can be seized."⁷¹ The veteran cadre continues that "[w]e first need to broaden our base in the countryside and the underground movement in the cities."⁷² Sebyo's statement is directed towards the argument forwarded by urban cadres like Ramon who, as I mentioned earlier, problematically conflates the political potential for ousting the President with the people's capacity to embark on the altogether different and more radical agenda of staging an insurrection.

Like Ben, David also stumbles upon an opportunity to discuss the insurrection with revolutionaries outside of his own territory. As a staff of the Central Committee, he is assigned by the Party to travel to Mindanao, in Southern Philippines, to broker the peace negotiations with the Moro Liberation movement. The Moro group's spokesperson is his former classmate, Hadji Muztaz, modelled after Nur Misuari,⁷³ the founder of the

⁷¹ Villegas, 53.

⁷² Villegas, 53.

⁷³A controversial figure, Nur Misuari spearheaded the formation of the armed group during the Martial Law period. MNLF had a peace settlement with the Philippine government in 1996. Later, he became governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. He would later lead an MNLF faction in staging armed attacks in Mindanao, and would also be

Moro separatist group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). During this travel, he learns from a labour leader based in Davao, the largest city in Mindanao, about the urban political activities in their area. The labour leader tells him that the right political opportunity like widespread poverty and people's riots in the city should convince revolutionaries to stage an urban uprising. The temptation to diverge from the rural guerrilla framework spreads even beyond Manila, recalling how in the 1980s, cadres in various urban areas in the country like Davao City in Mindanao intensified urban activities such as "all-out partisan warfare, sweeping propaganda, confrontational street actions and combinations of these" that had the effect of deemphasising the rural territory as the terrain of armed revolution.⁷⁴

Like Sebyo, David is however convinced that the armed struggle in the countryside must be strengthened first before an armed seizure in the city can be undertaken. This issue becomes a source of disagreement between him and Rosa. David tells her that the movement is ill-prepared and does not have enough weapons. Rosa retorts that the "the revolution is always disadvantaged in arms, but it wins because of the determination of the masses for a just society."⁷⁵

As Bomen Guillermo notes in his review of the novel, Rosa, with this line of thinking, recalls her historic namesake Rosa Luxemburg, known for her theory of spontaneous mass uprisings.⁷⁶ Luxemburg warned against waiting "in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the 'revolutionary situation,'" and calls on the advanced segments of the proletariat to "hasten

hounded with allegations of corruption. Tom Stern, *Nur Misuari: An Authorized Biography* (Mandaluyong: Anvil, 2017).

⁷⁴ Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors', 15.

⁷⁵ Villegas, *Barikada*, 122.

⁷⁶ Guillermo, 'Repeating Insurrection as Fiction'.

the development of things and endeavor to accelerate events.”⁷⁷ Lenin would criticise this principle of spontaneity, and emphasise the need for the vanguard Party’s leadership to take the lead in, and develop an, organised, coordinated strategy for the seizure of political power. In *What Is To be Done*, he wrote that spontaneous mass movements like strikes "represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo," which could thus not be taken hastily to carry on towards the higher struggle for socialism.⁷⁸ Ernest Mandel would elaborate on Lenin’s view of the limitations of such mass initiatives, suggesting that these alone cannot bring “about a sufficient centralisation of forces to make possible the downfall of a centralised state power with its repressive apparatus resting on a full utilisation of the advantages of its ‘inside lines’ of communication.”⁷⁹ The tragic fate that awaits the insurrection would confirm the limits of this urban strategy.

Insurrection

Before the novel moves towards the planned insurrection, Villegas devotes a brief chapter that forebodes the violent crackdown awaiting the planned urban uprising. In this chapter, set in the early 2000s, President Arroyo confers with cabinet members and military generals about suspicions of political destabilisation. These government officials are parodically constructed as gluttons, incompetent, and given to petty in-fighting. One character is named Heneral Tsubibo Kapalpakan [General Merry-go-round Failure], the jocular homonym of Jovito Palparan, the military general who

⁷⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The Mass Strike, Political Party and the Trade Unions’, in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform Or Revolution and The Mass Strike*, ed. Helen Scott (1906; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 161.

⁷⁸ Lenin, ‘What Is To Be Done’, 74.

⁷⁹ Ernest Mandel, ‘The Leninist Theory of Organization: Its Relevance for Today’, trans. David Thorstad and Theodore Edwards (Pamphlet, London, 1971), 8, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/img/img-pamphlets/the-leninist-theory-of-organization.pdf>.

gained notoriety for his active role in anti-communist campaigns that resulted in massive human rights violations during the Arroyo administration.⁸⁰ In this scene, Arroyo and her cabinet set out to quash the planned mass action, bearing references to real-life crackdowns on mass protests; the novel even makes mention of the notorious “calibrated pre-emptive response” (CPR), a tactic implemented by the Arroyo administration to disperse activists violently.⁸¹ As Guillermo notes in his review of the novel, the representation of government officials in this chapter bears “the same predilection we encounter in Amado V. Hernandez’s *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* (Birds of Prey) (1969), where the ruling class representatives are named rather coarsely as Huwes Pilato [Judge Pilate], Gobernador Doblado [Governor Folded], Heneral Bayoneta [General Bayonet], and Senador Botin [Senator Plunder].”⁸² Within the revolutionary literary tradition, Montañez pointed out that this tendency also appears in the underground novel *Hulagpos* [Break Free], which bore characters named like Capt. Mamaril [Captain To-Fire] and Col. Hestapo [Coronel Gestapo].⁸³ I am persuaded by the critical view of both Guillermo and Montañez towards the caricaturish tendency in these characterisations. While useful in villainising state forces, the use of caricature diminishes the novel’s potency as it produces unevenness in the dominantly realist fabric of the narrative.

The last few chapters of the novel depict the ill-fated insurrection led by the MMRC. The cadres stage a *welgang bayan* [national strike]. As historian

⁸⁰ Palparan, known as “Berdugo” or “the Butcher” was a key personnel in the Oplan Bantay Laya, the counterinsurgency programme of the Arroyo government. He was sentenced to imprisonment in 2018 for the disappearance of two university students in 2006.

⁸¹ ‘Human Rights under the Arroyo Government - Task Force Detainees of the Philippines’, accessed 27 July 2020, <https://tfdp.net/publications/hr-situationer/143-january-2001-march-2009>.

⁸² Guillermo, ‘Repeating Insurrection as Fiction’.

⁸³ Montañez, *The New Mass Art and Literature and Other Related Essays (1974-1987)*, 134.

Kathleen Weekley notes, the *welgang bayan* refers to an urban multisectoral mass action, “in which striking industrial workers would be joined by transport workers, especially the jeepney drivers, and supported by protesters mounting street barricades, pickets and rallies”⁸⁴ The conduct of the *welgang bayan*, particularly the one held in Metro Manila in 1990, was part of the MMRC’s urban insurrection strategy.⁸⁵ In *Barikada*, the *welgang bayan* takes place under the Arroyo administration, specifically in the context of the state of national emergency and implementation of the CPR against urban protesters, thereby emphasising the limits of urban uprisings in confronting the armed counterinsurgency mechanisms of the state, and portending the disastrous fate that await the urban cadres.

Under the heat of the sun, the city becomes the focal point of encounter among workers marching out of their factories, peasants arriving from nearby provinces, and students coming out of their universities. In this drama of the moving crowd, the novel’s multiple protagonists appear, simultaneously melding with, and standing out from, the multitude, evoking the Party urban committee’s vanguardist agency and involvement in the uprising; as Ben reflects, “he is like a drop of water in a giant wave that rushes to the shore.”⁸⁶ The state’s armed forces would however obstruct the wave of angry masses, violently dispersing them, hitting them with sticks and hosing them with dirty water.

The scene escalates into a violent armed confrontation between state forces and the urban revolutionaries. Pitted against the police and military, the revolutionaries in the ranks of the protesters set up a stronghold in

⁸⁴ Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice*, 121.

⁸⁵ Weekley, 220–21.

⁸⁶ Villegas, *Barikada*, 136.

university buildings. They barricade themselves while throwing molotovs and firing at the state forces. As they face the brutal strength of enemy forces, the novel gives space to the fiery acts of bravery that the revolutionaries display in the insurrection. Some of them, including Rosa, Ramon, Caesar, and Marita, meet their ends in the intensely violent confrontation with the armed military. Defeated by the better-equipped forces of the state, the remaining revolutionaries like Ben and his brother Danny retreat from the scene and meet up in the seashore by the city. Awash in regret, Ben informs Danny that the insurrection has not actually received approval from the Central Committee, making the regional committee in the city liable to face disciplinary action. Danny despairingly asks his brother “when will we be prepared? When will the time of victory arrive?” Ben replies calmly, “it will arrive,”⁸⁷ conceding regretfully that the protracted war framework remains the appropriate political strategy for the NatDem revolution.

In the novel’s final chapter, Ben consoles himself while lamenting the lives lost in the insurrection. Reiterating the metaphor of sea waves that earlier embodied the mass movement in the city, he looks at the sea and compares the insurrectionist wave to “raging waves from afar” that “fade upon arriving at the shore.”⁸⁸ With this comparison, he realises that the revolutionaries have erred in overestimating the strength of urban political forces, who are quashed by the stronger forces of counterinsurgency in the urban capital. In novelising the error and defeat of the insurrection, Villegas makes clear his adherence to the Second Great Rectification Movement’s resolution that reaffirms the official line of the protracted people’s war from the countryside to the cities.

⁸⁷ Villegas, 156.

⁸⁸ Villegas, 156.

Gerilya

In *Barikada*, the countryside appears as a site of rectification, where erring revolutionaries are sent to correct their ways and gain a clearer understanding of the revolution's political strategy. In this section, I analyse Norman Wilwayco's *Gerilya*, as it portrays the complexities and contradictions of revolutionary work in the countryside. In conveying a de-idealised representation of the countryside, *Gerilya* centres on the experiences of two university-educated guerrillas, Tony, and Ala, as they encounter different characters and situations in a guerrilla zone in the province of Bulacan in Central Luzon. These encounters highlight the failures and incompleteness in the revolutionary remoulding expected of revolutionaries hailing from both the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie.

As mentioned earlier, *Gerilya*, in its unpublished form, received the Grand Prize at the Filipino-language novel category of the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 2008. The same year, the novel was released by an independent publisher called Cotton Candy. In 2019, it was reissued, along with Wilwayco's other novels, by another independent publishing house, Rebo.

In his review of the novel, Edgar Calabia Samar considers *Gerilya* as a sequel to Wilwayco's earlier Palanca-winning novel, *Mondomanila* (2002). Both novels revolve around the anti-hero bearing the name Tony de Guzman, and display Wilwayco's characteristic "rude, obscene, bold, truthful" language,⁸⁹ which registers a crass variety of Tag-lish (Tagalog-English). In reading *Gerilya* in reference to this earlier novel, Samar explains how Wilwayco moves from a "very individualistic response to systemic problems" tackled in

⁸⁹ Edgar Calabia Samar, 'Mass and Mass Movement: Reading Norman Wilwayco's *Gerilya*', *Bookwatch*, 2009, 18.

Mondomanila to the “possibility and difficulty of collective struggle.”⁹⁰ Wilwayco, who claimed that *Gerilya* was based on his experiences, notes that he did not intend to write *Gerilya* as a follow-up to *Mondomanila*; he explains that he has always used the name Tony for his fictional protagonists, after the nom de guerre of a friend who died in the armed struggle.⁹¹ The similarities between the two characters are still worth noting. Like Tony in *Mondomanila*, the protagonist of *Gerilya* also has “two main addictions – marijuana and invectives.”⁹² These vices, which index the protagonist NPA guerrilla’s indulgences and excesses, are essential to the novel’s examination of the contradictions underlying the development of guerrilla subjectivities in the countryside. For instance, Tony’s swearing is technically prohibited in the Mao-inspired “Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention,” enforced in the NPA.⁹³ This behavioural transgression is one among the various entrenched habits and tendencies of revolutionaries that they bring with them in the guerrilla zone, illustrating the difficulties in the process of revolutionary remoulding.

Gerilya is divided into episodic chapters introduced by epigraphs quoted from the lyrics of revolutionary songs, which, according to Wilwayco, derives from the epigraph-introduced revolutionary reading materials in the NPA.⁹⁴ As Filipino revolutionary cultural theorist Kris Montañez explained, revolutionary songs are among the most popular of the creative forms in the struggle, expressing “in the emotive language of the art, the ideas, experiences, sentiments and aspirations which are directly linked to the tasks

⁹⁰ Samar, 18.

⁹¹ Wilwayco, Interview by the author.

⁹² Samar, ‘Mass and Mass Movement: Reading Norman Wilwayco’s *Gerilya*’, 18.

⁹³ Vida Gracias and Pat Gamboa, ‘Vibrant Democracy Thrives in the People’s Army’, *Liberation*, 30 October 2019, <https://liberation.ndfp.org/tag/three-main-rules-of-discipline-and-the-eight-points-of-attention/>.

⁹⁴ Wilwayco, Interview by the author.

and struggles of the masses,” and serving as among the most “accessible method of disseminating revolutionary ideas, policies, calls, etc. to the masses.”⁹⁵ The practical affective value of these cultural forms is of considerable weight; Montañez cited an incident when the song “Mendiola” (or “Awit sa Mendiola” [Song of Mendiola]) was “drawn from use” by an NPA regional command because it was said to “reinforce pessimism.”⁹⁶ Quite notably, parts of this song, which was composed in memory of student activists who died in the streets of Mendiola during the Marcos regime,⁹⁷ appear as epigraphs in a few chapters in *Gerilya*. The presence of these epigraphs, which convey a romantic view of revolutionary militancy, contrasts with the novel’s demystifying chronicle of the behavioural crudities and errors of revolutionaries. This contrasting effect is also registered in the novel’s vivid evocations of the lush environs and pastoral beauty of the countryside, where the gritty realities and violence of guerrilla activity take place.

The novel opens with a graphic scene of state violence in the countryside. The guerrilla Alma runs away from soldiers, straining to reach the safety of a peasant ally’s house. They shoot her in the leg, and take turns raping her. The episode abruptly takes a surrealistic turn; noises from a TV show and a profanity-laced interior monologue spill through this scene of violence. The violent assault in the countryside is revealed to be a traumatic memory of events that took place three years ago. This memory haunts Alma (who now uses her real name Ala), as she lies down, drunk, in the cockroach-infested

⁹⁵ Montañez, *The New Mass Art and Literature and Other Related Essays (1974-1987)*, 33.

⁹⁶ Montañez, 43.

⁹⁷ Teresita Gimenez Maceda, ‘Diskurso Ng Katipunan Sa Kaginhawahan: Pag-Ugat at Pagyabong Ng Mga Kilusang Panlipunan’, in *Ginhawa, Dalamhati, Kapalaran: Essays on Well Being, Opportunity/Destiny, and Anguish*, ed. Consuelo J. Paz (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008), 54.

floor of the house that she shares with her husband Tony in the city. The noises that flit in and out of her consciousness come from the TV show that her husband, high on cannabis, watches with irritation.

The psychedelic mood that suffuses the novel's opening impresses upon the reader the chaotic swirl of Ala's traumatic reveries, as well as her husband's intoxicated musings. In one scene, the hyperventilating Tony tries to get a grip of himself by launching into an interior monologue that evinces "the force of spectacle transforming subjects into mere spectators of their own experience."⁹⁸

Reality—Tony de Guzman, high-paying job, promising career, born for the revolution, stoner by choice, gone, dead, suffocated inside an antique elevator in Cityland Mandaluyong, modest starter condos for the newlyweds, Tony, a very good software engineer, bright future, nice friends, vegetable wife in bed tormented by the past, twitching under the blanket, Marxist revelations dancing inside her head, TV blaring all day and all night, gin burns down her throat... Reality check... think positive... think God... Yes God. Dig God. ⁹⁹

Set three years after the couple's revolutionary stint in the countryside, Tony's cannabis-induced "reality check" conveys the strong undercurrents of urban ennui in the middle-class lives that he and his wife presently lead. In the city, the couple strive in vain, so it appears, to rebuild their lives, while they recover from the tumultuous memories of their revolutionary experiences in the countryside. Taking up most of the novel, these rural

⁹⁸ Christopher B. R. Smith, *Addiction, Modernity, and the City: A Users' Guide to Urban Space* (Routledge, 2015), 135.

⁹⁹ Norman Wilwayco, *Gerilya* (Cotton Candy Publishing, 2008), 13–14.

guerrilla experiences reveal the difficulties that both Tony and Ala encounter as urban-bred, university-educated petty bourgeois revolutionaries forging comradely relations with the peasant cadres and unorganised masses in the countryside. As I discuss in the following section, such relational dynamics are rife with the subjective crises and contradictions hounding both urban and rural guerrillas.

In the countryside

In episodic flashbacks, *Gerilya* recounts Tony and Ala's experiences in the guerrilla zone in Bulacan, conveying their inner thoughts and feelings about their activities as guerrillas. Tony, who bears the nom de guerre Poli, describes his excitement about joining the NPA as akin to a drug-induced "trip."

Just the right hardcore nature trip. Why? It's true that what I'm entering into is hardcore. Son-of-a-bitch is there anything more hardcore than joining the NPA? Those bastard activists who throw stones during rallies in Manila are no match. Here, in the countryside, is the real struggle. Here is where the national democratic revolution is being written, motherfuckers!¹⁰⁰

Poli's view of the revolution as a "trip," expressed in irreverent, profanity-laced Taglish typical of urban middle-class youth in Manila, betrays a condescending individualism that regards one's guerrilla involvement as a reason to brag, and look down on other forms of political activities. Sentiments like this suffuse Poli's recounting of his experiences in the guerrilla zone. These chronicles are conveyed in the first-person point of view, akin to the angst-ridden narrators of Irvine Welsh and Chuck Palahniuk

¹⁰⁰ Wilwayco, 26.

who are Wilwayco's literary influences,¹⁰¹ providing the reader access to Poli's frequently disagreeable thoughts and feelings. Alternating with Poli's experiences are chapters that narrate the experiences of Alma, conveyed through the omniscient third-person perspective. These divergent narrative perspectives allow the shifts between the intrapersonal (in Poli's case) and the interpersonal (in Alma's case), capturing the complex individual and collective dimensions of comradeship in the struggle.

Comradeship, writes political theorist Jodi Dean, is a "political relation between those on the same side of a political struggle."¹⁰² Dean conceives of the idea of the comrade as a "utopian" mode of belonging," that can "cut through the determinations of the everyday,"¹⁰³ and transcend existing social hierarchies and categories. "The power of comrade," Dean elaborates, resides in "how it negates old relations" that mark the everyday, "and promises new ones."¹⁰⁴ Realising this mode of political belonging requires the party as an "emancipated egalitarian organization of collective life"¹⁰⁵ that secures, sustains, and disciplines the formation of comradeship in the struggle for communism.

Gerilya seizes the difficulties embedded in Dean's utopian view of comradeship by revealing how the emergence of comradely relations frequently comes up against existing modes of belonging. Dean's conception of the comrade, notes Mie Inouye, obscures the "objective -- and strategic -- limits to our ability to 'abstract' from specificity and 'posit' sameness and

¹⁰¹ Wilwayco, Interview by the author.

¹⁰² Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 3.

¹⁰³ Dean, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Dean, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Dean, 6.

equality.”¹⁰⁶ The experiences of Poli and Ala reveal that such limits, as well as potentials, are embodied in enduring non-revolutionary (or non-comradely) relations that shape the interactions of petty bourgeois guerrillas, and peasant revolutionaries and allies. As I have demonstrated in my analysis of *Barber's Tales* in Chapter 1, the transitory character of the revolution is shaped on, and by, the dialectic between older and newer relations.

Emergent, progressive forms of belonging like comradeship interact with, and oftentimes rely on, for better or for worse, entrenched social relations and hierarchies. In the feudal countryside, the peasants -- the base for organising as well as the main forces of the revolution -- bear affective practices and mentalities like close family ties, seniority, and patriarchal sexism, which variedly advance and impede the forging of genuine comradeship, and the organisational practices of the Party. Alma and Poli encounter these complex dynamics in the countryside, while also grappling with their own subjective contradictions as petty bourgeois individuals who strive to undergo, and often fall short of, revolutionary remoulding. Thus, the novel stages various interactions -- meetings, chance encounters, and casual conversations -- to illustrate the varied, often clashing behaviours, dispositions, and lifeways of revolutionaries hailing from the city and the countryside.

In a chapter entitled “Masaker sa Gulod” [Massacre on the Hill], the members of Alma’s revolutionary collective discuss the plan to massacre the herd of cows owned by Mr. Gomez, a rich peasant who refuses to pay revolutionary taxes. She questions the plan, incensing an elder peasant comrade, Ka [Comrade] Ely. “The problem with you, students from Manila,” the elder comrade admonishes her, “you think you know everything. All from

¹⁰⁶ Mie Inouye, ‘Organizing and Being Organized’, *Jacobin*, 1 November 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/11/comrade-jodi-dean-communism-organizing>.

books. You come here in the countryside, then you want to teach us how to struggle. We've been here for long; we know the revolution better."¹⁰⁷ Halfheartedly, she accedes to the decision of the collective, and weeps after the massacre.

Alma also provokes the derision of other peasant comrades, because of her willingness to question and criticise how they conduct themselves in the struggle. In one chapter, she stumbles upon the members of her Party collective -- the three elderly peasant comrades Ikong, Rey, and Papa Red -- having a drink, visibly unprepared for the meeting they are set to hold. While she reminds herself to be patient, because "whoever is more advanced, should learn to be more understanding,"¹⁰⁸ she calls them out for their lack of discipline. The elder comrades do not take this congenially, and instead lash out at her. Alma knows that they look down on her, being a woman new to the guerrilla struggle; she is aware that even seasoned Marxists in the countryside value seniority and harbour patriarchal attitudes, largely due to their entrenchment in feudal relations and values that are similar to the ones found in the community in *Barber's Tales* (see Chapter 1). When she calls out Papa Red for his subtle sexual advances, which even other female comrades complain about, the elderly revolutionary retorts: "You, I'll give you two-three years, you'll lie-low. You'll go home to your rich parents. Finish your studies, work, lose any concern for the country. One request though. When you become rich, send me money here. So you'll at least pay for the coffee I have served you."¹⁰⁹ Similar to Ka Ely's earlier retort, Papa Red's angry outburst demonstrates the peasants' mistrust of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly university-educated and city-bred ones. While he views the

¹⁰⁷ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Wilwayco, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Wilwayco, 53.

countryside as both a place of poverty and a place where one lives out one's concern for the country, the city is understood as a place where one lies low and extinguishes one's zeal for the struggle.

Later, the veteran cadre Ka Mon learns about this confrontation. "Peasants are very sensitive," he reminds Alma. "They know their status in the society is very low...So when you say something, their feelings get hurt."¹¹⁰ He tells her to be patient in dealing with them. "A true Marxist swims with the masses, is not detached from them like a saviour from heaven," he continues.¹¹¹ Ka Mon counts on Alma to be more understanding towards peasants, whose political consciousness and even personal dispositions are tied to their dehumanising experiences in the underdeveloped social order of the countryside. This expectation implies an esteemed view of the role of petty bourgeois revolutionaries, especially those hailing from the intelligentsia, in the struggle.

In the NatDem movement's landmark document *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Amado Guerrero wrote about the importance of the intellectual petty bourgeoisie, as illustrated in the contribution of the student movement (like the FQS, discussed in the next chapter) in the movement's history. University-educated petty bourgeois like Alma are valued for their "keen political sense" and their capacity to undertake educational and propaganda work in both the cities and the rural areas.¹¹² Guerrero however warned that petty bourgeois revolutionaries require guidance because they are "characteristically subjective, individualistic, impetuous or easily cowed because of their petty[-]bourgeois origin, living conditions and political

¹¹⁰ Wilwayco, 88–89.

¹¹¹ Wilwayco, 88–89.

¹¹² Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 139.

outlook. They are susceptible to counterrevolutionary ideas.”¹¹³ As echoed by Papa Red’s harsh remarks, Guerrero explained that some petty bourgeois revolutionaries “will drop out and a few will even become enemies of the revolution but others will revolutionize and remould their thinking and persist in the ranks of the revolutionaries.”¹¹⁴ They can overcome these tendencies, Guerrero argued, by “deeply involving themselves in mass struggles over a long period of time.”¹¹⁵

Poli however is proof that one's immersion and participation in the revolution do not guarantee a smooth transformation towards proper revolutionary subjectivity. Even while immersed in the struggle in the countryside, his behaviour falls short of the demands of revolutionary discipline. He fakes excuses just to snatch at a chance to smoke weed. His inner sentiments are also marked by some reactionary views, peppered with invectives and sarcastic quips. Out of contempt, he contemplates, in jest, about murdering a comrade; “had I shot him in the head during that time, it would’ve been a big favour to the Party and the overall advance of the people’s war.”¹¹⁶ Understandably irritated at the laziness of two of his comrades, he suspects them of being homosexuals and secretly wishes that homophobic cadres discover them,¹¹⁷ suggesting the persistence of sexual discrimination even in the years that followed the events fictionalised in *Lihis* (see Chapter 1). These inner sentiments, Samar writes in his review of the novel, “were his reflexive reactions to bourgeois tendencies of the people he worked with.”¹¹⁸ But I venture that these reactions are revealing of Poli’s

¹¹³ Guerrero, 140.

¹¹⁴ Guerrero, 140.

¹¹⁵ Guerrero, 140.

¹¹⁶ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Wilwayco, 40.

¹¹⁸ Samar, ‘Mass and Mass Movement: Reading Norman Wilwayco’s *Gerilya*’.

own problematic attitudes and dispositions -- his homophobia, his trigger-happy mentality, among others -- that are no less offensive than the behaviours of his comrades.

Despite these flaws in attitude and disposition, Poli has gained a legendary reputation among urban activists. “You’re the idol of activists in the city,” says a comrade who visits him in the guerrilla zone. “Your legend[ary reputation] has reached different universities.”¹¹⁹ Stories about his military exploits in the countryside circulate in the cities, fashioning him into a heroic figure. Despite his problematic behaviour in the countryside, this figuration plays an important part in inspiring activists to be drawn to the armed struggle. Poli therefore acquires “cult value,” which Tadiar, following Walter Benjamin, uses to refer to how social perception, mediated through stories about revolutionary experiences, transforms revolutionary personalities into valorised idols.¹²⁰ This cult value plays a crucial role in drawing the masses, as well as organised activists, to the struggle.

University-educated guerrillas like Poli and Alma command certain charismatic power that the movement deploys in the advancement of its political agenda. While they are hiding from enemy soldiers, Poli sees himself smitten with Alma, and soon imagines himself like the masses she organises. He reflects on how the revolutionary movement deploys university-educated guerrillas like her to the frontlines of political organisation, “how we, smooth-skinned students, are always the ones facing the masses.”¹²¹ Revolutionary propaganda and expansion, he acknowledges, depend not solely on politics and ideology, but also on factors like physical appearance and charisma that contribute to the effectiveness of political persuasion. It is

¹¹⁹ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 58.

¹²⁰ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 310.

¹²¹ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 140.

“clearer than in Filipino movies that here in the countryside,” he muses, “the NPA look like the protagonists, and the AFP look like villains.”¹²²

Poli’s reflection also registers the power of cultural spectacles like movies as an imaginative framework for political activity, particularly for petit-bourgeois guerrillas exposed to Hollywood culture. Poli, for instance, compares one of his exploits to the onscreen adventures of American martial artist and actor Chuck Norris. While conducting a tactical offensive, he imagines the action films that he has seen as practical templates from which he can imitate fighting “moves” during an enemy encounter. Alma, in another subplot, makes use of a threat inspired by the Hollywood film *The Godfather* (1972) to exact revolutionary tax from a businessman operating an illegal quarry. A violent chapter about revolutionaries punishing a group of illegal loggers is entitled “Baraka Chinso Masaker [Baraka Chainsaw Massacre],” in reference to the slasher movie *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). Revolutionaries in *Gerilya* imagine their guerrilla experiences as cinematic spectacles, drawing on violent genres like slasher and action movies that complement the graphic scenes of violence in the novel. These non-revolutionary cultural resources aid them in making sense of, and surviving, the perils and tedium of the armed revolution. *Gerilya* however constructs a less spectacular portrayal of revolutionary experiences, marked by tragicomic moments of guerrilla clumsiness and recklessness. For instance, an NPA guerrilla falls asleep and is abandoned by comrades during an encounter; another forgets a marriage certificate needed to officiate the wedding of two comrades; in another scene, Poli forgets to wear his shoes in fear, and runs to the forest barefoot to escape chasing soldiers. These moments, along with

¹²² Wilwayco, 140.

Poli's problematic behaviour and attitude, challenge the cultic figuration that stories about guerrillas like him generate in the cities.

