

# Phantom Limbs in the Body Politic: Filipinos in Foreign Cinema

Joel David

The Philippines's experience with its last foreign occupant, the US, resulted in an entire package of fraught "special relations" that, coupled with the country's problematic responses to the challenges of self-government, ultimately led to a global dispersal of the population, effectively turning the Philippines into the major Asian nation arguably most reliant on its citizens' overseas remittances. This paper takes the position that diasporic Filipinos, for a variety of reasons starting with the effectiveness of maintaining unintrusive presences in alien cultures (including the acceptance of menial positions), have possibly developed and have enabled others to perceive them as silent and discreet figures once they step into the circuits of globalized labor exchanges. Just as overseas Filipino characters have started being acknowledged in non-Philippine overseas film productions, their presences therein partake of this self-effacing configuration of global citizenship.

*Keywords:* discourse, OFW films, labor policy

Because of its historical and geographical circumstance, the Philippines had been the first Asian point of contact for European colonizers during their westward expansion across the Americas and into the Pacific. The Philippines's experience with its last foreign occupant, the US, resulted in an entire package of fraught "special relations" that, coupled with the country's problematic responses to the challenges of self-government, ultimately led to a global dispersal of the population, effectively turning the Philippines into the major Asian nation arguably most reliant on its citizens' overseas remittances. For this issue we take the position that diasporic Filipinos, for a variety of reasons starting with the effectiveness of maintaining unintrusive presences in alien cultures (including the acceptance of menial positions), have possibly developed and have enabled others to perceive them as silent and discreet figures once they step into the circuits of globalized labor exchanges. Just as overseas Filipino characters have started being acknowledged in non-Philippine overseas film productions, their presences therein partake of this self-effacing configuration of global citizenship.

Audiovisual media, starting with film, had arrived in the Philippines during the traumatic moment of transition between the defeated Spanish and the purportedly liberating American colonial occupants. The roughly century-and-score presence of film (assuming a historical continuity between its current digital form and its earlier celluloid incarnation), unlike the officials who introduced it, has remained and managed to play significant roles in various sociopolitical upheavals. More significant for the practice, recent developments in technological convergence and the introduction of film studies and training have allowed Filipinos heretofore unprecedented access to the medium, not just as consumers but also as creators.

The triumph of audiovisual media had a confirmation of sorts during the turn of the 1980s, which coincided with the peak years of martial rule (before the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos sealed its doom with the assassination of former Senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr. in 1983). An early '80s edition of the annual *Guinness Book of World Records*, in fact, discovered to everyone's surprise (when it used per-capita measurement, instead of the current absolute total) that Filipinos were the most active movie-going people in the world (McWhirter, 1983). The situation was more than mere accident: the Marcos dictatorship, in order to validate its claim to observing democratic processes, allowed cinema greater leeway than other media. The Marcos couple were in a sense star-struck figures, since Ferdinand Marcos won additional voters when a biographical picture of his alleged heroic deeds was supposedly censored (when in fact its exhibition permit was only delayed), and Imelda then-Romualdez had earlier screen-tested for Sampaguita Pictures (same outfit that produced Ferdinand's bio-pictures) before she left for Baguio and wound up married to Ferdinand shortly thereafter.

### **Continuing Contributions**

Hence one of the legacies of the Marcos dictatorship was the politicization of the Philippines's celebrity population: several artists participated in progressive democratization movements (just as a few, not surprisingly, opted to support the Marcoses), while political parties have since been eager to recruit showbiz personalities because of their inbuilt popularity and bands of loyal, often uncritical, followers. The daughters of the Marcoses as well as their successor, Corazon Aquino (Benigno's widow), became involved in film activity – Imee Marcos as producer and Kris Aquino as film and TV performer. More recently, two presidential elections, one in the 1990s and another in the 2000s, had the country's biggest male icons, Joseph Estrada and Fernando Poe Jr. respectively, participating as candidates, with Estrada winning and subsequently resigning.

Within the terms of the coverage of this paper, with politics left out, film remains a major Philippine activity even from the perspective of outsiders. Since the 1950s, when European film festivals looked toward Asia for fresh product, the Philippines was sending entries alongside Japan and India, albeit with less distinguished results. The martial-law period provided greater incentive for foreign-festival participation, since promoters at major events, including the Cannes Film Festival, found that playing on democratic nations' guilt went a long way in acquiring recognition for their new discoveries from less-privileged countries, many of which had been former colonies of Europe. The Philippines enjoyed a special position in this regard, since its most recent colonial occupant (and still-current neo-colonizer) was the US – a fact that enabled European events to criticize by association the continent's (and the world's) major rival, the US and its Hollywood film industry.

While several articles and book-length studies have focused on the Philippines' triumphs in the global festival circuit, scant attention has been paid until recently to another type of "Philippine" film presence: that of the country, in terms of its locales, people, and/or culture (including its languages) in what may be termed less-Filipino as well as non-Filipino cinema. Occasionally some attention may be focused on these types of productions, but the fact that the films had been made in the Philippines and/or featured Filipinos would turn out to be incidental to these titles' global reception – with the predictable exception of Filipino audiences. Only with the Best Director award at Cannes in 2009 for Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay* (2009) was the film's Philippine origin necessarily acknowledged; the Palm d'Or winner thirty years earlier, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), was also known as a Philippine-made film mainly by those who were aware of its manifold production problems despite the fact that its theme was the Viet Nam War. Another US film on the same topic, Oliver Stone's 1986 Best Oscar film winner *Platoon* (1986), was less known as a Philippine-made production, as were a number of other Viet Nam War movies as well as Oscar-recognized titles [e.g. Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982) as well as the sequel to David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), titled *Return from the River Kwai* (McLaglen, 1989)].

