

Social advocacy cinema: The mode of production by alternative multimedia collectives

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Abstract

Alternative multimedia collectives in the Philippines advocate for social change on behalf of the marginalized sectors of society by producing, distributing, and exhibiting social advocacy cinema and other audiovisual productions. They creatively utilize film in various forms as a tool for social advocacy by adhering to the theory and praxis of alternative cinema that counters the dominant ideology, hegemony, and culture of mainstream media and commercial filmmaking. Anchored in the framework of small-scale, collective, and political filmmaking, this paper examines the mode of production of alternative multimedia collectives such as Kodao Productions, Tudla Productions, Mayday Multimedia, Film Weekly, Southern Tagalog Exposure, and The Breakaway Media, to name a few, that emerged and active between 2000 to 2019, or from Estrada to Duterte regime.

Keywords: alternative cinema, social advocacy cinema, political films, alternative media, mode of production

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Introduction

The social advocacy films produced and screened by the alternative multimedia collectives, like the dominant system of film productions in the Philippines, are also comprised of their own economic and social components. No matter how noble their purposes are in advocating human rights and social change, they still need to undergo a process—production, distribution, and exhibition—which requires funds, workforce, labor, audience reach, and all other elements of the mode of film practice distinct from both mainstream and independent cinema.

In the context of the research topic of this paper, the mode of production in cinema is an analysis of “the relations in its work process, its means of production, the financing of its films, its conception of quality films, and its system of consumption” (Bordwell, Staiger, & Thompson, 1985, p. 555). It is no secret that more than an art form, filmmaking is also an industry that adheres to the practice of business affected by economic conditions. “It must be stressed that no film has ever been created,” say Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985) in *Film History: Theory and Practice*, “outside of an economic context” (p. 132). From Hollywood cinema to local mainstream and independent filmmaking, those people who own the means of production would not shell out an enormous amount of money to produce any film without expecting a return of investments. Film for them is a commodity that can be created to sell and acquire profit. Social advocacy cinema, however, seeks to challenge the notion that film is a product of which the primal motivation is in pursuit of profit.

Social advocacy cinema in this study refers to the subgenre of alternative cinema in various forms (e.g., short film, documentary, animation, experimental, avant-garde, music video, and other works in video) that progressively and politically present social issues (e.g., demolition and eviction from residences of urban poor community; labor issues such as contractualization and illegal dismissal of workers; land grabbing by private sectors; forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings; children and women abuse; gender inequality; and environmental degradation) based on the narratives of the marginalized and subaltern sectors of society mostly composed of the people from the lower brackets of the socioeconomic divide (e.g., urban poor community; poor working class; peasant farmers; indigenous peoples; overseas Filipino workers; children and youth; women sector; and victims of all forms of oppression and injustice) which aim to advocate a course of action or a solution towards the desired social change by utilizing “cinema as ideological tool to reflect, criticize, or provoke issues which have political relevance” (Deocampo, 1986, p. 4). Notable film scholars and critics call this specific type of film as either *political films* (Tolentino,

2009; Tolentino, 2016) and *Sineng Bayan* (People's Cinema) (Roque, 2018) which objectives "are therefore political: consciousness-raising towards the progressive analysis of issues affecting the nation, film as tool to mobilize people to act on these issues, and films to organize individuals to the cause of the movement as active members" (Tolentino, 2009, para. 2).

To further emphasize social advocacy cinema as a subgenre of alternative cinema, alternative filmmaking refers to a practice that deviates from the hegemonic mode of production, storytelling, and aesthetics that are distinct from mainstream (Deocampo, 1994) and independent films that are intended for niche art festival market (Tolentino, 2016). Nick Deocampo, a filmmaker, film historian, and "the primary exponent of alternative film practice in the Philippines" (David, 1998, p. 107), states that alternative cinema must be recognized as the "other" cinema or "counter-cinema" which are mostly "made without capitalization, machinery, and influence found in the making of commercial films" (Deocampo, 1994, p. 58). Supported by Rolando Tolentino (2016) through his essay *Politikal na Filmmaking* published in the book *Indie Cinema at mga Sanaysay sa Topograpiya ng Pelikula ng Filipinas*, the films produced by what he called political film collectives serve as the real independent filmmaking because they abide by a mode of production and reception of film that do not depend on film festival circuit or cultural institutions to create films (p. 226).

The most radical and progressive practitioners of social advocacy cinema within the civil society sector in the country are the alternative multimedia collectives (fig. 1). The nomenclature is derived from the notions of *alternative* (counter-thesis to the dominant or conventional such as the traditional business norms of the mainstream media institutions and their profit-ridden entertainment), *multimedia* (using a variety of artistic or communicative media), and *collective* (reflecting its nature as a cooperative enterprise). Examples of the alternative multimedia collectives that emerged between 2000 to 2016 are Metro Manila-based Kodao Productions (est. 2001); Tudla Productions (est. 2003); Mayday Multimedia (est. 2004); PinoyMedia Center (est. 2010); Film Weekly (est. 2016); and RESBAK or RESpond and Break the silence Against the Killings (est. 2016). Equally significant are the independent media groups in neighboring provinces like Southern Tagalog Exposure (est. 2001) and Quezon Reels (est. 2013), both from Southern Luzon; Kumpay Productions (est. 2016, Cordillera); Aninaw Productions (est. 2008, Cebu); Eastern Vista (est. 2003, Tacloban); Sine Panayanon (est. 2011, Iloilo City); and Davao-based Kilab Multimedia (est. 2011) and The Breakaway Media (est. 2016), among others.

As of this writing, the above-mentioned collectives are still active in serving the people. They are cause-oriented and social advocacy groups



Fig. 1. Examples of active Alternative Multimedia Collectives in the Philippines.

composed of volunteer artists, cultural workers, activists, filmmakers, journalists, media practitioners, students, and a network of empowered generations who utilize traditional media (e.g., newspapers and magazines, community radio, newsreels, and now includes websites and social media) and artistic productions (e.g., photography, videos, films, music, visual arts, theatre, and literature) to address social issues that need attention from the people. Throughout this study, they are treated as important social actors in the emergence of social advocacy-themed audiovisual works specifically the production of *social advocacy cinema* (Cabasal, 2019).

In this regard, this article's objective is to explore and examine how social advocacy cinema, from the hands of selected alternative multimedia collectives namely Kodao Productions, Tudla Production, Mayday Multimedia, Film Weekly, Southern Tagalog Exposure, Sine Panayanon, and The Breakaway Media, deals with the mode of production outside the confines of the studio system from 2000 to 2019. The study provides answers to the following research questions: (a) How do the above-mentioned alternative multimedia collectives generate capital to fund their production, distribution, and exhibition of social advocacy cinema? (b) How do they assemble human resources to exert labor in their film advocacy projects? (c) How do social advocacy films undergo the production processes: from preproduction, principal photography, to postproduction stage? (d) When already produced, how are these films distributed and exhibited? (e) Lastly, what are the challenges and constraints that they encounter and overcome along the process?

Qualitative in research design, the information and data were gathered and substantiated from in-depth interviews with the advocate-filmmakers and staff of the above-mentioned multimedia collectives: Raymund Villanueva (Deputy Director, Kodao Productions); Lady Ann Salem (Executive Director, Tudla Productions); Erika Cruz (Filmmaker, Tudla

Productions), Lordiane Odulio (Administrator, Mayday Multimedia); Vincent Silarde (Board Member, Southern Tagalog Exposure); Nona Prieto (Filmmaker, Sine Panayanon); JL Burgos (Filmmaker, PinoyMedia Center and Film Weekly); and Jaja Necosia (Filmmaker, The Breakaway Media) who all actively volunteered for both the creative and administrative jobs of social advocacy filmmaking. The interviews were conducted from 2016 to 2019. Furthermore, textual analysis of the selected social advocacy cinema in diverse forms from the filmography of the alternative multimedia collectives is also applied as a research method “to surface informed estimations of a particular context’s set of values, paradigms, motivations, and prospects for the future” (Baldo-Cubelo, 2021, p. 25). The culture embedded in the social advocacy cinema as film text is argued to reflect historical and social context of the alternative mode of production in the country.