It is important to take note that despite the predominantly unpleasant image of the petit-bourgeois revolutionaries inscribed in its pages, *Gerilya* offers some rare moments that point towards how even stubborn guerrillas like Poli are reminded of the correctness of the struggle through their experiences with the masses they organise and recruit for the struggle. As Tadiar notes, revolutionary literature treats the masses in the countryside as "both the material means and the symbolic object of revolutionary struggle," turning them into figurations of land -- "the cause on whose behalf the struggle is waged," as well as "the vital sources of food, shelter, protection, and information for the guerrilla forces."¹²³ In their various encounters in the countryside, Alma acknowledges the agential, almost messianic, power of the masses, musing, "it's always the masses who resolve the movement's problems."¹²⁴ Peasants welcome the guerrillas to their homes, feeding and sheltering them, treating them as part of their own family, and hiding them from enemy forces. In another scene, peasants from the indigenous Dumagat community welcome Poli, inspiring in him feelings of warmth and zeal.

The tension between feudal ties and revolutionary imperatives complicates the relational dynamics between the peasant masses and revolutionaries. In another subplot, the novel introduces the widow Inang [Mother] Goring, characterised as the guerrilla's Tandang [Elder] Sora, after the Filipina heroine, who, in her old age, provided shelter and refuge for revolutionaries during the 19th century Philippine revolution against Spain. Like Tandang Sora, Inang Goring opens her house as a haven and meeting place for

¹²³ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 271.

¹²⁴ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 122.

revolutionaries. She believes she owes the movement for radicalising her son Rading, turning him from a lazy drunkard, who brings nothing but trouble to his parents, into a brave guerrilla. Later, Alma learns Rading's fate which the guerrillas conceal from Inay Goring; he was executed by comrades after being discovered as an enemy agent. This concealment illustrates the complex dynamics of interactions between the guerrillas and the peasant masses, and reveals the ethical dilemmas that revolutionaries confront in the struggle, especially in their desperation to maintain a harmonious relationship with the masses they organise.

Rading's fate also reveals the reactionary tendencies lurking within the peasant classes, requiring the subordination of feudal ties to the disciplinary imperatives of the revolution. The case of Papa Red, who serves as a father figure among guerrillas, further illustrates the necessity of delivering revolutionary justice to erring cadres. As can be recalled, Papa Red has been accused by Alma of making unwanted sexual advances towards some female comrades. After the marriage of his daughter Luz and another comrade Jules under the Party's administration, the groom discovers that his bride is already pregnant. This prompts Luz to reveal a dark secret -- her father has raped her, and even molests her younger sister. As the revolutionary movement considers rape as a heinous crime punishable by death, the Party cadres decide to execute him. In the scene of the execution, Papa Red negotiates for his life and brings up his contribution to the revolution, and his established relations with his executioners: "I won't appear anymore. Tell the other comrades, you killed me. Have mercy, comrades. Since I welcomed you into my home, fed you in my dining table, allowed you to sleep in my house."¹²⁵ Here, Papa Red invokes the feudal ties, particularly embodied in

¹²⁵ Wilwayco, 154.

the notion of utang na loob [debt of gratitude], that support revolutionary work, in his desperation to dodge the disciplinary mechanisms of the movement. Unmoved by his plea, the cadres carry out the execution in a darkly comical manner; they forget to bring a knife to execute him, so they instead try to kill him, rather torturously, with a nail cutter, before eventually firing a gun to his head.

These subplots involving Papa Red and Rading highlight the difficulties that underpin Dean's utopian ideal of comradeship, which cadres strive to abstract from the feudal ties that serve as social infrastructures for the revolution. At the risk of endangering established friendships and allyship, revolutionaries struggle to uphold revolutionary discipline and caution, especially in the life-and-death zone in the countryside where enemies assiduously lurk.

Such concern for revolutionary discipline is however susceptible to the political miscalculations and erroneous analyses committed by even well-meaning comrades, particularly the characteristically reckless petty bourgeoisie. In another subplot, Alma and her comrades suspect Joseph, the son of a trustworthy ally Amba Dencio, to be an enemy agent hired by state forces. She proposes to take down Joseph, whose new clothes and motorcycle she believes to have been bought through the money he receives from the military. The graphically-depicted attempt to kill the suspected agent goes awry, leaving Joseph critically wounded. Later, Amba Dencio, who rescues Alma from the enemy forces who rape her in the novel's opening scene, tells her that Joseph has an older sister working abroad. Joseph, as it turns out, receives money from this sister, not from state forces, to buy his new belongings. Alma's mistaken accusation recalls the paranoid mentality and

suspicious disposition that fuelled the movement's tragic anti-infiltration campaigns that I mentioned in the earlier section.

Guilty over Joseph's fate and traumatised by her assault at the hands of enemy forces, Alma finds romantic comfort in Poli, who is likewise physically and morally battered in the struggle. Their lovemaking -- in Poli's words, "a temporary sanctuary amidst persistent struggle"¹²⁶ -- becomes an occasion to expose their weaknesses, their desires, and exhaustion in the face of revolutionary urgencies. This conscious transgression of the Party's restriction of premarital sex embodies their admission of their vulnerabilities as individuals who need, and usually fail, to embody the ideal subjectivity in the revolution. Sex, here embodying individual desires exceeding the disciplining principles of the revolution, allows them to come to terms with their demoralised dispositions, resulting in their joint decision to lie low from the struggle. They explore an option readily available to middle-class radicals like them -- a safe, comfortable existence away from the hardships and sacrifices of the revolution.

The two are emboldened by their decision to lie low -- without formally notifying their comrades -- to commit deeds that transgress their comrades' wishes, asserting their individual whims over collective decision-making. Alma reveals to Inay Goring the Party's long-held secret about Rading's fate. Enraged, the elderly woman refuses to believe her, and denounces Alma and Poli as rich kids who simply want to smear the movement -- an outburst revealing of the typical peasant view of the political unreliability of petty bourgeois revolutionaries. In an act that evinces his trigger-happy tendencies, Poli guns down a drug pusher, who he believes is responsible for ruining the lives of the youth in the countryside. After committing these reckless acts,

¹²⁶ Wilwayco, 174.

the lovers take the bus to the city, and reveal their real names to each other. In shedding off their revolutionary identities as they head out of the countryside, the novel closes with an image of the city as an escape route of petty bourgeois revolutionaries from the struggle.

Error and rectification

Wilwayco shares that he learned that some activists and others sympathetic to the movement have criticised the novel because of its unflattering depiction of the various failings of revolutionaries to adhere to the imperatives of revolutionary remoulding.¹²⁷ In her review of the novel, activist writer-turned-guerrilla Kerima Tariman, writing as Marijoe Monumento, noted that "the dominance of the 'lumpen tone' of the character and the depiction of individual and organisational weaknesses of the NPA were considered a big problem of the novel for many."¹²⁸ She ventured however that the novel's "disturbing" portrayal of the revolution serves to lay bare the "complexity in an individual's decision to abandon old ways and attitudes to serve the masses."¹²⁹ Despite what she noted as the absence of contextualisation in the novel which makes it difficult to situate it in a specific milieu, Monumento lauded the sensitive realism in Wilwayco's "concrete picture of revolutionary activities, the conduct of the NPA's movement in the countryside...even the description of the terrain in the Bulacan setting."¹³⁰ The absence of any explicit temporal marker that would position the novel's narrative in the 1990s, during which Wilwayco claimed

¹²⁷ Wilwayco, Interview by the author.

¹²⁸ Marijoe Monumento, 'Mga Tala Sa Dalawang Bagong Nobela Tungkol Sa Rebolusyon: Desaparesidos at Gerilya', *Pinoy Weekly*, 14 September 2009, <https://pinoyweekly.org/2009/09/mga-tala-sa-dalawang-bagong-nobela-tungkol-sa-rebolusyon-desaparesidos-at-gerilya/>.

¹²⁹ Monumento.

¹³⁰ Monumento.

the events fictionalised in the novel took place, also works to render how revolutionary hardships and errors perpetually afflict revolutionary work. The errors committed by the revolutionaries of the 1990s depicted in the novel might very well be the same errors of the revolutionaries in the 2000s, the milieu when the novel was published and reprinted.

I also affirm Monumento's assertion that *Gerilya*'s portrayal of the failings and weaknesses of revolutionaries does not negate the continuing need for the revolution. This point is particularly amplified in the novel's penultimate chapter, set three years after the couple's decision to lie low from the movement and live in the city. Here Ala and Tony decide to end their marriage and begin separate lives outside of Metro Manila. While Tony plans to start a new life in a faraway province, with no indication of ever returning to the struggle, Ala decides to go back to the countryside. Such decision ensues from her belief that the legitimacy of the revolutionary agenda exceeds the various failings of guerrillas like her.

Crippled from the wounds from the enemy's gun, Ala finds herself also damaged by the city, which, in her view, has turned into another forest that entraps her. "She needs to reach the ends of the forest," Ala contemplates, reiterating the motif of escape in the novel's opening chase; "[t]here is salvation. She needs to come out of this forest alive."¹³¹ For Ala, the return to the countryside -- the forest of the revolution -- promises political, as well as, personal, salvation. The messianic undertone of this imagery of the countryside as a refuge in times of loss recalls the quasi-religious sensibility of "revolutionary enchantment" that Tadiar similarly sees in revolutionary literary works.¹³² However, *Gerilya* challenges the idealistic undertone of this

¹³¹ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 167.

¹³² Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 277–80.

imagery. Ala is aware that, in the countryside, “doubt continues to spring...[b]ecause the revolution is not a picnic.”¹³³ This line echoes Mao's famous quote about the serious and violent reality of the revolutionary struggle,¹³⁴ which also appears in the novel's epigraph.

In the end, Ala believes that that the perennial possibilities of committing revolutionary errors are addressed by the perpetual efforts of the movement and its members to rectify. “True, the movement has many errors, but it does not cease to rectify,” she muses. “Of all the organisations in the country, or even in the whole world, the movement she knows has the most honest and determined policies and discipline in frequently criticising its own errors and endlessly correcting them.”¹³⁵ This assertion foregrounds how the practice of rectification is proof of the movement's integrity, as it is at the centre of the revolution's ethical and moral framework of accountability and redress.

Rectification opens up towards the possibility of correcting mistakes, and remoulding flawed revolutionaries. “Comrades will make mistakes, mistakes that violate party principles and damage the proletarian struggle, mistakes that must be condemned,” writes Jodi Dean.¹³⁶ “But that does not have to mean that they be cut off forever. Workers' justice and communist principles require that comrades be given a chance to return.”¹³⁷ As she rides the bus on the way to the guerrilla zone, presumably after reconnecting with former comrades, Ala is hopeful that, crippled she may be physically, psychologically, and even politically, the countryside awaits and will welcome her.

¹³³ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 169.

¹³⁴ Mao Tse-tung, ‘Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan’, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung: Vol. 1* (1927; repr., Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), 28.

¹³⁵ Wilwayco, *Gerilya*, 170.

¹³⁶ Dean, *Comrade*, 111.

¹³⁷ Dean, 111.

Conclusion

The NatDem fictions examined in this chapter offer an insider view of how revolutionaries commit errors in the struggle. The valiant urban cadres in *Barikada* misapprehend the potentials and limits of their sphere of engagement, leading to avoidable deaths and losses. The revolutionaries in *Gerilya*, even those hailing from the frequently romanticised segments of the peasantry, face the difficulties of revolutionary remoulding, and tend to succumb to personalistic impulses that violate comradely conduct. These fictions of revolutionary fallibility end up constructing the necessity and relevance of the revolution. They articulate that, in the same way that errors are unavoidable in the struggle, so is rectification. Thus, these narratives index the workings of the movement's disciplinary and judicial mechanisms that hold erring cadres accountable for their ways -- mechanisms that are premised on the principle that errors are experiential resources from which revolutionaries derive lessons in the struggle.

The inevitability of errors resides in the practical difficulties that shape the relationship of knowledge to action in waging the revolution. Fictional works, like the ones I have analysed, have engaged in this relationship. In her study of Philippine literary fiction, including the revolutionary novel *Hulagpos* (1980), Caroline Hau explains how revolutionary practice reconfigures this relationship in a way that subverts the dominant, idealised conception of a historical subject who engages in action only after obtaining complete knowledge.¹³⁸ In a discussion that recalls Mao's treatise on the indispensability of practice to knowledge,¹³⁹ she explains that revolutionary

¹³⁸ Hau, *Necessary Fictions*, 13; Also see Ramon G. Guillermo, 'Enabling Truths on the Verge of Pedagogy', *Philippine Studies* 50, no. 2 (2002): 279–89.

¹³⁹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Practice: On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice - Between Knowing and Doing* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964).

subjects regard the revolution as in itself a way of obtaining knowledge through trial and error. Such practice is susceptible to errors that arise from the structural and conjunctural difficulties, as well as subjective crises and contradictions that crop up in the relay between epistemic work and political struggle. But "the risk of error inherent in the political struggle impels, rather than suspends or terminates the theoretical task" undertaken in, and through, social practice.¹⁴⁰

The unavoidability of difficulties and errors in the struggle thus warrants an understanding of NatDem fictions as forms of pedagogical efforts. Fictions portray the inadequacies and failings of revolutionary subjects, providing a nuanced representation of the "reality of the subject's finite capacity for thought and action, and the reality of material constraints on the subject's thought and action."¹⁴¹ In enacting the individual and collective contradictions and tensions that revolutionaries face in applying theory to practice, they also represent how the revolution is in itself a pedagogical project, in which revolutionaries learn, and become transformed through trial, error, and rectification. The revolutionary movement, as the facilitator of rectification, is crucial in this regard; following Ernest Mandel, the revolutionary vanguard organisation serves as "memory, which is codified, one way or another, in a program in which you can educate the new generation which then does not need to start from scratch in its concrete way of intervention in the class struggle."¹⁴² In the next chapter, I explore further the dynamics of transmitting the memory of the painful experiences in the struggle, particularly in light of the affective dispositions of political disenchantment and loss.

¹⁴⁰ Hau, *Necessary Fictions*, 270.

¹⁴¹ Hau, 27. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴² Mandel, 'Vanguard Parties', 6.

CHAPTER 3

Left melancholia in *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa*

In the years following its crises and rectification, the revolutionary movement underwent a period of recovery and resurgence, revitalising its agenda to transform Philippine society. Many members of the movement have renewed their political commitment after the period of crises, but others became disenchanted with the struggle, demobilised by a variety of factors like the trauma of dictatorial violence, the tragic errors during the 1980s and 1990s, and the intra-organisational contestations that splintered the membership. These experiences urged them to question the viability of revolutionary politics, and return to lives detached from the revolution, while occasionally reflecting on the memory of their previous political involvement.

In this chapter, I examine two NatDem fictions that portray how Martial Law "veterans" harbour, and work through, these complex feelings of attachment to, and disenchantment with, the revolutionary cause -- the Filipino-language novel *Desaparecidos* [The Disappeared] (2007) and the independent film *Sigwa* [Rage] (2009). I argue in this chapter that these affective dispositions are associated with Left melancholia, a political affect related to the forfeiture of Marxist revolutionary visions at the end of the Cold War.¹ I explore this contemporary structure of feeling in these NatDem fictions to discuss how former revolutionaries contemplate the memory of their past revolutionary involvement, and its meaning for the younger generation. I contend that

¹ See reflections on Left melancholia in Wendy Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 458–66; Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

these works point to the necessity of overcoming one's melancholic relationship to the revolutionary past, and affirming the relevance of the revolution as a living project for the present and the future.

In the following sections, I discuss the notion of Left melancholia, as conceptualised in broader Left theory. This discussion is followed by an elaboration of how the NatDem fictions I examine in this chapter make use of a melodramatic trope -- the search for the lost daughter -- to explore the significance of the revolutionary struggle as a transgenerational political legacy. Building on these discussions, I analyse how these two texts engage with Left melancholia through their chronicles of the complexities of revolutionary and family relations.

Left melancholia

Desaparecidos and *Sigwa* are fictions set in the 2000s about Martial Law-era revolutionaries. In these narratives, revolutionaries look back on their past political involvement, and reflect on the meaning and relevance of the continuing revolution they helped wage in their youth. Remembering the revolution from the vantage point of their older, often disillusioned selves, these fictional revolutionaries manifest varying degrees of disengagement from, and attachment to, radical politics. In registering this affective disposition of revolutionaries, who have carved some distance from the revolutionary movement, these NatDem fictions engage with the phenomenon of Left melancholia.

The concept of Left melancholia was coined by German philosopher and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin in an essay entitled "Left-wing melancholy," originally published in 1931. In this essay, which reviewed the poetry of the Weimar era (1919-1933) poet, novelist and journalist Erich

Kästner, Benjamin described what he saw in Kästner's poems, collected in three volumes published in 1928 and 1930, as Left melancholy or "the metamorphosis of political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure."² Benjamin made this observation in relation to the spirit of defeatism and passivity in the context of the failure of the political left and the eventual rise of Nazism in Germany. Benjamin was critical of left-wing intellectuals and artists like Kästner for retreating from political action, and instead choosing to rechannel their "revolutionary reflexes" towards endeavours that commodified politics into cultural artefacts sellable to the market.³

In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that signified the collapse of communism and the global ascendancy of neoliberalism, theorists have built upon Benjamin's concept to describe a broader condition of political paralysis associated with the failures of the Left upon the end of the Cold War. In an essay first published in 1999, American political theorist Wendy Brown revisits Benjamin to elaborate on Stuart Hall's analyses of the crises of the Left and the rise of neoliberal conservatism. Brown draws on Freud's notion of melancholia as a fixation on, and idealisation of, loss in defining Left melancholia as "a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thinglike and frozen in the heart of the putative leftist."⁴ For Brown, this "melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its [the Left's] own dead past"⁵ deters efforts to seize "possibilities for radical change in the present."⁶ This

² Walter Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholy (On Erich Kästner's New Book of Poems)', *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1 July 1974): 29–30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/15.2.28>.

³ Benjamin, 29.

⁴ Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholia', 460.

⁵ Brown, 464.

⁶ Brown, 458.

disposition could aptly describe former radicals who are no longer concerned with changing the world, particularly through radical political action, but remain caught up in the memory of the Left's unrealised vision and unfulfilled hopes.

Left melancholia embodies a particular relationship to the memory of the past, to which former radicals now relegate Marxism as a failed, obsolete political project. Writing largely about the cultural responses to the collapse of socialism in Europe, Italian philosopher Enzo Traverso, in his book *Left-wing Melancholia*, expounds upon the idea of Left melancholia as a structure of remembrance. He suggests that Left melancholia also reshapes how we understand time. The failure of Marxist political projects has recast the future-oriented memory of utopia into a thing of the past, an object of melancholic remembrance that no longer holds sway in the present.

The Marxist vision of history implied a memorial prescription: we had to inscribe the events of the past in our historical consciousness in order to project ourselves into the future. It was a “strategic” memory of past emancipatory struggles, a future-oriented memory. Today, the end of communism has broken this dialectic between past and future, and the eclipse of utopias engendered by our “presentist” time has almost extinguished Marxist memory. The tension between past and future becomes a kind of “negative,” mutilated dialectic.⁷

In Traverso's conceptualisation of Left melancholia, Marxism exists in the present merely as a memory of the past, no longer as a vision for the future.

⁷ Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, xiv.

The present, he writes, is “charged with memory but unable to project itself into the future.”⁸

While Traverso and Brown reflect upon the crises of the Left in Europe, their ideas resonate with the kind of memory work produced by former NatDem revolutionaries in the Philippines. In a manner comparable to what Traverso identifies as the emergence of a “left-wing culture of defeat” in the Western world, memoirs by former NatDem revolutionaries like the Quimpo siblings' *Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years* (2012) and Robert Francis Garcia's *To Suffer thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated its Own* (2001) (see Chapter 2) recount episodes from the crises of the NatDem movement, a period that roughly coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, these crises resulted in a rectification process that led many revolutionaries to abandon the revolution. In the years that followed the Second Great Rectification Movement, some of these former revolutionaries chronicled their past political involvements mostly through memory narratives like memoirs,⁹ personal essays¹⁰ and autobiographical fiction.¹¹ Many of these works register Left melancholia, chronicling, and reflecting on, with both a sense of admiration and detachment, the travails, sacrifices, and even disillusionment of Martial Law-era revolutionaries. Calling to mind the temporal crisis of memory outlined by Traverso, these works refuse to acknowledge the

⁸ Traverso, 7.

⁹ For studies of these memoirs, see Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation*; Mary Grace Concepcion, ‘Writing to Live, Living to Write: The Self in Philippine Martial Law Autobiographies’ (PhD Thesis, National University of Singapore, 2016).

¹⁰ Soliman M. Santos and Paz Verdades M. Santos, *Militant But Groovy: Stories of Samahang Demokratiko Ng Kabataan* (Manila: Anvil, 2008); Ferdinand C. Llanes, *Tibak Rising: Activism in the Days of Martial Law* (Manila: Anvil, 2012).

¹¹ Jose Y. Dalisay Jr., *Killing Time in a Warm Place* (Pasig: Anvil, 1992); Domingo G. Landicho, *Mata ng Apoy* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2003); Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions*.

revolution beyond its use as a reminder of a generation's resistance in the past.

As part of this broader cultural archive of Martial Law-era memory, both *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* commemorate the political involvement of this generation of revolutionaries. While fictional, these works are inspired by their creators' experiences during the Martial Law period. Lualhati Bautista, the author of *Desaparecidos*, was involved in radical politics during the Marcos-era urban protest movement known as the First Quarter Storm (FQS).¹² According to her, she became politically involved due to the influence of her husband who was an activist, and her acquaintance with Charlie del Rosario, a student-activist who became the first case of enforced disappearance under Marcos; she was also affected by the death of another activist friend, Bodjie Jimenez, who was murdered by the Marcos military. *Sigwa*'s director Joel Lamangan, who also directed *Lihis* (see Chapter 2), and screenwriter Boni Ilagan were also FQS veterans who joined the revolutionary movement and were imprisoned by the Marcos military. Both artists are still active in the protest movements in the Philippines. *Sigwa* exemplifies their political commitment channelled through artistic endeavour. The film was intended to memorialise the legacy of the Marcos-era youth activism and the broader struggle against fascism in the context of post-EDSA Marcosian rehabilitation. According to Lamangan, they made *Sigwa* because "we wanted to reminisce those experiences and put it in a film, because many people do not know what it is," envisioning the film as

¹² This predominantly student-led protest movement in the early 1970s contributed to the radicalisation of many students during the Marcos era, enjoining them to join the revolutionary movement. See Jose F. Lacaba, *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: The First Quarter Storm & Related Events* (Manila: Salinlahi Publishing House, 1982).

part of ongoing efforts to challenge pervasive efforts by Marcos allies and loyalists to whitewash the atrocities of the Marcos dictatorship.¹³

What distinguishes these two works from other memory narratives is their exploration of the dynamics of memory-making by former revolutionaries hounded by Left melancholia. As my close readings suggest, *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* position these characters in confrontation with not just the memory of their former radical experiences, but the living legacy of the struggle that they embraced in their youth. Employing narrative flashbacks and flashforwards, these works touch on important questions about the remembrance of the past in light of defeats and traumas, and the persistence of the revolution now taken up by the younger generation. In so doing, these works engage, sympathetically yet critically, with Left melancholia by acknowledging the sacrifices and trauma of former revolutionaries, while refusing to encase the revolution to the obsolescent realm of memory, as some chronicles by disheartened revolutionaries are wont to do. These works therefore abide by the idea that, as Charity Scribner writes, “[t]he radical gaze cast backward onto past failures and traumas is not retrograde, but rather promises redemptive hope.”¹⁴

Desaparecidos and *Sigwa* embody how Left melancholia is a productive ground and a creative resource to think about the Left’s failure and potential in the present and the future. As Brown writes, while Benjamin was understandably critical about the tendency among former revolutionaries to transform their political involvements into materials primarily for cultural commodification,

¹³ Vanessa A. Balbuena, “‘Sigwa’ Brings Back Memories of First Quarter Storm’, *Philippine Star*, 27 September 2010, <https://www.philstar.com/cebu-entertainment/2010/09/27/615416/sigwa-brings-back-memories-first-quarter-storm>.

¹⁴ Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 123.

he also “treated melancholia itself as something of a creative wellspring.”¹⁵ In a similar vein, Traverso recognises the productive capacity of melancholia in thinking about the future of the struggle. In his practice of “melancholy criticism,” he pursues a critical endeavour that looks at cultural “expressions of socialist imagination” in a way that acknowledges the memory and history of past defeats and failures, while refusing to abandon radical imaginings and politics.¹⁶ This critical practice parallels how I approach *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* as engagements with, or even interrogations of, Left melancholia.

An important aspect to consider here is the presence of the narrative motif of the search for the lost daughter in both works. This motif evokes the question of how the revolution remains significant for the later generations of political subjects. In the following section, I elaborate on the significance of this motif and unpack how it embodies the Martial Law-era generation’s sacrifices and ideals, as well as the redemptive hope for the present and future of the struggle.

Lost daughters

Both *Sigwa* and *Desaparecidos* revolve around mothers -- former Martial Law-era revolutionaries -- searching for their daughters whom they entrusted to comrades at the height of the Marcos military rule. Decades later, this time, under the regime of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the 2000s, these mothers, who are no longer directly involved in the armed revolution, locate the whereabouts of their former comrades. In the process, they confront their revolutionary past, and reflect on its meaning for the country’s present and future.

¹⁵ Brown, ‘Resisting Left Melancholia’, 458.

¹⁶ Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, xv.

In these two works, the lost child bears narrative and symbolic significance both as a representation of the personal, particularly family, sacrifices by revolutionaries, and a symbol of the loss of ideological and political vision that characterise Left melancholia. It is important to mention that the lost child is a popular trope in Philippine melodrama, particularly in television drama series and films. The NatDem fictions I examine in this chapter contain some affinity with the melodramatic mode. They foreground the experiences of motherhood as a way of figuring political issues within the domain of the personal and familial. As Carla Marcantonio points out, “melodrama and melodramatic representations are most often associated with images of home -- the family and the domestic sphere.”¹⁷ Moreover, the pathos associated with melancholia also becomes articulated through melodrama’s deployment of the “opposing forces of action and stasis, or pathos and action.”¹⁸ In the works that I discuss, these oppositional forces are expressed in the political defeatism and enduring militancy exhibited by some of the characters.

Owing to the use of the same narrative trope, *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* became embroiled in a minor controversy. During *Sigwa*’s premiere, Bautista called attention to the film’s narrative similarity with *Desaparecidos*. The latter text was first written and aired as a teleplay for the television network GMA in 1998 before being edited and published as a novel in 2007 and staged as a play in 2018. She claimed that *Sigwa*’s director Lamangan would have been very familiar with *Desaparecidos*’ narrative because he directed the 1998 teleplay, which won the Philippine Centennial Literary Contest; she added that Lamangan was also slated to direct a now-shelved film version of this

¹⁷ Carla Marcantonio, *Global Melodrama: Nation, Body, and History in Contemporary Film* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 16.

¹⁸ Marcantonio, 14.

screenplay.¹⁹ In response to Bautista's accusation, Lamangan acknowledged the similarities between his film and Bautista's novel, but mentioned the presence of the mother-daughter separation plot in films like the Hollywood-produced *Not Without my Daughter* (1991) and an earlier Filipino melodrama, Gil Portes' film *Andrea Paano Maging Isang Ina* [Andrea, How to be A Mother?] (1990).²⁰ Like *Sigwa* and *Desaparesidos*, the latter film also centres on a former NPA guerrilla separated from her child due to her political work. Released a few years after the end of the Marcos dictatorship, this movie, scripted by *Lihis* writer Ricky Lee, follows the fate of the teacher-turned-NPA rebel Andrea (Nora Aunor), as she claims her son from her politically-conservative best friend (Gina Alajar) who takes him to the United States.

Writer Luna Sicat-Cleto opines that the narrative similarities between these texts -- including *Andrea* -- point to a common "package" of Martial Law experiences, particularly of mothers entrusting their children to other people (either comrades, relatives, or allies) for care and protection.²¹ As Leonard Davis recounts in his study of the NPA, "a female fighter, or any woman who decides to devote her full time to working for the underground movement, is always faced with the question of what to do with her children;" in some cases, children were left in the care of relatives or the masses.²² Bautista herself shares that she has a firsthand account of this experience, as her family once took care of a comrade's child, an experience that served as an inspiration for *Desaparesidos*.²³ "Separation from children," journalist Gregg

¹⁹ Luna Sicat-Cleto, 'Pagluluwal Ng Buhay, Panulat, Pighati, Laban: Isang Panayam Kay Lualhati Bautista', *Likhaan: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature* 5 (2011): 261.

²⁰ Marinel Cruz, 'Plagiarism Raps vs 2 Movie Directors', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 August 2010, <https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/philippine-daily-inquirer-1109/20100805/281535107281751>.