## Increasing Interest

The number of recent studies inspecting what we might provisionally label "Philippine cinema's global thrust" would include, in chronological order, a book, *Dream Factories of a Former Colony*, by José B. Capino (2010), which tackles Filipino films that look at American presence and influence in the Philippines; Bliss Cua Lim's (2012) article "American Pictures Made

by Filipinos,” which covers B-films made by Philippine producers and/or directors primarily for US drive-in release; and *Bamboo Gods and Bionic Boys*, based on its author Andrew Leavold’s (2008) dissertation proposal, that expands on Lim’s material by including films made in the Philippines by foreign sources intended for global distribution. This study would constitute the first step in complementing the aforementioned texts by focusing on something more elusive – the occasional (and increasingly insistent) appearance of any kind of reference to the Philippines in non-Philippine cinema.

The larger framework by which these types of work could be subsumed would be that of globalization, specifically the Philippines as having persisted, for virtually its entire modern existence, in an “always-already” globalized condition, proceeding from its formation, in contravention to indigenous Southeast Asian historical processes, as an artificially formed European-owned territory (the first in the region) and its colonial and arguably postcolonial designation as a nation without borders, through the emerging consensus among progressive intellectuals that a definitive sense of nationhood had been impossible to attain and might never be achievable (see Bello, Docena, de Guzman & Malig, 2004), culminating in the country’s uniquely near-exclusive reliance on labor export. Even Arjun Appadurai’s (2001) description of globalization as contemporarily perceived may be taken to represent the Philippines’ predicament from its inception as a nation:

The various flows we see – of objects, persons, images, and discourses – are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent. They are in what I have elsewhere called relations of disjuncture. By this I mean that the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies. Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations. Indeed, it is the disjunctures between the various vectors characterizing this world-in-motion that produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance. (pp. 5-6)

For all the admittedly overwhelming implications afforded by this insight, Appadurai (2001) points out a bright spot that provides a justification for proceeding with our present project: “If globalization is characterized by disjunctive flows that generate acute problems of social well-being, one

positive force that encourages an emancipatory politics...is the role of the imagination in social life” (p. 6). Although specifically addressing academics, his clarification of the challenges posed by globalization – the peculiarities of its optics, the filtering via area studies, and the nature of research activity – inform, on a basic level, the endeavor being undertaken by this study.

The Philippines’s stature as an “always-already” globalized country has meant, for the most part, that it has always been a globally available nation, both in the present sense that Filipinos regard themselves and are regarded by others as migration-ready citizens, and in the historical sense that the country is territorially “open” in allowing foreign intervention as well as in enabling foreign powers to solicit the country’s support for their expansionist causes. The possibly unprecedented success of US neocolonization in the Philippines may be attributed to a mutual minimalization of presences: the invisibility, on the one hand, of foreign manipulation, detectable only when one regards the relative success development policies in neighboring postcolonial territories vis-à-vis the Philippines’s observance of global corporate interests; and on the other hand, of the “silence” of the local response, in the sense that the ruling elite accepts its *comprador* (native manager) function, including the profits the said function provides, and relegates the underclass to serve foreign interests as pliant, versatile, long-suffering, essentially feminized workers.

## Process

The study is based on a database of non-Filipino films the researcher had been compiling since the early 1990s. Originally the list was intended to point in the direction of films that exemplified multiple-character narratives, but because of the focus on Philippine cinema, the foreign titles already acknowledged by foreign authors served to provide a background for earlier published studies. What emerged, which will be the primary organizing principle in this paper, was the need for a taxonomy of a wide range of film samples. These would range from the use of the Philippines (whether entirely or partially) as locale, to the appearance of one or more Filipino character(s), to any mention of the country. In certain instances the “emergence” of the Philippines would be entirely incidental, perceptible for example only to people who would recognize a native language or performer.

For the present paper, certain “typical” samples will have to be excluded, not because these would be predictable, but because the appearance of the Philippines would be precisely the point of the exercise and so would be subject to a more conscious handling of material by the filmmaker(s) – i.e., films about wars involving the US military, mostly set in World War II; similarly, films wherein the Philippines was meant to stand in for another

(actual or fictional) territory, usually Viet Nam or some anonymous exotic locale (as in the '60s *Blood Island* and '70s women-in-prison American exploitation films) will have to be the subject of another type of study, starting with the aforementioned papers by Bliss Cua Lim (2012) and Andrew Leavold (2008).

In effect, the films to be sampled either anticipate or recognize the current dispersal of Filipinos in pursuit of overseas employment. Using a reverse chronology in pursuit of genealogical investigation advocated by Michel Foucault (1977) in explicating a history of the present,<sup>1</sup> the study will dwell at some length on contemporary films depicting working-class Filipino workers, including women consigned to work in liminal capacities as domestic help or sex professionals. These texts will be subjected to a combination of casual (as opposed to close) reading, in order to situate the Filipino presence in the larger (foreign) narrative context, and structural analysis, to understand the function of the Filipino presence vis-à-vis the larger social and historical forces at play; examples of actual close readings of similar texts may be found in the other essays in this collection. Other relevant cinema-studies approaches, notably the auteur/genre approach advocated by *Cahiers du Cinéma* (see Comolli & Narboni, 1976), as well as queer-inflected gender criticism (see Kleinhans & Lesage, 1985), will also be deployed whenever necessary to enhance the study's interpretive efforts, with special attention to the issue of visibility (Wilton, 1995).

Hence the pursuit of Philippine presences in non-Philippine cinema will deploy a variety of strategies depending on the nature of the taxonomic category, including pre-internet investigation, especially forensic phonetics (or the attempt to draw evidence from spoken language, sometimes incidental to diegetic dialogue); deployment of a presence/absence binary rather than positive/negative images, premised on the assumption that a momentary imaging might have to be depicted in an offensive, inappropriate, and/or inaccurate manner in order to make an impression; basic empirical analyses; and a range of standard film approaches, including genre/auteur analysis, psychoanalysis (particularly gender criticism), and structuralist semiotics. The approach will not be exhaustive but rather selective, with samples selected on "best available so far" basis, inasmuch that further "better" examples may yet be produced or discovered.

