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Cinema and Politics:

The Creation of Postcolonial Self/Other and the Shaping of
Strategic Cultures in Southeast Asia, 1945-1967

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Strategic Cultures in Southeast Asia, 1945-1967

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASA	Association of Southeast Asia
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
FINAS	National Film Development Corporation Malaysia
Hukbalahap	Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon/Nation's Army against the Japanese
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
KMT	Kuomintang
LEKRA	Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat/Institute for the People's Culture
MANIKEBU	Cultural Manifesto
MANIPOL	Political Manifesto
MAPHILINDO	Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia
MASYUMI	Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MFU	Malayan Film Unit
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PERFINI	Indonesian National Film Company
PERSARI	Indonesian Artists Company/Perseroan Artis Indonesia
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia/Communist Party of Indonesia
PMIP	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party
PNI	Indonesian National Party
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEAC	Southeast Asian Command
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
TNI	Indonesian National Armed Forces
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
USIS	United States Information Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VOC	Dutch East India Company/Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie

The only way to get rid of my fears is to make films about them.
Alfred Hitchcock

Summary

This research examines the intersections among Southeast Asian strategic cultures, cinematic visualizations, and the formation of Southeast Asian foreign policies from 1945 to 1967. Veering away from realist, political, economic, and strategic frameworks on foreign policy and international studies, I apply cultural analysis to the study of the foreign policy orientations of Southeast Asian states in the early period of the Cold War—a period that coincided with the era of nation-building and decolonization in Southeast Asia. The underlying premise of this approach is that politics and foreign policy formulation are not impervious to culture—that the processes by which states relate to one another are inevitably grounded in distinct cultural spheres. Through an investigation of the strategic cultures of Southeast Asian states, I provide a provocative alternative for understanding how and why these states navigated the Cold War the way they did. I examine how Southeast Asian strategic cultures reflected and/or were shaped by the dominant ideologies in the national cinemas in three countries—Malaya/Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. I then explore how the strategic cultures of these Southeast Asian states eventually influenced their nation-building processes and international relations.

Using films as the primary analytical reference, I investigate what the dominant ideologies in popular cinematic products that circulated in the region illuminate concerning the broader cultural context, in general, and strategic cultures, in particular, of Southeast Asian states; how these films depict international realities following the Second World War, the Cold War and its major players (the United States, China, and, albeit to a lesser degree, the Soviet Union), and the role of the Malayan/Malaysian, Philippine, and Indonesian states in the battle between the communists and the anti-communists; how popular films and genres impinge on the corroboration or rejection of particular discourses dominant in Southeast Asian nation-building and foreign policy-making during the Cold War; and finally, how the strategic cultures of Southeast Asian states, which were captured in and influenced by the popular films produced by Southeast Asians themselves, shaped the outlook of key policy makers in dealing with and coming to terms with decolonization and Cold War realities in the region.

I argue that Southeast Asian films advance a cultural narrative about anti-colonialism, independence, and nation-building that produced, affirmed, and reinforced the Southeast Asian strategic culture of non-alignment. The ideologies, (re)created, negotiated, and embodied in Southeast Asian films, reflected and influenced the strategic cultures of Southeast Asian states. I further maintain that the strategic cultures not only shaped the perceptions of Southeast Asians concerning international affairs, they also affected the manner in which the peoples viewed themselves and others, and shaped their international behaviour.

Introduction

Cinema and Politics

Film and fiction are mirrors of a society's hopes and fears, pathologies and neurosis, dreams and visions. As with all mirrors, however, what we see are only reflections of ourselves.

Ronnie Lipschutz

On May 18, 2015, I was sitting in the Screening Room of the Arts House in Singapore anticipating the showing of the Mexican movie *Enamorada* (A Woman in Love, 1946).¹ People from diverse ethnicities and nationalities filled the room, with Mexicans forming the majority. A part of me wondered how a Mexican staying in Singapore would react to the classic movie from home, created and released six decades ago. My curiosity was satisfied when, half-way into the film, a Mexican woman sitting beside me started to sing along to the religious composition, *Ave Maria*, crooned by one of the movie characters. The music lasted for a good minute and she was so enamoured by the song that she was practically crying. When the music ended, she gesticulated to make the sign of the cross, and being born and raised in the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country, I knew that it was an expression common among Catholics.

At that precise moment, I realized (perhaps with more clarity than before) how absorbing and captivating films could be. She was watching a movie that reminded her of “home,” no matter how obscure its features could have appeared in her imagination. More importantly, she was prompted to act – singing a song she found meaningful and then publicly expressing her religious beliefs by making the sign of the cross. That episode triggered more questions. What do we see when we watch films? What do

¹ *Enamorada* (A Woman in Love, 1946) was screened as a part of the “100 Years of Mexican Cinema,” a film festival organized by the Embassy of Mexico in Singapore.

films tell us about ourselves, the ones who made them, or societies, in general? Why do some films provoke us to act or to behave in a certain way?

This research adopts an alternative approach to understanding the history of Southeast Asia during the period when the Cold War intersected with the European retreat from the colonies. Departing from the traditional method of studying history through solely scrutinizing (and being partial to) written documents and manuscripts, I reconstruct the past using and analysing moving pictures in their historical contexts. What were framed, what were excluded, and how the films themselves were products of culture and history are examined. Rather than limiting myself to written historical sources, I focus more on what can be understood through national cinema.

Contrary to the belief that films should be regarded as secondary, if not weak, sources of history, I maintain that films narrate and make sense of human experiences. Films are not produced only to entertain, to profit the production companies, and for filmmakers to make a name for themselves. Filmmaking is ultimately an act of empathy; films reflect as well as shape the concerns of societies. Filmmakers and actors take the lived experiences of their times and the past, and turn them into perceptive and soulful works of art. Like Renaissance Italy's architecture, paintings, and sculptures, post-1945 Southeast Asian films offer insight into the spirit of the age and the mind-sets of the societies that produced them.² In themselves, the films also shaped the spirit of the age and the mind-sets of the societies that produced them. Analysing the history, themes, and dynamics of Southeast Asian cinema during the Cold War helps us grasp how Southeast Asian states made sense of the Cold War, their decolonization experiences, their nationalist projects, and the processes that shaped their foreign policy approaches.

² See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990); the work was originally published in 1860.

The end of the Second World War sparked an era of radical changes across Southeast Asia. Cold warriors, anti-colonialists, nationalists, and imperialists operated to advance their interests across the region. Newly independent states strove to establish stable political and economic institutions, capable of enabling them to survive and stave off foreign interventions into their domestic affairs. Southeast Asian leaders furthermore articulated ideas championing regional unity, seeking to band together to protect their collective interests. This research explores this complex period in Southeast Asian history through a comprehensive analysis of the intersections between strategic cultures and cinematic visualizations.

Veering away from realist, political, economic, and strategic frameworks on foreign policy and international studies, I apply cultural analysis to the study of the foreign policy orientations of Southeast Asian states. The underlying premise of this approach is that politics and foreign policy formulation are not impervious to culture—the “webs of significances” or network of meanings that human beings rely on to define their experiences and perceptions of reality.³ The processes by which states relate to one another are inevitably grounded in distinct cultural spheres. As Akira Iriye rightly notes, the state is an entity that consists of a series of “distinctive traditions, social and intellectual orientations, and political arrangements.”⁴ International relations could thus be studied as intercultural relations. Culture and its products, ideologies, and public discourse could shape a state’s perceptions of and policy toward another state.⁵

³ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture” in Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders (eds.), *Anthropology in Theory Issues in Epistemology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 236.

⁴ Akira Iriye, “Culture and Power: International Relations as Intercultural Relations,” *Diplomatic History* Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 1979): 115.

⁵ See for example: Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A*

Before I go into the specific questions addressed in this research, it is vital to clarify what strategic culture means. The term is broadly defined in the scholarly literature.⁶ This study defines it as a system of ideas that shapes the strategic decisions and behaviour of states. This is loosely derived from Alastair Iain Johnston's definition of strategic culture as an:

“...integrated system of symbols which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by

History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) be consistent with the citations; details of the press or not?; Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York, 1967); Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and US Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Joseph Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Post-war Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Reinhold Wagleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Robert Park, *Race and Culture* (New York: Free Press, 1964); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of the Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China, 1031-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Servando Halili, *Iconography of the New Empire: Race and Gender Images and the American Colonization of the Philippines* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2006); and Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁶ See for example: Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options Rand R-2154-AF* (Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 1977); Colin Gray, “National Styles in Strategy: The American Example,” *International Security* Vol. 6 No. 2 (Fall 1981); Colin Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back,” *Review of International Studies* 25:1 (January 1999); Colin Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Press, 1986); Carnes Lord, “American Strategic Culture,” *Journal of Comparative Strategy* Vol. 5 Issue 3 (1985); Jeffrey Legro, “Culture and Preferences in International Two Step,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 90 No. 1 (March 1996); and Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 19 (Spring 1995).

clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious.”⁷

Simply put, strategic culture is the ideational arena that limits and facilitates state behaviour. Specifically, I examine how Southeast Asian strategic cultures reflected and/or were shaped by the dominant ideologies manifested in cinematic narratives in Malaya/Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. I then explore how the strategic cultures of these states eventually influenced their nation-building as well as international behaviour during the Cold War.

I argue that Southeast Asian films advanced a narrative that produced, affirmed, and reinforced the Southeast Asian strategic culture of nonalignment. Three interlinked ideologies were dominant in the narrative: a propensity to construe domestic politics and international relations as a continuing revolution; a championing of the nation and nationalism; and non-alignment. The ideologies—(re)created, negotiated, and embodied in Southeast Asian films—reflected and at the same time influenced the strategic cultures of Southeast Asian states. The images and narratives of Southeast Asian films, and the strategic cultures within the countries considered in this study were mutually constructing and reinforcing each other. Their relationship, accordingly, was dynamic and mutually constitutive rather than causal. The Southeast Asian strategic culture shaped the manner in which Southeast Asians perceived international affairs, approached international politics, and formulated their foreign policy decisions.

Using films as the primary sources, I investigate what the dominant ideologies in popular cinematic products that circulated in the region illuminated concerning the broader cultural context, in general, and strategic cultures, in particular, of Southeast

⁷ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. ix. and “Thinking about Strategic Culture” *International Security* Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring, 1995), pp. 32-64.

Asian states; how these films depicted the international affairs, the Cold War, and its major players (the United States, China, and the Soviet Union), and the role of the Malayan/Malaysian, Philippine, and Indonesian states in the battle between the communists and the anti-communists; how popular films and genres impinged on the corroboration or rejection of particular discourses dominant in Southeast Asian nation-building and foreign policy-making during the Cold War; and finally, how the strategic cultures of Southeast Asian states, which were captured in and influenced by the popular films produced by Southeast Asians, shaped the outlook of key policy makers in dealing with and coming to terms with Cold War realities in the region.

The rest of this chapter is divided into four parts. First, I discuss the current state of scholarship on the nature and dynamics of Southeast Asian foreign relations during the Cold War. To identify the lacunae in Southeast Asian historiography addressed in this work, I review the scholarly works that employ-strategic culture or cultural studies to analyse international relations. The second part explicates the major research questions, argument, scope, and limitations of this work. I then explain the methodological considerations and the key theoretical framework within which my analysis is grounded. I also elaborate on the relationship among strategic culture, cinema, and transnationality. In the fourth and final part, a succinct review of the films used and an elucidation of the organization of this dissertation are presented.

A. STATE OF THE LITERATURE

Much has been written about the Cold War in Southeast Asia in the past two decades. Scholars have explored the origins of the Cold War in the region, why the ideological fight shifted from Europe to Southeast Asia, the diverse factors that shaped

Washington's key policies, and the legacies of the conflict in the region.⁸ Despite offering interesting insights into the Cold War and Southeast Asian history, the rich body of work has some limitations. First, most of the publications focus on the Vietnam War and offer Western (that is to say, American) perspectives. Much less has been published on other Southeast Asian states such as Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia.⁹ Furthermore, as scholars generally focus on Western concerns, they invariably depict Southeast Asia as essentially an arena of contest between the great powers. Less emphasis is placed on the roles that local actors played in the conflict. Southeast Asian narratives and perspectives consequently remain under-studied—left at the margins of Cold War scholarship.

Scholars, for example, argue that the great powers' intervention in Southeast Asia, specifically Vietnam, was the inevitable outcome of American and communist Cold War concerns.¹⁰ Others who focus on U.S. policy contend that Washington sought to dominate the regional economies and link them to a US-led international capitalist

⁸ See for example: Matthew Foley, *The Cold War and National Assertion in Southeast Asia: Britain, the United States and Burma, 1948-1962* (London: Routledge, 2010); James Tyner, *America's Strategy in Southeast Asia: From the Cold War to the Terror War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Nicholas Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia, and the Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Robert McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Edmund Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

⁹ Albert Lau "Introduction: Southeast Asia and the Cold War" in Albert Lau (ed.) *Southeast Asia and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁰ George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

economy.¹¹ Still others privilege national security concerns: the US government regarded Southeast Asia to be of such economic and military importance to the United States and its anticommunist allies that Washington would countenance no communist challenge to Western dominance of the region.¹² Whatever the perspective, Southeast Asian voices remain comparatively muted in these studies.

In recent publications, scholars have offered more complex narratives of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Odd Westad, Karl Hack, and Geoff Wade contend that Southeast Asian political leaders played important roles in the global and regional Cold War. They were not merely weak actors or puppets of the Americans or the Soviets.¹³ A collection of essays written mostly by Southeast Asian scholars likewise demonstrate that the Cold War in the region took a different route compared to Europe precisely because of the unique “regional dynamics it interfaced with.”¹⁴ Altogether, these publications critically investigate the perspectives of Southeast Asians.

Another important collection of essays that examine Asian perspectives and actions in the Cold War is one edited by Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael

¹¹ See for example: Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: WW Norton & Co., 2009),

¹² See for example: Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹³ See for example: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonization in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya, and Singapore* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001); Geoff Wade, “The Beginnings of a ‘Cold War’ in Southeast Asia: British and Australian Perceptions,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 40 Issue 3 (October 2009), pp. 543-565.

¹⁴ Albert Lau (ed.) *Southeast Asia and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

Szonyi.¹⁵ They point out that Southeast Asian political leaders entertained communist ideas before the outbreak of World War II. They also contend that the leaders found communism both appealing and appropriate as an ideology that underpinned their anti-colonial and nationalist struggles against the imperial powers.¹⁶ The focus of Zheng, Liu, and Szonyi on local objectives, perceptions, and initiatives puts Southeast Asians very much at the center of the political and cultural transformations that were taking place in the region during the Cold War.

The scholarship on the Cold War in Southeast Asia has undoubtedly become more nuanced and sophisticated. Yet not many scholars have attempted a cultural analysis of the formulation of Southeast Asian foreign policy or international behaviour. Even Heonik Kwon, whose innovative work is informed by cultural and social history, is focused more on accentuating the diverse sociocultural experiences in Cold War Asia rather than how culture had influenced the Asian states' foreign policies.¹⁷ Similarly, Theodore Hughes' examination of literature and film in an Asian state—South Korea—is concerned more with their production rather than their influence on Seoul's foreign policy orientation.¹⁸

Among the few publications embracing the cultural approach to the study of Southeast Asian foreign relations is a volume edited by Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat. Vu, in particular, argues that Asian political leaders established a complex cultural network that helped ideas to cross boundaries and shape the Southeast

¹⁵ Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi (eds.) *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Asian policy makers' perception of international politics.¹⁹ Another collection edited by Tony Day and Maya Liem furnishes insight into how Southeast Asian novels, theatre, arts, literature, festivals, and the popular press moulded local identities and local perceptions of the Cold War.²⁰ Despite their novelty, the essays in the two volumes do not undertake a sustained and systematic investigation of the influence regional cultural products had on Southeast Asian foreign policymaking.

No major study, in other words, has been produced on the cultural sources of Southeast Asian foreign policy or international behaviour. This dissertation is an attempt to address that gap in the literature. In doing so, this study seeks to make an original contribution to the scholarship on Southeast Asian history, the Cold War, and strategic culture.

B. THE RESEARCH PUZZLE, SCOPE, AND LIMITATION

This study addresses the following questions:

- [1] What can the dominant national cinematic products that circulated in the region illuminate concerning the broader cultural context, in general, and strategic cultures, in particular, of Southeast Asian states?
- [2] How did these films depict the Cold War (and the period of decolonization and nation-building), the major players in the Cold War – the United States,

¹⁹ Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (eds.) *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann (eds.) *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009).

²⁰ Tony Day and Maya HT Liem (eds.) *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010). See, in particular, the essays by Francisco Benitez, Rachel Harrison, and Barbara Hatley.

China, and the Soviet Union - and the role of Southeast Asian states in the battle between the communists and the anti-communists?

[3] How did the ideologies in national cinema impinge on the strategic culture and the corroboration or rejection of particular discourses dominant in Southeast Asian states' foreign policy-making and international behaviour during the Cold War?

[4] How did the Southeast Asian states' strategic cultures, which were captured in and influenced by the national cinema produced by Southeast Asians, shape the outlook of key policy makers in dealing with and coming to terms with Cold War realities in the region?

At this juncture, several fundamental points need clarification. First, I focus only on three Southeast Asian states – the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia. The reasons for choosing these countries are twofold. First, there is a need to make the subject more manageable for analytical purposes. Southeast Asia during the Cold War was a very tumultuous and heterogeneous region, with each state dealing with its own internal complexities and external challenges. A comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the cultural underpinnings of all the states' Cold War policies would sacrifice depth of analysis for breadth. Additionally, given the necessity to limit the scope of the dissertation, I have selected cases that offer rich empirical data and address the questions I raised about the strategic cultures of Southeast Asia.

The Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia had vibrant film industries that were transnationally linked. Each Southeast Asian state also had different political historical experiences that made for useful comparative analyses. The Philippines had a “special relationship” with one of the major Cold War powers—the United States. Indonesia, conversely, did not. Many Indonesian leaders, in fact, held predominantly

negative views of the United States, and regarded China as an alternative model of modernity that was worthy of emulation.²¹ Malaya/Malaysia, meanwhile, had relatively close ties with Great Britain, and unlike Indonesia, achieved independence comparatively bloodlessly. How a former American colony, a state ostensibly sympathetic to communist China, and a former British colony confronted the challenges of the Cold War, decolonization, and nation-building would make for interesting comparative analysis.

Second, this study covers the period between 1945 and 1967. The Cold War, decolonization, and nation-building processes intersected in Southeast Asia as World War II came to a close in 1945. The leaders and peoples of the region had to grapple with those challenges, and preserve the viability of their nation-states. By 1967, Southeast Asian governments had formulated foreign policies that were distinct and evident. They were fundamentally founded on the principle of non-alignment. The year also marked the birth of the ASEAN—an institution that reflected its members' outlook on the Cold War and championed the principle of the non-interference of states in the internal affairs of other states.

Third, this dissertation is not a research on film studies or film criticism per se. An aesthetic examination of cinematic styles, techniques, and production is beyond my scope. The primary focus of this work is on the interaction between Southeast Asian film and politics. I define Southeast Asian films or national cinemas as those motion pictures produced by Southeast Asians. I chose films that are widely regarded as landmark films. These prominent films, produced from 1945 to 1967, were popular and influential. They were also predominantly made by pioneering Southeast Asian

²¹ Daniel Novotny, *Torn between America and China: Elite Perceptions and Indonesian Foreign Policy* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010); and Liu Hong, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949-1965* (Singapore: NUS Press and Kyoto University Press, 2011).

filmmakers: Lamberto Avellana, P. Ramlee, and Usmar Ismail—all of whom were instrumental in the birth of national cinemas in their respective countries.

Finally, this dissertation focuses on elite worldviews and perceptions rather than popular sentiments. Although film was a popular cultural product, the foreign policy making process in Cold War Southeast Asia was still primarily administered by the political elites. For the most part, Southeast Asian officials championed foreign policies without extensive and intensive consultation with the public. This is not to say that the people and public opinion wielded entirely no influence on the governments' decisions and policies. They could. Public and government views on foreign policy issues could also converge—affirmed and reaffirmed by the national cinema. Ultimately, though, the public did not manage the instruments of statecraft. This dissertation accordingly focuses on the Southeast Asian films' mutually constitutive relations with the political elite and the process of foreign policy making in the region.

C. METHODOLOGY

This study's central argument is grounded on two fundamental premises: First, the strategic culture of a state has an effect on its foreign policy decisions; and second, the strategic culture of a state can be determined by means of investigating the national cinema produced for both domestic and foreign consumption. By analysing the meanings entrenched in Southeast Asian films, in other words, we will be able to understand how the perceptions and cultural make-up of Southeast Asians influenced their international behaviour during the Cold War.

a. Strategic Culture

Strategic culture is the ideational setting that limits the strategic options of a state. The setting comprises a series of assumptions that a state holds about the use of

force, the nature of the enemy, the threats, and the nature of war in human affairs. These assumptions are shaped historically, and they help policy makers define the strategic options that will enable the state to advance its policy objectives. As Iain Johnston writes, strategic culture refers to the “ranked grand strategic preferences derived from central paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of conflict and the enemy, and collectively shared by decision makers.”²²

Following Johnston, I seek to determine the ideational arena that limited and shaped Southeast Asian state behaviour during the Cold War. I contend that the ideational context can be determined by the study of Southeast Asian national cinema. I assess how ideologies embedded in national cinema shaped Southeast Asian strategic culture. I then explain how the dominant strategic culture affected the policy options that Southeast Asian officials entertained and pursued during the Cold War. Note that a state can have more than one strategic culture. Nonetheless, there is usually one dominant strategic culture that influences state behaviour. This work does not ignore the clashing strategic cultures operating in Cold War Southeast Asia. But the primary focus is on the region’s dominant strategic culture.

This study does not attempt to trace the long historical origins of the sources that informed Southeast Asian strategic cultures. I focus on the period 1945 through 1967. I do not discount, however, the impact of pre-colonial and colonial narratives on the postwar strategic cultures of Southeast Asia. National cinema, after all, is inescapably and inherently built on the deeper historical experiences of the nation-state. Yet there was much in the postwar Southeast Asian films. Their characterization of the global conflict and its major actors influenced Southeast Asian threat perceptions and generated the policy options that the regional states eventually pursued.

²² Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, p. ix.

b. Why Films?

There is no consensus among scholars of strategic culture on what particular objects or referents best capture the strategic culture of a state. The sources indeed are vast. They range from writings, memoirs, and records of military officials, political leaders, and key national security advisers to novels, poems, songs, and short stories about war. The robustness of the analysis is best advanced, nonetheless, when scholars examine the sources and texts that inform the strategic culture during its formative period or “earliest accessible point in history.” These sources can be drawn on to comprehend the strategic preferences and choices of the political and military leaders of a society.²³

I rely on films—specifically the national cinemas produced by Southeast Asians during the period concerned—as the sources to draw out the spirit of the times, the political inclinations, the narratives, and the national aspirations that shaped the strategic culture of the region’s leaders.²⁴ The films bring to light key features of the societies and politics of the region. They tell us how Southeast Asians viewed their environment, themselves, and others, as well as how they wanted the rest of the world to view them. They reveal what made Southeast Asians during that period “laugh or

²³ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, pp. 40 (quotation), 47-48.

²⁴ Scholars studying Southeast Asian films have, conversely, focused on the history and development of the national cinemas or subject them to cultural criticism. See Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, and Rashmi Doraiswamy (eds.), *Being & Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2002); Jose Lacaba, *The Films of ASEAN* (Pasig, Philippines: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 2000); David Hanan, *Film in Southeast Asia Views from the Region: Essays on Film in Ten Southeast Asia-Pacific Countries* (Hanoi: SEAPAVAA, Vietnam Film Institute, and National Screen and Sound Archive of Australia, 2001); Jose Capino, *Dream Factories of a Former Colony: American Fantasies, Philippine Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Karl Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991); Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film* (Jakarta: Lontar Foundation, 1991); William van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

cry, what made them forget their troubles, and what they believed about their past.”²⁵ Accessible to the masses, national cinemas also served as an ideological tool that promoted ideas such as class relations, gender ideals, racial hierarchies, nationalism, and patriotism. They helped to define the “Self” and the “Other” in personal relationships as well as interstate relationships.

The films that I examine were not necessarily produced by the state. The local filmmakers and producers who created them also might or might not have clear-cut political motivations. But the film industry was not shielded from its cultural and socio-political environment. To appeal to and engage their audiences, films echoed the “fears, fantasies, and hopes” of their audiences. As Douglas Kellner observes, a film is “a contest of representations and a contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles and transcodes the political discourses of the era.”²⁶ Likewise, the local film industry was not isolated from external competitors such as Hollywood. In fact, Southeast Asian filmmakers adapted, resisted, or localized in their productions the films and ideas from Hollywood that they consumed, selling narratives that would appeal to and resonate with the local audiences. Ultimately, the film productions furnish much information about the societies that produced them. They reflect the cultural milieu and the socio-political condition of the societies that created them.

²⁵ John O’Connor and Martin Jackson, *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar, 1987), p. xvii.

²⁶ Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 2-4. See also Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility Second Version” in Michael Jennings, Brigid Doerty, and Theresa Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Belknap Press, 2008); Roman Horak and Monika Seidl, “Raymond Williams – towards cultural materialism: an introduction” in Monika Seidl, Roman Horak, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *About Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 7-8; and Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

As they are watched by many, films are furthermore able to reinforce the societies' dominant culture and prevailing ideologies. They are likewise capable of producing new cultural norms and ideologies that the societies use to simplify the complex world into comprehensible and mentally digestible narratives. Films, rather than products of high culture such as classical texts, novels, and music (which were mostly rooted in the colonialist/European cultures), thus serve as valuable references to ascertain the strategic thought, political ideologies, counter-discourses, and popular sentiments of the societies that produced them. They create, affirm, and reaffirm the ideational setting that limits the strategic options of a state and its officials.²⁷

c. The Transnationality of the Sources

The transnational links between culture and films in the region are also explored in this research. The premise underpinning the approach is that ideas, peoples, and cultural products move across national borders. Such movements necessarily bring into focus the “question of confrontation, accommodation, and dialogue among civilizations.”²⁸ Apart from examining the similarities and differences in the genres, styles, and techniques produced by Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia, and the Philippines,

²⁷ For discussions on film, history, and filmic analysis see: Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980); Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History: History: Concepts, Theories, and Practice* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006); Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Marnie Hughes-Warrington, ed., *The History on Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009); William Guynn, *Writing History in Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Janina Wildfeuer and John Bateman, *Film Text Analysis: New Perspectives on the Analysis of Filmic Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 2017); and David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

²⁸ Akira Iriye, “Transnational History,” *Contemporary European History* Vol. 13 No. 2 (May 2004) p. 222. See also Isabel Hofmeyr, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” with C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, *American Historical Review*, 111 (December 2006), pp. 1440-64; L. Briggs, G. McCormick, and J. Way, “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” *American Quarterly* 60 No. 3 (September 2008): pp. 625-648.

therefore, I trace the relationships and the transnational business and intellectual networks established among Southeast Asian filmmakers. I explore the circulation of the Southeast Asian films within the region, I also investigate the impact of Hollywood on the region's film industry. The films and the industry were ultimately linked by a transnational network of ideas, which influenced the filmmakers' craft and narratives.²⁹

As I will demonstrate, the transnational ties explain why Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia, and the Philippines responded to the Cold War in perceptible and distinctive patterns. The transnational circulation of ideas about filmmaking techniques shaped the production of the films. The transnational circulation of ideas about culture, politics, and society also influenced the ideologies and narratives of the films. The films and the ideas that they championed ultimately moulded the strategic culture of the Southeast Asian states. They also helped fashion ideas among leaders about a regional identity. By 1967, Southeast Asian leaders, sharing similar strategic outlooks and political aspirations, would congregate to create the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

D. REVIEW OF SOURCES AND OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

More than 60 films from the region were reviewed and 45 movies were extensively used and cited throughout this study. Philippine films were acquired from the Cultural Center of the Philippines, University of the Philippines Film Archives, and Video 48, a video shop specializing in classical Filipino films. The collections on

²⁹ Transnational approach in film and politics does not entail the exclusion of national cinemas. Rather it takes into account the dialogical interaction between national and global cinemas. Transnational approach allows for a richer and broader interpretation of films beyond their culturally-specific origins. For a discussion on the transnationality of films see: Milja Radovic, *Transnational Cinema and Ideology: Representing, Identity and Cultural Myths* (New York: Routledge, 2014); and Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Philippine Foreign Policy at the Asian Center Library, National Center for Public Administration and Governance, and the University of the Philippines Main Library have been utilized as well. In Malaysia, research locations include the P. Ramlee Memorial Museum along Jalan Dedap in Setapak where Ramlee's most important films can be viewed or purchased. Various stores at Chowkit market likewise sell Malayan/Malaysian as well as Indonesian films produced from as early as the 1950s. I also conducted research in Ramlee's hometown in Penang to gather additional data and to understand the local factors that shaped Ramlee as an actor and director. For documents on Malayan/Malaysian foreign policy, the main resource center is the National Archives of Malaysia.

Cinemas from Indonesia are available at the *Sinematek* Indonesia (Indonesian Film Archive and Library) in the Haji Usmail Film Center. Other primary materials on Indonesian politics and foreign policy were obtained from the National Library of Indonesia, *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*, and the *Museum Rekor Indonesia*. Throughout the course of writing this work, I also made comprehensive use of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Library, the Asian Communication Research Center at Nanyang Technological University, the National Archives of Singapore, and the National University of Singapore Central Library.

The source materials that I obtained are employed to craft a narrative organized in the following manner. Part One consists of three chapters that discuss the origin, development, and transnational facets of Southeast Asian films. Part Two contains three chapters exploring the three main ideological features of Southeast Asian strategic culture. Chapter One discusses the development of Southeast Asia's film industry from the colonial years to the outbreak of the Cold War. Chapter Two examines the transnational linkages among Southeast Asian national cinemas, the state

of the film industry, and the regional consumption of the films from 1945 to 1967. And Chapter Three focuses on the state of the film industries in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia from 1945 to 1967, and the lives and works of the most influential filmmakers in the region: Usmail Ismail, Lamberto Avellana, and P. Ramlee. These chapters highlight the manner in which cinema developed and functioned to influence the collective imagination of Southeast Asians over time.

In Chapter Four, I discuss one of the three ideological elements in Southeast Asian strategic culture that the region's films produced, affirmed, and reaffirmed: a continuing revolution in domestic and international affairs. Chapter Five examines the second ideological element: a championing of the sovereign nation and nationalism. Chapter Six discusses the notion of nonalignment and hybrid communist promoted by the films. These three ideas formed the bedrock of what I deem the Southeast Asian strategic culture. Finally, this dissertation ends with a discussion of its major contributions and new research possibilities.

Chapter One

Starting with the Backstory

*You must understand the frame of minds of peoples who having thrown off
foreign rule are flexing their muscles for the first time.*
Carlos P. Romulo

*Cinema will eliminate divergences of views among men and prove invaluable
in realizing the human idea.*
Kemal Ataturk

Any scholar attempting to study Southeast Asia is immediately confronted with its immense diversity in terms of religion, ethnicities, languages, and historical experiences. While this work does not go deep into the discussion of how heterogeneous the region is, it is important to, at the very outset, establish a general understanding of the historical background of Southeast Asia before the outbreak of the Second World War. This is essential to make sense of the composite condition of the region during the Cold War. This chapter also outlines the genesis of cinema during the pinnacle of colonial rule in Southeast Asia followed by a compendary synopsis of the Japanese Occupation and how this key historical juncture impacted the state of filmmaking (and the nationalist movements) in the region. The conclusion will include a discussion of the emergence of nascent national and independence campaigns in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia.

A. FILM AND SOCIETY UNDER COLONIALISM

European rule profoundly influenced the development of Southeast Asia, shaping almost every aspect of the region's societies – political, economic, cultural,

and social. The earliest Europeans who founded communities in the region were the Portuguese. In 1511, they built a small settlement in Malacca that served as a base for maritime commerce. By the 16th century, the Spaniards secured their foothold in the Philippines. They installed a formal form of government throughout the archipelago and effectively entrenched Catholicism among the local population.³⁰ In 1619, the Dutch East India Company took control of Batavia and then expanded their authority to the rest of East Indies. Following the Dutch were the British who established bustling trading posts in Malaya and Singapore and exploited the lands for vital resources such as tin and rubber. Each colonial power worked to protect their respective territories against other colonizers, essentially creating obstacles for the free movement of ideas, goods, and people across the region.³¹

The Europeans established different styles of colonial governments in the region. Each of them imposed their unique political systems, institutions, and ways of governance on their colonies. The installation of rigid colonial spheres of influence by the Europeans, specifically, the Dutch, British, and the Spaniards, made inter-regional interaction difficult. Given the Europeans' policies, the region was disconnected despite their shared experiences with colonialism and maritime trade.³² As Nicholas Tarling noted, the colonial states in the region "had little in common but their

³⁰ Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, p. 51.

³¹ See for example: Amitav Acharya, *The Making of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012).

³² See for example: Anthony Reid, ed., *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993); Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988-1993); Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1800* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kenneth Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100-1500* (SI: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2011).

colonialism.”³³ Simply put, Southeast Asia under colonial rule was internally segmented, culturally heterogeneous, and economically linked to, even dependent on Europe.

By the second half of the 19th century, the region witnessed radical economic changes and profound shifts in society, culture, and colonial governance.³⁴ As historian Russell Fifield explains, the region became vital as a production centre of raw materials to fulfil Europe’s needs.³⁵ While it is true that pre-colonial commerce in Southeast Asia was vibrant, particularly in the coastal areas, the advent of the Europeans intensified the mobility and exchange of goods and products within and outside the region. As the 19th century loomed, trade and commerce increased. Technological innovations from Europe percolated to Southeast Asia. Developments in communication and transportation, such as the telegraph and railroad system, reached the region.³⁶ Political boundaries were also drawn across the map of Southeast Asia.³⁷ A number of indigenous Southeast Asians furthermore went to Europe to study, and were exposed to Western ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Throughout these transformations, Southeast Asian countries began their search not only for independence, modernity, equality, and sovereignty but also for national identity.

While nationalist and independence movements developed in the region, some Southeast Asians were also drawn to communism. By the 1920s, labour activists in the

³³ Tarling, *Southeast Asia and the Great Powers*, p. 1.

³⁴ David Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, pp. 203-244.

³⁵ Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, p. 16; Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, p. 220.

³⁶ Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, pp. 254-268.

³⁷ Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, p. 16.

East Indies had been exposed to the writings of Karl Marx. In 1930, the Communist Party of the Philippines was established. The communists commenced their revolutionary campaign against American imperialism and advocated class struggle as the primary driving force of their movement. In the same year, the Malayan Communist Party was formed, and it organized labour protests and propaganda campaigns against the British. Employing Marxist and Leninist ideas into their independence and nationalistic campaigns, these groups sought to overturn the colonial order and usher in political change.³⁸

While Southeast Asian societies witnessed cultural, economic, social, and political change, their entertainment industries and cinemas also underwent transformation. The movie theatre that Europeans introduced to the region eventually became an important part of the society and culture of Southeast Asia. The technology underpinning modern cinemas was of European origins. To entertain people using visual images, entrepreneurs used pinhole cameras and then the camera obscura. The earliest motion-picture camera was invented in France by Louis Le Prince and was registered in 1887. Not long after, motion pictures found their way to the rest of the world, including Southeast Asia. Through the efforts of the Dutch colonizers, cinema reached Indonesia. They brought films from Europe and screened them in rented buildings. This was prior to the construction of movie houses in the country.

On December 5, 1900, the technology of cinema reached Indonesia. A Dutch company, *De Nederlandsche Bioscope Maatschappij* promoted the screening as Royal

³⁸ Christie Clive, *Ideology and Revolution in Southeast Asia, 1900-1980: Political Ideas of the Anti-Colonial Era* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001).

Bioscope.³⁹ A little over a decade after these first screenings, film production started in Indonesia. Dutch, French, German, and other European filmmakers came to Indonesia to produce mostly documentary clips about the country's culture, society, and lifestyle. In 1926, *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* (The Monkey Kasaroeng), considered the first film produced in Indonesia, was screened. G. Kruger and L. Heuveldrop collaborated to make the film. Europeans provided the technology and the capital was procured mostly from ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs. Besides, the political and economic atmosphere encumbered local participation in film industry. In other words, the main players involved were the Chinese and the Dutch.

The Dutch also made documentaries about Indonesia. They also brought films from Europe. But these films did not appeal to people in the colony. The locals were uninterested as they could not relate to the films' European-based storylines and the images captured on screen. Before Indonesian filmmakers released their works, most of the films that were screened locally were about the experiences of Europeans in Indonesia and not about the locals themselves. The locals could not accordingly identify with the early cinematic narratives. They thus ignored the movie houses and cinemas.⁴⁰

In due course, Chinese entrepreneurs became involved in producing films in Indonesia. The Wong Brothers arrived in Indonesia after their enterprise failed in Shanghai. They were unable to compete with the Hollywood productions that were flooding China. A Chinese writer and reporter, Kwee Tek Hwai, encouraged the Wong

³⁹ Karl Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 14-16, and Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen: A Social History of Indonesian Film* (Jakarta: Lontar Foundation, 1991), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, pp. 14-16.

brothers to move their movie business to Indonesia. The brothers agreed.⁴¹ In 1928, the Wongs released and screened the first Chinese-made film entitled *Lily van Java* in Indonesia.

Although Chinese entrepreneurs injected some life into the Indonesian movie industry, the appeal of film was initially limited. Despite the introduction of sound films in 1929, the industry also did not take off. The technical quality of the films was poor and could not draw audiences to the cinemas. By 1932, when news of the impending establishment of the American Film Company in Indonesia was released, Dutch producers like Kruger and Carli decided to halt their ventures. While some industry players pulled out from Indonesia, there were others who persisted in the industry.⁴²

Despite these challenges, a number of excellent films have been produced. Among the early films produced and screened in Indonesia were *Njai Dasima* (Concubine Dasima), *Indonesia Malaise*, and *Boenga Rosdari Tjikembang* (The Rose of Tjikembang). In 1937, Albert Balink in collaboration with the Wong brothers and funded by the Netherlands East Indies Film Syndicate, made one of the first films in Indonesia that attracted a considerable number of people. With the help of Saroeng, an Indonesian journalist, Balink produced *Terang Bulan* (Full Moon). The film marked a key milestone in the development of cinema in Indonesia as it represented a shift towards the Indonesianization of the films in the country. *Terang Bulan* was an adaptation of the American film, *Jungle Princess* starring Dorothy Lamour. It

⁴¹ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, p. 15; Dafna Ruppin, *The Komedi Bioscoop: Early Cinema in Colonial Indonesia* (United Kingdom: John Libbey Publishing, 2016), pp. 215-262.

⁴² Mischbach Yusa Biran, "The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance," in David Hanan, ed., *Film in Southeast Asia: Views from the Region* (Hanoi: SEAPAVAA, Vietnam Film Institute, and National Screen and Sound Archive of Australia, 2001), pp. 211-252.

employed *keroncong* music and appealed not just to the local Chinese but to Indonesians as well.⁴³ Due to the unprecedented success of the film, Balink's *Terang Bulan* became a template for other producers seeking to make the next successful movie.

Now led by Chinese businessmen, the number of locally made films began to expand in number. Demand for such films also increased. The political climate of the time especially fuelled the demand and influenced the productions released by the film industry. With the commencement of the Second World War and the stronger clamour for Indonesian independence, nationalists in the country rigorously promoted the consumption of local goods and products. By the 1940s, the country witnessed the elites and intellectuals becoming more politically conscious. Cinema was also regarded as an indispensable instrument in Indonesia's independence campaign. As the Cold War approached, cinema became intertwined with politics and local consumption of films increased.

Like Indonesia, the story of the cinema in the Philippines began during the colonial period. The Europeans, namely the Spaniards, introduced the cinema to the Philippines. According to the film historian, Nick Deocampo, "Film was among the last – if not the very last – cultural legacy those colonial powers bequeathed their native vessels before the winds of change finally shook off their control over the region."⁴⁴ In 1897, the earliest known display of moving pictures in the Philippines took place in a movie house in Escolta owned by Messrs Leibman and Peritz. With the use of *Lumiere* cinematography, they presented a series of shows. A live orchestra, conducted by Don

⁴³ William de Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p. 128; Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴ Nick Deocampo, *Lost Films of Asia*, p. 3.

Francisco de Barbat, further enhanced the moviegoing experience. The programme reportedly ran for four months and sold at 30 centavos for the regular seats and 60 centavos for the first class.

The subsequent years were tumultuous in Philippine history. The second phase of the revolution against Spain had begun, re-ignited by the return of Emilio Aguinaldo together with an American fleet.⁴⁵ The Spanish Americans fought each other in 1898, and not long after that conflict ended, tension between Filipino revolutionary leaders and American soldiers escalated. In 1902, some calm returned to the Philippines following the termination of the Philippine-American war. As the Americans consolidated their rule over their Filipino subjects, the film industry had a new lease of life. In 1905, Herbert Wyndham screened shorts of the Manila Fire Department's activity. In 1909, several new movie houses opened. Among them were Albert Yearsley's Empire Theatre and the Anda Theatre. Yearsely shot short films including *The Cebu Typhoon of 1912*, *The Eruption of Taal Volcano*, *The 1912 trip of the Igorots to Barcelona*, and *The Manila Carnival of 1910*.⁴⁶

Filmmakers from the United States also produced short newsreel documentaries about the islands. Silent films from Germany, France, the US, and Great Britain were screened in significant numbers in local movie houses. The earliest film production and distribution companies began to appear and slowly, film became one of the most dominant forms of entertainment in the Philippines. In July 1909, Pathes Frere Cinema began selling projection equipment in Manila and ensured the stable progress of local filmmaking. As a result of these developments, the production of

⁴⁵ See for example: Jose Arcilla, S.J., *An Introduction to Philippine History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1971).