²¹ Sicat-Cleto, 'Pagluluwal Ng Buhay, Panulat, Pighati, Laban', 262.

²² See accounts of women entrusting their children to relatives or allied masses in Davis, *Revolutionary Struggle in the Philippines*, 135–36.

²³ Lualhati Bautista, Interview by the author, Quezon City, 28 April 2019.

Jones observes in his account of experiences in the guerrilla zones, “was a psychological strain for some NPA members and Party workers assigned to guerrilla zones,” some of whom lamented the difficulties of trying to build a family amidst the struggle.²⁴ These real-life accounts, fictionalised in the search for lost child narratives in the NatDem fictions I examine, bring to the fore the sacrifices of revolutionaries, as well as the complex relations they build with their comrades and even non-revolutionary masses who serve as networks of support and care for their children.

Children also symbolise the unfulfilled aspirations driving revolutionaries to struggle for a better world, amidst dangers and hardships. If the child-image, as Carolyn Steedman points out, serves to embody the adult’s “sense of self within,”²⁵ then her disappearance could be interpreted in relation to the struggles, frustrations, and ideals of the older generation of political radicals. This point is not lost on some reviews of the film and the novel.

Filipino literary critic Epifanio San Juan Jr. describes the loss of the daughter in *Desaparesidos* as “seemingly a symbol of the loss of sovereignty, freedom, and integrity of the nation.”²⁶ Arlan Camba, reviewing *Desaparesidos*, wrote of the “child as the totality of the mother's personality,” revealing the latter's complexities in the political struggle.²⁷ A review of *Sigwa*, published in the alternative Leftist periodical *Pinoy Weekly*, describes Dolly’s search for her lost daughter as “an allusion to the search for the children of Rage,” referring to the former radicals borne out of the “rage” of the FQS; the review continues

²⁴ Jones, *Red Revolution*, 236.

²⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

²⁶ Epifanio San Juan, Jr., ‘Panitikan, Ideolohiya, Rebolusyon: Edukasyon at Pedagoghiya Sa Pagbasa Ng Nobelang Desaparesidos Ni Lualhati Bautista’, *Daluyan: Journal Ng Wikang Filipino*, no. 2 (2015): 225.

²⁷ Arlan Camba, ‘Desaparesidos: Ang Pagtalunton Ni Lualhati Bautista Sa Bakas Ng Mga Rebolusyonaryong Ina’, *Pilipinolohiya*, no. 1 (2015): 109.

that "[t]he recollection is a way of interrogating the fate of those children, how they are changed or fortified by the violence of their experiences of suppression."²⁸

Freud pointed out that melancholia is not just about the melancholic's loss of a person, but the loss of something within the melancholic's self.²⁹ As the critical reception to these narratives of lost daughters points out, the loss of the child embodies the loss of political ideals and commitment experienced by the older generation, aptly describing what I discussed earlier as Left melancholia. Through the search for the lost child, former revolutionaries are compelled to confront this sense of loss in a way that turns the process of melancholic contemplation into a collective venture -- a communal introspection of a generation. Staging the reunion of former comrades, *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* chronicle how members of this generation revisit the shared memory of their past, reflect on the value of their collective experiences and contribution to the project of national liberation, and examine the various, often divergent, political paths that they have since taken.

Beyond this melancholic register, I also intend to focus on the figuration of the lost child as a symbol of redemption and hope. She is, after all, not only the object of the search, but the connecting thread between the past, the present and the future of the revolution. As a symbol of the younger generation, she embodies how successive generations of Filipinos approach and understand the legacy of the revolution, given its complex and violent

²⁸ Digna Magtigilca, 'Sa Mata Ng Sigwa', *Pinoy Weekly*, 20 July 2010, <https://www.pinoyweekly.org/2010/07/sa-mata-ng-sigwa/>.

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (1917; repr., London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 243–58.

history. Throughout the search for her, the older generation are confronted with the questions: Will the younger generation appreciate the struggles and sacrifices in the past? Will they take up and continue the revolution started by their parents? As Debbie Olson writes, the child signifies, not only “historicity” but also “futuraity.”³⁰

In the following sections, I elaborate on these reflections through my close readings of *Desaparesidos* and *Sigwa*. I am concerned with how the recounting of the past brings up questions about the persistence of the revolution. I examine how each text transforms the search for the lost child into a narrative bridge that connects the revolutionary past of older generations to the contemporary reality of the ongoing struggle. Crucial to this is how the loss of the child lays bare the contradictions and intimacies in the social relations that are affected by revolutionary participation and transformed into transmission belts of memory: the family and the revolutionary collective.

Desaparesidos

Desaparesidos is a novel about the entanglements and tensions of the family with the revolution. At the core of the narrative is the question of how the relationship between parents and their children are shaped by political trauma and the legacy of the struggle. It is important to mention that Bautista earlier explored the intertwined issues of parenthood and revolution in her award-winning Martial Law-era novel *Dekada '70*³¹ (1983). But while *Dekada '70* is about a middle-class housewife in the 1970s whose eldest son

³⁰ Debbie C. Olson, ‘The Hitchcock Imp: Children and the Hyperreal in Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*’, in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Debbie C. Olson and Andrew Scahill (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 287.

³¹ Written and published during the Marcos regime, this novel won the Grand Prize at the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 1983 and became the basis of the 2002 film of the same title.

joins the NPA, *Desaparecidos*'s central protagonist Anna is herself a former revolutionary. As Bautista herself describes, compared to *Dekada '70*'s view "from the outside looking in," this later novel, which pre-eminent literary scholar Bienvenido Lumbera describes as more intense and heavier than the earlier novel,³² offers an inner view of the struggle by foregrounding the experiences of those who directly participated in the revolution.³³ According to Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, like *Dekada '70*, was informed by her brief involvement in the revolutionary movement, a political commitment that she had to forego to attend to the demands of motherhood. Her experience prompted her to ask "if those women who joined, and died in, the revolution were better daughters of the nation, or if I was just a better mother."³⁴

The novel's title *Desaparecidos* is the Filipinised equivalent of the Spanish word "desaparecidos," meaning "disappeared ones" in reference to the victims of enforced disappearances under the US-backed military dictatorships in Latin America, such as in Argentina and Chile.³⁵ In what Greg Grandin referred to as the "signature act of Cold War violence,"³⁶ victims, accused of political involvement, were abducted, or taken to military custody and presumably killed and disposed of, allegedly by state forces, never to be seen again.³⁷ In the Philippines, the term has gained currency with the increased forced disappearances as a result of the counterinsurgency operations during and after the Marcos dictatorship.³⁸ Relatives and friends

³² Bienvenido Lumbera, 'Introduction', in *Desaparecidos*, by Lualhati Bautista (Mandaluyong: Cacho and Anvil, 2007), vi, viii.

³³ Bautista, Interview by the author.

³⁴ Bautista.

³⁵ Ariel E Dulitzky, 'The Latin-American Flavor of Enforced Disappearances', *Chicago Journal of International Law* 19, no. 2 (2019): 423–89.

³⁶ Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War, Updated Edition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 74.

³⁷ Dulitzky, 'The Latin-American Flavor of Enforced Disappearances', 433.

³⁸ *Beyond Disappearance: Chronicles of Courage* (Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance, 2006).

would become drawn to activist involvements in their search for their disappeared loved ones. Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND), "a nationwide mass organization of families, relatives, friends and colleagues of disappeared victims and surfaced *desaparecidos* that is advocating human rights and participative empowerment," documented over 900 victims of forced disappearances during the Marcos regime, a number that continues to surge in the post-Marcos years under successive regimes that implemented their own counterinsurgency programs.³⁹ This continuity is emphasised in the novel's traversal of two narrative time frames, the Marcos dictatorial period and the time of the Arroyo presidency, also the political context of the novel's publication.⁴⁰ As I have pointed out earlier, Arroyo earned the label "Marcosian" from the media, owing to her violent counter-insurgency program against the Moro liberation movement in Mindanao and the NatDem movement. Thus, the shifting between two temporal frames that are marked by comparable experiences of political violence allows the novel's narrative emphasis on impunity to, following Katharine McGregor, "make cases of historical injustice more pressing in contemporary society," because in this case "connections can be made between the past and the present state of the society in question."⁴¹

Apart from denoting the victims of forced disappearances, the title also refers to parents and children rendered absent or disappeared by the contingencies of political struggle. These characters, according to Kerima Tariman, writing

³⁹ 'FIND', accessed 29 October 2021, <http://find.org.ph/>; Jodesz Gavilan, 'What You Need to Know about Enforced Disappearances in the Philippines', *Rappler*, 30 August 2018, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/210595-things-to-know-enforced-disappearances-philippines>.

⁴⁰ The political context of the Arroyo presidency is absent in the teleplay, which aired before Arroyo replaced Joseph Estrada in the second EDSA People Power in 2001.

⁴¹ Katharine McGregor, 'Exposing Impunity: Memory and Human Rights Activism in Indonesia and Argentina', *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 4 (2 October 2017): 553, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2017.1393948>.

as Marijoe Monumento, search not just for literally disappeared loved ones, but also “for their lost selves – which, in simple terms, do not refer to anything other than their severed roles in the family as children, spouses, or parents.”⁴² The question of the familial entanglements of revolutionary subjects is thus at the heart of the novel’s exploration of political disappearances.

In representing these disappearances and absences, *Desaparecidos* chronicles how the lives of two former revolutionaries, Anna and Roy, and their daughter Lorie are shaped by the violent experiences of revolutionary resistance against the Marcos dictatorship. Living in the post-EDSA years, the characters are haunted by the memory of Anna’s daughter whom she lost during the Martial Law period. Both Anna and Roy are paralysed by the trauma of the loss, as well as the political violence they experienced firsthand during the dictatorship, compelling them, as well as their daughter Lorie, to reflect on the relevance of the NatDem revolution. Strains of Left melancholia underpin these reflections, as the characters seek to make sense of the sacrifices and traumas in the struggle in relation to questions about the revolution's ethico-political legitimacy.

The novel begins in a human rights forum. Anna, a human rights worker, assists in documenting cases of Martial Law-era violence as part of a planned class suit against the Marcoses. In this forum, which conjures the past as a violent memory in the present, images and testimonies of dictatorial brutality propel the narrative to a shift back to the dark days of the dictatorship. One case discussed in the forum is of Anna’s first husband Nonong, a guerrilla in the revolutionary movement, whose tortured corpse was laid down, along with other murdered revolutionaries, in the town plaza. As she listens to the

⁴² Monumento, ‘Mga Tala Sa Dalawang Bagong Nobela Tungkol Sa Rebolusyon’.

detailed description of the torture and mutilation of his corpse, her memory takes her back to the Martial Law era, on that day when, without permission from the Party, she leaves the guerrilla zone with her newborn daughter to see her husband's corpse. Wary of being identified by the soldiers guarding the slain guerrillas, she looks at her husband from a distance, restraining her sorrow as she pretends to be a bystander. While outside the guerrilla zone, she seizes the chance to contact Nonong's family and inform them of her husband's fate. Nonong's aged father tries to claim his slain son's body from the military. In a tragic turn of events, the old man is baselessly accused of being a member of the NPA and killed by government soldiers.

Desaparecidos illustrates how families face the agonising consequences of the political commitment of sons, daughters, and even parents. The story of Anna and Roy foregrounds the painful intimacies between revolutionary involvement and the family. Traversing two political milieus, the novel portrays the experiences of family lives transformed by the brutal experiences and memory of the revolution. Under the Marcos dictatorship, families of revolutionaries serve as reliable networks of support for revolutionaries, and as a result, become targets of dictatorial violence. Decades later, during the time of Arroyo, the melancholic memory of Marcos-era atrocities haunts former revolutionaries, making it difficult for them to take on parental roles. In navigating these temporal frames, the novel employs narrative strategies like flashbacks and flashforwards, and omniscient third-person narration that flit in and out of the thoughts, feelings, and memory of its various characters. In the scene of Anna's viewing of her husband's body in the plaza, the omniscient narrator expresses the sentiments she tries to muffle in the presence of stationed soldiers:

She tightens her embrace around her child. *Child, your father. He's there, the second one. He died for the country.*

She badly wants to embrace Nonong's corpse. She badly wants to even drive away the flies feasting on the dried blood in his face, kiss his denailed fingers.⁴³

Anna's risky venture to see her husband's dead body becomes a cause of alarm for her comrades, who suspect a possible breach in Party security. They advise her to entrust her baby daughter Malaya (derived from the Tagalog word for "free") to Karla, a pregnant comrade who is staying with Roy's family in a rural barrio. However, this barrio becomes the target of military zoning, forcing Roy's father to take Karla and Anna's baby to another barrio for safety. Tragedy ensues after Karla and the baby move out. The military assaults Roy's house, massacring the entire family. This devastating episode, which illustrates the state's ruthlessness towards families supportive of revolutionaries, would haunt Roy in the years to come, stirring in him a lingering feeling of guilt for his family's tragic fate. As Freud described it, melancholia involves a certain measure of self-blame, converting mourning into expressions of self-reproach.⁴⁴

With the massacre of Roy's family, Anna loses her remaining link to her baby. Along with Karla's husband, Jinky, Anna leaves the guerrilla zone to locate the whereabouts of Karla and the baby. The house where Anna and Jinky are supposed to go to is however busted by the military, and the two are arrested. In the countryside, their comrades are alerted about the military interception, and prepare to transfer to a safer location. However, the

⁴³ Lualhati Bautista, *Desaparecidos* (Mandaluyong: Cacho and Anvil, 2007), 5. Italics in the original, untranslated text.

⁴⁴ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 251.

warning comes too late. Soldiers, accompanied by Jinky who betrays his comrades under torture, surround the camp, and capture Roy and a younger comrade named Lito.

The novel graphically details the torture of Anna and Roy, emphasising both the physical and psychological violence perpetrated by the Marcos military. Literary critics have praised the novel's "brutal prose," which Lumbera described as "slicing the consciousness of the reader and leaving our senses shocked."⁴⁵ San Juan Jr. similarly lauds the novel's realistic scenes of torture and other forms of military violence.⁴⁶ This graphic representation of state violence is crucial to the novel's traumatic narrative, stressing how pain and suffering shape the way revolutionaries would thereafter construct the memory of their revolutionary involvement.

In a scene that dramatizes the fate of many female political dissidents arrested by the military during the dictatorship,⁴⁷ the novel recounts, in harrowing detail, Anna's experience of sexual violence at the hands of the Marcos military. As soldiers attempt to penetrate her, she pees on herself, repelling her torturers. While this remains a humiliating episode for her, Anna's body expresses her resistance to state violence, and at one point, even channels her affective link to the daughter she lost. As the soldiers continue to inflict bodily harm on her, her breasts suddenly leak milk, offering her a glimmer of hope that her baby is still alive somewhere, and giving her a reason to survive this violent ordeal.

⁴⁵ Lumbera, 'Introduction', vii.

⁴⁶ San Juan, Jr., 'Panitikan, Ideolohiya, Rebolusyon', 223.

⁴⁷ Hilsdon, *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and Violence in the Philippines*; Patty Pasion, 'Women Victims Tell SC of Martial Law Torture', *Rappler*, 31 August 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/martial-law-victims-supreme-court-oral-arguments>; Mila De Guzman, *Women Against Marcos: Stories of Filipino and Filipino American Women Who Fought a Dictator* (San Francisco: Carayan Press, 2016).

Roy is also subjected to torture conducted in a way that perverts the affective ties developed in comradely relations in the struggle. Soldiers order Roy to beat up Lito, threatening to kill the younger comrade if he refuses. Roy is left with no choice but to obey, forcing him to occupy “the boundary between victim and perpetrator.”⁴⁸ Roy’s close attachment to Lito, built on their shared experiences of losing their family members at the hands of the military, makes the ordeal more painful. Roy would keep this humiliating episode a secret, privately justifying his participation in his comrade’s suffering: “I hit him in the desire to save his life.”⁴⁹

At the hands of state forces, Anna and Roy experience individualised forms of brutality, which the novel conjoins and melds into a shared experience of suffering. This is accomplished through the passage quoted below, which appears twice in the novel to chronicle first the torture of Anna, and thereafter, the torture of Roy.

They passed him/her on like a ball. Thrown by one, grabbed by another, punched by one, falling into the hands of another. Punched in the stomach, kicked, hanged upside down, bent backwards, feasted on. He/She couldn’t even fight, even claw, even curse.⁵⁰

This passage describes the separate sufferings of Anna and Roy in a way that conveys how political trauma becomes an intersubjective experience collectively shared by victims. State violence cuts across individual bodies; in the novel, the shared experience of brutality mark the intimacies that would

⁴⁸ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 173.

⁴⁹ Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 54.

⁵⁰ Bautista, 40–41, 52–53.

develop between Roy and Anna. After their release from detention, they cross paths once again, and travel to Roy's barrio -- a shared site of trauma, where the assault of state forces claimed the lives of Roy's family and led to the disappearance of Anna's baby. They visit the grave of Roy's family and set out to trace the whereabouts of Karla and the lost baby. In a moment of intimacy, memories of their torture intervene in their attempt to make love. This shared suffering would bring them closer to each other. They get married under the Party's flag, which indicates their mutual effort to resist Left melancholia and continue with the struggle, despite or precisely because of, their firsthand experience of state brutality. But the trauma of their suffering would continue to haunt them in their struggle to build a normal family life.

Lost generation

I now turn to Lorie, the daughter of Anna and Roy, who embodies the transgenerational tensions between the family and the revolutionary struggle. Named after the revolutionary heroine Lorena Barros⁵¹ (also referenced in *Sigwa*), Lorie recalls feeling an outsider during her childhood years, largely because of her parents' difficult balancing of parental commitment and political work. Due to her mother's political engagements, she would often be entrusted to one of her parents' former comrades or friends, before being fetched again. Lorie sees her parents as desaparecidos themselves, constantly disappearing from her life because of their political work. The absence of a sense of long-term belonging discourages Lorie from building friendships; the instability of her social relations instils in her a sense of fear, compounded by the transient condition of being entrusted from one house to

⁵¹ Lorena Barros (1948-1976) was a poet-revolutionary who became the leader of the women's organisation MAKIBAKA, and died fighting as an NPA guerrilla. See the biography Hernando, *Lorena*.

another where she needs to connect with new people again. In this set-up, she however grows close to Emmanuel, the son of her parents' former comrades. Like Lorena, Emmanuel is named after a revolutionary martyr, Emmanuel Lacaba.⁵² This act of naming signifies the commemorative aim of making the younger generation remember, if not continue and emulate, the former generation's revolutionary heroism. But for Lorie, her name is a burdensome reminder of her parents' traumatic past.

Lorie's experiences attest to how, as Gabriele Schwab and Marianne Hirsch argue, parents victimised and scarred by political violence "tend to pass their trauma onto their children."⁵³ The loss of Anna's firstborn has an impact on Lorie, who suffers as a "replacement child," a child born after the death or, in this case, loss of an earlier child. A replacement child, writes Schwab, "carries the legacy of a traumatic family history, if not a traumatic collective history."⁵⁴ Growing up, Lorie feels the void left by the loss of her mother's firstborn, while also playing witness to the haunting of the trauma of political violence in their home. She recalls waking up to her father's screams in his sleep because of a nightmare. Seeing her mother comforting her father, Lorena feels "she has no place in those sacred moments between her mother and father."⁵⁵ Her family life gives her "no real sense of belonging,"⁵⁶ cultivating within her a feeling of being an outsider who has no access to her mother's loss, and the history of violence that both her parents share.

⁵² Emmanuel Lacaba (1948-1976) is also a writer who joined the NPA. He was killed by the Marcos military two years after he joined the armed struggle. See 'LACABA, Emmanuel "Eman" Agapito F.', *Bantayog Ng Mga Bayani*, 15 November 2015, <http://www.bantayog.org/lacaba-emmanuel-eman-agapito-f/>.

⁵³ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012); Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 25.

⁵⁴ Gabriele Schwab, 'Replacement Children: The Transgenerational Transmission of Traumatic Loss', *American Imago* 66, no. 3 (2009): 286.

⁵⁵ Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 40-41, 52-53.

⁵⁶ Bautista, 118.

An episode in the novel further brings to the fore the affective gap between the traumatised parent and the replacement child. One night, Anna, suddenly stricken with worry, calls Lorie from her room. She hears no response from her daughter, who refuses to be bothered in her room by another of her mother's inexplicable behaviours. Growing anxious, Anna retrieves the house keys and proceeds to unlock Lorie's door. Lorie flies into a rage, and lashes out at her mother. She decries what she feels is an invasion of the privacy that she has learned to cherish as an emotional shelter from her parents' trauma. What for the daughter is an unreasonable and infuriating episode of intrusion is actually a panic attack of a mother who displays "severe parental restrictiveness and overprotection"⁵⁷ for fear of losing another child:

She wants to explain. Because, Lorie, sometimes I am visited by anxiety all of a sudden. No reason and no cause, but suddenly, anxiety shows up in my mind. Anxiety that turns to nervousness, nervousness that cannot be stopped. Panic attack, they say. Can you understand that, child?

When she twisted the knob on Lorie's door and it did not open, she suddenly got nervous. She suddenly feared that Lorie might not be here, might have left, been lost, kidnapped, abducted...have committed suicide!⁵⁸

Parental trauma thus alienates the replacement child. "[H]er daughter here," Anna realises, "is as distant as her lost daughter."⁵⁹ Lorie's growing distance from her parents draws her closer to Emmanuel, whose stable relationship

⁵⁷ Albert C. Cain and Barbara S. Cain, 'On Replacing a Child', *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 3, no. 3 (July 1964): 448, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138\(09\)60158-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138(09)60158-8).

⁵⁸ Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 126.

⁵⁹ Bautista, 129.

with his parents pulls him further towards radical politics. Lorie's dysfunctional family experience however makes her wary of Emmanuel's deepening political involvement. Fearing abandonment, she feels that Emmanuel is spending less time with her because of his political activities. Lorie's hostility to radical politics stems largely from its association with her parents. "Their parents just destroyed their own families," muses Lorie, "while the nation remains broken."⁶⁰ At one point, she argues that the movement's in-fighting -- referring to the crises and divisions during the post-EDSA years -- annuls the legitimacy of the revolution. "Look at them now, the messiahs of Philippine society," she mockingly tells Emman. "They themselves fight one another! They kill one another...grab power!"⁶¹ Refusing to recognise the worth and achievements of the struggle, Lorie concludes, "[o]ur parents created nothing...but a society of disappeared."⁶² Lorie's rejection of the revolution reflects how Left melancholia takes shape as a transgenerational legacy, embraced by the younger generation who view their parents' history of political commitment as a story of defeat, loss, and trauma.

Despite Lorie's feelings about her parents and their political history as revolutionaries, the novel establishes the affective force of the family that persists against the ravages of political trauma. When Anna and Roy travel to a distant province to locate Jinky's family, Lorie is left alone at home, savouring her temporary freedom from her parents. However, a feeling of anxiety immediately washes over her, and she recalls those tender moments when she would gaze at her parents' faces before sleeping, checking on them to make sure that they are at peace. This recollection evinces that despite, or

⁶⁰ Bautista, 201.

⁶¹ Bautista, 197.

⁶² Bautista, 197.

perhaps because, of transgenerational trauma, both parents and daughter share the feeling of fear and concern for each other's safety and well-being.

Reconciliation

Anna and Roy continue to resolve their own traumatic past by resuming their search for the lost daughter. From Jinky's parents, they learn that Jinky -- Fernando, in real life -- was killed by his former comrades, and that Karla has migrated to Canada with a daughter. This detail about Jinky's fate brings immense distress to the couple. Roy later reveals that he was part of the team that carried out the movement's decision to execute Jinky for betraying the movement. His participation lays bare the complex dynamics that underpin personal motivations and concerns in submitting to revolutionary imperatives. Roy admits to himself that his wilful participation in the execution is propelled by his desire to avenge himself for his torture, which he blames on Jinky's betrayal. Anna is however anguished about Roy's involvement in eliminating the only person who could lead her to Karla and the lost daughter.

Jinky's death touches on a sensitive issue concerning the movement's idea and practice of its revolutionary justice. In the years that followed the Second Great Rectification Movement, the revolutionary movement has admitted to ordering the killings of former cadres.⁶³ According to the CPP, these killings were part of revolutionary policy of punishing through death "present or former leaders of the Party and the NPA" as well as "wealthy or powerful highly placed reactionaries" who are "found guilty beyond reasonable doubt

⁶³ Fidel V. Agcaoili, 'Rejoinder to the Slanderous Article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset', *NDFP*, 31 March 2005, <https://ndfp.org/rejoinder-to-the-slanderous-article-of-french-trotskyite-pierre-rousset/>.

of having committed heinous crimes.”⁶⁴ In the novel, the movement adjudged Jinky guilty for his betrayal. The revolutionary court stipulates that “acting as spies ...for the Philippine military intelligence services” warrants death penalty.⁶⁵ The killings of former cadres have generated denunciations from various quarters, particularly from former members of the movement. One commentator, for instance, describes how the revolutionary cause has turned into “one which confuses strength with coercion, resolve with ruthlessness, life with death,”⁶⁶ viewing the killings as proof of the erosion of the movement’s political legitimacy, and a basis to reject the struggle.

Jinky’s widow Karla, who now uses her real name Sonia, refuses the strain of disillusionment underlying such view. Years after Jinky’s death and her severance from the movement, she returns to the Philippines, harbouring no grudge for the movement and the comrades who executed her husband:

True, Jinky was put in a situation where he had no choice but to betray people for his own safety. But the comrades were also put in a situation where they had to sacrifice Jinky for the safety of others. Him or them. One or many. Yes, she couldn’t fully blame the movement. According to the rules of war, and even the rule of life, there are decisions that are like crossing between life and death.⁶⁷

In invoking the rules of war, Sonia’s view bears some affinity to philosopher Norman Geras’ understanding of revolutionary violence in relation to the

⁶⁴ Gregorio Rosal, ‘It Was Absolutely Correct to Apprehend and Punish Romulo Kintanar’, 26 January 2003, <http://members.casema.nl/ndf/archive/2003/archive0019.html>.

⁶⁵ Agcaoili, ‘Rejoinder to the Slanderous Article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset’.

⁶⁶ Conrado De Quiros, quoted in Jovito Salonga, ‘Foreword’, in *U.G. an Underground Tale: The Journey of Edgar Jopson and the First Quarter Storm Generation*, by Benjamin Pimentel (Manila: Anvil, 2006), xxii.

⁶⁷ Bautista, *Desaparesidos*, 164.

doctrine of the just war. For Geras, revolutions need to be understood as examples of just war, precisely because of their root causes and agendas for liberation. However, the “justice of war” does not forfeit the need to observe “justice in war.”⁶⁸ As the experiences of errors in Chapter 2 attest to, revolutionaries, Geras writes, “are obliged for their part to bring a disciplined, scrupulous, discriminating, ethical code into the dark history they are fighting to transform.”⁶⁹ The “precise code of moral limits and rules” that such socialist ethics must embody involves identifying “the category of persons at whom violence may be directed.”⁷⁰ Such task is not without the attendant complexity and difficulty; but in cases when there is contention about how revolutionaries draw the line between valid targets of revolutionary violence and those who are not, Geras pointed out that “the crucial thing is that there is a line.”⁷¹ While the novel does not intervene fully into the broader and more complicated debates about the revolution’s execution of former comrades, Sonia’s acceptance of Jinky’s fate, while painful, suggests a recognition of the movement’s conception of revolutionary justice that puts due consideration on difficult contingencies -- including those related to questions of danger and security -- on which such acts of revolutionary violence are based.

The encounter among Sonia, Anna and Roy allows them to revisit the violent memory of their shared past. Sonia recounts the events on the night of the military’s attacks in Roy’s barrio. Vividly reconstructed in narrative flashbacks, she recalls how, in the middle of the chaos, Anna’s baby crawls from her while she is having labour pains. The child is crushed to death

⁶⁸ Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 37.

⁶⁹ Geras, 45.

⁷⁰ Geras, 38.

⁷¹ Geras, 39.

under the wheeled cart and fleeing people. Soldiers take Sonia to the hospital, where she gives birth to her daughter, which she also named Malaya. “Until now, I am surprised that the enemies saved me and my daughter,” she muses, remarking on the irony of her rescue, “while our comrades killed my husband.”⁷² Enemies and comrades become blurred, if not altogether erased, in that life-and-death situation. The situation however compels Sonia to sever ties with her comrades, fearing that this incident would cause her to be suspected of betrayal.

It is revealed later that Sonia has made-up this account of the death of Anna’s baby, perhaps as a way to make peace with the past and shield her present state of stability and peace now far, both temporally and spatially, removed from the tumultuous past of her revolutionary involvement. Nevertheless, Malaya -- Anna’s lost daughter whom Sonia raises as her own -- forces the intrusion of the past into her present and paves the way for the undoing of this fiction. In the process, she uncovers some uncomfortable truths about her adoptive family. Growing up in Canada, Malaya takes pride in the belief that Jinky, who she believes is her father, died a heroic death as a revolutionary at the hands of the military. Years later, she learns about Jinky’s betrayal and his execution by his former comrades. Upon her return to the Philippines to prepare for her wedding, Malaya chances upon Anna in the human rights office, and inquires about human rights claims, revealing her connection to Sonia and Fernando (Jinky’s real name).

