Screening Place: Regional and Vernacular Cinemas in Cebu[1]

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Abstract

The history of autonomous cultural production in the Philippines has been both blessed and cursed with a series of significant but contentious debates largely stemming from the nation's historical battles with colonialism and how that experience problematized the concept of an easily definable national identity. Using geographical concepts surrounding place to open up new approaches to understanding local cultural production, this essay turns to Philippine cinema as a propaedeutic for this contested history and traces the emergence and difficulties of vernacular and regional cinemas in Cebu, Philippines.

Keywords: Regional cinema, Cebu, cultural geography, place, colonialism

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The history of autonomous cultural production in the Philippines has been both blessed and cursed with a series of significant but contentious debates largely stemming from the nation's historical battles with colonialism and how that experience problematized the concept of an easily definable national identity. In many ways, Philippine cinema serves as a great propaedeutic for this contested history. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (2014) note that the emergence of cinema coincided with the imperial project during an age when Europe ruled over large amounts of foreign land and subjugated peoples. The beginning of the twentieth century was the height of capitalist appropriation of resources, an imperialist ordering of the globe under what they call the "panoptical regime" and the colonial domination of indigenous peoples (Shohat & Stam, 2014, p. 100).

One of the earliest and most prescient questions that served to challenge a coherent narrative about Philippine cultural production was the question of language. Where the use of Spanish in the early twentieth century Philippines could function as a shibboleth to undermine the American imperialism of the period, it was also a dismissal of the over 175 local Filipino languages and dialects. With the arrival of cinema in the Philippines and the appearance of films made by Filipinos with Tagalog titles and eventually, with the coming of sound, spoken Tagalog, it seemed that Philippine cinema was on its way to becoming a well-defined national cinema.[2] However, Tagalog was and remains the language of the capital, a language much of the archipelago's inhabitants felt was imposed upon them from above (see Pensar, 1988).

Such a situation provokes a number of significant questions related to issues of vernacular and regional cultural production. For instance, what are the cultural roles of the multitude of Filipino languages? These languages and the practices associated with their speakers make up, not only the linguistic, but equally the cultural, political, and geographical fabric of the Philippines and its ever-proliferating diasporic populations. It would thus seem self-evident that neglecting the inclusion of these languages in popular media would tend to limit the definition of Philippine national cultural production. Furthermore, it should be asked: what is a national cinema that only speaks from the vantage point of political and economic power? Is it not, again, a limited understanding and representation of the nation as well as a marginalization of provincial, nonmetropolitan communities? Ultimately can a Filipino cinema ever claim the title of a national cinema if it only recounts capital narratives in the capital language? The answers come with as many complications as the questions, but there are responses, even if they are unable to account for the myriad *aporiae* that haunt them.

In order to offer some preliminary and tentative responses to these questions this text uses the cinema of Cebu as an example of a provincial vernacular Philippine cinema, which until the twenty-first century served as the only consistent cinematic alternative to the Tagalog language film industry in Manila (see Grant & Anissimov, 2016). It is worth noting that "cinema of Cebu" is used instead of the more common "Cebuano cinema" in an effort to acknowledge the complex web of finance, labor, and technology that this cinema benefits from, which comes from outside of the province and city of Cebu. This history of cinema in Cebu has already been, for better or for worse, formalized, with a number of texts being published on the subject (see Alburo, 1997; Co, 1987; Deocampo, 2005; Grant, & Anissimov, 2016; Mojares, 1995). Generally, the history begins with Jose Nepomuceno's newsreel of the funeral of the first wife of then House Speaker Sergio Osmeña Sr. in Cebu. Following this, Nick Deocampo (2005) writes, "that by 1922, Cebu saw the first locally produced movie *El Hijo Desobediente*" (p 8). Deocampo, in researching Cebuano film history, found the reference to *El Hijo* in D. M. Estabaya's 1975 article in *The Republic News* "First Visayan Movies Recalled" (Estabaya, 1975).[3]