⁴⁶ Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: NCCA, 2003).

documentaries, expedition films, travelogues, shorts clips on festivals, and ethnographic films proliferated.⁴⁷

In the early period of filmmaking in the Philippines, the primary subject that caught the interest of directors and the local audience was the life and dramatic death of the national hero—Jose Rizal. Edward Gross, operator of the Rizalina Photoplay Company, competed against Yearsley and produced *La Vida de Jose Rizal* (The Life of Rizal). It featured Honorio Lopez as the lead character.⁴⁸ One day before the screening of Gross' film, Yearsley made his film entitled *El Fusilamiento de Dr. Jose Rizal* (The Execution of Dr. Jose Rizal). It was shot in a single day in Manila. Both films appealed to and entertained the local audience. This was not surprising, given the nationalistic fervour among the local populace. The era of Spanish rule had just ended. The promise of American tutelage invigorated the Filipino people, although a number continued to resist American rule. The political events of the preceding years not only stimulated patriotic themes in films but also shaped the consciousness of the people.

During this period emerged pioneering Filipino filmmakers such as Jose Nepomuceno, Vicente Salumbides, Julian Manansala, and Lamberto Avellana. Jose Nepomuceno established the Malayan Movies. With the help of his brother, they began making one film in two months. In 1919, Nepomuceno created the film *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden). It depicted local culture and society. In the following years, he made other films including *Tatlong Hambog* (Three Braggarts, 1926), *Punyal na Ginto* (The Golden Dagger, 1932), and *Noli Me Tangere* (1930). A detailed analysis of Lamberto Avellana's role and beliefs as a Filipino filmmaker is covered in Chapter Three.

⁴⁷ Nick Deocampo, *Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema*, pp. 10-12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Towards the end of the 1920s, the film industry in the country was well established. Seven films were produced in 1929, rising to eleven the following year. In 1931, nine films were made and the next year, the total number jumped to twenty-four.⁴⁹ Without a doubt, the local film industry gained momentum during the American colonial period. This unprecedented growth resulted in the formal institutionalization of the film industry in the Philippines. Many Filipinos who studied film or worked for the big film companies in the United States came back and contributed to the vibrant production of Philippine cinema. Philippine local studios such as Sampaguita Pictures and LVN emerged. Improvements to the moviegoing experience such as the introduction of sound came to the Philippines during this period.⁵⁰ In addition, Hollywood actors and actresses went to the Philippines to star in Filipino-American co-produced movies. As the Second World War appeared in the horizon, more and more filmmakers strove to make films that upheld the indigenous culture and promoted nationalist sentiments. This process was suspended during the War as Japanese soldiers marched into the islands and captured one town after another.

Like the Philippines and Indonesia, film also arrived in Malaya via the Europeans. The film industry thrived especially in Singapore. As Shariff Ahmad asserts, “Any discussion of the history of the Malay film industry must always start with Singapore.”⁵¹ As the most important entrepôt of the British in the region, Singapore, which was once a part of Malaya and subsequently of the Federation of Malaysia, served as the locus of the movie industry where local and international filmmakers congregated. The British brought films to the island, although there are

⁴⁹ Hanan, *Film in Southeast Asia*, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jose Lacaba, *The Films of ASEAN*, p. 51.

disagreements among scholars regarding the exact year when they arrived. Some scholars believe that in 1897, British producer Robert William Paul brought projectors from Europe and screened the first film in Singapore at the Alhambra. Later that year, the first British-imported film, entitled *Edison's Projectoscope*, was shown in Kuala Lumpur.⁵² According to Hassan Abd Muthalib, the earliest film was, in actuality, screened in 1902. Nevertheless, despite the lack of concrete and reliable evidence on the introduction of film in Malaya, it is certain that the early 20th century saw the growth of the local film industry with the opening of big cinema halls across all of Malaya. In 1933, the first film in Bahasa Melayu entitled *Laila Majnun* was produced. It was a collaboration between the director B.S. Rahjans and the producer S.M. Chesty.⁵³

Laila Majnun is a love story premised on the Persian-Arabic tale, and its production was informed by Indian techniques and style. While it is unanimously regarded as an important film, there are different views about it. For instance, Muthalib opined that the film was “only a film in the Malay language” made by foreign filmmakers from India. He asserts that Malay cinema, in fact, only started with P. Ramlee’s *Semarah Padi*. As opposed to the obvious Indian influences and features of *Laila Majnun*, Ramlee’s film, he argues, highlights Malay culture, norms, and customs in a way that were never seen before.⁵⁴ Although this work does not include a deeper investigation on the cultural significance and technical components of the *Laila Majnun*, it is sufficient to note that the film represents a step toward the development of

⁵² Hassan Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p. 32.

⁵³ Baharudin Latif, “A Brief History of Malaysian Film,” in David Hanan, ed., *Film in Southeast Asia*, pp. 163-193.

⁵⁴ See for example: William Van de Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Borders Crossings and National Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

what eventually will be called Malaysian cinema. Without a doubt, prior to the prominence of Ramlee and other Malay filmmakers, Indian directors facilitated the development of Malay/Malaysian cinema by delivering the early films using Malay language, actors, and setting. Certainly, Ramlee epitomizes the soul of Malaysian cinema. Further discussion on him as a pivotal icon in the history of Malaysian cinema is expounded in the subsequent chapter.

Prior to film viewing, the popular entertainment in Malaya was the opera, known in local term as *bangsawan*. Early Malay films in fact borrowed actors from the opera who helped boost the popularity of films. Among the pioneering stars were Khairuddin, Cik Tijah, Syed Al-Attas, Shariff Medah, Yem, and Fatimah Jasmin. Nascent Malay/Malaysian national cinema was also heavily influenced by Indian films. For instance, Rahjans brought with him a tradition of Indian filmmaking patterned on Indian mythologies such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This entailed the inclusion of song and dance performances in the middle of the narrative.⁵⁵ Following Rahjans, more Indian filmmakers ventured into producing Malay films with strong Indian influence. Apart from the Indians, Chinese filmmakers and entrepreneurs also helped build the local film industry. Prior the Second World War, Chinese businessmen produced movies based on Chinese narratives. Like Indian directors, they also used *bangsawan* actors for films like *Toga Bekasi* (Three Lovers) and *Ibo Tire* (Stepmother).⁵⁶

As in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia, early films in Malaya were intricately embedded in the distinct political, social, and economic milieu of the country. As Hassan Abd Muthalib remarked about Malaysian cinema, “The

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

performances were not only to entertain; they usually imparted something of relevance to life as well as depicting the culture of the particular community in which they were presented. They were, in fact, reflecting man, his world, his world and his condition...”⁵⁷ In this respect, the early films of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia serve as valuable windows to the nascent nations of the region.

It is clear that the colonial period in Southeast Asia brought unprecedented changes and transformations in the region. From political systems to cultural forms, each European ruler transplanted pieces of his own institutions and way of life to the colonies. At the end of the 19th century, cinema was one of the last legacies of technological transfer from Europe to the region. In a sense, the technology of cinema was one of foreign origin. Yet, as aforementioned, in due course, this product became a crucial instrument in the development of sovereign and independent Southeast Asian societies.

Despite the foreign origin of motion pictures, they were transformed and employed by Southeast Asian nationalists to further their causes. Gradually, films in the region became national cinemas; they became Indonesian, Filipino, and Malayan/Malaysian cinemas. More importantly, the shared narratives and images so evident in these national cinemas further served as fertile ground for creating and crafting the then embryonic Southeast Asian regional identity.

B. THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND THE BLEAK STATE OF CINEMA

The Second World War had a profound impact on Southeast Asia. The Japanese conquest put most of the region under one colonial rule for the very first time

⁵⁷ Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p. 11.

in history. Despite the fact that the brief Japanese control was not extensive enough (in terms of time) or protracted enough to integrate the various states into one cohesive region, during this period, nationalist fervour and anti-colonial sentiments among the locals intensified. The Japanese interlude served as the key catalyst for nationalism across Southeast Asia. As Fifield notes, “Not only was the imperial structure of the Western states easily destroyed by an Asian power but also the prestige associated with the white Western official almost suffered an eclipse at the hands of the Japanese.”⁵⁸

Looking at the regional level, Amitav Acharya asserts that the Japanese Occupation triggered regional consciousness not only by putting it under one Asian power but by eradicating the colonial division of Southeast Asia.⁵⁹ While under Japanese Occupation, Southeast Asian political leaders met for the very first time ever. In November 1943, Thailand’s Prince Wan Waithayakon, the Philippine President Jose P. Laurel, and Burma’s Prime Minister Ba Maw attended the first general Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations. Japan’s short-lived triumph over the Dutch, British, and American colonizers obliterated the illusion of the former colonisers’ invincibility. This was evident both in the condition of film and politics in the region throughout the period.

In 1942, the Japanese military forced their way into Indonesia but they were welcomed by many of the locals. Unlike the Filipinos who viewed the Japanese as invaders, Indonesians considered them as liberators from the Dutch rule. As soon as the occupation began, the realities of war surfaced. The Japanese took over the film companies and sequestered their cameras and equipment, using them to produce

⁵⁸ Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, p. See also: Alfred McCoy, *Southeast Asia under the Japanese Occupation*; and Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, pp. 349-355.

⁵⁹ Amitav Acharya, *The Making of Southeast Asia*, p. 82-88.

propaganda films—documentaries, feature films, and short news clips.⁶⁰ The distress of the war was also manifested in a drop in of the number of film produced. Among the few films produced during this period were Rustam Sutan Palindih's *Berdjoang* (To Fight, 1943) and *Di Desa* (At the Village, 1944).

Filmmaking in the Philippines also halted. The Japanese confiscated various film companies owned by Americans and utilized them to make propaganda materials. One example was Abe Yutaka and Gerardo de Leon's *Dawn of Freedom*. The movie depicted Westerners as the enemies of Asians and appealed to the nationalists in the Philippines to resist the West.⁶¹ This strong political allusion resonated with the Japanese pronouncement of "Asia for the Asians" – the core principle of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. The Japanese promoted local culture and banned American films from being screened in the country. Nonetheless, this tactic did not appeal to the people in the Philippines. The Filipinos were heavily influenced by American culture and merely saw the Japanese as foreign invaders. Despite the influx in nationalist and pro-Filipino campaigns, the Japanese never got on the good side of the Filipinos. In fact, the Filipinos were repelled by the Japanese cruelty and ill-treatment during the occupation.

The Japanese administered Malaya and Singapore from 1941 to 1945 and promoted a different kind of film production. As in the case of Indonesia and the Philippines, propaganda films were also introduced in Malaya. Local and foreign personnel working for film companies were forced to work for a Japanese film

⁶⁰ Del Mundo, "Philippines," p. 96-97; Luis Francia, "Side-Stepping History – Beginnings to 1980s," in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, and Rashmi Doraiswamy, eds., *Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia* New Delhi: MacMillan India, 2002), pp. 346-347.

⁶¹ *Dawn of Freedom*, directed by Abe Yutaka and Gerardo de Leon (Philippines: Toho/Tagalog Pictures, 1944).

company instead. The company, Eiga Haikya Sha, took control of the movie houses, film companies, as well as the distribution of films in Malaya and Singapore. The company also reviewed and censored films before allowing them to be publicly screened. In Singapore, Cathay Cinema became the most famous venue for Japanese-approved screenings. Old Indian films and Japanese propaganda were permitted while war films were prohibited. *Singapore Sokogeki*, *Marat Na Tora* (March to Singapore), *Shina No Yoru* (A Night in China), and Tokyo Symphony were some of the very few films allowed to be screened.⁶² The Japanese occupation had left an impact to style and technique of filmmaker in the region. For example, Ramlee's *Kancan Tirana* was based on the acclaimed Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's *Sanshiro Sugata*.⁶³

In this regard, the Japanese interregnum brought about crucial transformations in film and politics in the region. Anti-western sentiments escalated and nationalist ideas suffused in movies created by local and Japanese directors and pervaded even in the political debates and rhetoric among the elites. At the end of Japanese Occupation, the whole political landscape of Southeast Asia had changed. The perceptions of the locals towards their former colonial masters changed. The nationalist groups in Indonesia and Malaya acquired strength. The Filipinos looked forward to independence, which the Americans pledged to grant to the Philippines.

C. PRELUDE TO NATIONAL CINEMA

The Second World War weakened the hold that the European powers had over Southeast Asia. Their facilities and resources to re-establish colonial control were

⁶² Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*; Van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, pp. 130-132.

⁶³ Ibid.

drained. The movement for nationalism and independence grew stronger than before. Independence and nationalist movements rose and were determined to prevent the return of colonial authorities in their respective countries. Indonesians declared independence from the Dutch. The United States granted independence to the Philippines in 1946.⁶⁴ Although the Malaysians welcomed the return of the British, even they knew that independence was imminent.

As nationalist and anti-colonialist movements spread across the region, the process of decolonization began. In this nexus, the nascent Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began and aggravated and complicated the decolonization process. Albert Lau aptly explains:

“...decolonization was a compelling but manifestly separate historical process from the two superpowers’ global rivalry and would have carried on with or without a Cold War. However, in Southeast Asia, the two emerging processes conflated in the swirl of competing and interacting post-war forces rapidly emerging in the region, each influencing and being influenced by the other.”⁶⁵

The bipolarity of the Cold War immediately complicated the process of decolonization in the region. The political and ideological framework of the Cold War inadvertently influenced nationalist interests and agendas.⁶⁶ The Second World War and the damage it left in the region did not weaken the Westerners’ desire to return to their colonies. As local nationalist movements grew stronger, a series of violent armed

⁶⁴ Although today, Filipinos commemorate Independence Day on June 12, the day Emilio Aguinaldo declared freedom from the Spanish colonizers.

⁶⁵ Lau, *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

conflicts erupted. In the realm of ideas, Cold War rhetoric became closely intertwined with the local political elites' nationalist pro-independence language. As Lau explains, "By shrouding their causes in Cold War rhetoric, colonial regimes were able to coax a reprieve for empires by invoking their value as a Western bulwark against encroaching communism, disguised as nationalism."⁶⁷

During this period, the strategic cultures of Southeast Asia began to take shape. Local political leaders strove to define their international outlook. Although the region was characterized by great diversity – in language, ethnicity, and religion, among others, their experience under the mantle of colonialism served as a shared experience among Southeast Asian states. With the ending of the Second World War, these newly independent states struggled to define their role as sovereign nations in the international system. In the middle of this political, social, and economic mayhem, the key elements of the region's strategic cultures began to take shape.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

Chapter Two

Transnational Linkages in Southeast Asian Cinema

Films potentially have a utopian dimension which enables audiences to transcend the limitations of their current life and times to envisage new ways of seeing, living, and being.

They can also project idealized views of a better world that can provide ideological halos, which when critically decoded can generate insights into the ideological problematics and struggles of the era.

Douglas Kellner

Movies are like dreams – collective social dreams.

Robert Deniro

National cinemas in Southeast Asia did not emerge in isolation. They were transnationally connected. Traveling across borders to collaborate with one another, the producers shared their ideas, techniques of filmmaking, and political ideals. Hollywood productions also influenced their craft. All of these ideas and influences would find their way into the films that they created. Facilitating the transnational exchange and productions were the ethnic Chinese who funded a number of the films. Through these transnational exchanges, collaborations, and financial support, the post-war Southeast Asian film industry became notably vibrant and popular with the local population. The locals would embrace the films as valuable entertainment products and as significant parts of their social and cultural lives.

Three pioneering Southeast Asian filmmakers were notably important in the development of their countries' national cinemas. Lamberto Avellana, P. Ramlee and Usmar Ismail took an active part in the construction of images – of the National Self (and eventually the Southeast Asian Self, albeit abstrusely) and the Others (i.e. former colonizers, the United States and China and the Soviet Union as Others). Above all,

through their cinematic productions, they interpreted the social and political milieu in their own countries as well as how they related to other countries in the region. The cinematic productions furnished their audiences with ideas and mental images to comprehend the region and regional developments as well.

A. THE TIES THAT BIND: TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES

Films produced in Southeast Asia after World War II promoted the idea of regionalism among Southeast Asians. The writers of the scripts hailed across the region. They formed transnational networks, interacting with each other, exchanging ideas, and influencing one another. The products of those transnational exchanges were films that moved the people of Southeast Asia to imagine not only what their respective nations were like. More importantly, the films induced the audiences to see what lay beyond their borders, and to develop a sense of affinity with the history and cultures, of their neighbouring countries.

a. Strong Chinese Links

The ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs played key roles in the development of the film industry in the region. They started and managed many of the earliest studios and film companies that produced and screened local films. Growing the film industry in Southeast Asia, they produced films that stirred the imaginations of peoples about their countries and their neighbours. Developing a transnational network of relations among the peoples in the film industry in Southeast Asia, they also facilitated the exchange of technology, ideas, and cinematic narratives among interested parties in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia. In other words, the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs facilitated the development of cinema in the region at two levels: national (cinema

industry and the national construct) as well as transnational (regional cinematic web and regionalism or a sense of regional identity).

The ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs were key actors in Indonesia's nascent cinema industry. Aside from Oriental Film, which produced *Kris Mataram* (1940), Chinese businessmen owned two other prominent film companies, Wong Brothers and Tan Films. They are credited for being among the pioneers of Indonesian cinema (apart from Western companies), producing the first feature films in the country. Their movies included *Melatie van Java* (Jasmine of Java, 1928), *Njai Dasima*, *Pembelasan Nancy*, and *Melatie van Agam* (Melatie of Agam, 1930).⁶⁸ The companies also collaborated among themselves and with European filmmakers to produce films. *Terang Boelan* (Full Moon, 1937), for example, bore the imprimatur of Dutch filmmakers Albert Balink and Mannus Franken, and the Wong brothers, Othniel and Joshua.⁶⁹

Trained in countries like the United States, the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs saw the film industry as one sector of the economy that could potentially reap them significant financial gains. But they also entertained certain ideas about Indonesia and the region. They produced films that reflected their ideas about Indonesia, its people, and its culture—a plural nation-state. Their cinematic narratives described Indonesia as a country that comprised peoples from a wide array of cultures and ethnicities, which included the indigenous Indonesians as well as the Dutch and Chinese. Initially, not everyone appreciated their cinematic works. As some scholars note: “precisely because ethnic Chinese producers portrayed a different image of Indonesia than one imagined

⁶⁸ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, pp. 15-16; Ruppin, *The Komedi Bioscoop*, pp. 215-262.

by ethno-nationalist ideologues that their films become labelled as “un-Indonesian.”⁷⁰ But their “un-Indonesian” films actually brought into the public consciousness the notion of a plural and united Indonesia. More so than Usmar Ismail’s great work, *Darah dan Doa*, the movies created and produced by the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs effectively functioned to further the Indonesian nationalist cause. They propounded the ideology of nationhood and created images that furnished Indonesians with the notion of what a plural nation-state would look like.⁷¹

The ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs promoted the idea of a plural “imagined community” in Indonesia through their films.⁷² They included *Terang Boelan, Impian di Bali* (Dreams in Bali, 1939), *Zoebaidah* (1940), and *Kris Mataram* (Mataram Keris, 1940). Employing the Shanghai filmic style, techniques used by Hollywood filmmakers, and local traditional theatre narrative practices, these films acquainted Indonesians with the lives and aspirations of the ethnic Chinese community as well as their identification with Indonesia. Njoo Cheong Seng’s film *Kris Mataram*, for example, has scenes about the East Indies society. Instead of portraying it as being associated exclusively with one cultural group in Indonesia, Njoo used the big screen to show it was cosmopolitan and linked to different cultures. The film’s lead actress was also ethnic Chinese who wore traditional Javanese attire. To convey its message of inclusivity and promote the film, Njoo further employed publicity posters worded in

⁷⁰ Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn and Thomas Barker, “Imagining ‘Indonesia’: Ethnic Chinese Film Producers in Pre-Independence Cinema,” *Asia Cinema Vol. 21 No. 2*. (Fall/Winter 2010), p. 28.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Benedict Anderson, *Imagines Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* First Edition (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

both Dutch and Malay. In other words, Njoo's work effectively propounded the idea of an Indonesia that was culturally variegated but also distinctly Indonesian.

This theme can also be found in films made by other ethnic Chinese. *Terang Boelan* was one work produced by the Chinese filmmakers that contributed to the "Indonesianization" of films in the East Indies. After watching the film, audiences would have left the cinemas with the vivid notion of Indonesia as a complex but viable nation made up of multiple cultures.⁷³ The filmmakers, in sum, promoted an image of Indonesia "that is complex, idiosyncratic, and unique, yet connected to global flows and modern practices...such an image of Indonesia is different from later insular indigenist imaginings of Indonesian belonging."⁷⁴ Their film techniques, styles, and narratives brought onto the big screen and in the public consciousness new understandings of the Indonesian nation.

If ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs were active in the Indonesian film industry, they also invested in and keenly developed the Malayan and Singaporean film business. The principal film enterprises were the Shaw brothers and the Cathay-Keris. The Shaw brothers arrived in Singapore from Shanghai and established the Hai Seng Company. They were initially focused on distributing films in Singapore and Malaya. They then turned to making them. In 1937, the brothers bought second-hand film production equipment from Hong Kong and began producing films. Among their early creations was *Ibu Tiri* (The-Step Mother), which was released in 1937. Seeing much economic potential in the business, the Shaw brothers expanded their film empire. By 1939, they

⁷³ Karl Heider, "National Cinema, National Culture: The Indonesian Case," in Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 162-173.

⁷⁴ Setijadi-Dunn and Barker, "Imagining 'Indonesia'," p. 27.

had established 139 movie houses across Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Indo-China.⁷⁵

The following year, the Shaw brothers constructed a studio in Singapore. The entrepreneurs planned to use it to especially produce Malay and Cantonese films. To broaden their appeal to the local audience, the Malay works featured prominent Malay and Indonesian artists such as Haron and Tina.⁷⁶ These films were undoubtedly popular. Following the end of the Second World War, the Shaw brothers decided to expand their operations and meet the heightened demand for entertainment. In 1949, the company's Malay film department became the Malay Film Productions. Through this new set-up, the studio made films in the region, and even brought filmmakers from the Philippines, Malaya, and Indonesia together to create the earliest transnational film productions.⁷⁷ The Shaw brothers, thus, contributed to the establishment of a regional transnational network of filmmakers that would churn out productions that shaped the peoples' attitudes toward the region and the world.

Like the Shaw brothers, another prominent ethnic Chinese film company that was influential in shaping the cinematic narratives in the region was Cathay Organization. Formerly known as Associated Theatres, the company was established by Lim Cheng Kim (wife of Loke Yew) and her son, Loke Wan Tho. Loke Yew, the patriarch, was born in Guandong, China, to a simple farming family. In 1858, he travelled to Malaya to look for better opportunities. For several years, he worked in a

⁷⁵ Muthalib and Tuck Cheong, "Gentle Winds of Change," pp. 301-304.

⁷⁶ Haron was a prominent Malay comedian and Tina was a singer from the Indonesian province of Medan. See: Shaw Ventures into Local Film Productions, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/6854ed6a-6614-4ecc-b728-278f0a8ffb98>, Date last accessed: January 26, 2016.

⁷⁷ Shaw Brothers hired Filipino directors Lamberto Avellana and Ramon Estrella, more details on them will be presented in the succeeding section, as well as the Malay director Hussein Haniff.

provisions shop. He built up his savings and was eventually able to open his own store. Loke also explored opportunities in the Malayan peninsula and invested in the tin mines of Perak. In due course, the entrepreneurial Loke Yew managed to expand his commercial ventures, diversifying into the liquor, real estate, and transportation businesses. His fourth wife, Lim Cheng Kim (born and raised in Malaya), and son, Loke Wan Tho, drew upon the large financial war chest that he built to start the Associated Theatres Ltd in 1935.⁷⁸

The Lokes opened numerous cinema houses in Singapore and Malaya. In August 1941, the company finally completed the construction of the Cathay Building along Handy Road—the tallest structure in Singapore. Construction of the building had incidentally begun in 1937 and its cinema was opened to the public in 1939. At that time, the Cathay Building boasted a 1,300-seater cinema lined with armchairs. It also had air-conditioning. The first movie the cinema screened was Zoltan Korda's *The Four Feathers*. It attracted a sizeable crowd, which included prominent guests such as the Colonial Secretary Sir Alexander Small and Lady Small. While the Cathay Building consistently drew large crowds until the war, the Lokes continued to expand their business. They developed an extensive network of cinema houses in the region. They also led the way in producing Malay and Mandarin films. They even employed mobile film vehicles to bring cinematic productions to far flung villages and rural areas. Cathay Organization played a vital role in developing the cinema and

⁷⁸ Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri and Raja Ahmad Alauddin, "The Search for a Malaysian Cinema: Between U-wei, Shuhaimi, Yusof and LPFM," *Asian Cinema* Vol. 7 No. 2 (August 2012), pp. 58-73; Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema*, pp.; Krishna Sen, "Chinese Indonesians in National Cinema," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 171-184.

entertainment industries of Singapore and Malaya, and to a certain extent, the region as well.⁷⁹

If ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs helped develop the film industry in Malaya and Singapore, they also played significant roles in the Philippines. The pioneering group of businessmen, apart from the Spaniards and other Europeans, who invested in making films, included *chinos cristianos* (Chinese Christians). Among them were the Palanca and Leongson clans. These Chinese Christians, who were mainly businessmen, had reportedly been in the movie business before Jose Nepomuceno, the more famous “founder” of Filipino cinema, started his operations and released his first feature film.⁸⁰

Nepomuceno released his masterpiece, *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden), in 1919. The locally produced silent film garnered significant attention and generated a lot of ticket sales. Yet another equally laudable work, *La Conquista Filipinas* (The Conquest of the Philippines) had been released seven years earlier by Edward Meyer Gross’s Rizalina Film Manufacturing Company. Backing Gross were ethnic Chinese businessmen in the Philippines.⁸¹

Gross was an American businessman who decided to move into the Filipino film industry in the early 1910s. He ostensibly had help from key individuals in the Philippines—those who were familiar with the country’s history—in crafting *La Conquista Filipinas*’ screenplay. The film’s storyline explores the ancient history of the Philippines prior to Spanish colonization. It also narrates the early years of contact

⁷⁹ Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*. See also: Krishna Sen, “Hidden From History: Aspects of Indonesian Cinema 1955-1965,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 1-55.

⁸⁰ Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Philippines: The National Commission for the Culture and the Arts, 2003), pp. 237-238.

⁸¹ Edward Meyer Gross was married to Titay Molina who had extensive experience in the *zarzuela*. He made key films such as *La Vida de Rizal*, *Los Milagros de la Virgen*.

between the colonized and the colonizers. Other works released by the Rizalina Film Manufacturing Company such as *La Vida Rizal* (The Life of Rizal, 1912), *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not, 1915), and *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed, 1916) similarly deal with local and nationalist themes, or historical subjects such as the revolution against Spain and the Filipino martyr, Dr. Jose Rizal. Apart from local experts, such films undoubtedly had the imprimatur of Filipino businesspeople and government officials. Reflecting local production practices, the movies featured these businessmen and officials playing bit parts.⁸²

As an American who had only recently settled in the country, Gross would therefore have had assistance from the locals, including ethnic Chinese partners, in producing the films. A well-known ethnic Chinese businessman had, in fact, funded the production of *La Conquista*. Born in Xiamen, Don Carlos Palanca had moved to the Philippines in 1869 to look for better opportunities. Like Loke Yew, Palanca started his new life in Southeast Asia as a humble shop assistant. He worked diligently, accumulated enough funds to open up his own merchandise shop, progressively expanded his businesses, and eventually made his fortune. Among his many economic interests was the film industry. He clearly saw potential in Gross's work when he agreed to fund the production of *La Conquista*.⁸³

Palanca's financial support to Gross, though, was neither exceptional nor incomprehensible. Many ethnic Chinese who had acquired wealth and built their investments in the Philippines also financed the film industry. They included Don Francisco Lichauco, Don Francisco Leongson, Don Jose Tiotoco, and Don Jose Lauchengco. The returns could be handsome as movies were popular forms of

⁸² Deocampo, *Cine*, pp. 239-242.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

entertainment in the country. Given their endeavours in the film industry, the ethnic Chinese magnates certainly had significant sway over popular entertainment and public perception of issues in the Philippines. As a scholar notes, one should not neglect “the role that the *chinos cristianos* (Chinese Christians) played in the cultural affairs of the emerging nation.”⁸⁴

Apart from funding the production of films, the ethnic Chinese community also built theatres in the Philippines. In 1915, the Yu Uy Tong Clan Association erected one of the very first theatres in Binondo. This establishment eventually came to be known as the Rex Theatre. Another Chinese-owned movie house was the Asia Theatre Building. It was controlled by Vicente Gotamco. Born in Amoy in 1875, Gotamco came to the Philippines in 1885 to seek a better life. He made money, but lost most of his investments in a fire after the Filipino-American war. He rebuilt his businesses again, establishing a lumber company and acquiring large tracts of land in Pasay, a suburb of Manila. Gotamco also went into the film industry. At the Chinese-owned Asia Theatre Building and Rex Theatre, numerous Chinese and Hollywood movies would be screened.⁸⁵ Ultimately, like Indonesia and Malaya, the ethnic Chinese community in the Philippines was one key actor that helped develop the country’s film industry.

Although ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs featured prominently in the movie business across Southeast Asia, they did not pompously compel the scriptwriters and actors to overtly advance political messages in their cinematic works. They could not,

⁸⁴Nick Deocampo, *Cine*, pp. 242-245.

⁸⁵ Jeremy Taylor, “Chinese Film Exhibition in Occupied Manila (1942-1945),” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, 5 (2013), pp. 1588-1621. See also: https://archive.org/stream/WhosWhoInThePhilippinesChineseEdition/Who's%20Who%20in%20the%20Philippines,%20Chinese%20Edition_djvu.txt. Date last accessed: January 29, 2016.

for example, openly call for the British imperialists to be violently booted out of Malaya. They would have been incarcerated.⁸⁶ Yet their films reflected the societies of their times, and these societies were evidently ripe for reform and change. Putting images and generating narratives of racially-stratified societies on the silver screen would have invariably provoked reactions. Ethnic Chinese filmmakers and producers thus participated, whether consciously or not, in the process of creating images and meanings of the nation. They would eventually rouse the local imagination.

The substantial Chinese investment and involvement, then, facilitated the development and growth of film enterprise in the region. Prior to the increased participation of other Southeast Asians in film production, the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs had helped fund and build the infrastructure and facilities for a dynamic network of national cinemas. They further contributed to developing the moviegoing culture in Southeast Asia, offering movies in the local languages. Their involvement prevented the industry from being dominated by Western entrepreneurs and European-produced films. The ethnic Chinese businesspeople enabled Southeast Asia's film industry to develop its unique identity. As one of the first groups of non-Western film producers in the region, these ethnic Chinese managed to assemble the initial bits and pieces—fragments of what eventually would underpin the development of a distinct Southeast Asian political and strategic culture.

b. Co-productions and Transnational Distributions

The Southeast Asian film industry that the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs helped build saw much transnational collaboration and exchange of ideas. The mobility and exchange of cultures, ideas, and filmmaking technology in Southeast Asia generated cultural products that people across the region could relate to. The interconnection and

⁸⁶ Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema: Then and Now*, pp. 1-38.

interaction among Southeast Asian filmmakers and producers after World War II were dynamic. A number of outstanding films were made through co-productions among pioneering Southeast Asian filmmakers. Film distribution also expanded beyond national borders. Films from the Philippines made their way to Malaya and Indonesia. Cinematic productions from Malaya crossed easily to Indonesia and the Philippines. As the European empires retreated, intra-regional collaboration in film production and circulation intensified. Through these transnational associations, national cinemas progressively become transnational cinemas, producing films that resonated with audiences across national territorial borders.

The filmic collaborations in postwar Southeast Asia generated enthralling movies that illustrate the physiognomies and nature of cultural and social interaction within the region. These co-productions pervaded all levels of film making, and brought together Southeast Asia directors, producers, technicians, cameramen, and actors to work on films. The filmmakers also circulated the films intraregionally.⁸⁷ In a microcosm, the Malayan case was quite telling. It was highly fragmented and plural society, divided along ethnic lines, but as Timothy Barnard points out, “As film was a new form of expression in the region, the Shaw Brothers, Chinese migrants from Shanghai, hired Indian film directors to oversee the nascent industry. These Indian directors – mostly from India, although few has grown up in Malaya – wrote screenplays based on tales from their homeland, and used actors from *bangsawan*...to perform on-screen. This pattern—of Chinese owners, Malay *bangsawan*-based actors, and Indian writers and producers, which also reinforced stereotypes of the labour profiles of the region—held true for the period from 1947 until around 1955 at the two major studios.” The movement and screening of these films across national borders

⁸⁷ Timothy Barnard, “Decolonization and the Nation in Malay Film, 1955-1965.” Southeast Asia Research, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 65-86.

helped to connect communities culturally and bring forth a nascent sense of regionalism among the peoples of Southeast Asia. Malaysians learnt more about Filipinos; Indonesians more about Malaysians; and Filipinos more about Indonesians. Finding common ground in their decolonization experiences, they also consumed cinematic productions that revealed the socioeconomic and political aspirations of their fellow Southeast Asian brethren. Films, then, paved the way for Southeast Asians to collectively entertain the thought of regionalism—decades before the regional organization, the ASEAN, was formed in 1967.

One of the foremost examples of these transnational cinematic productions in Southeast Asia is a work that resulted from the collaboration between Lamberto Avellana, a pioneering Filipino director, and P. Ramlee, who is known as a great, if not the greatest, actor, composer, director, and singer in Malaysian film history. *Sergeant Hassan* is one of the greatest and most memorable films of postwar Malaysia, and by extension, of Southeast Asia.⁸⁸ It is also an excellent case to examine transnational production in the region not only because it was made by two pioneers of Southeast Asian national cinemas, but, also because it portrayed nationalist sentiment at the peak of decolonization and Cold War.

The film was set at the height of the Japanese invasion of Malaya and explores the story of a simple orphan turned soldier during the war. Hassan's parents died when he was young. His father's friend subsequently adopted him. Embittered by the attention that was lavished on Hassan, the latter's foster brother, Aziz, bullied him. As grownups, Aziz continued to hate Hassan because Salmah, a woman he likes, fancied Hassan instead of him. With the outbreak of war, the Royal Malay Regiment called for

⁸⁸ The film was directed by Lamberto Avellana and P. Ramlee under the production of the Malay Film Productions, Ltd and distributed by Shaw Brothers, Ltd. It was first released in Malaysia on August 28, 1958.

volunteers. Aziz joined but Hassan was forced to stay at home to manage the land owned by his foster father. As a result, he was labelled a coward by the townsfolk. Hassan decided to leave and join the regiment and was soon promoted to Sergeant. Hassan proved to be a good and brave fighter and even saved Aziz when he was captured by the Japanese.

The film was screened in Malaya in 1958—only one year following the granting of independence by their British colonial officers. The memory of negotiations, limbo, and tension was very much present and alive in the minds not only the Malaysians themselves but of their neighbouring countries such as the Philippines and the Indonesians. While the Philippines was granted independence in 1946, Indonesia declared their sovereignty in 1947. The founding political leaders of Malaya led by Tunku Abdul Rahman were surveying for ways on how to build the country, navigate international relations, and design the internal institutions and framework of the newly independent state. In the broader social and cultural context, the period corresponds to the comprehensive process of decolonization – moving away from the grip of their former colonizers. The very same trend was apparent in the Philippines and Indonesia.

The entire film captures the dilemma of ordinary citizens at the height of the Japanese Occupation. It puts the narratives of resistance at the forefront of its filmic message. It argues for the awakening of Malay/Malaysian nationalist fervour. At a significant juncture in the film, the main character, Hassan, bravely proclaims: *“Memang bangsa kita masih muda dan masih lemah. Aku tak peduli itu semua. Harapanku hanyalah kita sama bangsa bersatu-padulah hendaknya.* [Even though we

are still a young and new nation, I do not care. I hope we can all rise together.]”⁸⁹ Clearly, the film recognizes the state of the Malayan nation – its vulnerabilities at a stage of decolonization and its efforts of coming to terms not merely with the Japanese Occupation but more importantly with the British hegemony.

In his analysis of the film, Timothy Barnard argues that *Sergeant Hassan* “mimics the plot of countless other war films and stands out for its jingoistic tone, long segments of dialogue in English, and having a major Chinese character with whom Sergeant Hassan interacts while planning his guerrilla attacks.”⁹⁰ In essence, he opines that the film was a glitch as it somehow alludes to the notion of a multi-ethnic nation. He also adds that the film mirrors the arguably ambivalent perspective on nationalism in Malaya. Nevertheless, I would add that this only proves that *Sergeant Hassan* was way ahead of its time. It envisioned the growth of a young yet sturdy nation and despite the strong presence of the Malay – as a race and group, as epitomized by the hero himself, P. Ramlee – it also incorporated other ethnic groups through key characters such as a Chinese person who assisted Hassan during the skirmishes.

It is also salient to underscore that this film produced through collaboration and cooperation between a Filipino and Malay filmmaker not only indicates the transnational relationship between the two countries’ budding film industries. It also reflects their shared history and experience under the Japanese Occupation. In this respect, the film represents a shared vision – a common imagination within Southeast Asia forged through their experience under the Japanese rule. As in the film, the war disrupted the life of ordinary citizens in the region. While some Filipinos and Malays fought fiercely against the Japanese, as in the film, some also worked with the Japanese

⁸⁹ *Sergeant Hassan*, DVD, directed by P. Ramlee and Lamberto Avellana (Malaya: 1958).

⁹⁰ Timothy Barnard, “Decolonization and the Nation in Malay film, 1955-1960,” p. 66.

and facilitated their occupation. The production of *Sergeant Hassan* exemplified a collective desire to depict the memories of the war and the possibilities of moving forward and away from it.

The transnational production of *Sergeant Hassan* established the continuity of a narrative that crossed national imaginaries and subjectivities. Both Lamberto Avellana, as a Filipino director, and P. Ramlee, a Malay/Malaysian popular icon, were able to comprehend the quintessence of the film, and through their shared experiences produced a single and cohesive narrative that traversed national borders. In this respect, the division that separated the “Filipino” from his “Malay/Malaysian” counterpart ceased to exist. What surfaced, then, was an amalgam of their common histories under foreign rule and a shared vision of coming to terms with their colonial past.

More importantly, the main character, Hassan ceases to be a Malay soldier—he becomes a hybrid persona who can easily be recognized by Southeast Asians. In other words, the film is an early Southeast Asian attempt to paint recognizable images of Southeast Asians. According to Malaysian film scholars, *Sergeant Hassan* remains a symbol of Malay production at the height of the studio era in the country. Malays identified with the Filipino who directed the film since both societies had undergone colonization, and understood the broad cultural and historical landscape of Southeast Asia. This then indicates a coalescing of the prevailing subjectivities shared by the societies in the region.⁹¹

Films such as *Sergeant Hassan* created the opportunities for Southeast Asians to imagine not just the nation but also the cooperative region. By the 1950s, more transnational co-productions had transpired. Filipino directors travelled to Malaya and

⁹¹ See for example: Sharif Ahmad, “Malaysia” in *The Films of ASEAN*, ed., Jose Lacaba, pp. 52; Muthalib and Tuck Cheong, “Gentle Winds of Change” in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, and Raashmi Doraiswamy (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2002), pp. 304-306.

collaborated with local filmmakers. Their joint works resulted in transnational and hybrid narratives and styles that resonated with Filipinos, Malaysians, and even Indonesians. Familiar with Malay culture and language, Filipinos cooperated easily and fruitfully with the Malaysians. They also helped their counterparts to develop new shooting and lighting techniques—skills that the Filipinos acquired from the Americans.⁹² The end result was films that connected with and inspired the peoples of the region.

Aside from Lamberto Avellana, other Filipinos also gained prominence in Malaya's and Singapore's cinema industry. Three of the most important Filipino filmmakers who operated in Malaya were Eddie Infante, Teodorico Santos, and Ramon Estella. In 1955, Infante worked for the Shaw Brothers and created the film *Gadis Liar* (Girl of the Wild, 1955). The work effectively bridged the cultures of Southeast Asia, and promoted especially the sense of affinity between Filipinos and Malaysians. *Gadis Liar* effectively accentuated “the cultural similarities between Malay kampong life and the world of the Muslims in the southern Philippines.” The rituals, norms, and social fibre of Malaysian communities certainly resembled those practiced and developed among the Muslim communities in the Philippines.⁹³ By bringing those practices onto the big screen, *Gadis Liar* helped lodge onto the consciousness of those who watched the film that peoples in the region shared similar cultural practices and traits.