The novel stages through the subsequent encounters among the former comrades how they move from the escapism underpinning Sonia’s invented story towards healing and reconciliation. Their reunion becomes an opportunity for them to reflect on the value of their past revolutionary

⁷² Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 194.

commitment, as well as the sacrifices made for the struggle. In a conversation between Anna and Karla, they talk about how they joined the movement fully aware of the personal hardships it entails: “Our lives are risky. Who would’ve have dictated the right or wrong way? Even the movement has a lot of mistakes. Mistakes that led to many deaths.”⁷³ One such tragic mistake is revealed upon Roy’s admission to Sonia of his participation in Jinky’s execution. Guilt-ridden, he admits a secret he has long harboured: after the execution, Party members learned that Jinky sent his comrades a letter warning them about the details he disclosed to the enemies under torture. The belated discovery of Jinky’s effort to save them from his betrayal has been a source of unspoken burden for Roy, who was propelled by personal hatred in carrying out the tragically mistaken task of killing one of his dear comrades.

These mistakes and tragedies are occasions no longer for regret, but for reflection, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Sonia embraces such reconciliatory attitude towards the past out of her belief in the enduring value of the tumultuous and crisis-ridden history of the revolution that they wilfully waged. Bereft of hatred, she forgives Roy. In an act that evinces her transformed view of the need to confront the truth of the past, she finally reveals to Malaya her real parentage. Another narrative flashback recounts that Sonia kept Anna’s infant in her arms while giving birth to a dead baby amidst the chaos in the barrio. In his review of *Desaparecidos*, San Juan Jr. lauds Karla or Sonia, for she “sacrifices her own daughter in order to protect and save her comrade’s child, thus valorizing community over biology” and “proves that though the struggle separates bodies and destroys families, they [sic] also open up the space for new forms of belonging, solidarity, and

⁷³ Bautista, 199.

fellowship.”⁷⁴ I venture however that Sonia is also instrumental in reaffirming biological ties, as her admission of the truth to Malaya -- her wedding gift to her adopted daughter -- resolves the political traumas of the past through the reunion of the mother and the lost daughter.

As the older generation confront their traumatic political past, the novel also resolves the crisis of passing their legacy of political involvement onto the younger generation. Roy talks to Lorena to explain the revolution that Emmanuel now joins. He tells her “that what they created is not a society of desaparecidos but a brave history,”⁷⁵ explaining how continuing social oppression validates the dream to change society. This emotive conversation leads to Lorie’s reconciliation with Anna, as well as her acceptance of Emmanuel’s politics. “She hugged Emman tightly, and she felt that she was not only hugging him, but her mother and father, and his mother and father, and the entire significance and meaning of their lives!”⁷⁶ The revolution, after all, is very much a collective endeavour of people with families, for their families.

Reviews of the novel have raised how the novel’s focus on the family reunion tends to elide over the question of the relevance of revolutionary politics as a viable solution to the country’s social ills. Marijoe Monumento doubted the seriousness with which Lorena retracts her negative sentiments, and accepts her parents’ past.⁷⁷ San Juan, Jr. comments how the novel compromises the problems of imperialism, oligarchic politics, and the national democratic

⁷⁴ Epifanio San Juan, Jr., ‘Lualhati Bautista’s DESAPARECIDOS, Bonifacio, & the Politics of Time’ (History, Literature and the Politics of Time, University of the Philippines Visayas, 4 February 2014), <https://philcsc.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/lualhati-bautistas-desaparecidos-bonifacio-the-politics-of-time-e-san-juan-jr/>.

⁷⁵ Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 205.

⁷⁶ Bautista, 208.

⁷⁷ Monumento, ‘Mga Tala Sa Dalawang Bagong Nobela Tungkol Sa Rebolusyon’.

struggle in a narrow framework of family concerns involving a lost child and tortured activists.⁷⁸

While it is arguable that the novel's familial crises are resolved through reliance on melodramatic moments, these reviews focus on the contradictions between the family and revolution, suggesting that the family melodrama has the effect of dehistoricising and depoliticising the novel's narrative of revolutionary politics. But I venture in the foregoing analysis that the novel unravels the tensions that underpin both the antinomies and intimacies between family and revolution, highlighting how they shape and trouble each other. Even familial memory is transcribed in the vocabulary of revolutionary sacrifice and trauma, evident in how parents and daughters resolve the problem of transgenerational political legacy. Lorie sees in the face of her father "the wounds of many deaths...the many deaths that did not result in surrender, but rather intensified the conviction to resurrect the ideals for which heroes died."⁷⁹

Gaining a renewed understanding of her parents' revolutionary past, Lorie welcomes her lost sister, who represents the now-occupied void left by the past. The reunion with the lost child heals the political and personal divide between the past and the present. Bautista thus describes Malaya's wedding symbolically as her marriage "to the past and future of her nation. To the present that bridges these two times. To the seeds of dreams tirelessly planted in the land that has the colour of her skin."⁸⁰

The novel takes on a non-fictional register with an epilogue about the successful outcome of the judicial fight waged by the victims of the Marcos

⁷⁸ San Juan, Jr., 'Panitikan, Ideolohiya, Rebolusyon', 223.

⁷⁹ Bautista, *Desaparecidos*, 206.

⁸⁰ Bautista, 221.

dictatorship to gain reparation from the Marcoses and the Philippine government. This epilogue points out the enduring traces of Marcosian politics that pose difficulties to the search for justice, recounting how the Arroyo government's political manoeuvres sabotaged the release of reparation to the rightful beneficiaries. Amidst growing calls for her ouster, Arroyo's dictatorial features, the novel suggests, becomes more obvious with her declaration of Proclamation 1017, a decree placing the entire country under a state of emergency (referenced in *Barikada*), or as Bautista describes it, "another name for the state of martial law."⁸¹ The replication of Marcosian terror lends a foreboding tone towards the novel's end, implying how the persistence of state violence at present warrants the continuation of the revolutionary struggle in the time of Malaya, Lorie, and Emmanuel.

Sigwa

The lost child motif indexes how families are affected by political struggle and trauma. At the same time, it points to the importance of networks of support beyond biological and marital ties, like the ones established within the revolutionary movement. I thus turn my attention to *Sigwa* to explore the question of comradeship, and examine how the social relations formed in the revolutionary collective become complicated by political trauma and disillusionment.

Sigwa premiered as part of the Director's Showcase of the 6th Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival in 2010, winning an acting award for best supporting actor (for Tirso Cruz III). The film was also screened in international film festivals in Brussels and Montreal. It received Best Film and Screenplay prizes in local bodies like the 2011 Golden Screen Awards, and

⁸¹ Bautista, 223.

the Star Awards for Movies. In the years after its Cinemalaya premiere, *Sigwa* was also screened in universities and schools, and included in the line-up of Pista Rizalina,⁸² a cultural festival held by the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 2017 to observe the Martial Law anniversary.

Reviews of the film were quite critical of the film's technical aspects, but pointed out its relevance in explaining the anti-dictatorship struggle especially to younger viewers. For example, Elvin Luciano faults the lack of authenticity in the movie's flashback scenes but recognises that, "[t]hrough this movie, viewers will be able to better appreciate the ideals of activism." He adds that "[b]y witnessing the passion of these revolutionaries, today's generation will hopefully see the relevance of youth activism in the present times and realize how these ideals are still applicable to current circumstances."⁸³ Philbert Dy recognises that *Sigwa* is distinct from other films that depict Martial Law-era activism, as it is one of the few to "have taken a look at where those activists are now." Commenting on its narrative shifts between the past and the present, he adds that the film hits its stride "in the present, where [sic] the film explores what that activism has accomplished, and where it's taken the lives of the various people who decided to take up that sacrifice."⁸⁴

Sigwa was produced to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the FQS, which as I mentioned earlier, occurred during the first quarter of the 1970s. It was a period of predominantly student-led mass protests and civil

⁸²This festival was named after Rizalina Ilagan, a Filipina activist who disappeared during the Martial Law-era, and sister of the film's scriptwriter Bonifacio. See 'ILAGAN, Rizalina P.', *Bantayog Ng Mga Bayani*, 21 October 2015, <http://www.bantayog.org/ilagan-rizalina-p/>.

⁸³ Elvin Luciano, 'Sigwa Reminds the Youth Not to Take Freedom for Granted', *PEP.Ph*, 31 August 2010, <https://www.pep.ph/guide/movies/6710/pep-review-sigwa-reminds-the-youth-not-to-take-freedom-for-granted>.

⁸⁴ Philbert Ortiz Dy, 'Hints of Passion', *ClickTheCity*, 2011, <https://www.clickthecity.com/movies/a/13409/sigwa-movie-review-hints-of-passion>.

disobedience mounted against the Marcos regime. This event served as a turning point for the radicalisation of many students, who went on to become members of the NatDem movement during the Marcos dictatorship. The film's title, which literally translates to "rage" or "storm" in Tagalog, is a shorthand reference to the FQS. At the same time, the term *sigwa* connotes "tumult" or "chaos," which might refer to the political disturbances and turmoil in the country that carry on through the decades of democratisation.

Like *Desaparecidos*, *Sigwa* explores how Marcos-era revolutionaries construct the collective memory of their generation's struggle. This memory-making process, the film suggests, is significantly affected by the politico-ideological shifts and transformation that former revolutionaries have since undergone. As I have mentioned earlier, in the years following the FQS, the anti-Marcos struggle and the first EDSA People Power, the movement went through an organisational split, resulting in former comrades parting ways and embracing divergent political ideologies. These differences have not prevented them from gathering together in the name of the shared memory of their past political involvements. In these reunions, political differences are temporarily forgotten, giving way to the commemoration of the heroism of their fallen contemporaries and affirmation of the need to unite against impending threats of dictatorial rule. "Reunions are beautiful," muses one former activist who participated in one such reunion, "because the older we get, the more we cease seeing ourselves as friends or enemies. We are simply survivors sharing a common memory."⁸⁵

In *Sigwa*'s enactment of the reunion of former comrades, ideological and political differences are laid bare, intervening in the collective remembrance

⁸⁵ Rodel Rodis, 'Remembering the First Quarter Storm', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 30 January 2015, sec. Global Nation, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/118130/remembering-the-first-quarter-storm>.

of the past. As I elaborate in the following sections, the reunion of former comrades in the film sets the stage for heated contestations about the legacy and relevance of the revolution.

Reconnection

The film traces the lives of FQS-era revolutionaries over three decades after the FQS. At the centre of the narrative is the Filipino-American Dolly (Dawn Zulueta), who returns to the Philippines in 2009 to search for her lost daughter. Decades earlier before being arrested by the military during a surprise raid in their headquarters in 1971, Dolly (played during her younger years by Megan Young) entrusted her daughter to the care of her comrade Azon (Lovi Poe) (see Figure 7). Arrested by the Marcos military, she is sent back by her parents to the US, away from the political tumult of the Philippines, and loses contact with Azon. Thirty years later, after learning from a former comrade in the US that her daughter is alive, Dolly embarks on her search, reconnecting with her former comrades, who now lead different lives and maintain different political convictions -- the urban activist Rading (Jim Pebanco), the government spokesperson Oliver (Tirso Cruz III), the NPA guerrilla Cita (Zsa-zsa Padilla), also Oliver's former beau, and the traumatised Azon (played in her aged years by Gina Alajar).



Figure 7. The younger Dolly (Megan Young) entrusting her daughter to the younger Azon (Lovi Poe) before being arrested by the military in Joel Lamangan's *Sigwa* (Beginnings at Twenty Plus, Cinemalaya Foundation & Star Express, 2010).

According to both Lamangan and Ilagan, the characters in the movie are composites of real-life activists and revolutionaries.⁸⁶ Even the protagonists' names allude to actual personalities in the movement. For instance, Cita's name is taken from the nom de guerre of revolutionary feminist and martyr Lorena Barros, after whom Lorie in *Desaparecidos* is also named. The Filipino-American Dolly is named after American academic and activist Dolores Feria, while Oliver is named after Gary Olivar, who, similar to his fictional counterpart, is a former activist who became a spokesperson for the Arroyo administration.⁸⁷ As in the case of *Barikada*, these references reinforce the text's correspondences with, and interventions into, historical reality.

⁸⁶ Bonifacio Ilagan, Interview by the author, Quezon City, 13 June 2019; Lamangan, Interview by the author.

⁸⁷ Ilagan, Interview by the author. Lorena Barros was a poet-revolutionary who became the leader of the women's organisation MAKIBAKA (see Chapter 1 and note 49). Dolores Feria is an American academic who went on to live in the Philippines. She became a member of the revolutionary underground during the Martial Law period. Upon her release, she continued teaching until her retirement. She died in 1992. For her account of the Martial Law years, see Dolores Stephens Feria, *Project Sea Hawk: The Barbed Wire Journal* (Baguio: Paper Tigers and Circle Publications, 1993). Gary Olivar was a student leader from UP who was later appointed as Arroyo's deputy spokesperson. He died in 2021.

Dolly's search is the fulcrum for *Sigwa's* narrative, which brings together these characters in what could be interpreted as a biography of a generation. The film takes on the form of a multi-character drama. To follow from Bliss Cua Lim, multi-character films provide "a snapshot of a whole society in miniature, by having each of the many characters stand in for a social type."⁸⁸ Such social types, such as the state bureaucrat, the labour unionist, and the NPA guerrilla, embody specific positions across the ideological spectrum that former revolutionaries have since assumed. Navigating these political distances, Dolly's search compels them to revisit their shared memory of political radicalism.

Sigwa opens with a dedication "to the heroes and martyrs of the First Quarter Storm in 1970 in its fortieth anniversary," followed by a montage of black and white footage of the events in the 1970s -- the FQS, Marcos' declaration of the Martial Law, and an interview with prominent Marcos opponent, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr. This montage cuts to Dolly's arrival from the US. Her return to the Philippines after more than thirty years takes her on a literal and figurative memory journey across Manila.

As she plies the roads of the city through a taxi ride, she muses about the changes in Manila since her departure in the 1970s. Travelling shots of Manila landmarks compose a sequence of urban images that symbolise the country's tumultuous dictatorial and post-dictatorial political history -- from the unfulfilled promises of nationalist politics (monumentalised in the Rizal Park, a national landmark dedicated to the country's national hero Jose Rizal), post-dictatorial ruins (represented by Manila itself, which was primed by the Marcos dictatorship as a showcase city known as the "City of Man," as

⁸⁸ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 165.

well as by the image of the moving city train operated by the Marcos-established Light Rail Transit), to the EDSA People Power (shown in the highway adorned with yellow flags bearing the image of Marcos opposition figure and People Power icon Ninoy Aquino). The film situates these images in the context of an incomplete or, more accurately, failed democratisation under the Arroyo administration. In her hotel room, Dolly chances upon a newspaper carrying a headline about an impeachment complaint against Arroyo, indexing the then popular discontent with her regime because of allegations of corruption. A later scene enforces the regime's impunity with references to real-life incidents of Arroyo-era political violence like the Ampatuan massacre in 2009.⁸⁹

Dolly's visual reveries on post-Marcos Philippine society transitions to a flashback scene. The younger Dolly, a journalist freshly arrived from the US, covers a student-led protest rally violently dispersed by the Marcos military. "Yes, I became part of it," the voice of the older Dolly declares over this flashback scene, "the First Quarter Storm of 1970."

The flashback cuts to the present. Dolly spots Rading, a former comrade in the revolutionary movement, in a marching contingent of protesters. The old friends catch up, and Rading takes Dolly to his house in the slums, where they talk about their lives after the FQS. Slums -- figured in this scene through mountains of trash and makeshift houses -- are common indices of

⁸⁹ The Ampatuan massacre, regarded as the worst incident of electoral violence in the country, took place in Maguindanao, Southern Philippines in November 2009, when the armed goons of politician Andal Ampatuan kidnapped and killed the contingent of political rival Esmael Mangudadatu on their way to file his candidacy. The massacre, which killed 58 people, brought to sharp relief the culture of impunity under Arroyo, whose friendship with the Ampatuans came under fire for her administration's failure to bring them to court. It would take almost a decade since her administration for the Ampatuans to be finally prosecuted. See 'Philippines: Massacre Shows Arroyo's Failure to Address Impunity', *Human Rights Watch*, 24 November 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/11/24/philippines-massacre-shows-arroyos-failure-address-impunity>.

poverty in cultural practices and texts like film. At the same time, the slums embody the legacies of the Marcos dictatorship. As film scholar Katrina Macapagal points out, the current state of slums in Manila is significantly shaped by the elite-oriented urban modernity projects initiated by the Marcos dictatorship, and continued by succeeding administrations through neoliberal projects that have resulted in the displacement of many urban dwellers.⁹⁰

Writer Ed Maranan, in an article about Lamangan's films done in collaboration with Ilagan, aptly described the reunion between these friends as taking place "under basically unchanged conditions."⁹¹ For Dolly, the slums connote the intertwining of the past and the present; a later flashback scene shows that thirty years earlier, her immersion in a similar slum community led to her political radicalisation. The persisting conditions of underdevelopment and social injustice indexed in the slums provide the impetus to take up, and continue embracing radical politics, as embodied in the protest rally, in which Rading is involved.

The conversation between Dolly and Rading turns to the question of the persistence of activists and revolutionaries in their political commitment. Dolly learns that Rading is currently engaged in labour union activism. "A true activist remains an activist," he tells her, "even in old age." For him and similar members of his generation who remain attached to the cause, the abiding conditions of social inequality and injustice, as represented by the slums and indexed in the replication of Marcosian atrocities under the Arroyo regime, validate the continuation of activist, and by extension,

⁹⁰ Katrina Macapagal, *Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 30.

⁹¹ Ed Maranan, 'Film as Advocacy (or Truth-Telling, the Lamangan/Ilagan Way)', *Philippine Star*, 5 December 2011, sec. Arts and Culture: Passage, <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/arts-and-culture/2011/12/05/754656/film-advocacy-or-truth-telling-lamanganilagan-way>.

revolutionary commitment. Their discussion about the obstinacy of revolutionary duty continues in their visit to the Bantayog ng mga Bayani, which also appears in the closing scene in *Lihis* (see Chapter 1).

The movement from the slums to the Bantayog memorial complex constructs an allusion to how former revolutionaries navigate the present reality of social injustice and poverty, visualised in the slums, and the memory of radical politics commemorated in the Bantayog. This points to the tension underlying the film's engagement with Left melancholia, as it positions the history of radicalism as both memory and an ongoing political project. As they tour this Martial Law memorial complex, they talk about some of their contemporaries in the movement, mentioning real-life Left personalities like Satur (Ocampo), Judy (Taguiwalo), and Carol (Araullo).⁹² This reiteration of the filmic events' relationship to, and positioning in, historical reality conjures these real-life figures as models for the persistence of political commitment among activists even in their old age.

Multiple flashbacks further articulate the relations between the revolution of the past and its continuation to the present. These scenes interrupt and dialogue with present-day events. In contrast to the stabilised cinematography of the present-day scenes, these flashback scenes are rendered via shaky camerawork and often graded in grey to achieve a documentary effect, a cinematographic approach that evokes the atmosphere of urgency and tumult of the 1970s, and the political volatility and radical

⁹² This scene affirms the filmmakers' claim that *Sigwa's* characters correspond to real life ones. Ocampo, Araullo and Taguiwalo are veterans of the anti-Marcos movement and became members of the revolutionary movement. Rading's descriptions of their present-day lives reflect real-life details: Ocampo served in the Philippine congress as representative of the Leftist party-list Bayan Muna [Nation First]; Araullo served as national chairperson of the Leftist multi-sectoral alliance Bagong Alyansang Makabayan [New Nationalist Alliance] (BAYAN), and Taguiwalo served as Faculty Regent of the state university, the University of the Philippines (UP). All of them are still active in legal national democratic organisations.

energy of youth activism. These flashbacks conjure memories of revolutionary solidarity, showing the younger protagonists preparing for and staging mass protests, attending meetings, debating with one another, and even forging romantic ties amidst their hectic political activities. These episodes of past collective action and comradeship endow a melancholic tone upon the scenes set in the present, when these former comrades already lead different lives.

It is notable how Dolly attempts to repair already severed comradesly ties through not only her search for her daughter, but also her journalistic practice. In the flashback scenes, the younger Dolly, then still a politically unaffiliated journalist, becomes drawn to youth activists, initially with the aim of interviewing them and writing their character profiles. Years later, Dolly's reconnection with her former comrades assumes a parallel structure of interview-like conversations with them, allowing the exposition of their subsequent destinies since the Martial Law years. These encounters assemble into a collective biography of their generation, chronicling their divergent lifepaths.

After catching up with Rading, Dolly visits Oliver in his government office. Now a spokesperson for Arroyo, Oliver tracks a lifepath that exemplifies the "usual cliched trek from youthful radical to middle-aged reactionary."⁹³ In his capacity as government mouthpiece, he makes public pronouncements of his hatred for Leftist politics. In a press conference about the Ampatuan massacre, he deflects criticisms of the Arroyo administration by blaming the country's problems on the Left. Notwithstanding this contempt for the Left, the memory of his past radical involvement continues to haunt him.

⁹³ Terry Eagleton, 'Resources for a Journey of Hope: Raymond Williams', in *The Eagleton Reader*, ed. Stephen Regan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 315.

Interruptive flashbacks show the psychological torture he went through at the hands of the Marcos military, which as later revealed, compelled him to betray his comrades. “For old times’ sake,” he agrees to help Dolly, using his connections in the government to locate Azon, who now lives in a rural town outside Manila.

Visibly weakened by the years, Azon has retreated from all forms of political involvement, apart from occasionally hosting Cita and her NPA comrades during their visits to the communities they organise. At Dolly’s surprise visit, Azon registers a sense of distress, stemming, as revealed later, from a secret she has long been keeping: Dolly’s daughter is alive. Like Sonia in *Desaparecidos*, Azon has taken this daughter, now a teacher, as her own, and instead offers Dolly a fabricated story of her daughter’s death. The uncomfortable encounter between these two women also becomes an occasion for Azon to reveal the traumatic experience she went through during the dictatorship -- her rape at the hands of the Marcos military. A disturbing flashback sequence portrays this harrowing experience, intercut with the older Azon’s tearful narration. Like Anna’s torture in *Desaparecidos*, this disturbing segment alludes to the real-life experiences of female activists and revolutionaries sexually violated by government forces during the Martial Law period.⁹⁴ Azon’s traumatising experience has burdened her, causing her to suffer weak health for the rest of her life.

Flashbacks, writes Maureen Turim, “symbolize the conditions that inform a character’s emotional trauma.”⁹⁵ In *Sigwa*, they serve to dramatize how Marcos-era state violence shape the political and personal dispositions of former radicals through graphic scenes of torture. While reviewers like Dy

⁹⁴ Pasion, ‘Women Victims Tell SC of Martial Law Torture’.Guzman, *Women Against Marcos*.

⁹⁵ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History* (1989; repr., London: Routledge, 2014), 40.

criticised the lack of subtlety in *Sigwa*,⁹⁶ Lamangan explains that these scenes of brutality communicate how “there is no subtlety in murder and violence.”⁹⁷ One scene shows the younger Rading (Jay Aquitania), bleeding and repeatedly punched in the face by a soldier, permanently blinding his right eye. Another scene shows, in tight close-ups, the younger Oliver (Marvin Agustin) being forced by soldiers to listen to the disembodied cries of unseen tortured people in the warehouse where he is detained, causing him extreme mental anguish. Under duress, he discloses the location of his comrades, leading to their arrest and torture by the military. This episode earns him the contempt of his former comrades, illustrating how the state deploys violence to crack down on comradely relations. His subsequent severance of ties from the movement evinces how trauma, particularly that arising from violence, compel one “to distance the self not only from one's memory, but also from the experience of others, and from any collective formation.”⁹⁸

Confrontation

The film reaches its emotional climax when the former comrades reunite in the funeral wake of their former professor in the university. The figure of the deceased professor (Tony Mabesa) exemplifies progressive-minded educators who have sought to turn the university into an arena to draw students towards political activism. A flashback scene portrays him inside the classroom, mobilising his institutional role as a teacher to critique the limits of traditional university education and encourage his students to instead embark on social practice beyond the classroom, “out there, with the people,

⁹⁶ Dy, ‘Hints of Passion’.

⁹⁷ Lamangan, Interview by the author.

⁹⁸ Maureen Turim, ‘The Trauma of History: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks’, *Screen* 42, no. 2 (1 July 2001): 210, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/42.2.205>.

with the world.” For his former students, this was a call to embrace revolutionary politics. Their reunion in his funeral thus becomes an occasion to reflect on the radical underpinnings and implications of his teachings.

Despite the dangers of coming down to the city, the NPA guerrilla Cita appears at the wake. Strengthened by years of revolutionary work in the countryside, Cita appears invigorated by her sustained political commitment. “[W]e sowed a seed in the storm of our youth. Now it has become a great tree that bears fruits,” she tells the elated Rading and Dolly.

The pleasant reunion is interrupted by the arrival of Oliver with his bodyguards carrying a funeral wreath. As he moves across the aisle of younger activists who look at him angrily, the camera frames Oliver’s figure cutting against the backdrop of the red “FQS [First Quarter Storm] Movement” flag, symbolically visualising his act of turning back on his generation’s radical history.

A confrontation ensues, as his former comrades rebuke Oliver’s political transformation (see Figure 8). “You will recall, I was one of the very first political detainees, way ahead of all of you,” he retorts. “I made sacrifices before any of you.” This response, as Wendy Brown states in her discussion of Left melancholia, evinces “a certain narcissism with regard to one’s past political attachments and identity that exceeds any contemporary investment in political mobilization, alliance, or transformation.”⁹⁹ For Oliver, the “politics of confrontation” associated with the armed revolution “needed to give way to the politics of understanding,” a political framework that favours non-armed negotiations and procedures in resolving social issues and conflicts within the parameters of formal democracy. He hastens to add that

⁹⁹ Brown, ‘Resisting Left Melancholia’, 459.

progress is everywhere. The politically radical members of the group, Cita and Rading, however quickly contest this celebratory invocation of the state's developmentalism. This progress, they argue, consists of "outward appearances" that conceal the unchanging internal characteristics of societal structures and relations. Oliver dismisses these contentions as mere "Marxist jargon."

Oliver goes to take aim at the movement's errors, bringing up the issue of the anti-infiltration campaigns. "[T]he revolution devoured its own children,"¹⁰⁰ he mutters with contempt. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the violent anti-infiltration campaigns referenced here were waged in the late 1980s by the local chapters of the movement in various territories to weed out suspected military infiltrators. In bringing up this issue, Oliver insinuates that Eddie, Dolly's then boyfriend, was killed by comrades during these "purges." An earlier flashback scene however contradicts this insinuation; here Eddie (Allen Dizon) is shown repentantly admitting to Dolly that he is an infiltrator who has a change of heart and now embraces the revolution, before firing a gun to his head in front of his comrades. The scene also appears to take place in the 1970s, a few years before the actual conduct of the campaigns, and before Dolly's arrest and eventual return to the US. Oliver's mistaken insinuation, which Dolly inexplicably does not refute, allows the film to make tangential reference to this dark chapter in the movement's history, illustrating how these errors haunt any discussion about the relevance of the revolutionary project.

¹⁰⁰The utterance appears to reference other works that have discussed the "purges." Abinales, 'When a Revolution Devours Its Children Before Victory: Operasyon Kampanyang Ahas and the Tragedy of Mindanao Communism'; Garcia, *To Suffer Thy Comrades*.



Figure 8. The revolutionary-turned-government mouthpiece Oliver (Tirso Cruz) being confronted by his former comrades in Joel Lamangan's *Sigwa* (Beginnings at Twenty Plus, Cinemalaya Foundation & Star Express, 2010).

The heated exchanges among the comrades also touch on the real dangers posed by the government to anyone who profess support for radical politics. When Oliver challenges his former comrades to disclose their present view of the revolution, Dolly brings up the danger of implicating herself if she admits her support for the cause. “[A]ny ‘radical position,’” scholar Edel Garcellano wrote, “would be prey to the surveillance apparatus of the state,”¹⁰¹ even in a nominally democratic order premised upon the liberal ideals of civil liberties and political freedom. While Oliver assures them that he does not intend to put them in danger, the confrontation scene already bears the dangerous traces of counterinsurgency. Government agents are briefly shown stationed outside the funeral chapel, suspiciously watching Cita. Later, in a chase scene, these agents reappear, tailing Cita’s vehicle. A firefight ensues, and Cita escapes unscathed. This scene of armed violence against dissidents refutes the non-confrontational “politics of understanding” championed by Oliver, revealing how the formal democracy he celebrates is marked by the

¹⁰¹ Garcellano, *Knife’s Edge*, 52.

continuation of violent counterinsurgency operations reconfigured and adopted from dictatorial rule.