Prior to the introduction of the possibility of *El Hijo*, it was generally accepted that the first Cebuano film was a talkie from late 1939, Piux Kabahar's *Bertoldo ug Balodoy* (Grant & Anissimov, 2016). Generally, the 1940s are considered to have opened rather productively for Cebuano movie production, but it quickly came to an end with the onset of the war (Grant & Anissimov, 2016) Following the war, however, starting in 1947, cinema in Cebu began to take off and experienced what was dubbed by some as its first "Golden Age" of cinema (Grant & Anissimov, (2016). By 1955 a Manila-based newspaper, *Philippines Free Press*, ran an article that showed a doubling in production from 1954, and noted that between 1947 and 1955, 50 Cebuano films had been produced ("Banner year for Visayan movies," 1955).[4]

However, the boom in production did not last long. By 1958 a *This Week* article on Visayan movies opens with the less than enthusiastic assertion that "although Visayan movies are beset with a number of difficulties, the speculation is wrong that the situation is really hopeless" ("The Visayan Movies," 1958, n.p.). And in 1959, D. M. Estabaya in his unrepentant article "Dead as a Doornail" opens with the abrasive salvo: "The Visayan movie industry today is dead as a doornail!" (p. 62).

The 1960s were almost entirely unproductive until the end of the decade when there was again an upturn in production that saw the release of one of the region's most famed products (and one of the few Visayan movies from this period currently known to exist), *Badlis sa Kinabuhi* (1969).

The stars of this film were a power couple who featured in many Cebuano film productions as well as radio dramas, Gloria Sevilla and Mat Ranillo Jr. Shortly after the film's release Mat Ranillo Jr. died in a plane crash.

The 1970s were productive years for Cebuano cinema, and it is at this point that we can perhaps technically start talking about a regional cinema as opposed to a vernacular provincial cinema, given that this is the decade that President Marcos officially regionalized the archipelago.[5] In December 1973, Eugene Labella's *Mayor Andal* was released and heralded as marking the revival of Cebuano cinema. In 1974, upwards of 17 feature-length films were made in the region, which further spurred the First Visayan Film Festival that took place the following year in 1975 (see Grant & Anissimov, 2016). Equally, the various productions pointed to a capacity to make films across a number of popular genres: among others *Mayor Andal* was a comedy, *Batul of Mactan* (1974) was a trans-generic comedy-musical-drama, *Bulawan sa Lapok* (1975) and *Ang Medalyon nga Bulawan* (1974) were high melodrama, *Enter Garote* (1974) and *Visayan Dragon* (1974) were martial-arts action films, and *Mga Milagro sa Señor Santo Niño* (1973) was a quasi-religious historical movie released during the Christmas season.

1976 saw a flash of Cebuano slapstick comedies, almost all of which starred the singer Roman "Yoyoy" Villame. Yoyoy was a jeepney driver in Bohol who began recording novelty songs in Bisaya, English, and Tagalog and along with Max Surban held the title of the "Visayan Jukebox King." Villame starred in Eugene Labella's *Kilum Kilum*, Tony Solis's *Itlog, Manoy, Orange*, *Wa Sa Ta Ron* by Romy Diola and *Ay Takya Takya*. 1976 also saw the production of Ben Abrarquez Villaluz's *Abay Dading Bay* and the announcement of a film that never seemed to materialize, *Si Jimmy ug si Joni Naggukod sa Gugma.*

But of all the Cebuano film projects of the 1970s nothing was more original or lucrative than 1977's *Ang Manok ni San Pedro* (St. Peter's Gamecock). The film was produced by two industrious brothers, Ray (Rey) and Domingo Arong, and directed by Jose Macachor. *Ang Manok …* was an adaptation of a famous Cebuano radio drama and the film starred the popular comedian Julian Daan, aka Esteban "Teban" Escudero, who was until his death in 2019 a politician in the Talisay region of Cebu and continued to host the morning radio comedy show *Kung Ako Ang Pasultihon*. While difficult to classify generically (a peculiar comedy-fantasy-romance-action hybrid), the film is remarkable for its use of alternative modes of production and distribution. The film was shot on super-8 and blown up to 35mm for theatrical distribution. But the film also traveled throughout the Visayas exploiting alternative screening venues, such as fiestas and local barangay (neighborhood) events (Grant & Anissimov, 2016). By relying on these low-

budget production formats and distribution models, the film proved to be an absolute financial success (Grant & Anissimov, 2016).