Another Filipino director who was hired by the Shaw Brothers was Teodorico C. Santos. He only made one movie, entitled *Taufan* (Typhoon), with the company. He arrived in Singapore in August 1957 and mentioned that “His firm was looking forward

⁹² William van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p. 136.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

to producing a series of Malay-Filipino films in Malaya in the near future.”⁹⁴ Famous Malayan actors Ahmad Mahmud, Salleh, and Zaiton starred in the film. Entitled *Ribut di-Pulau Mutiara* (Storm on the Pearl Island), it is set in a fishing village after a horrendous typhoon had ravaged the people’s homes and affected their livelihoods. It centres on the turbulent love story of Fatimah and Amir. A devious moneylender had coerced Fatimah to marry him instead of Amir. A heartbroken Amir copes with his loss by exploring pearl diving.

The movie depicts life in presumably Tanjong Kling. But, in actuality, what Santos was able to project were scenes that mimic life elsewhere in Southeast Asia.⁹⁵ The stilt houses look a lot like those in the rural villages of the Philippines and Indonesia. The setting which includes the coconut trees all around, the sea, natural calamities, such as the typhoon, projects a distinctive illustration of life in rural Southeast Asia. Similar to *Sergeant Hassan*, this film is an interwoven tapestry of cultural and ideological elements of the region. The production of the film also crossed national borders. The distinctive nationalities of the actors are also blurred. The film ceases to be Malay or Filipino. It is transnational in scope and in meaning. The film managed to accentuate the then burgeoning notion of Southeast Asia. The film might have been shot and produced in the Malay language. But the complex network of narratives, techniques, and individuals employed in the film made it Southeast Asian.

⁹⁴ “He will help direct Malay film here”, *The Straits Times*, 8 August, 1957, p. 5. Date last accessed: March 11, 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article.aspx?articleid=straitstimes19570808-1.2.65&sessionid=058b7db87561491b9b9e4a4cd5347dc5&keyword=He+will+help+direct+Malay+film+here&token=here%2Cfilm%2Cmalay%2Cdirect%2Chelp%2Cwill%2Che>.

⁹⁵ Singapore Film Location Archive, “Taufan/Typhoon” Date last accessed: February 2, 2016, <http://sgfilmlocations.com/2014/12/05/taufan-typhoon-1957/>.

Another Filipino, Ramon Estella had one of the longest and most successful transnational practices in Southeast Asia. He had experiences working in Malaya, Philippines, Vietnam, Italy, and the United States. Run Run Shaw, then the head of Shaw Brothers, hired him when the latter went to the Philippines during the Asian Film Festival.⁹⁶ He worked for Shaw Brothers for almost eight years until 1963. Thereafter, he transferred to Cathay-Keris and made a few more Malay films including *Darah-Ku* (Of My Blood, date?) with lead actors, Maria Menado and Melak Selamat. Among his key productions are *Pontianak Kembali* (The Return of the *Pontianak*, 1963), *Melanchong Ka-Tokyo* (Holiday in Tokyo, 1964), *Samseng* (Gangster, 1959), *Matahari* (The Spy, 1958), *Dupa Chendana* (1964), and *Saudagar Minyak Urat* (The Liniment Merchant, 1959).

During his time at Shaw, Estella brought to cinematic life one of Malaya's (as well as Indonesia's) mythological creatures—the ghost of a pregnant woman called *pontianak*. Estella contributed to the rising popularity of *Pontianak*-themed movies. His *Anak Pontianak* inspired B.N. Rao to roll out *Pontianak* and *Dendam*—both produced by the Cathay-Keris film studios in 1957. Abdul Razak wrote the script as well as the anthology of stories on which the *Pontianak*-themed films were based. The Shaw Brothers joined the bandwagon and convinced Abdul Razak to come up with a new manuscript for them. They hired Estella as the director and released the movie in February 1958.⁹⁷

Interestingly, *Pontianak* was not entirely foreign to the Filipino director. In the Philippines, there is another folklore creature called *tianak*. It is a demonic baby or the

⁹⁶ 'Shaw looks forward to East-West film exchange', *Straits Times*, 23 April 1958, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Amir Muhammad, *120 Malay Movies*, 2010.

ghost of a new-born who died or an aborted foetus. Despite the intrinsic differences between the two creatures, what is apparent is that these images belong in the same cultural landscape and imaginary. Thus, when shown in films, they were immediately familiar among Southeast Asians.

Apart from the storyline, the geographical setting could also help Southeast Asians develop affinity for the film and to each other. The movie would feature some village in Cebu or a community located a few miles away from Yogyakarta. With the exception of language (the region has diverse languages), the world unveiled in the film captures Southeast Asia – in a nascent yet coherently recognizable form. Moreover, the presence of proverbial underworld characters that were easily understood and appreciated by the audience underscores an emerging Southeast Asian collective fantasy, or, in this case, fear. Such visual images helped develop a collective regional imagination and world-view. As Milja Radovic explains about transnationality in films, “a stereotypical representation of ‘others’, and self-representation are dialogical: while our view of ‘others’ springs from our specific local ideological viewpoint, our self-representation might just as well be shaped by global stereotypes.”⁹⁸ A transnational filmmaker such as Ramon Estella furthered the process when he produced films that transcended the themes of “national cinema.” His productions, which dealt with transnational themes, helped impress on his audiences the notion of Southeast Asian regionalism.

Like Estella, another filmmaker also encouraged Southeast Asians to imagine a political space beyond their national boundaries. The father of Indonesian national cinema, Usmar Ismail, collaborated with producers and actors in Malaya/Malaysia and Singapore. Ismail entered into a joint venture with Cathay-Keris and produced the film

⁹⁸ Milja Radovic, *Transnational Cinema and Ideology*, p. 5.

Bayangan Di-Waktu Fajar (Shadows at Dawn, 1962). The film was co-produced by two giants in the region's film industry, Cathay Keris, which was based in Singapore, and Indonesia's PERFINI. The film also involved actors from the two countries.⁹⁹

Indonesian as well as Filipino films also found their way to Malaya and vice versa. For instance, Lamberto Avellana's award-winning film, *Badjao: Sea Gypsies*, was screened in Malaya as *Badjau: Anak Laut*, with Malay subtitles. Usmar Ismail's films were sent to Manila for processing and he even encouraged some Indonesians to go to the Philippines for further training in film production. According to Said, "It was in fact this Manila-connection that opened his [Ismail] eyes to the possibilities of the domestic film industry."¹⁰⁰ Said further mentioned that when Ismail established his own studio, he used the Manila model as a basis.¹⁰¹ The interconnection among Southeast Asian filmmakers and their national film industries were clearly strong.

Among the earliest Indonesian films that crossed the borders were *Terang Bulan* (Bright Moon, 1937), *Jambatan Patah* (Broken Bridge, date?), and *Gagak Hitam* (Black Crow, 1939). The popularity of these Indonesian sound films that incorporated features of *bangsawan* stimulated the production of similar films in Malaya. The films also moved filmmakers in the region to collaborate. Actors also crossed national boundaries to ply their trade. Maria Menado, dubbed the Malay Elizabeth Taylor, was born and raised in Indonesia. But it was in Singapore and Malaysia that she built her

⁹⁹ "Shooting 'Bayangan Di-Waktu Fajar' Di-Melaka," *Berita Harian*, 15 December 1962. See also: <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/beritaharian19621215-1.2.59.aspx>, Date last accessed: February 2, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen*, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

successful career in the film industry.¹⁰² In 1951, Shaw Brothers cast Menado in the film *Penghidupan* (Life), alongside the Malay icon, P. Ramlee. The film became a success, and her career took off. She then played a role in *Pontianak* (date?), a move that made her a household name in Southeast Asia. She also established the Maria Menado Productions, making her one of the first women producers in the region. She maintained her connection with Indonesia and co-produced the film *Korban Fitnah* (Victim of Lies, 1961) with the Indonesian film pioneer, Usmar Ismail and his company, Persari. Aside from Menado, other Indonesian actors also starred in Malayan films such as *Saudaku* (My Brother), *Irama Kaseh*, *Mutiara dari Malaya* (Pearl of Malaya), and *Korban Fitnah*.¹⁰³

The film industry in the region, then, was evidently interconnected and transnationally linked. These partnerships and cooperation influenced local filmmakers to produce cinematic narratives and employ images that subsequently formed a part of the web of perceptions and representations in the region. These cinematic products promoted the earliest collective imagination and perceptions of the region. These films not only strengthened the connections among the people in Southeast Asia, they also opened new possibilities for Southeast Asians to visualize the region, and to develop empathy for the anti-colonial and decolonization politics championed by their fellow Southeast Asians. Through the production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of the films, Southeast Asians were presented with the idea that they shared similar cultures, undertook common social practices, encountered familiar colonization

¹⁰² Zieman, "A Role She Will Always be Remembered For," date last accessed: March 3, 2015, <http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2f2007%2f8%2f19%2ffocus%2f20070819081256&sec=focus>.

¹⁰³ Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, "Malaysia: Gentle Winds of Change," in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, and Rashmi Doraiswamy, eds., *Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2002), pp. 308-309.

experiences, and confronted comparable anxieties in nation-building. The films effectively captured and fed their aspirations and fears as the Europeans retreated from empire.

c. The Hollywood Factor

Hollywood was another transnational force that affected Southeast Asian cinema. Following the end of World War II, Hollywood became rather influential in shaping Southeast Asia's cinematic landscape. It radically changed the regional film industry's production techniques and use of technology to make films. It also influenced the plots and story lines of Southeast Asian film. Hollywood furthermore played a part in moulding regional public opinion toward the Cold War and international politics. As the ideological battle between communist and anti-communist states escalated, Hollywood became an important instrument employed by the American government to condition the hearts and minds of Southeast Asians. At the same time, Southeast Asian filmmakers responded to Hollywood's foray into the regional film industry by consolidating and configuring new discourses about regionalism and international relations. Hollywood's arrival in the region, therefore, opened a new site for Southeast Asian filmmakers to develop shared political, ideological, and cultural subjectivities of an emerging Southeast Asia. These subjectivities can be identified in the region's cinematic productions.¹⁰⁴

In the case of Indonesia, the diffusion of politics into the cinematic world was apparent and can be understood by looking into the state, problems, and endeavours of American film companies in the country. The plight of American film companies resembled and reflected the complex and deteriorating diplomatic relations between

¹⁰⁴ Paul Cooke, ed., *Introduction: to World Cinema's Dialogues with Hollywood* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-16.

Indonesia and the United States. Various campaigns against the importation of American films begun. The campaign was pursued mostly by members and officers of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) who were intensely anti-colonial and anti-American.¹⁰⁵

As the US embassy noted, the “matter was handled by the GOI more as a cultural and political problem than as an economic one. The PKI certainly saw it in this light and its attacks were almost entirely on the cultural and political level with little emphasis on movies as a branch of American business.”¹⁰⁶ Clearly, Indonesians viewed Hollywood as symbol and manifestation of American hegemony. Their clamour to stop the importation of Hollywood films reflects their desire to protect Indonesian culture and politics from any direct or indirect American influence. The Indonesian government, however, did not issue a decree banning American films. In fact, government intervention did not appear to be coordinated. American film companies such as Allied Artists, Columbia Films, MGM, Paramount Films, 20th Century Fox, United Artists, Universal Pictures, and Warner Brothers continued to be represented in the country by Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA). Some of these companies had also established local offices in Jakarta, which served as distributing companies for American-made films. The MPEAA also circulated films, in addition to its main function of acting as the primary representative body of American film companies.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See for example: Harun Suwadi, “Indonesia,” in *The Films of ASEAN*, Jose Lacaba, ed., pp. 27-29 and Mischbach Yusa Biran, “The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance,” in *Films in Southeast Asia: Views from the Region*, David Hanan, ed., pp. 225-227.

¹⁰⁶ US Embassy telegram (Ellis) dated July 19 1965, (USNACP, RG 59 Central Files 1964-1966, Economic Foreign Trade, Box 1051).

¹⁰⁷ US Embassy telegram (Jones) dated 17 March 1965 (USNACP), RG 59 Central Files 1964-1966, Inco 15-2 Indon Boxes 1072-3).

The campaign against American films was led by the Action Committee to Boycott American Imperialist Films (PAPFIAS), a group that was established by the PKI and other organizations in 1964. This was around the time when US official William Bundy publicly suggested that an expansion of Konfrontasi might result in a reduction of US aid. [in a sentence or two, briefly explain Konfrontasi] Both Sukarno and Minister Subandrio expressed their concern over the deterioration of the relationship to the US Ambassador Howard Jones. Utami Suryadarma, then the chairperson of PAPFIAS, was identified by the US embassy as an extreme leftist. She also headed the Board of Censors.¹⁰⁸ The Suryadarma-led campaign was not novel. Before her group was established, there had been threats of an Indonesian boycott of Hollywood films. But none ever materialized. Nonetheless, following the establishment of PAPFIAS, an effective boycott started against American films.¹⁰⁹

At the request of American Ambassador Jones, President Sukarno instructed the First Deputy Prime Minister Subandrio to stop the boycott. However, Minister Subdandrio's efforts were ineffective. Around the middle of June 1964, more than 100 theatres were reportedly shut down. Film screenings were halted in the main cities of Java (except those in the homes of Indonesian government officials, including the Presidential Palace in Jakarta). By July 1964, the National Front joined the campaign. Sukarno reassured Jones that the boycott would be resolved, but tensions escalated.

The film industry reflected the political tension between Indonesia and the United States. The development of Indonesian national cinema reflected international relations. By the 1960s, Indonesians regarded the United States with suspicion.

¹⁰⁸ Misbach. "The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance," pp. 211-251.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Indonesian cinema united in opposition to Hollywood. It is clear that Indonesians perceived Hollywood as the end of a spectrum. As Salim Said suggests, Hollywood style (where the Chinese style of filmmaking was rooted) refers to the commercial pattern of making films where the director is not encouraged, or even allowed, artistic expression.¹¹⁰ He further opined that Usmar Ismail and his cohort of friends represent the anti-thesis to Hollywood. They were the idealists – the nationalists, in essence, who attempted to portray the predicaments and challenges that Indonesia experienced.¹¹¹ In other words, while Ismail epitomizes the ideal Indonesian, the Americans exude values and behaviour considered to be very un-Indonesian.

In the process of identifying Hollywood as the *Other* and, therefore, the anti-thesis to Indonesian cinema, the latter indubitably constructed what eventually formed the basic features of the common Indonesian cinematic culture. This cinematic culture also produced new understandings and perceptions concerning the geopolitical environment where the newly independent Indonesia was located. In this new strategic culture, Indonesia desired to project a “true” Indonesian identity premised on independence and autonomy. That is to say, the Indonesians asserted the prominence of Indonesian interests and agenda within the film industry and the political sphere. As Salim Said believed, Usmar Ismail represented the other side of the spectrum – one that was embedded in the Indonesian nation, identity, and culture – no matter how volatile and precarious it was still then.

Hollywood’s influence can be seen in the ways national cinemas reacted to it. Indonesian national cinema contested and opposed Hollywood, and in due course, constructed and defined itself. Indonesian filmmakers and producers opposed and held

¹¹⁰ Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen: A Social History of Indonesian Film*, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

strong opinions about the dominance of Hollywood. Ardent nationalist leanings appeared in the movies and ideological and political debates within the film industry sparked. While opposing Hollywood's cultural and political messages, Indonesian filmmakers also adapted to the challenge posed by the U.S. film industry. For example, Djamalludin Malik, a pioneering Indonesian film director, adapted the style and approach of Hollywood in his films. As a scholar notes, "Limited finances, equipment, and markets, of course, prevented the wholesale copying of Hollywood style but fundamentally, the working methods of this Indonesian producer [Malik] stayed close to Hollywood."¹¹² In other words, although filmmakers like Malik might have opposed American productions, they had no qualms about exploiting the filmmaking techniques and narrative styles of Hollywood to further their cinematic productions and widen the appeal of Indonesian cinema.

If many Indonesians resisted and adapted to Hollywood hegemony, the people in the Philippines reacted differently to American films. Being under the tutelage of the Americans from 1899 to 1946 (interrupted by the Japanese Occupation from 1941 to 1945), Filipinos were more tolerant and accommodating towards Hollywood. In fact, Hollywood served as the model to imitate. Yet, while "imitating" Hollywood, Filipino filmmakers also indigenized it. The Filipinos consumed Hollywood films and adapted them in their creative works. Hollywood thus functioned as the transnational factor that moved regional filmmakers to modify and improve their craft. It also served as the archetype of the *Other*, against which Filipino and other Southeast Asian filmmakers constituted their regional identity. Via their movies, these filmmakers would help the people of Southeast Asia to entertain the notion of regionalism.

¹¹² Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen* pp. 8-9. See also: Marseth Sumarno and Nan Triveni Achnas, "In Two Worlds," in *The Cinemas of Asia*, eds. Vasudev, Padgaonkar, and Doraiswamy, pp. 153-169.

The first encounter between Hollywood and Philippine cinema occurred in 1919. Albert Yearsley, an American who owned a theatre in Manila, collaborated with Universal Studios to produce a film in the Philippines. Directed by an American, Henry MacRae, a segment of *The Dragon's Net* (1920) was filmed at several locations in the country.¹¹³ This film is significant because it was the very first American film that used the Philippines as a shooting location. Eventually, more and more American film companies began to look at the Philippines not only as a location of filmmaking but also as a market for Hollywood. The 1920s saw the rise of the popularity of films in conjunction with the appeal of Hollywood among local talents. Filipino filmmakers travelled to the United States to gain more knowledge of American filmmaking techniques, processes, and cinematographic styles.¹¹⁴ For instance, Vicente Salumbides in cooperation with Jose Nepomuceno applied Hollywood techniques of close-ups, props, and make-up in the film *Miracles of Love* (1925). A large number of American filmmakers and films also found their way to the Philippines. Two Americans, George Harris and Eddie Tait, established the first film company in the Philippines that was patterned on Hollywood studios.¹¹⁵ They dreamed of making Manila the film capital of Asia. In 1933, they introduced the first sound stage in the Philippines.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Luis Francia, "Side-Stepping History – Beginnings to 1980s" in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, and Rashmi Doraiswamy (eds.), *Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia*, pp. 346-348.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹¹⁵ Michael Gary Hawkins, "Co-producing the Post-colonial: US-Philippine Cinemat Relations, 1946-1986," (PhD Diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., "Philippines" in Jose Lacaba, *The Films of ASEAN*, pp. 90-91.

Harris and Tait also produced a well-known film called *Zamboanga* (1937). It was shown in the United States and was for a long time considered a lost film.¹¹⁷ It was rediscovered when the prominent Filipino film historian, Nick Deocampo, identified it at a screening of the film in the United States in 2004.¹¹⁸ The film brought onto the big screen the way of life of the people in Jolo, the southernmost part of the Philippines. It starred the famous actor Fernando Poe Sr. alongside Rosa del Rosario. Fernando played the main character of a pearl diver who weds Rosa, daughter of the community chief. On the day of the ceremony, a pirate kidnaps Rosa and sparks a bloody tribal war. Produced by Americans and helmed by Filipino actors, the film reflects the accommodating and positive sentiments that Filipinos had toward Hollywood.¹¹⁹

Harris and Tait also helped shape the filmmaking business in the Philippines as well as influenced the way images would be portrayed on the big screen. For one, they transferred cutting-edge technological know-how to the film industry, and influenced the way films were shot and edited. They replaced European-made cameras, lenses, and other production devices with those made in the United States. These included the Bell and Howell standard camera, the De brie parvo camera, the Mitchell speed colour camera, the camera car, the 16mm film, and the use of widescreens. Indeed, they were the first to produce coloured films in the Philippines even before local filmmakers were able to have their hands on filming in colour. Using studio microphones, re-recording and dubbing channels, boom microphones, and a recording truck, they also employed

¹¹⁷The movie was screened in New York and San Diego on December 10, 1937. The film was recovered in Finland and was shipped to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

¹¹⁸“In Focus: ‘Lost’ RP film found in US Archive.” <http://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/in-focus/lost-rp-film-found-in-us-archive/>, Date last accessed: February 5, 2016.

¹¹⁹ The film is a result of collaboration and co-production between Filipinos and Americans.

sound and special effects in film. Harris and Tait further acquainted Filipino filmmakers with the Hollywood big studio model of producing and distributing films. The Americans “ushered in the studio system that made it possible for subsequent native-owned studios like the LVN, Sampaguita, Premiere, and Lebran to bring Philippine movies to their Golden Year in the 50s.”¹²⁰

While Americans such as Harris and Tai helped transform the filmmaking business in the Philippines, they also left behind other enduring legacies. American filmmakers and executives helped the U.S. colonial authorities to develop the Philippines into a technological captive—dependent on the devices and equipment that the American colonial master imported into the country. The years following the Second World War witnessed an intensification of such technological transfer. This did not result in the demise or the *Hollywoodification* of what was to become the Philippine national cinema. Instead, these developments invigorated local industry and catapulted it to attain its own style, identity, and flavour. Indeed, American-made technology served as tools as well for indigenous directors to do?¹²¹

While Hollywood influenced how filmmakers operated in the Philippines, it also brought other ideas to the country. Hollywood became one of the most crucial conduits for the spreading of American values and ideas to the Philippines. American films sparked the imagination of the Filipinos on what America was all about or what Hollywood perceived the United States to be. It was an agent of cultural imperialism. It was an instrument to condition the hearts and minds of the Filipinos to believe in the

¹²⁰ Nick Deocampo, “In Focus: Lost RP Film Found in US Archive,” date last accessed: February 1, 2015, <http://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/in-focus/lost-rp-film-found-in-us-archive/>. See also Nick Deocampo, *Film: American Influences on Philippine Cinema* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2011), pp. 441, 447-448, 453.

¹²¹ For discussion on Hollywood’s influence to non-Western cinema, see for example: Paul Cooke, ed., *World Cinema’s Dialogue with Hollywood*, (2007).

benevolence of the Americans. This study does not elaborate on this subject matter, because there have been a few studies on this.¹²² But it is crucial to establish how Hollywood was an essential imperial tool of the Americans to promote their values and ideology on the Philippines. The Vice President of the Hollywood giant, Warner Brothers, Joseph Hazen once stated: “It [Hollywood] sells our motorcars, bathroom fixtures, furniture, electrical and the hundred and one article which are shown in our films...But the American film is also America’s greatest ambassador... It furnishes the principal means of entertainment for all the peoples throughout the world...and it is difficult for anyone whom you entertain and make laugh to hate you...”¹²³ This only corroborates that Hollywood, was perceived as an important cultural carrier of American values. This does not mean though that the Filipinos merely borrowed Hollywood in wholesale. As in the case of other Southeast Asian states, the Philippines was not a passive recipient of American cultural flows. They selected, negotiated, and appropriated what was offered and presented by the Americans to produce their own identity. Hollywood provided the narrative style but local filmmakers altered to provide something that reflects Hollywood but is also innately Filipino.

The boom in Philippine secret agent films during the 1960s provides another good case to analyse the relationship between Hollywood and Southeast Asian national cinema. Cold War tensions stimulated the production of Hollywood films that dealt, directly or indirectly, with the battle between communists and anti-communists. Films such as the James Bond series, *Goldfinger* (1964) and *From Russia with Love* (1963),

¹²² Deocampo, *Film: American Influences on Philippine Cinema*; Nick Deocampo, “Cinema and Colonization: American Colonization and the Rise of Cinema in the Philippines,” *Comparative American Studies* Vol. 5 Issue 2 (June 2007), pp. 147-171.

¹²³ Barbara Wake, “Sex Appeal vs. Swastika” *Philippine Movie Newsreel*, (April 1941), p. 37.

were popular with audiences. Their success encouraged Southeast Asian filmmakers to create their own indigenized versions of protagonist spies. In fact, during the 1966 Manila Film Festival, the Filipino James Bond was born. The film festival sought to shift the domestic audience's focus from foreign-made to locally-made films. Among the entries, Tony Falcon's secret agent thriller, *Sabotage* (1966), became the top-grosser. The film follows the plot and style of the James Bond movies. It revolves around the story of a Filipino spy who hunts down a syndicate planning to sabotage the country's power facilities. It has been described as the "best carbon copy of James Bond yet, with its torrid kissing scenes, chilling karate bouts, and very effective bang-bang."¹²⁴

One can argue that this imitation of Hollywood reflects the lack of ingenuity of Filipino filmmakers and the prevailing "colonial mentality" of the local audience. But the movie did not slavishly follow the plot and style of the James Bond movies. It sought to define, contest, and negotiate the notion of Philippine/ness vis-à-vis the imagery of Americanness in Hollywood. The triumph of a Filipino spy over his foreign adversaries can also be seen as Filipinos appropriating foreign cultures to suit the local context. Not only was this film a box office hit in the country, it was also exported to Guam, Thailand, Hawaii, Indonesia, and Pakistan.¹²⁵

The international success of a Philippine film was a way of contesting the power of Hollywood. In doing so, it asserted what was or who was a Filipino. It became a source of national pride and honour. But more importantly, this film, like other Philippine films premised on the Hollywood-formula, became an arena to define the postcolonial identity of the Philippines (as well as its postcolonial relationship with

¹²⁴ Wilfrido Nolledo, "12 days of Local Movies" *Philippine Free Press*, July 2, 1966, p. 69.

¹²⁵ Michael Gary Hawkins, "Co-producing the Post-colonial," pp. 295-370.

the United States) at the height of the Cold War. It defined the Philippine Self, not just in the cinematic world, but within the complex arena of the international system.

Lamberto Avellana also used American filmic and narrative techniques to bring the Cold War realities in the region onto the big screen. Having worked closely with the United States Information Service (USIS), Avellana was able to make use of the resources offered by the American government. In the process of doing so, he was able to produce a distinctively and principally Filipino idea of identity, worldview, and realism.¹²⁶ This is a salient point as Lamberto Avellana played an important role in the depicting of clear images of the Philippines as a nation during the crucial nexus of decolonization during the Cold War. Certainly, his engagement with Hollywood, the USIS, as well as the American style of filmmaking were not only reflected in his movies but also shaped his approach to filmmaking.

The case of Malay/Malaysian national cinema bear similarities with the Philippines and Indonesian cases. Several things need to be clarified at the outset. First, Hollywood offered the technical and business model that facilitated the institution of the film industry in Malaya/Malaysia. Second, as in the rest of Southeast Asia, local Malayan/Malaysian directors borrowed and adopted cinematic styles from Hollywood. Third, Hollywood became a scape for local directors to negotiate and define the differences between American culture and Malayan/Malaysian culture. American films were associated with hedonistic ways of the West as opposed to the sophistication and elegance of British culture. In other words, Malayan/Malaysian cinema, like other Southeast Asian cinemas, resisted, responded, or accommodated the dominant cultural and ideological influences of Hollywood. Finally, Hollywood served as a common

¹²⁶Francisco Benitez, *Filming Philippine Modernity*, pp. 21-43. See also: Clodualdo del Mundo, "Philippines," in, *The Films of ASEAN*, ed. Jose Lacaba, pp. 89-103.

external factor that pervaded Southeast Asia—as Malayan/Malaysian cinema in conjunction with other cinemas in the region responded to and maintained a constant ‘dialogue’ with Hollywood. The result was an integration of cinematic ideas, styles, and images across Southeast Asia that forged the burgeoning notion of regional identity.

Malayan/Malaysian cinema evolved in part because of its reactions and resistance to various external influences, among which is Hollywood. At the beginning of Malay/Malaysian national cinema, directors from India adjusted Indian film narratives and styles to suit the local context and the response was great. The Malayan audience patronized and welcomed the early productions by Indian directors such as B.S. Rajan. Even bangsawan storylines influenced early film productions. Local legends, folktales, and historical and mythical accounts also served as templates. Foreign films and narratives also inspired local productions. For example, K.R. Shastry’s film *Iman* (Faith, 1954) was an adaptation of Goethe’s *Faust*. Hussein Hanif used William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as a template for his film *Istana Berdarah* (Palace of Blood, 1964). Through these adaptations, Malay cinema developed and at the same time acquired distinctive features of Malayan/Malaysian-ness.¹²⁷

External influences are identifiable in Malayan/Malaysian cinema. The narratives and styles from Hollywood and British films influenced and inspired the production of Malay films. For instance, social realism from Hollywood inspired directors such as P. Ramlee and Hussein Haniff. The latter’s first film, *Hang Jebat* (1961) is considered a classic depiction of the protagonist as the anti-hero.¹²⁸ On September 18, 1926, *The Times* published an article entitled “The Cinema in the East:

¹²⁷ Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, “Gentle Winds of Change”, pp. 304-306.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

Factor in the Spread of Communism.” According to the anonymous author, there was a growing resistance and derision among the locals towards the Europeans. He further maintained that one of the fundamental reasons for this was cinema. More specifically, he asserted that the locals were easily swayed by American cinema, which portrays a lack of values and indecent or improper behaviour. The author states:

“The simple native has a positive genius for picking up false impressions and is very deficient in the sense of proportion. By the unsophisticated Malay, Javanese, or even the Indian and the Chinese, the scenes of crime and depravity which are thrown on to the screen are accepted as faithful representations of the ordinary life of the white man in his own country.”¹²⁹

While the author might have overstated his case, American cinema was undoubtedly popular in the region. Many movie houses screened American-made films. During the 1930s, 71% of the total number of films screened in Malaya was produced by Hollywood filmmakers. The rest were Chinese or Indian. Malayan filmmakers were not popular then.¹³⁰ Heider relates that “While American films has been as pervasive in Malaysia as elsewhere, its overall popularity ran (until the late 1990s) a distant second to that of Hong Kong film and its cultural influence similarly ran a poor second to that of Indian cinema.”¹³¹

As in the case of the Philippines, Malaya too was influenced by the international success and popularity of James Bond. The Shaw Brothers produced *Jefri*

¹²⁹ The Cinema in the East: Factor in Spread of Communism, The Times., London: September 18, 1926, reproduced in *The Cinema and Colonial Rule in Southeast Asia: A Documentary Anecdote, Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, 1981, pp. 151-155.

¹³⁰ Van Der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p. 131.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

Zain dalam Gerak Kilat (Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning, 1966). The film performed very well at the box office and was acclaimed for the realistic performance of the main actors, Jins Shamsudin and Sarimah. The unprecedented popularity of Jefri Zain films resulted to the production of other secret agent films. These borrowings further establish how Hollywood became an important model for Southeast Asian national cinemas.

The case of Malaya/Malaysia is distinctively different in some aspects from the Philippines and Indonesia. The dynamics between Hollywood and Filipino filmmakers were more open and accommodating. The Indonesians expressed quite a strong antagonism against American film businesses. Malaya/Malaysia, while influenced by Hollywood, was also heavily influenced by the British. As the colonial masters of Malaya, the British played a crucial role in the transmission or contact between Malaya/Malaysia and Hollywood. They acted as cultural brokers – on the one hand, they helped facilitate the introduction of Hollywood in the country but in some ways presented Hollywood as an alternative to British film (the ideal model of Western cinema). The question is how did the British view Hollywood?

The English writer-philosopher, Aldous Huxley, was of the opinion that “Hollywood has scattered broadcast over brown and black and yellow worlds a grotesquely garbled account of our civilization.”¹³² His sentiments were not exceptional. Indeed, there was a prevalent perception that American films were ignominious in various levels: economic, moral, political, educational, and most importantly, colonial.¹³³ Although Hollywood influenced the plots and genres of Southeast Asian films, it was still evident that Southeast Asians translated what they

¹³² Rex Stevenson, “Cinemas and Censorship in Colonial Malaya,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 5:2 (1974), p. 211.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

borrowed, copied, or imitated into products and images that displayed distinguishable Southeast Asian elements. These encounters between Hollywood and budding Southeast Asian national cinemas fuelled the creation of clearer images of Southeast Asia. The indigenization of Hollywood narratives became a way for Southeast Asians to regain their agency against Western hegemonic narratives. As local filmmakers borrowed images and style from Hollywood and changed it to suit their own contexts, they were able to construct coherent depictions of Southeast Asia. In this respect, Southeast Asian filmmakers operated as “*Orientalists*”— looking at and studying themselves. They formed visualizations of their nation and, through transnational links, even the region. They defined national identity and at the same time facilitated the creation of Southeast Asian regional identity.

B. Screening Transnational Southeast Asia

National cinemas in the region did not emerge in isolation. They were influenced by transnational forces that influenced their development and transformation. I have explained how the transnational role of Chinese businessmen and immigrants instilled non-Western cinematic roots in Southeast Asia. They provided capital and financial resources to filmmakers. They imported films from China. They were also responsible for a lot of technical, aesthetic, and stylistic transference. More importantly, they conjured an alternative lens of viewing or portraying Southeast Asia and its people—an alternative perspective that would then Southeast Asian directors. The local filmmakers and producers formed an informal network of technology, people, and ideas that further invigorated the maturation of national cinemas. I have also explained how these transnational collaborations were made easy by the region’s collective historical, social, and cultural attributes.

Finally, Hollywood, a global cinematic force, impacted the region as a whole. Hollywood flooded the market and gained unprecedented popularity in the region. It influenced the cinematic apparatus, material production, business-model, technique, as well ideology of Southeast Asian cinemas. As perhaps the most enduring transnational linkage in the region, Hollywood infiltrated the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia in so many levels and ways, inciting perceptible responses from them. In other words, their own national identity was solidified and somehow refined upon direct contact with the seeming homogenous form of Hollywood.

Paul Cooke quoted the famous filmmaker Volker Schöndorff saying that, “Although the markets opened up, culture has been shut out. This paradox is to be seen in Asia and Southeast America, just as much as it can in Middle and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet states, where the flood of American films in recent years has washed away a wealth of national cinematography.”¹³⁴ What we have seen in Southeast Asia was that the global potency of Hollywood (in conjunction with other transnational forces identified) brought about networks and individual communities that paved the way for the materialization of their respective cultural particularities. This phenomenon complements the case of Southeast Asia very well as it is often described as a unified yet highly diversified region. These transnational linkages were crucial for various reasons. They helped in the development of the technology, apparatus, style, and technique of national cinemas; served as conduits for the connections and interactions among Southeast Asian states; and most importantly crafted the preliminary ideas and notions of regional identity in Southeast Asia long before its formal institutionalization.

¹³⁴ Paul Cooke, ed., *World Cinema's 'Dialogues' with Hollywood*, pp. 6-7.

Chapter Three

Post-War Film Milieu and Pioneering Filmmakers in Southeast Asia

A. Post-War Film Milieu

The Japanese invasion and occupation of much of Southeast Asia halted most local cinematic productions. Some cinema houses were closed down, and various equipment from Western film companies were sequestered. The immediate years following the conclusion of the Second World War saw the rehabilitation and revival of cinemas in the region—the blossoming of the “Golden Era” of national cinemas. What was the state of film and national cinema during this period? What genres, styles, and narratives surfaced? How popular was film among Southeast Asians? The succeeding section presents the general milieu of cinema in the region and ascertains the status of films as popular cultural products reaching the masses.

On August 17, 1945, Indonesia declared independence from Dutch rule. The Dutch attempted to re-establish themselves in the East Indies and were met with strong local opposition. When the Indonesian revolution broke out, filmmaking in the country temporarily stopped. But in 1948, a couple of Chinese-owned film businesses returned to Indonesia and jumpstarted the domestic film industry. On December 27, 1949, while Indonesian independence was formally announced, the country’s social and political predicaments persisted. In fact, new issues and questions surfaced. How should they promote economic development and social change? What kind of political system should be implemented? How should they project themselves to the world? Where do they go after independence? As these predicaments circulated in the realm of politics,

Indonesian filmmakers and producers also scrambled to present possibilities in the marketplace of ideas.

In 1949, under the leadership of Usmar Ismail, a group of Indonesians established the first film company in the country that was exclusively owned by Indonesians. They called the company, PERFINI. In the same year, Djamalludin Malik opened another Indonesian-owned company, Persari. These two pioneers are recognized as important figures in the history of Indonesian films. They are regarded as the cultural warriors of the country. They employed films to stimulate the imagination and political consciousness of the Indonesians. In 1950, they produced more than twenty films in the country, though only one survived—Usmar Ismail's *Darah dan Doa* (Blood and Prayer, 1950).¹³⁵

Ismail's and Malik's works brought the political challenges and opportunities confronting Indonesia to the forefront of the people's imaginations. The Indonesian films reflected and constructed the nation-state's strategic culture, and served as a means to shape Indonesia's national identity. As Karl Heider strongly asserts, "Not only do Indonesian films use the Indonesian language almost exclusively but, further...Indonesian films depict generalized behaviour patterns...And in doing so, these films have become an important medium for the shaping of an emergent national Indonesian culture."¹³⁶ Indeed, these postwar national cinemas in Indonesia would function to systematically generate and articulate the notion of an Indonesian national identity.

¹³⁵ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, p. 17. See also: Harun Suwardi, "Indonesia," in *The Films of ASEAN*, ed. Jose Lacaba, pp. 17-42.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Usmar Ismail's *Darah dan Doa* (The Long March, date?) was one work that brought into focus the political life in Indonesia and its society. The film is generally considered the first truly indigenous film that was created in Indonesia by an Indonesian. Ismail is also regarded as the "first [Indonesian] director to connect his films to national events that concerned the fate of every Indonesian."¹³⁷ Unlike films that contained narratives of vehement heroism and extreme nationalism, the film is about human fallibility, hunger to survive, and conflicted ideologies. Reinterpreting the history of Indonesia, the film details the journey of Captain Sudarto and his men, the Siliwangi Division, together with numerous civilians including women and children, from Yogyakarta to West Java. [Why is the captain undertaking the journey? This should be explained.] The group had to constantly defend themselves against Dutch attacks. Indonesians, who were members of belligerent Muslim groups, also endangered their lives. More importantly, the story accentuates how individual actions and whims impact the nature of the war.

In essence, the film enabled Indonesians to reflect on their past—their roles and actions during the revolution, the memory of bloodshed, and the results of their struggles to survive as an independent nation-state. Viewed from this perspective, *Darah dan Doa* reflects Indonesia's postcolonial nation-building. Despite the unquestionable significance of the film, its production was not easy at all. Ismail lacked the financial resources and was almost forced to stop work on the film. Despite possessing limited financial resources, he had to pay an exorbitant amount of money to use the studio of South Pacific Film Corporation, a Dutch-backed film company. His

¹³⁷ Hairus Salim HS, "Indonesian Muslims and Cultural Networks," in Jeniffer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (eds.), *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, p. 91.

shooting equipment and camera were antiquated, and the crew commuted to their filming locations using an outmoded minibus.¹³⁸

These struggles did not stop Ismail. Under his leadership, local film companies proliferated. Jakarta became the centre of film production. Aspiring filmmakers, actors, and actresses arrived in Jakarta to be part of the bustling film industry and participated in the early attempts to portray and imagine a multi-ethnic society through films. Writing about the state of Indonesian cinema during Sukarno's Guided Democracy period, David Hanan maintains that there was, "a decline in local production.... PAPFIAS (the Committee to Boycott Imperialist American Films) ordered the banning of all American imports over a period of two years."¹³⁹ This reflects the intertwining of politics and the film industry. Indonesian filmmakers advanced a protectionist stance and campaigned against the importation of Hollywood films. This was immediately reversed after the events of September 30, 1965 resulted in a massive government crackdown of communist members and sympathisers. The political influence of the PKI declined and the young General Suharto deposed Sukarno. When the ASEAN was established and Indonesia, under the leadership of Suharto, established closer relations with its neighbouring countries, local film production was resuscitated. However, Hanan laments that many "of the films that had been made by left-wing directors such as Bachtiar Siagan and Basoeki Effendi were lost in time."¹⁴⁰ Certainly, post-war Indonesian cinema was characterized by a confluence of political ideologies that were circulating within the political environment of Indonesia.

¹³⁸ Daraj dan Doa., date last accessed: February 10, 2016, <http://datab.us/i/Darah%20dan%20Doa>,

¹³⁹ David Hanan, "Innovation and Tradition in Indonesian Cinema," *Third Text*, 24:1, p. 110.

¹⁴⁰ Hanan, "Innovation and Tradition in Indonesian Cinema," p. 110.

The case of the Philippines resembled that of Indonesia in many ways. After the Second World War, the country's film industry emerged from a three-year slump. Leading Filipino filmmakers such as Manuel Conde, Gerardo de Leon, and Lamberto Avellana came out of it with a renewed and profound sense of creative imagination. Not long after the end of the war, the Philippine film industry entered one of its most productive and vibrant phases. Globally acclaimed Filipino classics were produced by the foremost founders and key shapers of Philippine national cinema. For instance, Manuel Conde's magnum opus, *Genghis Khan* (1950), is regarded as important and it paved the path for the films to gain international attention. *Genghis Khan* has been described as the one film that "could have perpetually etched Conde's place in entertainment history."¹⁴¹

This remark is not without merit. *Genghis Khan* was the first movie produced by a local filmmaker that managed to reach an international audience and compete with foreign-made films. Conde's role went beyond directing. He was responsible for the script and the production of the film. He also played the role of Genghis Khan. The historical character himself is a complex subject to deal, especially for a Filipino director who seemed to bear no cultural affinity with the overall theme. Nevertheless, the film made it to the Venice Film Festival and with it carried the name of the very first Filipino director to represent the country in such a prestigious competition.¹⁴²

Another key figure worth mentioning here is Gerardo de Leon. He questioned the society's accepted notions of morality and decency. Among his masterpieces are *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (Forget me Not, 1960), *Hanggang sa Dulo ng Daigdig* (Till the Ends of the Earth, 1958), and *Bagong Umaga* (New Day, 1958). Aside from the

¹⁴¹ Bibsy Carballo, *Filipino Directors Up-Close: The Golden Ages of Philippine Cinema 1950-2010* (Manila: Anvil, 2010), p. 7.