Activist-commentator Teo Marasigan, in his review of the film, shares that some of his fellow activists have reacted favourably to the film's confrontation scene. While admitting his reservations over the lengthy polemics and "hardcore" arguments in this scene, he acknowledges that its appeal lies in how it brings face to face former youth activists who now embrace diverging political convictions.¹⁰² By "hardcore," Marasigan may be describing how the protagonists transform the confrontation into a discursive arena for politico-ideological contentions about the relevance of the revolution and its communist vision. In a way, the exchanges condense political ideologies in a manner comparable to the essayistic expositions in NatDem fictions like *Barikada*.

That the confrontation takes place in the professor's wake bears symbolic significance. The wake, for Oliver, is not only for the deceased professor, but also for the death of his generation's radicalism, an invitation to the "world burial of socialism," in the words of writer Eduardo Galeano.¹⁰³ "Activism is dead," Oliver tells his former comrades. "The armed revolution is passé." He cites the familiar narratives of the retreat of China and the Soviet Union from socialist politics -- events that are at the cornerstone of global Left melancholia. The revolutionary vigour in their youth, he concedes, is understandable, but it no longer holds relevance.

¹⁰² Teo S. Marasigan, 'Sine Sigwa', in *Na kung saan: kapisasong kritika, mahigit isang dekada* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2018), 9.

¹⁰³ Eduardo Galeano, 'A Child Lost in the Storm', in *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*, ed. Robin Blackburn, trans. Asa Katz (London: Verso, 1991), 250.

Oliver's former comrades however regard the wake as a commemorative occasion to honour their dead professor and apply his teachings. Responding to Oliver's invocation of the global demise of socialism, Rading contends that the revolution continues, not because of the external conditions such as those that obtain in other post-socialist countries, but because of the persistence of internal social conditions in the Philippines. Cita offers a final rebuke to Oliver, criticising his political detachment from, and denial of, the social basis for revolution in the Philippines. Echoing their deceased professor's teachings in a memorable line, she utters: "A person without social practice picks up all the wrong ideas anywhere." Humiliated, Oliver sees it fit to leave, amidst the jeers of the activists in the wake. As he makes his exit, he raises his middle finger, symbolically profaning the revolutionary politics embodied by his former comrades, their deceased professor, and the activist crowd.

The rejection of Oliver's post-mortem for Marxist politics comes not just from his contemporaries, but also from the younger generation, some of whom make up the rally that Rading joins in, and the crowd in the professor's wake. The transgenerational legacy of political struggle is also figured in scenes that depict how the members of the FQS generation communicate revolutionary politics to their children. For instance, Rading tells his son Dodong (Rico Barrera), who initially disapproves of his father's activism, to read his tattered copy of Jose Lacaba's reportage of the FQS, *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: The First Quarter Storm & Related Events* (1982), with the hope of making him understand the older generation's radical involvement. While the film admits no extensive opportunity to chart Dodong's political radicalisation, Rading's effort bears fruit. It is revealed later that his son would join the labour union.

Dolly's search for her lost daughter also allows her to see the workings of transgenerational political legacy. Rightly sceptical of Azon's story of her daughter's death, Dolly visits the school where Karina, Azon's supposed daughter, teaches music. As she approaches the classroom, Dolly hears Karina singing the nationalist hymn "Pilipinas kong Mahal" (Philippines, my Beloved). "If you want to be world-class," Karina thereafter tells her students, "first be a class to your country and your people." This view may not be as patently radical as the NatDem movement's revolutionary nationalism, but it asserts the enduring relevance of nationalist politics -- including that espoused by the revolutionary movement -- even in the age of globalisation. Karina's name is also evocative of radical politics; it was the pre-Martial Law code name for the NatDem youth organisation Kabataang Makabayan [Nationalist Youth] (KM), which since the Martial Law period has gone underground to continue operating as a clandestine revolutionary organisation.¹⁰⁴ During their conversation, Karina tells Dolly that she hears the stories about their days in the revolution from Azon. Despite Azon's retreat from political involvement, memories of her generation's radicalism underpin her performance of surrogate motherhood.

The film resolves Dolly's search for her lost daughter in a melodramatic scene in Azon's deathbed. Succumbing to physical deterioration significantly caused by years of trauma, Azon confesses to Karina and Dolly the truth about Karina's real parentage. To explain Azon's change of heart, an earlier scene briefly shows Cita reprimanding Azon for lying about Dolly's daughter, the NPA figure here serving as a voice of clarity that resolves the narrative's dramatic search and rectifies historical and personal wrongs. Azon's

¹⁰⁴ Beto Reyes, 'A Brief History of the CPP Movement in the Philippine Student Sector 1976-1977 Part 3', *Beto Reyes Blog: Memoirs of an Anti-Martial Law Activist in the Philippines* (blog), 22 June 2013, http://beto-reyes.blogspot.com/2013/06/history-of-cpp-movement-in-philippine_22.html.

deathbed confession is instrumental in inaugurating a new family life for the separated mother and daughter. After Azon's death, Dolly introduces Karina and her daughter Lina to Eddie's mother (Raquel Villavicencio). When asked by Eddie's mother about his son's death, Dolly tells the elder woman that he died "trying to remould himself," rewriting his act of suicide as a demonstration of his fidelity to the revolution that he was initially tasked by state agents to betray.

In the penultimate scene, Dolly returns to the US. As Marasigan points out in his review, she makes no explicit commitment to continue the struggle.¹⁰⁵ However, her optimistic reaction upon learning that Rading's son has decided to join the worker's union suggests her continuing support for radical politics and opens the possibility of her future engagement in activism abroad. Leaving the Philippines does not foreclose opportunities for engaging in political struggles in the homeland, as I explore in the next chapter.

The film ends with an epilogue set a year later. Oliver's car is blocked by a checkpoint, manned by NPA guerrillas. They surround and disarm the security personnel of Oliver, prompting him to step out of the car. Cita then emerges behind the checkpoint, cradling a rifle. The two former lovers and comrades look at each other: the surprised Oliver, helpless before Cita's confident stance. The film's final image is a close-up of Cita, gazing with fiery eyes (see Figure 9). In this symbolic dramatization of the confrontation between the state and the revolution, Cita, grey-haired and determined, embodies the persistence not just of her generation but of the revolution itself in withstanding the tumult and crises of the past decades.

¹⁰⁵ Marasigan, 'Sine Sigwa', 10.



Figure 9. The NPA guerrilla Cita (Zsa Zsa Padilla) as the image of persisting revolution in Joel Lamangan's *Sigwa* (Beginnings at Twenty Plus, Cinemalaya Foundation & Star Express, 2010).

Conclusion

In the foregoing analyses of *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa*, I have explored how Martial Law-era revolutionaries reflect on the relevance and legacies of the political struggle, for which they endured hardships and trauma. Through the narrative motif of the search for the lost daughter, these works enunciate the feelings of despair and sacrifices of this generation of revolutionaries, turning these affective dispositions into productive grounds to examine the persistence and limits of political commitment, lay bare the social intimacies and affections that the revolution has enabled and complicated, and contemplate on the relevance of the continuing struggle, especially for the younger generation. Storytelling techniques like multiple flashbacks convey how the past shapes, in complex ways, the present, and even future political subjectivities of the characters. The graphic depictions of political violence --

torture and other forms of military brutality -- in these works also emphasise the corporeal dimension of political sacrifice, bringing to the fore the complex intimacies between memory, politics, and subjectivity.

Such intimacies are also foregrounded through the narratives' focus on the revolutionaries' experience of familial and comradely relations, articulating political and ideological concerns in the narrative framework of the personal. Thus, the problems of Left melancholia are resolved through the melodramatic reunion of the separated mother and daughter, conveniently tying together generational strands, and effacing doubts about the legacy of the revolution. While some critical responses to these works find discomfort in the melodramatic use of the personal as a vantage point for political articulation, these resolutions still reveal, following Carla Marcantonio's observation, melodrama's "bent for denouncing an unjust world or, alternately, for imagining a just one."¹⁰⁶

In these works, the persistence of the radical vision to transform society is aptly set in a narrative present of continuing political violence. *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* set the commemorative and reflective process of former revolutionaries in the Marcosian context of the Arroyo administration, also the political milieu of other NatDem fictions examined in previous chapters like *Lihis* and *Barikada*. This narrative context stages the repetition of historical and political violence that earlier affirmed the necessity and relevance of revolution. By showing that the dictatorial politics that encouraged the political involvement of former revolutionaries in their youth has returned in a different permutation, under the guise of formal democracy,

¹⁰⁶ Marcantonio, *Global Melodrama*, 12.

Desaparecidos and *Sigwa* thus propel the characters to acknowledge the political wisdom of continuing the struggle.

In chronicling the contemporary reincarnation of Marcosian terror, these texts resist the Left melancholic tendency to configure the present as a temporal “ground zero,” in which both the memory of the radical past and its future-oriented memory are de-radicalised as dead objects of commemoration, and mere relics of a forfeited utopia. Instead, *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa* recast the present as a site, not of ruins, but of continuing, living struggle, staging the dialogue between, and reunion of, the generation of searching mothers and the younger generation of lost daughters, who confront the complexities of their parents’ legacy. The narratives communicate to the younger generation -- the lost and now found daughters, as well as the works’ imagined audiences -- the movement’s complex, often tragic history of setbacks, errors, and sacrifices. These fictions transcend the melancholic attachment to such complex, often violent memory, by positing that, following Traverso, “the tragedies and the lost battles of the past...are also a promise of redemption.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, *Desaparecidos* ends with a tone of militancy, with an epilogue about the replication of Marcosian terror that implies the need to continue the struggle; while *Sigwa* closes with the valiant NPA guerrilla, standing as an image of the revolution forged by the years of difficult struggle, and undaunted by the challenges of the present and future. Both narrative conclusions move on from Left melancholia’s spirit of passivity towards the imperative of the unfinished struggle for national democracy.

¹⁰⁷ Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, xv.

CHAPTER 4**Spectres of revolutionary nationalism in *Alma-ata***

The previous chapters have explored revolutionary experiences through NatDem fictions that predominantly centre on memories of the revolution. These narratives highlight how past experiences in the struggle engender lessons, traumas, and sacrifices, which serve as political resources through which the revolutionary movement addresses the changing realities in the socio-political landscape while maintaining fidelity to the cause of national liberation.

In this chapter, I continue this reflection by exploring the revolution as a living legacy of the present that continues and opens to the future. While the lost daughter narratives in Chapter 3 bring up the question of how members of the older generation of revolutionaries communicate the memory and legacy of the struggle to their children, Arnel Mardoquio's film *Alma-ata* (2018) elaborates on the response of the younger generation.

The film follows a migrant woman as she journeys from her adopted home in Melbourne, Australia to the zone of political conflict in her homeland, in the island of Mindanao in southern Philippines, where she develops a deeper understanding and appreciation of the revolutionary legacy of her martyred parents. The journey also tracks the enactment of revolutionary politics by Filipinos who experience displacement because of neoliberal capitalism -- diasporic activists who hail from families forced to seek fortunes overseas as migrant workers, and the indigenous peoples internally displaced in the Philippines, uprooted from their villages by the colluding forces of the state

and corporations. The experiences of these figures of revolutionary and nationalist agency are central to the film's reflections on the politics of parental legacy, and more broadly on the revolution's conception of nationalism and its vision of establishing an alternative modernity.

Alma-ata is produced by the Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA) Melbourne, an organisation of Filipino artists and cultural workers based in Melbourne, and the independent film outfit Cine Sosyalista. It premiered in November 2018 at the UP Diliman. It was also screened at the Filipino Arts & Cinema International (FACINE) festival in the US, and the Pelikultura 2019: the Calabarzon Film Festival at the UP Los Baños. The film makes use of Australian English, Tagalog, and Bisaya, the regional language spoken predominantly in Mindanao, where the film's narrative is largely set. The film's multilingual character indicates the duality of the film as both a diasporic drama and a regional film, indicated by the narrative's contextual positioning in the diasporic space of Melbourne, and the Philippine's regional periphery.

Conceptualised and produced during Mardoquio's temporary migration stint in Melbourne, the film owes significantly to the participation of Filipino migrant organisations, particularly ALPA and its umbrella Filipino migrant organisation, Migrante Melbourne. As a member of Migrante, I was able to take a small part in the film's production during the winter of 2018 in Melbourne. I consider the film as an example of what Hamid Naficy calls "accented cinema."¹ This refers to the cinematic works produced by diasporic and exilic filmmakers that are commonly preoccupied with issues of displacement and identity struggles. *Alma-ata* bears some generic affinity to

¹ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

this cinematic formation. It has some of the features that Naficy enumerates, like multilingualism, “subject matter and themes that involve journeying, historicity, identity, and displacement,” as well “as interstitial and collective modes of production.”² Accented “films,” according to Naficy, “signify and signify upon exile and diaspora by expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers.”³ The issue of the homeland is at the core of *Alma-ata*’s homecoming journey narrative, which also brings it within the framework of regional cinema -- another cinematic formation that has developed in the Philippines with the aim of portraying the experiences of the localities within the nation’s peripheries.

In the subsequent sections, I explore some issues that underpin *Alma-ata*’s place within the filmic frameworks of accented and regional cinemas. First, I discuss the phenomenon of labour migration and the emergence of activist and revolutionary politics in the diaspora. Such issues are important to highlight, given that *Alma-ata* is produced out of diasporic conditions and conveys some of the issues in the home country that diasporic activists are also concerned with. Second, I turn to the film as an example of a regional filmic practice that narrates the homecoming journey of the diasporic protagonist. This journey enables her to be acquainted with the experiences of the indigenous peoples in Mindanao, which I also discuss briefly. These discussions inform my close reading of *Alma-ata*, which revolves around the contradictions of the nation, and the question of the revolution’s agenda of imagining and actualising an alternative form of modernity.

² Naficy, 4.

³ Naficy, 5.

Revolution in the diaspora

Alma-ata follows a Filipino-Australian medical doctor named Julia Cuevas (Sue Prado) as she journeys from Melbourne, Australia to the southern island of Mindanao, Philippines to retrieve the remains of her parents. The deceased couple are both medical doctors based in Melbourne who return to the Philippines to serve in the revolutionary movement in Mindanao, where they died at the hands of a paramilitary group called Alamara. Julia's journey introduces her to the homeland that she and her parents left when she was still a child. While the film is silent about the specific reasons for her family's migration decades ago, Julia's story points to the revolutionary engagement of overseas Filipinos in the context of one of the most significant developments in Philippine society in the past few decades -- the massive labour migration of Filipinos.

It is important to understand labour migration as a means by which the Philippine state manages socio-economic crises. While already taking place even during the colonial period, labour migration or labour export has been institutionalised by the Philippine government for the past five decades, initially as a short-term response to the problem of unemployment under the Marcos administration in the 1970s, and eventually into a "cornerstone policy" under post-EDSA presidencies.⁴ According to sociologist Robyn Rodriguez, the government actively promotes overseas work by assuming the role of "labor broker" that facilitates the export of Filipino labourers from various industries -- service and hospitality, manufacturing, care work, etc. -- in order to profit from their remittances.⁵ The state's labour brokerage assumes a variety of strategies, usually with the help of civil society

⁴ Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation*, 230–31.

⁵ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xviii.

formations -- from the retooling of the educational curriculum according to the employment needs of the global market, the establishment of agencies dedicated to overseas labour policies to the ideological reframing of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as *bagong bayani* [modern-day heroes] in state and civil society discourses. Largely because of these mechanisms, the number of Filipino labour migrants has dramatically increased in recent decades, keeping afloat the crises-ridden domestic economy with their remittances. In 2019, the remittances sent home by these OFWs reached over US \$33 billion.⁶ While touted as heroes back home, OFWs commonly suffer abuse, harassment and even death overseas, receiving inadequate support and protection from the state that benefits from their deployment in the global labour market.⁷

Labour migration is intertwined with the country's integration to the neoliberal order, which has resulted in "multiple social dislocations" that compel many Filipinos to seek work overseas.⁸ As Filipino migrant scholars have already pointed out, the implementation of neoliberal policies in the country, specifically through "structural adjustment policies" imposed by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, has brought about widespread unemployment, the narrowing of access to increasingly privatised and commercialised social services, and the decline in the quality of life in the country.⁹ What Caroline Hau describes as the "precariousness of everyday life for the working classes and the poor" thus lures a broad segment of the Philippine population to the

⁶ Ralf Rivas, 'OFW Remittances Hit Record High of \$33.5 Billion in 2019', *Rappler*, 17 February 2020, <https://rappler.com/business/overseas-filipino-workers-remittances-2019>.

⁷ Carlos M. Piosos, *Affect, Narratives and Politics of Southeast Asian Migration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 107.

⁸ Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, xviii.

⁹ Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation*, 229; Epifanio San Juan, Jr., *U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), xxv.

state-marketed alternative of labour migration. At the same time, this socio-economic situation also brews social discontent and draws many to political activism and even to the revolutionary struggle. As Hau writes, “the revolutionary movement and international labor migration of Filipinos represent two classic responses to social crisis: stay and struggle against the system or leave and seek opportunities elsewhere.”¹⁰

Prior to *Alma-ata*, filmic and literary fictions produced in the post-EDSA years have imagined migration in relation to the revolution. The idea of migration as a recourse away from the revolutionary struggle in the homeland is registered in some NatDem fictions that I have discussed in previous chapters. For instance, Cecilia in *Lihis* (see Chapter 1), Dolly in *Sigwa* and Sonia in *Desaparesidos* (see Chapter 3) all left the country after becoming involved in the revolution. Migration becomes a symbolic process of severing ties with one’s revolutionary past, as in the case of Jose Dalisay Jr.’s award-winning autobiographical novel *Killing Time in a Warm Place* (1992), which follows the experiences of a Martial Law-era revolutionary who migrates to the US, where he soon embraces a more conservative ideological path.¹¹ In contrast to what Neferti Tadiar describes as Dalisay’s “postnationalist novel’s portrayal of the failure and powerlessness of the Philippine revolution as an anticipated defeat,”¹² other literary works have centred on how former revolutionaries participate in efforts by diasporic communities to imagine the nation overseas. The former NPA guerrilla in Luna Sicat-Cleto’s Filipino-language novel *Mga Prodigal* [The Prodigal Ones] (2010) goes through the painful process of forging solidarity with fellow contractual labourers in the

¹⁰ Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation*, 3.

¹¹ Dalisay Jr., *Killing Time in a Warm Place*.

¹² Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 334; Neferti X. M. Tadiar, ‘The Fantasy-Secret of Killing Time in a Warm Place’, in *The Likhaan Book of Philippine Criticism, 1992-1997* (Quezon City: U.P. Creative Writing Center and the University of the Philippines Press, 2000), 465–74.

Middle East, while being haunted by the trauma of his experiences in the guerrilla zone back home.¹³ In the novel *America is Not the Heart* (2018), written by Filipino-American novelist Elaine Castillo, a lesbian woman who used to become an NPA guerrilla rebuilds her life in the US, where she finds a home and romance.¹⁴ These texts represent migrant spaces as sites where one experiences a collective sense of belongingness similar to that encountered in nationalist projects like the revolution.

While the abovementioned works imagine the revolution as an object of memory that haunts diasporic subjects, *Alma-ata* imagines the continuation of political commitment outside the country. The continuation of revolutionary participation in migrant spaces has been earlier represented in Siri and Kiri Dalena's docu-fiction *The Guerrilla is a Poet* (2013), which recounts the tumultuous life of the CPP founding chair Jose Maria Sison from his pioneering forays in the revolutionary terrain in the Philippines to his current life as a political exile in Europe. While Sison is not an OFW, his story of ongoing political commitment overseas resonates with the fictionalised story of Julia's parents in *Alma-ata*, who remain involved in the struggles in the home country after migration. This political involvement embodies a form of what Benedict Anderson called "long-distance nationalism,"¹⁵ which refers to the nationalist attachment that citizens based overseas maintain. This nationalism is premised upon the persistent, even intensified, identification of migrants with the faraway homeland, which sometimes translates into involvement in organised social movements. As Nina Glick Schiller explains, "[l]ong-distance nationalists are engaged in

¹³ Luna Sicat-Cleto, *Mga Prodigal* (Manila: Anvil, 2010).

¹⁴ Elaine Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* (London: Atlantic Books, 2018).

¹⁵ Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, 'Long-Distance Nationalism', in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 58–74.

some form of political project oriented specifically toward the territory they designate as the homeland.”¹⁶ In *Alma-ata*, diasporic subjects are involved in the revolutionary struggle in the homeland.

The emergence and growth of diasporic activism have been historically linked to the struggles in the homeland, specifically those waged by communists in the Philippines. As early as the 1930s and 1940s, international linkages between local communists, then represented by the older Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP), and diasporic Filipinos were documented, perhaps never more compellingly than in labour migrant activist Carlos Bulosan’s autobiographical narrative of labour diaspora in Cold War-era America, *America is in the Heart* (1946).¹⁷ Later, during the Marcos dictatorship, solidarity groups in the diaspora like Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino [Union of Democratic Filipinos] (KDP) (1973–1987) in the US and the Philippine Action Support Group (PASG) in Australia were formed by Filipino migrants, some of whom were activists already in the Philippines, and foreign nationals. These groups espoused a two-pronged social movement framework that supported home front causes like the anti-dictatorship struggle and the CPP-led NatDem revolution in the Philippines, while mobilising social justice campaigns in support of Filipinos experiencing various forms of exploitation, discrimination and abuse in their host countries.¹⁸ During and after the Marcos years, the CPP also made efforts to

¹⁶ Nina Glick Schiller, ‘Long-Distance Nationalism’, in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*, ed. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2005), 571, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_59.

¹⁷ Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946). Carlos Bulosan was a Filipino writer who migrated to the United States in 1930, becoming an activist in the labour movement and embracing socialist politics until his death in 1956.

¹⁸ Rene Ciria Cruz, Cindy Domingo, and Bruce Occena, *A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Guzman, *Women Against Marcos*; Shirlita Africa Espinosa, *Sexualised Citizenship: A Cultural History of Philippines-Australian Migration* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 199–203; Robyn

build overseas solidarity networks to gain support for the armed struggle in the Philippines, as chronicled in the accounts of former CPP cadres.¹⁹

Alma-ata is set in contemporary Australia, rendering visible the political practices of Filipino migrant organisations in this country. Filipino migrant organisations have a vibrant history of activist engagements and solidarity with Australian Leftist groups. In her cultural history of Filipino migrants in Australia, Filipino scholar Shirlita Espinosa explains that during their early efforts in solidarity work, Filipino migrant activists confronted the difficulty of dealing with Australia's "historically assertive (white) working class tradition of labour unionism" centred on "a class-based fight for equality that seriously sidelined indigenous struggle, among other legitimate concerns," including racial issues, which resulted in disagreements between segments of Filipino migrant activists and Australian leftists in the late 1980s to the early 1990s.²⁰

In the following years, Filipino migrant activism has been shaped by recent developments both in Australia and the Philippines. Australia adopted an "integrationist approach to 'ethnic' politics," and has become a terrain for vibrant decolonial social movements that strive to decentre the dominant white Australian politics, and foreground national, ethnic as well as gender and sexual identities. In the Philippines, the post-Marcos transition to neoliberal democracy and the splintering within the NatDem movement after the Second Great Rectification Movement also affected the dynamics of

Magalit Rodriguez, ed., *Filipino American Transnational Activism: Diasporic Politics among the Second Generation* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019).

¹⁹ See, for instance, Quimpo and Quimpo, *Subversive Lives*; Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, 'CPP-NDF Members in Western Europe: Travails in International Relations Work', in *Brokering a Revolution: Cadres in a Philippine Insurgency*, ed. Rosanne Rutten (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2008).

²⁰ Espinosa, *Sexualised Citizenship*, 196, 204–14.

Filipino migrant activism.²¹ Activists who maintain their ideological adherence to the RAs, Espinosa observes, “have discovered how it is to be ethnically segregated, socialise within this ethnic boundary and pursue political activism.”²² As I have witnessed in my engagements with them, Filipino activists in Melbourne also express solidarity for the struggles of the First Nations peoples in Australia, viewing these struggles in relation to the concerns of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. This provides an important context for *Alma-ata*'s portrayal of a Filipino-Australian's political awakening through her encounter with the Lumad peoples in her home country.

According to Mardoquio, the original screenplay for *Alma-ata* was about two doctors based in the US. Upon his migration to Melbourne, he decided to relocate the narrative to this migrant terrain where he has already acquired a certain degree of familiarity. His migrant experiences also influenced the shape of his narrative. He joined the Melbourne chapter of Migrante, a community organisation of Filipino migrants with chapters all over the world which belongs to the RA faction of the NatDem movement, and co-founded its cultural group ALPA, which helped produce the film.²³ ALPA and Migrante members were involved in the film's production, playing some of the film's supporting characters, and lending logistical support, even donating financial and other material sources. As I have mentioned earlier, by virtue of my involvement with Migrante, I was among those recruited to appear briefly in uncredited acting parts. This brief opportunity allowed me to witness, and even gain firsthand experience of, migrant participation in this creative practice.

²¹ Espinosa, 193.

²² Espinosa, 220.

²³ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

The production of *Alma-ata* in 2018 coincided with the broad campaign of Migrante and other NatDem-allied or sympathetic groups both in the Philippines and abroad to call for the resumption of the then-stalled peace negotiations between the Duterte administration and the NDFP. The peace negotiations formed an important basis for the NatDem movement's critical association with Duterte, as they provided an opportunity to advance progressive socio-economic reforms.²⁴ Since the revival of the peace negotiations under Duterte,²⁵ legal formations within the movement have launched various public discussions about the root causes of the NatDem revolution in the country, and clarify certain misperceptions about the struggle. In some informal screenings that I have attended, the film became a creative pedagogical resource that fits into the agenda of this campaign. For instance, a test screening of the film with Migrante members in Melbourne became an occasion to discuss the roots of the ongoing armed revolution in the Philippines. Another informal screening in Melbourne with Australian allies took the film as a starting point to discuss some details of the peace negotiations. Mardoquio also shares that *Alma-ata* has also been shown in informal screenings among migrant communities outside of Australia; plans to screen it in other overseas migrant communities were however stalled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁶

These deployments of the film resonate with accented cinema's function of articulating the social realities in the homeland for diasporic communities. In the next section, I explore how the film explores a very important issue in

²⁴ Jayson S. Lamchek and Emerson M. Sanchez, 'Friends and Foes: Human Rights, the Philippine Left and Duterte, 2016–2017', *Asian Studies Review* 45, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 28–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2020.1828273>.

²⁵ The peace negotiations, which were on and off several times during the Duterte administration, were however cancelled in 2019. Many political prisoners have been arrested and some NDFP negotiators were killed, allegedly by state agents.

²⁶ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

the peripheries of the Philippines -- the plight and struggles of the indigenous peoples in Mindanao.

Diasporic subjectivity and the regions

Alma-ata is centrally concerned with the reconnection of diasporic subjects with their homeland and their identification with the struggles of their fellow Filipinos in it. Early in the film, flashbacks show Julia as a young girl with her parents in Australia, suggesting that her childhood memories are those in the host country. These scenes imply that she is a 1.5 generation migrant, who is born in the Philippines where she also spent a few years of school, migrating to Australia “before developing a sense of Filipino adulthood” but “young enough to have experienced growing up in Australia.”²⁷ The film does not present any memory of Julia’s childhood in the Philippines, and it is possibly only through her parents and fellow Filipino migrants that she sustains meaningful relationship to the homeland. Her language facility is also proof of the limited extent to which diasporic social practices expose her to Filipino culture; she can understand, but not speak, the regional language Bisaya, the language of her parents.

Julia’s decision to journey to the Philippines is propelled primarily by the purpose of retrieving her parents’ remains. The journey also turns into an occasion to deepen her knowledge of, and ties with, her homeland, and the NatDem revolutionary project that aims to transform it. This fictional journey calls to mind the exposure programs conducted by the NatDem movement to further transnational linkages between the revolutionary

²⁷ Raul Pertierra, ‘Children on the Move: 1.5-Generation Filipinos in Australia Across the Generations’, in *Mobile Childhoods in Filipino Transnational Families: Migrant Children with Similar Roots in Different Routes*, ed. Itaru Nagasaka and Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 181, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137515148_8.

movement and Filipinos in the diaspora.²⁸ In these programs, revolutionary organisations in the Philippines coordinate with sympathetic or allied migrant groups, who facilitate the travel of their members to the Philippines, where they immerse in community strongholds of the revolutionary movement, or in some cases, NPA bases.