Historical and Social Context: Profile and Filmography

The year 2000, also branded as the dawn of the new millennium, signaled the beginning of the social and political challenges that the Philippines encountered within two decades. It all started with the administration of then actor-turned-politician, Joseph “Erap” Estrada, who took the highest office of the land in 1998 after Fidel V. Ramos (1992–1998) but was ousted from the presidency in 2001 due to plunder and perjury charges (Mogato, 2007). His presidency ended as an effect of People Power II in EDSA—a people’s revolution triggered by the wide and large-scale issues of graft and corruption attributed to the president himself and his administration. It was indeed an irony to his famous slogan, “Erap para sa mahirap” [Erap for the poor]. Alongside all the nongovernmental organizations that emerged to advance national democratic movements, one small group of filmmakers who wanted to document the popular uprising in Metro Manila eventually produced the video documentary *Oust* (2001) (R. Villanueva, personal communication, March 7, 2019). This led to the birth of what is now known as Kodao Productions that saw the need for alternative media to serve as an ally of the masses in exposing the social realities and harsh truth in the country. Today, Kodao Productions is recognized as an award-winning multimedia production outfit that “produces video documentaries on pressing social issues in the Philippines such as environmental destruction, human rights, and other civil liberties” (Kodao Productions, n.d. para. 1). Examples are *Basilan: Siklab ng Digma* (2002), *Diagnosing Poverty, Building Community* (2004), *Ruta ni Ka Roda* (2006), *UCCP: Sa Hamon ng Panahon* (2009), *CPR* (2009), *Demolisyon* (2011), *Women at the Forefront* (2012), and *Nanay Mameng* (2012), to name only a few.

When the seat in Malacañang Palace was vacated by Erap, his constitutional successor, Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was sworn into the presidency, got reelected in 2004, and served until 2010. Arroyo’s own presidency lasted for a total of nine years and was mired in numerous scandals including Oakwood Mutiny (“What went before,” 2018); allegations of vote rigging or the “Hello, Garci” controversy (Macaraeg, 2021); the Northrail Project anomaly (Burgonio, 2014); the Fertilizer Fund scam (“What went before,” 2016); the NBN-ZTE deal controversy (“What went before,” 2011); and the Maguindanao Massacre (Gregorio & Santos, 2019), among others. In the backdrop of all these controversies during the Arroyo administration, the world witnessed how the Philippines continued to suffer from poverty, unemployment, heinous crimes, and all other social problems that directly affect the marginalized sectors of society. An example of these was the rampant violation of human rights, including the recorded cases of extrajudicial killings in the Southern Tagalog region that occurred under the leadership of then Major General Jovito Palparan (Silarde, 2007). This led to the production of a 48-minute video documentary titled *Alingawngaw ng mga Punglo* (2003) that documented the stories of the victims, “their grieving families and friends, terrorized community members, and angry protests” (Carranza, 2003, para.1) against the acts of killing (fig. 2).

Founded in 2001 by the former students and graduates (with filmmaker Kiri Dalena as one of the cofounders) of the University of the Philippines Los Baños as a core group, Southern Tagalog Exposure, also known as ST-Exposure, is an independent multimedia collective of young artists and

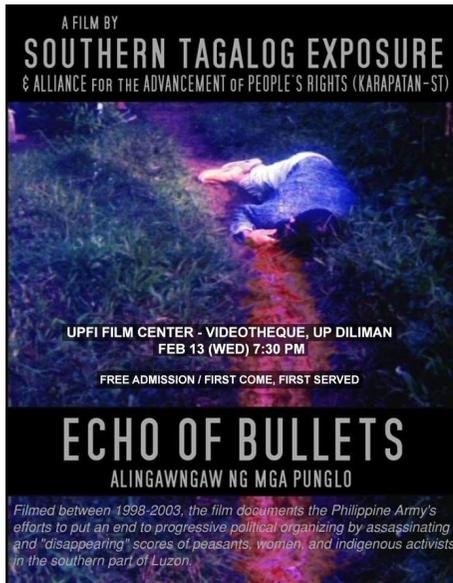


Fig. 2. Promotional poster of *Alingawngaw ng mga Punglo* (UPFI Film Center, 2019)

workers based in the Southern Tagalog region (e.g., Aurora, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, and Quezon) that appropriates multimedia as a tool to advance human rights and social justice. This is done by “arousing the larger society on pressing issues concerning the marginalized and underserved sectors in the region” (Silarde, 2007, p. 230). Other video documentaries of ST-Exposure include *Agno* (2002), *Oyayi sa Kanlungan ng Digma* (2002), *Sulyap sa Kadakilaan* (2003), *There’s Blood in Your Coffee* (2003), *Satur* (2009), *Banta ng Demolisyon* (2016), *Bakwit* (2019), and *Stop the Killings* (2019), the offsprings of their integration and interaction with the minorities (Silarde, 2007; ST-Exposure, n.d.). Apart from the documentaries, ST-Exposure also produced an experimental music video known as *On Potok* (2002) particularly about the *Dumagat* tribe and their struggle for land and ancestral domain; and a shadow-play animation titled *43* (2011) that presents the story of forty-three health workers who were physically and psychologically tortured when they were accused of being members of the communist New People’s Army (Karapatan, 2013).

The Macapagal-Arroyo regime was also the period when another progressive media collective called Tudla Productions that saw the need to serve the underrepresented and disfavored sectors in the society. This gave birth to their landmark social advocacy films such as *Buhay Barya* (2003), a documentary that narrates the plight of informal workers and minimum wage earners; *Daang Bakal* (2005) which is about the demolition of shelters of urban poor communities in the Manila district who reside as informal settlers beside the railroad tracks of the Philippine National Railways; and *Sa Ngalan ng Tubo* (2005), a documentary about the struggle and massacre of the sugar plantation farmers and workers of Hacienda Luisita. From then on, Tudla “explores other means of maximizing media in providing alternative channels and modes of artistic production, distribution and popularization of social advocacy and activism” (Tudla Productions, n.d.). Tudla’s filmography also includes *Banta sa Bayan* (2006), *Pinaglabanan* (2012), *Unos* (2012), *Yolanda Aftermath* (2013), *100 Days of Injustice* (2014), *Lupa at Hustisya: Hacienda Luisita* (2014), *Atohan* (2015), *Workers Demand for a Mimimum Wage* (2016), *Kampuhan Kontra Kontraktwalisasyon* (2017), and *Liliosa Hilao: First Detainee Killed during Martial Law* (2017), among others. The said progressive group is also known in producing music videos such as *Buhay Aktibista* (2011), *Harana* (2011), and *Katribu Ko* (2017); and public service announcements (PSA) such as *Pader* (2011); *Nagmamahal* (2011); *Tsinelas* (2012); *Kontraktwal* (2014); and *Pirma* (2014), a series of short videos ranging from two to four minutes that campaign for a call to action to address certain social issues during that time. After almost two years of immersion, Tudla released *Barikada* (2011), a 33-minute short

feature based on true story of the urban poor community in Corazon de Jesus, San Juan City, when their shelters were about to be demolished by the local government in 2011 to give way for infrastructure projects (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The urban poor community in Corazon de Jesus, San Juan City are mobilized to resist against demolition. Screenshot from "Barikada" (Tudla Productions, 2011)

Lady Ann Salem, the writer-director of *Barikada*, shares her critique of the dominant culture and mainstream media, as well as the main objective of their progressive collective in engaging into social advocacies:

Sa kabuuan ang gustong mangyari ng Tudla ay mabigyan niya ng boses ang mga mamamayan, sa kanyang mga ginagawa. Kasi 'yung mga marginalized sa lipunan ay marginalized din sa mainstream media. Turuan natin sila, wag natin sila lunurin sa mga bagay na hindi naman nila kailangan at hindi naman makakatulong para iahon nila ang kanilang sariling mga buhay. Talamak sa atin yun eh, talamak sa kultura, talamak sa media. May adbokasya kami para sa bayan, may adbokasya kami para sa sarili naming larangan. (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 9, 2016)

[In general, what Tudla wants to happen is to give voice to the citizens. As we see it, the marginalized people in society are also marginalized in mainstream media. We have to teach them to empower themselves and not to drown them on the things that aren't helpful in elevating the conditions of their lives. That is rampant in our culture, rampant in

our media. We have an advocacy for the nation, we have an advocacy for our chosen field.]