¹⁴² Carballo, *Filipino Directors Up Close*, pp. 7-8.

emergence of highly motivated and talented local directors, studios drawing on the Hollywood model also began appearing including LVN Pictures, Premiere, and Sampaguita Pictures. These companies were churning out the majority of the films produced in the country and were developing their companies alongside each other. They employed their own actors, technicians, writers, publicists, and directors – although there were collaborations and co-productions. In essence, these studios behaved like companies who had their own consortium of contractual employees. They also built up their own brand or type of films.¹⁴³

LVN specialized in comedies as well as costume films, and was associated with famous actors such as Charito Solis, Nida Blanca, Delia Razon, and Mario Montenegro. It was operated by Dona Narcisa de Leon, also known as Dona Sisang. Premiere, which was owned by Ciriaco and Adela Santiago, topped the production of action motion pictures. Among the top actors were the Fernando Poe, Sr., Jose Padilla, Jr., and Eddie Fernandez. Sampaguita's motion pictures tended to focus on comedy and fantasies. Susan Roces, Rogelio de la Rosa, Amalia Fuentes, and Tita Duran were among the famed stars of the company. These names became household terms and with the escalation in the number of films screened and distributed across the country, the popularity of motion pictures and show business also increased.

It has been mentioned above that the end of the Japanese Occupation triggered this surge in the Philippine film industry. Upon the granting of independence in 1946, the general feeling among Filipinos was one of euphoria – of fervent nationalism as a newly independent state. This atmosphere was captured in films that depicted narratives of revolutionaries, war heroes, and guerrillas. At this point, it is imperative to underline a crucial similarity between Indonesian and Philippine cinemas. Whereas Ismail's

¹⁴³ Luis Francia, "Side-Stepping History—Beginnings to 1980s," in *The Cinemas of Asia*, ed. Vasudev, Padgaonkar, and Doraiswamy, pp. 346-349.

Darah dan Doa epitomized the first masterful historical reimagining of the revolutionary struggle by an Indonesian, *Victory Joe* (1946) is the Philippines' early attempt to capture both the country's anxieties about aftermath of the revolution and its changing relationship with its former colonizers. The latter film is a story about a young Filipina caught between her feelings for an American GI, Bob, and her deep affection for her Filipino lover, Eduardo, a guerrilla who was believed to have died fighting the Japanese during the Occupation. Bob met Rosie and fell in love with her. They spent romantic times together; he courted her; she taught him some Filipino phrases and lectured him on the Filipino way of courtship. Eventually, she grew fond of Bob but could not forget Eduardo.

Eventually, she grew fond of Bob but could not forget Eduardo, with whom she was happy before the outbreak of the war. The story becomes even more complex when Eduardo turns out to be alive. One day, he returns to the village hoping to reunite with Rosie. A conflict between Bob and Eduardo ensues as Bob challenges Eduardo to a duel. But Bob realizes that regardless of what he does, Rosie was and has always been in love with Eduardo. In a conversation with Eduardo, Bob says, "She loves you, you fool. She always loved you. The more I tried to make her love me, the more she loved you." The film ends when Bob finally deciding to go back to the United States, leaving Rosie and Eduardo to, presumably, live happily ever after.

The story became even more complex when Eduardo's death turned out to be untrue. One day, he returned to the village hoping to re-unite with Rosie. The conflict between Bob and Eduardo ensued as Bob challenged Eduardo to a duel. But Bob realized that regardless of what he did, Rosie was and had always been in love with Eduardo. In a conversation with Eduardo, Bob said, "She loves you, you fool. She always loved you. The more I tried to make her love me, the more she loved you." The

film ends when Bob finally decided to go back to the United States, leaving Rosie and Eduardo to, presumably, live a happy life together.

The film explores a critical juncture in the history of the Philippines when it finally acquired its official status as a free and independent nation. It interrogates the complex relationship between the Philippines and the United States as much as it celebrates the departure of the Americans from Philippine soil. In the film, Rosie was captivated by Bob in the same way that the Philippines was captivated by the glamour and allure of the United States. This intimate relationship and deep respect of Filipinos toward the Americans was reflected in President Manuel Roxas' inaugural speech in 1946: "we have never had cause to waiver in our confidence or faith in America. We have clasped to our bosom her system of government, her language, her institutions, her historical traditions...We are to be a free nation largely because we were aided in that direction by the love of liberty and the goodwill of the American people."¹⁴⁴

But also, as in the film, Rosie's heart remained loyal and profoundly committed to Eduardo and all she ever wanted was to be with him—and even Bob understood this. The film instills a sense of nationalism and an ideological reference of re-uniting the Philippines with the Filipinos. Despite the long relationship between the Americans and the Filipinos, 1946 marked the Filipino's triumph over colonialism, a celebration of genuine nationalism and love for the country. The film reflects an attempt [by whom?] to make sense of the new international status of the Philippines and to redefine the country's relationship with the Americans. Simply put, *Victory Joe* celebrates the postcolonial hope of the Philippines to reconstruct itself as an independent and free nation.

¹⁴⁴ His Excellency Manuel Roxas, President of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, Inaugural Speech, May 28, 1946, Republic of the Philippines, *Official Gazette*, date last accessed: May 22, 2016, <http://www.gov.ph/1946/05/28/inaugural-address-of-president-roxas-may-28-1946/>.

Also in 1946, Manuel Conde produced the film *Orasang Ginto*, which is about the experiences of Filipino guerrillas during the Japanese Occupation. There was a critical shift in cinematic themes. More realistic plots and genres emerged. One of the most important themes that emerged during the Cold War was the returning of guerrillas and their experiences of adjusting back to life in mainstream society. Another film that captured the general ecstasy of achieving independence among Filipinos was *So Long America* (date?). It was made by the prominent director Gerardo de Leon, and traces the story of an American GI who went back to the United States at the end of the war.

Not long after the end of the Second World War, the widespread corruption and inefficiencies in Philippine government became major themes in films. War films that depict tragedies, miseries, and fear appealed to many Filipino moviegoers. From the “coyness and simple-mindedness of fairy-tale romances,” films began to reflect the hard realism of the war’s effects to the Philippine society.¹⁴⁵ A series of films began to accentuate the economic and social challenges that Filipinos citizens confronted after the end of World War II. One of those films was *Backpay* (1947). It explores the failure of the Philippine government to implement agrarian reform and protect the welfare of the people, which included former anti-Japanese guerrillas. These combatants accordingly decided to join the Communist group, the Hukbalahap. Another film, *Palaboy ng Tadhana* (1947), explores the story of a former guerrilla who pawned his war medal so that he could buy lunch. In *Lupang Pangako* (1949), former guerrillas were forced to beg for food or steal to survive. In Lamberto Avellana’s *Anak Dalita* (1956), a war veteran finds himself living in the slums and resorts to smuggling for a living. The film did not do well at the box office, but it won several accolades

¹⁴⁵ Deocampo, *Film: American Influences*, p. 404.

including the Golden Harvest Award at the 1956 Asian Film Festival. The popularity of these films confirmed the prevailing issues of the Philippines. They capture the country's postcolonial anxieties as well as the lingering traumas of the war.

Decolonization was not the only political issue dominating the political and socio-cultural life of the country. The Cold War was beginning to manifest itself in cinematic frames and narratives. A series of films dealt with themes related to the escalation of tensions between the communists and anti-communists in the international arena, and conflict in the developing world. One was related to the returning guerrilla and his difficulties in adjusting to mainstream society. Two of the best films produced by Filipinos were Lamberto Avellana's *Anak Dalita* (Child of Sorrow/The Ruins, 1956) and *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* (Huk in New Life, 1953).¹⁴⁶ These movies bring into focus the political and social conundrums confronting the Philippines—a decolonizing state caught in between the global conflict. These films are regarded not only as veritable lens to the state of the Philippines, but also as important cultural materials that defined the country's industry of filmmaking. As the writer Agustin Sotto opines, "There was nothing as the early post-war era in the history of Philippine film. Not even EDSA [People Power Revolution of 1986] has the same effect on the industry. For four years (1946-49), after the end of the hostilities, the image of the guerrilla returning to his hometown and experiencing hardships engrossed filmmakers and audiences alike."¹⁴⁷ Films such as *Anak Dalita* projected onto the big screen the prevailing concerns confronting the Philippine society. Through repetitive

¹⁴⁶ *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay*, DVD, directed by Lamberto Avellana (Philippines: LVN Pictures, 1953); *Anak Dalita*, DVD, directed by Lamberto Avellana (Philippines: LVN Pictures, 1956).

¹⁴⁷ Agustin Sotto, "Philippine Independence and National Cinema," *Cinemaya 24* (Summer 1994), p. 16.

images, embodied meanings, and a plethora of representations, the country's strategic culture was crafted, and within in, a coherent idea of the Philippine nation.

The 1950s and 1960s also marked the golden age of Malayan/Malaysian. This period witnessed a surge in local film production and the rise to national prominence of key Malayan/Malaysian filmmakers and actors.¹⁴⁸ As aforementioned, Malaya's early cinema shared its history with Singapore. They remained closely linked even after the Japanese Occupation. In 1957, Great Britain granted Malaya independence. In 1963, the Federation of Malaya merged with Singapore, North Borneo, and Sarawak to form Malaysia. Singapore left the federation in 1965 and became an independent state.¹⁴⁹ Concurrent with the political turbulence in the former British territories, the post-war film industry expanded.

The Shaw Brothers re-established the Malay Film Productions and structured it along the lines of the big studios in Hollywood. The company hired new actors, directors, and technicians from Malaysia and abroad. Prominent filmmakers from the Philippines, India, and even China including B.S Rahjans, B.N Rao, Rolf Bayer, Ramon Estella, and Lamberto Avellana were recruited. These directors were tasked to conceptualize their own films. They even had to write the scripts. Indian films served as one of the major influences, after being adapted to the domestic taste and culture. Malaysian films incorporated music and dance into their narrative structure. Malay spectators welcomed these features because they saw the similarities between new

¹⁴⁸ Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema, Then and Now*, pp. 1-38; Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, "Gentle Winds of Change," pp. 303-304; Latif, "A Brief History of Malaysian Film," pp. 183-188.

¹⁴⁹Muthalib, *Malaysian Cinema, Then and Now*, pp. 1-38.

films and *bangsawan*—the most popular entertainment before the introduction of film.¹⁵⁰

Other film studios also surfaced. Rimau Film Productions started as a partnership between Gian Singh and Ho Ah Loke but the former withdrew when the latter ventured into costly productions. The famous actress Maria Menado built the Maria Menado Productions. She produced a number of non-Chinese films. Another company, Nusantara Films, screened the first locally produced feature film. It was established by Hsu Chiao Meng, a former cameraman from Shanghai. In 1946, the Malayan Arts Production released B.S. Rahjans' *Seruan Merdeka* (The Call to Freedom). Salleh Ghani wrote the script. He also played the key role. The film explores the dynamics of race in the country during the height of the Japanese colonization. It depicts the Malays and the Chinese striving together to defend their land and people against a common enemy. However, film production had to stop because there were not enough theatres for screening. In 1947, Shaw Studios screened *Singapura Di-Waktu Malam* (Singapore by Night), which was also directed by B.S. Rahjans. Subsequently, other films followed such as *Chempaka* (1947), *Pisau Beracun* (The Poisoned Knife, 1948), and *Chinta* (Love, 1948).

With the plodding recovery of Malaysian cinema, film companies took the technology to towns and villages. In 1947, the Cathay Organization built Caravan Films. It operated mobile film units. They reached the provinces and introduced the greater number of Indians, Malays, and Chinese to new films. The following year, Cathay formed the International Theatres Ltd. They acquired a total of 19 cinema houses located in various towns from Singapore to Malaya. In 1953, they also opened

¹⁵⁰ William van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, pp. 82-86, pp. 118. See also: Mohd Anis Md Nor, *Zain: Folk Dance of the Malay World* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Tan Sooi Beng, *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993).

new theatres in North Borneo and Sarawak. While Cathay kept producing more films, Shaw managed to maintain its dominance. It operated twice as many cinemas as Cathay. It also actively produced films and distributed imported movies to the local audience. The competition between Shaw and Cathay remained. Loke Wan Tho of the Cathay Organization was resolute to establish his company's position in the film industry. In 1951, he set up the International Film Distributors Ltd. Through this department, Cathay expanded its role as a film distributor supplying films to some 200 independent cinemas. The result was a surge in the popularity of cinema across the country.¹⁵¹

Another prominent businessman who stimulated the growth of Malaysian cinema was Ho Ah Lore. He was professionally trained as an architect, but decided to go into the movie business. Riding his bicycle, Ho visited towns to sell tickets and screen films. In 1925, he bought a movie house in Ipoh. Shortly thereafter, he expanded his movie business by buying another cinema in Ipoh. During the 1930s, he bought other establishments in major villages across Malaya. In 1951, he opened Rimau Productions. Later, he formed Keris Films and produced films through the assistance of Roomai Noor. In 1953, Ho decided to merge with Cathay Organization and the famous Cathay-Keris Productions was born. In 1953, B.S Rahjans made the first coloured film in Malaya entitled *Buluh Perindu* for Cathay-Keris. A young bangsawan actor, Shariff Medan, starred in the film. In the following years, more new films were produced by giant studios in Malaysian cinema. The competition between Shaw and Cathay-Keris stirred Malaysia's film industry. By the late 1960s, Malaysian national cinema was

¹⁵¹ Sharuff Ahmad, "Malaysia," pp. 51-59.

well formed. It had a solid audience base and as will be discussed later, films became intricately linked with the emerging politics and social predicaments of Malaysia.¹⁵²

The national cinemas of Southeast Asia put on the big screen the challenges and issues confronting the societies in the region. Local filmmakers and studios assumed more active roles in producing films that contain their social commentaries and emerging strategic cultures. Films reflected the socio-cultural, political, and economic anxieties of states across the region. Just as cinema became an important part of the popular culture, it has also embedded itself within the political culture, and more specifically in the strategic culture of Southeast Asia.

The end of the Second World War saw the popularity of movies intensify in the region and growth in the number of spectators who frequented locally owned cinema houses. In Indonesia, watching films eventually replaced traditional theatres as one of the most popular entertainment activities in the country. Although there is no comprehensive study about the Indonesian audience – who frequented the cinemas more? From what age group? Class? Race? There are a few authors who advanced some interesting insights. According to James Peacock, in the 1960s, watching movies in cinema houses was popular among young people aged eighteen to twenty-two. Noted film historian, Karl Heider concurred with Peacock and maintained based on his own research that the age range of movie goers in Indonesia was from 15 to 24. Jakarta became the centre for the nation's film industry. It recorded the highest number of movie houses and, inevitably, the highest number of audiences. The same can be said about Malaya. After Singapore, Kuala Lumpur became the main location for

¹⁵² Baharudin Latif, "A Brief History of Malaysian Film," in *Film in Southeast Asia*, ed. David Hanan, pp. 163-193.

filmmaking and setting up of film companies. Most filmmakers targeted the youth as their intended audience.¹⁵³

Before the rise in popularity of television in Southeast Asia, locals chose films as the most popular form of entertainment. Those who watched were among the educated and middle class, which corroborates the strength of films as a mass culture product. The number of moviegoers also influenced the number of films released in the region. Based on the records of the National Film Council of Indonesia, it is clear that the 1950s saw the highest rate in film production. In 1948, only three movies were made. This number increased to 40 by 1950 and in 1955, the country recorded the highest production rate of 65 films.

Table 1 Annual Film Production in Indonesia 1945-1967¹⁵⁴

1945	0
1946	0
1947	0
1948	3
1949	8
1950	23
1951	40
1952	50
1953	41
1954	60
1955	65
1956	36
1957	21
1958	19
1959	16
1960	38
1961	37
1962	12
1963	19
1964	20

¹⁵³ Mohd Hamdan Hj Adnan, *Malaysian Films: Survival or Revival*, p. 11

¹⁵⁴ Karl Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen*, p. 19.

1965	15
1966	13
1967	14

Similarly, the local film industry in Malaya/Malaysia also developed beginning in the 1950s. The golden age of Malayan/Malaysian cinema witnessed a surge in the production of films. Malay Film Productions, Ltd, which was regarded as one of the most active companies in the country, released only two films in 1947, another two the following year, and three in 1949. The 1950s saw a big leap in the number of films it produced annually. Malay Film Productions released an average of 9 to 12 films per year. This decade witnessed the peak in Malaya/Malaysian cinema's development. Local filmmakers, actors, and producers and more importantly, took over the reins of filmmaking in the country. They depicted scenes and stories of their country, from their perspective. Although the number of films produced by the companies dropped during the 1960s and onwards, by then, national cinema had already taken its roots. Prominent Malayan/Malaysian filmmakers created films that were aesthetically influential and historically significant.

Table 2 Malay Film Productions Ltd., Film Release 1947-1967¹⁵⁵

1947	2
1948	2
1949	3
1950	6
1951	10
1952	12
1953	12
1954	9
1955	9
1956	9
1957	11

¹⁵⁵National Archives of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

1958	11
1959	9
1960	7
1961	8
1962	8
1963	7
1964	7
1965	5
1966	6
1967	4

In the Philippines, local films had to compete against the massive influx of Hollywood films. Following the end of World War II, Americans noted the significant demand for Hollywood films in the Philippines. Market research published as early as 1946 affirmed this increased demand among Filipinos for visual entertainment. By 1950, the Filipinos had to position themselves to protect the local film industry against Hollywood. Legislators promulgated Republic Act 426, which required that a minimum 25% of all the earnings of film companies should remain in the country. This act stemmed the outflow of capital from the Philippines to the United States.¹⁵⁶

The immense popularity of films indicated that cinema had found a prominent place in the social and cultural life of the people of postwar Southeast Asia. It became so important that it also occupied a principal role in the political dynamics of the region. On the one hand, filmmakers utilized film as a canvass in depicting the convoluted political environment of their respective countries. Some demonstrated their ideas about their nation and their quest for sovereignty and freedom. Some filmmakers reminisced about their country's past and confronted the challenges of decolonization. Some questioned, re-interpreted, and fantasized about the changed relationship between a former colony and its colonial master, particularly in an

¹⁵⁶ Deocampo, *Film: American Influences on Philippine Cinema*, p. 462.

increasingly tensed and ideologically charged international environment. On the other hand, the newly-formed independent governments of Southeast Asia recognized the potential (and risks) of cinema and, hence, tapped into it as a vehicle for spreading ideologies and ideas about national unity, independence, and nationalism.

B. Ismail, Avellana, and Ramlee: Filmmakers Imag(in)ing the Nation

There were several key filmmakers that considerably shaped national cinemas in the region. They established the groundwork for building national cinemas in Southeast Asia. The filmmakers were cultural translators. They were influential and politically conscious individuals who furnished movie patrons with ideas to imagine the nation. Filmmakers produced works that conjured not only their conceptions of the nation. They also tapped into the fantasies, anxieties, and aspirations of the plural societies where they were from to tell their narratives on screen.

Three pioneering filmmakers are to be examined here. Usmar Ismail, the father of Indonesian cinema, opened the path for local Indonesian directors [to do what?]. He pioneered the amalgamation of cinematic visualizations and politics in Indonesia. Lamberto Avellana produced many classic Philippine films and had significant involvement in many film productions relating to crucial political issues such as the communist threat and the Cold War in the Philippines. No account of Malaya/Malaysian cinema will be complete without a mention of the great Malaysian icon, P. Ramlee, whose films intersect and reflect the budding nation of Malaysia as it gradually emerged from the grip of the British.

These three key personalities were selected from the long roster of Southeast Asian filmmakers who helped develop the national cinemas of the Philippines,

Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia. This does not imply that I do not give due credit to others who have also produced meaningful classics. The decision to focus on these three figures is also predicated upon their transnational endeavours. Lamberto Avellana collaborated with P. Ramlee and did several films in Malaya and Singapore.¹⁵⁷ Usmar Ismail was invited to collaborate with Malayan studios to produce transnational co-productions.¹⁵⁸ This interesting aspect makes it more illuminating to scrutinize the motivations behind these filmmakers' productions, how they viewed their roles in society and politics, and how they envisioned the nation and the multifarious issues that concerned not just their respective countries but the region as a whole.

a. Usmar Ismail: Pioneer of Indonesian Cinema

In 1956, one of the most famous, if not the most famous, filmmakers of Indonesia asserted the need to “build up the Indonesian film industry on a foundation of national cultural ideals.”¹⁵⁹ This statement came from Usmar Ismail. Among the new group of pioneering Indonesian filmmakers, Ismail influenced many to tenaciously believe in the use of film to further the cause of the Indonesian nation. According to Ismail, “film had to be an expression of free art (not as a means of propaganda) ...film should not be simply a commercial entity, and it must reflect national identity.”¹⁶⁰ Ismail's decision to visualize and present the nation on screen makes him an interesting figure to examine the intersection of film, politics, and culture in Indonesia.

¹⁵⁷ One of the most prominent collaboration between Avellana and Ramlee is the movie *Sarjan Hassan*.

¹⁵⁸ Marseth Surmano and Nan Triveni Achmas, “In Two Worlds,” *Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia*, pp. 154.

¹⁵⁹ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ Misbach, p. 167.

Ismail was a key figure in Indonesian cinema not only because of his idealism and passion for developing an Indonesian national cinema, but also because he created what was to become the first indigenous Indonesian film (based on available data, there were about 24 films released in 1950, but only Ismail's film has been preserved). *Darah dan Doa*, made in 1950, reflects Ismail's fiery dedication to capture narratives that were meaningful and significant, albeit painful, for the budding Indonesian society. He chose an event that took place only eighteen months ago – the long march of the Siliwangi Division from West Java to Central Java.

Although the threat was crushed immediately, what followed was a memory of bloodshed and division. David Charles Anderson opines, “The atrocities...were so appalling in their magnitude and intensity that they could not only have been committed by groups roused to highly volatile states of religious and political fervour.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, Ismail leaned into the turmoil trailed in the wake of the Indonesian revolution. *Darah Dan Doa* offers a crucial link to the three ideological facets of Southeast Asian strategic culture. Though it begins when the communist group in Maidun were defeated by the Siliwangi unit, it also covers the consequences of the bloodshed. At the core of the story, Captain Sudarto, the leader of the Siliwangi Division who defeated the communists, meets his death at the hands of a communist. Writing on the subject, Heider observes: “While the champions of the films are unquestionably the Republican Siliwangi men, it is significant that in 1952 the Communists are not pictured as monsters. Since they have been treated unjustly, the act of final revenge is quite understandable.”¹⁶² In this respect, Ismail sheds light on the

¹⁶¹ Karl Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, p. 103. See also: Harun Suwardi, “Indonesia,” in *The Films of ASEAN*, ed. Jose Lacaba, pp. 22-27.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

intricacies of war and the ideological, religious, and social fragmentation of Indonesia. In his pioneering masterpiece, Ismail tackled head on the diversity and convolutions of the country and its impact on people's actions and behaviour.

At this point, it is important to take a step back and probe the background of Usmar Ismail. He was born on March 20, 1921 and was from Minangkabau. He began his career in the film industry before the outbreak of the Japanese Occupation. He worked under the mentorship of Andjar Asmara. In 1949, Ismail finally directed two films, *Harta Karun* (The Lost Treasure) and *Tjitra* (Image).¹⁶³ For his first two films, Ismail worked under the auspices and support of the South Pacific Film Corporation, which was founded and sponsored by the Dutch. As it turned out, the second film performed very poorly in the box office. Ismail decided to leave the company and in 1950 created the film *Darah dan Doa*. In 1962, Ismail revealed in a letter his discontent with the lack of creative freedom in the Dutch company. He wrote: "I cannot really say that the two films are my works, during the writing process and the film's production, there were so many instructions that I disagreed with."¹⁶⁴ This is the reason why Ismail would eventually regard *Darah dan Doa* as his first real film.

On March 31, 1951, Ismail established PERFINI with very little financial capital. The lack of funds caused him difficulties in filming his first movie. He almost called off filming in the middle of shooting *Darah dan Doa* because of insufficient funds. However, a Chinese movie house owner, Tong Kim Mew, lent him some money

¹⁶³ Filem Indonesia, "Tjitra" See also: http://filmindonesia.or.id/movie/title/lf-t006-49-102168_tjitra/credit#.VsLpOhh97cs, date last accessed: February 10, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ "Tjitra", date last accessed: February 15, 2016, http://catalogue.filmindonesia.or.id/movie/title/lf-t006-49-102168_tjitra.

in order for him to complete shooting scenes.¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the difficulties did not end there. Upon the completion of the film, Ismail had trouble seeking for approval from the Board of Censors to release the film.¹⁶⁶ Ismail's initial attempt to make an Indonesian movie based on his idea of national culture was not free of troubles – not just because of the lack of funds but also because of the volatility of ideological and political landscape in the newly independent Indonesia. Reflecting on his early experience in filmmaking, Ismail wrote:

“PERFINI's first film was made with no commercial consideration whatsoever; it was pure idealism and the public reacted to the film in a variety of ways. In some areas, the army forbade the showing of this movie. This was a very significant experience because of the negative effect it had on the making of historical films in Indonesia. The ban stymied the development of Indonesian film. ... This became apparent in the making of PERFINI's second film, *Enam Jam di Jogja* (Six Hours in Jogja). The extremely strict supervision of the production by all parties concerned effectively limited creative freedom. The step forward that had been taken with *The Long March* could not be followed by another because of the attitude of authorities (the censors) who stood before us baring their teeth and also the attitude of the

¹⁶⁵ Star News, VIII, No. 1, 1959, p. 10. See also: Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen*, p 51.

¹⁶⁶ “From PERFINI staff members and other people involved in the production of *The Long March*, it learned that official and public objections to this film concerned two basic issues: first, according to other army units, the film gave the Siliwangi Division excessive and undue praise; and second, the film portrayed members of Darul Islam and Tentara Islam Indonesia (The Indonesian Islamic Army) as traitors. Darul Islam, a dissident Moslem group, and Tentara Islam Indonesia, its fighting arm, may have had the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia but for many people this was not an entirely unacceptable stance.” See: Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 52.

public who seemed unwilling to see the realities of their life, whether good or bad, depicted accurate...”¹⁶⁷

For Ismail, films were supposed to depict the realities of the Indonesian society, no matter how complex or desolate they may be. His key objective was to expose the realities of Indonesian society. Perhaps it was because of his desire to produce authentic films that regardless of the difficulties he confronted early in his career, he was not dejected. In 1951, he began making his second film, *Enam Djam di Jogya* (Six Hours in Jogya). Similar to *Darah dan Doa*, Ismail’s second film also addresses the theme of the revolution. It explores the Indonesian Republic Armed Forces’ skirmishes and guerrilla tactics following the subjugation of Jogjakarta by the Dutch army. The occupation began on December 1948. By March 1949, a massive attack broke out between the Dutch and the Indonesian forces. For six hours, Indonesian forces managed to control Jogyakarta. This event was of immense importance to Indonesians precisely because it demonstrated the capacity and fierce commitment of the Indonesians to expel the Dutch forces. As Said remarked, the episode indicated that “contrary to Dutch propaganda, the Republic of Indonesia still existed.”¹⁶⁸ *Enam Djam di Jogya* captured the determination of the Indonesians to assert their sovereignty and separation from the Netherlands.

In 1949, Indonesia’s quest for self-determination was being discussed at the United Nations Assembly. On the one hand, the Dutch wanted to assert their control over the East Indies and maintain their hold onto the colony. They wanted to demonstrate that the nationalist campaigns were futile and weak. On the other hand, the Indonesian Republic Armed Forces aspired to show their strength and sheer capacity to

¹⁶⁷ Usmar Ismail, Sari Soal, *Star News* Vol. III No. 5 September 25, 1954, p. 30.

¹⁶⁸ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 34.

take command of the country. While the Dutch struggled to assert their dominance, Indonesian guerrilla fighters launched an assault on Yogyakarta, which was the capital of Dutch-controlled Indonesia. Despite the brief occupation of the Indonesian revolutionaries, their bold and daring act showed the world that the Dutch had not quelled local resistance to their return to the archipelago.¹⁶⁹

Due to the lack of extensive information and documents detailing what exactly transpired during the assault, Ismail had to resort to employing historical fiction to put a cohesive narrative together. Although his film's storyline was based on actual events that took place during the occupation of Yogyakarta, Ismail was careful not to cause offense to particular groups who might find the narrative and issues about the revolution controversial. He had evidently learned from his previous experiences and tried to be more cautious in his films. This does not imply though that he gave up on his idealism about the role of film for Indonesia. This only indicates Ismail's understanding of the domestic politics and the controversiality of the film's subject.

One notable feature of the film was that it was presented from the vantage point of ordinary individuals and common soldiers. There were no main or leading characters. They were a number of interesting individuals who each had the opportunity to discuss their personal experiences of the war. The film veers away from stories about high-ranking officials and heroes of the revolution. Instead, it mirrors the suffering and experiences of common folks during the struggle. Ismail highlighted the impact of the Dutch government's oppressive actions against the ordinary people who

¹⁶⁹ Miscbach Yusa Biran, "The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance," in *Film in Southeast Asia*, ed. David Hanan, pp. 221-224.

eventually joined the fighting. Forced by their misery and poverty, many Indonesians took up arms and enlisted with the army to fight the Dutch.¹⁷⁰

As a filmmaker, Ismail's presentation of the realities of Indonesia also centred on the experiences and narratives of the ordinary people. In addition, the war and postcolonial turmoil had evidently traumatized the filmmaker.¹⁷¹ The Indonesian society that was portrayed in Ismail's film was, therefore, one that continues to confront the traumas and memories of conflict during the war. He depicted Indonesia as a complex space where various forces intersected: the legacies of colonialism, the open wounds left by the war for independence, and the anxieties and uncertainties of fostering a strong and stable independent state and unified nation.

Indeed, *Enam Djam di Joyga* faced a plethora of reactions and criticisms. A critic commented that the camera work needed enhancement "especially for night scenes which were shot with so much light that the time frame was recognizable only by the sound of crickets. Nonetheless, overall, the camera work is much better than what we are generally accustomed to seeing and the acting is fairly smooth."¹⁷² Furthermore, since Indonesia was still recuperating and coming out of the traumas of the fight for independence, it was somehow understandable that such fierce comments surfaced.¹⁷³ In other words, the responses of the people towards Ismail's films—both positive and negative—were determined by the political situation of the newly

¹⁷⁰ Film Indonesia, "Enam Djam di Jogya," date last accessed: February 14, 2016, http://filmindonesia.or.id/catalogue.php/movie/title/1f-e017-51-507852_enam-djam-di-djogdja#.VEcyXbWwrcs.

¹⁷¹ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 53.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

independent Indonesia. Ismail's films perceptively reflected the apprehensions and aspirations of the people in post-war Indonesia.

Although the challenges confronting Indonesia after 1945 affected Ismail and the people of the country politically, the war also had a lot of impact on the way filmmakers like Ismail approached their subject matter. Ismail had asserted: "The atmosphere during the Japanese Occupation stimulated growth and change in the content as well as the techniques of filmmaking. It was under the Japanese that people became aware of the function of film and the awakening of (Indonesian) language... Film began to mature and to be infused with a greater sense of national consciousness."¹⁷⁴ This statement is crucial because it reaffirms that the Japanese period opened up more spaces for the Southeast Asians, not just the Indonesians, to imagine the nation. As Ismail stated, film was an indispensable tool to awaken the national consciousness of the people in Indonesia.

Ismail epitomizes a nationalist and highly ideological filmmaker. He truly believed in the role of film in building Indonesian politics and government. This belief did not guarantee him enough support or assistance from key political players in the country. Ismail hoped that the state would support the country's film industry. But, he was mistaken. When he requested for government funding to purchase equipment, he was denied. Worse, some of his films were highly criticized and censored by the government officials themselves.¹⁷⁵ Although it is difficult to believe that these predicaments did not affect Ismail, he remained true to his ideals. After the release of the film, *The Unforgiveable Sin* (date?), Ismail was given a Rockefeller Foundational

¹⁷⁴ Usmar Ismail, "Sari Soal dalam Film-film Indonesia," p. 30.

¹⁷⁵ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 54. See also: Harun Suwardi, "Indonesia," in *The Films of ASEAN*, ed. Jose Lacaba, pp. 24-26.

Fellowship to study film in the United States. For one year at the University of California in Los Angeles, Ismail learned from the Americans and developed his filmmaking skills.¹⁷⁶

Relentless in his endeavours, Ismail made another film in 1953. The work would garner numerous accolades. The film *Krisis* (Crisis) explores Jakarta's worsening housing problem. Further discussion on this film will follow in the next chapters, but suffice to mention at this point that *Krisis* presented the raw situation of Indonesia during the course of its efforts to stabilize its economy and politics. Ismail managed to portray the values, behaviour, and experiences of common Indonesians caught in the middle of the internal transformations that were taking place. Once again, in the film, he focused on the naked and harsh realities that surfaced in the country. Interestingly, the film performed well in the market and in 1955, Ismail released a sequel entitled, *Lagi-lagi Krisis* (Yet another Crisis). In the following chapters, I present the ideological facets of Usmar Ismail's films and how these are reflected in politics as well. Suffice to say at this juncture that, Ismail is an exemplar of a Southeast Asian cultural translator whose contributions to film helped define the nation identity of Indonesia.

As mentioned, Ismail struggled to promote his ideals. By the mid-1950s, Ismail's ideals and beliefs were confronted by the contradictory state of Indonesia's film industry. Hollywood films saturated the Indonesian market. Very few local films explored new materials and narratives. Some films were even banned from the market. Against this backdrop, *Tiga Dara* (Three Sisters) performed well in the box office. But Ismail was not entirely happy because he felt that his ideals were compromised in

¹⁷⁶ Misbach, "The History of Indonesian Cinema at a Glance," pp. 221-224.

making film.¹⁷⁷ In other words, for financial and practical reasons, Ismail also employed popular and mainstream storylines to produce films that would perform well at the box office. Ismail's decision to make films that are intended primarily for profit does not, in any way, diminish his cultural and political contributions to the Indonesian society. It only reveals his understanding of the Indonesian society in general and is one of the reasons that make Ismail a key figure in the formation of Indonesia's national culture and national identity. In Said's interview with D. Djajakusuma, he related that, in fact, Ismail was actually embarrassed by some of the movies he made, particularly those made for commercial distribution without any sort of ideals embedded in it. Ismail was disappointed in making the film *The Three Sisters* (1957). It earned a lot in the market but lacked the hue of Ismail's ideals. D. Djajakusuma related, "His intention to sell the movie even before it was finished was proof enough of how difficult it was him to accept the reality that he had been forced to make such a film."¹⁷⁸

As one of the foremost cultural translators of the new Indonesian state, Ismail set the path for critically looking at the predicaments of his society, including, but not limited to, the fractures left by Dutch rule, the instability and convulsion of sundry ideologies coming from multiple sectors of the plural Indonesian society, and the severe social and economic hardships that prevailed across communities. Through his films, Ismail managed to capture coherent and distinguishable snapshots of Indonesia. More than that, he was able to identify the cracks within the Indonesian society – problems that were also pertinent political and diplomatic issues. Ismail produced films that facilitated and reflected the process of collective imagination of Indonesia as a unified nation – albeit one with obvious ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity.

¹⁷⁷ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

b. Lamberto Avellana: Screening the New Filipino

Lamberto Avellana is one of the pioneers and pillars of Philippine national cinema. His films embody the intersection between culture and politics, both domestic and international. Although he began his career in theatre, he was widely renowned for the world-class films he created. He became one of the earliest filmmakers from the Philippines who ventured into filmmaking within the region and conveyed the earliest images of the region from a Southeast Asian perspective. He collaborated with other Southeast Asian filmmakers, and produced films that depict the earliest transnational images of the region. Working with a visual medium, Lamberto Avellana contributed in identifying distinctive facets of Southeast Asian culture, society, and politics recognizable and familiar across national borders. As a pioneering Filipino director, he played a crucial role in crafting and reproducing visual manifestations of the nation. Avellana operated as a cultural warrior and a political intermediary reflecting on the plight of the newly independent Philippines and questioning how it should deal with the ideological tension between the United States and the Soviet Union as well as its own decolonization process.¹⁷⁹

Lamberto Avellana was born in Bontoc, Mountain Province on 12 February 1915. He studied at Ateneo de Manila University where he developed his acumen and skills for theatre. At a very young age, Avellana established the Barangay Theatre Guild to help advance Filipino theatre. With the help of other members of the theatre including Daisy Hontiveros and Raul Manglapus, Avellana staged several outstanding plays in Ateneo. Carlos P. Garcia (who eventually would be the President of the Philippines from March 1957 to December 30 1961) saw one of Avellana's plays.

¹⁷⁹ National Commission for Culture and the Arts, "Lamberto Avellana," date last accessed: April 3, 2016, <http://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/national-artists-of-the-philippines/lamberto-v-avellana/>.

Impressed by the latter's flair for the stage, he advised Avellana try his skills in filmmaking.¹⁸⁰

Avellana's first film reflected his thoughts and fears on the Philippine nation. Screened in 1939, the film *Sakay* depicts the life of the Filipino hero Macario Sakay. Avellana learned the most basic things about filmmaking from his trusted friend and mentor, William Jansen.¹⁸¹ Using characteristic visual sequences, Avellana introduced new perspectives in developing narrative. The technique uses the camera to give the audience a unique vantage point. As a result of his effective manipulation of the camera, Filipino film enthusiasts and critics acclaimed the movie and gave Avellana the appellation "The Boy Wonder of Philippine Movies." Teodoro Agcaoili, one of the most notable film critics in the country, commended Avellana's filmic style, which was responsible for the "introduction of a truly creative Philippine cinema, employing organically in film some of the elements of modern stagecraft and dramaturgy that had been lacking in Philippine movies."¹⁸²

It should be noted that despite the success of the Avellana's first film, there is one thing that the director would eventually regret. In the film, Sakay was presented as a brigand and rebel instead of as a revolutionary Filipino soldier. The former perspective was one that was upheld and circulated by the Americans as part of their propaganda in the Philippines. From the Filipino perspective, Sakay was, in fact, a revolutionary hero who bravely fought to expel the Americans from the country. Avellana's son related that his father regretted the way he portrayed Sakay. The famed director even wanted to produce another version that would address the faults of the

¹⁸⁰ Carballo, *Filipino Directors Up Close*, p. 12

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Agustin Sotto, "Focus on Filipino Directors: Lamberto Avellana", p. 1.

original film. Although Avellana's plan to re-make *Sakay* did not pan out, his feelings of disappointment reveal his predilection to represent the Philippines (and the Filipinos) from the lens and vantage point of the Filipinos themselves, and not based on what the Americans dictated or wanted the Filipinos to believe.¹⁸³

Avellana produced more than 70 films during his career. Among his outstanding productions are *Badjao* (1957) and *Anak Dalita* (1956). The former explores the lifestyle of the indigenous seafaring people living in the southernmost part of the Philippines while *Anak Dalita* is about the miseries and difficulties of life in the Philippines even after the official conclusion of the Second World War. Avellana "produced, promoted, and cultivated a specifically Filipino, loyal, liberal, nationalist subject, even after the official end of the military's psychological warfare against the Huks."¹⁸⁴

Avellana's productions contain politically and socially relevant themes and characters.¹⁸⁵ Like Indonesia's Usmar Ismail, Avellana captured on film the crude reality and gnarly predicaments of his country, which was undergoing decolonization, post-war rehabilitation, and nation-building. Explaining his cinematic style, Avellana said, "I like reality in-depth. I like to see dirt in nobility—in its rawest form. I prefer my audience to sit back and identify with the characters. I also like my characters to mirror human imperfections, speaking down to each dialogue, the way authentic people speak. And sex is a part of a film that pulsates."¹⁸⁶ In other words, Avellana embraced

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Francisco Benitez, "Filming Philippine Modernity", in *Cultures at War*, ed. Tony Day and Maya Hian Tig Liem (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 24.

¹⁸⁵ In the 1950s, *bakya* movies were popular among the general audience.

¹⁸⁶ Agustin Sotto, "Focus on Filipino Directors: Lamberto Avellana", p. 2.

the same philosophy as Usmar Ismail. Both placed high premium on portraying reality as truthfully and precisely as possible—within which mundane trivialities, predicaments, human errors and faults, and even sex, are included.

The famous Filipina actress Delia Razon, who had played various roles in Avellana's films, recounted how the director demanded his actors do very realistic and dangerous stunts. In one instance, Manuel Conde, another famous actor and director, was supposed to appear on screen in a gust of smoke but on the day of shooting, Avellana thought the smoke was not thick enough. He then ordered his props men to thicken it by burning more firecrackers and using more gunpowder, which did not bring about good results. Delia related, "Conde lost his eyelashes and his moustache. We had to wait three months to continue the shooting."¹⁸⁷

Not long after his debut in the film industry, Lamberto Avellana received more acclamation and acknowledgment. In 1956, *Anak Dalita* bagged the Best Film award at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival. It was one of the first international awards for a Filipino filmmaker, cementing Avellana's influence and significance in representing the Philippines within the filmic world.¹⁸⁸ In other words, his works were known not just among Filipinos (Filipinos gazing at themselves through Avellana's films) but also to the outside world. Through Avellana's films, the rest of the world saw images of the Philippines.