Through these exposure programs, migrants become acquainted with the realities of the armed struggle, and spend time with revolutionaries in the countryside. For a migrant subject hailing from the First World, the trip is an opportunity to see the contradictions of the global order invisible to her, exposing her to pockets of the world -- particularly those in her land of birth -- that are systematically impoverished and exploited to enrich other countries, and serving as fertile grounds for political resistance to capitalism. As one account from a migrant participant in these immersions explains, for people outside the country, “many of us feel that our struggle is not enough or we cannot help because we are far from the revolution;” immersing with the NPA thus becomes important “to understand the revolutionary struggle.”²⁹

Alma-ata symbolically structures Julia’s retrieval of her parents’ remains as her “exposure” trip to the heartlands of the revolution in her home country. It is also a form of political homecoming, resonating with Naficy’s assertion about the presence of “home-seeking” and “homecoming” journeys as a common trope in accented cinema. These journeys,” he writes, are not just

²⁸ Augusto F. Espiritu, ‘Journeys of Discovery and Difference: Transnational Politics and the Union of Democratic Filipinos’, in *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans*, ed. Christian Collet and Pei-Te Lien (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 48–51.

²⁹ Kasamang Jane (pseudonym), ‘Kwentong Integrasyon Ng Isang Expat: Sa Gitna Ng Putik at Mga Unos’, *Philippine Revolution Web Central*, 17 September 2020, <https://cpp.ph/2020/09/17/kwentong-integrasyon-ng-isang-expat-sa-gitna-ng-putik-at-mga-unos/>.

physical and territorial but are also deeply psychological and philosophical,” shaping the identity and political agency of the protagonist.³⁰ Julia’s journey to the Philippines dramatizes her political awakening, particularly as it brings her into the regions -- the nation’s periphery -- where socio-economic and political violence affect the lives of regional subjects, particularly the indigenous peoples in Mindanao, compelling them to participate in a broader armed struggle.

According to regional cinema scholar Katrina Ross Tan, journeying is also a prominent narrative feature in what is known as the regional cinema movement in the Philippines, which emerged with the rise of the Philippine independent cinema in the 2000s.³¹ Carving an alternative creative practice outside the constraints of commercial filmmaking based in the country’s centre in Manila, filmmakers hailing from the regions create works that “articulate place-based concerns and discourses,” and provide a counterpoint to the Manila-centric, Tagalog-speaking lowland filmic imagination which has since shaped the dominant conception of national cinema.³² Mardoquio, who hails from Mindanao, is an active participant in the regional filmmaking movement in southern Philippines. Prior to his temporary migration to Melbourne in 2017, he penned and directed critically acclaimed films like *Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin sa Gabing Madilim* [The Journey of Stars Into the Dark Night] (2012) and *Tigmo sa aking Pagpauli* [Riddles of my Homecoming] (2014), which both centre on the ongoing Moro struggle in Mindanao. Tan takes Mardoquio’s filmic practice, particularly in *Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin sa*

³⁰ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 6.

³¹ Katrina Ross Tan, “Visual Journaling’ in Narratives of Departure in Philippine Regional Cinema’ (Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society Conference 2019, Silliman University, 2 August 2019).

³² Katrina Ross Tan and Laurence Marvin S. Castillo, ‘Urban Anxieties in Davao Horror Short Films’, *Humanities Diliman: A Philippine Journal of Humanities* 16, no. 1 (28 May 2019): 4–9, <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/humanitiesdiliman/article/view/6719>.

Gabing Madilim, as an example of the use of “visual journaling,” an aesthetic strategy that conveys the sensory experience of displacement and returns in journey narratives in regional films³³. As I discuss later, visual journaling also applies to *Alma-ata*’s narrative of diasporic return to the homeland.

“Accented films,” Naficy writes, “are interstitial because they are created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices” and “are simultaneously local and global.”³⁴ True to this description, *Alma-ata* belongs not just to the global genre of diasporic cinema, but also regional cinema, from its production mode, narrative context, and even aesthetic features. Its narrative is predominantly set in the heartlands of Mindanao, with characters speaking Bisaya, the language spoken in many parts of the island. Security concerns however prevented Mardoquio from shooting in Mindanao, which Duterte placed under the Martial Law at the time of the production. The Philippine scenes were instead filmed in Laguna, a province located in the Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon (CALABARZON) region, located south of Manila. The film was later screened in the same province, at the campus of the UP Los Baños, as part of the Pelikultura 2019, the CALABARZON regional film festival.

Notwithstanding the proxy location, *Alma-ata* is part of Mardoquio’s creative venture of filming Mindanao experiences, particularly the political struggles in the island. The film focuses on the struggles of the Lumad (Bisaya for “native” or “indigenous”) -- the general term that identifies non-Muslim, non-Christian indigenous peoples in Mindanao.³⁵ The Lumad peoples form one

³³ Tan, “Visual Journaling’ in Narratives of Departure in Philippine Regional Cinema’.

³⁴ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

³⁵ The Lumad is an umbrella term for various indigenous groups in Mindanao. Rudy Rodil, ‘The Lumads Are Our People, Too!’ (Bishops-Ulama Forum, Davao City, 22 February 1999).

third of what scholars and policy-makers call the “tri-people” occupying Mindanao, the other two being the Muslim Moros and the settlers, mostly Christian migrants hailing from other regions.³⁶ As chronicled in films made by Mindanaoan filmmakers like Mardoquio, Mindanao has been the site of "intense contestations regarding access to land in view of increasing commercial interests, as well as continuing struggles for self-determination by Moro and Lumad peoples."³⁷ Since the Spanish colonial period, the encroachment on their ancestral lands of these groups has resulted in their political and economic marginalisation, giving rise to political struggles for liberation. Muslim groups like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro International Liberation Front (MILF) have been mounting armed challenges to the Philippine state to assert political autonomy. Some "[f]actions of the Lumad have sided with the communist New People’s Army in the uplands as a way to advance their struggles;" others "have been forced to take the side of the state’s military apparatus and some have even been supportive of the encroachment of corporate business interests in the uplands, especially mining firms."³⁸ In later years, many Lumad peoples resistant to the militarised corporate takeover of their lands have become organised through the Revolutionary Organization of Lumad (ROL), an underground organisation allied with the NDFP.³⁹

³⁶ Rudy Rodil, ‘The Tri-People Relationship and the Peace Process in Mindanao’, *Kalinaw Mindanao*, 5 August 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040805041220/http://mindanao.com/kalinaw/dev/tri-people.htm>.

³⁷ Karl Gaspar, ‘No End to Lumad Dislocation from Their Homeland: The Case of the Sarangani Manobo and B’laans in Davao Occidental’, *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 30/31, no. 2/1 (2016 2015): 74.

³⁸ Gaspar, 74.

³⁹ Iliya Makalipay, ‘The National Minorities and the National Democratic Revolution’, *Liberation*, 1 September 2017, <https://liberation.ndfp.org/main-stream/the-national-minorities-and-the-national-democratic-revolution/>.

In 1997, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) was passed by the Philippine government, legally providing for the protection of indigenous rights to self-determination and ancestral domain in the country. This legislative achievement however has not prevented the state-aided corporate encroachment upon ancestral lands, particularly by extractive industries like mining. Mindanao-based sociologist Arnold Alamon noted how the Philippine government has continued to wage a "war of extinction" against the Lumad in order "to displace and uproot indigenous communities from their ancestral land in the name of extractive industries such as mining and large-scale agricultural plantations."⁴⁰ Facilitating such corporatist intrusions in Mindanao, the Philippine government has intensified its counterinsurgency operations in the island to subdue indigenous resistance, curb the Moro insurgency as well as the revolutionary activities of the CPP-NPA in the island.

In addition to heightened militarisation in Mindanao, the state has mobilised paramilitary or vigilante groups like the Magahat Bagani Force and the Alamara⁴¹ against indigenous communities resistant to state-facilitated corporate intrusions. A legacy of the low-intensity conflict strategy developed in the early post-Marcos years, these vigilante groups, whose members are also recruited from the Lumad themselves, are responsible for various incidents of armed violence in the indigenous communities.⁴² In recent years, indigenous groups have mounted protests against the extrajudicial killings of

⁴⁰ Arnold P. Alamon, *Wars of Extinction: Discrimination & the Lumad Struggle in Mindanao* (Iligan City: Rural Missionaries of the Philippines Northern Mindanao Sub-Region (RMP-NMR), Inc., 2017), 112.

⁴¹ 'Philippines: Paramilitaries Attack Tribal Villages, Schools', *Human Rights Watch*, 23 September 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/23/philippines-paramilitaries-attack-tribal-villages-schools>.

⁴² Kodao Productions, 'The Paramilitary versus the Lumad: A History of State-Sponsored Oppression', Kodao Productions, 11 May 2018, <https://kodao.org/the-paramilitary-versus-the-lumad-a-history-of-state-sponsored-oppression/>.

Lumad peoples, environmentalists, and human rights defenders, and the state-protected presence of multinational mining companies in their lands.⁴³ The killings, abuses and displacement have intensified under the presidency of Duterte. The multisectoral advocacy network Save Our Schools Network documented over 500 attacks in Lumad communities -- “ranging from school-related extrajudicial killings to sexual harassment cases, among others” -- from May 2017 to March 2019.⁴⁴

The experiences of political violence among the Lumad communities are chronicled in Arbi Barbarona’s fiction film *Tu Pug Imatuy* (2017), based on a script written by Mardoquio. This film centres on the experiences of a Lumad family who experience harassment and torture at the hands of soldiers. This film devotes a good part of its running time to the experiences of victimisation that the Lumad peoples suffer at the hands of the Philippine military, and presents an image of the NPA as an emancipatory figure. Because of this content, Barbarona and the film became the target of an anonymously-produced smear campaign online.⁴⁵

In *Alma-ata*, Mardoquio enlarges the political role of the NPA in relation to the struggles of the Lumad, portraying the revolution as an articulating framework for indigenous resistance. Explicitly critical of the state-aided

⁴³ Hannibal Rhoades, ‘Thousands March Against Killings of Indigenous Peoples in Philippine “Mining Capital”’, *Intercontinental Cry*, 19 December 2015, <https://intercontinentalcry.org/thousands-march-killings-indigenous-peoples-philippine-mining-capital/>.

⁴⁴ Rina Chandran, ‘Driven from Home, Philippine Indigenous People Long for Their Land’, *Reuters*, 19 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-landrights-crime-idUSKBN1HQ034>; Nina Diño and Maxine Sta. Cruz, ‘Dwindling Numbers: Lumad Schools Continue to Suffer Closures, Attacks during Pandemic’, *Rappler*, 18 September 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/lumad-schools-continue-to-suffer-closures-attacks-coronavirus-pandemic>.

⁴⁵ ‘Indie Filmmaker Rues Red-Tagging of Independent Films’, *Davao Today*, 28 September 2018, sec. Arts & Culture, <http://davaotoday.com/main/arts-culture/indie-filmmaker-rues-red-tagging-of-independent-films/>.

corporatist violence in the Lumad lands, *Alma-ata* portrays the paramilitary group Alamara as the villain that the NPA fights. The film is part of Mardoquio's planned trilogy about the NPA in Mindanao -- a project that according to Mardoquio is inspired by his previous experiences as a Martial Law-era NatDem activist.⁴⁶ He expounds that, by situating the struggle in his hometown in Mindanao, he aims to represent the place of the island in the NatDem revolution, which he believes "may occupy an important centre of political power after victory."⁴⁷ This possibility, he elaborates, owes something to Mindanao's capacity to hold a solid revolutionary base composed of people from various ethno-linguistic backgrounds.⁴⁸

As I explore in *Alma-ata*, Mindanao is constructed as a space in which the revolution develops as a dynamic socio-political practice that opens towards, and integrates, different subjects within the rubric of nationalist struggle. The focus on this regional space's important role in the struggle also calls to mind the revolution's political line of encircling the cities from the countryside, which upholds a peripheralized and decentralising view of the national struggle, and prioritises revolutionary base building in the peripheries and rejects the insurrectionist privileging of Manila (see Chapter 2). This resonates with the imaginative practice performed by regional cinema, which works to decentralise the national imagination by imaging the nation as, and from, the peripheries. As film scholar Patrick Campos explains, "regional cinema could reactivate the radical potential of the

⁴⁶ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

⁴⁷ Mardoquio.

⁴⁸ Mardoquio.

margins...[which] allows us to interrogate the constitution not only of national cinema but also of the nation itself.”⁴⁹

In the following analysis of *Alma-ata*, I read the imaging of the region -- particularly the indigenous sphere -- in relation to the contradictions of the nation as a contested terrain shaped by the dynamics of capitalist modernity. By modernity, I refer to a mode of experience, which Perry Anderson describes as “the gigantic objective transformations of society unleashed by the advent of the capitalist world market,” and the attendant “momentous subjective transformations of individual life and personality which occur under their impact.”⁵⁰ Conceived dialectically, these transformations generate not only destructive and exploitative, but also emancipatory possibilities, which shape national experiences.

A crucial agent in organising these experiences is the modern apparatus of the state, which operates as the nation’s institutionalised and institutionalising expression, and is responsible for integrating it to the hierarchical global interstate system.⁵¹ I have explained earlier that the state, in the name of capitalist modernity, functions as a “labour broker” for the global market, and an enabler of developmentalist incursions in indigenous lands, creating conditions of social violence and displacement. As a machinery of capitalist and neo-colonial oppression, the state provokes and counters the rise of alternative, revolutionary imaginings of the nation and modernity both by the migrant population displaced by neoliberal

⁴⁹ Patrick F. Campos, ‘Small Film, Global Connections’, in *Art Archive 02* (Manila: The Japan Foundation, 2019), 34.

⁵⁰ Perry Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’, *New Left Review* 1, no. 144 (1984): 98.

⁵¹ Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

developmentalism outside of the nation, and by those suffering in the nation's peripheral spheres, like indigenous communities.

This then brings to the fore the issue of modernity in relation to capitalism and the projects -- such as national liberation struggles towards socialism -- which intend to challenge the latter. "Marxism," as Crystal Bartolovich explains, "viewed modernity and capitalism as inextricably bound up with each other in the world as we, collectively -- though heterogeneously -- live it, and sought to understand its variously shaping force throughout the globe."⁵² These uneven experiences, particularly those of exploitation and oppression, shape efforts such as the socialist agenda inscribed in revolutionary forms of nationalism to imagine and actualise a modernity beyond capitalism. Thus, as Neil Davidson states, "modernity may owe its existence to capitalism, but is not necessarily confined to it," with Marx seeing "modernity, not only as characterising the capitalist present, but also pointing towards the socialist future."⁵³ Third world liberation struggles, like the NatDem revolution in the Philippines, represent such claims to modernity, as they partake of "the Enlightenment narrative of sovereignty"⁵⁴ in advancing a different kind of nation that could break free from imperialism and capitalist violence.

While the detailed debates about nationalism, Marxism, and modernity lie outside the scope of my study, these issues are relevant to mention because

⁵² Crystal Bartolovich, 'Introduction: Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies', in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–17.

⁵³ Neil Davidson, 'Uneven and Combined Development: Between Capitalist Modernity and Modernism', in *Cultures of Uneven and Combined Development: From International Relations to World Literature*, ed. James Christie and Nesrin Degirmencioglu (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 170, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004384736_007.

⁵⁴ Epifanio San Juan, Jr., 'Imperial Terror, Neo-Colonialism and the Filipino Diaspora' (Lecture, English Department Lecture Series, St. John's University, Fall 2003), <http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~ganterg/sjureview/vol2-1/diaspora.html>.

of how *Alma-ata* evokes them in its representation of the NatDem revolution. I touch on these issues in the following sections, as I trace Julia's political transformation as a revolutionary nationalist from the diaspora. Central to this transformation is her journey from her host country to the heartlands of the revolution in her homeland.

Alma-ata

Alma-ata appeared in the list of best films in 2018 by critic Skilty Labastilla, who described the film as director Mardoquio's "angriest," predicting it to "be a polarizing film..." as "socialists will embrace its blunt critique of the repressive state apparatus while liberals and the right will dismiss it as propaganda."⁵⁵ Ysh Cabana applauds the film as a "bravura ode to suppressed historical upheavals that mirror domestic struggle for social equity in his native island of Mindanao."⁵⁶ Mario Feria Tumbocon, Jr. also praised the film's vision of humanist agency that is "internationalist in perspective."⁵⁷

The film's title is a direct reference to the International Conference on Primary Health Care held in what was then Alma-Ata, Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in the Soviet Union (now Almaty, Kazakhstan) in 1978. The historic conference culminated in what is known as the Alma-Ata declaration, which elevated health into "a fundamental human right," which "all governments, all health and development workers, and the world

⁵⁵ Skilty Labastilla, 'The Best Filipino Films of 2018', *Pinoy Rebyu* (blog), 5 January 2019, <https://pinoyrebyu.wordpress.com/2019/01/05/the-best-filipino-films-of-2018/>.

⁵⁶ Ysh Cabana, 'Ode to Suppressed Historical Upheavals', *The Philippine Reporter*, 11 January 2019, <https://philippinereporter.com/index.php/2019/01/11/ode-to-suppressed-historical-upheavals/>.

⁵⁷ F A C I N E Filipino International Cine Festival, 'Quick Notes on Arnel Mutia Mardoquio's ALMA-ATA', Facebook, 11 December 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/facineUS/posts/1925281377593250>.

community” must promote and secure.⁵⁸ While this consensus was formulated in the context of the Cold War struggle between the Soviet Union and the US, some historical accounts interpreted the Alma-ata declaration as a story of “Soviet triumph,” because the conference opened an opportunity to showcase some socialist advancements in public health care.⁵⁹ An important aspect of the conference is the consolidation of the global agenda of securing “acceptable level of health for all the people of the world by the year 2000 through a fuller and better use of the world’s resources.”⁶⁰ In the twenty-first century, the accelerated development of neoliberal capitalism has effectively failed this agenda, “resulting in large-scale public downsizing and privatization of health and social services across wide swathes of the world, along with a reorientation of the state favoring financial interests and transnational corporations.”⁶¹

Alma-ata is situated in a social milieu almost two decades after this failed target, in a country where the healthcare system has suffered because of neoliberal policies. The Philippine’s adherence to structural adjustment policies has resulted in the decrease in public budget for health (from 4.85 to 4.52% in 2020), the privatisation of healthcare institutions and facilities, and widespread job insecurity that drives over 17,000 healthcare professionals to leave the country yearly to seek overseas work.⁶² For Mardoquio, the dismal

⁵⁸ ‘Declaration of Alma-Ata International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6–12 September 1978’, *Development* 47, no. 2 (1 June 2004): 159, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.development.1100047>.

⁵⁹ Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Nikolai Kremontsov, “Socialising” Primary Care? The Soviet Union, WHO and the 1978 Alma-Ata Conference’, *BMJ Global Health* 3, no. Suppl 3 (October 2018): 2, 13, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2018-000992>; Anne-Emanuelle Birn, ‘Back to Alma-Ata, From 1978 to 2018 and Beyond’, *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 9 (September 2018): 1153, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304625>.

⁶⁰ ‘Declaration of Alma-Ata International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6–12 September 1978’, 161.

⁶¹ Birn, ‘Back to Alma-Ata, From 1978 to 2018 and Beyond’, 1154.

⁶² Jose Lorenzo Lim, ‘COVID-19 and the Philippine Healthcare System’, IBON Foundation, 20 March 2020, <https://www.ibon.org/covid-19-and-the-philippine-healthcare-system/>;

healthcare conditions in the country prove that “the Philippines does not acknowledge the resolution in the conference.”⁶³

Alma-ata explicitly conveys how the NatDem movement addresses the widespread healthcare problem in the country, particularly in peripheral areas unreached by government services. The presence of Julia’s parents as medical doctors for the revolution indexes not just the experiences of healthcare professionals driven to overseas work by the country’s dire healthcare situation, but the efforts of communist revolutionaries to expand access to health services in marginalised communities. Within the movement, there is an underground organisation of healthcare practitioners called Makabayang Samahang Pangkalusugan [Patriotic Health Organisation] (MASAPA) committed to this task. Members of this organisation deliver healthcare assistance to the revolutionary movement and the communities on which it operates, training the NPA to administer health services, organising traditional healers like “hilot and komadrona” and learning about indigenous healing practices.⁶⁴ While MASAPA is not mentioned in the film, it could be understood that Joaquin, Juliet and their other comrades in the medical field are associated with this revolutionary organisation, as their activities fall within the purview of MASAPA's mandate in the movement . As I elaborate in the following sections, the often difficult task of broadening access to healthcare services undertaken by NatDem revolutionaries is one of the many dimensions of the struggle that Julia will discover, as she follows the tracks of her martyred parents.

Ramon Pedro P Paterno, ‘The Future of Universal Health Coverage: A Philippine Perspective’, *Global Health Governance* 6, no. 2 (2013): 9.

⁶³ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

⁶⁴ ‘Health Services Benefit Peasants, Indigenous Peoples in Guerrilla Fronts’, *Liberation*, 9 January 2018, <https://liberation.ndfp.org/main-stream/health-services-benefit-peasants-indigenous-peoples-in-guerilla-fronts/>.

Haunting

The film begins with images of haunting. As Julia sleeps in a couch in her parents' house in Melbourne, her dreams are haunted by her parents and younger self, intercut with scenes of the deceased doctors' trek to the Philippine countryside. Lamps illuminate the low-lit scenes of her parents' apparitions; like the presence of oil lamps in *Barber's Tales*, the film makes use of the visual motif of light as a symbol of political awakening. A brief shot shows the ghostly couple standing by the street lamp in front of the house where Julia is staying, as if guarding their daughter. Another shot frames Julia, waking up from her haunted dreams, beside a salt lamp that also appears in the film's title card.

The spectral appearances of her parents Joaquin and Juliet open Julia's life to the disruptions of the historical realities in the Philippines. As Avery Gordon writes, haunting is one way to make known, and encounter, those invisible, forgotten and suppressed experiences of social violence, laying bare those "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us."⁶⁵ But rather than forfeiting agency in the face of excavated violence, haunting engenders "a something-to-be-done."⁶⁶ For Julia, these ghostly encounters exhort her to recover her parents' legacies and histories and claim them as her own.

Aside from being a narrative framework that stages an encounter with histories and systems of violence, haunting also provides a conceptual metaphor for the complex relationships among political violence, global capitalism, and the nation. In his work on postcolonial nationalism, literary

⁶⁵ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19.

⁶⁶ Gordon, xvii.

theorist Pheng Cheah takes the figure of the ghost as the metaphor for the post-colonial nation contained by the inhuman body of the state. This ghostliness, according to Cheah, resides in the “interminable experience of the aporia of life-death” caused by the nation-state’s embeddedness in the deadly dynamics of global capitalism.⁶⁷ But from death comes life, as Cheah posits that the spectral nation remains the “most apposite figure of freedom,”⁶⁸ despite theorisations about the nation’s obsolescence as a project of liberation.⁶⁹ Cheah explains that this spectral nation lives on in living political projects like revolutionary nationalism that seek “to reappropriate the state from authoritarian and global capitalist forces so that it can fully incarnate itself” into a state directed by, and towards, the people’s genuine interests.⁷⁰ In this regard, Cheah views nationalist modernity in terms of not only its oppressive, but also emancipatory potential.

I find much in Cheah’s theoretical exploration that resonates with *Alma-ata*’s portrayal of the death-giving operations of capitalism, and the life-giving operations of the revolutionary struggle, which I elaborate later. The film conveys the nation’s “haunted life,”⁷¹ through ghosts and spectral episodes of deaths that figure the violence of the state’s subservience to global capitalism. At the same time, these deaths animate the radical energies of the living nation, embodied by the revolutionaries, who aim to bring justice to these ghosts. In this sense, the ghostly appearances of Julia’s parents assume an important role in Julia’s political awakening. Even in death, they live on in

⁶⁷ Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 391.

⁶⁸ Cheah, 383.

⁶⁹ Cheah, 382–83.

⁷⁰ Cheah, 11.

⁷¹ Cheah, 383.

their daughter who discovers and eventually embraces their revolutionary legacy.

These scenes of apparition are followed by a scene of Julia's own involvement in activism in the host country. She congregates with her friends, who, like her, are part of the younger generation of Filipino migrants. One of them, a Caucasian-looking lad, shares an anecdote of how he got mistaken for an Australian by a Filipina because of his white features. He then launches into a light-hearted discussion about popular, and superficial cultural markers of Filipino-ness such as local cuisine and culinary curio like adobo [stew in vinegar and soy sauce] and balut [fertilised duck egg] and local expressions like "anak ng tipaklong" [son of a grasshopper]. A hearty exchange of laughter among the group is punctuated, when he asks, "is patriotism about adobo, dinuguan [stew in blood] and sinigang [sour meat soup]?"

As it turns out, the light-hearted discussion about stereotypical norms of Filipino-ness is a prelude to the real objective of their gathering -- an educational discussion of *Lipunan at Rebolusyong Pilipino*, the Filipino translation of Amado Guerrero's *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1970), the landmark political treatise of the NatDem revolution. They take turns to read from the book, audibly struggling in their Australian accents with Tagalog passages that talk about the class struggle in the Philippines. The group of friends exchanging banter about their national identity turns out to be a collective of migrant activists.

This scene is crucial in destabilising a homogenised framework of Filipino-ness by allowing the younger generation of Filipino migrants -- some of whom are no longer fluent in Tagalog and bear white Australian features -- to stake a claim in nationalist belonging and identity. As suggested by the presence of Guerrero's radical work that they study with diligence,

revolutionary commitment becomes the form in which such claim is embodied and bolstered. The revolutionary nationalism of the NatDem movement thus departs from the premises and practices of nationalist identification conventionally tethered to racial features, language and even territory. It instead advances a more inclusive framework of belongingness, attachment and political community through which migrants come to know, identify with, and commit in the fight for, their nation and fellow Filipinos back home. As Julia would witness in her journey back home, this framework serves as an important infrastructure for political solidarity that binds national subjects from diverse backgrounds. It is this same framework, for instance, that shapes the encounter of many revolutionaries with the indigenous peoples of the Philippines, with whom they forge a shared and unifying vision of the nation as a horizon for liberation.

The scenes of apparition and Julia's collective education with fellow migrants index the haunting of the nation left behind in the migrant space, providing an important narrative precursor to her journey. In the following section, I trace Julia's journey to Mindanao, which enacts the process of her further discovery of her parents' tragic yet courageous fate, and the nationalist project of the revolution that they have become involved in.

Journey home

Upon learning of her parents' death at the hands of a paramilitary group recruited from the Lumad, Julia travels to Mindanao and gets in touch with their comrades in the NPA -- Joel (Jamee Rivera), Liyab (Hecate Andres) and Bidlisiw (Alison Landeras); the latter two derive their names respectively from the Bisaya words for "flame" and "sunrise," in keeping with the motif of light earlier set up in the film. They call her "kauban" (Bisaya for "comrade"), establishing comradeship with her early on, and join her to retrieve her

parents' bodies. The journey takes up most of the film's running time, as the group follows the spectral traces of Joaquin and Juliet across the violent landscape of the national periphery where the tragic narrative of their martyrdom soon unfolds.

As I have earlier mentioned, the journey narrative uses the filmic storytelling style which Katrina Ross Tan denotes as "visual journaling."⁷² This approach refers to the ways by which journey narratives in regional films convey a sensory experience of the place traversed by the characters. Certain filmic techniques capture the sensory dimension of the journey in this mode. Long shots and handheld camerawork vividly capture the characters' movements across the jungle. Often, the camera appears to lie between the branches and leaves, as if spying on Julia and the guerrillas from a distance, while they emerge from the brushes of the woods. This builds a sense of dread that emanates from the threatening presence of frequently unseen yet ever present state forces in the jungle. In other scenes, the camera is positioned near them, akin to a companion that visually catalogues their movements and details the physical struggle of their moving bodies across the thick greenery, muddy paths, and boulders.

This visual journaling catalogues the movements of both revolutionary characters and enemy forces like soldiers and paramilitary brigades who roam the terrain, revealing the political contestations and violent histories haunting this landscape. These movements conjure the socio-political violence experienced not just by Julia's parents, but also the people and communities in the area. Visual journaling thus turns into a mode of experiencing the nation's haunted life, recalling what Gordon, invoking Walter Benjamin, calls blasting, "a method of dialectics that reconstructs a

⁷² Tan, "Visual Journaling' in Narratives of Departure in Philippine Regional Cinema'.

lifework by following the scrambled trail the ghost leaves, picking up its pieces, setting them down elsewhere.”⁷³

Like Mardoquio’s earlier journey film *Ang Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin sa Gabing Madilim*, the film turns the forested locale into a commemorative site of political violence. The journeying troupe stumble upon a makeshift hut, which, Liyab tells her, is where the paramilitary group Alamara first brought her parents. “They probably sat here,” Julia mutters, as she sits down in a wooden bench in the hut. The NPA guerrillas then tell her the events surrounding her parents’ abduction by the Alamara, a paramilitary group that provides armed support to state-aided corporate intrusion in Lumad lands. The revolutionary movement sent reinforcements to rescue them, but the abductors were able to escape. The Datus [male Lumad chieftains] intervened and held a dyandi [indigenous peace pact] for their release. The abductors agreed to free Juliet, but she refused to leave without her husband and abandon him to the hands of these, in the words of Bidlisiw, “terrorists.” An atmosphere of haunting and tragedy pervades the NPA guerrillas’ recounting of this grim story of abduction; a long unbroken shot entraps Julia and her guerrilla companions in the abandoned hut, before transitioning to a slow-motion capture of the ominous forest and the ruins of makeshift hut, coupled with the sounds of the rustling leaves and a tribal score. The forest, through these audio-visual modes, turns into a haunted space.