Focusing on the plight of the poor working class, Mayday Productions was conceptualized in 2004 as the video production unit of EILER (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc.) until it decided to establish itself as a separate collective in 2009 (Mayday Multimedia, n.d.). Now known as Mayday Multimedia, its members produced social advocacy cinema in the forms of public service announcement, video animation, short film, and documentary. Among these are *Proletaryo* (2006), *Blood and Sweat* (2007), *Sinulid* (2007), *Kasama sa Bawat Mayo Uno* (2009), *Kakasa Ka Ba?: Hamon sa Panahon ng Krisis* (2009), *Lakbayan: A People's Journey* (2009), *Walang Umaga, Walang Gabi* (2009), *Pa-Siyam: Sigaw ng Anakpawis, Gloria Alis* (2010), *Ani ng Welga* (2010), *Ka Bel* (2010), *Kayo ang Busabos* (2010), *Pagbawi sa Luisita* (2010), *Kuwentong Obrero: Dagdag Sahod na Makabuluhan Kailangang Ipaglaban* (2011), *Mustad* (2011), *Happiness for Coke Workers in the Philippines* (2012), *Piyon* (2012), *Unang Mayo Uno* (2012), *Welga ng Co Ban Kiat Workers' Union* (2012), *Pag-unlad Para Kanino* (2013), *Dispossession* (2015), *Justice for Kentex Workers* (2015), *Bakit Nananawagan ang mga Manggagawa ng National Minimum Wage?* (2016), *Manggagawa ng Dong Yun* (2016), *Ang Tunay na Puso ng Saging* (2017), *Kontrata* (2018), *Ang Duguang Labada ng PEPMACO* (2019), *Kalbaryo ng Mamamayan* (2019), *My Day with Mayday* series (2019), and many others that deal with the age-old labor issues in the country.

Kodao, ST-Exposure, Tudla, and Mayday continued producing social advocacy cinema during the regime of President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III, a scion of a famed political family, who took the highest office in 2010. In the six-year term of Aquino, his administration faced criticism over several crises such as the Quirino Grandstand hostage-taking incident in August 2010 (Arquiza, 2010); the controversial pork barrel scam or illegal deals with several government officials (Inquirer Research, 2018); slow response to Super Typhoon Yolanda which killed over 7,000 people in November 2013 (Morella, 2018); the Mamasapano encounter in Maguindanao that killed 44 Special Action Force soldiers in January 2015 (Cal, 2019); the use of the anti-dengue vaccine that was injected into 830,000 Filipinos that caused massive complications and death among children (Tiglaio, 2018); and the worsening struggles of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) like Mary Jane Veloso who was convicted of drug trafficking and is still about to face the capital punishment in Indonesia (Medenilla, 2020). It was in the time of Aquino's administration that PinoyMedia Center (est. 2010); Sine Panayanon (est. 2011); and Kilab Multimedia (est. 2011) were added to the

roster of progressive multimedia collectives that bring stories of those in the margins, especially from their home regions through diverse platforms such as newsreels and social advocacy films.

PinoyMedia Center (PMC) is a nonprofit media organization devoted to democratizing the practice of journalism in the country. Eventually, it ventured into film and audiovisual work beyond reportage to advocate for the issues of the disenfranchised sectors through the media (PinoyMedia Center, n.d.) In terms of video productions, PMC is known for *Eskinita: Ang Alternatibong Ruta*. It is a web series in the form of documentary that tells the stories of the ordinary communities with hosts and cyclists Noel Colina and Silay Lumbera who take on Manila's sidestreets to expose social realities and present the views of the people about the current issues. Sample episodes of the said web series are *Mga Anak ng Bayan* (2013), *So, Ano Na?* (2013), *Ang Martial Law Ngayon* (2014), *Bagong Yolanda, Bagong Gobyerno* (2014), *#Throwback Kabataan* (2014), *Bayan ng mga Kontraktual* (2015), *Binabanatan, Lumalaban: Maralita sa Kamay ng mga Pasista* (2019); and *Bunga ng Pakikibaka: Mula COMVAL hanggang Maynila* (2019), among others.

Sine Panayanon is a progressive media group based in Iloilo City that actively produces both newsreels and documentaries since 2011 that focus on issues that are oppressive for the subaltern sectors of the region (N. Prieto, personal communication, November 15, 2019). For this collective, their camera purposefully serves the nation because it is built by the workforce of the working class and not of the capitalists. The short videos that Sine Panayanon has produced are the following: *Bukay Isda: Ang Pagbutwa* (2012), about Jalaud River, the second largest river on the island of Panay, and the problem of the indigenous people who will be affected by the construction of a mega-dam; *Tumandok* (2012), a documentary about *Tumandok*, a national minority living in the central plain of Panay island who mobilized themselves to defend their ancestral domain; and *Yolanda: Ang Pagbangon* (2014), a documentary that presents how Panay Center for Disaster Response, Inc. (PCDR) and Caritas shared blessings and hope to the residents in the island after the disaster. The list of their audiovisual works also includes *Pnoy Education Program* (2012), *Hulat* (2012); *Panaad sa Desaparacidós* (2012); and *RH Bill Para Kay Sino* (2012) to name a few.

Meanwhile, in the southern part of the country, Kilab Multimedia acts to immediately bring news stories on the subaltern sectors of Mindanao. This Davao-based alternative multimedia collective produces news and documentaries on human rights and other issues of the oppressed in the region. Among these are *Magda Not for Sale* (2014), which narrates the

stories, plight, and vulnerability of women victims of sex trafficking in Davao City; *Save Our Schools: The Plight in Achieving Children's Right to Education* (2014), a documentary that presents how schools in Mindanao are being used by the military as their barracks, military encampment, and war field which hugely affect the children and their rights to education; and *Zamboanga Crisis* (2013), about the aftermath of the military encounter in Zamboanga City between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the current situation of the people victimized by this war and conflict.

From this filmography, the social advocacy films that were produced and released during the Aquino administration from 2010 to 2016 reflect how the state veered away from the government's campaign for "Daang Matuwid" [Straight Path] that aimed for honest and good governance, anti-corruption, and transparency. The social issues and the narratives of the public in these audiovisual works demonstrate how the president has done the very opposite of his "Kayo ang Boss Ko" [You are my boss] mantra which, unfortunately "became just another campaign slogan, a vessel for broken promises and unanswered prayers" (Aseo, 2019, para. 4). The myth of "Daang Matuwid" was changed to "Tapang at Malasakit" [Fearlessness and Compassion] and "Change Is Coming" when Rodrigo Roa Duterte took office on June 30, 2016.