## **Taxonomy**

Films set partially or entirely in (a country identified as) the Philippines. Samples of early cinema, originally called *actualities* (after the French term) and later described as "attractions" because of how they were regarded by their audiences, included scenes of the country as colonial territory. Early samples

such as Antonio Ramos's *Escenas Callejeras* (1898) depicted the arrival of modernization, if not the persistence of tradition or the inevitability of the exotic; later films, made by Americans led by Thomas Alva Edison (1899), who produced reenactments of scenes from the Philippine-American War as part of a series on the Spanish-American War, usually in distinctly non-Philippine settings and with non-Filipino performers (including African Americans to represent Filipinos). The technical crudeness of the medium tended to be matched by the presentation's theatricality, sentimentality, and pro-colonial slant. During the Classical Hollywood period, a prominent example would be Henry Hathaway's *The Real Glory* (1939), which recounts the efforts of US soldiers in training a native Filipino tribe to fight Muslim warriors.

In a sense, these actuality and early narrative images would be the predecessors of films produced during the Second World War (Table 1). The difference this time was that the medium (and its concomitant industry) was sufficiently developed so that the films could boast of stronger reality effects. Several heroicizing features, Hollywood as well as Filipino, presupposed the bravery and/or martyrdom of American and Filipino forces, alongside the persistent demonization of the invading Japanese. This imaging may be tied in with a so-far uninspected racial suppression of the East Asian ancestry of film performers during this period, with fair features ascribed to European origins as suggested by screen surnames; or, when the East Asian features are too pronounced, the performers get relegated to secondary roles such as villains or femmes fatales, or in less-respected "body" genres such as comedy (with the genre's biggest star, Dolphy, eschewing the use of his Chinese family name, in contradistinction to his descendants).

**Table 1.**

Examples of Foreign Films Set (in Whole or in Part) in the Philippines.

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Actualities (early attractions): 2 primary types	Pre-1939	US	Edison, Thomas et al.	
Real Glory, The	1939	US	Hathaway, Henry	Gary Cooper
Air Force	1943	US	Hawks, Howard	John Garfield
Bataan	1943	US	Garnett, Tay	Robert Taylor
Corregidor	1943	US	Nigh, William	

<b>Primary Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Primary Country</b>	<b>Filmmaker(s)</b>	<b>Star(s)</b>
December 7th - the Pearl Harbor Story	1943	US	Ford, John and Gregg Toland	Walter Huston
The Dawn of Freedom	1944	Japan	De Leon, Gerardo and Abe Yutaka	Fernando Poe, Leopoldo Salcedo, Carmen Rosales
Back to Bataan	1945	US	Dmytryk, Edward	John Wayne, Anthony Quinn
They Were Expendable	1945	US	Ford, John	Robert Montgomery, John Wayne
American Guerilla in the Philippines	1950	US	Lang, Fritz	Tyrone Power
No Place to Hide	1955	US	Shaftel, Josef	
Eddy Duchin Story, The	1956	US	Sydney, George	Tyrone Power, Kim Novak
Cavalry Command (Day of the Trumpet)	1958	US	Romero, Eddie	
Surrender - Hell!	1950	US	Barnwell, John	
Fires on the Plain	1959	Japan	Ichikawa, Kon	
Raiders of Leyte Gulf, The	1963	US	Romero, Eddie	Leopoldo Salcedo, Michael Parsons
Back Door to Hell	1964	US	Hellman, Monte	Jack Nicholson
Walls of Hell, The	1964	US	De Leon, Gerardo and Eddie Romero	FPJ, Michael Parsons
Ravagers, The	1965	US	Romero, Eddie	John Saxon, Roberto Arevalo, Michael Parsons
Impasse	1969	US	Benedict, Richard	Burt Reynolds
Stoney	1969	US	Davis, Wray	
MacArthur	1977	US	Sargent, Joseph	Gregory Peck
Women of Valor	1984	US	Kulik, Buzz	Susan Sarandon
Bataan Death March, The	2000	US	Martin, J.V.	
Bataan Death March	2003	Philippines	Jacob, Robin	
Death March of Bataan	2008	Philippines	Loeser, Rainer	

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Amigo	2010	US	Sayles, John	Joel Torre, Rio Locsin, Chris Cooper

The romantic appeal of nationalist narratives (once described with the pejorative term “jingoistic”) set in exotic locales may be seen as the most basic component in the furtherance of this made-in-the-Philippines trend, with post-war Philippines configured as open space for foreign treasure hunters, adventurers, gangsters, mad scientists, and several other self-aggrandizing characters banished from the center (usually Hollywood) because of their morally problematic stature. While these types of films may be recuperated as the presentation of varied types of *Otherness* from the neocolonial center, and (as mentioned earlier) are tackled in now-available studies, we venture to present what we may term an *Other of the Other*: two Japanese films set in the Philippines, one shot in the country during the war – i.e., Gerardo de Leon’s *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (1944) (see Figure 1), described by Japanese film scholar Abé Mark Nornes (1995) as “unquestionably one of the finest and most effective Japanese films from the Pacific War” (p. 67); and another, shot in Japan but representing the rout of the Japanese Imperial Army in the Visayas, Kon Ichikawa’s *Nobi* (1959), described by Pauline Kael (1965) as “quite possibly the best anti-war movie ever made” (p. 205).