They carry on with their journey. An old woman they meet in the forest gives Julia her mother’s shoes. Julia weeps, realising that her mother “walked on her bare feet.” Details of her parents’ suffering at the hands of their abductors grow more vivid when they meet Kina, a Lumad woman. Kina tells them that she joined the troupe of abductors and volunteered to be their

⁷³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 66.

cook after seeing the pitiful state of Julia's mother. While giving her account of the events during the abduction, Kina experiences violent seizures, as if possessed by a spirit. The scene cuts to a series of sepia-tinted flashback scenes introducing the paramilitary forces who abducted and killed Julia's parents. One scene shows the vigilante leader, an amulet-wearing tattooed man, stretching his arms skyward, summoning some invisible force by a smoky hot spring. In the next scene, a procession of armed men carrying jars of body parts marches across the mountain jungle. Those jars, Kina tells Julia, carry "flesh, human entrails, food for the Alamara." Before the horrified migrant, she continues, "the Alamara are not humans. They're demons" (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. The distraught Julia (Sue Prado) listening to the account of her parents' abduction in Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata* (Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA) Melbourne, Cine Sosyalista, & Lope Campesino, 2018)

Julia throws up, repulsed by the gory details of Kina's story. Kina continues with her story; the next day, as they walked under the sun and the rain, Juliet passed out, turning stiff but still alive. Julia grows more hysterical, weeping violently before running away. The frenetic realism of this scene shifts to another nightmarish sepia-tinted sequence portraying the political violence that took place in the past. This sequence positions Julia in the same space

and time as the vigilantes. A horrifying scene unfolds before her eyes. The vigilante leader and his bolo-wielding companions butcher some victims hidden in the dark, presumably Joaquin and Juliet (see Figure 11). Later, the leader sits in front of a bonfire, eating what is suggested to be human meat. Julia, horrified at this scene, begins to experience seizures. This scene is intercut with moments from the film's narrative present -- of Kina also being attacked by seizures and a weeping fit, of jars containing human eyeballs and entrails stored in her kitchen, and of Julia running aimlessly across the wilderness, undertaking an emotional escape from the violence that ended her parents' lives.



Figure 11. The Alamaras' act of killing in Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata* (Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA)Melbourne, Cine Sosyalista, & Lope Campesino, 2018)

Parallel editing situates Kina and Julia in simultaneity, despite their temporal divergences. Past and present become what film scholar Bliss Cua Lim calls "immiscible times,"⁷⁴ which occur in Asian fantastic cinema to convey how the spectral past haunts the present "as both a return and a permeating presence that was never really put aside in the first place."⁷⁵ By inscribing

⁷⁴ Lim, *Translating Time*, 32.

⁷⁵ Lim, 156.

Julia as a witness to this spectral past, *Alma-ata* communicates a political imperative, as it makes direct Julia's, and by extension, the viewers' "sense of responsibility and solidarity toward the injustices endured by those long dead."⁷⁶

The film's spectral sequences derive their disturbing effect from the fictionalised portrayal of Alamara as cannibals. Along with Bidlisiw's reference to them as "terrorists," this portrayal disengages Alamara from the Lumad community where they hail from, marking them off as animalistic predators who feed on the flesh of their fellow indigenous peoples. On a symbolic level, the Lumad who join Alamara are transformed into such predators due largely to the divide-and-conquer strategy of the neo-colonial state, making them prey upon their kin. It is important to note however that while there are documented practices of cannibal rituals in some Lumad groups,⁷⁷ Mardoquio claims that his portrayal of cannibalism derives from stories about the cannibalistic practices of state-sponsored paramilitary groups, like the non-Lumad Christian group Ilaga.⁷⁸ The Ilaga's murder of Italian Catholic missionary Tulio Favali has been earlier fictionalised in Brocka's film *Orapronobis*, which Mardoquio cites as an influence in his representation of the cannibalistic vigilantes.⁷⁹ In this 1989 movie, an anti-communist vigilante leader, patterned after Ilaga leader Norberto Manero Jr., scoops and eats the brain of the murdered foreign priest.⁸⁰

Cannibalism in *Alma-ata* bears similarity to its portrayal in *Orapronobis*. It offers a visual configuration of how, as Cheah writes, "the [neo]colonial

⁷⁶ Lim, 151.

⁷⁷ John M. Garvan, *The Manobos of Mindanao* (BiblioBazaar, 2008).

⁷⁸ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

⁷⁹ Mardoquio.

⁸⁰ Capino, *Martial Law Melodrama*, 165–66.

state, a servant of capital, is unequivocally an agent of death.”⁸¹ Graphic images of body parts, shown stored in body jars in close ups, suggest the destruction, disposal and consumption of human bodies and lives in the name of capitalism and the practices of modernity that it forces upon the people, particularly those indigenous communities occupying spaces targeted by commercial interests. This focus on the body is not lost on some of the film’s reviews. One reviewer, for instance, points out that “the gaping wounds, lacerated extremities and pickled intestines” is suggestive of “the inhumane and monstrous tendencies of the bloodthirsty paramilitary group in a brutal war inflicted by State security forces against the progressive Lumad.”⁸²

On another level, the figuration of the body in *Alma-ata* also symbolises political contestations in terms of oppositional corporeal interventions. If the Alamara mutilates and consumes the bodies of one of their own, the NatDem revolutionaries are depicted as healers of indigenous bodies. This revolutionary corporeal intervention is literally embodied in the efforts of Julia’s parents to extend medical support to impoverished communities, like those of indigenous groups. This healthcare project initiated by the revolutionary movement points more broadly to an alternative modernity that diverges from, and challenges, the destructive, cannibalistic developmentalism of neoliberal capitalism and the neo-colonial state.

Alternative modernity

The rest of Julia’s journey allows her to see the makings of this alternative modernity enacted by the NatDem struggle. Through a combination of didactic dialogues and chance encounters, her immersion turns into a

⁸¹ Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 287–88.

⁸² Cabana, ‘Ode to Suppressed Historical Upheavals’.

political bildungsroman that deepens her understanding of the principles and practical dimensions of the struggle. Joel acts as an educator, patiently responding to Julia's various inquiries about the struggle. She learns from him about her parents' role in implementing the revolutionary healthcare programme in the locality. The couple helped build local clinics, and trained revolutionaries, even those without medical background or higher educational attainment, to perform complex medical procedures like surgery. As proof, Joel shows Julia his neatly-stitched arm, which Liyab and Bidlisiw operated on under Joaquin's guidance.

In another scene, Liyab shows Julia how to prepare disinfectant and antibiotics from herbs growing in the guerrilla zone. For someone who hails from the First World, this moment asserts the legitimacy of local knowledge and practices invisible to, and often derided by, the Western episteme. Encounters between doctors trained in modern medicinal practice and the community they are bound by duty to serve have also been enacted in earlier Filipino films. In *Mulanay: Sa Pusod ng Paraiso* [Deep in Paradise] (1996), a doctor chooses to serve a coastal community neglected by the state, and finds herself confronting people's religious beliefs. In another film, *Mumbaki* (1996), a young doctor forfeits his dream of going to America, and returns to his indigenous community in the uplands of northern Philippines, rediscovering his roots and eventually assuming the role of mumbaki or indigenous healer.

In the case of *Alma-ata*, the encounter between a figure of Westernised scientific modernity and peasants-turned-guerrillas foregrounds the revolutionary movement's refusal to impose an orthodox notion of scientific modernity on the communities it serves. Community participation, Julia learns from Joel, is an important aspect in implementing the revolutionary

healthcare programme, which significantly involves learning about, and applying local practices and knowledge. This process is a difficult and complex one. As Joel tells Julia, the developments in the healthcare programmes vary from community to community. Specific social conditions in each locality generate and shape the multiple temporalities of revolutionary modernity across these contexts.

In addition to learning about the revolutionary healthcare programme that her parents participated in, Julia catches a glimpse of the various aspects of revolutionary lifeways and practices in chance encounters during their journey. These practices, as portrayed in the film, construct an alternative history of the movement, highlighting the emergent ways and practices of revolutionaries directed to actualise a more humane social order, as well as providing an opportunity to clarify some misperceptions about the revolution in the mainstream public sphere.

For instance, the NPA guerrillas face a firefight with a group of soldiers. After subduing the enemy troop, Joel reads a lengthy document in Filipino to the captured soldiers. The document details the rights of prisoners of war (POWs), reiterating the movement's policy of treating them humanely and giving them political education about the roots of the armed revolution before releasing them to their families.⁸³ This scene relies on explanatory dialogue, perhaps to explicate not just for Julia, but the viewer as well the little-known policy of the movement regarding POWs. Julia herself becomes

⁸³ The NPA's guide for discipline forbids the ill-treatment of captives. Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Basic Rules of the New People's Army', in *Foundation for Resuming the Philippine Revolution: Selected Writings, 1968 to 1972*, by Jose Maria Sison (1969; repr., The Netherlands and the Philippines: International Network for Philippine Studies (INPS) and Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2013), 125; Gracias and Gamboa, 'Vibrant Democracy Thrives in the People's Army'.

a direct participant in implementing this humanitarian policy and helps in treating the wounded enemies.

The scene also contains what one reviewer notes as a polite portrayal of “political dissent...in the moving image.”⁸⁴ Joel calmly corrects one wounded soldier when the latter addresses him as “Sir,” and tells him, “you are too feudal,” visibly contrasting with the crass behaviour of guerrillas in the novel *Gerilya* (2008) (see Chapter 2). Here, *Alma-ata* advances an idealised conception of revolutionary attitude and disposition. By portraying the NPA as polite and humane towards soldiers, the film also differentiates revolutionaries from government forces like the police and military who have been accused in several accounts of torturing political detainees.⁸⁵

In another scene, while they are camping out in the jungle, Julia asks Joel about news of the NPA guerrillas burning industrial plants and tractors. This activity, Joel explains, is the last resort taken by revolutionaries against abusive capitalists who employ private armies. Julia also brings up the issue of revolutionary tax; she shares that news of the “extortion” allegedly committed by revolutionaries gets broadcast on the television and online news. Joel responds that revolutionary tax is used to administer social services such as in agriculture, healthcare and even education in the communities organised by the revolutionaries. He also touches on how media oligarchs produce “fake news” -- to which Julia and the general public are usually exposed -- that maintain “a bias towards the reactionary government,” and demonise the revolution.

⁸⁴ Cabana, ‘Ode to Suppressed Historical Upheavals’.

⁸⁵ Artemio Dumlao, ‘Torture by Military, Police Remains Routine, Says Rights Group’, *Philippine Star*, 26 June 2017, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/06/26/1713801/torture-military-police-remains-routine-says-rights-group>.

The foregoing exchange diegetically explains the film's didactic engagement with the commonly negative figurations of the revolution in the public sphere. Some reviewers have commented on the political value of the film's didactic approach. Mario Tumbocon, Jr. for instance, writes that "its didacticism may have undercut the emotive potential of its narrative," but explains that "any appreciation of the film is seen in the context of a certain tradition of dissent in film, political dissent in particular, film as reflective of societal ills, predicated on rage/protest as response."⁸⁶ Cabana, for his part, sees the use of didacticism as presumably "unpalatable to the mainstream audiences," but values it in relation to the film's rejection of "self-gratifying anti-communist denunciation and shaming."⁸⁷ For Mardoquio, didacticism adheres to the agit-prop (agitation propaganda) motive of the film.⁸⁸ I venture that this design explicitly asserts and justifies political partisanship, and rejects the ambiguity often found in politically-themed cinema that belongs to the Second Cinema or arthouse tradition. As Mike Wayne explains, this arthouse convention assumes that "knowledge about the world is generated at a higher level by *not* unequivocally committing to a position or cause."⁸⁹ Mardoquio's didactic style may therefore be seen as part of the filmic agenda of enhancing the legibility of the film's political message to a broader audience.

Alma-ata also explains the socio-economic basis for revolution, as gleaned in the experiences of peasants. The story of Liyab's family, which she tells Julia during their trek, assumes the form of a testimonial narrative that conveys such experiences. Liyab comes from a family of peasants victimised by the

⁸⁶ F A C I N E Filipino International Cine Festival, 'Quick Notes on Arnel Mutia Mardoquio's ALMA-ATA'.

⁸⁷ Cabana, 'Ode to Suppressed Historical Upheavals'.

⁸⁸ Mardoquio, Interview by the author.

⁸⁹ Wayne, *Political Film*, 13. Emphasis in the original.

government's land reform program. The landlord bribed government officials to prevent the awarding of land to her parents, and connived to have them arrested for seeking refuge in the land during a typhoon. They both died in prison, her mother of heart attack, and her father by suicide. This story of agrarian violence points to the centrality of land as a material resource and object of contestation in what the revolutionary movement describes as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country. The reference to the failure of post-EDSA land reform programs like the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in addressing the age-old conditions of land-grabbing and peasant unrest particularly indicates the limits of social reforms achievable within the so-called democratic parameters of the current Philippine state. Through the tragic destinies of Liyab's parents, the film fictionalises the experiences of land rights-claimants facing harassment and fabricated charges by landlords, who conspire with the state to protect land ownership.⁹⁰ This story is instrumental in explaining how the country's land problem continues to the present, compelling peasants to join the revolution.

The life stories of the NPA guerrillas reveal not just the experiences of social injustice and violence in the Philippines, and their continuation and intensification in the years since the country's transition to democracy. They also allow Julia to bear a glimpse into the emergent social experiences in the revolution, some of which are shaped by the tumultuous setbacks and errors that I have discussed in the previous chapters. One compelling dimension

⁹⁰ Jennifer Franco and Saturnino Borras, 'Struggles Over Land Resources in the Philippines', *Peace Review* 19, no. 1 (February 2007): 67–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650601181923>; Jennifer Franco and Danilo Carranza, 'Backlash and Beyond: The Criminalization of Agrarian Reform and Peasant Response in the Philippines' 4, no. 1 (2014): 28.

that *Alma-ata* highlights concerns the revolutionary movement's approach towards the LGBT community.

Set over three decades after the events in *Lihis* (see Chapter 1), the narrative milieu of *Alma-ata* presents the dramatic changes in revolutionary gender and sexual politics, at a time when the movement has already approved homosexual relations and even legalised same sex marriage. "The Party," Joel tells Julia, "recognises the significance of the LGBT community...in the fight for freedom and nation building." As they continue their journey, Julia discovers that Liyab and Bidlisiw are a couple married in the movement, making them the first lesbian NPA guerrillas to appear in Philippine cinema. The movement's progressive stance towards gender and sexual politics is also evident in Joel's disclosure that he is a straight man in a romantic relationship with a Lumad transgender woman, also a comrade in the revolution. Joel rejects the dominant yet problematic social script that derisively ascribes homosexuality to men who enter into a relationship with transgender women. Moreover, he exemplifies how some revolutionaries subscribe to the trans-inclusive view of transgender women as women. This then points to the presence within the revolutionary movement of efforts to imagine an alternative modernity that involves the integration of progressive discourses and practices related to gender and sexuality.

Indigenous revolutionaries

The figure of Ata (Frida Calderon), Joel's partner, is central to the film's portrayal of how the revolutionary struggle is linked to the struggles of the indigenous peoples. The journeying group reach her hut, lit by bonfire and torches in keeping with the symbolic motif of light. Ata leads them to where she keeps the remains of Julia's parents. They cross the river, which in Ata's words, "serves as the vestibule of our history." These words bear reference to

the importance of the river for Lumad people, as particularly evinced in the richness of riverine symbols and content in the "panud" or oral history of the Higaunon people.⁹¹

They arrive at a cave, where the ashes of Joaquin and Juliet are kept in two separate wooden urns, illuminated by oil lamps. She begins to chronicle the struggle of the Lumad peoples and the socio-economic roots of their participation in the revolutionary struggle of the NatDem movement. In chronicling her peoples' history, Ata assumes the sacred role of the indigenous priestess, which transgender women have also historically fulfilled in Lumad groups like the Teduray.⁹² She therefore becomes a figure of an emancipatory gender and sexual politics upheld in the revolutionary movement as well as in some indigenous groups. The relational dynamics between the revolution and indigenous struggles is also at the centre of the oral history that she delivers.

"The Lumads are fighting back," she begins, speaking in Bisaya. "We have armed ourselves and joined the struggle of the New People's Army to fight the foreign control of our land." She continues to explain how the state has obeyed the dictates of foreign corporations to "unearth gold, copper and nickel out of the mountains, to transform farmlands into plantations, and to cut down rainforests for timber," and armed the Lumad "to turn against each other." This oral history becomes an agit-prop strategy to explain the socio-economic root causes of the Lumad struggle and their decision to embrace the revolution. This agit-prop rendering is also evident in the montage of

⁹¹ Oona Paredes, 'Rivers of Memory and Oceans of Difference in the Lumad World of Mindanao', *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 4, no. 2 (July 2016): 329–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2015.28>.

⁹² Stuart A. Schlegel, *Wisdom from a Rainforest: The Spiritual Journey of an Anthropologist* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

scenes that visualises Lumad agency through a dramatic tableau, a storytelling device used in protest street theatre since the Martial Law period.⁹³

In *Alma-ata*, the tableau constructs indigenous revolutionary agency. Ata and her Lumad comrades run across the jungle, carrying spears and guns, before assembling within the towering trunk of a tree. They assume varied postures of vigilance, their faces revealing expressions of grim determination. This image offers a radicalised view of indigenous agency, and subtly addresses some commentaries that cast the Lumad as “pawns” caught in the crossfire between revolutionaries and state armed forces.⁹⁴ Ata’s story constructs Lumad revolutionary agency as borne out of their political awakening about the material realities of exploitation, in contrast to the decision of their fellow Lumad to join the paramilitary vigilantes as a result of the state’s deception.

Overt symbolisms appear in the next sequence, through the *mise-en-scène*'s construction of cannibalism in relation to the nationalism sponsored by the state and foreign imperialist power. As Cheah reminds us, official nationalism is one way through which, “the forces of dead global capital” impinge upon the state and the people.⁹⁵ A grisly visual allegory suggests this commentary. A member of the Alamara drags a pig to a feast set deep within the forest. The camera then pans from the armed vigilantes standing by the

⁹³ Joi Barrios, ‘The Taumbayan as Epic Hero, the Audience as Community’, in *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 256.

⁹⁴ ‘Lumads — Endangered Species’, *The Daily Tribune*, 24 August 2020, sec. Commentary, <https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/08/24/lumads-endangered-species/>; Boying Pimentel, ‘Lumad, the Left and Mareng Winnie’s “New People’s Army”’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 October 2015, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/129159/lumad-the-left-and-mareng-winnies-new-peoples-army>; Tony La Viña, ‘Leave the Lumad Alone!’, *Rappler*, 14 September 2015, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/leave-lumad-alone>.

⁹⁵ Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 384.

river stream towards a dining table with the Philippine flag draping in the background. A wide shot reveals a tattered American flag -- an image of US imperialism -- hanging atop the dining set-up like an open tent. On the table are spread jars of human entrails, like those seen in Kina's house, and wine glasses filled with red liquid, presumably blood. The Alamara leader picks up the wine glasses from the table, and hands one to a seated uniformed man -- his attire suggesting that he is an officer of the state's armed forces. "The Alamara believe that the more they drink blood, the greater their love for the country grows. They believe that they can also achieve Jose Rizal's feats," Ata's voice continues, suggesting the perverted, cultic character of Alamara's brand of nationalism.

As the Alamara members hungrily feast upon a large wok of what can be assumed to be human flesh, the leader wipes the blood on his lips with the Philippine flag. This image conveys the cannibalistic character of the official nationalism embraced by the Alamara, which serves the design of foreign powers, specifically US imperialism, through the complicity of the state, as personified by the uniformed man. Sexual violence also figures in this disturbing sequence. Kina sits by the table, her legs spread wide open. The Alamara leader approaches her and pierces her vagina with his rifle (see Figure 12). This harrowing image of sexual violence against the indigenous woman carries allegorical significance, figuring the penetration of ancestral lands by the violent agents of the neo-colonial state and US imperialism, and more broadly the feminised embodiment of the Philippines as an object coveted and subjugated by the dominant forces of capitalism.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Neferti X. M. Tadiar, *Fantasy Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).



Figure 12. The Alamara leader and Kina in Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata* (Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA)Melbourne, Cine Sosyalista, & Lope Campesino, 2018)

The pig in the early part of this disturbingly symbolic sequence is crucial to explaining the tragic fate that befell Julia's parents. Switching from Bisaya to English, Ata tells Julia that her mother died of illness. "The Alamara thought that her body was contaminated," Ata mournfully reveals. "They fed her to the pig." Images of Joaquin and Juliet treating comrades in the Philippine countryside accompany Ata's recounting of this tragedy, visually commemorating their revolutionary legacy in a way that renders more lamentable and contemptible their violent deaths at the hands of the Alamara. In another series of flashbacks, their comrades slaughter the pig to gather the remains of Juliet from its belly. Ata weeps in front of the pig's slaughtered body in a hot spring, reclaiming the space where the tattooed vigilante leader is earlier shown summoning some powerful force. "They're monsters. They're not humans," Julia utters, weeping with horror and rage.

The Party moves to bring justice to the deaths of the couple, and puts the Alamara leader, his followers, and even Kina on trial. The Party finds Kina guilty of being an accomplice to Alamara. But her complicity, the Party's spokesperson empathetically adds, is rooted in her mental health problem

which is the “effect of decadent and violent culture, and poverty,” and recommends sending her to the city to get adequate medical care, a decision that suggests the Party’s understanding of the socio-political roots of mental health issues. Unlike in the case of Kina, the film does not devote time to explain the Party’s verdict towards the Alamara and proceeds to show their execution. The previous scenes of their murderous and cannibalistic activities are rendered sufficient to explain the Party’s decision to implement capital punishment. In real-life accounts, the CPP and the NPA have admitted to killing individuals belonging to armed paramilitary groups in Mindanao, in some cases, after repeated warnings from the NPA.⁹⁷ These targeted killings are often done by the NPA in the open, further eliciting criticisms from human rights groups who doubt the legitimacy of the revolutionary movement’s due process.⁹⁸ *Alma-ata* however places such execution in the context of a trial to illustrate the presence of due process in the revolutionary courts of the movement. To further construct this legitimacy, the film shows the Party delivering its verdict in the presence of Julia and other members of the Lumad community, suggesting their involvement in, and approval of, the revolution’s juridical process.

Her quest coming to an end, Julia bids farewell to Ata, who reveals that she was with Joaquin and Juliet before they were kidnapped, as part of the health committee overseeing various projects in the community. They were involved in studying the medicinal use of local herbs. Julia asks her if she believes in Western medicine. “We do believe in it,” Ata answers. “What we are against

⁹⁷ Anton Faisca, ‘Revolutionary Justice Meted against CAFGU-Alamara Recruiters in Talaingod’, *Redspark*, 10 February 2018, <https://www.redspark.nu/en/peoples-war/philippines/revolutionary-justice-meted-against-cafgu-alamara-recruiters-in-talaingod/>.

⁹⁸ Elaine Pearson, ‘Philippines: People’s Courts or Cold-Blooded Murder?’, *Human Rights Watch*, 18 April 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/18/philippines-peoples-courts-or-cold-blooded-murder>.

is the use of science and technology to manipulate other nations.” She then asks Julia her nom de guerre. “Alma,” the latter offers. Alma-ata, the film’s title, assumes double significance for the two characters; they remark in unison that their names combined refer to “the international declaration of Alma-ata on Primary Healthcare.” Ata then reveals that she is university-educated, “a pharmacologist by profession who chose to return to the community.”

This final exchange between Alma or Julia, and Ata provokes reflections about the place and role of modernity in indigenous communities. Ata embodies an indigenous subject who, while educated in the modern university, remains firmly grounded on the indigenous practices and knowledge of her community. Her complex subject-position allows her to acknowledge the value of Western epistemic frameworks, and at the same time oppose the instrumental reason of the state and global capitalism that deploys these frameworks at the expense of people like the Lumad. The film refuses “the utopian characterization of subaltern politics as a subversive negativity,”⁹⁹ which pertains to the tendency to valorise indigeneity as a purely and completely oppositional project to non-indigenous forms of modernity. Such refusal also serves to underpin the decision of the Lumad people to welcome and even become NatDem revolutionaries. In *Alma-ata*, the indigenous peoples embrace the latter’s promise of a social order that aims to recuperate the emancipatory potential of formations and practices of modernity like the nation and the state, and even medical science.

Along these lines, sociologist Arnold Alamon advances a rethinking of “indigeneity,” not as “an essential category that refers to an unchanging notion of something similar to the idea of a noble savage, but rather one that

⁹⁹ Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 303.

is defined by historical circumstances and dialectical struggle as well.”¹⁰⁰ Indigenous peoples encounter practices and variants of non-indigenous modernity that carry both oppressive and emancipatory potential in shaping the experiences of indigeneity. As some of them become members of the revolutionary movement and embrace its framework of modernity, their experiences and issues contribute to steering the direction of the struggle, which then eventually informs how they construct their identity and express political agency. Related to this, the NDFP, with the cooperation of national minorities, included in the revolutionary programme the agenda to “uphold the rights of the Bangsa Moro and the Cordillera peoples and other indigenous peoples to self-determination and democracy.”¹⁰¹ This opens up a space for indigenous assertion within the revolutionary struggle, and becomes an important reminder to ward off the possibility of the revolution’s devolution into a developmentalist “regime of subjection.”¹⁰²

At the same time, the social order that the revolutionary struggle aims to achieve can be defined and imagined according to the features of indigenous modernity -- that is, the indigenous peoples' self-determined lifeworld and social practices. Alamon suggests that, like the revolutionaries who learn about indigenous practices and knowledge in *Alma-ata*, revolutionaries have much to learn from indigenous social systems in laying down the foundations of a just social order:

¹⁰⁰ Alamon, *Wars of Extinction*, 194.

¹⁰¹ ‘12 Points of the NDFP Program’, *Liberation*, 24 April 2017, <https://liberation.ndfp.org/our-program/>.

¹⁰² This has been the accusation levelled against revolutionary projects of modernity in territories, such as in Latin America, where indigenous peoples have joined the Marxist struggle. See, for instance, Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*.

surplus production may have to give way to food security; class relations might have to give way to communal relations in providing access to labor and resources; the complicated trade system may have to give way to a system that is within the communities' control; the individual accumulation of wealth may have to give way to a community-oriented way of sharing; and the extractive form of exploitation may have to give way to a manner that respects the rhythms of the ecosystem.¹⁰³

This passage foregrounds how capitalist modernity could be overcome, and replaced by a system that bears some of the features of indigenous modernity that the former seeks to destroy. *Alma-ata* traces the makings of this emancipatory modernity by showing how non-indigenous and Lumad revolutionaries jointly enact this living project -- Cheah's spectral nation -- through the NatDem revolution. The spectres of this nation, which resists the deadly containment of the neo-colonial state and global capitalism, are also incarnated in Julia, as she returns to her adopted home country.

Diasporic spectres

Haunting marks Julia's return to Melbourne. The visual motif of light suffuses these spectral appearances, signifying the protagonist's political awakening. Julia sees her parents facing the setting sun; in another scene, she watches her parents appear for the last time, illuminated by the yellow glow from the fireplace. The final apparition suggests that Julia has accomplished the historical imperative, to which their ghosts have directed her. The next scene shows Julia in the candle-lit hall of her parents' house, looking lovingly at the photographs of her parents serving in the countryside. Behind her

¹⁰³ Alamon, *Wars of Extinction*, 218.

looms a large portrait of Lenin hanging in the wall. The camera captures Julia's faint smile, before she blows out the candle. The scene is unambiguous in its subtlety, conveying Julia's whole-hearted embrace of her parents' chosen political commitment.

As she scatters her parents' ashes across various spots in Melbourne, Julia's voice-over narration addresses her parents (see Figure 12). The use of this diegetic speech recalls the epistolarity or use of letters in accented films, which according to Naficy offers the way through which characters "think and construct their affiliative identities."¹⁰⁴ Julia's understanding of herself derives from her understanding of her parents, and by extension, the struggle in the country they left behind and continued to serve. "Your revolution," she says, addressing her deceased parents, "affirms the greatness of love, love for fellow, love for the world." It is worth noting that this sentiment links her parent's revolutionary nationalism to the broader, internationalist struggle to fashion a humane global order. This internationalism also provides an important frame to understand the radical involvement of diasporic citizens in the nationalist project back home.