The year 2019 marked the third year in power of President Rodrigo Duterte, the former mayor of Davao and the first president from Mindanao. During the elections in 2016, Duterte persuaded over 16 million Filipinos to vote for him holding a promise from relentless campaigns to "solve drugs, criminality, and corruption in three to six months" (Human Rights Watch, 2017, para. 24). As of this writing, his government's "war on drugs" has continually inflicted heavy casualties with estimates ranging from over 5,000 killed in police operations and over 27,000 deaths under investigation (Gallagher, A., Raffle, E., & Maulana, Z., 2019; Gavilan 2021). It is in the current administration that the country is seemingly moving backward by resurrecting the dark days of fascism as Duterte attempts to consolidate and centralize his power. The culture of violence and killings has worsened, victimizing peasant farmers, human rights defenders, and activists in different regions (Modesto, 2019; Gonzales, 2020). The majority of the population remain poor and unemployed (Rivas, 2020). Instead of alleviating poverty, the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion or TRAIN law that serves as a revenue-generating measure to fund the administration's projects adds to the burden of the country's many problems (Asian Journal Press, 2018; De Vera, 2020). The long-time dispute with China on the issue of the West Philippine Sea seems to never have a decent resolution causing a massive

impact on our local fishermen (Viray, 2020). Martial Law was proclaimed in Mindanao and has caused terror to the citizens in the south (Ortiz, 2017). Duterte's fascist government punishes those critical of his wrongdoings and abuses. With an attempt to suppress freedom of expression, the repressive state apparatuses maliciously "red tag" selected progressive groups (Beltran, 2020) and academic institutions (Fererras, 2021).

Human rights being savagely suppressed and abused is, unfortunately, the grim picture of the Philippines. Indeed, the social and political climate in the country became the exact opposite of "Tapang at Malasakit" as only fear and indifference are the only things shown for the powerless and voiceless. It is in this crucial period that no genuine *change is coming* that alternative multimedia collectives, with all other people's organizations and social movements groups, are needed the most. They kept on growing as new alternative multimedia groups were established: The Breakaway Media (2016), Film Weekly (2016), RESBAK (2016), and Aninaw Productions (re-established in 2017), respectively.

The Breakaway Media aims to subvert the social and political reports of the dominant and commercial media by exposing truthful narratives and accurate news coverage in Mindanao (The Breakaway Media, n. d.) in the same way that Aninaw Productions utilizes newsreels and documentaries to reveal the conditions of the oppressed sectors in the Visayan region. Aninaw (or "Discernment"), which initially became active only from 2008 to 2010, released *Tapak Tapak* (2008), about the demolition in the community in Sitio Tayong, Cebu City and its effects on families and children; and *Target* (2009), a video that depicts the hardships of the working class brought by the financial crisis in the region. After almost seven years of being inactive, Aninaw was established again in 2017 to continue "exposing issues from the point of view of the masses" (Aninaw Productions, n.d.) especially during these challenging times. Meanwhile, the filmography of The Breakaway Media includes but not limited to *Marawi Under Siege* (2017), *Promised Lands* (2017), *Kamaisan: Sowing the Seeds of Land Reform* (2018), *Salugpongan* (2018), and *Pasak Nu Tagama: A Struggle for the Next Generation* (2018). The most notable is *Pasak Nu Tagama: A Struggle for the Next Generation* (2018), a short documentary that narrates how hundreds of families of the Manobo, an indigenous tribe or *Lumad* from Mindanao, were forced to escape from their community when the military harassed and accused them of being rebels (fig. 4).

Established in 2016 as a response against the widespread extrajudicial killings brought forth by the administration of Duterte in its "war on drugs", RESBAK as an interdisciplinary alliance of artists, media practitioners, and cultural workers in collaboration with other organizations and artists



Fig. 4. Screenshot from “Pasak Nu Tagama: A Struggle for the Next Generation” (The Breakaway Media, 2018).

produced various audiovisual works that range from documentary, informational video, poetry video, experimental film and music video. They produced *HindiOke: Christmas In Our Hearts Reloaded* (2016); *HindiOke2: Maligaya Sana Ang Pasko* (2017); *Panawagan ng Pagkilos* (2017); *Tokhanginamo Unabes!* (2017); *Orphan* (2017); *Ang Mga Kriminal* (2018); *Tumbang Preso ng Bayan* (2018); and *Sonang Bayan* (2018), to name a few, that are released online to “empower the most vulnerable sectors targeted by the state-endorsed killings” (“About RESBAK”, n. d.).

Motivated by the desire to focus on the video aspect of advocacy, Film Weekly was established as an audiovisual group of PinoyMedia Center. It is now known as an independent online source of alternative news and video documentaries by the likes of *A Mother’s Courage* (2016), *Longing* (2016), *Occupy Bulacan* (2016), *Byahe* (2017), *Dula-anan* (2017), *Journey to Freedom* (2017), and *Ang Sinapit ng Saka* (2019), among others. JL Burgos, a resident filmmaker from PinoyMedia Center and Film Weekly, remarks in one account how he finds the need to communicate such stories of the people, especially those in the margins:

Hindi mahirap ma-involve sa ganitong klaseng stories. Kapag pumunta ka sa mga pabrika, makikita mo ang strike. Kapag pumunta ka sa mga magsasaka sila naman yung mga walang makain at inaagawan pa ng lupa at pinapatay. Bilang isang tao, kailangan mong ikuwento itong istorya na ‘to. Sa iba ay sa pamamagitan ng social media post, kami sa pamamagitan ng video. Tao kami so nararamdaman namin yung mga nangyayari bilang isang artist o bilang isang journalist. ‘Yun lang ang aming way to contribute sa nakikita naming totoo. (JL Burgos, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

[It is not actually that hard to be involved in this kind of stories. Once you go to the factories, you will see strikes. When you meet the farmers, you will discover that they are the ones who have no food to eat, landless, and even killed. As a human being, you have to tell that story. For others it is through the social media post, we do it through video. We are human beings, so we become sensitive to what is happening as an artist or as a journalist. That is the only way that we can contribute to exposing the truth.]

In this scenario, we may understand the context where the consciousness-raising social advocacy cinema of all forms produced by alternative multimedia collectives can find their purpose. Social advocacy cinema, as this article would propose to call it, could be part of public education and media works along with other creative approaches to campaign for a diverse cause that need to be addressed; thus, becoming a *cinema of need*. But first of all, these films must need to properly undergo a process from acquiring funds to their screenings that are resiliently anchored to the glimpse of hope that these will contribute to the most-awaited emancipation of the Filipino people from the long-time sociopolitical and socioeconomic struggles.

Funds, Volunteerism, and Collaboration

The dominant mode of production of the media industry is inherently capitalist. As Vincent Mosco (2009) asserts in his book *The Political Economy of Communication*, media giants “share an interest in maximizing profit by selling audiences to advertisers and using all other means to create networks and content that serve their business interests” (p. 114), or simply put, a practice in media industry that is “driven by the continuous desire to increase capital, an ideology known as the profit-motive” (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 26). The corporate media (i.e., ABS-CBN, GMA, TV5, CNN Philippines) play a hegemonic role in commercializing news, information, and entertainment that reveals their oligarchic and capitalistic system. Luis Teodoro (2016) states that “the media, being commercial enterprises pandering to the public’s supposedly limited wants, what rates enough to insure the network’s profitability” (p. 14). More so, the mainstream media giants adhere to what Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) call the “propaganda model” that “traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (p. 2). Furthermore, most of them conform to the standardized qualities of the massified products of “culture industry” (Horkheimer

& Adorno, 2002, p. 94) or “the factory-like and profit-oriented approach to cultural production within capitalist society” (Stam, R., Porton, R., & Goldsmith, L., 2015, p. 110). Raymond Williams (1962) asserts that “all the new means of communication have been abused, for political control (as in propaganda) or commercial profit (as in advertising)” (p. 19). Such practice is driven to protect their private interests as most of their executives and shareholders are involved in other large-scale corporate-controlled financial or business activities. Based on the above-mentioned literature, the media conglomerates in a capitalist society are more concerned with treating their audience as a commodity than actually making a difference through education, information, and advocacy. In effect, it is generally assumed that every decision and every move of a commercial media company is motivated by the pursuit of profits. In contrast, alternative multimedia collectives as they produce their radical and progressive social advocacy cinema oppose the practice of controlling and operating the media (films included) by the ruling class.