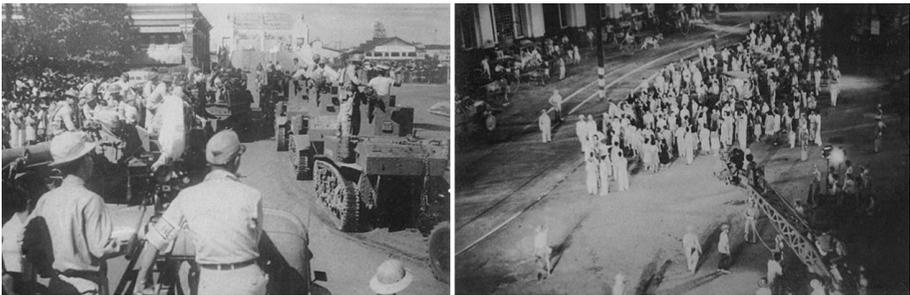


Figure 1. Scenes from the location shoot of *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Gerardo de Leon, 1944), also known as *Dawn of Freedom*, credited to Gerardo de Leon and Yutaka Abe. (Pictures courtesy of Pinoy Kollektor, used with permission)

Foreign films where one or more Filipino character(s) appear(s).

These titles, necessarily from the US, purport to reflect one or more of the following historical upheavals: the effects of American colonization or wars (anti-US resistance, anti-Japanese occupation, Cold War anti-insurgency and anti-terrorist) as capable of touching, as it were, the everyday affairs

of even the most ordinary US citizens; the spread of Filipinos as exported labor; and the rise in prominence and visibility of Filipino migrants and their (sometimes pure, sometimes mixed) descendants, following the deliberate reconceptualization of Asians as the US's model minority (see Klein, 2003); some of these films, especially contemporary ones, derive some plot issue or point from identifying the performer's nationality as Filipino, as in some of the films that feature Rob Schneider. A few other films (not confined to just the US) point to the increasing presence of Filipinos in foreign regions, notably (aside from North America) the Middle East and East Asia, including "prestige" (i.e., film-festival) projects from Japan and Korea (see Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
Examples of Films with Characters Identified as "Filipino"

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Actualities (early attractions): 2 primary types	Pre-1939	US	Edison, Thomas et al.	
Superclock	1975	US	Trikonis, Gus	Nancy Kwan
God of Killers	1981	Hong Kong	Hui, Ann	Chow Yun-Fat
I Am Blushing	1981	Sweden	Sjoman, Vilgot	Bibi Anderson, Bing Fabregas, Larry Hagman, Chanda Romero
Cinq et la peau	1982	France	Rissent, Pierre	Eiko Matsuda
No Way Out	1987	US	Donaldson, Roger	Kevin Costner, Gene Hackman, Sean Young
Signed: Lino Brocka	1987	US	Blackwood, Christian	
Dangerous Life, A	1988	Australia	Markowitz, Robert	
Days of Being Wild	1990	Hong Kong	Wong Kar-Wai	Leslie Cheung, Maggie Cheung, Andy Lau
Mission Manila	1990	US	Mackenzie, Peter M.	
Goodbye America	1990	US	Notz, Thierry	James Brolin, Michael Yoirk
Gray's Anatomy	1996	US	Soderbergh, Steven	

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
The Suspect	1998	US	Lam, Ringo	
The Guys from Paradise (The Hell of Manila - German Title)	2000	Japan	Miike, Takashi	
Manila	2000	Germany	Karmakar, Romuald	
Tazza, The High Rollers	2006	Korea	Choi Dong- Hoon	
I Come with the Rain	2009	Hong Kong	Tranh Anh Hung	Josh Hartnett
The Bourne Legacy	2012	US	Gilroy, Tony	Jeremy Renner, Rachel Weisz
Tropical Manila	2012	Korea	Lee Sang-woo	Jerald de Vera, Kim Su-Nam, Maries Chanel Rebucas

Films set abroad that mention the Philippines or any Filipino(s).

The fact that the Philippines or its people has to be mentioned denotes that these films would be set during the sound era, although it might still be possible to rediscover silent films that also mention the country in its intertitle(s). Several instances of these may be found in Classical Hollywood and even post-Classical Hollywood films set in the US during the World War II period, where a character mentions serving (as military personnel) in the Philippines, and presume that the audience would fully understand the reference. These types of films are capable of generating intense cross-cultural studies (Campos, 2013; David, 2013; & Yu, 2013) proceeding from but not confined to the positive-images debate (Artel & Wengraf, 1978) in cultural activism. All the films focus on the migrant Filipino experience (see Table 3), with one of them, Lee Han's *Wandeugi* (2011), taking the next step, so to speak, by having as its title character a first-generation Filipino Korean who discovers that his initially estranged mother is a migrant wife. Another exceptional example of a US film interfacing with Philippine history is Richard Benjamin's *My Favorite Year* (1982), where the migrant Filipino character, a Brooklyn-based boxer named Rookie Carroca, is married (presumably to acquire US citizenship) to the Jewish mother of the narrator; Carroca is played by the late Ramon Sison (Figure 2), a medical doctor and jazz musician, who started out in films playing a medical doctor to the title character in Joseph Sargent's *MacArthur* (1977), befitting his real-life appointment as US Army Colonel. Beyond the irony of Sison playing a comic

boxer who cooks the family's pet parrot, his familial circumstance provides the more profound irony of his being the older brother of Communist Party of the Philippines founding chair, Jose Ma. Sison.



Figure 2. Ramon Sison plays Rookie Carroca in Richard Benjamin's *My Favorite Year* (1982): the character welcomes Allan Swann (Peter O'Toole) to his home (left photo) but gets crowded out (right photo) when Swann charms Carroca's Jewish wife (Lainie Cazan), as their stepson (Mark Linn-Baker), who narrates the story, and Uncle Morty (Lou Jacobi), witness how Swann overwhelms not just the family but the entire neighborhood with his movie-star demeanor. (Left photo – publicity still from MGM & Brookfilms; right photo – screen capture by the author)

**Table 3.**

Examples of Foreign-Set Films That Mention the Philippines (the Country or Its People).