Following this period, the 1980s and '90s saw a turn toward television as well as the production of Leroy Salvador's feature film starring Gloria Sevilla, *Matud Nila* (1991). There was equally a turn toward narrative video projects by filmmakers such as Bien Fernandez, Leonardo Chiu, and Allan Jayme Rabaya, but these were particularly obscure and remained in the margins, thus, in terms of a visible cinematic output Cebu remained relatively unproductive until the onset of the digital age. The arrival of the 2000s saw the emergence of a new crop of filmmakers, a generation substantially younger than their predecessors, and unencumbered by the weight of the region's film history. New technologies, the rise of film appreciation courses within mass communications programs, and the establishment of the Big Foot film studio on the island of Mactan served as support for a generation interested in creating a new Cebuano cinema (Grant & Anissimov, 2016).

In 2007 Jerrold Tarog and Ruel Antipuesto made *Confessional* which is credited as being a seminal film, or at least a kind of Cebuano clarion call for the increase in regional productions. Following *Confessional*, films began to be produced at regular intervals by independent filmmakers like Ara Chawdhury, Keith Deligero, Christian Linaban, Victor Villanueva and Remoton Zuasola. Each of these filmmakers was supported by Cinema One Originals for at least one of their feature film projects. In terms of feature film production the 2000s have yet reach the same numbers that were seen in the 1950s and 1970s, however there is a large number of Cebuano shorts that need to be accounted for and which make up the landscape of Cebuano film production.

Today, in the contemporary discussion of Philippine cinema, Cebuano cinema figures within the larger concept of "regional cinema," however, the term "regional" has thus far been used in a predominantly popular sense and assumes a common and discrete understanding. Yet, a region is a historically and theoretically complicated concept to articulate.[6] In the Philippines, the term "region" comes with the added complication that the country was not officially regionalized until the 1970s under the Marcos regime. This would mean that in some sense, Cebuano film production in the 1950s could not yet include this administrative aspect of being regional in its definition. Such films made at that time might instead be considered provincial or vernacular cinema. It would seem then that the concept of a region requires a heterodox approach when attempting to identify or define it, an approach that interrogates the subject from a multitude of disciplinary vantage points, principally political, spatial, aesthetic, and linguistic.[7]

This heterodox approach illustrates the complex task of identifying the cultural composition of a region. Furthermore, this complexity becomes symbolic in that while it describes the difficulties of the notion of a discrete region, it is at the same time demonstrating the need for many discourses to help narrate, and in effect, construct a region's cultural, political, territorial, and aesthetic identities. In this way regional cinema is no longer (contrary to its popular articulation) reflective of the expressive cultural elements of a given territory but rather, it is itself a necessary condition for the construction of a region's identity.

Approaching the definition of the region in this multifaceted manner helps to reorient a dominant tendency in thinking about a region and its relationship to cultural production, a tendency that suggests there is the spatial region and its autochthonous expressive culture, and from that topological unit (country, region, village, etc.) there springs forth, in our case, a cinema that maintains fidelity to that region's endemic sensibilities, histories, and aesthetics. Ultimately, the region defines the cinema. While there is little doubt that a given region with all its attendant geographical considerations contributes to the cultural expression found in the cinema produced there, the reconsideration here is that cinema and other modes and practices of cultural production also participate in defining a given place or region.