For the movie *Badjao*, Avellana won the Best Director award at the Asia Award held in Tokyo. He was also the first Filipino filmmaker whose film was shown at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. The movie was entitled *Kandelerong Pilak* (Silver Candlesticks, date), starring Miniong Alvarez, Alfonso Carvajal, Joseph de

¹⁸⁷ Carballo, *Filipino Directors Up Close*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Cordova, Lilia Dizon, and, the future President of the Philippines, Joseph Estrada. Aside from the accolades and awards he received for his own films, he was a major force driving collaboration between other Southeast Asian filmmakers. As previously mentioned, Avellana worked with the Malayan film icon, P. Ramlee in the movie *Sergeant Hassan*. He also directed other films that aimed at reaching out to international audiences including *Destination Vietnam* (1969), *Cry Freedom*, and *The Evil Within* (1970). These films not only solidified the place of the Philippines in global cinema, but also expanded the reach of a Filipino-made film to the international arena. These films served as windows to the Philippine settings.

In 1976, the Philippine government, headed by President Ferdinand Marcos declared him the first National Artist for Film. These recognitions do not merely demonstrate Avellana's keen eye for a good shot, but also his relevance and role as a Filipino filmmaker participating in the process of weaving social reality and crafting a particular Filipino subjectivity. As one of the foremost Filipino filmmakers, Avellana's role involved both the cultural and the political realms. He interpreted and explored the major facets of the postcolonial identity of the Philippines through his filmic style and depictions of his characters. He stitched together anxieties concerning the Cold War and juxtaposed them with the necessity of forming the ideal Filipino identity. The Filipino subject, as portrayed in Avellana's films, was one who, in the midst of the battle between two Cold War ideologies, remained intensely devoted to the nation. The ideal Filipino is one who aims to be, or aspires to pursue a good life—for himself, his family, and the broader society, in general. He decides and lives as a free and autonomous individual, albeit maintaining a crucial and somewhat indispensable link to the United States.

Lamberto Avellana also assumed an official position in the government and produced some films in close collaboration with key governmental institutions. In 1953, Avellana worked with LVN Pictures, one of the biggest studios in the Philippines at that time, to make several films with the assistance of the United States Information Service (USIS). The films included *Not by Bread Alone*, *Yaman ng Dukha* (Wealth of the Poor), *Maginoong Mamamayan* (Honourable Citizen), and *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* (Huk in the New Life).¹⁸⁹

In the seventies, Avellana was diagnosed with goiter but refused to have it removed. He was forced to stop working and shooting films but he never entirely retired. He established a company called Documentary Incorporated and shifted his focus to filming documentaries such as *The Survivor* and *The Legacy*. When television became more popular than cinema, Avellana also did some projects for television and radio. In 1983, he made his very last film entitled *Waywaya* which explores the sordid reality that confronted the indigenous peoples of the country, specifically the Igorots. It was based on the acclaimed novel written by F. Sionil Jose, National Artist for Literature. On April 25, 1991, Avellana finally succumbed to his illness.

c. P. Ramlee: Epitome of the Malayan/Malaysian identity

Like Usmar Ismail and Lamberto Avellana, P. Ramlee was an influential filmmaker in Southeast Asia. He was a filmmaker, actor, scriptwriter, singer, and composer. His films are considered as classics in Malaysia and are still being shown frequently on local television. Ramlee's rise to prominence in the cinematic world is important for the broader Malayan society. But the question is why? As mentioned above, racial stereotypes and ethnic segmentation characterized Malayan society and film industry. Ethnic Chinese businessmen provided financial resources as well as

¹⁸⁹ The significance of these films will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

technical capital to the filmmaking industry. Indians generally assumed the positions of scriptwriters and directors. The actors and actresses were mostly Malays and had the least contribution. But with P. Ramlee's rise to stardom, he epitomized the highest ideal and achievement for the whole community of Malays. He also served as an icon that defined and at the same time criticized what it meant to be Malay in the newly-formed independent state.

Coming from a simple family, P. Ramlee, whose real name was Teuku Zakaria bin Teuku Nyak Puteh, was born in Penang on March 22, 1929.¹⁹⁰ His father was a common worker who died of an illness when Ramlee was a young boy. His mother raised him and his siblings (from his mother's first marriage) alone. At a young age, he was exposed to Islam through reading of the Quran and attending the local school for Malays. His love for music was evident since he was eight years old. He participated in school performances, musicals, and eventually became a member of the prestigious Penang Orchestra.¹⁹¹

Ramlee began his career singing in *bangsawan* performances. He then worked as a back-up singer for films. B.S. Rahjans saw Ramlee's talent in music and acting, and offered him the villainous role in the film *Cinta* (Love, 1948). According to Timothy White, "Although he had a very good singing voice, he was considered ugly, and was cast as the villain in all of his early films."¹⁹² He was also known to assist in different stages of filmmaking. For instance, he worked as a clapper in numerous films. From time to time, he would also help the cameraman and observe the techniques of

¹⁹⁰ The house where P. Ramlee grew up in is currently regarded as an important landmark in Malaysia. The street was also re-named Jalan P. Ramlee.

¹⁹¹ James Harding and Ahmad Sarji, *P. Ramlee: The Bright Star* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: MPH, 2011).

¹⁹² Timothy White, "Pontianaks, P. Ramlee, and Islam: The Cinema of Malaysia," p. 5.

film directing. In 1955, he directed the film *Penarik Becha* (The Trickshaw Peddler). It explores the social stratification of Malay society as well as the rising predicament of poverty among the locals. The film's unforeseen success served as an opportunity for other local directors to come to the fore.¹⁹³

Ramlee tried different genres including comedy and drama. In total, he directed some 35 films and starred in more than 50. His highly celebrated *Bujang Lapok* series was popular with Malaysians. As the foremost figure in Malaysian cinema, Ramlee's role in depicting Malaysian society in films is crucial. Although Hassan Abd Muthalib opined that there is "No evidence that he [Ramlee] was into identity creation or nation-building," I believe the opposite is true. P. Ramlee's subtle criticisms of the Malay society and his lucid presentations of stereotypes and race in the country, in fact, reflect precisely the nature of the burgeoning Malay/Malaysian society.¹⁹⁴

Like Usmar Ismail's as well as Lamberto Avellana's works, P. Ramlee's films mirrored the dynamics and hybridity of different cultures and ethnic groups that comprised postwar Malaya/Malaysia. Furthermore, in the process of actually depicting multiraciality in filmic narratives, Ramlee essentially took part in the process of nation-building—no matter how complex and intricate that process was in Malaya/Malaysia. In *Penarek Becha*, Ramlee captured issues of class and poverty in the country during the 1950s. A trishaw driver fell in love with a rich man's daughter. Initially, the rich man despised the driver because he is poor but when another man whom he trusted robbed him, the rich man finally saw the merits of the simple trishaw driver. Through this film, Ramlee presented his criticisms of the society in Malaya. As a filmmaker, he

¹⁹³ Following P. Ramlee's rise to popularity, Malay directors rose in the country's film industry such as Roomai Noor and Jamil Sulong made their respective films in 1956 and in 1959, respectively.

¹⁹⁴ Interview by author, June 19, 2015.

employed Indian techniques, parody, and even burlesque dialogue to express his message. In *Bujang Lapok*, Ramlee was able to issue to the audience his commentary on the Malay community and their quest for modernity and development.

Similar to Usmar Ismail and Lamberto Avellana, P. Ramlee also embodied *transnationality* in two fundamental ways. First, he was among the earliest Southeast Asians who were able to create films that crossed national borders. In 1956, he created *Semarah Padi* (The Village of Semarah Padi). Based on one of the movies of the eminent Japanese director Arika Kurosawa, *Semarah Padi* explores Islamic traditions and culture in Aceh in Indonesia. Furthermore, he was a popular figure outside the Malayan/Malaysian peninsula. Many Indonesians flocked to the theatres to watch Ramlee's films. However, when Indonesia introduced a protectionist policy as a consequence of the escalating political turmoil between the two countries, Ramlee's movies became less accessible to Indonesians.¹⁹⁵ Second, he collaborated with other Southeast Asian filmmakers in making the earliest co-productions in the region. The movie *Sarjan Hassan* was a product of P. Ramlee and the Filipino director Lamberto Avellana's collaboration. As one of the pioneering local directors in Malaysia, P. Ramlee's works project the emergent images of the Malaysian nation. These images were complex at times and even confusing and contradictory. Nevertheless, they represent the plurality of social dimensions palpable in the country in the midst of political, social, and economic transformations.

P. Ramlee also produced other top-grossing films including *Sumpah Orang Minyak* (The Curse of the Oily Man, 1958), *Antara Dua Darjat* (Between Two Classes, 1960), and *Ibu Mertua-ku* (My Mother-in-Law, 1962). By the 1960s, the rising popularity of television resulted in the decline in the number of people patronising

¹⁹⁵ Misbach Yusa Biran, "The History of Indonesian Cinema," pp. 219-224.

cinemas, severely affecting the country's film industry. The decline in film's popularity was aggravated by the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia, which hampered the distribution of films made in the peninsula to the other side of the Straits of Malacca. The Shaw Brother's Malay Film Productions closed down, compelling P. Ramlee to join Merdeka Film Studio located in Kuala Lumpur. The move affected Ramlee dearly. Given no access to high-quality equipment and technology as well as resources, P. Ramlee created insipid movies such as *Si-Tora Harimau Jadian* (Tora, the Were-Tiger, 1964), *Ragam P. Ramlee* (The Style of P. Ramlee, 1965), and *Masam-masam Manis* (A Sweet & Sour Life, 1965). In 1972, he released his last film entitled *Laksamana Do Re Mi* (The Warriors, Do Re Mi). The following year, P. Ramlee died of a heart attack at a young age of 44. His was a short but exceedingly productive career. Following his death, his works regained prominence and they continue to occupy the high place in the memory of Malays and Malaysians. Beside P. Ramlee's undeniable talent, perhaps his sudden death is partly responsible for his enduring fame and distinction.¹⁹⁶

Despite the tragic end of this Malaysian figure, it is indubitable that his legacy remains significant and that his contributions to the shaping of the Malaysian cinema and nation are of great consequence. P. Ramlee's key films demonstrate the ideological facets of Malayan/Malaysian. According to Hassan Abd Muthalib: According to Hassan Abd Muthalib:

“Ramlee's entry into the industry signalled a change. He refuted the backwardness of the Malays and extolled Malay culture and values. In *Semerah Padi*, he showed respect for the old and love for the young, and politeness in speech and action. *Tiga Abdul* (The Three Abduls,

¹⁹⁶ James Harding and Ahmad Sarji, P. Ramlee: Bright Star, pp. 3-26.

1964) showed that the road to ruin and disruption lay in conflict over power, property and women. *Musang Berjanggut* (Bearding the Fox, 1959), and *Nujum Pa' Blalang* (Pa' Blalang, the Royal Diviner, 1959), spoke about maintaining one's integrity in the face of temptation. *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* (The Raggedy Warrior Bachelors, 1959) was about breaking away from a negative milieu. P. Ramlee spoke about finding love, family and education, cleverly portraying it in classic binary opposition. *Sesudah Subuh* (After the Dawn, 1967), and *Grimes* (Light Rain, 1965), was about issues of multiculturalism – they threw up questions about the Malay race, its conditions of powerlessness, frustration, doubt, as also about the future.”¹⁹⁷

Indeed, P. Ramlee's films translated the realities of Malaya/Malaysia into sequential filmic narratives masked in varying genres. In his films, we see the idealism and principles of an indigenous Southeast Asian filmmaker, like Ismail and Avellana, committed to not only unveiling the social dilemmas of his society but to conveying clear images and possibilities for improvement

The end of the Second World War left a germane environment for the likes of P. Ramlee to express their messages, beliefs and ideologies from the Southeast Asian vantage point, through films. As William Van der Heide opined “P. Ramlee's films are loved for their music and for their acute social analysis of the condition of the Malays, who were suddenly caught up in rapid social, political, and cultural changes in the 1950s and 1960s.”¹⁹⁸ These images and Ramlee's acute social analysis eventually

¹⁹⁷ Hassan Abd Muthalib, “P. Ramlee: A Life of Love, Humor, and Tears,” *Cinemaya*, India, November 2005.

¹⁹⁸ Van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p. 139.

percolated into politics and in the same way, were influenced and shaped by politics as well.

C. THE RISE OF NATIONAL CINEMAS

Three fundamental aspects in the development of cinema as the dream factories of Southeast Asia are established here. First, transnational linkages strengthened the connections among the emergent national cinemas in the region. The ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs and directors fostered the formation of local cinema industries. Transnational collaborations and co-productions created the foundation of a somewhat volatile concept of Southeast Asia. The overarching influence of Hollywood served as a common external factor that influenced Southeast Asian national cinemas. The potent force of Hollywood, threatening the vitality of local cinemas, sparked interrelated effects in Southeast Asia – the most fundamental of which was the configuration of national and regional identities vis-à-vis the Western/Hollywood Other. In other words, the existence of transnational linkages in the region's film industries inexorably provided vital building blocks for the construction of national and regional identities in ways not seen before.

Second, the end of the Japanese occupation in Southeast Asia led to a Golden Age of national cinemas across the region. Locally owned studios developed alongside Western and Chinese-owned film businesses. The number of films being produced every year rose drastically. Local movie-goers increased the frequency of their visits to the cinema houses. As members of the entertainment industry, the Southeast Asian actors and actresses turned into household names. The popularity and significance of films as dream factories of the people of the region intensified.

Finally, the pioneering Southeast Asian filmmakers came to the forefront of the cinema industry. Their contributions went beyond the technical or stylistic aspects of filmmaking. They created films that were essentially embedded within the unique cultural and social environment of the region. Southeast Asian perspectives appeared and gradually (albeit not totally) replaced or countered Western-centric storylines. Dialogue and discourse between films and politics became evident more than ever. In fact, pioneering filmmakers such as Usmar Ismail, Lamberto Avellana, and P. Ramlee had in one way or another injected political and social commentaries concerning their respective countries into their films.

Usmar Ismail was vocal in utilizing films to further the nationalistic agenda. His films brought into focus the social problems of Indonesia at the outset of independent rule. He played a crucial role in the creation of images and portrayals of Indonesia. Lamberto Avellana, through his films, offered new possibilities to visualize and define the new Filipino. He also carried Philippine narratives and perspectives to the regional level through his numerous co-productions with other Southeast Asian film pioneers. P. Ramlee symbolized the ideals of Malaysian society—its multi-cultural nature and its complex political situation. Ramlee also contributed in depicting images of the nation from the Malaysian vantage point. Though subtler compared to the other two filmmakers, Ramlee infused his political ideas and critiques into his productions.

These three personalities are crucial to bridging the gap among the social realities, films and politics. Their films shaped the cultural context within which the strategic cultures of Southeast Asia emerged. The transnational linkages in cinema and the rise of local filmmakers paved the way for the emergence of film as the conduit of strategic cultural and political discourse.

Chapter Four

Continuing the Epithet of Revolution

“It is important to know the basic problems of our revolution. Knowing the basic problems of the Indonesian Revolution means knowing the targets and tasks of the Indonesian revolution, knowing the forces which push it forward, knowing its character and its perspectives. In order to know the basic problem of the Indonesian revolution, we must in the first place know Indonesian society.”
Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution

“A Revolution, woven in the dim light of mystery, has kept me from you. Another Revolution will return me to your arms, bring me back to life.”
Jose Rizal

Anyone attempting to understand the societies, cultures, and political thinking of Southeast Asia after the Second World War is compelled to look into the vestiges and impacts of colonialism. The shadow cast by European rule, which extended from the 15th to the early 20th century, was only partially lifted upon the acquisition of independence of some Southeast Asian states. Few would dispute that anti-colonialism and consequently postcolonialism were core concepts in the politics, society, and culture of the region.¹⁹⁹ Local political leaders and prominent thinkers emerged to challenge or eliminate the remnants of Western dominance in the region.²⁰⁰ In the process of doing so, they formed the foundational concepts of what were to become the underlying tenets of Southeast Asian strategic culture.

¹⁹⁹ Clive Christie, *Ideology and Revolution in Southeast Asia, 1900-1980: Political Ideas of the Anti-Colonial Era*; John Bastin and Harry Benda, *A History of Modern Southeast Asia*, pp. 136-175.

²⁰⁰ Bastin and Benda, *A History of Modern Southeast Asia*, pp. 147.

Anti-colonial themes also dominated the silver screen albeit in a slightly more nuanced form. Pioneering filmmakers from the region crafted a spectrum of representations depicting their former colonial masters.²⁰¹ They rendered a multitude of interpretations of the evolving nature of Western colonialism, underscoring the roles and responses of the Southeast Asians. These interpretations mirrored post-war Southeast Asian anxieties and attitudes towards the empires. In the Philippines, there was a renewed sense of nationalism following the acquisition of independence in 1946. Usmar Ismail wasted no time and immediately employed cinema as a tool to conjure up memories of colonial oppression and traumas of the peoples in the East Indies living under the Dutch. In a less obvious way, Malaysian cinema presented the problems of British rule and difficult formation of a plural and multiracial Malaysian nation.

Among the three countries scrutinized in this study, expressions of anti-colonialism took many forms. But what is interesting is that they all share a common predilection to emphasize revolutionary ideals. They interpreted their issues and consequences of their colonial past with such ardent revolutionary zeal. For instance, their economic problems were perceived as a part of their revolutionary struggle. Southeast Asians believed that they needed to continue fighting for their ideals. For them, the struggle for independence had not ended. They were committed to protect the integrity and unity of their new countries. This revolutionary zeal was apparent not only in the realm of politics. Films made during the aftermath of the war also exuded the same ethos.

The Southeast Asian states' predilection towards the revolutionary expressions, of course, was entrenched in the wider experience of national revolutions that broke out to topple colonial authorities. This ideological tenet, the predilection towards

²⁰¹ For example, *Between Two Races* (1947) and *Enam Djam di Jogya* (1951).

revolutionary expressions, continued in the aftermath of independence. The founding fathers of Southeast Asian nations repeatedly recounted their revolutionary struggles as a constant theme in their political discourse and debates. The ideals of the revolution were apparent in the nationalist speeches and employed in political ideologies defending the construction of the nation. Southeast Asian political leaders and filmmakers anchored their political and cultural expressions in the countries' revolutionary paths toward independence and the quest for national identity. The processes of establishing new political systems in Southeast Asia and advocating nation-building were regarded by Southeast Asians as a part of their revolutionary paths.

In this ideological framework, those who questioned or antagonized the state's nationalistic agenda were deemed traitors by the nationalistic Southeast Asians to the revolutionary cause. That is to say, a nationalist was a revolutionary as well. Domestic politics were a field where revolutionary ideals were constantly being fought for by local political leaders. For Southeast Asians, the international arena was a bigger and wider platform where the revolution was either threatened by foreign nations or furthered by Southeast Asians themselves. In essence, the whole region of Southeast Asia underwent a series of radical shifts during this period – the complexities and peculiarities of which were evident in the political and the cultural (in this case, filmic) milieus. At the height of the Cold War then, Southeast Asian states viewed international relations in terms of their revolutionary struggle for sovereignty, self-determination, and national development. Emerging from the dust of colonialism and the Second World War, Southeast Asian countries embraced ardent revolutionary zeal that influenced the political and the cultural realms.

A. INDONESIA AND THE PROTRACTED REVOLUTION

Nationalism did not arrive overnight in Indonesia. There were early symptoms, igniting factors that spurred the gradual formation of nationalist sentiments among the peoples of the East Indies. The Japanese emboldened local leaders in their nationalist campaigns, and provided military training for people hailing from numerous political organizations such as Masyumi and Peta. Sukarno and Hatta, key figures in the struggle for independence, ignited a social movement for a free, unified, and independent Indonesia. Furthermore, the violent and harrowing armed struggle for self-determination instilled in the minds and hearts of Indonesians the essence of the nation. The Indonesian revolution was a key turning point in Indonesia's transition from a colony to becoming a sovereign state and it started just when another war was about to reach its end. On August 15, 1945, the Japanese empire witnessed its demise. Following the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Japanese surrendered to the allied powers.

On December 27, 1949, Indonesia finally acquired its independence. By August 17, 1950, the new Republic of Indonesia was established. It had its own constitution and Jakarta was designated as the capital of the new state. Officially, Indonesia had concluded its revolution. At this point, it is crucial to underscore that throughout the period following Indonesia's independence, revolutionary fervour soared in the whole archipelago beyond politics to culture and the arts. Local poets, writers, and artists championed revolutionary ideals and became prominent figures. For instance, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's writings were critically acclaimed and regarded as a crucial part of the spirit of the Indonesian revolution. Sutan Sjahrir's *Perjuangan Kita* (Our Struggle) roused anti-aristocratic and democratic ideals. More importantly,

filmmakers in Indonesia would also infuse their films with themes from the revolution.²⁰²

Although filmmakers had difficulty running their studios during the revolution, they would restore their operations and churn out films in significant numbers following its conclusion. These works portrayed various facets of the revolution. Usmar Ismail created films that highlighted the social, political, and cultural dynamics of Indonesia following its independence. Ismail made *Darah dan Doa* (Blood and Prayer) in 1950, and *Enam Djam di Jogya* (Six Hours in Yogja) a year after.²⁰³ Both films deal with struggles of the Indonesians during the revolution. In 1960, Ismail produced what would be regarded as one of his most internationally acclaimed films, *Pedjuang* (Freedom Fighter). Joining Ismail in championing the revolution via films was another filmmaker, Asrul Sani. Sani made *Pagar Kawat Berduri* (The Barbed Wire Fence) made in 1962.²⁰⁴ These films encapsulate the dynamics of the Indonesian revolution—its ideals, complexities, legacies, and significances. Furthermore, these films, which promoted the revolution stirred the political sentiments of people in Indonesia and shaped their attitudes toward domestic and international political affairs.

Darah dan Doa captured and projected the ideals of the revolutionary struggle onto the big screen Usmar Ismail took his audience back to 1948.²⁰⁵ The main protagonist, Sudarto, is a Captain of the Indonesian Army. He is caught in the midst of a turbulent revolution and the Maidun Affair. Although he was married, he met and fell in love with a woman from Bandung named Connie. His fellow soldiers do not approve

²⁰² See for example: Max Lane, *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia Before and After Suharto*, (London: Verso, 2008), p. 8-10; Anthony Reid, *To Nation by Revolution: Indonesia in the 20th Century*, (Singapore: National University Press, 2011).

of the relationship. When Sudarto is tasked to travel west from his base in Jogjakarta, he vowed to Connie that he will meet her again in Bandung.

Leading his soldiers and a number of civilians, men, women, and children, Sudarto leaves Jogjakarta. With him is his right-hand man and good friend, Adam. They embark on a long and perilous journey. The film depicts the revolution occurring in the grassroots level, affecting the lives of simple soldiers and individuals who had to confront the uncertainties and threats of such a turbulent period. The men, women, and children are forced to dodge Dutch airstrikes during the day. By night, they continue their journey, overcoming many obstacles and adversities along the way. They lack food, fall sick, and have to ward off the resistance army. Sudarto gets involved with another woman—a nurse named Widja. Adam and the other soldiers again express their uneasiness with the captain's behaviour.²⁰⁶

As they continue with their expedition, the group stumbles upon a survivor of a Dutch raid. They question him and the person directs them to a nearby village. The village chief welcomes them, and furnishes the group with food and a place to rest for the night. The following morning, Sudarto's group realises they have been led into a trap. The villagers who had offered them help turn on the group. Fighting between the two groups ensue—Indonesian versus fellow Indonesian. Sudarto and his men manage to ward off the attack. He then commands his people to execute the village chief. In a dramatic turn, Sudarto assigns the task of killing the chief to the latter's son. Symbolically, the scene represents Ismail's understanding of politics and sacrifice. To further the objectives of the revolution, a son has to be prepared to kill his own father. As the narrator in the film relates: *"Itulah yang dinamakan Adam Revolusi: Revolusi yang mempersatukan makhluk manusia yang tadinya bermusuhan, revolusi yang*

²⁰⁶ *Darah dan Doa*, DVD, directed by Usmar Ismail (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1950).

menceraikan mereka yang berkasih-kasihan, anak bunuh bapak, saudara bunuh saudara.”²⁰⁷ Ismail’s film, then, suggests that the revolution united Indonesia as it focused the people’s eyes on one goal: the journey to independence. But politics could also be divisive. This understanding of the revolution reflects the dichotomy that persisted in postcolonial Indonesia: the imagination and formation of the notion of nationhood against the fragmentation and diversity in the country. The film nevertheless suggests that Indonesians were determined to maintain their journey toward political freedom and independence. After overcoming the obstacles, Sudarto and his group continue with their trek toward their destination: Bandung.

While the film addresses themes like human resolve, it also accentuates division among comrades. Adam and the other soldiers harbour doubts about Sudarto’s leadership. They secretly sent to the headquarters reports criticizing Sudarto’s leadership. That plot in the film suggests that the revolution was more than a political struggle for independence. There were also internal squabbles and disputes among the revolutionaries. Soldiers clashed with their fellow soldiers, and the notions of morality and values were contested and constantly breached.

The movie concludes with the Dutch arresting Sudarto. He is alone. When Indonesia achieves independence, he is released. He learns that his soldiers and the civilians accompanying them arrived safely at their destination. He is, however, in custody, placed under investigation for his conduct during the war. The experiences move Sudarto to contemplate on the war, his actions, the things he did to survive, and the lives he killed. Dramatically, a man whose family Sudarto killed enters his room and shoots him. The credits roll and the movie finally ends.

²⁰⁷“This is what Adam calls the Revolution: A revolution that brings together humans that once fought, a revolution that separates (divorces) those who love each other, children killing fathers, brothers killing brothers.” Translated by author.

Usmar Ismail clearly did not attempt to use the film to glorify the soldier of the revolution. Sudarto was, at the core, a man whose past had caught up with him. Ismail's film suggests that one of the most crucial problems during the revolution was the revolutionary himself. The film also stresses that not only was the revolution occurring in from the grassroots to high politics and within the individual to the state level, it was also, a continuing revolution. It was a protracted revolution. It did not end with the recognition of the Indonesian state but continued to preoccupy those who witnessed it.

The intricacies of the revolution and how pervading a phenomenon it was emerge most astutely in the character of Sudarto. He is someone who believed in the revolutionary cause and ideals. But the revolution was fought in multiple areas beyond ideals. Sudarto had to endure multiple levels of struggles: a constant battle with himself, the environment, his morality, and his fellow soldiers. One of the most crucial scenes was when he reflects on his deeds during the revolution. In this scene, suggests an innate reflex to ruminate on the process, impacts, as well as the lingering vestiges of the revolution. Indeed, the revolution and travails did not stop when the fighting stopped. Investigators interrogated and prosecuted soldiers who were charged and found guilty of misconduct when the war ended. Those who lost family members and loved ones remained traumatized and had to deal with grief. In addition, Indonesians had to come to terms with the revolution and build their new nation-state.²⁰⁸

Also a product of the postcolonial setting was another masterpiece by Usmar Ismail, *Enam Djam di Djogya* (Six Hours in Jogja).²⁰⁹ Screened in 1951, the film

²⁰⁸ *Darah dan Doa*, streaming, directed by Usmar Ismail (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1950).

²⁰⁹ *Enam Djam di Jogya* (Six Hours in Jogja), directed by Usmar Ismail, (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1951).

details the bravery and heroism of the Indonesian National Army (TNI). The film shows how the Indonesian soldiers seized and held the city of Yogyakarta (then occupied by the Dutch) for six hours. The attack is regarded as a turning point in the history of the country. The Indonesian resistance and freedom fighters remained strong despite Dutch insistence on remaining in the archipelago. As a key event for the Indonesian nation, Ismail employed this event to highlight the on-going upheavals of the country.

The movie starts in the city of Yogyakarta, which was overrun by Dutch military forces that refused to leave the country. The defeated Indonesian National Army is forced to flee to the countryside to fight as guerrillas while the rest of the population suffer under Dutch subjugation. While the Indonesian forces failed to defend the city from Dutch incursion, they continued to fight for independence. They wish to remind the world that the Indonesian army is still a force to be reckoned with. They eventually launch an attack to recover Yogyakarta, managing to hold the city for six hours.

The film depicts the revolution as a nuanced phenomenon. Within the Indonesian populace, there were conflicting perspectives and expectations. In particular, there was a clash between the more idealistic young generation and the wary and pragmatic older generation. The narrative follows a group of old-time friends and revolutionaries in the days leading up to the attack. The young people of the city, or *pemuda*, actively but quietly support the army hiding out in the countryside by exchanging secret messages through women who go out to the fields to work. These *pemuda* are highly passionate nationalists who strongly dislike the Dutch for their rough treatment of the civilians. They are also wary of potential supporters of the Dutch whom they see as betrayers.

In stark contrast, the older generation or the parents of the *pemuda* were warier of the younger generation's ability to prevail in the struggle with the Dutch and secure a better life for all of them. In Ismail's film, this concern is represented in the character of Hadi's father who, for a moment, even contemplated working for the Dutch. He seeks a better life and is prepared to go against the wishes of his son, a guerrilla soldier in the National Army. The father remarks, "*Apa kau lihat aku? Bukan karenaku keadaan menjadi seperti ini. Mau makan jual baju.... Dulu aku sudah bilang biarlah aku kerja kembali. Apa bedanya aku kerja sama republik, sama Jepang atau sama Belanda? Nasib kita tetap terus begini saja.*"²¹⁰ *Enam Djam di Djogya* successfully captures the intergenerational clash of perspectives towards the revolution.

Furthermore, the film explores the issue of morality. One character worth mentioning is that of an Indonesian policeman working for the Dutch. He seems to only bother about his personal welfare. In the film, locals who wish to live an affluent and secure life envy him. Those in the army, however, abhor the policeman. They consider him to be a traitor for aligning with the Dutch and oppressing the citizens. As a result, the Indonesian army, with the help of Hadi's sister, Wiwi, lure the policeman into a trap and capture him. Wiwi was then arrested by the Dutch. Jono, Wiwi's friend, vows to help her escape during the Indonesian forces' planned attack against the Dutch.

The attack commences and the army successfully occupies the city for six hours before they flee. True to his word, Jono attempts to save Wiwi but is wounded in the process. Jono's friends free Wiwi, and she bolts to her parent's house to hide. But the Dutch follow her and ransack the home. Wiwi and her mother manage to evade

²¹⁰ "Don't you see me? It's not my fault that our situation is like this. We have to sell clothes to eat. I have told you in the past, let me work again. What difference does it make if I work with the Republic, the Japanese or the Dutch? Our lives are still going to be like this." Translated by author.

capture. To demonstrate his support to the cause of the revolution, however, Wiwi's father surrenders himself to the Dutch. The movie ends when Wiwi joins the freedom fighters, anticipating and hoping that their assault will rouse the people of Indonesia to expel the Dutch from the archipelago. In the film's final scene, a nationalist message appeared: "*Selama merapi, Masih berapi, Walau dipukul, Seribu kali, Semangat Gerilya, Ta' akan mati!*"²¹¹ The film thus concludes by proclaiming that the revolution continues.

Enam Djam di Djogya categorically paralleled the social and political climate of Indonesia in the 1950s. When Ismail released and screened the movie, Indonesia had achieved its independence. The new nation-state was focused on its domestic and international affairs and in inspiring nationalist sentiments among its people. Government officials promoted the notion of protracted revolution. Artists and filmmakers celebrated it. As in the closing shot, the necessity of resolute guerrilla spirit was emphasized.

In another film entitled *Pedjuang* (Warriors for Freedom date), Usmar Ismail explored the overlapping narratives of love and war.²¹² This movie deals with the sacrifices made and miseries of the Indonesians during the clamour for independence. Individuals also had to struggle with their own interests and fears amidst the disorder in their surroundings. These personalities include Lieutenant Amin and Sergeant Major Imron who lead a section of the guerrilla army. They are tasked to mount an ambush against the Dutch at a strategically located bridge. They rig the bridge with explosives so that it can be destroyed if the Dutch cross the bridge. After rigging the bridge, they

²¹¹"While the Merapi, Still roars, Though beaten, A thousand times, The guerrilla spirit, Will never die." Translated by author.

²¹² *Pedjuang* (Warriors for Freedom) directed by Usmar Ismail (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1960).

wait for the Dutch. Soon the Dutch forces arrive and two men are sent to inspect the bridge. When more men cross the bridge, the Indonesian soldiers launch their attack. Dutch airplanes arrive to support the infantry, forcing the Indonesian lieutenant to withdraw his men higher up the mountain. The Dutch forces launch their counterattack. The Indonesians, however, destroy the bridge and defend their ground. A number of Indonesian soldiers die in the attack, causing their family members to later lament and express doubts about the need for the men to sacrifice their lives. Lieutenant Amin was also heavily wounded during the fight.

The Indonesians retreat and bring Amin to the hospital. Orders arrive for them to evacuate their position that night. However, Amin's younger sister, Latifah, refuses to leave her brother's side. Irma, Amin's lover, decides to flee. She is pessimistic that the Indonesian cause will be successful. Imron, now in charge, leaves the siblings at the mercy of the advancing Dutch forces. He leads the soldiers and their families to the next village. During the journey, Corporal Seno, Latifah's lover, begs Imron to permit him to return to save Amin and Latifah. Seno also harbours the suspicion that Imron wants Amin dead so that he can have Irma for himself. However, Imron stands firm and instead locks Seno in prison. Imron states:

“Leutnan Amin adalah atasanku, sahabatku. Kepentingannya adalah lebih penting daripada kepentinganku. Tapi ada yang lebih penting: perjuangan kita. Perintah dari markas besar: kampung ini harus dikosongkan mala mini juga. Kalau Latifah mau tinggal disini merawat lefnan Amin—terserah.”²¹³

²¹³“Lieutenant Amin is my superior, my friend. His importance is more important than mine. But there is something even more important: Our cause. We have been given orders to empty this village this very night. If Latifah wants to care of Lieutenant Amin—up to her.”
Translated by author.

*Latifah mau tinggal disini merawat lefnan Amin—terserah.*²¹⁴

Using such narratives, Usmar Ismail conveyed to the film's audience the political message that the cause of the revolution should be held above individual or group interests. He employed the following scenes to emphasize the idea. When the Dutch army patrols move closer to the village where Imron and his group are taking shelter, Irma lures the Dutch soldiers through the village to an open field where they are ambushed by Indonesian soldiers. In the commotion, Seno escapes his prison and spies on the Dutch. He returns with an even greater resolve to rescue Latifah and Amin. Seno and Irma convince Imron of the rightness of the rescue. Imron decides to act, but dies during the operation. Seno and Latifah are reunited, along with Irma and Amin. The film illustrates how the revolution permeated the lives of ordinary people. It separated lovers and caused divisions among friends and in communities. But, in the end, the film still reinforces the importance of the fight for independence when Imron boldly rescued Latifah and Amin from the enemies. In this respect, Usmar's idealism remains as the film affirms that the aims of revolution took precedence over individual interests.

As Indonesian films employed the theme of revolution earnestly, it is also imperative to note that the political realm bears resemblances to these filmic narratives. After the acquisition of independence, traces of revolutionary ideals remained. Indonesia entered a period of political and ideological turbulence, characterized by various groups competing for political power and influence. Against this background, Sukarno assumed one of the most important roles. According to Clive Christie, "after independence, Sukarno's political philosophy remained distinct and coherent. His

²¹⁴"Lieutenant Amin is my superior, my friend. His importance is more important than mine. But there is something even more important: Our cause. We have been given orders to empty this village this very night. If Latifah wants to care of Lieutenant Amin—up to her." Translated by author.

fundamental vision led him, perhaps inexorably, towards a stance that became more, not less, revolutionary once independence from the Dutch had been negotiated in 1949.”²¹⁵

For Sukarno, the revolution did not end with the ouster of the Dutch from Indonesia. He asserted: “Revolution is only truly Revolution if it is a continuous struggle. Not just an external struggle against an enemy, but an inner struggle, fighting and subduing all negative aspects which hinder or do damage to the course of the Revolution. In this light Revolution is... a mighty symphony of victory over the enemy and over oneself.”²¹⁶ For Sukarno a genuine sense of independence went beyond the formal granting of sovereignty. He asserted that economic independence was also of equal importance as political freedom. The revolutionary spirit lingered on to ward off any vestiges of colonialism and economic oppression.²¹⁷ The notion of revolution formed a crucial part of his political rhetoric and philosophy. For Sukarno, the national revolution remained half-finished. In reality, this premise was evident. The Dutch continued to hold New Guinea and Dutch economic interests in Indonesia were significant. Furthermore, the internal division and fragmentation of the country indicated an unfinished formation of the nation.

Similarly, Hatta perceived the revolution as unfinished and could only be completed upon the achievement of independence followed by the sordid task of

²¹⁵ Christie, *Ideology and Revolution*, p. 159.

²¹⁶ Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (Great Britain: Penguin Press, 1972).

²¹⁷ It is salient to mention that several authors also link the emergence of Indonesia Revolution to the historical development of the Philippines. For instance, the prominent Indonesian Marxist revolutionary Datuk Tun Malaka expressed his admiration to Filipino nationalists such as Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio and contends that the former's two novels, *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* are influential works that sparked revolutionary spirit in Indonesia.

propelling Indonesia to modernity and development. He believed the country had to extend the revolution to the economy, overturning old practices and arrangements that benefited only a limited sector of the population. The government had to pursue new economic policies to address the problem of Indonesian economic underdevelopment and improve the lives of the people in the country. According to Hatta, ‘A revolution shakes the floor and the foundations; it loosens all hinges and boards.’²¹⁸

Hatta also understood that postcolonial politics in Indonesia would be challenging and unpredictable. The revolution had “give[n] rise to an atmosphere influenced by a mass psychology, which is itself strongly affected by romanticism and heroism. The primary problem in a revolution is how to channel the burning but anarchic energies of the masses, and to mould them into a body, strong at heart, capable of enduring suffering and undergoing trials in facing reactions that may arise, until the final victory is achieved.”²¹⁹ Political victory had been achieved through the acquisition of independence, but for Hatta, real victory was yet to be achieved.

Certainly, the Indonesian administration had its hands full governing an immense and highly fragmented society like Indonesia. During the fight for independence, a common nemesis—the Dutch—had functioned to unite the diverse political groups. The Indonesians put aside their political differences to fight the Dutch. Once Indonesia became independent, the indigenous people had to assume the task of building a viable and sovereign nation-state. How were they to even maintain the

²¹⁸ Hatta, “Past and Future,” Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, date last accessed: June 1, 2016, <https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/cmip:022>.

²¹⁹ Hatta, “Isi Proklamasi” in *Fakta dan Dokumen-dokumen untuk menjusan buku ‘Indonesia memasuki Gelanggang Internasional’*, Suplemen I Vol. II (Kemlu R.I. Direktorat V, Seksi Penyelidikan Dokumentasi dan Perpustakaan [ed. Emzita], p. 1, as cited in Anderson, *Some Aspects of Indonesian Politics under the Japanese Occupation* (Jakarta: Euiinox Publishing, 2009) pp. 99-100 and Mavis Rose, *Indonesia Free: A Political Biography of Mohammad Hatta* (Singapore: Equinox Publishing Asia) p. 199.

integral composition of the nation? How to secure the unity of the territory? What was the best way to govern Indonesia?

President Sukarno championed a political ideology to govern the country. Under Guided Democracy, the Sukarno government sought to further the goals of the revolution. It aimed to diminish the influence of Western liberal democratic practices and the power of the political parties in the country. A *gotong-royong* cabinet was established with representatives from different political groups to provide advice and assistance to the president. In reality, Sukarno appointed all the representatives and those who opposed him or challenged the fundamental premises of Guided Democracy were marginalized.²²⁰

Sukarno employed the necessity of continuing the national revolution as an ideological foundation of his political philosophy. He formed a Supreme Advisory Council, which comprised delegates from different sectors including the military, youth, and women. There was an attempt to consolidate the heterogeneous nation of Indonesia and give representation to every single group despite the glaring fact that they were still subject to the authority of Sukarno. As Clive Christie maintains, “The ultimate goal of this new political structure was, of course, the completion of the national revolution. This involved the continuation of the struggle to end the colonial grip on Indonesia’s economy, and the ‘liberation’ of the Dutch New Guinea, or Irian Jaya, as it was called by the Indonesians.”²²¹ Apart from furthering his political agenda, Sukarno also intensified tight government control of the economy. As with the rest of the region, the end of the Second World War left Indonesia with an economy in shambles. The war destroyed many plantations, agricultural areas, and industrial machineries. Food

²²⁰ Christie, *Ideology and Revolution*, p. 161.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

production could not keep up with the rapid rise in population. Many individuals and families turned to the booming cities for new opportunities and a better life. Makeshift houses and illegal settlements sprawled across the city.

Agrarian and land issues were among the most urgent matters that had to be resolved. Sukarno decided to restore traditional rights to land. Colonial and foreign ownership of land was disallowed. The government reserved the right to regulate property issues and redistribute land. These government policies were tackled in another one of Usmar Ismail's films, *Krisis* (1953). It is a comedy film, which explores the changes in the social status and value systems of the Indonesians as a result of the Indonesian Revolution. In the film, the main protagonist is Jaka who is forced to go to the countryside owing to the armed conflict between the Dutch army and the army of the Republic of Indonesia in the city. Once the Dutch have accepted the independence of Indonesia, Jaka returns and finds his house still safe, guarded by Husin, his assistant.²²²

But now Jaka is forced to share his house with Husin. Husin is no longer merely his assistant. In this new and more egalitarian society, he also has become Jaka's neighbour. Aside from this, his house is also occupied by two other people, a student and a model. Jaka has to accept this reality because in truth the house was abandoned when he fled. The story of this film is carried forth via the interactions of the occupants of the house who have different kinds of social status and importance. This comedy by Usmar was screened and well received even in the first-class cinemas. The film garnered a lot of attention and accolades from various groups. Analysing the film, Sitor Situmorang states:

²²² *Krisis (Crisis)*, DVD, directed by Usmar Ismail (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1953).