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Operation Petticoat	1959	US	Edwards, Blake	Cary Grant, Tony Curtis
Reflections in a Golden Eye	1967	US	Huston, John	Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor
Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, The	1974	Germany	Herzog, Werner	Bruno S.
My Favorite Year	1982	US	Benjamin, Richard	Peter O'Toole
Money Pit, The	1986	US	Benjamin Richard	Tom Hanks
Her Alibi	1989	US	Beresford, Bruce	Tom Selleck
All Under the Moon	1993	Japan	Sai Yoichi	Ruby Moreno
Roosters	1993	US	Young, Robert M.	Edward James Olmos, Sonia Brags
Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, The	1994	Australia	Eliot, Stephen	Guy Pearce, Terence Stamp, Julia Cortez

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
C'est la vie, mon cheri	1994	Hong Kong	Yee Derek	Anita Yuen, Carina Lau
Stem: The Turkish Bath	1997	Turkey	Ozpetek, Ferzan	
The Versace Murder	1998	US	Golan, Menahem	Franco Nero
Strangers with Candy, Season 1	1999	US	Lauer, Peter	Amy Sedaris, Stephen Colbert, Orlando Pabotoy (as Orlando Pinatubo)
A Bittersweet Life	2005	Korea	Kim Jee-won	Lee Byung-hun
Maid, The	2005	Singapore	Tong, Kelvin	Alessandra de Rossi
Paper Dolls	2006	Israel	Heymann, Tomer	
Jellyfish	2007	Israel	Keret, Etgar and Sheera Geffen	Ma-nenita De Latorre
Mona, Singapore Escort	2007	Singapore	Morel, Jowee	Iza Calzado
Mammoth	2009	US	Moodysson, Lukas	Gael Garcia Bernal, Michelle Williams, Marife Necesito
Thirst	2009	Korea	Park Chan-wook	Song Kang-ho, Mercedes Cabral
Wandeugi	2011	Korea	Lee Han	Kim Yun-seok, Ah In Yoo, Jasmine Lee
Leona Calderon	2012	England	Morel, Jowee	Virginia McKenna, Junix Inocian, Pilar Pilapil
The Taste of Money	2012	Korea	Im Sang-soo	Baek Yun-shik, Maui Taylor

Interestingly, a number of US films are able to assume that the audience will be able to understand what a Filipino or the Philippines is, without any need to depict someone identified as such. In Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve* (1941), for example, the romantic couple make a toast "to Manila" – where it might be presumed they refer to the country's (alongside the US

Army's) resistance to Japanese occupation. In Pedro Almodóvar's *La ley del deseo* (1987), made just after the peaceful anti-dictatorship revolt of February 1986, the main characters opt to go to a café that just happens to have the name "Manila" (reminiscent of the Spanish chocolate bar named Filipino). An even more unusual case is Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* (1962), where the Philippines is not mentioned at all, and the title is meant to refer to "A French kids' wish-granting game [where] 'philippine' means 'sweetheart'" (Greenspun, 1973). Several other types of films, set after World War II, situate the country as a destination for exoticism, sex tourism, small or illegal business, and/or retirement. Table 4 provides a sampling of the aforementioned possible range of titles, where the characters refer to the Philippines and/or Filipinos but the narrative does not confirm the presence of anyone from the Philippines.

**Table 4.**

Examples of Foreign-Set Films That Mention the Philippines with Either No or Indirect Depiction.

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Lady Eve, The	1941	US	Sturges, Preston	Barbara Stanwyck, Henry Fonda
Letter to Three Wives, A	1949	US	Mankiewicz, Joseph L.	Kirk Douglas, Joe Bautista
Incredible Shrinking Man, The	1957	US	Arnold, Jack	
Adieu Philippine	1962	France	Rozier, Jacques	
Jaws	1975	US	Spielberg, Steven	Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss
"Crocodile" Dundee	1986	Australia	Faiman, Peter	Paul Hogan
Law of Desire	1987	Spain	Almodovar, Pedro	Antonio Banderas, Carmen Maura
Sea of Love	1989	US	Becker, Harold	Al Pacino, Ellen Barkin
Passion Fish	1992	US	Sayles, John	
Sum of Us, The	1994	Australia	Burton, Geoff and Kevin Dowling	Russell Crowe

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Mars Attacks!	1996	US	Burton, Tim	Jack Nicholson, Michael J. Fox
Grosse Pointe Blank	1997	US	Armitage, George	John Cusack, Minnie Driver
8MM	1999	US	Schumacher, Joel	Nicolas Cage, Joaquin Phoenix
Man on the Moon	1999	US	Forman, Milos	Jim Carrey
Training Day	2001	US	Fuqua, Antoine	Denzel Washington, Ethan Hawke
Anger Management	2003	US	Segal, Peter	Jack Nicholson, Adam Sandler
Mr. & Mrs. Smith	2005	US	Liman, Doug	Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt
Walk the Line	2005	US	Mangold, James	Reese Witherspoon, Joaquin Phoenix

Films shot entirely or partly in the Philippines, with the country anonymized. As previously mentioned, this area is under intensive coverage from a current research project by Andrew Leavold (2012), with useful groundwork laid by Bliss Cua Lim (2012). This area of practice was responsible for two undercurrents in American cinema, essentially sub-genres (Table 5). The first, under horror, comprised the “Blood Island” films initiated by Gerardo de Leon’s *Terror Is a Man* (1959), which had the alternate title (and source of the trend’s name) *Creature from Blood Island*; Robert Sklar (1975) once postulated that because whenever wars were in progress the US government would pressure Hollywood to assist in the war effort, “echoes and shadows” (p. 337) of the Viet Nam conflict could only be provided in specifically this realm of practice. The other trend, under action adventure (with an overlap with soft-core pornography) was what in a sense the Blood Island series transmuted into – penal-colony women-in-prison (WIP) exploitation films; curiously, several of these, including Eddie Romero’s *Black Mama, White Mama* (1973), launched the career of Pam Grier (a mixed-race performer with Filipino ancestry), the biggest female star in a mainland-US trend, Blaxploitation (see Figure 3). These types of films necessarily avoided identifying the Philippines as any specific place, except possibly in publicity materials.<sup>2</sup>

