

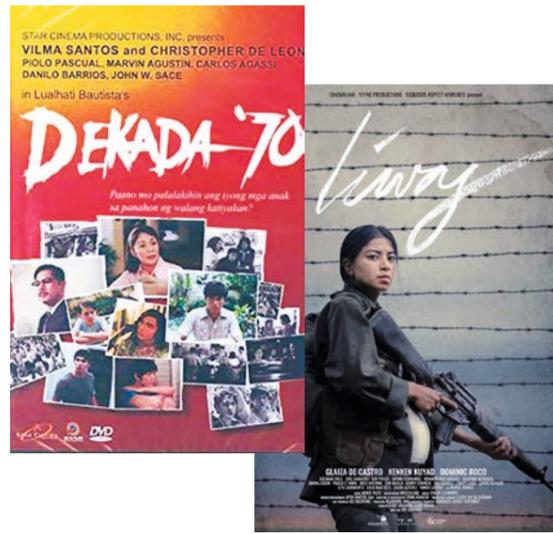
When watching films is resistance

Laurence Marvin S. Castillo

In November 2018, Brigadier General Antonio Parlade Jr. of the Armed Forces of the Philippines accused university and school-based screenings of films about the Martial Law as being part of the 'Red October plot' to recruit for the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army (CPP-NPA). The accusation gave rise to statements of condemnation from hundreds of independent filmmakers, scholars, cultural workers and activists. These statements emphasised the danger that Parlade's accusation poses to the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Philippine constitution.

The military's linking of the memory of the Martial Law period to communism shows how the state cultivates "authoritarian nostalgia"¹ in the Philippine public sphere. The spectre of the communist revolution is brought up to whitewash the atrocities of the earlier authoritarian order, and more disturbingly, to justify the return of dictatorial rule, this time under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte.

My doctoral research project, which began in 2018, is about how the communist revolution is imagined in films and literary works produced in the decades that followed the toppling of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the 1986 EDSA People Power. Some of these works are films set in the Martial Law era. For



many Filipinos who lived through this period, the memory of the dictatorship is intertwined with the memory of the revolutionary movement. Marcos invoked and magnified the threat of communism to justify the declaration of the Martial Law in 1972. The repressive conditions under authoritarian rule compelled a lot of Filipinos to join the revolution, which did not only embody the most radical form of anti-dictatorship resistance, but also offered a comprehensive agenda for the transformation of Philippine society.

For Filipinos like me, born during the post-authoritarian period of democratisation and living through the present in which the revolution continues to rage on, Martial Law films are forms of "imagined memory".² They enable us to imagine and remember the experiences – of state violence, as well as of radical political involvement – during the

Martial Law period. One prominent example is the commercially successful and critically acclaimed period melodrama *Dekada '70* (*The 1970s*, 2002). This film, produced by a major commercial film company, depicts the experiences of middle-class family in the titular milieu. In this film, the eldest son decides to join the communist armed movement, bringing to the fore the deep-seated contradictions that have long incubated in the family. At the centre of the film's narrative is the political awakening of the mother, who not only begins to understand her son's involvement, but also gradually liberates herself from the constraints of the social role she performs inside and outside the family home.

A visible commonality between *Dekada '70* and other recent films on the revolution is their examination of how gender and sexuality figure in an individual's radicalisation. Such thematic concern relates to contemporary identity-based advocacies and social movement practices that prompt a nuancing, if not rethinking of, the class-oriented and nationalist politics associated primarily with the revolutionary movement. The independent films *Barber's Tales* (2013) and *Liway* (2018) centre on women characters, whose expressions of empowerment are depicted as contingent upon, and linked to, their involvement in the communist movement. In other independent films like *Muli* (*The Affair*, 2010) and *Lihis* (*Wayward*, 2013), the experiences of gay members of the communist movement are highlighted, challenging the macho stereotypes associated with the popularised figure of the NPA guerrilla depicted in some post-EDSA action

films. Apart from relating stories of courage shown by these revolutionary characters who have been cast as sexual minorities within and without the guerrilla zones, these films offer critical reflections on the communist movement's own painful contradictions, as particularly evinced in their straightforward depiction of the persistence of heteronormative and patriarchal lifeways and values that revolutionaries need to wrestle from, and overcome.

The potency of these films lies in their capacity not only to memorialise the violence of the dictatorship, which continues to be the subject of systematic historical revisionism, but to also make use of the power of fiction cinema to examine the relevance and persistence of the revolutionary vision, especially in light of contemporary concerns such as identity politics. They produce fictionalised versions of the radical past that are significantly shaped by, while dialoguing with, the socio-political sensibilities of the present. And indeed it is the current nominally democratic order's shared features with, and gradual transition to, authoritarian rule that urgently demand the surfacing of such radical memory practices.

Laurence Marvin S. Castillo,
PhD candidate at the Asia Institute,
University of Melbourne
castillo@student.unimelb.edu.au

Notes

- 1 Webb, A. 2017. 'Why Are the Middle Class Misbehaving?: Exploring Democratic Ambivalence and Authoritarian Nostalgia', *Philippine Sociological Review* 65:77-102.
- 2 Huyssen, A. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford University Press.

Researching the Philippines in Australia: the Philippine Studies Network in Australia (PINAS)

Reagan Maiquez

Filipinos are the fifth largest migrant group in Australia with around 236,000 residents. In 2017-2018, 10640 migrants came from the Philippines. Additionally, around thirteen thousand student visas from the Philippines were granted in 2018-2019, a significantly marked increase (108%) from the 2017-2018 program year. Historically, prior to Australia's birth as a modern nation, this second largest archipelago in the world was already linked to the world's largest island. During the late 1800s, Filipinos pearl divers, known as 'Manila Men' arrived in the island-continent and intermarried with Indigenous Australians. The Philippines has maintained diplomatic relationships with Australia for 70 years, longer than most of the ASEAN countries.