“...satire and cutting criticism are not apparent but we can at least be grateful for the opportunity to laugh. Seated in a comfortable movie house for the duration of the film, we can forget for a moment the overcrowded conditions in which we live, that being the basis of this film’s story and the source of its humour. With (Jakarta’s) housing problem or, ‘difficulty in accommodations’ as the background, Usmar Ismail depicts a variety of human characters and a range of human behaviour and responses to this distressing situation. ...In presenting the experiences of his protagonists Usmar Ismail veers away from social trends and directs his attention to psychological issues by focusing on the various kinds of personalities found in society and noting how their characteristics became more pronounced when faced when with difficulties.”²²³

The film not only depicts the social and economic realities of Indonesia, but it also reflects the mounting distress in the country. It contends that the aims of the revolution had not been achieved. At the same time, the social configuration of the country has been transformed. This coincided with Sukarno’s ideological predilection. He “believed that the manifold weaknesses of the Indonesian Republic – its administrative and institutional weakness, its tendency to fragmentation, its ideological dissension, and above all, its desperate state of economic backwardness – could only be overcome by a colossal and united effort of the national will.” Through his revolutionary rhetoric and expressions, he intended to stimulate the masses to support the state and its policies.

²²³ Sitor Situmorang, “Krisis” *Aneka V* (July 20, 1954), p. 17

Because of the success of the film, Ismail decided to follow it up with a sequel. It is entitled *Lagi-lagi Krisis* (Yet Another Crisis). The issues raised in this film were even more fundamental to the Indonesian society. It shows the pervasive instability of the common people, who could lose the power of logical calculation because too often they sought a sense of security in the world of the occult and the paranormal. Husin, the household assistant from his earlier film, *Krisis*, suddenly acquires the power and the knowledge of a dukun (a dealer in magic). The medicine man is able to cure illnesses and use magic to fulfil the wishes of the people who come to him for help. Many seek his assistance. Some ask if they could get capital for investment. Jaka, who does not believe in these practices, in the end becomes involved in his assistant's activities. While the film still reflected the general state of social insecurity in the country, it was not particularly successful at the box office.²²⁴

The film is in itself a critique on the turbulence in the life of a veteran freedom fighter, who strives to cope with the aftermath of the war and to adjust into the society. It questions the seemingly critical gap between the ideals he fought to defend and the plight of the society he finds himself in. The complexity of the main character reflects the dynamic processes occurring within Indonesia as the country laboured to determine its independent course of action as the Cold War ensued. For Sukarno, there was a need to constantly revive and maintain the spirit of revolution among the Indonesians. In the process of nation-building, it was key to condition the memory of the Indonesians and re-frame the national memory to incorporate sublime devotion to those who fought for their freedom. From 1957 to 1963, Sukarno implemented various decrees and proclamations to identify and determine the country's national heroes focusing

²²⁴ Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen*, pp. 56-57, p. 102. See also Harun Suwardi, "Indonesia," in *The Films of ASEAN*, ed. Jose Lacaba, pp. 17-47.

particularly on those who staunchly resisted and fought against colonialism. Sukarno ordered the construction of monuments. Streets and schools were named after the heroes. The descendants of those named national heroes were given recompense. In 1959, Sukarno announced as national heroes a number of anti-Dutch soldiers alongside prominent traditional political figures such as Sultan Agung and Iskandar Muda.²²⁵

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At this point, it is salient to underline that just as other nationalist and revolutionary leaders of former colonies, Sukarno studied and pondered on the nature

²²⁵Anthony Reid, *A History of Southeast Asia*, p. 73.

²²⁶*Ibid.*

and evolution of revolutions. He believed that a revolution had a specific life span and phases. The first stage involved physical violence—the turbulent struggle between the revolutionaries and the ones holding the power or the status quo. The second stage entailed a phase of survival. The last stage of the revolution involved the state continuing the struggle to reach social and economic freedom. In his political biography of Sukarno, Legge maintains that, “He [Sukarno] referred to the compromise which had followed the physical revolution – ‘Compromise in the sense of sacrificing the Spirit of the Revolution’ – and to the sense of loss of the revolutionary *elan*.”²²⁷

In one of his most important speeches, Sukarno tenaciously examined the state of Indonesian revolution. He lamented that the people had forgotten the utmost principles of the revolution and instead, advanced their own specific agendas. He also expressed dissatisfaction with the political fragmentation of the country and the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor in Indonesia.

“Where is that Spirit of the Revolution today? The Spirit of the Revolution has been almost extinguished, has already become cold and without fire. Where are the Principles of the Revolution today? Today nobody knows where those Principles of the Revolution are, because each and every party lays down its own principles... Where is the objective of the Revolution today? The objective of the Revolution – that is, a just and prosperous society – is now, for persons who are not sons of the Revolution, replaced by liberal politics and liberal economy. Replaced by liberal politics, in which the votes of the majority of the people are exploited, black-marketed, corrupted by various groups.

²²⁷ Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, pp. 3-4.

Replaced by liberal economy wherein various groups wantonly grab riches through sacrificing the interests of the People.”²²⁸

In international relations, the same revolutionary ethos was evident. Sukarno evidently perceived global affairs and foreign relations as an extension of Indonesia’s revolutionary struggle. For Sukarno, “The world of today is a tinder box of Revolution.”²²⁹ As such, he strongly believed that the struggle could only be fought through stringent and bold policies. As Legge explains, Sukarno “showed that bold, unexpected and unconventional behaviour could sometimes achieve goals which not be secured through the less spectacular channels of conventional diplomacy.”²³⁰ Sukarno’s unconventional diplomacy was embodied in his infamous declaration of *Konfrontasi* against Malaysia.

In 1964, the Indonesian government reinforced the relationship among revolutionary ideals, politics, and films. Speaking about that year’s national conference on Indonesian film, State Minister Boegie Supeno said, “I hope that at this meeting PAPFIAS [define...] will formulate concepts that are based on revolutionary-progressive national unity so that film, as a revolutionary tool, can pioneer the eradication of imperialism...The revolutionary and patriotic movement in which PAPFIAS has participated in up to the time of this convention, is a reflection of the desires which are alive in society and which must, in the interest and goals of the revolution, be accommodated, coordinated and channelled in a positive and constructive direction.”²³¹ It is clear that the leitmotif of revolution actually persisted

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen*, pp. 71-72.

long after the acquisition of sovereignty in Indonesia and films were utilized as crucial means to reproduce the revolutionary zeal among the Indonesian society.

By 1967, the year that ASEAN was established, the very same revolutionary theme remained loud and clear ²³² Sukarno proclaimed, “The activities of the Revolution go on... For a fighting nation, there is no journey’s end.”²³³ This statement distinctly indicates Sukarno’s resolute belief that there persisted a need to struggle and keep the revolutionary pyre growing. Although the impetus for the formation of ASEAN, in fact, took place when Suharto assumed the reins of the government, it was aligned with the predominant strategic culture forming in the region. As the official institution aimed to merge the interests and strengthen the geopolitical power of Southeast Asian states, ASEAN served as a means to continue the pursuance of revolutionary ideals in the international platform.

B. REVISITING THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION

The Philippine Revolution is an important turning point in the country’s national narrative. Filipino historians characterize the Philippine Revolution as composed of two distinct phases. The first phase pertains to the armed campaign for independence against the Spanish colonial power. It began in 1896 when the fighting broke out between the Spanish soldiers and the members of the secret society of revolutionaries and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898. The second

²³² Anthony Reid explores this in his book entitled *To Nation By Revolution: Indonesian in the 10th Century*, where he further examines the prevalence of revolution as a subject in regional studies. He also contends, “As a rule, revolutions have had a powerful centralizing influence, however unconnected this may have been with their original aims.” p. 182.

²³³Legge, *Sukarno*, p. 8.

phase of the revolution refers to the Philippine-American War, which took place from 1899, with the incident at Calle Sociega, and ended in 1902, with the arrest of General Miguel Malvar. The Philippine Revolution has been the subject of various historical and scholarly projects. There is no dearth of publications on that period. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is a universally agreed upon interpretation of the succession of events within it. As Caroline Hau explains,

“A single event such as the Philippine revolution is therefore capable of generating multiple meanings, and becomes itself an object and subject of political debate and contestation over ‘correct’ or ‘valid’ interpretations of Philippine history in light of the exigencies of present concerns. Narratives of the past – particularly the colonial times, of which the American regime was the fraught type case – are double-edged weapons which may be used to legitimize or challenge the status quo, to generate consensus and conflict among politically diverse individuals and groups.”²³⁴

The Philippine Revolution became a crucial juncture in the historical, political, social, and cultural narrative of the country. Similar with the Indonesian case, the revolution operated and appeared frequently in cinematic themes and political rhetoric. The revolution in the Philippines was incessantly depicted as unfinished and convoluted. In cinematic images, the theme of the returning guerrilla or freedom fighter who found out that life after the war continued to be deplorable became popular. In this respect, films captured the features of an unfinished revolution that was repetitively mentioned by leading Filipino political leaders.

²³⁴ Hau, “History and Nation-Building: Philippines,” p. 47.

The Filipino film pioneer, Lamberto Avellana, effectively encapsulated the subtleties of the revolutionary theme in two of his most important film productions. *Anak Dalita* is a story about a Korean War veteran who returns to the Philippines a hero but is welcomed with the sudden death of his mother and the deplorable situation of the country. As he finds himself living in the slums and in a hopeless situation, he is pushed to undertake illegal activities to survive. The hero turns to a life of crime (money laundering) to survive the endemic poverty of the post-war situation. Within the cinematic frame, Avellana explored the situation in the Philippines following the war and the country's acquisition of independence. Similar to Usmar Ismail, he employed social realism to present dire issues such as poverty, crimes, and corruption that remained rampant.²³⁵

The movie begins with captivating shots of the rubbles and wreckages of Manila Cathedral, which was destroyed at the end of the Second World War. A community is forced to live in temporary shelters and makeshift houses around the ruins. Avellana wanted his audience to appreciate the fact that many Filipinos lost a lot during the war—their homes, properties, and loved ones. The surrounding area of the Cathedral serves as a temporary refuge for the families who are displaced by the war and the escalating poverty in the country. For those members of the audience who were familiar with the church and its surroundings, they would have been impressed by Avellana's camera work on the once grand and impressive structure of the church. The building, of course, was juxtaposed to the sordid sight of the remnants and rubbles that indicate the deplorable economic and social condition of the Philippines following the war.

²³⁵ *Anak Dalita (Child of Sorrow)*, DVD, directed by Lamberto Avellana (Philippines: LVN Pictures, 1956).

Even though the cathedral is crowded with many people who have lost a lot during the war, they still manage to establish a community characterized by resilience, unwavering positive outlook about the future, and of course, the good-humour that is characteristic of Filipinos. There is a group of men drinking and having a good time. In another corner, a barber continues his daily toil despite not having a shop. The women continue their regular routine of taking care of their children and gossiping. As such, Avellana lucidly constructs the multifaceted reality in the Philippines after the war: rampant poverty and destitution interlaced with the staunch sense of community and determination for survival among Filipinos.

This was the setting in which the protagonist finds himself in. Vic, who was played by the acclaimed actor Tony Santos, is a Korean war veteran who returns to Manila with an injured arm. He is compelled to live among the community living within the church ruins. Soon after his return, he is informed by Cita's brother that his mother is critically ill. He immediately looks for her mother amidst the chaos of the makeshift settlement only to find his mother struggling for her last breath. His mother dies and Vic is distraught.

He finds solace and companionship in Cita, a prostitute living in one of the temporary houses in the community. She is remarkably beautiful and seductive. She wears inappropriate clothes yet placidly navigates the slums. Her image drastically dissects the extreme poverty of her surroundings and offers a hint of natural beauty despite the chaos of the situation. Avellana then develops the love story between Cita and Vic against the backdrop of dire poverty where values and morality are constantly challenged and questioned. Their predicament escalates when the reconstruction for the church is planned, forcing the residents to vacate the premises.

Vic assiduously works to survive in the slums. But he is forced to leave his decent job for a higher paying one offered by another war veteran, Carlo. Carlo has managed to accumulate wealth through dubious means. Pushed by the desperate situation, Vic realizes that values and virtues are ignored for the sake of survival. Carlo asks Vic to launder the money from Hong Kong by putting it inside the statue of Mother Mary he made for the church. He insists that no one would ever suspect that there is illegal money inside the sacred idol. Vic asks Cita for help, then without his knowledge she takes the money and hides it in another statue, hoping to protect Vic and her and use the money for their own survival. In the final scene, Vic and Carlo fight for the money. The latter is shot and as he lies dying inside the church premises, he asks the priest for penance. The priest uses the laundered money to buy land for the temporary settlers and provide them with a better chance of living a decent life. The culmination of the story then harks back to the idiosyncratic salience of capital in the economically deprived post-war Philippines.

As Francisco Benitez asserts, “Money – capital, even if ill-gotten –is necessary and can provide the basis of a good life when used properly. The money must stay within the confines of the nation-state to benefit the many rather than the few, and radical social changes are not necessary if the money can be redirected to satisfy the needs of the poor, who in turn, remains nobly loyal to the state despite the demands of survival.”²³⁶ The Filipino film critic, Noel Vera, opines that the film provides a divine depiction of poverty—of poor people living around the ruins of an old church. He further comments that, “Avellana’s neo-realist film quickly and quietly tells the story of the two lovers, with the surrounding church and community for backdrop. The ending is melodramatic – the result of two deaths, a shootout, and a villain dramatic

²³⁶ Francisco Benitez, “Filming Philippine Modernity,” p. 38.

last-minute conversion – but otherwise the film is a model of economical storytelling.”²³⁷

In these films, the ideals of the revolution were illustrated as dream unfulfilled.²³⁸ Both narratives present the miserable plight of the Philippine following the war. The heroes of the war, after suffering a lot during wartime, had to confront a new set of challenges when peace was actually acquired. These lucid portrayals reflect the ensuing problems that the Philippines confronted after the acquisition of independence from the Americans in 1946. In this respect, the goals of the revolution were not achieved yet but became a continuing aspiration of the nation-state. Furthermore, in both cases the lack of economic stability forced the twin protagonists to make drastic decisions about engaging in illegal activities.

In *Anak Dalita*, Vic trades his legitimate job and accepts to be a part of the illicit money laundering activity of his wartime friend. In *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay*, Carding joins the communist movement in order to fight for a decent life he has always wanted. Just as the struggle for independence needed to take the form of a violent and armed movement, the struggle for economic and social stability after the war must also be fought using all options necessary. In the realm of foreign affairs, a close partnership with the former colonizers, the Americans, was imperative for commercial and economic reasons. The Cold War struggle is portrayed in its local context with critical details. For instance, Carding’s decision to join the Huks/local communist

²³⁷ Noel Vera, *Critic After Dark*, p. 121.

²³⁸ The same premise or claim of an unfinished revolution can, in fact, be seen in the communist produced books and publications. For example, Amado Guerrero proposes the continuation of the Philippine Revolution by means of overthrowing “US imperialism, feudalism and beaurocrat capitalism... Our purpose is to liberate the Filipino nation from foreign oppression and also the great masses of the Filipino people, especially the peasantry, from feudal oppression.” See: Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao, 1971), p. 287.

movement is not motivated by his adherence to communist ideology. Instead, Avellana depicts him as a nationalist who chose armed struggle because of the failure of the government to deliver its promises of land reform and backpay. When he is captured and sent to a resettlement area given to peasants and Huks who surrendered, he finally decides to make a living for himself and his family. In the particular situation of the Philippines then, the struggle between the government and the communists was not so much an ideological battle but a product of the twin dilemma of the government's incompetence to implement change and address the enduring, seemingly unending the poverty of many Filipinos.

The 1950s saw the increasing involvement of the Philippines in regional and international Cold War issues. During this period, the Philippines struggled to re-define its position within the broader context of the Cold War as a close ally (or more accurately as a dependent) of the United States and as a decolonizing Southeast Asian state. As the films suggest, communism as it was known in the Philippines had a rather nuanced image. The protagonists in *Anak Dalita* and *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* were portrayed as nationalists, not as true-blooded communists; they were depicted as heroes who had to turn to violence in order to fight for the needs of their family and the right of decent living. The films depict the Cold War not as a rigid struggle between communists and non-communists, but instead as a failure of the state to provide for the people.

As Avellana's protagonists seek to define their identity as Filipinos, as they try to sustain their families, and find their way amidst the Cold War, in the bigger stage of international relations, the Philippines too was struggling to define its own foreign policy and not as a mere pawn of the United States. Among these attempts were the Baguio Conference in 1950, SEATO in 1954, and the Bandung Conference in 1955,

where the Philippines re-established its links to other decolonizing states of Asia and Africa and joined them in trying to carve out an alternative way of navigating the Cold War based on the principles of neutrality and non-alignment. The Champion of the Masses holds the key to the Philippine government by 1955. President Ramon Magsaysay was vocal critic of communism during the Cold War as he aimed to defeat the Marxist movements across the Southeast Asian region. He supported the creation of the SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organization) and was a close friend and supporter of the United States government. He also had high hopes for a clean and corrupt free bureaucracy in the Philippines.

This period was characterized by efforts for reform and rehabilitation, of ensuring peace and economic growth. President Ramon Magsaysay enacted laws that addressed poverty and economic stagnation. For the President, poverty and the absence of choice pushed the indigent people, farmers as a big part of this state, to not trust their government. Their economic insecurity drove them to rebel and join the armed communist groups. Republic Act 1160 established the NARRA or National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration as it aimed for the free distribution of agricultural lands to the landless farmers. Furthermore, these laws aimed to provide former rebels with lands to till and home lots, with the goal of eradicating the insurgents and the poverty that gave rise to them. The Republic Act No. 1400 or the Land Reform Act of 1955 emphasized the responsibility of the government to create an agrarian system that would bring prosperity to each and every citizen. It aimed to open up public agricultural lands and the division and distribution of private agricultural lands where agrarian conflicts exist, either by private arrangement with the owners or through expropriation.

In this respect, the Magsaysay Administration aimed to resolve violent conflicts through peaceful means by reaching to every citizen and gaining their confidence back through reforms and action systems. Eddie Romero's film entitled *Huling Mandirigma* (The Last Warrior, 1956), alludes to the transformations not only in the Philippines but in the international system. The struggle to secure peace and stability in the middle of the communist insurgencies within and beyond the country had become a major goal of the Philippine government, and this is reflected in the film's protagonist. To live by the sword is to die by the sword – *Huling Mandirigma* revolves around these words. As the savage tribe of Mandaya knows nothing but violence, they are nearing the verge of extinction through both the hands of their tribal enemies and famine.²³⁹

The Mandaya employ violence as a solution to every problem. Malik, a young boy of the tribe, considers himself not fit in their society as he fears to kill and loathes the life of a warrior. He runs away from their tribe to escape that fate. On the other hand, Sede is a popular boy in the village owing to his prowess on the battlefield and aggressive nature, skills that are valued by the tribe. Malik, with the help of a priest, achieves his dream of a peaceful life and becomes a medical doctor. Sede, now a man of strength, is a Bagani or a noble and fierce warrior of the Mandaya tribe. Malik wants his tribe to adapt to the new ways of the present time and to prosper by abandoning their warrior culture. Malik's character advocates that change and peace are the only means to achieve prosperity. He introduces the tribe to technologies they are not accustomed to. He introduces them to modern tools as well as medicine. The tribal leaders and elders are enraged by such disrespect to their ancient ways, but some do admire the progressive ideals that Malik has to offer.

²³⁹ *Huling Mandirigma* (The Last Warrior), DVD, directed by Eddie Romero (Philippines: 1956).

Malik uses his wits and intelligence to persuade some of the tribe's men to leave their warrior culture behind, adopt change, and cooperate with other tribes in order to achieve prosperity and resolve the pressing issue of starvation within their group. Malik fights but did not want to kill Sede as he treats him like his brother. With one sharp stab, Sede takes his own life to escape the shame of being defeated by the doctor, Malik. Savage was Sede, he lived and died by the sword. Change the inevitable was Malik. The film was a subtle message to the rebels of that time as well as to every Filipino citizen. The story was a reflection of the theme of the golden years of Philippines—reform and peace towards progress.

In the realm of political ideas, President Ramon Magsaysay effectively utilized the theme of Philippine Revolution and the country's "glorious past" to promote his programs and policies.²⁴⁰ In his inaugural speech as Philippine President, Magsaysay stressed the necessity of building a future that is worthy of the glorious history of the country and its national heroes. He asserted:

"All too often, however, we speak of Rizal – and of Del Pilar, Bonifacio, Mabini and our host of heroes – as if their work were done, as if today their spirit had ceased to have any meaning or value to our people. The truth is that we need their spirit now more than ever. We need it to complete the work which they began."²⁴¹

Yet again, the revolutionary past of the Philippines was recalled and labelled as unfinished. Magsaysay emphasized the need for Filipinos to continue advancing the

²⁴⁰ Inaugural Address of President Magsaysay, December 30, 11953, delivered at the Independence Grandstand, Manila, Philippines, date last accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.gov.ph/1956/01/23/ramon-magsaysay-third-state-of-the-nation-address-january-23-1956/>.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

aims of the revolution and keep nationalistic and patriotic zeal burning among Filipinos. He believed that the Philippines needed more heroes such as Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, and Marcelo del Pilar who were “men of inflexible patriotism...”²⁴² He added, “We need their zeal, their self-reliance, their capacity for work, their devotion to service, their ability to lose themselves in the common cause of building a nation.”²⁴³

By 1959, the Philippines was under the administration of President Carlos P. Garcia. The country was still re-building its economy. The semi-protectionist economic programs and the launching of the system of exchange controls and import controls aimed to further Garcia’s plans to develop the country’s economy. One of the major changes that were pushed through during the Garcia administration was the Republic Act No. 1700 or the Anti-Subversion Act of 1957. It outlawed the formation of subversive organizations. It also penalized membership in Marxist communist organizations like the Communist Party of the Philippines or Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas which was founded in the 1930s. The founding of CPP took place after the surrender of the Huks (which at that point was left leaning) headed by Luis Taruc. Another part of rebuilding a stable society was the Filipino First Policy, which heavily favoured Filipino businessmen over foreign investors and enterprises and was intended to support the strengthening of the local economy. In the 1960s an Austerity program was launched by the government to re-affirm their commitment to complete economic

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

freedom, to counter the dominance of foreign interests in national economy and to emphasize the Filipino culture and arts.²⁴⁴

In *Kundiman ng Lahi* (Song of the Race, date), Avellana explored the notions of independence, revolution, and change. It mirrored the efforts of the Philippines to rebuild its economy, society, and politics during the Cold War and the decolonization process. The movie revolves around the suffering and the struggle of the barrio paramour, Isang. At the start of the film she is an orphan, forced to face the burden of her mother's debts and the mortgage of the land she inherited.

Isang is forced to confront the vestiges of a past that was not even her own doing. As the country was left without any option but to tackle the remnants of the colonial period and the Second World War, Isang similarly is left struggling with the cruel acts of her aunt and is forced into becoming a dancer of cabarets which causes her much internal angst as she continues, fighting for her morals, her honour, and her name despite the pressures of her profession. Isang in a way was placed by director Lamberto Avellana to become the reflection and personification of the Filipina virtues of purity and innocence, but also strength amidst the fast-paced changes of her time. Her persona and the events that show the imagery of change through the lens. Though she was faced with different tragedies, Isang's virtues remained intact, unbent and unbroken. In this way, she represents the Philippines, as the country attempted to stay true to its roots despite the temptations of the "Hollywood Sparkle."

Lamberto Avellana masterfully plays with the persona of Isang as she changes from a simple and innocent girl in the barrio to an alluring vixen after her time in the cabaret, becoming an object of desire for lecherous men. This is a representation of the beauty of the Philippines chased down by different colonial masters. Isang's only

²⁴⁴ Milton Walter Meyer, *A Diplomatic History of the Philippine Republic (USA: University of Hawaii Press, 1965)*, pp. 247-270.

prayer from the start of the movie is to be set free from indebtedness and the servile bonds of her cruel guardians. Arguably, this was also the aim of the government at that time – to alleviate foreign debts and chart an independent course. In the film, this message is repeated over and over again closing with a message of victory: “...*at sa wakas, nang mahawi ang ulap, nagtagumpay din ang pagtitiis, ang katapatan sa sumpaang, ang dalisay na pag ibig ng babaeng Filipina, ang dangal ng lahing kayumanggi.*”²⁴⁵ Isang’s story reflected the country’s revolutionary efforts at that period to regain full independence and the struggle to retain Philippine identity.²⁴⁶

Both the cinematic sphere and the political rhetoric in post-war Philippines employed the ethos of revolution in several ways. Explaining the political motifs utilized by Filipino political leaders, Ileo asserted that “in order to remain in control and popularly backed, [the leaders] spoke to crowds of people and elicited responses that might as well be described as nation-building responses because they served to establish communication among various forces and social groups.”²⁴⁷ He also added that “when the Revolution of 1896-1898 was written into national history as a foundational event – the birth of nation – it also engendered a set of ‘heroes’ or ‘founding fathers’ with whom political leaders and citizens alike could identify.”²⁴⁸

The Philippines also had to deal with the need to accommodate differences and diversity in the international political sphere. This outlook is evidenced in a prominent feature film entitled *Geron Busabos*, Geron is a young labourer in Quiapo. Strong and

²⁴⁵ Translation: And we finally overcome the suffering, our devotion and sincerity to our vows remain, the pure love of the Filipina, the pride of our race.

²⁴⁶ *Kundiman ng Lahi* (Song of the Race), directed by Lamberto Avellana (1959: LVN Pictures, 1959).

²⁴⁷ Caroline Hau, “History and Nation-Building: Philippines” in Wang Gungwu, ed. *Nation Building*, p. 46.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

brawny, he is a friend and protector of market vendors, stall owners, jeepney drivers, and other poor, humble folk victimized by *tong* collectors. The most notorious of these crooks call themselves the 'Quiapo Gang.' An old meal vendor is harassed for refusing to pay up. His grandson, Beto, runs to Geron for help. Geron rushes to the scene and thrashes the gang members, but it is too late to save the old man's life. With no place to go, Beto comes to live with Geron as his buddy and sidekick.

Through Beto, Geron meets and falls in love with Nena, the pretty daughter of a laundry woman and an American GI, who sells sampaguita flowers. Nena's mother hopes to marry her off to a rich man or even to an old widower like Mr Lopez, who is courting Nena. But Nena loves Geron and, whenever she has the chance, meets him furtively with the help of Beto. Trouble enters in the person of Digno, who exploits Geron's pity for him when he is beaten up by the Quiapo Gang. Digno comes from Sampaloc and, unknown to Geron has been collecting *tong* using Geron's name. When Geron discovers this, Digno runs off to join the Quiapo Gang.²⁴⁹

An underworld character, Murillo, tries to rape Nena. Geron and Beto arrive in time to rescue her. Murillo escapes and is later found dead. The blame falls on Geron and the police launch a massive search for him. At the same time, Digno is ordered by the Quiapo Gang to get rid of Geron. In the ensuing chase scene, Geron is caught in between the underworld characters and the long arm of the law, in the Quiapo underpass. But, Digno has a change of heart and shouts a warning to save Geron's life. Geron Busabos established the character of what would later on be the archetype of the Filipino action hero: a champion of the masses, an essentially peaceful person who is drawn to the fight against violent forces as a defender of the weak and the oppressed.

²⁴⁹ *Geron Busabos*, directed by Cesar Gallardo (Philippines: Emar Pictures, 1964).

One of the most prominent foreign policy thinkers of the Philippines, Carlos Romulo, believed a New Asia had to be forged on the principle of respect. Talking about the Philippines evolving relationship with the United States, Romulo argued that “...we can only keep it unimpaired if we do not take each other for granted, if we respect each other’s sovereignty, if we keep in mind that this is 1956 and not 1900, that practices once countenanced by a subject nation are now vigorously opposed contrary to an independent nation’s dignity, and that Filipino-American friendship to endure must be based on tolerance on equality and mutual respect.”²⁵⁰ Despite the change in the relations between the Philippines, a former colony, and the United States, a former colonizer, the emphasis on respect and tolerance remained.

The premise of revolution was not a definite or explicit leitmotif. Filipino political leaders expressed revolutionary ideas to vindicate their political decisions or to challenge the political realities in the country. There was a certain level of ambivalence that prevailed in political expressions that allowed revolution to reflect a multitude of meanings. For instance, the drive for a more nationalist economic policy as encapsulated in Carlos P. Garcia’s Filipino First Policy was described as another step in the continuing revolution of the country. Caroline Hau also remarked that “Presidents like Manuel Roxas and Elpidio Quirino used the revolution to stress the virtues of American tutelage. They argue that the United States had fulfilled its promise to nurture the Filipinos politically until the latter were ready to off on their own as an independent nation-state. But, on the other hand, this benign view of American

²⁵⁰Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo, *The New Asia*. Speech Delivered at the Far East Session at the National Foreign Trade Council, Inc. held in New York, 1956, from Bartimeo Velasquez (ed.) *Selected Speeches of Living Filipino Statemen*, (Manila: Ilagan & Langaga Press), 1958, p. 95.

colonialism in the Philippines was subject to criticism by radical intellectuals and peasant groups.”²⁵¹

In 1962, President Diosdado Macapagal delivered a speech to the members of the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Society, and discussed the nature and significances of the “Magsaysay Revolution.”²⁵² He argued that Magsaysay brought his own revolution into the “scene of violence and upheaval, of ferment and revolt... But unlike the bloody revolutions which carried many another leader into power, the revolution that swept Ramon Magsaysay to the leadership of his country was a revolution of peace, of hope and of love.”²⁵³

President Macapagal talked about Magsaysay’s efforts to restore the reputation of the Armed Forces and his unwavering attempt to focus on the people—the ordinary people, “to their own talents, to their own hearts, to their own strength... This is the essence of the Magsaysay revolution.”²⁵⁴ He maintained, “Having held in his hands the tremendous powers of ²⁵⁵the Presidency of the Philippines, he began to restore a significant measure of this power to the people themselves... He gave the people a feeling of their own power.” ²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the revolution, he maintained was unfinished not only because of the sudden death of Magsaysay but also because, a

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Address of President Macapagal before the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Society, delivered on March 16, 1962, Philippine Government, *Official Gazette*, date last accessed: May 1, 2016, <http://www.gov.ph/1962/03/16/address-of-president-macapagal-before-the-ramon-magsaysay-memorial-society/>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

revolution, a true revolution could not happen in one lifetime. In this respect, the political theme of a revolution was not only persistently used but also categorically identified as fragmentary and incomplete.

Further support for this claim comes from President Macapagal's Independence Day address given on June 12, 1963. He contended that the national revolution was interrupted when the Americans intervened at the precise period when, he surmised, the Filipinos were about to reach success against the Spaniards. According to Macapagal, "the fact that American power intervened...resulted in the rapid dissipation of the force behind it as well as in the abandonments of its ultimate objectives in the political, economic, and social fields."²⁵⁷ It was therefore necessary to continue to fight for the tasks of the unfinished revolution which included, foremost of all, "the need to do away with the surviving evils of colonialism...the tendency to regard the achievement of national liberation or independence as an end rather than as a means to an end."²⁵⁸ The cinematic and political theme surrounding the unfinished national revolution forged a robust facet of the Philippine nation. These images helped Filipinos to visualize the concept of the nation and form their identity. Furthermore, these ideas informed them of the way they should think or behave in the society, and at the same time set limits to what the state could do within the international political sphere.

C. TRACES OF REVOLUTION IN MALAYA

²⁵⁷ Address of President Macapagal in Independence Day, delivered on June 12, 1963 in Luneta, Manila, Philippines, Philippine Government, *Official Gazette*, date last accessed: May 1, 2016, <http://www.gov.ph/1962/06/12/address-of-president-macapagal-on-independence-day/>

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Probing the critical junctures of Malayan/Malaysian history reveals a multifarious and gruelling succession of episodes that imperilled and at the same time constructed nationalism in the country. Unlike the Philippines and Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia did not experience an armed national revolution or a united anti-colonial movement against the British. This single truism is crucial. Foremost of all, the process of nation-building following the acquisition of independence was not (could not have been) embedded or intimately entrenched in a 'shared glorious past.' As discussed in the first two sections of this chapter, there was a vigorous inclination for the Philippine and Indonesian states to appeal the ideals of their respective national revolution—their independence campaigns to consolidate their otherwise disjointed communities. The précis of a national revolution paving the way for independence was a rousing concept that not only induced popular support but also dissipated antagonistic expressions. This was not possible in Malaya. Nevertheless, despite the absence of a national revolution, cinematic and political motifs still manifested a penchant to view a national struggle as an unfinished, continuing process that needed constant support and effort. In this respect, conflicts with other groups (other than the British) such as the Japanese intrusion and the *Konfrontasi* against Indonesia served as consolidating factors that helped push the emergence of Malaysian nationhood.

In P.T. Bauer's article written two years after the defeat of the Japanese, he advanced a crucial question. Comparing the situation among Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and French Indo-China, he asked: "Why is it that while large sections of the populations of those other areas are fighting desperately to prevent a return of the Dutch and the French, the inhabitants of Malaya have generally welcomed the British and have shown no signs of hostility, with the exception of the Communists and their

affiliates?”²⁵⁹ He believed that the “differences in power” did not sufficiently explain the disparity in these colonies. From the perspective of the Dutch, the British returned to Malaya with strong military forces while the Dutch, due to a lack of ships, could not reach Java and Sumatra in full force. Bauer observed that beyond the variance in military strength and resources, the general attitude of Malays and Indonesians towards the British and the Dutch differed. He expounded:

“When one talks frankly and privately to the Asiatics in Malaya they sometimes criticize the British administration freely, and emphasize the social, political, and economic discrimination against non-Europeans. But even in this criticism there is often a friendly undertone, and there is certainly a notable absence of the bitterness and hatred which is so often felt against the Dutch by the Indonesians, and which is a driving force behind the Indonesian resistance.”²⁶⁰

Instead, the author conjectured that the disparity in the style of colonial governance and treatment of the locals could explain the nature of the situation. Bauer appositely explained that the Dutch treated the locals of the Netherlands East Indies with far more brutality. His observation was astute. Other scholars who also attempted to illuminate the incongruence in British and Dutch experience in the region after the Second World War concur with the same interpretation.

Beyond the contrast in colonial policies, Bauer also suggested that the “composite population of British Malaya, and the large proportion of comparatively recent immigrants, may also have been partly responsible for the absence of such a

²⁵⁹ Bauer, P. T. "Nationalism and Politics in Malaya." *Foreign Affairs*. April 1947, date last accessed June 8, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/malaysia/1947-04-01/nationalism-and-politics-malaya>.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

violent reaction has been displayed by the more homogeneous autochthonous populations of the Netherlands East Indies and of French Indo-China.”²⁶¹ This proposition is indeed crucial for two reasons. On the one hand, the internal division and inter-ethnic tension among the inhabitants of Malaya made it too strenuous, if not impossible, for a national coordinated anti-colonial movement to emerge. On the other hand, the ethnic composition in Malaya shaped the kind of nationalism the people espoused and the nation-building they pursued. While this section elaborates on the first point, the subsequent chapter explores the intricacies of the multi-racial society and nationalism in Malaya/Malaysia.

Despite the absence of widespread armed anti-colonial movement in Malaya/Malaysia, anti-colonial themes still permeated their political and social discourse. A number of films screened even before the granting of independence in 1957 reveal strong anti-colonialist and revolutionary ideas. One of the earliest films screened in Malaya entitled *Seruan Merdeka* (Call for Freedom date) encapsulated the anti-colonial spirit. Although the British was not the main target of their revolt, the film nevertheless represents an essential political discourse circulating in Malaya.²⁶² The preferred target of Malay/Malaysian themes of revolt in cinema was the Japanese – the same external enemy that the rest of Southeast Asia had to deal with.

The film tackles the narratives of an underground movement against the Japanese. As aforementioned, *Seruan Merdeka* is considered a turning point in the history of Malaysian/Singaporean cinema precisely because it had Chinese and Malay actors as the primary protagonists. This is remarkable given the fact that during the

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² In an interview with Hassan Muthalib, he opined that one of the key reasons why there was no strong nationalistic ideology in Malaysian cinema compared to other Southeast Asian national cinemas was because of British censorship.

Japanese Occupation, the racial divide between the Malays and Chinese was very apparent. While the Malays were given privileges by the Japanese, the Chinese were seen as enemies and somehow linked to the anti-Japanese movement in mainland China.

In the movie, the Chinese and Malay main characters fight the Japanese alongside each other. They lead the guerrilla movement during the Japanese occupation. Rashid, the Malay soldier, is a radio signaller who worked for the Allied military forces strategically based in Singapore. He is captured by Japanese special police but manages to break out with the assistance of the person who divulged his details to the Japanese. The film was well received. It is regarded as the “first locally produced post-war Malay film.”²⁶³ It is also interesting to note that the film incorporated both Chinese and Malay languages into the script, indicating an attempt to bridge ethnic differences and convey an idea of racial harmony or communal struggle against one enemy—the Japanese. The movie was the result of the collaboration between the prominent director B.S. Rahjans and producer S.M. Christy. While the former was away from Malaya during the war, one of the people who shot this film was, in fact, a member of the guerrilla force and had fought the Japanese. Mohamed Pillus was a part of Force 136 and was therefore intimately familiar with the complex reality during the Japanese period.

Despite being considered an important film and having a popular line-up of local *bangsawan* actors including Bachtiar Effendi, Johar Effendi, Rukiah Hanafi, Salleh Ghani, and Siti Tanjung Perak, *Seruan Merdeka* did not perform well at the box office. It was not circulated wide enough to be able to acquire substantial viewership.

²⁶³ According to a The Singapore Free Press advertisement, the film is Singapore’s “first re-occupation film...” The Straits Times regards the film as “the first story of the Malayan underground movement.” See also: <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/4f36251e-d62b-482c-b8d9-2da1f0ec56ea>

This was because the two big studios in Malaya had control over the screenings across the country. Shaw Brothers and Cathay placed a restriction on the number of screenings of movies produced by other small production companies. On August 16, 1947, the film was first shown in Singapore. This, however, did not contribute much to the overall earnings of the film. The producer nonetheless attempted to circulate the movie throughout the country. Several screenings were conducted in Kuching, Penang, and Johor Bahru. It was also screened in India.²⁶⁴

The film certainly captured the overarching impact of the Second World War across Southeast Asian countries. Like the rest of Southeast Asia, Japanese forces advanced across Malaya in 1941 and established their foothold which lasted until 1945. The whole peninsula was divided into provinces managed by Japanese officials who also retained local and traditional rulers as advisers. Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo were placed under military rule and were further divided into prefectures. Similar to the plight of the Philippines and Indonesia, under the Japanese authority, Malaya was, for the first time in its history, managed by a single power. In this respect, the invincibility of British colonial power was shattered.

However, even if this was the case, the nature of anti-colonialism in Malaya still took quite a placid route. In *Seruan Merdeka*, the subject of resistance is the Japanese while the British remains as allies. In this respect, in the process, or in the struggle for liberation, the British remains as Malaya's key partner. What the film emphasizes instead is the necessity of racial harmony or cooperation among different ethnic groups in Malaya in order to cast away the primary enemies, the Japanese colonizers.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

The ethos of anti-colonialism also took the form of bargaining and reconciliation with the British. Instead of a sonorous repudiation against their colonial masters, who were not able to protect them from the incursions of the Japanese, Malaya redirected its focus on a multifaceted compromise with the British. The wavering nature of Anglo-Malay relationship is skilfully explored and interrogated in the film *Bakti* (Faithfulness). When it was released, the film was highly regarded as “the best Malay film yet.”²⁶⁵ It stars two of the best pioneering actors of the Malaysian national cinema, P. Ramlee and Lakshmanan Krishnan.²⁶⁶ According to a *Straits Times* article, “Here at last is a film which draws with fineness and tenderness a true outline of the Malay character and the Malay way of life.”²⁶⁷ The story revolves around the dynamics between Nasir, an orphan boy adopted by a rich man named Ibrahim, and Ibrahim’s precocious son, Hassan. The latter obstinately objects to giving food and shelter to Nasir but his sister, the sweet Saadiah concurs with their father’s decision and supports Nasir.

In *Bakti*, Nasir transforms from being destitute to a rich man while Hassan marries a materialistic and greedy woman and eventually resorts to stealing to maintain their hedonistic way of life. More specifically, he steals jewellery from his father just so he can impress his wife. But Nasir catches him in the act and persuades him not to proceed with his plan. Hassan ignores Nasir’s pleas and instead he incriminates him in

²⁶⁵ “Bakti is te Best Malay Film Yet” The Straits Times March 31 1950, Singapore Government, *NewspaperSG*, date last accessed: June 2, 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19500331-1.2.128.1.aspx>

²⁶⁶ Krishnan, who was also a director saw P. Ramlee’s potential. The latter was a prominent bangsawan singer and had already done a few short bits in film before. *Bakti* was his first major film. When Krishnan gave Ramlee the main role as Nasir, neither of them realized or even anticipated that it will open the road for Ramlee’s rise as, perhaps, the most significant star in Malaysian/Singaporean film industry.