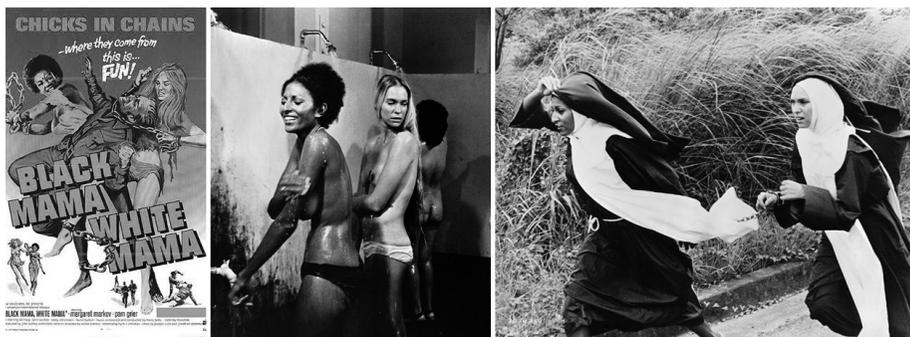


Figure 3. Eddie Romero's *Black Mama, White Mama* (1973) features Pam Grier and Margaret Markov as a racially mixed odd couple, thrown in women's prison and initially squabbling because of a difference in principle, with the black woman intent on pulling off a get-rich-quick scheme and the white woman seeking to fulfill her revolutionary ideals; the opportunity to escape forces them to rely on each other and eventually change each other for the better. (Theatrical poster and publicity stills from AIP & Four Associates)

**Table 5.**

Examples of Films with the Philippines Representing an Anonymous Locale.

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Terror Is a Man	1959	Philippines	De Leon, Gerardo	
Blood Drinkers, The (Kulay Dugo ang Gabi)	1964	Philippines	De Leon, Gerardo	Amalia Fuentes
Blood of the Vampires (Ibulong mo sa Hangin)	1966	Philippines	De Leon, Gerardo	Amalia Fuentes
Brides of Blood	1968	Philippines	De Leon, Gerardo and Eddie Romero	John Ashley
Mad Doctor of Blood Island	1968	US	De Leon, Gerardo and Eddie Romero	John Ashley
Beast of Blood	1971	US	Romero, Eddie	John Ashley
Beast of the Yellow Night	1971	US	Romero, Eddie	John Ashley
Big Doll House, The	1971	US	Hill, Jack	Pam Grier
Women in Cages	1971	US	De Leon, Gerardo	
Big Bird Cage, The	1972	US	Hill, Jack	Pam Grier
Daughters of Satan	1972	US	Morse, Hollingsworth	Tom Selleck

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Superbeast	1972	US	Schenck, George	
Beyond Atlantis	1973	US	Romero, Eddie	John Ashley
Black Mama, White Mama	1973	US	Romero, Eddie	Pam Grier
Twilight People	1973	US	Romero, Eddie	John Ashley
Woman Hunt, The	1973	US	Romero, Eddie	John Ashley
Savage Sisters	1974	US	Romero, Eddie	Rosanna Ortiz
TNT Jackson	1974	US	Santiago, Cirio H.	
Jungle Holocaust	1977	Italy	Deodato, Ruggero	
Night Games	1980	France	Vadim, Roger	
Story of the Dolls, The	1984	Germany	Hubert, Frank	Tetchie Agbayani
Platoon	1986	US	Stone, Oliver	Charlie Sheen, Johnny Depp
Whiteforce	1988	Australia	Romero, Eddie	
DNA	1997	US	Mesa, William	Jürgen Prochnow
Island of the Living Dead	2006	Italy	Mattei, Bruno	

Several other productions followed the US's (literal) exploitation trend and set their production locales in the Philippines. With the end of the Viet Nam War, or "after the Communist victory, it became possible [for Americans] to look back" (Sklar, 1975, p. 337); but with Viet Nam then closed to relations with the US, various other Southeast Asian countries had to stand in for the country, starting with the Philippines (see Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* [1979]). Apart from Viet Nam, the other countries and territories that the Philippines was made to represent included Indonesia, Thailand, East Timor, North Korea, Panama, and the Amazon jungle (see Table 6).

**Table 6.**  
Examples of Films with the Philippines Representing another Locale.

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Represented Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Boys in Company C, The	1978	US	Viet Nam	Furie, Sidney J.	Andrew Stevens
Apocalypse Now	1979	US	Viet Nam	Coppola, Francis Ford	Marlon Brando, Charlie Sheen
Children of An Lac, The	1980	US	Viet Nam	Moxey, John Llewellyn	Shirley Jones
Year of Living Dangerously	1982	Australia	Indonesia	Weir, Peter	Mel Gibson, Sigourney Weaver, Linda Hunt
Brothers	1982	Australia	East Timor	Bourke, Terry	
Intrusion Cambodia	1983	US	Cambodia	Gallard, Jun	
Purple Hearts	1984	US	Viet Nam	Furie, Sidney J.	Ken Wahl, Cheryl Ladd
Platoon	1986	US	Viet Nam	Stone, Oliver	Charlie Sheen, Johnny Depp
Return from the River Kwai	1989	US	Thailand	McLaglen, Andrew V.	Timothy Bottoms
Indio	1988	Italy	Amazon	Margheriti, Antonio	Brian Dennehy
Indio 2 (The Revolt)	1991	Italy	Amazon	Margheriti, Antonio	
Dean Men Can't Dance	1997	US	North Korea	Anderson, Stephen Milburn	Michael Biehn
DNA	1997	US	Malaysia	Mesa, William	Jürgen Prochnow
Brokedown Palace	1999	US	Thailand	Kaplan, Jonathan	Claire Danes
Noriega: God's Favorite	2006	US	Panama	Spottiswoode, Roger	Bob Hoskins
My Lai Four	2006	Italy	Viet Nam	Bartola, Paolo	