Alternative multimedia collectives in the country do not produce and obtain their capital from sales of media mileage of advertisers and investments of wealthy stakeholders. Instead, they acquire their funds through different means such as solicitations and voluntary donations, and financial support from grants (R. Villanueva, personal communication, March 7, 2019). In some cases, they gather funds from ticket selling of their film festivals and screenings, selling of merchandise and goods, and prize money from filmmaking competitions (V. Silarde, personal communication, November 23, 2016). The members themselves also contribute a portion of their own money. These are used to maintain the sustainability and operation of their advocacy projects which involve productions of social advocacy cinema.

In the process of solicitation for funds, the members of alternative multimedia collectives look for more privileged friends and potential partners who can provide voluntary help by sending cash and/or by lending their equipment (e.g., camera, editing computers, projector, etc.) for logistical support (V. Silarde, personal communication, November 23, 2016; L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 29, 2016). They do not usually purchase high-end production equipment due to lack of resources. Instead, they sometimes borrow from some friends with whom they share the same. Since some of the members of the collectives have other jobs or commitments with other companies as a regular source of income, they share a portion of what they earn to the organizations where they belong to help support the funding in their own little way. For instance, Raymund Villanueva (personal communication, March 7, 2019), deputy director of Kodao Productions, recalls that there are times they accept paid labor

from other organizations or institutions that need their services like video coverage. These are jobs outside Kodao Productions but helpful for the sustainability of the said collective which also needs to pay the bills of their office. Meanwhile, JL Burgos of Film Weekly (personal communication, April 4, 2019) calls it “principled rackets” when they produce videos for other organizations and get paid for it. The money they earn from it can be used to buy an equipment (e.g., camera) for their productions.

Most of these collectives also procure grants in producing their own social advocacy cinema. For instance, Tudla Productions procured a grant from the International Association of Women in Radio and TV (IAWRT), an international network of media women or researchers, in television, film, radio, and online journalism (Villanueva, 2018). The grant was used to produce *Himulayananan* (2018) of Tudla, a 15-minute documentary film directed by Erika Cruz that depicts the story of the two women Lumad chieftains and the struggles of their displaced tribes. However small the amount of money or support that they can get from other financially able organizations, alternative multimedia collectives grab each opportunity as long as their social advocacies are compatible and not contrasting or problematic with each other. This is to ensure that they only partner with groups of people whose main concerns are in favor of the marginalized sectors of society (JL Burgos & J. Necosia, personal communication, April 4, 2019).

Not intended for entrepreneurship, some of the alternative multimedia collectives also sell merchandise and goods that can help in their funding. These are but not limited to bags, t-shirts, mugs, customized pins, books, etc. ST-Exposure shared that they also used to sell a few VCDs/CDs of their videos, but it was merely to support their operations (V. Silarde, personal communication, November 23, 2016). Joining filmmaking competitions also serves as a valuable source of funding for alternative multimedia collectives. When their documentaries, short films, or any type of audiovisual works win or being recognized by the jury, the prize money that they receive from the competitions is also used as a source of budget for their next social advocacy film productions. For example, ST-Exposure’s *Alingawngaw ng mga Punglo* (2003) and *On Potok* (2002) both won 2nd prize in two separate categories of Gawad CCP para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video: the documentary and experimental films (Silarde, 2007, p. 237). They received cash prizes from the said film competition and used them to fund their other projects.

Core groups that compose the alternative media collectives serve as an assurance for the continuous operations of the organization. However, due to the lack of manpower, there are compartmentalized tasks that “overlap among individual members of the core group. In the absence or

unavailability of one member, another member assumes the position and responsibility of a specific work. No chain of command exists as the group works as a peer group” (Silarde, 2007, p. 233). In some cases, they outsource manpower from other alternative multimedia collectives to help them work on their productions. In contrast to the commercial type of media, such practice in labor may not always be possible as they are competing with each other and their sources of manpower have signed contracts stating the exclusivity of their services.

Alternative multimedia collectives also partner with other nongovernmental entities, international foundations, people’s organizations, and coproduce with other cause-oriented media groups to intensify their commitment toward the advocacy projects, and economically speaking, to lessen their expenses. The greater purpose is not only to acquire grants but also to strengthen the forces of productions to achieve the best results caused by collaborative efforts. For example, ST-Exposure worked hand in hand with Karapatan Timog Katagalugan, a people’s organization in Southern Tagalog region, to produce *Alingawngaw ng mga Punglo* (2003); Mayday Multimedia with Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Development and Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad for *Piyon* (2012); and Tudla Productions in cooperation with Sandigang Maralitang Nagkakaisa (SAMANA) and Kalipunang Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY) for *Barikada* (2011), to name a few. Sometimes social advocacy cinema is a joint project with another multimedia collective, like that of Tudla Productions and Mayday Multimedia with their *Sa Ngalan ng Tubo* (2004); and Mayday Multimedia in cooperation with PinoyMedia Center for *Pagbawi sa Luisita* (2010) that both represent the fight against age-old problems related to agrarian reform.

Even though the democratization of digital technologies appears as “manna from heaven” for alternative multimedia collectives, the production of social advocacy cinema is always a challenge in itself. Handicapped with their lack of capitalization, machinery, and influence, it is predictable that the process of advocacy filmmaking faces a number of constraints to test the sustainability of championing a cause. Starting with the funds and labor which are crucial in any film productions, alternative multimedia collectives could not demand enormously since most of their budget is tight and their film workers are volunteers (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 29, 2016; J. Necosia & JL Burgos, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Due to a lack of monetary resources, they solely rely on what skills their members could offer for a limited time without the luxury of an extensive quality check in terms of technical elements (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 29, 2016). As a solution, they

send volunteers to production workshops to ease the problem (N. Prieto, personal communication, November 15, 2019).

Small-scale and Collective

The filmmaking process for social advocacy cinema of alternative multimedia collectives may operate within the paradigm of what David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008) term as “small-scale production” (p. 28), or “collective mode of production” (Allen & Gomery, 1985, p. 86). In a small-scale or collective mode of production, several film workers within the group participate equally and share common goals and make production decisions democratically (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 28), instead of the sole authorship of a filmmaker whose vision and voice are the most dominant among all film crew. It adheres to the notion of “democratization of the filmic authorship” (Stam et al., 2015, p. 200). While specific tasks are delegated in this mode, “every member of the crew is capable of operating every piece of equipment” (Allen & Gomery, 1985, p. 86).

Only a few numbers of people work together and not as many as to how mainstream media would employ manpower. In this mode of production by alternative multimedia collectives, any audiovisual work still undergoes preparation (preproduction), shooting or filming (principal photography), and assembly (postproduction) stages but in radically different ways from how mainstream media outlets or film studios operate. They depart from the profit-driven “studio mode of production” that manufactures films and is “characterized by a hierarchical organization, extensive division of labor, and standardized production practices” (Allen & Gomery, 1985, p. 86).

In preproduction, anyone from the members can pitch their concepts or stories. These concepts are aligned with the advocacies of the alternative multimedia collectives where they belong. For instance, if it is a documentary, stories usually come from the current social and political issues and problems of the nation, or of a particular community or region that they monitor as a media group and film collective. There are times that people’s organizations approach and coordinate with them to tell their stories that recently happened to them. Members see that there is a need for these issues to be told and exposed especially if certain people in the community are unjustly affected or oppressed. If the proposed production is collectively agreed upon as relevant and feasible, the production process would not immediately begin by working on its production requirements (e.g., finance and logistics, conceptual framework, manpower, and equipment). Instead, they see to it that they would first understand the story (or the plight and struggles) of their chosen subjects by immersing themselves in the community where the conflicts occur. They call it “immersion” or “integration process” when

there would be consultations and meetings, especially with the community leaders. It becomes an important opportunity to build a relationship with the people that they want to document.