With the development of popular and more affordable audio-visual technology regional cinema has been of particular import for the Philippines. Thus, the later periods of Cebuano cinema, those that undertook video and eventually digital production, may begin to inch closer to a slightly more comprehensive instantiation of regional cinema. But even in the classical mode of film production the concept of regional cinema was gaining ground. For example, in a 1987 issue of the Mowelfund film magazine *Movement*, Teddy Co (1987) wrote what is probably the inaugural essay on the subject entitled "In Search of a Regional Philippine Cinema." The article looked to Iloilo, Baguio, and especially Cebu for instances of this other, lesser-known cinema. The idea of a regional cinema has its obvious appeal; it invokes hopes of a local, sometimes minor, conception of cinema that challenges the fetishized (and highly Eurocentric) aesthetics, production values, and corporatism of dominant national cinemas.[8]

Given that a region, as the term is being used here, is a form of local community or territory within a nation, it is in some sense required to pass first through the difficult terrain of the national. This is primarily because while the regional approach does offer more heterogeneous and hybrid expressions of what constitute a nation—expressions that give more credence to indigenous, local, and perhaps above all linguistic distinctions—

it still maintains constitutive parameters that tend toward a potential homogenization of the concept. Ultimately boundaries are still erected and territories established, but what they encircle appears to offer, at the very least, more malleable or protean concepts of community.

There is a productive discussion concerning these issues as they arise in national cinemas by film scholars Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (2006), who, in critically addressing the turn to a transnational approach to cinema, end up providing a précis of the problem of regional cinemas. The authors cite the work of scholar Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto who notes the ways in which there was once a simple, if mistaken, notion about how to construct the history of a national cinema.

> Writing about national cinemas used to be an easy task: Film critics believed all they had to do was to construct a linear historical narrative describing a development of a cinema within a particular national boundary whose unity and coherence seemed to be beyond all doubt. Yet, this apparent obviousness of national cinema scholarship is now in great danger, since, on the one hand, we are no longer so sure about the coherence of the nation-state and, on the other hand, the idea of history has also become far from self-evident. As the question of authorship in the cinema was reproblematized by poststructuralist film theory, the notion of national cinema has been similarly put to an intense, critical scrutiny. (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 4)

This prelapsarian model might unfold by organizing a chronological narrative beginning with the earliest articulations of cinema and arriving at a unified picture of that cinema within the territorial bounds of the nation. From there one might have constructed a table of elements in which all the expressive cultural features of that nation would be noted, coming up with something that could constitute, let's say, for our purposes, Filipinoness. The pair shirks at the temptation to succumb to the transnational and instead reinvest in an expanded approach to national cinema. They cite three outcomes from their rethinking of the national, without having recourse to the trans-national:

> First, the nation-state is not universal and trans-historical, but a socially and historically located form of community with origins in post-Enlightenment Europe; there are other ways of conceiving of the nation or similar large communities. Second, if this form of community appears fixed, unified, and coherent, then that is an effect that is produced by the suppression of internal difference and blurred boundaries. Third, producing this effect of fixity, coherence, and unity depends upon the establishment and

> recitation of stories and images—the nation exists to some extent because it is narrated. (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 5-6)

This passage could serve as a dialectical model to critique at once the dominant conception of a national cinema that appears to repress the regional and marginalized voices, while simultaneously suggesting a critique of that very same imagined regional cinema. In particular the second point must certainly raise some red flags for those interested in regional cinemas; in fact, it seems to be calling on such a notion specifically, namely that those suppressed internal boundaries and differences are precisely those regions that undermine the picture of the fixed, coherent, and unified nation. All of these imply that we are faced with the same challenge of transnational models in articulating regional cinemas against the national. Are we not, ultimately, faced with an imagined region with a fixed, unified and coherent narrative?

Thus, again from the complicated question of the nation emerges the equally thorny question as to what constitutes a region. The question seems perhaps naïve, and yet when we interrogate its most rudimentary implications, the capacity for this simplism to raise increasingly complicated, problematic, and defamiliarizing points, challenges most easy responses. The two primary problems we are faced with are the definition of a region as such, and then what will be constitutive of this region's cultural production: namely, how will a region escape national and regional hybridity in a global situation that has international, cultural, political, and social contagions occupying the most minute territories of the planet?[9]

With regard to the first question "what is a region?" we can start with a most rudimentary definition that would consider a region as a place. Geographers sometimes distinguish between the *chora* as region and *topos* as place, but the two often overlap (Entrikin, 1991). Chorology is the study of regions and can best be thought of perhaps as a spatial version of chronology. In conceptualizing place, Tim Cresswell (2014) has pointed to the work of radical geographers who offer what we can consider a kind of conservative or reactionary definition of place that could be composed as: connection between place and singular identity; authentically rooted in history; clear set of boundaries separating the world outside of a given place.