²⁶⁷ “Bakti is the Best Malay Film Yet”, date last accessed, June 2, 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19500331-1.2.128.1.aspx>.

the crime. Before the police arrive, Ibrahim and Saadiah persuade Nasir to leave. In due course, he becomes a popular musician who makes a good amount of money. The story unfolds when Hassan steals again and then gets caught by the police and is incarcerated. Upon his release, he steals again, this time from his adopted brother, Nasir, who later informs the authorities that the stolen goods were meant to be given to Hassan anyway. In that moment, Hassan recognizes his mistakes and sees that Nasir is, in fact, a good person. The movie ends happily. With Hassan and his wife Eda wearing beautiful silk and satin and Saadiah and Nasir's duets, the film proves entertaining.²⁶⁸

On April 1, 1950, the film was first screened at the Rex Cinema, owned by the Shaw Brothers. For two weeks, it occupied five slots of screening per day. It was also screened in Penang and Johor Bahru a little more than a month after the Singapore premier. In just a few days, the film acquired excellent reviews. Kuan Yin of *The Straits Times* commented that *Bakti* "is skilfully directed and beautifully photographed."²⁶⁹ Since the movie has English subtitles, Kuan Yin noted that "even those of us who have been too lazy to strengthen our Malay vocabulary can enjoy it to the full."²⁷⁰ In addition, the plot itself is quite straightforward that guarantees the spectators will understand it easily.²⁷¹ Aligned with the anti-Western propaganda of the Japanese, Malayan organizations were encouraged. This fuelled the early stirrings of

²⁶⁸ "'Bakti' is the best Malay film yet." (March 31, 1950) *The Straits Times*, p. 9. <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19500331-1.2.128.1.aspx>

²⁶⁹ The music and songs in the film were composed and written by Osman Ahmad. P. Ramlee sang five songs – *Hidup Berdua*, *Merpati Dua Sejoli*, *Hidup Melarat*, *Taman Puspawarna* and *Sate*. Nona Asiah performed one song entitled *Sedang Bergaya*. Probably because of the success of the film, in due course the songs were compiled into an album and released for commercial purposes; *Ibid*.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

²⁷¹ *Bakti* also stars other significant actors including Kasma Booty, who played as Sa'adiyah, S. Roomai Noor as Hassan and Siput Sarawak, who played the role of Edah, Hassan's wife.

national identity formation in the country albeit its emphasis on the Malay identity. The Japanese encouraged the integration of the Malay population across the Peninsula while at the same time maintained a sceptical outlook towards the Chinese (because of the strong anti-Japanese movement in China). While numerous Malays joined the Japanese-sponsored paramilitary Pembela Tanah Air (PETA), a significant number of Malays also became affiliated with Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM).²⁷² The latter was led by Ibrahim Yaacob and aimed to collaborate with the Japanese in order to attain eventual full independence.

In 1945, Yaacob established the *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semananjung* (Union of Peninsular Indonesians). Backed by the Japanese, it was premised on the idea of a “Greater Indonesia.” Shortly afterwards, the Japanese empire collapsed. These early stirrings indicate the roots of Malay nationalism or, at the very least, a revolutionary zeal to acquire independence. These were prelude to emergence of the ethos of independence founded upon their precolonial achievements. They also hoped to see the Peninsula not only free from colonial rule but united with Indonesia. Furthermore, inter-ethnic dialogue concerning the future of an independent Malaya also began as Yaacob initiated relations with the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), which comprised in the majority ethnic Chinese revolutionaries.

In this respect, the national revolution in the specific case of Malaya actually began as a response to the Japanese, which also embodies the only widespread armed anti-colonial movement in Malaya. The role of MPAJA cannot be underestimated. Despite having connections with the Allied contingents, the members of MPAJA (which was dominated by MCP members) were left autonomous during the struggle against the Japanese. Prominent Malaysian scholars remarked:

²⁷² Defenders of the Fatherland.

“It is not surprising that in 1945 members of the MCP saw themselves as the rightful victors because of their intense involvement in the MPAJA’s wartime activities. Having achieved the immediate goal of defeating the Fascist powers in accordance with Communist International (Comintern) policy enunciated in 1941, they could now turn their attention to the attainment of a ‘national revolution.’”²⁷³

All three states considered repeatedly and used the poignant epithet of revolution in their political discussions, debates, and decisions. They intensely recalled their revolutionary past struggling against their former colonizers – this was evident in their political rhetoric as well as their cinematic projections. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia defined their domestic and international political strategy as a continuing revolution. For these countries, the acquisition of independence did not end the phase of revolution in Southeast Asia; it merely entered into a different chapter. Fundamentally, the continuity of the process of revolution meant the pursuit for economic development, modernity, and equality. All three countries, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia, suffered economically during the Second World War. Hence, what followed after the war were these countries’ determined efforts to revitalize their economies, and alleviate poverty and social inequality that characterized their societies. Even nation-building was promoted by overlaying the template of the revolution. To the three postwar governments, the work to build a unified and stable nation was necessarily predicated upon an enduring revolution.

Local political leaders perpetuated the climate of revolution in state and international affairs while films captured the essence of revolution in various ways from its failures to its continuity. Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta persistently spoke of

²⁷³ Watson-Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaya*, p. 262.

the revolution in Indonesia. In the Philippines, Elpidio Quirino, Ramon Magsaysay, and Carlos Garcia, among others, also harked back to the Philippine Revolution to articulate state interests and goals during the Cold War. Immediately after the granting of independence, Malaya's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman also alluded to an unfinished struggle towards building a strong, multi-racial country. While there was a palpable recurring theme of unfinished revolution among the three states, the ethos of revolution among the Southeast Asian states eventually manifested in their outlook toward the international system and the bipolarity of the Cold War. For these states, the international system was not only a space for the culmination and practice of their sovereignty, it was also a crucial space for where revolutionary ideals continued to circulate. As global politics was dominated by the Cold War, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia, fought for and safeguarded their national interests and hard-earned freedoms.

The Cold War and the clamour for alliances was, from the Southeast Asian perspective, an incursion to their independence. They responded as they did during the revolution – wrangle out of Western impositions and assert their own interests. The result of this particular strategic culture was the underlying penchant for non-alignment and the protection of their national rights and liberties. The creation of ASEAN, arguably, was at the apex of such tendency. According to Anthony Reid, “Revolutions create a sharp break with the past of each region; they destroy the legitimacy of local dynasties, and they create powerful new myths of shared sacrifice, new “imagined communities” to replace the discredited identities of the past. The Indonesian Revolution is therefore not exceptional, but it is one of the most striking demonstrations of this general tendency.”²⁷⁴ I further add that this was the same as the

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 182.

case in the Philippines and to a lesser degree, Malaya/Malaysia. The revolutions, regardless of their nature and duration, that these countries experienced eventually influenced the formation of a shared strategic culture in the region. The revolution became a memory of the years of colonialism and oppression and, consequently, the ardour of the Southeast Asians to reclaim their freedom. In postcolonial Southeast Asia, the revolution remained a crucial rallying point for the pioneering political leaders as it had the capacity to move people – it contained a psychological and emotional impulse to inculcate and inspire citizens to continue working towards the presumed interests of the state, including economic development and socio-political stability. The experience and memory of the revolution also served a crucial motivation for these Southeast Asian states not only in forming their states but in coursing through global affairs from the onset of the Cold War and after.

Chapter Five

Heralding the Nation

But now a national culture does exist, in an emerging form at least, and it is most clearly visible as a fictional construct in Indonesian films.

Karl Heider

“...it is an imagined political community...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication.”

Benedict Anderson

The absence of the Europeans and the Americans during the pinnacle of the Second World War left the people of Southeast Asia to deal with the Japanese on their own. Local political leaders such as Sukarno, Jose P. Laurel, and traditional sultans in Malaya were in a particular position to negotiate, transact, and discuss local interests with the Japanese. Although Southeast Asian responses to Japanese rule differed, the latter nevertheless left particular marks that can be identified in all three countries studied here. In particular, a more formidable and precipitous thrust towards self-determination and nationalism emerged. More importantly, soon after the end of the war, these three countries attained independence and launched their own nationalist projects.

In this section, the convoluted attempts of Southeast Asian states—Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya to ascertain their national character are examined. The process of nation-building these countries underwent is scrutinized. Throughout this process, cinema became a platform within which the images of the nation were constructed and challenged or contested at the same time. While the foremost political elites of these countries were formulating official narratives and discourses on what their new nations would represent, a plethora of depictions of the nation also pervaded

the filmic realm. Indonesian, Filipino, and Malayan/Malaysian filmmakers also contributed to the process of defining the nation by sketching various versions of the ideal citizen. This ideal citizen and its variants assumed a character embedded not only within the framework of decolonization but also within the context of the Cold War.

Indonesia's attempt to transcend its heterogeneity and plurality by means of crafting a coherent image of a nation that is unified amidst its intrinsic diversity. The idea of nationalism became a rallying point throughout the Indonesian revolution and lasted even during the Sukarno years. The Indonesian government also championed the concept of Pancasila—a political philosophy that eventually underpinned the ideals and identity of the Indonesian nation. For Sukarno, a free and independent Indonesia should be founded on the five principles of nationalism, internationalism, democracy, social justice, and belief in one God. The idea of Pancasila operated as a unifying principle in the country's thrust for nation-building. This discourse was reflected in films as well. Usmar Ismail's films mirrored the volatile nature of the Indonesian nation—an emerging nation composed of different people from various ethno-linguistic, religious, and economic backgrounds plagued by the same dire social and economic problems. Films produced by Indonesians mirrored how Indonesians reflected, imagined, or challenged the elements that defined them as a nation.

The emergence of nationalism in the Philippines can probably be considered as the first in the region. The early stirrings of nationalism can be traced back way before the end of American colonial rule. In the late 19th century, the propaganda movement began and picked up pace during the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution against Spain. Philippines nationalism was subsequently suppressed by the arrival and eventual formalization of American rule in the Philippines. The clamour for nationalism and autonomy remained, although stifled, throughout the period when the Americans

consolidated their authority, and reconfigured the government and bureaucracy in the country. One of the most fundamental components of national identity construction included the definition postcolonial relations with the United States. This is not to say though that nation-building in the Philippines was not induced from within or that it did not emerge internally. But the process was closely intertwined with the Filipinos' effort to re-define the Philippine-American postcolonial relationship. Films produced following the acquisition of independence provide valuable lens to the composite nature of national identity construction and decolonization in the Philippines. One of the most recurrent and coherent images that appeared in the films was the Philippines' conflicted attitude towards its former colonial master. On the one hand, films depicted the Filipinos' strong affection or fondness towards the Americans. On the other hand, there was also resistance, and a rigorous Filipino tendency to subvert and disrupt the ties that bound the Philippines to the United States. In other words, the idea of the Philippine nation was contingent, albeit partially, upon its outlook towards the United States.

Malaya/Malaysia's case is characterized by ethnic and racial tensions against the background of their historical saga under British colonialism. British Malaya remained deeply fragmented, particularly in administration and loyalties to traditional rulers. The British implemented economic and educational colonial policies premised on ethnic segregation. By the 1920s to 1930s, however, the earliest stirrings of nationalist sentiments appeared, though still following racial identities. In the 1920s, the Malay community began to explore new ways of defining the concept of Malayness. The Malayan Communist Party was established in 1930, thus furthering the ethnic and ideological divide within the communities in Malaya. In 1936, Indian Malays also

began to form organizations when the Central Indian Association of Malaya was founded to guarantee Indian interests.

A. PANCASILA AND THE INDONESIAN NATION

On August 17, 1950, the entire constitutional framework of the revolutionary period and a new Republic of Indonesia was created. A provisional constitution was implemented, establishing a multiparty parliamentary system. A National Assembly tasked to write a permanent constitution was established. Officially, the revolution had ended. Yet there were many unresolved issues that confronted Indonesia. Ideological and power struggles persisted. Social, ethnic, and religious problems continued. Extreme poverty, a majority of uneducated public, distrust among varying political and ideological streams, the obstinate political power of the armed forces, and the power struggle among Islamic, communist, and secular political parties ensued. What followed was the story of Indonesia and its assiduous effort at building the nation and maintaining unity in diversity.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Indonesia viewed international affairs through the lens of continuing hostility to colonialism – a platform where the revolution persisted and sovereignty and freedom must be safeguarded. This ideological predilection was related to the formation of Indonesian national identity—the stringent emphasis on unity amidst diversity and the clear line between the Indonesian Self and the Western Other. More importantly, this helps make sense of the third facet of Southeast Asian strategic culture, that is, the insistence on non-alignment amidst the bipolarity of the Cold War.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Legge, *Sukarno*, p. 340.

Indonesian films produced in the postwar years depicted the nation as well as the process of nation-building – its features, goals, impediments, and nature. One of the earliest films that accentuated the notion of the Indonesian nation was Usmar Ismail's film, *Darah dan Doa*. Ismail drew his audience's attention to the division and disagreements among the revolutionaries in Indonesia. The campaign for independence and the Indonesian nation was depicted as being fought internally as well. This is salient as it indicates an image of Indonesian nation as intrinsically heterogeneous, marked by conflicts and disagreements. Setijadi-Dunn and Barker rightly assert that "The Indonesia of *Darah dan Doa* is one where its citizens look inwards towards the project of nationalism as embodied in the physical and ideological struggle of the military... their vision of Indonesia replaced with one that is more aligned to the nationalist ideologies of the New Order government."²⁷⁶ The film, however, was furthermore a product of the crucial process of self-reflection of an embryonic nation wiggling itself out of the throes of colonialism.

Another film that highlighted the nationalist discourse in Indonesia is Basuki Effendi's *Pulang* (Returning Home date). It revolves around the story of Tamin, an ordinary village boy who is entrapped [?] by the Japanese during the Second World War and becomes a *heiho* (auxiliary soldier). He then enlists for the Japanese mission as a part of the Red Cross group. When the Japanese empire collapses, Tamin is forced to return to Indonesia. Upon reaching Java, he is transferred to the Royal Dutch East Indian Army (KNIL), supporting the Dutch attempt to re-establish their control of the country.

²⁷⁶ Setijadi-Dunn and Barker, "Imagining Indonesia," p. 40.

In this respect, Tamin is compelled to be a part of the Dutch forces and fight his own people who are struggling for self-determination. When the country is finally granted independence, Tamin has no other choice but to go back to his own village. He finds out that he is now perceived as a traitor for collaborating with the Dutch against the Indonesian fighters. Feeling ostracized, Tamin leaves his village and returns to the city where he meets his old *heiho* friend who, interestingly, has joined the Indonesian military forces. He helps Tamin to realize that regardless of his past, there are many ways he can contribute to the process of nation-building and to continue the national struggle. In the end, Tamin decides to return to his village and become an ideal citizen of the new Indonesian nation.

At this point, you will probably object that the film deals with nation-building because it is about the armed struggles in Indonesia before independence, before the formation of the nation-state. While it is true that the film can be regarded as midpoint between two genres – revolution film and Japanese period film, I still maintain that by stressing an individual's oscillating situation beginning from the Japanese occupation, the film, in fact, interrogates the internal predicaments of Indonesia as an emerging nation. Tamin embodies Indonesia's quest for national identity despite its convoluted historical experience. He attempts to make sense of his vacillation from the Japanese side to the Dutch forces and finally turning toward his own nation. At the end of the day, regardless of Tamin's wavering, his ultimate desire and certainly his decision is to contribute to Indonesia's nation-building efforts.

The nation-building in Indonesia was nevertheless multifarious. Indonesia had to confront numerous social, economic, and political challenges. These dynamics were captured and reflected in films. For example, PERFINI's fourth production in 1952 mirrored the social realities of Indonesia in the immediate post-independence milieu.

Embun (Dewdrops) was directed by D. Djajakusuma—a close friend and collaborator of Usmar Ismail. The film revolves around the story of the returning soldier, Leman. His old friend Barjo, also a former soldier, invites Leman to assist him in asking money and donations from businessmen. In an effort to make a living, Leman agrees and then realizes how tedious the whole pursuit is. Some businessmen decide to give them money, but others refused.

In one scene, Leman gets into a heated argument with a businessman who staunchly declines to accede to their request for money. A brawl breaks out and Leman accidentally kills the businessman. Together with Barjo, Leman flees the scene and goes to Jakarta. They decide to split up. After several years hiding from the law, Leman chooses to settle in a village and attempts to live a normal life as a farmer. He encounters difficulties in the village, but finds comfort in the arms of his caring and dependable girlfriend. As the plot proceeds, Leman learns that Barjo has become a wealthy man through illicit businesses ventures in prostitution and gambling. Moreover, he is living with Leman's sister.

Hoping to live a decent life, Leman focuses on his farm. However, Barjo is concerned that Leman might reveal their past crime. He then compels Leman to work with him as a truck driver, transporting smuggled guns and weapons. But as soon as Leman learns about the smuggled arms, he confronts his friend. They wrestle on top of a hill and, in the end, Barjo dies. Through its depiction of Indonesia's most pressing problems in cities as well as in the villages, the film presents a sombre picture of a fragile nation on its way to maturation. In one of his articles, Usmar Ismail maintains that:

“The value of Dewdrops lies in its realistic depiction of village life with its detailed visual description of living customs and beliefs. It was

precisely this aspect that made the film run afoul of the censors, thereby convincing producers that the safest way to avoid problems is to steer clear of realistic themes.”²⁷⁷

This statement indicates Ismail’s dedication to create films that exude veracity and authenticity in terms of depicting the situation in Indonesia. Through this approach, the film also shows how D. Djajakusuma, Ismail, and PERFINI viewed their country’s nuances and issues. In fact, the film had such a powerful narrative about the situation in Indonesia that it provoked opposition from the press. It even had difficulties passing muster with the censorship review. One film review states that *Embun* does not suit the audience from the cities because they are already conditioned by imperialism. As such, women from the urban areas will not blindly follow or fall in love with a pitiable veteran. According to the article:

“The veteran portrayed in Dewdrops is a man who has given up. All because of the influence of a woman. This simplistic picture might be welcomed in the village but the situation is completely different in the city. Is it really possible that a man who is living such an aimless existence is going to find the moral support of a woman? ... City women and girls don’t chase after or cling to demobilized veterans but to young men with star bars, with cars and tall buildings, and with rank and a good name... What therefore is the use of showing Dewdrops to an urban audience, one that is already heavily under the influence of imperialism? Is it in the least bit likely that a broken-hearted girl is

²⁷⁷ Usmar Ismail, ‘Sari Soal’, *Star News*, Vol. III, No. 5, 5 September 25, 1954, 31.

going to offer her refreshing assistance to a veteran who has tried to find a job, any job at all, but found only disasters instead?”²⁷⁸

While one can argue that this highly disparaging commentary demonstrates resistance (and therefore lack of impact) rather than recognition of the film. I assert that the fact that the film warranted such a strongly worded review attests to its significance. Entrenched in Ismail’s ideals, D. Djajakusuma was able to encapsulate village customs and norms and the struggles of the returning warriors. In other words, films are not only powerful or influential based on their content. Their relevance can also be gauged in how they elicit responses and reactions from their viewers.

In 1953, PERFINI produced another film entitled *Harimau Tjampa* (The Tiger of Tjampa). The work is concerned with life in a village in West Sumatra during the period of colonialism, at a time when many Indonesian civil servants working for the Dutch are highhanded in their relations with the people. It was originally planned that this film would be directed by Usmar Ismail, who was a Sumatran. But, it was eventually directed by the Javanese, D. Djajakusuma, a filmmaker subsequently noted for his interest in regional cultures and traditions. In the film, a young man attempts to avenge the death of his father by learning the local martial arts, pencak silat. He trains under a master of silat at a small village-based Islamic boarding school. His secret aim is to challenge the murderer, a local village head, to a duel. The exteriors for this film were shot on location in West Sumatra. Djajakusuma incorporated the music and dance of the region into the film. Adding a layer of authenticity into the script, Djajakusuma also used local sayings and traditional proverbs in the dialogue. He further managed to convey the intricacies of the Islamic religion and how students practiced its traditions

²⁷⁸ Lingga Wisnu MS. “Keadaan Masyarakat dan Tjerita Embun” in *Sunday Courier*, November 25, 1951, p. 16.

and rituals. This way, the film acquired a more culturally specific façade that pertains to West Sumatra.

One can argue that the decision to focus on regional specificities substantiates a negation or opposition to the broader narrative of nation-building. However, I argue that this propensity to trace regional cultural and social particularities was, in fact, a result of the more extensive process of nation-building. Concurrent with the formation of national identity was the almost reflexive affair of identifying the internal differences and heterogeneity in Indonesia. The national ideology within which Indonesia's identity was and arguably still is founded resonate with the aphorism of unity amidst diversity. *Harimau Tjampa's* portrayal of village life and the local Islamic practices manifests and affirms the notion of nation-building. In essence, *Harimau Tjampa* remains an important pioneering film in the history of Indonesian cinema.

In the film *Lewat Djam Malam*, Usmar Ismail tackled the complexity of nationalism and national identity in the country. Similar to *Embun*, *Lewat Djam Malam* (After the Curfew) also underscores the narrative of the returning freedom fighter and the hardships that he encounters thereafter. The film was set in Bandung in the immediate period following Indonesian independence. Iskandar, the main protagonist, struggles to re-assimilate into the society. He finds this process difficult, particularly after participating in the struggle for independence against the Dutch. In the newly independent Indonesia, the government imposes a curfew from ten in the evening to five in the morning. This policy is purportedly for security purposes. In the meantime, Iskandar realizes that numerous issues still remain unresolved in Indonesia. He reunites with his girlfriend, Norma. However, he is unable to “carry the emotional burdens of

war, and is haunted by his experiences during the revolutionary era.”²⁷⁹ He attempts to lead a normal life by accepting a job at the governor’s office but that does not work out well for him. Like many returning revolutionaries, Iskandar experiences severe psychological issues that eventually cause problems not only between him and his girlfriend but also with his friends.

Confronting his remorse and despair, Iskandar devotes his time walking around the city to look for a job. He then runs into his fellow soldiers during the revolution, Puja, Gunawan, and Gafar. Each character epitomizes three particular trajectories or representations of predicaments in post-independence Indonesia. Puja runs a prostitution ring and earns his keep as a pimp. Moreover, he leads a debauched lifestyle and spends his time gambling and drinking. Gunawan who was once a brutal revolutionary commander manages to accumulate wealth. But he uses brute force and coercion to undercut his commercial competitors. The third person is Gafar who, after the war, works hard until he finally owns a construction company. Gafar warns Iskandar not to contact their fellow soldiers. In a serious talk between Iskandar and Gafar, the latter reveals that one family who was killed by Iskandar was, in fact, not guilty of any crime. Upon learning that he has killed innocent people, Iskandar plots revenge. Together with Puja, Iskandar rushes to Gunawan’s home and blames him not only for the innocent blood on his hands, but also of his continued use of violence against innocents and acts of corruption. Iskandar points a gun at Gunawan and kills him. He subsequently tries to escape and runs back to his girlfriend Norma. But he is shot and killed by the police before he could reach Norma’s house.

²⁷⁹ Triwik Kurniasari, “Reviving Usmair Ismail’s Legacy,” *The Jakarta Post*, date last accessed: February 10, 2016, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/24/reviving-usmar-ismail-s-legacy.html>.

Interestingly, the film was a huge success and was well-received by critics both locally and internationally. An acclaimed film critic commented, “In its sensitive portrayal of contemporary human events and emotions (the film) attains the level already reached by contemporary modern Indonesian literature... While from the point of view of artistry, i.e. the formation of image, *After Curfew* displays numerous shortcomings, in light of the film’s experimentation, these shortcomings can be easily justified...”²⁸⁰ The film was effective in its realistic portrayal of the experiences of returning freedom fighters. *Lewat Djam Malam* is an important social commentary on the problems of those who took up arms during the independence campaign. In this film, Ismail underlined the unique struggles, and certainly the harsh realities of veterans trying to deal with the psychological impacts of the war. He further emphasized the difficulties of veterans returning to the society while realizing that they had not established the ideal society they were fighting for during the revolutionary struggle.

While the theme of a continuing revolution remains in this particular film, what comes as more distinct is, in fact, the ringing interrogation of nationalism and the process of nation-building taking place in Indonesia. Ismail was able to scrutinize Indonesian nationalism through the multi-layered intricacy of Iskandar. By following the main character’s struggles, the audience would also be guided through the complexities and ugly facets of nation-building. Iskandar is haunted by his actions during the war and he is further dampened by the realization that his endeavours have not enabled Indonesia to establish the ideal society. Indeed, the film affirmed, yet again, the necessity and persisting on strengthening the nation. Iskandar’s exasperation leads him to take matters into his own hands, which resulted not only in Gunawan’s

²⁸⁰ As cited in Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silverscreen*, p. 43.

death but also to his. In this sense, the film illuminated the problems arising from the most acute social and economic problems of Indonesia. Nationalism, in this view, involves the perpetuation of building the ideal society envisioned during the war for independence.

In 1955, the film received numerous accolades from the local film industry, including five citations during the Indonesian Film Festival. *After Curfew* bagged several awards including best picture, best leading actor (AN Alcaff), and best leading actress (Dhalia). Asrul Sani was named best script writer. Ismail was delighted with the success of this film. But prior to the screening of the film in Indonesia, Usmar Ismail intended to launch the film at the Asian Film Festival in Tokyo, Japan. This, however, did not happen because the Indonesian government refused to permit Ismail and his staff to travel overseas. The filmmakers were caught up in politics. The Indonesian government was unhappy that Japan had refused to pay reparations for its crimes during the Second World War. Jakarta accordingly denied its citizens' requests for visas to travel to Japan.²⁸¹

Although I have shown how Indonesian films advanced a cultural narrative of nation-building, it is important to note that the latter was also manifested outside the cinematic frame. In the bigger industry of filmmaking, nation-building, was highly prominent. As Indonesian national cinema confronted foreign films from Hollywood, China, or other Southeast Asian countries, tension at the industry level also escalated. The increase in nationalist fervour resulted to a more protectionist stance that, in due course, also facilitated the delineation of the border between Indonesian national cinema and foreign films. Economic and financial interests were crucial factors in the

²⁸¹ Twiwick Kurniasari, "Reviving Usmar Ismail's Legacy," <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/24/reviving-usmar-ismail-s-legacy.html>; See also: Miscbach, "The History of Indonesian Cinema," p. 221-224.

local industry's reaction against the inflow of imported films. However, nationalistic expressions were nonetheless used frequently to justify their campaign. The clash between the local and foreign film industries escalated during the economic crisis in the 1960s. Several local film companies stopped their operations. In 1964, PAPFIAS (The Committee for Action to Boycott Imperialist Films from the USA) instigated a widespread campaign to boycott Hollywood movies. Protestors burned and vandalized the buildings and offices of American production and distribution companies in Indonesia. Many Indonesians working in the cinema industry supported the campaign— “the majority of whom sympathized with the left.”²⁸²

This resistance against Hollywood and other imported film can be considered a part of nation-building. The industry and protestors promoted local culture, industries, and the arts. For the left-leaning filmmakers, American films were means the United States employed to dominate Indonesia; they had to be rejected. By doing so, Indonesian films, which they argued were truly for the Indonesian population, would have the opportunity to flourish. Some Indonesian filmmakers and artists, however, countered PAPFIAS by circulating a document that was eventually called MANIKEBU (Manifesto Kebudayaan or Cultural Manifesto).²⁸³ According to the Manifesto, “culture is the struggle to improve the human condition... In implementing the national culture, we tried to create with the seriousness that honestly as a struggle to maintain and develop our dignity as a nation of Indonesia in the community of nations.”²⁸⁴ The proponents opposed the communists' monolithic view on Indonesian culture. Instead,

²⁸² Misbach., p. 172.

²⁸³ The draft was written by Wiratmo Soekito and was submitted to Gunawan Mohamad and Bokor Hutasuhut.

²⁸⁴ LEKRA, *Manifesto Kebudayaan (Cultural Manifesto)*, 1964

they advocated a national culture based on Pancasila. Instead of undermining other cultures, the proponents believed that Indonesia should preserve its plurality of cultures.

In a crucial move, President Sukarno ordered the confiscation of the Manifesto. The PKI managed to beat its critics. What followed was a period of eliminating American cultural influence in the local film industry. Hollywood films were banned from the country. Personal attacks against Indonesian filmmakers who did not side with PKI or LEKRA were waged by members of the two organizations. The result was revealing. Cinema attendance declined and the number of films being screened also declined, causing the industry to crumble. According to a news article:

“Many cinemas around the country have been forced out of business. Simply stated, the number of Indonesian films that are available is insufficient to meet their needs. While film imports from other countries, such as the People’s Republic of China and Russia, have been accelerated, most of these films are nothing more than propaganda for foreign ideologies. Some of the films even go as far as to mock and insult religion and are, therefore unacceptable to the majority of Indonesians who have their own philosophy of Pancasila which exalts the existence of God.”²⁸⁵

While it is clear that the PKI’s staunch opposition against American imperialism and cultural influence had immense impact on the overall state of cinema in the country, further elucidation on its relations with nation-building is still needed. As discussed earlier, post-war Indonesia not only had to deal with the vast divergence and multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and religions within its territory, but also with

²⁸⁵ Sinar harapan, June 21, 1964, cited in Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 71.

the emergence of different political streams that competed and clashed with each other. Sukarno, as the foremost political figure of the country, had to efficiently balance his power and engage with various political groups in order to retain his authority. In this process, the PKI was one of the strongest and most influential groups. This massive attack against American films had critical implications that culminated during the communist purge of 1965.

Sukarno aimed to foster a unified nation by advocating people adhere to the tenets of Pancasila. Given the immense diversity of Indonesia, a broad, inclusive, and unifying ideology was required. Pancasila offered a means to imagine the nation through a single ideology. The films examined here show how internal fissures and multiple political streams were key concerns that affected the process of nation-building in the country. These films espoused and interrogated Pancasila at the same time. Indonesian cinema fostered Pancasila and strengthened nation-building by analysing the social realities and political predicaments of the country after independence.

Pancasila served as the core tenet of the country's constitution and national unity. It integrates the vision of a modern and secular nation with distinctive traditions and norms. In his speech, Sukarno laid down the "basic principles for Free Indonesia."²⁸⁶ The first principle is nationalism. He advocated the establishment of a nation not only to serve one group or community. For Sukarno, a Free Indonesia should be a "...state all for all. Neither for a single individual, nor for a group, neither for a group of nobles, nor a group of wealthy people – but all for all."²⁸⁷ Sukarno

²⁸⁶ Indonesian Independence and Pancasila, Sukarno, "The Birth of Pancasila" as cited in ed., SarDesai, *Southeast Asian History: Essential Readings*, pp. 152-159.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

emphasized unity and solidarity amidst the inherent fragmentation and heterogeneity of Indonesia. He asserted, “According to geopolitics, Indonesia is our country. Indonesia in its entirety, neither Java alone, nor Sumatra alone, nor Borneo alone, nor Celebes alone, nor Ambon alone, not the Moluccas alone, but the whole archipelago ordained by God almighty to be a single entity between two continents and two oceans...”²⁸⁸ He sternly advocated the oneness of the people of Indonesia, “the Indonesian human beings numbering seventy million persons, but seventy million who have already become one, one, once again one.”²⁸⁹ Without a doubt, the unity of Indonesia was a key element in Sukarno’s image of an independent and sovereign Indonesia.²⁹⁰

The second pillar of the Indonesian nation, for Sukarno, is internationalism: the idea that the nation must also co-exist in the spectrum of various sovereign nations across the globe. Internationalism, he insisted, was different from cosmopolitanism. The latter disregarded the notion and preponderance of nation while the former is intricately embedded in nationalism. For Sukarno, “Internationalism cannot flower if it is not rooted in the soil of nationalism. Nationalism, cannot flower if it does not grow within the garden of internationalism.”²⁹¹ The next tenet is representative government entrenched in the principle of consultation and consent. For an ethnically diverse country, dominated by Muslims, and comprised of numerous linguistic groups, Sukarno’s vision of an Indonesian nation was innately rooted in the tenet of conferring. The fourth principle pertains to the nation’s goals for economic and social sovereignty.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ See also: Anthony Reid, “The Nationalist Quest for an Indonesian Past,” in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, eds. Reid and Marr, pp. 281-298.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

A Free Indonesia – the new nation of Indonesia should be one where poverty (ideally) has no space. Sukarno envisioned a prosperous nation –not only for a select few, but prosperous for all. For Sukarno, political equality was also translated to “the best common prosperity” in Indonesia.²⁹² The fifth and final principle that defined the contours of the constructed vision of the Indonesian nation refers to the belief in one God. This is an essential component in the formation of the Indonesian nation – the creed that everyone should believe in God. Sukarno argued, “...every Indonesian should believe in his own particular God. The Christians should worship God according to the teachings of Jesus Christ; Moslems according to the teachings of Prophet Mohammed, Buddhists should discharge their religious rites according to their own books.”²⁹³ Although the rationale behind this is definitely the accommodation of the various religions co-existing in the country, the principle did not allow space for non-believers or atheists. This eventually had repercussions in Indonesia as everyone had to declare a religion, regardless of whether they believed it or practiced it.

The narrative of Indonesia’s Pancasila and nation-building can also be seen in the movie *Pedjuang*. This movie deals with the ultimate sacrifice in the fight for independence and how individuals battle their own needs to overcome it. A section of the guerrilla army, led by Lieutenant Amin and Sergeant Major Imron, is tasked to defend a very strategic bridge from the Dutch forces looking for them. They rig the bridge with explosives so that it can be destroyed in the event the Dutch try to cross it. After rigging the bridge, they wait for the Dutch. Soon the Dutch army arrive and two men are sent to inspect the bridge.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

When more men cross the bridge the Indonesian soldiers attack and gunfire ensues. Dutch airplanes arrive and the Lieutenant is forced to retreat the men higher up the mountain. Men die in the attack, causing women to express their concern over the need for them to sacrifice their lives. The Dutch forces, discovering that there are “extremist soldiers” by the bridge, begin their attack. The Indonesian soldiers destroy the bridge and defend their ground, but Lt. Amin is heavily wounded in the process. They retreat, bringing him to the hospital. Orders arrive for them to evacuate the village that night. However, Lt. Amin’s younger sister Latifah refuses to leave her brother’s side. Lt. Amin’s lover, Irma, decides not to stay with Amin and Latifah.

SM Imron, now in charge, leaves the siblings to the mercy of the incoming Dutch and takes the soldiers and their families to the next village. In the journey Corporal Seno, Latifah’s lover, begs SM Imron for permission to return to save them. However, SM Imron is firm in his decision and instead locks Seno in prison. SM Imron also begins to pursue Irma. When the Dutch army patrols close to the village that they are hiding in, Irma lures the soldier through the village to an open field where they are ambushed by Indonesian soldiers. In the commotion, Seno escapes his prison and spies on the Dutch. He returns with an even greater resolve to rescue Latifah and Amin. Seno and Irma convince Imron that it is the right thing to do. Imron decides to return for them but dies in the process. Seno and Latifah are reunited, along with Irma and Amin.

While the film uses the struggle for independence against the Dutch as its background, the theme of national identity and nation-building remains apparent and expedient in two ways. First, the audience is taken back to the horrific history of fighting for independence and in due course they are drawn to recognize the basis of their nation. The idea of the nation is reinforced as the characters convey a resolute commitment to expel the Dutch. In this case, the audience is compelled to concede to

the national myth and collectively envisage the nation's existence. Second, as the film underscores the role played by individuals in the nationalist struggle, the audience is also led to reflect on their own contributions as citizens of an independent Indonesia.

Just a few years prior to the institutionalization of regionalism in Southeast Asia, the leitmotif of nation-building in Indonesia remained visible in films. In *Djiwa Kolonial* (Colonial Spirit, 1964), the ideals of nation-building are affirmed. The story revolves around a group of Indonesian paratroopers who are sent to the Dutch-controlled territory of West Irian. By using West Irian as the film's setting, the director heightens the sense of exigency to uphold national interests and think within the parameters of nationalism. The film indicates that the vestiges of colonialism affect local industries as well as the broader notion of national development.²⁹⁴ In the film *Matjan Kemayoran* (The Tiger of Kemayoran), Wim Umboh presents a "romantic portrait of resistance and collaboration in the colonial era."²⁹⁵ Similar to *Djiwa Kolonial*, this particular film tackles human frailty and vulnerability under Dutch rule. It also explores the tendency of local community leaders to be enticed by greed and corruption. Screened in 1965, this film still echoes the persistent theme of nation-building and Pancasila amidst the growing castigation against communists that characterized that period.

Prior to establishment a regional institution in Southeast Asia, filmmakers continued to weave the themes of Pancasila and nation into their films. In a statement [released when?], the Minister of Trade Adam Malik maintained: "It is, in my opinion,

²⁹⁴ Film Indonesia, *Djiwa Kolonial*, date last accessed: February 16, 2016, http://catalogue.filmindonesia.or.id/movie/title/lf-d013-64-551171_djiwa-kolonial.

²⁹⁵ Film Indonesia, *Matjan Kemajoran*, date last accessed: February 17, 2016. http://catalogue.filmindonesia.or.id/movie/title/lf-m015-65-268843_matjan-kemajoran; See also: Oxford Encyclopedia of World Cinema, p. 690.

quite appropriate that the theme of this conference is ‘Implementation of Presidential Decree No. 1 / 1964.’ This shows for all of us that Presidential Decision No. 1 / 1964, the operating base of the film world, does in fact meet the hopes and aspirations of the film world since it integrates ideological, cultural and commercial elements based on the Panca Sila.”²⁹⁶ In this respect, films did not function as mere entertainment products. From the point of view of the Indonesian state, films had the capacity to produce and reinforce ideologies that it deemed crucial to nation-building. In the process of nation-building in a country as diverse and immense as Indonesia, films not only mirror the dynamic process of nation-building, it also produced coherent images necessary for social imagination, for the collective visualising the ideal Indonesian nation.

B. CONSTRUCTING THE FILIPINO: IN AMERICA’S IMAGE

The films produced by Filipino filmmakers during the 1940s and 1960s promoted three key ideas. The first was the notion that the process of nation-building involved a series of epic struggles—of fighting for self-determination and combating domestic problems such as poverty and corruption. Nation-building was a struggle that would persist years after the Philippines had won its independence. Second, Philippine nationalism and commitment to the ideals of democracy, liberty, and equality do not necessarily contradict communist ideals. In fact, a nuanced view of communism is a significant facet of nationalism. Philippine films suggested that communism was an ideology that strengthened rather than destroyed the state’s national identity. Lastly, the

²⁹⁶Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 71.

Philippine's postcolonial image has been constructed simultaneous with the process redefining its relationship with the United States. This is to say that Philippine national identity has been fashioned vis-à-vis the image of the United States.

Philippine cinema during this period advanced a nationalist narrative that extolled the peoples' heroism, and their fight for freedom and survival. The protagonist in the films is one that carries out the struggle for a better life and takes the risks of crossing the limits of the law for an arguably noble pursuit. This archetype includes several interesting types of characters from the social bandit, *ubermensch*, martyr, and the James Bond-stereotype. There is a tendency for cinematic narratives to emphasise deliverance from crisis situations.

From the earliest films screened immediately after 1946 to the landmark films of the late 1960s, narratives about nation and nationalism continue. This supports Caroline Hau's observation that "the fragility of the nation-building project is the condition of possibility of nationalist thought and action, of politics and history in fact. The ambivalence about nation-building is inevitably linked to the very conception of the politics of nation-making because the project itself is not just 'unfinished' but rather 'unfinishable'."²⁹⁷ While the previous chapter explores how a number of films from the region depict their revolution as unfinished, this section furthers the analysis by highlighting that the process of heralding the nation, of constructing national identity, is basically, unfinishable. That is to say those films capture the fluctuations and the derisory, yet dynamic, course of nation-building.

This is further substantiated by Valerio Nofuente's observation concerning the state of mass media in the Philippines during the late 1980s. He maintains that:

²⁹⁷ Hau, "History and Nation-Building," pp. 60-61.

“The view of life being fed to the Filipino people through radio and TV should be assessed in relation to the existing realities in society. Our country is not a paradise for the average Filipino. In it, 90 percent of the people suffer poverty, a situation that worsens with the passing of time and the rampant oppression all over the Philippines. Class oppression exists: workers are not allowed to stage strikes, the common people are not given the chance to speak out through the mass media, and the country is ruled by the power of the gun and harassment.”²⁹⁸

While it is true that Valerio is describing the country almost two decades after the timeframe specifically delineated in this study, his observation nevertheless affirms the permanent creation and re-creation of the Philippine nation against the ostensibly lurid continuity of the Filipino masses’ misery. As mentioned, further support for this contention comes from the films produced by Filipinos themselves. A shimmering light amidst devastation and disruption; survival and reconstruction; a search for the national identity – these were the themes of this period. *Genghis Khan* by Manuel Conde was an ambitious attempt by a Filipino artist to convey one of the greatest historical personas into the lens of the camera and the reel of the cinema.