Gusto ko mag-focus din doon sa process ng alternative filmmaking. Kung babaybayin mo ang process from preproduction to distribution, kakaiba talaga siya sa mainstream. Isang pinagkaiba ng alternative filmmaking at mainstream na paggawa ng pelikula ay ang paglubog doon sa community, pag-integrate, or ang pakikisalamuha sa mismong mga tao na ginagawan ng istorya, ginagawan ng film. So paano ginagawa yan? We work closely with people's organizations. Nagkakaroon ng mga consultations. Nagkakaroon ng mga meetings prior sa paggawa ng video. So with that in mind, may audience ka na. (E. Cruz, personal communication, November 9, 2016)

[I also want to focus on the process of alternative filmmaking. If you will go through the process from preproduction to distribution, it is really different from mainstream. One difference of alternative filmmaking to mainstream in making film is the immersion in the community, to integrate, or socializing with the people whom you make the story or film. So how do we do that? We work closely with people's organizations. We do consultations. We conduct meetings prior to the production of video. With that in mind, you already have an audience.]

In theory, Jean Rouch (in Stam et al., 2015) calls it “shared anthropology” or “a dialogic collaboration between filmmaker-ethnographer and the ethnographic subject” (p. 201). Shared anthropology is possible in this mode of production because they are not constrained in beating deadlines, unlike the mainstream news media. Social advocacy filmmakers could afford to make an in-depth analysis and understanding of the situation of the specific community.

Hindi kami constrained na kailangan mabilis mag-produce, kailangan may cut-off ng 4:00 pm everyday ganyan. Kaya pwede talaga kaming magtagal dun sa usapin e which in fact benefits us kasi mas malalim yung analysis, mas malalim yung pag-unawa. Ayun nga, alternative siya hindi lang sa form o porma, lalo na sa content, saka alternative doon sa

process. (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 9, 2016)

[We are not constrained to the practice that we have to produce quickly, that we should have 4:00 pm cut-off every day. That's the reason why we are able to immerse in the community in a longer period of time which in fact benefits us because it allows us to have in-depth analysis and understanding of the problem. And yes, it is alternative not only in form but especially in content, and alternative also in the process.]

This practice recalls Rouch's (in Stam et al., 2015) goal of how "cohabitation" or the process of "living with the subjects prior to filmmaking – fosters more intimacy with the filmed subjects" (p. 201). Because of the practice of ethnographic research that alternative multimedia collectives do, their social advocacy cinema can be considered as "ethnographic film" or "film that may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another" (MacDougall as quoted in Nichols, 1976, p. 136). After the immersion process, details of the production and labor assignments are discussed among members of the group to prepare everything that are needed such as the usual scheduling, allocation of resources, etc.

During the filming stage of the material, for example in video documentaries, the group members especially the camera operators and producers with portable production equipment such as DSLR cameras and audio recorders proceed directly to the place or community that they wish to document. Most of the time, they just commute from their office to the target location with their own money while keeping small budget for other necessities. Depending on the material and duration of the story, filmmakers stay in locations for weeks or months if necessary to intensively capture the real events as they unfold. This is far different from the "hit-and-run" style of video coverage by the mainstream media which would normally record some clips to complement with the voice-over spiels of their known field reporters. Because of the trust that the alternative multimedia collectives have already built from the very beginning even before the actual shoot starts due to immersion and integration process, it is easier for them to get support and participation from the communities or subjects that they are filming. These communities believe that alternative multimedia collectives would work on their behalf to hear their voices and represent them. On the actual filming itself, the production has only minimal crew and handheld equipment "which make film production less intimidating by minimizing intrusion into the subject's everyday lives" (Stam et al., 2015, p. 201).

The filming or shooting process is already a challenge in itself. It is the point when the lives of the filmmakers are at risk especially if they engage in news and documentaries that directly critique institutions and political and private figures. In one account, Vincent Silarde (personal communication, November 23, 2016) of ST-Exposure recalls that Virgilio Catoy II, one of the filmmakers of their documentary *Alingawngaw ng mga Punglo* (2003), was abducted while investigating reports of military abuses on April 23, 2003 in Oriental Mindoro and was released after being threatened and divested his documentary video footage and equipment. “There is a general perception that when you say media,” says Silarde, “it should be mainstream but when you introduce yourself as alternative media, you need to be extra careful” (personal communication, November 23, 2016). This story of Catoy appeared as a disclaimer text in *Alingawngaw* with another two victims of summary execution in the region: Eden Marcellana, secretary-general of KARAPATAN-ST (the human rights alliance that coproduced the said documentary), and Eddie Gumanoy, chairperson of KASAMA-TK (a peasant association) that shows how rampant the culture of violence and killings was during the Macapagal-Arroyo regime.

Another serious instance was when Jaja Necosia (personal communication, April 4, 2019) in an interview confessed that he already had two of the worst experiences in his life as social advocacy filmmaker from The Breakaway Media. First, he was beaten by a police officer while filming, and second, he was one of the 15 human rights advocates accused and sued by the military for kidnapping and serious illegal detention of children and *Lumad* evacuees at the Haran Evacuation Center in Davao City. This case was known as “Haran 15” (Torres-Tupas, 2016) which had already been dismissed by the Department of Justice (DOJ) when the Lumads “issued an affidavit of desistance withdrawing the allegation against them” (Torres-Tupas, 2016, para. 6). Furthermore, JL Burgos (personal communication, April 4, 2019) testified that he witnessed instances that police or military officers intentionally hit the cameras of filmmakers especially if they are not crew members of either ABS-CBN or GMA and other media giants.

In addition to these life-threatening experiences, some members of the alternative multimedia collectives during the shooting process are sometimes prevented from entering a community by military personnel or police officers. It becomes even harder for them to interview officials of the government and be part of the coverage teams of government events (JL Burgos & J. Necosia, personal communication, April 4, 2019). This only proves that alternative multimedia collectives in the country face serious threats in their security and suffer from a lack of recognition as legitimate media entities that affect their production process.

In the postproduction or assembly stage, the editors from alternative multimedia collectives preview all the captured materials and stitch them following the audiovisual form decided by the group. If it is a short newsreel, it ranges from one to five minutes only especially if the story needs to be aired immediately via social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Vimeo). For other forms like documentaries and short features, the duration ranges from 10 to 45 minutes for a more in-depth presentation of the topic. The editing process of long-form videos also takes a couple of days or weeks depending on the availability of the volunteers. Afterward, the first cut would be previewed by the group for feedback, however, it doesn't stop there. Tudla Productions revealed that before the release of their audiovisual works, they go out first and randomly select citizens on the streets for them to watch their media outputs (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 9, 2016). This is to test if their documentaries or short films can easily be understood by nonfilm people—a process which they call “mass criticism.”

“Mass criticism” or “participant feedback” (Stam et al., 2015, p. 201) happens when the subjects offer their commentary and critiques to the social advocacy cinema. This is also evident to the practice of ST-Exposure when they even consult the subjects themselves or the family of the subjects for the approval of their outputs (V. Silarde, personal communication, November 23, 2016). Similarly, Kodaio Productions goes back to the communities that they documented to ask for feedback (R. Villanueva, personal communication, March 7, 2019). They sincerely involve the masses and the subjects of their films in the process. If there are ethical considerations, like showing unblurred corpses of the victims of extrajudicial killings, they ask for the consent of the family members. Arriving at the final cut is a product of collaborative efforts exerted by the majority of the members of the collectives and of the communities, and not necessarily from the decision of one person-in-charge only.

Exhibition and Call to Action

The goal of alternative multimedia collectives for producing social advocacy cinema is to thrust the advocacy inherent in their audiovisual works, to amplify the voices of the marginalized sectors in society, and to inspire the viewers to be part of the movement toward social transformation. With that in mind, the pressure of competing with how commercial media firms and film studios distribute and exhibit their audiovisual works is not a priority (or totally not a goal). However, they are still aware that they need to reach an audience.

Despite the challenges and constraints brought by lack of financial resources and progressive content of social advocacy cinema, alternative multimedia collectives have creatively thought of various ways to let the world see their audiovisual works, namely: (a) film festivals; (b) community film screenings; (c) screenings during street protests and activism; and (d) online screenings (via websites and social media).