We might want to think about how this more parochial understanding of place plays out in the struggle to understand regional cinema. Again, Cebuano cinema works well as a productive model, in part because of its slightly longer history than some of the other more recent regional cinemas that have emerged in the last decade. Writing, particularly journalistic

writing, about cinema in Cebu has a long history of hand-wringing that coincides with a more homogeneous conception of place and eventually region. Early articles wondered what would the future of this cinema would be, and then up through the 1990s and into the present the melancholic tone of Cebuano film journalism persists, where articles like "Revival of Visayan Films: Is It Still a Possibility?" (1995) lament "Frankly, I don't know if reviving the Visayan film industry is still a possibility" (p. 36) or in an article about the 1991 *Matud Nila,* "It's Time to Revive the Visayan Film Industry" (1997):

> I can still vividly recall when Bisaya Films, headed by a Cebuano politician, produced a Visayan film which he then said would signal the 'uninterrupted' revival of the local movie industry. Sadly, after his debut project nothing positive ever happened. It was because a number of Tagalogs called the shots during the production of the movie and the result was a complete mess. (p. C3)

This short quote encapsulates some aspect of each of Cresswell's (2014) three elements of the reactionary approach to place. The reference to a Visayan film—calling on the difficulties outlined above regarding national cinema—suggests a kind of singular cinematic identity. This potential singular identity is immediately complicated by the writer's use of the term "Visayan," given the multiple languages, cultures, islands, and ultimately regions that make up the Visayas and Visayan. The author suggests something like the existence of *Visayaness*, which given the territorial and cultural diversity of the Visayas is highly problematic and tends toward a hermetic ensnaring of the term.

The latter point coincides with the connection between place and singular identity as well as a clear set of boundaries separating the world outside of a given place. There is a certain tendency in Cebuano film historiography to call on a regionalism that defines itself largely against Manila and the Tagalog language, typified above in the comment that "Tagalogs called the shots." There are material reasons for such an isolationist position, the region does not have a priori identities but rather ones that are in part created by those with more power than others to define territorial, linguistic, and other determining factors. Thus, the sensitivity to a seeming intra-national colonization maintains some legitimacy, however this position does unfortunately appeal to the identification of a region based on us/them distinctions, which often serve as catalysts for prejudice and nationalism.

Finally, the author over the course of the article, and even in the title itself, calls on the history of cinema production in Cebu. What is at stake here is Creswell's (2014) point about a conservative definition of place; in this case a region, or even more specifically Cebu, identifies itself as authentically rooted in history. As we saw to some degree, there is a mythology that is perhaps bigger than the reality of the history of cinema in Cebu, but given its status as perhaps the only substantial alternative to Tagalog cinema, it ends up standing in as a kind of regional shibboleth. On the one hand, we can see how this historical pride can have a positive impact on local cultural production, and it calls out any attempt to homogenize the history of Philippine national cinema as Tagalog or strictly from Manila. On the other hand, however, it can also tend toward an isolationism and for many young filmmakers in Cebu it serves as a mythological benchmark set up by the old guard, but which diverges strongly from their own contemporary sensibilities and practices.

Cebuano literary scholar and historian Resil Mojares has addressed some of the complications of approaching regional cultural production from parochial or narrowly defined set of parameters. In 1976, Mojares wrote "On Native Grounds: The Significance of Regional Literature," a very instructive text for our purposes as it lays the groundwork for developing a concept (however mutable) of the regional, or of regional cultural production (Mojares, 1976). Obviously, one of the issues here is when trying to take the text on regional literatures and superimpose it seamlessly onto cinema we will experience some resistance around medium specificity. Without diminishing the complications of regional determination in literature, of which there are many, we can perhaps imagine a more workaday definition of how a single writer born in Cebu to a family with ancestral roots in Cebu, and who writes in Cebuano about local issues or narratives and publishes in a Cebuano publication, might constitute a pretty good approximation of a regional writer. Obviously the issues of the technique of writing, the literary traditions from other cultures and other serious historical factors have not been eliminated here, but the complication for the everyday reader may seem less, that is, some of the complications vis-à-vis the determination has been attenuated. The problem with film, its economics, its narrative methods, its imposition from the West as a tool of imperialism, and its technical historicity might well be more difficult to disentangle.