Figure 13. Julia carrying her parent's ashes in Melbourne in Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata*

¹⁰⁴ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 120.

(Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA) Melbourne, Cine Sosyalista, & Lope Campesino, 2018)

Reflecting on the sacrifices of people like her parents, Julia shifts her address to the viewer and recounts the fate of her revolutionary friends in the Philippines. She reveals that Joel is a lawyer who decides to forego his privileged life to be a revolutionary. A brief scene shows the tragic fate of Joel and Ata, who are both killed by soldiers in the forests, as Julia's voice-over recounts the sacrifices and bravery of revolutionaries in the struggle in the homeland. In recounting this event back home, Julia claims their struggle as also her own. Their nationalist sacrifices inspire her own political involvement outside the territory of the nation.

The story of Julia's radicalisation therefore continues in Melbourne. Subsequent scenes show her attending a political forum, and engaging in a discussion with other Filipino migrants, who hail from different sectors and industries. "They are faraway," she says, "but their hearts belong to the Philippines." The film's final scene goes a step further in imagining and even endorsing the most radical form of nationalism that migrant subjects could embrace. This scene shows the existence of communist organising in Melbourne. The cadres take an oath of allegiance against the backdrop of the faces of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, and the CPP flag. The camera moves from them to foreground Julia. She casts a glance at her comrades, before gazing intently at the camera (see Figure 14). Her voice-over declares in Filipino, with her Australian accent: "I come from a good family. My parents are Filipino revolutionaries. I am Alma. I am a Filipino. I am a Communist."



Figure 14. Julia's (Sue Prado) embrace of communism in Arnel Mardoquio's *Alma-ata* (Advanced League of Peoples' Artists (ALPA) Melbourne, Cine Sosyalista, & Lope Campesino, 2018)

Julia's declaration rejects the demonised image of revolutionaries as terrorists, and more importantly, foregrounds communism as central to the struggle in, and for, the nation. This is important to highlight, given that the revolutionary movement envisions the NatDem struggle, in its current form, as the first stage to imagine a socialist and eventually a communist order. Philippine communism, in its present, nationalist form, is thus the living project of the spectral nation that binds people inside and outside the Philippines. Appearing after the closing shot, the film's dedication -- "to all the Filipino martyrs [who] have graciously died in serving the Filipino revolution" -- affirms how this living project is built on the spectres of revolutionaries martyred in the struggle. After this dedication, the Filipino version of the "Internationale" plays in the closing credits, while images of revolutionary artworks appear.

Conclusion

The preceding discussions on *Alma-ata* have touched on how revolutionary experiences are shaped by the conditions of displacement and violence generated by the state's subjection to neoliberal capitalism. These conditions compel migrants and indigenous peoples to join the struggle and embrace its promise of an emancipatory future. The varied experiences of these revolutionary subjects who unite towards a singular national liberation struggle, while situated across the uneven geographical reaches of capitalism, inform the revolutionary movement's conceptualisation and enactment of nationalism. As scholar Epifanio San Juan, Jr. points out, the revolution takes the "Philippines as an "imagined" and actually experienced ensemble of communities, or multiplicities in motion... in the process of being constructed primarily through modes of political and social resistance against [globalization] and its technologically mediated ideologies, fashioning thereby the appropriate cultural forms of dissent, resistance, and subversion worthy of its people's history and its collective vision."¹⁰⁵ The film thus presents a complex representation of the revolution's nationalist framework, which unifies national subjects outside the nation like migrants, and those inside it -- indigenous peoples, LGBT, and middle-class intellectuals. Such inclusive view of nationalist subjectivities is part of the broader experience of learning from past experiences, as evinced, for instance, in how the film's understanding of sexual and gender politics evolves from the one depicted in the film *Lihis*, discussed in Chapter 1.

The film's affirmation of the enduring value of nationalism, as particularly conceived and reworked by the revolution, must also be seen as part of an ongoing discourse concerning the overall salience of nationalism in the

¹⁰⁵ San Juan, Jr., 'Imperial Terror, Neo-Colonialism and the Filipino Diaspora'.

contemporary period. Scholarly debates have centred on nationalism's potentials and limits as an ideological and political framework, particularly in the struggle for social justice and equality in postcolonial territories.¹⁰⁶ The film also depicts the reactionary, US-sponsored nationalism of the Philippine state, which the revolution seeks to challenge. The cinematic formations of accented and regional cinemas also intervene in contestations about nationalism, offering a complex view of national cinema and consequently advancing a more inclusive paradigm for nationalist politics. Accented cinema, for instance, seeks to convey the complex structure of nationalist feeling in experiences of exile and diaspora. Regional cinema also complicates the imagination of the nation, by foregrounding diverse national experiences outside the centre.

These suppositions, as evident in *Alma-ata*'s deployment of the representational strategies in these cinematic formations, posit a rethinking, not rejection, of nationalism -- one that is founded on the promise of liberation by, and for people coming from diverse backgrounds yet claiming the name of the nation. Such diverse experiences -- in this case, situated along the uneven terrain of global capitalism in the First and Third worlds -- are conveyed by *Alma-ata* through a kind of "cognitive mapping," which Fredric Jameson describes as a way of imagining the global social totality, as it encompasses the various experiences of capitalism and attempts to imagine a utopian alternative to it.¹⁰⁷ In this cognitive map, the nation emerges as a spectre, exceeding the territorial and political boundaries of the state, and

¹⁰⁶ Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 69.

¹⁰⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347–58.

incarnated in the revolutionary involvement of migrants and indigenous subjects across global and local spheres of human experience.

The spectres in the film also symbolise the legacies of the older generation's political practices and the experiences of political violence and brutality that have taken place in the past, which engender further and continued revolutionary participation among the subjects of the nation. The Marxist revolution directed towards communism in this regard is an act of justice for the ghosts of the past -- those victimised by political violence like Julia's parents and the indigenous peoples killed and displaced by the state and capitalists -- as well as for the ghosts of the future to come, those future generations in whose name the struggle is waged. As Derrida reminds us, this act of justice is premised on "the principle of some responsibility" for "the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead."¹⁰⁸ These spectres embody the possibility of incarnating a different nation -- beyond the violence of the state-capitalist body embodied in the figure of cannibalising and death-giving agents of the state. From the centres to the peripheries of global capitalism, *Alma-ata* offers an imagination of this revolution, and its agenda of cultivating an alternative modernity that promises social justice and equality.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), xviii.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has elaborated on the oppositional and analytic purpose of fictions in portraying a national liberation project in the Third World. I have examined selected NatDem fictions, or fictions about the ongoing NatDem revolution in the Philippines to reflect on this emancipatory project and the relevance of its agenda of social transformation. Drawing from, and building on scholarly works on NatDem fictions, particularly those produced during the Marcos dictatorship, as well as a wealth of theoretical and empirical resources from disciplines such as film and literary studies, political theory, memory studies, and indigenous and migration studies, this study has discussed how NatDem fictions not only represent but also examine revolutionary experiences. These representational and analytic mediations on revolutionary experiences communicate important insights about the revolutionary project in light of recent historical developments in the country like the trauma and traces of the dictatorship, the crises, rectification and resurgence of the NatDem movement, the social movements that emerged in the post-Marcos years, and the social impacts of neoliberalism in the Philippines.

The study's main contribution is its theoretical formulation of revolutionary experience as a dynamic, emergent and transformative ensemble of social practices and relations that revolutionaries enact in the struggle to challenge the state, and install a new social order. I reconfigured Neferti Tadiar's formulation of experience, Raymond Williams' idea of structure of feeling and the conceptualisations of Party politics advanced by Jodi Dean and J.

Moufawad-Paul to explain the complex experiential workings of the revolutionary struggle as mediated through the organisational workings of the Party-led NatDem movement.¹ My conceptualisation encompasses the emergent and transformative interactions between revolutionary relations and practices, and non-revolutionary ones. This allows a deeper understanding of the contradictions that revolutionaries face, as they embark on political practices in the context of recent Philippine historical developments.

The study has therefore examined NatDem fictions as cultural articulations of revolutionary experiences. Through close readings of selected filmic and literary examples produced within the past two decades, I have examined the complex relational and practical dynamics of the revolutionary struggle. These analyses have also discussed the political function of formal narrative strategies mobilised by writers and filmmakers -- employed in a variety of literary and filmic genres and narrative forms like women's and family melodrama, memory narrative, pink film, proletarian social novel, regional and accented cinemas -- in portraying, and reflecting on, the revolution. I have also positioned my analyses in conversation with the artists who produced these works and the critical reception that they generated from an engaged public of mainstream audiences, cultural critics, academics, and activists. These interlocutors provocatively link aesthetic and formal concerns to urgent socio-political questions. These critical responses also provide an important lens to understand how the public participates in exchanges about political discourses and issues like the revolution in the Philippine public sphere.

¹ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*; Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture*; Dean, *Crowds and Party*; Dean, *The Communist Horizon*.

The selected NatDem fictions examined in this study represent and examine the history of, and experiences in, the NatDem struggle for the past five decades. Chapter 1 is about two post-EDSA filmic NatDem fictions that portray the experiences of political resistance during the Marcos dictatorship. These films -- *Barber's Tales* and *Lihis* -- serve as forms of imagined gendered memory that foreground the issues surrounding gender and sexuality in the revolution. In this chapter, I have positioned these two filmic fictions in dialogue with the discourses on gender and sexuality that emerged in the post-EDSA years, and examined the persistence of retrograde gender and sexual norms and behaviours among revolutionaries, as well as the ways through which the movement relies on, and addresses, them.

In Chapter 2, I have studied fictions set in the years after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship -- a period marked by the crises of the NatDem movement. The subjects of analyses here are the novels *Barikada* and *Gerilya*, two examples of what I refer to as pedagogies of errors or narratives that portray the errors and miscalculations in the struggle. These NatDem fictions are set in two zones of revolutionary activities, the urban and the rural. I have argued in this chapter how space underpins the development of political subjectivity, as well as erroneous tendencies among revolutionaries. In examining these fictional portrayals of revolutionary errors, I have posited how the experiences of error serve pedagogical functions that affirm the perpetual importance of rectification in the struggle.

Chapter 3 is about two narratives set in the violent post-EDSA presidency of Arroyo. Both narratives engage with the impact of the traumatic experiences of Marcos-era revolutionaries on the shaping of comradeship and family relations. I have examined the novel *Desaparecidos* and the film *Sigwa* -- NatDem fictions that make use of the narrative trope of former

revolutionaries who search for their lost daughters -- in relation to the disposition of political disillusionment known as Left melancholia. This chapter has laid bare how affective ties and transgenerational legacy open towards the possibility of overcoming Left melancholia, and reaffirming commitment to the ongoing revolution in the context of continuing socio-political violence.

The transgenerational legacy of political radicalism is explored further in Chapter 4, which centres on the accented-regional film *Alma-ata*. In this final analytic chapter, I have argued that the film imagines how the revolution's nationalist framework is advanced by the participation of migrants and indigenous peoples who resist the violence of neoliberal globalisation. This analysis, which draws on Pheng Cheah's notion of spectral nationalism, points to the capacity of the revolutionary movement to configure its nationalist politics in relation to the lived experiences of political subjects both in the core and the periphery shaped by the violent modernity of neoliberal capitalism.

My analytic engagements with these NatDem fictions have revealed the complexities and challenges involved in applying revolutionary theory to practice, and enriching theory with practice. These difficulties emerge from how the structural and conjunctural conditions of Philippine society give shape to the formation of revolutionary relations and subjective practices. Revolutionary behaviours and dispositions are therefore built on not only the theoretical imperatives of the struggle, but also persisting non-revolutionary, even retrograde, social paradigms, values and tendencies borne out of social

conditions, as well as affective intimacies and linkages that are often left out or devalued in accounts of political subjectivity.²

This study has also examined the complex interplay between the personal and the political in the project of national liberation. The NatDem fictions I have studied show revolutionaries struggling, sometimes failing, to overcome the dominant, often regressive social practices and behavioural tendencies in which they are immersed. Patriarchal sexism and heteronormativity influence the behaviour of revolutionaries, as illustrated, for example, in *Lihis*. In *Gerilya*, petit-bourgeois tendencies like individualism and adventurism continue to shape the behaviour of city-bred, university-educated guerrillas, triggering clashes with the peasant revolutionaries they organise, and work with, in the countryside. In this novel, individual disinclinations also undercut the building of comradely ties. In *Barikada*, revolutionaries fall prey to the adventurist tendencies cultivated in the city, propelling them to formulate and stage the ill-fated insurrection. In many of these NatDem fictions, personal feelings and emotional ties intervene, for better or for worse, in the enactment of revolutionary duties. Sexual and romantic ties pose challenges to political commitment. Familial affections and friendships also enrich, and sometimes undercut, the relations formed in the struggle.

As these examples have revealed, NatDem fictions register critiques of some practices and behavioural tendencies in the revolution, pointing to the limitations and weaknesses of political subjects who are supposedly armed with radical political consciousness and given important roles in the revolution. These critiques have laid bare the complicated subjective dimensions of revolutionary lives that render difficult the task of living up to revolutionary ideological imperatives. Such critical figurations of

² Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 2009, 8.

revolutionaries and even the movement are ultimately instrumental in highlighting the complicated exercise of personal and political agency by revolutionaries who harbour behavioural tendencies and dispositions rooted in their social upbringing.

This study has explored how the contradictory features of Philippine society shape people's similarly contradictory experiences in the struggle against the ruling system. While posing difficulties to the application of theory to practice, the regressive conditions that revolutionaries inhabit also generate the resources through which these political subjects exercise their agency to support and even participate in the revolution. The rural women of *Barber's Tales* use their feudal feminine and religious practices, shaped by the dominant and largely subjugating paradigm of Catholicism, to shelter and protect revolutionaries. In the maternal melodramas *Desaparecidos* and *Sigwa*, families are portrayed as complex social formations that serve as conduits of political support and even radicalisation for some of the characters, as well as the refuge from the trauma of revolutionary involvement. The accented-regional film *Alma-ata* likewise points to the revolutionary importance of parental legacies. The film also features the transformative dynamics of revolutionary nationalism that harnesses, and draws on, the experiences and struggles of indigenous and migrant subjects, who eventually become participants in the NatDem revolution. In these NatDem fictions, non-revolutionary communities and social formations emerge as, and transform into, channels of support for the struggle.

The transformative dynamics of revolutionary experiences lies not only in how the practice of the struggle remakes the social worlds of people drawn to it. It also operates within and through the movement's own practice of rectification. The NatDem fictions examined in this study encode the

mechanisms by which the Party and revolutionaries acknowledge, criticise, and rectify the errors in the struggle. For example, *Lihis* registers the movement's eventual revision of its policy towards homosexuality as a corrective to the homophobia experienced by Martial Law-era revolutionaries. Situated at a later time, under the Duterte administration, *Alma-ata* also makes reference to this policy change, even introducing the CPP-sanctioned union of queer revolutionaries like lesbians and transgender women. *Barikada* directly engages with some of the strategic deviations criticised in the Second Great Rectification Movement through its counterfactual dramatization of the insurrection, and reaffirms the need to rectify erroneous political strategies. In narratives like *Gerilya* and *Desaparesidos*, disillusioned revolutionaries maintain their conviction that the process of rectification is integral to the NatDem movement's framework, allowing the movement and its members to weather the various crises and errors in the struggle. These instances of rectification point to the imperative for the revolutionary movement and its members to observe reflexivity in conducting political work and undergo revolutionary remoulding.

In examining these complex transformative dynamics of revolutionary experiences, I have examined how NatDem fictions address the question of the revolution's legitimacy as a national liberation project. Produced after the movement's crisis in the post-Marcos years under conditions of post-Cold War hegemonic anti-communism, the NatDem fictions examined in this study register the post-rectification developments and changes in the movement. Memory devices like narrative flashbacks and flashforwards are functional in this regard, allowing temporal dialogues between the past and the present, particularly in NatDem fictions that look back on the revolutionary experiences during the Martial Law -- a dramatically high point

in the revolution's history -- as a source of inspiration and lessons for continuing the struggle in the present towards the future.

As revealed in my close readings, these NatDem fictions articulate how the revolution address emerging social issues and experiences as well as political developments, which compel revolutionaries to refine revolutionary actions, and if necessary, reconsider long-held beliefs and behavioural tendencies. The ever-present possibilities of committing errors during the struggle are also encoded in these works, providing occasions to reflect on the challenges of undertaking an armed challenge to the state and establishing a new social order, while apprehending the complex terrain of Philippine politics and society. Also functional in this regard is the deployment of essayistic/didactic exposition as a stylistic register in these works, which serves pedagogical ends by synthesising the lessons in the dramatic enactments of revolutionary experiences in these fictions.

I have argued thus that in advancing the dynamic and complex view of revolutionary experiences, the NatDem fictions examined in this study assert a sense of faith in the transformative capacity of the revolutionary movement and revolutionaries in overcoming challenges, correcting errors, and addressing the contingencies and developments in Philippine society. Narrative resolutions pursued in these selected NatDem fictions signify active support for the continuing revolutionary struggle. Both *Barber's Tales* and *Alma-ata*, for instance, end with the protagonists taking an oath to the revolutionary movement, positioning their embrace of political commitment as the summit of their subjective development in the narrative. In *Desaparesidos* and *Lihis*, the scenes of intergenerational reconciliation signify the necessity to commemorate the legacies of fallen revolutionaries in the past, and acknowledge the continuing legitimacy of the struggle, which

younger generations are called on to continue. In *Sigwa*, the veteran NPA rebel stands proud before her former lover-comrade-turned-state bureaucrat, symbolising the decades-old vitality of the revolution that belies claims of its obsolescence made by apostates. In *Barikada* and *Gerilya*, the characters recover from traumatising experiences of tragic errors and disenchantment, and resolve to correct their ways to continue in the struggle. These narrative resolutions convey an optimistic conviction about the revolution.

In discussing how filmmakers and artists, through their fictions, communicate their support for a continuing national liberation project in the 21st century, I have also offered an account of the limits and possibilities of politically committed cultural work in the Philippines in the context of post-Marcos democratisation. By paying attention to the open terrain of cultural production, this study has contributed to understanding the complex interactions of artists with the structures of surveillance and gatekeeping in contemporary Philippine society. Given that they explore a contested and dangerous topic circumscribed by state counterinsurgency, artists take advantage of the democratic space that opened after the dictatorship, while confronting various structures of cultural gatekeeping and political regulation.

I have detailed how, amidst the formal restoration of democracy and the removal of many forms of dictatorial-era control over culture, the post-Marcos Philippine governments have continued to threaten creative freedoms through censorship and other forms of political containment implemented as part of state counterinsurgency. Nevertheless, artists persist in carving spaces to create and distribute their politically committed creations. Many of them participate in independent initiatives in film and literature, while continuing to interact with entities of gatekeeping like the state, the academe, and

private award-giving institutions for tactical gains. These works have also circulated in various platforms -- from the niche spaces of festival screenings to broader circuits of distribution like schools and universities, government offices, and the internet. Despite the presence of these opportunities to create and distribute their works, artists are subjected to forms of political containment -- from state censorship to surveillance and political harassment. By considering these experiences, I have painted a picture of the complex cultural politics and political culture in a formally yet limitedly democratised country, where artistic political agency continues to be hounded by various threats to freedoms, artistic and otherwise.

This study is therefore a contribution to the documentation of the complex process of making politically committed cultural work in a Third World country, particularly in the context of post-Cold War anti-communism. In recent years, under the Duterte administration, anti-communism has become more intensified in the Philippines, rendering more difficult the creation and distribution of political art, while amplifying the important role of NatDem fictions as forms of oppositional culture against state propaganda.

As I finish this thesis amidst the pandemic crisis in the country, and the deepening political contestations setting the stage for the national and local elections to be held in May 2022, the Philippine state's widespread anti-communist propaganda has intensified under the auspices of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). This agency was formed in 2018 as part of the Duterte government's "whole-of-nation" approach of "synchronizing the government's instrumentalities of power with the capabilities of private sector stakeholders" against the

communist insurgency.³ Appointed as one of the spokespersons in this task force was Brigadier General Antonio Parlade,⁴ the military officer who, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, claimed in 2018 that screenings of films about the Martial Law were part of the recruitment efforts of the communist movement.

The lavishly-funded NTF-ELCAC has since spearheaded a massive anti-communist propaganda campaign coursed through a range of platforms -- from social media, community seminars and fora to broadcast media -- in order to promote the view of the NatDem movement as a CTG (communist terrorist group). It has undertaken aggressive "red-tagging" of many individuals and organisations.⁵ Critics from various sectors have called for the abolition of the agency and the halting of the state's red-tagging campaign, but the agency has continued unabated.⁶ As I have stated in the Introduction, the signing of the Republic Act 11479 or the Anti-Terrorism Act, also known as the Terror Law, in 2020 also provides legislative backing to the Duterte administration's anti-communist campaign. This law, which broadens the definition of terrorism beyond combatant activities, has

³ 'About Us: National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict', *National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict*, accessed 2 November 2021, <https://www.ntfelcac.org/about>.

⁴ Katrina Domingo, 'NTF-ELCAC Retains Parlade as Spokesperson', *ABS-CBN News*, 10 May 2021, sec. News, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/05/10/21/ntf-elcac-retains-parlade-as-spokesperson>.

⁵ Many red-tagged activists have been harassed, detained and killed. 'Attacks, Red-Tagging of Activists in the Philippines Persist as UN Fails to Support Investigation', *Civicus*, 29 October 2020, <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/10/29/attacks-red-tagging-activists-philippines-persist-un-fails-support-investigation/>.

⁶ Ralph Lawrence G. Llemit, 'Group Calls for Abolition of NTF-Elcac Anew', *Sunstar*, 20 May 2021, sec. Davao, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph//article/1895241/Davao/Local-News/Group-calls-for-abolition-of-NTF-Elcac-anew>; 'After Two Years of Red-Tagging, Lies, and Rights Violations, NTF-ELCAC Should Be Defunded and Abolished — Karapatan', *Karapatan*, 4 December 2020, <https://www.karapatan.org/after+two+years+of+red+tagging+lies+and+rights+violation+s+ntf+elcac+should+be+defunded+and+abolished>.

received criticisms for advancing the institutionalisation of the state-sponsored crackdown on civil liberties and freedom of expression. Various groups have filed petitions to challenge the law's constitutionality.⁷

Cultural texts and practices are instrumental in the Duterte government's broad anti-communist campaign. In addition to Parlade's linking of Martial Law film screenings to communist recruitment (see Introduction), there have been various efforts mounted by the government to use artistic practices like films to demonise the NatDem movement, and communism in general. The PNP (Philippine National Police), for instance, has organised a student film festival in a region in Southern Philippines, enjoining high school students to create short films depicting the "terrorism" of the CPP-NPA.⁸ Police officers were also involved in a smear campaign against the fiction film *Liway* (2018), a biopic set in the Martial Law-era about a female NPA rebel imprisoned with her young son.⁹ Narratives of former rebels portraying terroristic images of the NatDem movement have also come out. A few months after the Terror Law was signed by Duterte, the Film Development Council of the Philippines released a documentary film entitled *Memoirs of a Teenage Rebel* (2020), which purportedly recounts the story of former rebels claiming to have experienced abuses within the movement.¹⁰

⁷ CNN Philippines Staff, '37 Petitions vs. Anti-Terrorism Law May Be Refiled Collectively, Says Solon', *CNN Philippines*, 29 October 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/10/29/anti-terrorism-law-petitions-collective-refiling-TRO-Lagman.html>.

⁸ Jennifer Gaitano, 'PNP Bares 1st Caraga Filmfest Winners', *Philippine Information Agency*, 9 September 2019, <https://pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1027003>.

⁹ Jeline Malasig, 'Director Questions PNP's Campaign against His Film in Anti-Insurgency Drive', *Interaksyon*, 9 October 2019, sec. Trends + Spotlights, <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/trends-spotlights/2019/10/09/156093/liway-director-pnp-anti-npa-campaign/>.

¹⁰ Robert Requentina, 'What You Need to Know about "Memoirs of A Teenage Rebel"', *Manila Bulletin*, 7 December 2020, sec. Entertainment,

Artists have been actively involved in contesting the widespread and lavishly-funded anti-communist campaign in the Philippines. Artists' groups have raised an outcry in response to the Terror Law, particularly pointing out the law's broad and vague definitions of terrorism, which include intent.¹¹ In an open letter signed by various artists' organisations, they expressed fears that "[a]s artists, we are vulnerable to the subjectivity and the impreciseness of this section. Our job, quite literally, is to incite. To trigger emotion and to question. To move. To mobilize. Our responsibility is to serve the truth, whether or not it is aligned or in accordance with the government's stance."¹² Aside from joining the petition to challenge the Constitutionality of the Anti-Terror Law in the Supreme Court, they have also mounted various activities, from online campaigns and fora, as well as mass protests that aim to discredit and contest NTF-ELCAC's pronouncements.

Speaking at a recent forum about the Martial Law-era arts and culture, director Joel Lamangan asserts how "[i]n times of great oppression and when you see the shamelessness of the leaders, the arts become stronger. Forms of art like theater, plays and visual arts become stronger."¹³ Indeed, in the context of these developments, NatDem fictions have become powerful weapons wielded against Duterte's anti-communist propaganda. By representing, making visible, and reflecting on, the complex dynamics of revolutionary experiences, these works convey the relevance of the NatDem

<https://mb.com.ph/2020/12/07/what-you-need-to-know-about-memoirs-of-a-teenage-rebel/>.

¹¹ Dominic Zinampan, 'ArtAsiaPacific: Philippine Artists Resist Anti Terror Law', *ArtAsiaPacific*, 17 July 2020, <http://artasiapacific.com/News/PhilippineArtistsResistAntiTerrorLaw>.

¹² 'Filipino Artists Unite to Fight New Anti-Terror Bill', *Artforum*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.artforum.com/news/filipino-artists-unite-to-fight-new-anti-terror-bill-83228>.

¹³ Vince Nonato, 'Why Philippine Cinema Flourished During Martial Law: Oppression Gives Life To The Arts, Say Filmmakers', *OneNews.Ph*, 21 September 2020, <https://www.onenews.ph/why-philippine-cinema-flourished-during-martial-law-oppression-gives-life-to-the-arts-say-filmmakers>.

movement's ongoing project of political resistance. Some of the texts that I have examined in the previous chapters have enjoyed renewed attention midway through the Duterte administration. Jun Lana shared that during Duterte's repeated threats of declaring military rule, *Barber's Tales'* narrative of anti-dictatorship resistance has become more resonant, and received invitations for screenings.¹⁴ In 2018, a decade after its original release, *Gerilya* was reprinted by Rebo, another independent publisher, introducing it to a new set of readers. Wilwayco also made the free download link to his novel available on Facebook, with a caption taking a swipe at, and questioning the credibility of, an allegedly former NPA rebel's claim during a Senate hearing that she was a "student by day and NPA by night."¹⁵ During the pandemic, some of the films examined in this thesis like *Sigwa* and *Alma-ata* have been screened in online events organised through both private and state-affiliated efforts, enabling more people to gain access to narratives that challenge the NTF-ELCAC's discourses on the NatDem movement.¹⁶

Narrative fictions conveyed in forms that fall outside this study's admittedly limited focus on feature-length films and novels have also been produced to challenge the state's demonisation of political dissent. Revolutionary experiences have been articulated and examined in narrative forms such as theatre plays, short fiction, and short films. These creative works deserve

¹⁴ Lana, Interview by the author.

¹⁵ Norman Wilwayco, 'Halatang Wala Kayong Alam Sa Mga NPA. Basa-Basa Rin Pag May Time', Facebook, 14 August 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/nwilwayco/posts/halatang-wala-kayong-alam-sa-mga-mpa-basa-basa-rin-pag-may-time/10156932763539915/>; Maila Ager, 'Ex-Rebel Confesses to Senate: "I Was Student by Day, NPA by Night"', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 14 August 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1153671/ex-rebel-confesses-to-senate-i-was-student-by-day-mpa-by-night>.

¹⁶ *Alma-ata*, for instance, was included in Cinema Centenario's virtual cinema line-up last year. *Sigwa* was screened at the online edition of the CCP Arthouse Cinema as part of its Martial Law commemoration program.

scholarly attention that could engage with the theoretical conceptualisation that I have formulated in this study.

The active presence of these fictions within the public sphere resonates with this study's acknowledgment of the potency of NatDem fictions to contest the state's anti-communist discourse, and construct a more complex and ultimately affirmative representation of the ongoing revolutionary struggle. In examining the dynamic experiential makings of this project of liberation, NatDem fictions, even and especially under conditions of intense political repression, imaginatively uphold the power of the living struggle to realise an emancipatory social order.

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