First of all, film festivals are a profitable part of the film industry that usually focuses on their role in the business of filmmaking. Here in the country, it is evident in the film festivals that dominate the local theatres by the likes of Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) hosted by Metropolitan Manila Development Authority and Pista ng Pelikulang Pilipino (PPP), or Festival of Filipino Films hosted by Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP). Independent cinema in the country is equally active in the film festival scene as they run their film festivals that screen films produced by the filmmakers who received seed grants such as Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival (Cinemalaya Foundation, Inc.); Cinema One Originals (ABS-CBN Films); CineFilipino Film Festival (Signal TV and Unitel Productions, Inc.); QCinema International Film Festival (Quezon City Film Development Foundation); and Sinag Maynila Independent Film Festival (Solar Entertainment Corporation), among others. All of these film festivals are clear with their objective of reaching paying audiences who seek entertainment from both mainstream and independent films.

On the contrary, entertainment and aesthetics from the commercial film festivals is not the primary objective of the alternative multimedia collectives who are clear in treating such film event as “activist film festival” (Tascon & Wils, 2017) in order “to increase public awareness about a particular issue, to build or strengthen the membership of a community, campaign or movement, or otherwise catalyze some form of political action” (Davies, 2018, para 1). Dealing with the politically engaged spectators, they aspire to contribute to an increase of critical thinking and active citizenship among its viewers. These are Tudla Productions’ Pandayang Lino Brocka Political Film and New Media Festival; PinoyMedia Center’s *Indiependensya* Film Festival; Southern Tagalog Exposure’s *Agitprop International Film Festival on People’s Struggles*; and RESBAK’s *CineResbak: Visions of Resistance Films* and *CineMaralita: A Film Festival about the Filipino Urban Poor* (in partnership with other nongovernmental organizations and institutions) that deliberately produce, curate, and showcase films that present narratives and discourses on social and political issues produced by independent and alternative filmmakers, students, amateurs, and other film collectives as well. More than an exhibition of social advocacy cinema, film festivals mainly serves as a cultural gathering of all alternative multimedia collectives, other

Truth Cinema Film Festival in the past years, which delivered human right-themed alternative films and videos to grassroot communities (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 9, 2016).

PinoyMedia Center and Mayday Multimedia collaborated in launching the *Indiependensya* Film Festival in 2012, in cooperation with Red Ants Productions and Stand UP-CMC in order to create a discourse on how “freedom, independence and national sovereignty remain unfulfilled” (*Indiependensya* Film Festival, 2012, para. 7). This is a festival that screens short films and public service announcements produced by independent and student filmmakers. This is in parallel with the showcase of international and local feature-length films that similarly present social and political issues. These films articulate people’s aspirations while questioning the narratives of national independence. Meanwhile, RESBAK launched their formal film screening via *CineResbak: Visions of Resistance* on April 27, 2017, at the Cine Adarna of UP Film Center “which is the first of a series of film screenings and forums discussing the current (Duterte) administration’s inhumane war on drugs and how to resist, fight, and end these extrajudicial deaths” (RESBAK, n.d.). The second edition called *CineResbak: Decades of Resistance*, in partnership with selected progressive media groups in the country followed. This screened short films that focus on human rights and martial law on December 3, 2018.

CineMaralita: A Film Festival about the Filipino Urban Poor has been active since 2012. It was initiated by the Urban Poor Resource Center of the Philippines, Inc. (UPRCP), a nonstock, nonprofit resource institution committed to “help shape public discourse and policy in favor of urban poor interests and aspirations through its programs, in the pursuit of realizing genuine national development and ending poverty” (Urban Poor Resource Center of the Philippines, n.d.). It is a film festival that features short and full-length films and documentaries that narrate the lives and struggles of the urban poor communities in the country. Sponsored by NCCA, the said festival through the years has been organized in partnership with selected cultural organizations, people’s organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the academe. In 2019, RESBAK partnered with *CineMaralita* that “seeks to deepen the discourse and magnify through film the social and systemic conditions that bind the Filipino urban poor struggling within various forms of institutional discrimination and inequalities” (Save San Roque, 2019, para. 1). The one that was held last September 7, 2019, focused on the urban poor community of Sitio San Roque and also served as a fund-raising event for the benefit of the campaigns and advocacy of the Save San Roque Alliance.



Fig. 6. Promotional poster of the Agitprop International Film Festival on People's Struggles for July 2-4, 2011 screening (Diliman Diary, 2011).

The vivid pictures of people's struggles and resistance are not only photographed in the Philippines but across the globe. Social advocacy films from both local and international productions are showcased in the country when ST-Exposure, in cooperation with Mayday Multimedia, Tudla Productions, Kodao Productions, Concerned Artists of the Philippines, and Free Jonas Burgos Mov't, etc. established a non-competition film festival called Agitprop International Film Festival on People's Struggles (fig. 6) that kicked off in 2011 by taking "the role of giving a much-needed venue for films and filmmakers that dare present social realities, often silenced and confused by the dominant modes and channels of information" (Agitprop, n.d., para 1.). Inspired by how the films

in Russia were used to agitate in the 1920s, the idea of mounting the said film festival is to bring political films to the masses—a campaign to arouse public concern about national issues in the hope of prompting action. The first two editions of *Agitprop* were held on July 2-4, 2011, and November 11-12, 2015, respectively, also at the Cine Adarna of UP Film Center. The social advocacy films (both local and international) that they already exhibited in the past few years took on the issue of human rights, the welfare of the working class, imperialism and neoliberal globalization, resistance and liberation struggles, democracy, and social justice, etc.

The process of selecting films for programming of the festivals begins with a collective decision of the specific theme that should be highlighted within the year or edition. The themes only revolve around social advocacies that have national significance, for example, human rights, peace and freedom, social justice, nationalism, and movement against impunity, imperialism, and fascism, to name a few. The group members would create mechanics, criteria for judging or selection, and ways to submit entries either online or

by mail. This is followed by the creation and release of publicity materials in social media to call for entries.

The above-mentioned social advocacy-themed and activist film festivals and screenings receive a number of film entries every time they conduct such cultural events. Obviously, they cannot accommodate all films for programming. What the members do is they carefully select the films that best suit the theme of the festival in that season. More than the alignment with the theme, Lady Ann Salem (personal communication, November 9, 2016) reiterates that there is a special consideration for the films that bring hope to the viewers and do not imply lack of inspiration. Otherwise, the mere objective of instigating a little hope for its viewers would not be achieved.

Audiences from different demographics—students, professionals, activists, film enthusiasts, and even ordinary citizens—spend time watching the entries of the said activist film festivals in a theater-like UP Cine Adarna, a type of screening that commercial SM or Ayala Cinemas would not accommodate. Apart from film screenings, the event also serves as a perfect venue to hold off-screen events, sometimes termed as “extra-cinematic” activities, such as art exhibit, stage performances, open forum, question and answer sessions, dialogue sessions, in-depth discussion, and speeches or talks from film subjects, filmmakers or experts that are intended to connect the message of social advocacy cinema to its audiences in a more profound way by discussing the pressing issues in accordance with the current theme



Fig. 7. Q & A session in Pandayang Lino Brocka Political Film and New Media Festival, courtesy of Tudla Productions (Pandayang Lino Brocka, 2016).

(fig. 7). They exchange dialogues and discourses to stir critical thinking and social consciousness among their viewers, to be aware of the progress of what they are fighting and advocating for and how to be part of the solution to the problems.

If film studios negotiate to business-oriented cinema theaters to screen their commercial films, alternative media groups literally tour and bring

their audiovisual works to the grassroots and alternative spaces such as urban poor compounds, workplaces, streets, and schools for free through “community film screening” also termed as “mobile cinema” or “film caravan.” Examples of community film screenings conducted by alternative multimedia collectives are *Sineng Kalye* by Tudla Productions; *Sineng Bayan* by ST-Exposure; *Sinehang Bayan* of Kodao Productions; *Sine Obrero* of Mayday Multimedia; and *Sine Pukaw* by The Breakaway Media which all explain the reason why social advocacy cinema adheres to *Sineng Bayan* (People’s Cinema). Social advocacy cinema here is intended to be seen by the masses.