Mojares (1976) establishes some early coordinates for discussing regional cultural production. While not synonymous, Mojares frequently moves between references to regional literature and to vernacular literatures, and he locates sites of vernacular literature in magazines, pamphlets, periodicals and sometimes books (Mojares, 1976, p. 156). What is being summoned is

the idea of a vernacular literature that is associated with "a different and lower social class" a literature that "lies close to the soil … and provides us with insights into a different order of reality with its own characteristic patterns of thinking and feelings and modes of expression" (Mojares, 1976, p. 157). The hope is that by accounting for these other tendencies in literature the national literature can be a more robust one that in turn gives voice to or is expressive of the multiplicity of languages, experiences, and cultures in a given country. For our purposes, it might be appropriate to begin to think about how what we refer to as regional cinemas conforms in some sense to this description of a vernacular literature. Yet, already problematic in Mojares's description is the expressive aspect, especially if we are rejecting the early expressive mode of national cinema.

In 1986 Mojares wrote a kind of rejoinder to this piece. While the argument in favor of a national literature that accommodates, or even insists on, regional literatures forming a part of the totality of a national canon is still present in the second text, he does pose a couple of troubling questions. First, he asks, in reflecting on his previous writing, if a regional literature still exists ten years after the publication of the previous essay. Mojares writes:

> That there are writers writing in the regions is easily seen. That librarians now have respectable collections of vernacular works is true. Yet, undoubtedly there ought to be more to the concept of a regional literature than facts of medium, bulk or residence. (pp. 128-129)

This line of reasoning eventually finds Mojares asking a question that we might rather repress, and that is, what cultural validity, if any, does the concept of the region hold? Mojares (1986) implies that what is needed in the face of this question is not the jettisoning of the concept in its entirety but a reinvigoration of its definition and an articulation of what the concept claims.

But when faced with the question of a regional cinema, as opposed to a regional literature, we have to keep in mind the differences between these media and the material at our disposal. And it is here that as historians a kind of contradiction will emerge in our approach. If, for instance, the Cebuano cinema of the pre-digital age is all but lost (we have access to roughly five movies from the entire history, all made during or after 1969[10]), we are not yet in a position to have even the basic historical and material conditions for what Mojares describes as being insufficient for a regional cultural production. We can imagine a scenario where we would have access to the majority of the films and could then set about a kind of analysis of these

works that would eventually allow us to come up with a similar conclusion as Mojares, but this is, materially speaking, not the case.

The upshot of this, is that again, while place does influence cultural production—in our case, cinema—we would perhaps benefit more from employing conceptual paradigms that rely on a dialogical approach to understanding place and region. The radical feminist geographer Lynn Staeheli (2003) offers five conceptualizations regarding place that can be useful to bear in mind as we continue to wrestle with cinema in the regions: place as physical location or site; place as a cultural and/or social location; place as context; place as constructed over time; place as process (p. 159). While, the first of these conceptualizations is a standard of any definition of place, it is in those that follow that we can broaden the scope of how we understand the interweaving of cultural production and the region and in particular how the fixity of place as a topographical location may begin to take the back seat to other considerations.