The Philippines has also become an important site for examining modern, democratic, and postcolonial states in Asia and beyond. Philippine Studies is the juncture between Area studies and the interdisciplinary investigation of Filipino culture, history, language, art, heritage, internal and global diaspora. Over the past decades, it has been relevant for examining not only the growth and challenges of the Philippines, but also how this country and its people are linked with the rest of the world, including Australia.

It is with this impetus that PINAS, the Philippine Studies Network in Australia, was conceived and formed in early 2017 by independent scholars and postgraduate research students of several Victorian universities. Inspired by Filipino migrant researchers who have made earlier engagement efforts in other diasporic sites like the United States and Europe, the group aims to contribute to and examine Filipino and Filipino-Australian community-formation within Australia. PINAS is a collective of scholars in the humanities and social sciences, particularly the interdisciplinary studies of culture, society, politics, and art known as Philippine Studies. PINAS welcomes

scholars from all disciplines and focusses on topics, issues, and challenges faced by the Filipino community in both Australia and the Philippines. It aims to foster connection, dialogue, research and creative projects among academics, artists, activists, and the larger Filipino and Filipino-Australian public.

PINAS, in the last three years, has responded to the problems and issues faced by Filipinos through critical and creative engagement in both digital and live venues. It has also served as a study circle for research and coursework scholars who are working on research projects and papers on the Philippines. Many of them are research students at Monash University, The University of Melbourne, and La Trobe University in Melbourne. Melbourne-based scholars are part of the advisory team of this newly-emerging collective, including the author, Dr Reyvi Marinas who completed a research in Citizenship Studies and Law, Dr Walter Robles of Swinburne University, and Dr Gary Devilles, who completed his urban research project at La Trobe University and has now returned to teaching and research at Ateneo de Manila University.

In September 2017, PINAS together with postgraduate students from various Victorian universities initiated a roundtable dialogue at The University of Melbourne regarding the prospect of Philippine Studies in Australia. The following month, PINAS hosted a lecture-forum at Monash University by the prolific Filipino migrant scholar Robyn Rodriguez, Professor of Asian-American Studies at the University of California Davis, and founding head of the Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies. The title of his lecture was "Decolonizing Filipino Migration Research".

In 2018, PINAS became a major academic partner of the yearly International Research Forum on the Philippines organised by the Filipino-Australian Student Council of Victoria. PINAS contributed to the development and curation of the conference's theme *Becoming*

Filipino. It was also involved in the development of a conference panel that interrogated the connections between community action and research, particularly regarding various Filipino community organisations in Victoria, like Migrante Melbourne, Gabriela Australia, Advanced League of Peoples' Artists Incorporated, Philippine Australia Solidarity Association, and Anakbayan Melbourne.

Following the success of the conference, PINAS hosted another forum that examined the link between community issues and the formation of diasporic communities in Australia through critical reflections by visiting Filipino academics, including University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) film and cultural studies professor Dr Rolando B. Tolentino, Filipino creative writing scholar and translator Dr Vladimere Gonzales (UPD), and multi-award winning writer, commentator and sociologist Arnold Alamon, who is Assistant Professor of Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology.

Currently PINAS is conducting research led by this author, Monash University's PhD Candidate Katrina Ross Tan, and PINAS member and data analyst Candice Rabusa. The project, "Understanding Filipino Youth Immigrant Lived Experience in Melbourne, Australia: A Preliminary Study", explores how Filipino youth in Melbourne view and understand their cultural values in an ongoing formation of hyphenated and complex Filipino identity abroad. Through a qualitative enquiry from focus-group discussions among 1.5 (young people who were born in the Philippines but migrated to Australia with their parent/s before the age of 9) and second generation Filipino-Australians, the study seeks to interrogate issues surrounding the identity and cultural formation of this demographic segment. It also aims to examine the problems of this particular segment of the Filipino-Australian population and to mobilise the potential of the young Filipino-Australian voice and contribution to community engagement in Australia as well as in the Philippines.

Amidst the difficulty of navigating the terrains of community formations and academic networks in the context of the diaspora, and the defunding of university research in the humanities, social sciences, and Area studies, PINAS represents an important effort to bridge the gap between research and grassroots communities. In the coming years,

PINAS aims to continue to be a critical voice for engaging the Filipino and Australian publics in topics of importance, such as migration, politics, community building, globalisation, culture, the arts, the ongoing relationship between Australia and the Philippines, and problems in the Asia-Pacific Region.

The challenges faced by Area/Philippine Studies in Australia include the lack of an academic institution for advancing research on one of the largest migrant communities in the world. Also, with more global economic woes and ongoing environmental and social catastrophes, the government, private institution and public funding of research in the arts, humanities, social sciences and Area studies has been dwindling. Furthermore, there is a changing landscape of research globally, in which academic institutions are faced with increased pressure to measure their impact not only in terms of their research publications but also their active role in community and nation building.

Nonetheless, Australia's role in developing world class research in the region also lies heavily in collaboration with nations in the Asia-Pacific region, and in the innovation and scholarship produced in this part of the world, including the Philippines. It is with this in mind that PINAS in Australia seeks to involve the academic community, independent scholars and the general public in research and community engagement about pressing topical issues in both Australia and the Philippines.

Reagan Maiquez completed his doctoral research at Monash University in the area of theatre and performance studies. He has taught writing and literature at the University of the Philippines at Los Baños and is currently involved in community, creative, and research projects with various organisations in Melbourne, Australia. This includes being a co-convenor of PINAS rrmaiquez@gmail.com