Foreign films with performers of Filipino descent passing as non-Filipinos. The recent rediscovery of Elena Jurado, “a young Filipina who appeared in a few silent films in America in the early 1920s and sued a motion picture company in San Francisco, and then vanished” (Pascual, 2014, n.p.), indicates how early Filipino talent sought opportunities in Hollywood as well as how early American film audiences were curious about people from the country that their government had occupied. Jurado in fact is currently listed at the Internet Movie Database as having appeared in two early sound films by directors who were subsequently recuperated by French critics: Raoul Walsh in *What Price Glory* (1926) and Howard Hawks in *A Girl in Every Port* (1928). An even more famous female performer, Dimples Cooper, was better known for her real-life role as unruly mistress of Douglas MacArthur (Manchester, 1978), rather than the few Hollywood productions where she appeared uncredited. More contemporary and still-active performers, owing to the increased professionalism in talent management, have tended to have better exposure and longevity than the earlier mentioned ones (see Table 7).

**Table 7.**

Examples of Films with Filipino Performers who Play Non-Filipino Characters.

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
What Price Glory	1926	US	Raoul Walsh	Edmund Lowe, Victor McLaglen, Dolores del Rio, Elena Jurado
A Girl in Every Port	1928	US	Howard Hawks	Victor McLaglen, Robert Armstrong, Louise Brooks, Elena Jurado
West Side Story	1961	US	Wise, Robert and Jerome Robbins	Natalie Wood, Rita Moreno, Jose de Vega
Blue Hawaii	1961	US	Taurog, Norman	Elvis Presley, Jose de Vega
Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!	1965	US	Meyer, Russ	Tara Sutana
Emerald Forest, The	1985	US	Boorman, John	Meg Foster, Tetchie Agbayani

Primary Title	Year	Primary Country	Filmmaker(s)	Star(s)
Gymkata	1985	US	Clouse, Robert	Tetchie Agbayani
Descent, The	2005	England	Marshall, Neil	Natalie Mendoza
Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	2011	US	Marshall, Rob	Johnny Depp, Penelope Cruz, Daphne Joy, Michael Rosales

Foreign films where a Philippine language can be heard but is not identified. At this time, only two foreign productions can be confirmed as containing a Philippine language, specifically Tagalog, without the narrative identifying the language, much less its country of origin. The first, William Wyler's *The Letter* (1940), is an adaptation of a play by W. Somerset Maugham; the action takes place during the colonial period in a British Malaya plantation and subsequently moves to Singapore for a trial sequence. The crime that precipitates the investigation and said trial is committed at the beginning of the narrative, when a married white woman (played by Bette Davis) shoots a white man (later disclosed as her lover, who had left her for a "Eurasian," actually highly Orientalized, woman) late in the evening. The awakened coolies congregate around the body and whisper among themselves, but in fact can be heard to be saying "Ano'ng nangyari? May binaril. Patay na yata" [What happened? Someone was shot. He must be dead already]. The other film, made 65 years later but, like the earlier one, co-produced by Warner Bros., is Francis Lawrence's *Constantine* (2005), where a demon-possessed woman utters "*Papatayin natin sila!*" [We'll kill them all!] prior to being exorcised by the title character, played by Keanu Reeves; apparently the director had intended a different line to be spoken and wanted to underline the fact that one of the performers, Jhoanna Trias, was a Filipina ("Keanu Reeves Hired Me," 2005).

These cases resemble that of a film whose narrative is set in neighboring Indonesia but whose locales and native performers are familiar to Filipino audiences – *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Weir, 1982). In this instance the Indonesian characters are supposed to, and do, speak in untranslated Bahasa, particularly during exchanges with the major (Western) characters. But in frenzied crowd scenes, the characters shout distinctly in Tagalog. The discrepancy would be apparent only to fluent speakers of either language, thus playing into the standard assumption that Other peoples tend to sound (as well as look) alike to those who are privileged in relation to them.

## Preliminary Observations

While acquiescing to the caveat that any conclusions based on the preceding examples may be altered by further discoveries or developments, it would still be instructive to determine for the moment certain basic trends. Table 8 lists the numbers of films from Tables 1 through 7 according to decades these were produced and released, from the 1930s to the early 2010s. Although the US leads the rest of the world in the production of films that (at the very least) touch on the Philippines, the most active decades were the 1930s, when the Philippines was newly pacified colonial territory, and the 1970s, when it lent itself to representing (apart from itself) Viet Nam, then the US's most recent expansionist attempt.

**Table 8.**

Decadal Frequencies of Foreign Films Listed According to Country of Origin.

1930s	US (20 films)
1940s	US (9); Japan (1)
1950s	US (7); Japan (1)
1960s	US (11); France (1?)
1970s	US (18); France & Italy (1 ea.)
1980s	US (13); Australia (5); France, Germany, HK, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK (1 ea.)
1990s	US (16); Australia (2); HK, Italy, Japan, Turkey (1 ea.)
2000s	US (8); Korea, Israel, Italy, Singapore (2 ea.); Germany, HK, Japan, UK (1 ea.)
2010s	US, Korea (3 ea.); UK (1)

Of more than incidental significance would be the other countries that also paid attention, as it were, to the Philippines. During the World War II and early Cold War decades, it was (understandably) Japan, which regarded itself as the “Co-Prosperity Sphere’s” rightful ally, asserting its vision by displacing the Western powers in the East and Southeast Asian region. In the 1960s, France had its otherwise unrelated *Adieu Philippine* New Wave title, but by the 1970s onward, various other countries were taking the cue from the profitability of American B-movie productions made in the Philippines, encouraged by the incentives provided by the Marcos dictatorship and the subsequent interest in the people-power phenomenon. By the current millennium, foreign countries did not have to shoot film projects in the Philippines in order to

feature Filipino characters or themes, since the population had become increasingly diasporic. Equally as enthusiastic as the US during the current decade, for example, is Korea – which had displaced Japan as the source of the most number of visitors (as well as migrants) to the Philippines.