We can think about a separation of the topographical notion of place as a necessary component of cultural identification by considering the question of migration and diasporic populations. One anecdotal example is to look at the history of Somalian film production, which is quite young, commencing principally in the early 1960s. However, a large majority of the films were produced in the 1990s and 2000s in what became known as Somaliwood. Yet, Somaliwood is geographically located in Columbus, Ohio (Smith, 2007). The upshot, of course, is that a large sector of a nation's cultural production is not even taking place in the nation itself. When we scale this down to a nation's internal regions, and the kinds of migratory and diasporic populations adopting regions (often temporarily), we see how the location does not have to be the final determinant in identifying regional cinema.[11]

With all of these preliminary considerations we have to wonder if we are any closer to coming up with satisfactory responses to the questions that haunt the notion of a regional cinema. Perhaps, what we can see is at least a few more conditions that open up the terrain of how we discuss such a concept. Apart from the geographical framework, the evolving technologies in contemporary audio-visual screen arts point to the emergence of a slightly more autonomous regional cinema within a given nation. One of the most significant effects of independent nonregulated digital media on regional cinema relates to issues of institutional censorship. Once independent media producers (replacing filmmakers perhaps) have decentralized platforms and networks with which they are able to exhibit their work without any real infringement on the part of the MTRCB (Movie and Television Review and Classification Board) or other governmental censorship or ratings agency,

the cultural expression that emerges is something other than that cinema which, in order to have permission to be exhibited in movie theaters, has to be accepted by the review board. We should note for example, that the second largest period of film production in Cebu, prior to the digital age was during the period of Martial Law (Grant & Anissimov, 2016). Working under such constraints we have ask how a region's attempts at autonomous cinematic expression could really emerge. So while on the one hand we have the global complications of reconceptualizing what cinema is tout court, we begin to see on the other hand the development of a space for regional expression less imbued with the institutional and governmental constraints in place during the more restricted period of classical film production.

The second most important amelioration for the concept of regional cinema in the contemporary technical regime is the question of language. In looking at cinema from the pre-digital period, there are myriad complications for coming up with even a rough constellation of descriptives to define what we mean by a regional film. Continually, the most persistent element is that of language and in a quasi-Althusserian formulation we could say that it was language in the final instance that determined a regional film. Today, with the means of production being much more accessible, user friendly, popular, mobile, immediate, and immensely distributable, we are suddenly confronted with films in Visayan, Hiligaynon, Chavacano, and many other Filipino languages. Of course, these two elements—more autonomous expression and a body of productions—are only beginning to fulfill Mojares's necessary but insufficient conditions for the definition of a regional production.

One of the key aspects missing from this discussion is the drastically changing landscape of cinema itself. While this subject has been treated at length in many contemporary works of screen studies, we have in a sense tabled the issues for the moment in order to focus on the importance of a more inclusive concept of national cultural production that maintains some of the necessary elements of the nation but includes its marginalized, excluded, ignored and devalued cultures. A national cinema will have difficulty claiming itself as such until it takes into consideration the regions that compose the nation. In turn these regions will have to continue to interrogate what in their constitution separates them from the same problems that the nation faces with its borders, imagined cultural identities, its inclusions, and its exclusions. In terms of cultural production, and cinema specifically, the recent explosion of regional film festivals celebrating local languages, cultures, stories, and practices would appear to be a step in the right direction. Ideally, this will translate into a more complex understanding of Philippine cinema, not only for the local/national audience but also for

the international audience that has in large part only been presented with Tagalog cinema as representing the Philippine nation.

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Endnotes

[1] Sections of this essay are from two chapters in my coauthored book, *Lilas: An Illustrated History of the Golden Ages of Cebuano Cinema* (Grant & Anissimov, 2016).

[2] The use of the term "national cinema" and all its attendant critique is perhaps too lengthy to address here, however, it should be noted that this instance of its use should signify the term in its most base sense. That is to say, a cinema that emerges from the national boundaries, is made by nationals, and uses the languages of those nationals. Given that this is an impoverished and reductive reading of national cinema and eschews a multitude of complications in the definitions of both "national" and "cinema," it can be understood as a placeholder for a perhaps quasi-utopian idea of a national cinema that, in this case, would necessarily incorporate the vast linguistic landscape of the Philippines.