Alternative multimedia collectives partner and coordinate with people’s organizations in certain communities, community leaders, or student organizations in schools. This is crucial before the actual screenings to avoid possible problems brought by surprise visits. In actual screening, people of a community, school, or workplace, for example, gather in a designated place—literally anywhere like streets, covered courts, or under the trees—to watch films. These are social advocacy films which are either produced by alternative media collectives themselves or collected entries from their film festivals that they previously held. In order to watch these films, they are projected on the improvised white screen such as tarpaulin or cloth, or on the bare space of a wall. If there is no electricity, they would watch on a laptop.

After each screening, this is followed by film talks and discussions among community members, students, speakers, and the collective itself to raise awareness about certain issues like what they also do in film festivals. But it does not stop there. Mayday Multimedia, for example, sometimes burn or record their audiovisual works to DVDs and flash drives to distribute amongst federations and unions (L. Odulio, personal communication, November 24, 2016). This only means that when certain alternative multimedia collectives are not present in the community anymore, the community leaders or people’s organizations are expected to hold their own film screenings for those who they want to reach out by using the DVD or digital copies of films left to them.

Social advocacy cinema also becomes participatory by actively joining in the assembly and mobilization of the people that can be in the forms of rally, strike, mass demonstration, vigil, or picket line. Aside from the video coverage to document street protests and activism, alternative multimedia collectives see them as an opportunity to screen their documentaries, short features, and other audiovisual works that complement to the advocacies of the empowered people.

In the history of Philippine cinema, there were films (e.g., *Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, 1975; *Manila by Night*, 1980; *Batch '81*, 1982; *Sister Stella L.*, 1983) that served their purpose to portray the “true and undeceptive conditions of the country and its people” (Deocampo, 1986, p. 7). Such practice has continued in the contemporary period as the advocacy filmmakers, especially from the alternative multimedia collectives, have sought new tools and methods to shift the impact of film from awareness to social change. The advent of new media and digital technologies becomes a significant factor in thinking of new ways of using film for advocacy. For instance, the rise of the Internet in the digital era not only paved way for many valuable things that revolutionized communication and information exchange (Rogers, 2019) but also created new means of distribution and exhibition for the mass dissemination of social advocacy cinema of alternative multimedia collectives in the country (R. Villanueva, personal communication, March 7, 2019; JL Burgos, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Social advocacy cinema maintained by the collectives can also be viewed on the websites (e.g., kodao.org, tudlaproductions.org, pinoymediacenter.org, resbak.org, stexposure.wordpress.com, etc.). Their audiovisual productions are also accessible through social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Vimeo. Because of this, “the film has now the capacity to comprehensively spread your message” (L. A. Salem, personal communication, November 9, 2016). The collectives even approve those individuals who want to download their audiovisual works to conduct their own film screenings in their communities.

However, the number of likes, followers, and subscribers is not a guarantee that social advocacy cinema can easily penetrate the consciousness of netizens. This is another challenge for the distribution and exhibition of such films via online because of many elements that can hinder the dissemination of the message. First, many happenings in the virtual world compete for the attention of the netizens. Second, the content of the social advocacy cinema may not be taken seriously by other netizens who are merely aiming to be relaxed in social media.

Vincent Mosco (2009) asserts that “while by no means setting aside older media, political economy has since made the transition to a focus on new media, especially the Internet and the new media forms that it has stimulated” (p. 119). This, in turn, results in the emergence of what other scholars call “digital capitalism” (Schiller, 1999; Bentacourt, 2015). But in these mechanisms of online film distribution and exhibition practiced by the alternative multimedia collectives with no intention of profit generation at all, it only shows that social movements can now utilize new media for

social advocacy purposes. This phenomenon can be considered as “digital activism” (Joyce, 2010).

Similar to what they experience during the filming of audiovisual works, alternative multimedia collectives are also attacked and harassed online (also called “cyberattack”). In uploaded videos of The Breakaway Media, for example, these are usually bombarded with comments from online trolls especially if the videos are very critical of the government. The military or police officers themselves would even comment online that they are rebels, communists, or members of NPA (J. Necosia, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Worse, their websites would be taken down by hackers like what happened to Kodaio Productions (R. Villanueva, personal communication, March 7, 2019). Detractors do that to disable their capacity to disseminate and seed political and radical ideologies to the consciousness of the citizens. Furthermore, a Facebook page “Todla Production” used and mimicked the logo of the original Tudla Productions by using and re-editing some of Tudla’s videos to post fake news and attack their social advocacies. While they acknowledge that it is one form of harassment for advocates and activists like them, they also look at it as a badge of honor as it proves that what they do is effective. Social advocacy cinema indeed irritates the status quo.

Conclusion

The mode of production, distribution, and exhibition of social advocacy cinema serves as a means to empower the marginalized, to provide a platform to hear and amplify their voices, to uplift their morale and spirit to continue fighting for what is right, for what is humane, and to firmly stand on truth. Social advocacy cinema creates a space for public discourse, argument, discussion, forum, as it aims to find solutions to problems. Ideally, the desired result of this filmmaking process is a social movement based on a vision of a just and decent society that can unite the Filipino people and raise the level of their dissent and counter-consciousness rooted in the growing discontent over the crisis of the dominant ruling system that runs across different administrations.

Therefore, social advocacy cinema is a progressive and political engagement aimed at advocating and bringing about justice, liberation, equality, peace and order—or in some way a desire for nearly “utopian” society. It is progressive because it favors and advocates change, improvement, or reform, as opposed to maintaining things as they are especially in sociopolitical and socioeconomic matters and liberal ideas. It is political because these audiovisual works and the people behind them seek to present current or historical events and social conditions in favor of a particular cause to inform, influence, and agitate viewers.

Veering away from the entertainment-driven and profit-oriented practice of filmmaking and media productions, such mode of production by the alternative multimedia collectives instead demonstrates a creative resistance as a result of a conscious adherence to counter-hegemony and alternative ideologies. Social advocacy cinema in its historical and social context challenges the notion of escapist cinema which oftentimes creates passive audiences. Instead, social advocacy cinema encourages its viewers to confront realities and serve as agents of change.

The pursuit of social change, however, is not yet over and is still unsure if it will happen in our lifetime. A new decade has begun in 2020 and yet each one of us still witnesses the worst scenarios of the suppression of human rights of the people in the margins. As long as this country is mired in its long-time poverty, injustices, inequalities, political crises, and human rights violations in all forms caused by the harsh attempts of the ruling class in maintaining the status quo in society by tolerating monopoly and bureaucrat capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, imperialism, feudalism, and fascism, the production of social advocacy cinema as progressive and political films will remain active in its mission of amplifying the voices of the proletarians, subalterns, and the oppressed. It is in this way that film becomes an important tool for social advocacies of alternative multimedia collectives and their allies, not only as a mode of production outside the confines of media conglomerates and film studios but most significantly to serve as the chronicler of the plight and struggles of the people as they advocate for their essential needs primarily in the aspect of social inclusion.

Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. (2002) asserts that “the development of a truly Philippine national cinema has a greater probability of happening outside the mainstream” (p. 45). On that note, this paper proposes that social advocacy cinema must be recognized as one of the diverse categories of alternative cinema that is contributory to national cinema that reveals the genuine identity of the nation. This type of cinema represents the public sentiment, aspirations, and social and political issues of the nation from the points of view of those who are disfavored, disenfranchised, and deprived of human rights and social justice. To support this conclusion, it anchors on the assertion of Renato Constantino (1975) who states that “the only way a history of the Philippines can be Filipino is to write on the basis of the struggles of the people, for in these struggles the Filipino emerged” (p. 11). The social advocacy cinema in various forms as a result of the mode of production by the alternative multimedia collectives in the Philippines manifests that kind of history that is based on the struggles of the Filipino people.

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