A related observation would be the participation of so-called auteurs, or major players in US and global film practice (Table 9). Again, the listing is necessarily casual and incomplete, but it nevertheless enables the country to claim to being one of the most active in terms of attracting Western talent, outside of the Western (i.e., non-Atlantic) hemisphere. As mentioned earlier, the Philippines in fact had taken a hand in propagating at least two US film trends, the “Blood Island” horror films of the 1960s and the women-in-prison-islands films of the early 1970s; each trend in turn influenced two mainland film movements – the Viet Nam War films in the first case, and the blaxploitation films in the second case. The patterns in the imaging of the Philippines had undertaken at least three perceptible (and historically determined) shifts on three levels: from site of peril to source of assistance; from colonial to global (if not Asian); and from identifiability to increasing spectrality via the OFW phenomenon.

**Table 9.**

World Cinema Auteurs (Directors and Performers) who Participated in Film Productions in the Philippines and/or Involving Filipinos.

Directors	Actors
Fritz Lang Francis Coppola Ann Hui Oliver Stone Roger Corman Jonathan Demme John Sayles Vilgot Sjoman Peter Weir	John Ashley Tom Selleck Timothy Bottoms Marlon Brando Chris Cooper Pam Grier John Saxon Martin & Charlie Sheen

**Problematizations & Possibilities**

The always-already globalized nature of the Philippines’ historical experience may be regarded as a source of complications that require their own specific measures. In terms of the contemporary boom in so-called independent digital production, we can bring up what may be termed “foreign attraction,” or the tendency of Filipino talents to appeal to foreign venues rather than to local audiences – a strategy that was once essential during the period of martial-law dictatorship, since local artists could use

foreign acclaim to legitimize the screening of films considered critical of the regime and/or the system it represented. The example or support of visiting foreign film practitioners encouraged this willingness (or eagerness) to submit local product to foreign festivals, but with the dismantling of most dictatorial systems of oppression, the “enemy” of local filmmakers has been reconfigured, from government functionaries who seek to implement politically expedient policies aimed at maximizing the positive images of people in power, to distribution and exhibition monopolists allegedly concerned with maximizing the profits that only mainstream productions could guarantee; in both instances, the local audience is the sector deprived of an opportunity to be provided with a wider range of available products. In fact the current “foreign attraction” trend is more worrisome, since several of the “indie” practitioners present themselves as talents rejected by their own people, in effect slandering a population unable to make its preferences and defenses better known and understood.

Cultural institutions similarly have the potential to contribute positively to this state of affairs. The government’s self-imposed limits (duly observed in academic institutions) proceed from the standard high-art and pro-literary disavowal, if not condemnation, of marginal products, including B-films and other products generally categorized as trash or detritus. Concomitant with this is the relative absence of contextualization in local exhibition, with analogue- or digital-media commentary available primarily to young middle-class audience members. One consequence of this lack in film-culture orientation is the absence of negative imaging in foreign film-texts – presumably a positive consequence of the cultural elite’s abhorrence of “bad” depictions of the Philippines and Filipinos. This is problematic and related to the problem regarding marginalized products, which have a tendency to present a wider variety of images, positive and/or negative.

These problems may be affected, though not necessarily solved, by certain observable trends in film production. Because of the increasing affordability of filmmaking equipment, more and more film-texts can be produced; also, the increasing accessibility of the worldwide web means that, along with the expected complaints about piracy, films can be uploaded and made available without having to go through the difficult process of commercial distribution. In order to prepare the audience for an appreciation of a wider range of possibilities, new film historiography should be promoted, of the type that can tackle history from below, overseas history, history of images, narratives of the marginalized, etc. Finally, elite institutions in government, education, and media can be challenged to develop, if possible, a national aesthetics, in order to provide a missing dimension whenever the idea of “Philippine cinema” is advanced.

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## End Notes

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[1] In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault (1977) called for a “search for descent,” which he defined as “not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (p. 147).

[2] Several references to WIP films acknowledge the primacy of Philippine-set films, including a series made by Roger Corman (see Schubart [2007], p. 327, footnote 6 for Chapter 1). Publicity material for Stephanie Rothman’s *Terminal Island* (1973) – which came out later in the same year as *Black Mama, White Mama* (1973) and featured Tom Selleck, who had by then already starred in another Philippine-shot movie, Hollingsworth Morse’s *Daughters of Satan* (1972) – was in fact highly reminiscent of *Black Mama, White Mama* (see Figure 4). [Thanks to Brecht Andersch for mentioning Stephanie Rothman and *Terminal Island*.]



Figure 4. Comparison of publicity materials for *Black Mama, White Mama* (Eddie Romero, 1973) and *Terminal Island* (Stephanie Rothman, 1973).

**JOEL DAVID** is Professor for Cultural Studies at Inha University in Incheon, Korea. He is the author of a number of books and articles on Philippine cinema, now archived at his Amateurish! blog (<http://amateurish.com>). He was also conference coordinator and proceedings editor of the Whither the Orient event held in Gwangju, Korea in 2006, and was founding Director of the University of the Philippines Film Institute (corresponding author: [joelsky2000@yahoo.com](mailto:joelsky2000@yahoo.com)).