[3] No copy of *El Hijo Desobediente* has surfaced as of yet, but citing this film as the first Cebuano production wouldn't be problematic as long as it was sufficiently referenced in the literature of the period when it was said to have been produced. However, no reference to this film has yet been found in any Cebuano newspaper of the1920s. The most reliable source for finding mention of this film would be *Bag-ongKusog*, but there is nothing in that periodical to suggest that such a film was produced.

[4] There is a fair amount of discrepancy with regards to the number of films produced during the 1950s in Cebu. Erlinda Alburo writes that 12 films were produced in the period between 1950 and 1957 (Alburo, 1997), while an article in the *Philippines Free Press* entitled "Banner Year for Visayan movies" suggests that between 1947 and 1955 50 Cebuano movies had been produced, with 14 completed in 1955 alone ("Banner year for Visayan movies," 1955). In a 1995 dossier on Cebuano cinema Resil Mojares (1955) wrote that 80 films were produced between 1947 and 1960.

[5] "Technically" means here that there is not necessarily an aesthetic or qualitative shift from a provincial vernacular cinema to a regional one, but rather it is the emergence of the name, following Marcos' regionalization of the Philippines. This remark serves primarily as a reminder that the Philippine regions as understood as political entities are not naturally occurring, thus when we speak of a regional Philippine cinema, the term region comes with this historical weight.

[6] Region in this context is not referring specifically to the broad geopolitical entities such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa, but rather to a nation's internal regions, often represented by smaller, local communities or territories and can sometimes be distinguished by linguistic differences.

[7] Another distinction to note here is the metropole-periphery. This spatial distinction becomes further complicated in the context of regional cinemas, because the various provinces have their respective capitols, for example Cebu City being the capitol of Cebu. While the cultural workers in Cebu City are struggling to have their voices put on equal footing with those from Manila, there is the rest of provincial Cebu which equally must struggle to have its manifold voices included in the metropolitan cultural "scene" of Cebu City.

[8] This hope, and often disappointment, is expressed across more than a century of writing about cinema in Cebu, particularly in the local Cebuano newspapers. In fact one of the earliest articles on the subject, published in *Bag-Ong Kusog* in 1939, around the same time as the production of the first Cebuano feature film, is entitled "Unsay Kaugmaon sa Pelikulang Binisaya?" (What is the Future of Cebuano Cinema?). The article is a perfect mix of the hope that such a cinema brings and the fear that

it will not survive. This tone continues up until the present. For a more detailed look at these articles see Grant (2013).

[9] In terms of global cinemas, the most basic aspect of these two concepts of contagion and hybridity that I wish to convey are as follows. The contagion is perhaps a sort of negative corollary to hybridity. An example might be that a given national cinema adopts narrative, formal and structural strategies of mainstream Hollywood cinema (it could be another major national cinema, but I use Hollywood here as perhaps the most obvious example of a structurally influential cinema, in no small part due its early imperialist aspirations). One argument might be that the hope of extracting a "pure" autonomous national cinema from a country's body of film work becomes an ephemeral pipe dream, given that it is already aesthetically contaminated by a colonizing force like Hollywood. Hybridity, is perhaps now the more progressive and perhaps useful way of understanding this influence. In contrast to contagion, hybridity makes its own use of the influence, hijacking it and putting in the service of the national, or in this case, regional cinemas.

[10] The pre-digital films which we know are still available (though at least one is only available in digital format) are: *Badlissakinabuhi* (Leroy Salvador, 1969), *Aliyana ang engkantada* (Eugene Labella, 1974), *Itlog Manoy Orange* (Alfonso Ang, 1976), *Ang Manok ni San Pedro* (Joe Macachor, 1977), and *Matud Nila* (Leroy Salvador, 1991).

[11] This holds for both intra- and international diasporas. For instance, Keith Deligero is identified as one of the key contributors to contemporary cinema in Cebu. Deligero not only makes Cebuano language films, he also maintains the Binisaya film festival, which promotes films in Bisaya as well as other regional languages. However, Deligero lives and works in Manila. There is also the case of Ara Chawdhury and Christian Linaban, two key Cebuano filmmakers (although Ara is from Butuan) living in California, but who still work in the context of Visayan filmmakers.

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