The story starts with the agreement of a tribal contest within opposing tribes, the winner of which will rule all over Mongolia. Temujin, representing his father’s tribe, wins not with his brute strength and skill but with his intelligence. He uses his wits in every level of the competition whether pushing a huge boulder using only pieces of a quarterstaff as wheels and rope to pull rather than stubbornly dragging the boulder or using his cunning to defeat every opponent on a wrestling match as he pits

²⁹⁸ Valerio Nofuente, *Portrayals of Life and Reality in Radio and Television Drama*, pp. 136-137.

them against each other then, finishing the last one, tickling him to death. As Temujin's tribe celebrates their victory along with the other tribe, a plot is made to slaughter them. Conde's use of shadows and lights express and emphasize the weight of this scene. Temujin is held captive even though he used everything he has to escape. From a cunning and sly competitor of the event to rule supremacy over Mongolia, he became himself as an intelligent soldier, shooting improvised arrows, pushing boulders, utilizing every resource, every inch he has. He is later released by one of the soldiers, rebuilds and strengthens his tribe through cooperation then defeats the treacherous troops of Birchou to avenge his fallen comrades and finally unite all of Mongolia.

The greatness of this masterpiece lies in its realism. Every character in every scene was conveyed and expressed in a fierce manner. Manuel Conde used every resource that he had because of the film's tight 125, 000 peso-budget. He used the slopes of Angono to portray the vast terrains of Mongolia. He used jeep and truck headlights to cover their lack of lighting. They used small horses in the action scenes as they lacked the budget for muscular horses. His ambition was to create a grand masterpiece. The film represents Conde's need to express himself with his art, to emphasize his capabilities, his creativity, and his identity to match and be on par with western cinema. This film emphasizes prevalent themes of the period. This was an expression of identity, the Filipino touch, against the deluge of Western cinema.

The struggle for survival and development and nation-building is also reaffirmed in the movie *Huling Mandirigma*. The tribe of Mandaya knows nothing but violence, sword and combat. They were nearing the verge of extinction due to war or famine. Their numbers are quickly decreasing as they engage into warfare as it acted as a solution to their every problem. Malik, a young boy of the tribe, considers himself not fit in their society as he fears to kill and loathes the life of a warrior. He ran away from

their tribe to escape that limited fate their group has in store for him. On the other hand, Sede, a boy whose innate aggressiveness and elite prowess in the battle field has drawn the eyes of many, including the Datu, gave him popularity and respect among the tribesmen and the women of their group.

As time passes by, the two boys grew differently. Malik, with the help of a priest achieved his dream of a peaceful life and becoming a medical doctor. Sede, now a man of strength, is a Bagani or a noble and fierce warrior of the Mandaya tribe. The twist of the story is when Malik wanted his tribe to adapt to the new ways of the present time and to prosper, eradicating their warrior culture. Every scene when Malik first set foot again into the Mandaya society was about peace and change. As Malik's character gives point to change and peace as the only means to achieve prosperity. He introduces the tribe with technologies they are not accustomed to. He introduced them to the modern tools as well as medicine, to which they respond differently. Those tribe leaders and elders are enraged by such disrespect to their ancient ways but some are left in awe of what more Malik has to offer. The film offers a lens to the dynamic process of achieving peace amidst the turbulence the Philippines confronted. Malik represents the ideal society – the ideal Filipino who took his fate in his own hands and steered his way towards development and growth. Sede epitomizes the rebels – those who took matters in their own hands and declared armed violence as their prime means of expressing discontent. In the end, Malik remained. In other words, the peaceful Filipino remained – one who aims progress and accepts that change had to happen. As the ideal Filipino, Malik used his wits and intelligence to sway the minds of some tribe's men to leave their warrior ancestry far behind them and adapt change, cooperate with other tribes in which they will only achieve prosperity and resolve the pressing issue of starvation within their group.

In another film, Lamberto Avellana, focusing on tribal minorities in the Philippines, dissects the very notion of the Philippine nation by highlighting cultural and ethnic diversities within it. As he depicts the traditions, rituals, and particularities of the Tausugs and the Badjao communities in the southern part of the country, he also extends the boundary of the concept of nation – which is otherwise heavily premised on the Tagalog speaking communities near the capital. The film itself can be regarded as a sentimentalized portrayal of the Badjao and Tausug ethnic communities. It explores the romantic narrative of a Badjao prince named Hassan, played by Tony Santos, and Bala Amai, played by Rosa Rosal, who is the niece of the Tausug chief. The two ethnic communities, although they live nearby each other could not be any more different. On the one hand, the Tausugs practice Islam. They follow a specific code of law and traditions and exercise political power over an immense territory. On the other hand, the Badjaos are prominently called sea gypsies. They live by the sea, in stilt houses, and their main source of livelihood comes from pearl-diving.

Hassan falls in love with Bala Amai and because of the cultural difference and Tausug's sense of ethnic superiority over the Badjaos, his intention and individual disposition are tested. Hence, the film's plot probes into the inevitable conflicts and tensions between the two communities. Hassan needs to prove himself to be considered worthy of a Tausug woman. He is asked to acquire blue pearls and abandon his community and convert to Islam. The problem then arises – should Hassan pursue Bala Amai and abandon his heritage or remain with the community which he regards as home? Hassan decides to marry Bala Amai and become a farmer, which results to him being ostracized by his own community. Eventually, Hassan realizes the consequences of his actions. A pearl trader named Ishmael convinces the Datu Tahil, of the Tausug tribe, to compel Hassan to get more pearls. Nudged by greed and selfishness, Datu

Tahil coerces Hassan to go back and get some more pearls – despite the fact that he had already left and turned his back on his community to be able to live with Bala Amai. Datu Tahil orders his men to set fire to Hassan’s properties on the very same night that Bala Amai is in labour. This act of cruelty compels Hassan to realize the errors in his decision. But, more importantly, he begins to regret his decision of abandoning his own heritage.

The film captures the raw nature of the minority cultures in the Philippines – and as such, underscores the complexity of the idea of nationalism. Through a detailed exposition of the idiosyncrasies of Philippine ethnicities and tribes, Avellana conjures a more accurate vision of the Philippine nation. The opening scenes of the film are pregnant with meaning. The camera zooms into an apparently uncivilized way of life of the Badjaos when they throw a new-born baby into the ocean, which is then rescued by two men who return the baby to the head of the Badjao tribe. This indicates the official introduction of the baby into the tribe. This practice conveys the very core principle of their way of life – they are born by the sea, live by the sea, and will die by the sea. Although this depiction contradicts the prominent image of a Filipino – one that is a hybrid of Spanish and American cultural synthesis, it nevertheless asserts the existence of other layers in Philippine nationalism.

This is also to say that Avellana, in his role as a contributor to the production of images of the nation, actually offers the possibility of widening the spectrum of representations of the Philippine nation. In her analysis of the film, Aileen Toohey states:

“...argues that the visualization of ethnic difference in *Badjao* serves to convey a sense of nationality and nationalism. These nationalist concerns are discernible in the framing of the film. The poster for the

film indicates its documentary quality, and even Filipinos know very little about the southern tribes. The Tausug and the Badjao are narrated into the history of nation-formation by the film: foreigners get to view what even Filipinos themselves have never seen. A secret aspect of national identity is made into the spectacle.”²⁹⁹

This succinct construal is indeed cogent. Spectators, Filipinos and foreigners alike, get a sense of the Tausug and Badjao ways of life through the skilful movement of Avellana’s direction. From their distinct idea of justice, their clothing, rites of passage, and marriage practices, to the universality of greed, love, the pursuit of a better life, and sense of honour and primacy of family ties. I would also add that, against this supposedly exotic background, the image of a Filipino emerges. The Filipino is conjured as a moral man – noble and despite turning against his heritage, he eventually finds a way to go back, and this time carries his future, his wife and kid, with him. The Filipino in the film is someone capable of determining his own future.

Although Benitez maintains that Hassan is the “liberal democratic man...his actions do not create revolutionary changes that erase social hierarchy; instead, the narrative’s conflicts are addressed by a return to natural communities and the validation of the individual’s choice to live life in concert with established (familiar) social structures.”³⁰⁰ I still argue that Hassan nevertheless embodies the ideal Filipino who is intimately linked and embedded in his heritage. He decides to assert himself amidst the conflicting inter-ethnic tension between the Tausugs and the Badjao, before finally

²⁹⁹ Toohey, Aileen. “Badjao: Cinematic Representations of Difference in the Philippines,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Volume 36 Issue 2 (2005), pp. 281-312. See also: Benitez, “Filming Philippine Modernity,” p. 39.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

settling for the satisfaction of safeguarding his family. This, in essence, captures the nationalist rhetoric of the period.³⁰¹

In the immediate post-war era, the Philippines needed to align itself with the United States in order to secure resources for the country's rehabilitation. Like the main character, Hassan, the Philippines had to compromise by establishing, or re-defining, its ties with the United States. In the manner of doing so, the Philippines undermined its own interests. For example, Americans were given parity rights. In the area of defence and security, they were given access to construct their naval and military bases in the country. Hassan had to turn his back on his community. The Philippine government had to give up some of its liberty and disregard nationalist ideologies and interests in exchange for US aid. As in the story, there is a point of realization. Hassan was harassed and oppressed by the same society that he thought offered him a better life. Upon realizing the implications of greed and experiencing the height of repression, Hassan goes back to his roots to safeguard his family. In the realm of politics, the economic and political bilateral agreements that were initially necessary were eventually regarded as contradictory to the formation of an independent Philippine nation.

In the film's concluding scene, Avellana masterfully brings the audience back to the original frame and projects the Badjao ritual once again. In doing so, he casts a strong sense of "going back to one's roots." He offers a solution to the series of conflicts that Hassan has endured, and to the series of upheavals the audience themselves have experienced, by pointing out the serenity of one's original culture. In

³⁰¹ The relationship between ethnicity and nationalism remains futile up until the present. It remains a significant point of inquiry in history, security studies and international relations, as well as sociology. See for example: Rizal Buendia, *Ethnicity and Sub-Nationalist Independence Movements in the Philippines and Indonesia: Implications for Regional Security*. Manila: Yuchengco Center, De La Salle University-Manila, 2002.

addition, he assures that doing so remains aligned with one's goal of securing a good future for one's family. It suggests that tradition does not necessarily clash with development and the desire for a good life. In fact, it was when the protagonist was in a relatively modern community that oppression limited his options and curtailed his freedom. While recognizing the distinctive ethnic cultures, the film nevertheless opens the audience's perspective on the most fundamental values that transcend differences. Certainly, this is what Benitez means in his remark that:

“What the film proposes is that the enduring and universal desire for freedom, dignity, rights, and national unity become the basis for a universal humanity – and by extension, a world system dependent on the recognition of the liberal subject's human rights based on a modern social imaginary of property. That such a desire, though still inchoate, is evident even among the “pure” Filipinos untouched by colonial and imperial history is further proof of its universality and timelessness.”³⁰²

In this regard, the film facilitates an understanding of the essence and humanity underlying the traditional in Philippine communities. Thus, the film helps them to be more open and tolerant to the most basic and shared desires and values that bind the nation. The idea of a solid and unified nation, no matter how loosely imagined it was and is, is constructed despite the diversity in religion, languages, and culture. Certainly, nation-state exists despite having a strong and seemingly reflexive juxtaposition with the Western Other or even the Filipino Other.

In the 1960s, the leitmotif of national struggle, development, and nation-building remained. This is captured in the film *Ito Ang Maynila*. It was 1962, when the city life was tough. Manila, the country's capital was in a rebuilding state under the

³⁰² Benitez, “Filming Philippine Modernity,” p. 40.

leadership of the “Arsenic”, the first elective mayor of Manila – Arsenio Lacson. The city was being plagued by widespread corruption of all ranks; from the police in the streets to the councilmen inside the Manila City Hall. Manila was a city with a huge population at that time and one of those that suffered the harshest devastation during the last World War, and it was a total mess. Most of its streets and structures were in bad condition, its employees were not receiving enough salaries, its police force was a little better than an army of extortionists, and worse, it was still saddled with debts from decades ago.

The movie revolves around the life in the city streets of Manila. The Manila streets are being run by the local gangsters. These gangsters will do anything to survive the harshness of poverty and hunger. They will disrupt local business and enterprise; they will extort local merchants in return for favours of “brawn” protection. Life in this area equates to how strong your dignity is. Survival is measured with the toughness of a man’s fist and the fierceness of a man’s soul. To go all straight and moral is to go hungry and die poor. To go to the path of crime is to embellish themselves with riches, a trembling conscience and a foot in the grave. The films scenes are filled with opposites. Nanding is the personification of the good. He is a straight arrow. He lives to serve others. He believes that he could survive the Manila life with honour through legal and moral means. That is even though Nanding, together with his brother, suffers poverty and hunger every day. Pepe on the other hand, stands as the character that will do anything to achieve his dreams. He will grab every opportunity that will serve him well. He believes that money is the single most important thing there is in the world. It is more than love. It is a means to an end for him. Pepe, the criminal master mind started out as a man like Nanding. Then, his beliefs began spiralling down due to the

hardships that he faced every day: his grumbling stomach, his empty pockets and his spoiled dreams.

These two personas battle each other, scene after scene, and act after act. Nanding tries to do his best to persuade Pepe of his wrong doings but Pepe refuses to acknowledge it. He will fight till the end. He will never surrender and never retreat. In the end, Pepe dies in the hands of his friend Nanding. The personification of the road that would serve many won against the imagery of the road that would serve only oneself.

Just before the establishment of ASEAN and in conjunction with the configuration of Southeast Asian regionalism, notions of nationalism and nation-building persisted in cinematic realm. Now regarded as a classic Philippine film, *Ito ang Pilipino* mirrored the grim social realities of the country.

This move is contrary to the previous administrations economic policies of protectionism, currency controls, Filipino First, import restrictions and the like. Macapagal believed that to achieve economic and social progress, the people must choose their preferred method – democratic or dictatorial. The dictatorial method of government prevailed upon the Communist countries and so do the communists carry a bad stigma with them – the ambush that killed the beloved Doña Aurora Quezon in 1951 and the violence that terrorized the barrios and towns of the Southern Tagalog caused by the *Huks*.

The United States, the so-called champion of democracy and free trade and Philippines' key benefactor towards full rehabilitation, would never allow such idea to flourish in its "Little Brown Brother's" society. Macapagal also emphasized that the task of economic development should principally belong to private enterprises and not to the government. This earned the President little support from the masses, especially

the farmers. A large part of this was due to the failure of the land reform program which tried to combat landlordism but gained little support from the legislature. The farmers were enchained to the cycle of poverty as they incurred more debts; their situation further worsened and just to emphasize the consequential point, with the use of the CPP-NPA-NDF line: “*Ang Kahirapan/Gobyerno ang numero unong recruiter ng NPA.*”

By 1967, the Philippines, together with Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore founded the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN forged a new way for Southeast Asian states to plot a navigate through the Cold War without conceding to the bipolar structure imposed by the West. This shift in policy came even in light of the complex political scenario between the Philippines and the United States. The former had heavily depended on the latter for economic, military, and political reasons since the beginning of the post-war rehabilitation. Nonetheless, throughout the Cold War, the Philippines strived to secure an independent course and assert its sovereignty and nationhood.

C. BUILDING A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY

Malaysian national cinema parallels the intricate and distinctive features of the budding Malaysian society itself. That is to say, Malaysian films emulate both the thrust to forge a ‘homogeneous community’ and to retain the plurality of the country’s ethnic groups. The following films, images and narratives interrogate, challenge, and, in due course, inescapably forge Malaysian nation-building and national identity. Carefully scrutinizing the limits, contours, and what lies beyond the nation is imperative and ultimately produces a more thorough understanding of the nation itself. Malaysian films offer an evaluation of the dynamics underlying Malaysian

experimentation with forming a sense of nationness. Regardless of the lack/absence of explicit depictions of the Malaysian nation itself (as opposed to the clear portrayals in Indonesian or Philippine cinema) – or given the impossibility of completely projecting or even ascertaining a definitive representation of the Malaysian nation, the films examined here are reliable sources of the volatile stirrings of nation-building and nationalism.

It is salient to point out that the leitmotif of nation-building and nationalism appeared long before the British bestowed independence on Malaya. Compared to Indonesia and the Philippines where the strong features of revolutionary ideals and nation-building permeated the cinematic milieu immediately after independence, post-war films in Malaya/Malaysia disclose the interaction among varying cultural influences. Malayan/Malaysian national cinema indicates the interweaving of these cultural traditions in an integrative way. Instead of leaning into tenacious nationalist rhetoric, Malayan/Malaysian films embraced Indian folklores, music, and dance; they drew inspiration from *bangsawan*; and they interrogate socio-cultural issues of ethnicity, religion, poverty, and social class.

In the preceding chapter, I mentioned that in the aftermath of the Second World War, Malayan/Malaysian cinema entered a period of rapid development (which initially took off in Singapore before taking roots in Kuala Lumpur) including the rise of the studio system and the surge in local film production. I have also explained that one of the first films screened was *Seruan Merdeka* (Call for Independence, 1946). It was a product of collaboration between K.R. Christy and B.S Rahjans. Despite the fact that the film did not do well at the box office, many scholars argue, and I concur, that it

represents a turning point in the country's film and cultural history.³⁰³ This is because the film depicts the struggle against the Japanese as a unifying factor for the Chinese and Malays. Contrary to the actual enmity between the two groups during the Japanese Occupation, the film imagines the two wrestling for liberation together. It demonstrates the nascent nationalist stirrings in Malaya and Singapore and how working together, despite ethnic differences, was crucial for the defence of their territory. Showcasing both Malay and Chinese actors as the main protagonists, and incorporating both languages in the script, the film, offer the possibility for the audience to visualize a multi-racial society. Moreover, the film promotes the notion of Malaysian nation as a multi-racial society.

Malaysian nationalism can also be seen in the movie *Hujan Pana*. It centres on the triangular love affair between Amir, played by P. Ramlee, and two women, Hasnah and Aminah. It borrows heavily from the Indian cinematic tradition that applies a melodramatic approach to the battle between modern and traditional, unrequited love, death, and gender relations in the Malayan/Malaysian society. Amir is in love with Aminah, who is depicted as a modern, independent, and almost aggressive woman. Amir actively pursues Aminah, composing songs for her and having his gaze almost always fixed at her. Hasnah represents the emotionally tormented woman who selflessly prioritizes her beloved's plight. She subdues her own feelings and becomes actively involved in Amir's life. When the latter's son dies, Hasnah finally demonstrates her compelling influence as she helps Amir realize the consequences of his actions.

³⁰³ Despite being unsuccessful in Malaya/Singapore, ostensibly due to limited screenings imposed by Cathay and Shaw Brothers, the film was eventually shown in Southeast Asia and India.

The director, B.N. Rao takes a lot from his Tamil film industry background in terms of the narrative and direction. For instance, Amir's utmost compliance and almost submission to Aminah is patterned on the Devdas character that is found in Indian cinema. Nevertheless, Rao was also able to incorporate the features of bangsawan, particularly in the music and dance segments in the film. More importantly, the film offers a glimpse into the social realities of Malaya in the immediate aftermath of the war. Certainly, Malaya was not, in reality, homogenous. Plurality of ethnicities, not sameness captures the overarching state of its society. However, *Hujan Panas* presents a clear view of a fraction of the broader society of Malaya by concentrating on the distinct world of the Malays. It also hints to the mounting tension between tradition and modernity that was made exigent by the war. The distinctive representations of the two women reveal, on the one hand, the potent power of customs and traditions in Malaya juxtaposed with the latent desire to go re-claim influence over the land. On the other hand, the westernized Malay woman suggests the desire for modernity – perhaps, something that can be acquired through the return of the British. Moreover, she embodies independence and progressive ideas – she is not confined by the conformist tendencies of the society, rather she knows how to assert herself regardless of the consequences.

Although van der Heide looks at this dichotomy from the perspective of gender relations, it actually goes beyond that. It exposes the swelling ideological conflict within the Malayan society concerning the plight of their territory. The end of the Japanese Occupation catapulted the issue of independence to a higher ground. As part of this, lingering questions regarding the future of the Malay world became even more prominent. While the traditional hierarchy of power remained crucial, global political

and social realities required a re-thinking of modernity – in this case, it was modernity embodied by the westernized woman.

Viewed through the lens of the political and social dilemma of the period, Amir seemingly embodies the future of Malaya. He is caught in between the opposing forces of tradition and modernity. In the end, although it seems that Aminah, the modern Malay woman, lost to the traditional Hasnah, it should be noted that it was only after the latter assertively expressed herself that she was able to claim ascendancy and power. In the oscillating struggle between the two, a hybrid character was formed – Hasnah took over the narrative when she expressed her own agency (embracing some of the values that Aminah has) and took action to achieve her goal. This inclination towards self-assertion while vacillating in between tradition and modernity certainly defines one of the central dilemmas of post-war Malaya/Malaysia.

The same plot structure highlighting the dichotomy between traditional versus western, persisted in Malaysian national cinema. Another film that upholds this premise is P. Ramlee's directorial debut film, *Penarik Becha* (The Rickshaw Driver, 1955). The film explores, yet again, the impediments and tribulations of the love story between Amran, a rickshaw driver played by P. Ramlee himself, and Azizah, played by Saadiah. Caught in the middle of a prohibited affair, the couple confronts some of the prevailing ruptures within Malayan/Malaysian society. In particular, the film interrogates social and economic schisms – that is to say, the division between the rich and the poor.

The movie opens on a busy street. A rich man calls for a rickshaw puller to drive him home. When he gets home he lays his coins out on his palms and chooses two and gives them to the becha driver. The becha driver calls out “sir” softly but is quickly scolded. The driver drives off sad until he arrives at a busy food stall. Pak

Ahmad, the owner asks if he's had good business – to which the poor guy responds no. He then admits his dejection and frustration about how rich people treat poor people. The owner explains that it is because rich people have never known hardship. A loud noise comes from inside the restaurant where three young boys, dressed well, are playing a board game. They are loud and obnoxious, without care for the people around them. Pak Ahmad packs two portions of food for Amran, despite Amran not being able to pay for them. Amran then cycles home to his hut where a beggar begs for food. He gives one of his portions to the beggar willingly. Inside his mother is waiting for him and gladly receives him. He hands over the single packet of food to his mother. His mother asks why there is only one, and if he has eaten, and he says that business was bad so he could only get one. Amran then adds that his friends had already bought him food. His mother, however, knows that he is lying and she shares half of her food with him. As he begins to eat, strong winds begin to blow and his house is flooded with rain.

Subsequently, the sequence proceeds to a school for women where young elite girls, including Azizah, are learning to bake and sew. When the school ends in the afternoon, Azizah and some of her friends decide to go to a movie that night. Azizah asks her parents for permission but while her mother is supportive, her father, Marzuki, refuses to give her money. In the end, she is allowed to go. The story then continues to a dance, where some young men watch as beautiful women gracefully perform traditional dances. When their offers to dance with women are denied, they get irritated and leave the performance only to meet Azizah along the way. They approach her and begin harassing her. Frightened, she hurriedly calls the becha driver, Amran to take her home. The young men try to stop Amran and start to assault him. The simple becha driver fights back and they give up and run away.

Azizah, thankful to the becha driver for helping her, offers him 40 ringgit to drive her to and from school every day for a month. He is surprised at his good fortune and accepts after being convinced. He tells his mom the good news. He arrives at Azizah's residence the next morning and meets her parents. Her father is angry because Azizah promised 40 ringgit when he thought the driver's work was only worth 10 ringgit. In the end, the father grudgingly agrees to the amount after Azizah expresses her protest.

Beyond the poor versus rich dichotomy, the film also touches on, albeit in a very subtle way, racial schisms in Malaya. In one particular scene, Azizah's father is trying to get to Kampung Bisi and hails a becha. The first driver is Chinese who charges 1 ringgit. Marzuki, finding it ridiculous, tells him off and the Chinese becha driver goes away. The second becha he flags is driven by an Indian man, and he asks for 1.50 ringgit to which Marzuki snarls, "Are you crazy?" The third becha driver is a Malay man and he charges 1.4 ringgit. Still not contented, Marzuki picks a fight with this becha driver by waving his walking stick, and the becha driver fights back by flinging his stick into the middle of the road. The man goes to pick up the stick but is unfortunately run over by a car. The Malay becha driver runs away immediately while the driver of the car jumps out to help Marzuki to the hospital.

In the hospital, Azizah's father is badly wounded. The driver of the car who is a young man requests to see Marzuki, and seeks his forgiveness for running him over. The wounded man graciously replies that it was entirely his fault and that he should not worry. He asks that the young man deliver the bad news to his wife and child. The man does so and upon hearing the news, Azizah's mother is devastated. The man drives away to pick up his friends. He pawns his house. Then he picks up the mother and Azizah. When Azizah sees the man, she is instantly disgusted because the man was in

fact, Ghazali, the very man that tried to assault her the night she met the beca driver. The man smirks as he recognises her. She initially refuses to go to the hospital with him, but then relents. When Azizah and her mother meet Marzuki, he tells them of how good the man is, and how he treats him like family. Marzuki and Ghazali become good friends and the latter is invited to visit the family often.

The next morning Amran is waiting for Azizah in the front porch but his vehicle is pushed aside with a loud honk by Ghazali. They meet again and Ghazali instantly shows his disgust towards Amran. Ghazali tries to make Amran's life miserable by telling Azizah's father once he has been discharged that Amran has fallen in love with Azizah and takes her to the movies every night. This infuriates Marzuki and he immediately fires Amran and forbids him to come back and see Azizah. Now realising her love for him, Azizah visits him at his house, where she is spotted by one of Ghazali's men. He tells this information to Ghazali. Both Ghazali and Azizah's father go to Amran's house. They rudely scold Amran's mother and takes Azizah away. Ghazali then suggests to the father that it would be wiser to marry Azizah off to him, and Marzuki wholeheartedly agrees. But Azizah, hearing this news, runs away from home. When the family finds out, Azizah's father is extremely angry. Ghazali volunteers to bring her back. He goes to Amran's house and they fight for her. It results in Ghazali throwing a knife directly to Amran's mother's chest. Terrified of what he's done he runs away. Amran's mother begs Amran to bring Azizah home. They concede. When they arrived, they realise that Ghazali has threatened Azizah's father and robbed him of all the money he had in the safe. Amran fights Ghazali until they both faint. The police are called and Ghazali is taken away. When Amran comes back, they return to his mother where Azizah's father apologises for his disrespectful actions and seeks forgiveness. He promises to agree to marry Azizah off to Amran one day.

The most fundamental themes that the film explores, including class division, gender roles, and racial categorization are reflections of the process of nation-building in Malaya/Malaysia. By 1955, it was already clear that the country would be able to attain self-determination and, thus, be freed from the influence of the British. However, given the social and cultural fractures in Malaya, the prospect of a unified nation remained elusive. This does not mean though that the film is expressing resistance to nationalism. In fact, by highlighting these fractures, the film also encourages the spectators to look past them. In other words, by normalizing the internal differences of their society, the film was able to construct an image of a plural nation. One can also argue that by portraying these differences and issues, the film encourages the broader public to visualize a unified nation that has inherent crevices. That is also to say that the film affirms nation-building in the course of acknowledging heterogeneity.

As Malaya's Independence Day approached, films being produced continued to treat themes that presaged the emergent nation, despite the internal limitations and idiosyncrasies of its society. In yet another film, *Semarah Padi*, the acclaimed Malaysian director presents a model of governance of the emerging independent Malaya. The entire film is shot through with reference to the foundation or origin of a community. It opens with a solemn invocation about *Semarah Padi* – a community of devoted Muslims in the Malay Archipelago. Combining a dramatic narrative and an intense romance, the film portrays an ideal village setting. That ideal setting is a Malay-Muslim community headed by a strong-willed chief whose power is immense and whose words is law.

The film's narrative revolves around the themes of a triangular love story, crime, adultery, and punishment as seen through the lens of Islamic laws and values. Dara, daughter of the village head, is harbouring feelings for Aduka, an assistant to

Dara's father, and he loves her too. However, Dara's father decides that she should marry Teruna instead. The latter is also one of the village head's assistants. Being a dutiful child, Dara suppresses her own feelings and agrees to marry Taruna, who also genuinely likes her. At the time of their engagement, the peace and tranquillity of the village are disrupted when a wounded villager named Kecewa is taken to the village head. He is beaten by his adulterous wife, Galak, and a man named Jejaka. Kecewa dies, thus prompting Dara's father to instruct Aduka to arrest the two culprits. Taruna then insists on accompanying Aduka because it is his responsibility as an assistant to the village head.

A fight ensues and ends up with the arrest of Galak and Jejaka. Adhering to the laws of the village, the chief orders death by impalement. The story then turns to another plot when Borek, Jejaka's brother begins to assault the village – murdering locals and burning their houses to avenge Jejaka. Amidst this chaos, Teruna is sent to aid the Sultan's men against pirate attacks. While Aduka remains in the village to protect the people from Borek, the latter abducts Dara who is eventually saved by Aduka. Swept by their feelings towards each other, Aduka and Dara engage in physical intimacy. Penitent for what they did, Dara weeps furiously and Aduka begs Teruna to punish him. In the end, Dara's father orders that each get one hundred lashes for their sins. Dara and Aduka then get married.

Despite an uncharacteristically tragic conclusion, the meaning of the film remains clear. It advances the idea of a nation based on historical and religious preconditions. The whole narrative explores the twofold process of securing peace and stability and defining the identity of the village. The community becomes the space for constructing the national identity. Islamic laws serve as the framework for maintaining order for Malaya/Malaysia's multi-racial societies. At this point, you might argue that

the film is, in fact, a rejection of a unified nation – precisely because it essentializes Malay cultural and Islamic tradition. I look at it from a different angle. Certainly, the film interrogates the role of Islam and Malay people in the formation of the new nation, but it also attempts to incorporate non-Malays.

In one of the advertisements, the film is presented as “A picture of infinite appeal to all cinemagoers of all nationalities!”³⁰⁴ The film attempts to publicize itself as an experience that suits everyone regardless of their racial background. As such, in the process of watching the film, the audience is exposed to the foundational tenets of a stable and peaceful village but also prompted to accede to the saliency of Islam and Malay authority in the process of nation-building. The film is a decisive portrayal of various levels of chaos and anarchy during the period, and therefore, the reflexive desire to endure as a robust and well-ordered society.

First, there is the chaos within the village itself which reflects the internal divisions and conflicts in the emerging Malayan/Malaysian nation. The headman and Islam are presented as the pillars of the village. Individual desires and interests, as represented by Dara and Aduka’s initial attempt to repress their feelings towards each other, must be tapered, if not totally eliminated, for the overall well-being of the village, that is to say, the nation. This is the same message conveyed when Taruna forgives the two and when the village chief chooses to uphold the law and punish them. In this respect, in every character’s individual story the prominence of the village/nation is evident.

Second, the immediate external threat represented by Jejaka and Borek appears to be an indication, as mentioned, of the menace that lurks near the village itself. These perceived threats are the local communist groups and perhaps even the non-Malays

³⁰⁴ William van der Heide, *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p. 186.

who posed a danger to the formation of a new and independent nation. This does not mean that the film tries to exclude non-Malays – as I explained above, the publicity for the film was decidedly inclusive. The only prerequisite is adherence to the overarching laws of the nation and, in the process, the curtailment of individual interests. A case in point is that even though Aduka and Dara were from the village, they gave into their own desires and were punished as a result. This then indicates that the general well-being of the village, and also the nation, rests upon the dissolution of individual agency and the prominence of the ideological principle that keeps the whole nation intact and stable.

The third realm of chaos is signified by the pirate raids that imperil the Sultan's domain. It can be seen as an allusion to the anarchy of the international political arena during the Cold War. The necessity of sending Teruna to aid the Sultan hints at the obligation of the village, and certainly the nation, to safeguard peace and protect it from outside dangers (whether the communists or colonizers). The main message, hence, centres on the defence of the nation – securing its survival amidst different levels of threats. This tendency to construct the nation vis-à-vis the perception of threats is in a way a symptom of the eruption of widespread consciousness in Malaya to claim control over their fate and harness traditional power structures in nation-building – or at the very least, in imagining the notion of a nation.

A year after the proclamation of independence, Malaysian national cinema continued to advance narratives of nation-building and nationalism. Perhaps, one of the most important productions that capture this leitmotif is P. Ramlee's *Sergeant Hassan*. As mentioned, the film is key as a transnational cultural product of two great Southeast Asian filmmakers. It is a collective narrative of the region under the Japanese rule. In addition, it is a focal reference for Malaya/Malaysia's experiment with nation-building.

The film reflects the predicament of ordinary people in Malaya during Japanese Occupation. It accentuates the resistance against the incursion of Japanese power, and how even a simple man, who is adopted and categorized by the society as weak, can do great things for the security and stability of the nation. Through the development of the main character, the film engages the audience to take part in nation-building because they are like Hassan. He may be an ordinary man but he was able to save someone's life and defend their community. In one scene, Hassan boldly asserts that despite being citizens of a young nation, he is confident that the people can all rise together to protect their territory and liberty. In this sense, the film recognizes the state of the Malayan nation—its vulnerabilities at a stage of decolonization and its efforts at coming to terms not merely with the Japanese occupation but more importantly with British hegemony. The film, I surmise, is way ahead of its time. It promotes nationalist ideology among a multi-ethnic group – this time, with more clarity than previous films analysed. *Sergeant Hassan* envisions the growth of a young yet sturdy nation and despite the strong presence of the Malay—as a race and group, as epitomized by the hero himself, P. Ramlee—it also incorporated other ethnic groups through key characters such as a Chinese who assisted Hassan during the skirmishes. In other words, it evokes the inclusivity of the nation and that even non-Malays have their roles to play in the experiment of nation-building.

Interestingly, the process of nation-building in Malaya/Malaysia has also been depicted in a rather comical, almost satirical way. In many of P. Ramlee's comedy films, for example, he incorporates astute social critiques concerning the state of Malaya set amidst seemingly simple humour. The film *Nujum Pak Blalang* (Fortune-teller Father Blalang) is a movie that was, according to P. Ramlee, simple enough for

the kampong people to be able to understand.³⁰⁵ Based on Malay folklore, the film's plot is indeed simple. It centres around Blalang (Malay for cricket), a little boy whose mother passes away, and whose father, Pak Blalang, is a sluggard who refuses to work. Against his father's protests, Blalang sets out to work every day. He goes around looking for any jobs that will feed the two of them. The farmers, men and women, who toil in the fields watch Blalang and feel a great pity for him. To them, hard work is necessary in order live (to eat), and being lazy is a terrible thing.

The story takes a turn when one day, Blalang is walking back home from a day of hard work washing dishes, and he comes upon two brightly dressed thieves tugging two cows and two goats that they stole. Blalang climbs high up a tree and scares the thieves away by pretending to be a jinni. The thieves run away leaving the cows and goats behind. Blalang brings the animals home and, together with his father, hatches a plan to get them returned to the owner and be rewarded at the same time. He hides the animals while his father poses as a fortune-teller (nujum), who successfully locates the lost animals for the farmers. Their scheme works and they are rewarded with rice and sarong as payment. That night the thieves enter the Sultan's house. Using a magic spell, they cast a deep sleep on everyone in the house, including the Sultan and the guards. They then proceed to steal the royal crown and pearls along with a chest of coins. The King wakes up angry and orders his men to announce to the whole kingdom that whoever finds the goods will be greatly rewarded. Meanwhile, the thieves run away into a cave in the hills and bicker about dividing their treasure. Blalang's father is brought to the Sultan and the Sultan orders him to locate the treasure or face execution. Terrified, he returns home and prepares to run away. Blalang instead tells him to hide,

³⁰⁵ Alan Khoo, "Hashimah (7 Films) and Ramlee (50) Team Up," *The Singapore Free Press*, 12 October 1959, p. 7. Date last accessed March 15, 2016. <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article.aspx?articleid=freepress19591012-1.2.74>

coincidentally in the same cave as the thieves. He pretends to be the spirit of the cave, scaring the thieves away. He then returns the treasure and is appointed the royal fortune-teller. His old hut is replaced with a grand house. The once poor man can now give alms to the poor.

The story then continues when the princess soon falls in love with the fortune-teller, and hatches a plan to get him to her chambers. She feigns sickness and her distressed father calls Pak Blalang to her room. When they are left alone, the princess confesses that she only pretended to be sick to get him to see her. The Sultan returns to the room and Pak Blalang prescribes that she should go to the gardens unattended in the middle of the night because the wind from the midnight air will heal her. The Sultan is bewildered but agrees. At the garden both of them confess that they like each other. She calls him “Kanda Satria”. They repeat this the next night and the Sultan is reassured that she is better. Suddenly, news arrives that their rival kingdom’s king has arrived. They welcome him warily. The Sultan proposes a wager: the *nujum* from their kingdom will ask questions, and if Pak Blalang answers all correctly, he loses not only the wager but his country as well to the Sultan. The Sultan, confident with his own fortune-teller, agrees. Pak Blalang pretends to be confident but soon decides to escape. When he gets home he prepares to flee in fear. He orders his son to find a ship, but he accidentally overhears the rival king’s fortune-teller revealing to his mates the answers to his questions. Blalang runs back to his father to tell him the answers.

When the day of the wager arrives, Pak Blalang successfully answers all the riddles, to the horror of the King. In desperation, the King asks for one last chance to pose a question. The King asks: “What do I have in my hands?” Pak Blalang, almost panicking, wails for his son who started everything. Luckily, a blalang (cricket) was

exactly what the King had in his hands. The Sultan rejoices at winning the wager against the rival kingdom.

Devastated, the King returns to his ship on his way home but is intercepted by the two thieves who then tell him they have a way for him to take his losses back. The king accompanies the two in the cave where Pak Blalang saw them and there, the King finds the Sultan's daughter being held. The Sultan, discovering that she is gone, is about to decree that whoever finds her will get anything they desire. However, his advisors suggest that he ask Pak Blalang instead. The film concludes when the water Pak Blalang was using miraculously reveals the people connected to the crime. They reach the cave and free the princess.

In an almost sardonic way, *Nujum Pak Blalang* depicts the Malays, as embodied in Pak Blalang's character, as indolent – this is a widespread stereotype and theme across P. Ramlee's films. What is interesting is that despite Pak Blalang's defects, things still turn out in his favour, either by accident or just when he is about to escape or evade his obligations. This serves as a commentary on the role of Malays in the process of nation-building. While the centre of the film is the Malay community – the film mocks them and by doing so it also challenges the political dominance of the Malays in the budding nation.

When the fate of the kingdom was wagered against the rival territory, the outcome was solely entrusted to Pak Blalang whose false bravado caused him to run away and flee. His lack of conviction and capacity to aid the kingdom was only made irrelevant by fate – it is by accident that his son stumbles upon the blabbing fortune-teller of the rival domain. This can be viewed as a fair warning concerning the fate of the new nation. The lack of interest of the Malays or the failure to address the needs of the nation can lead to its destruction – this is a cautionary message one gets from the

film. Some scholars argue that P. Ramlee's films "enhance the Malaynisation project that dominantly located the Malays as the ruling force that only benefits a certain fraction of society. As such, some members of society become marginalised, dominated, and exploited for the creation of a selected few."³⁰⁶ I contend that by targeting the Malays as the subjects of comedy – the spectators laugh at them and disparage them – Ramlee was also exposing their vulnerabilities. In other words, he takes an active part in defining their role in nation-building while at the same time opening the space for either self-reflection (from the point of view of the Malays) or discovery of the Other (from the point of view of the non-Malays).

Intensified ethnic division and suspicion fundamentally characterized the social dynamics of Malaya during the Japanese Occupation. This is crucial largely because ethnic relations consequently influenced the experiment of nation-building in postcolonial Malaysia. In other words, in the process of conjuring Malaysian national identity (as well as in political, economic, and socio-cultural affairs), heterogeneity based on racial groups became a core facet. In his analysis of nationalism and politics in the immediate post-war Malaya, Bauer succinctly explains:

“The great majority of the Chinese in Malaya have no deep, sentimental roots in the country and could certainly not be expected to fight for its independence. The majority of the Malays rarely adopt a Pan-Malayan attitude and would think more in terms of their own small states than of Malaya as a whole. Moreover, the Malays are genuinely fond of the British and would very much prefer to see the country administered by them than by the Chinese. Communal

³⁰⁶ Mahyuddin Ahmad and Yuen Beng Lee, “Negotiating class, ethnicity, and modernity: the ‘Malaynisation’ of P. Ramlee and his films” *Asian Journal of Communication*, 25:4, pp. 408-421.

differences caused tension and trouble over the last 18 months and may raise acute problems in the future. But they may have been partly responsible for the absence of such violent clashes between the local population and the returning authorities as have occurred elsewhere.”³⁰⁷

All of these events combined with other factors contribute to the nature of the nationalism that emerged in Malaysia – a multi-ethnic nation. As a Malaysian scholar asserts, “Since its birth, Malaysia has lacked a clear-cut national identity.”³⁰⁸ I concur with his view that as a new nation, Malaysia was a multi-ethnic community that consisted of myriad heterogeneous groups coming from different ethnic backgrounds, professing different religious beliefs, speaking different languages, and following different traditions and norms. Nonetheless, they were all bounded by and are living within a specific territory that has defined boundaries. In this respect, the notion of Malaysian national identity is embedded in the multi-raciality of its society.

This arduous means of constructing the Malaysian self was, and perhaps still is, a parallel bifurcation of inventing a monolithic image while at the same time perpetuating cultural and social pluralities and intricacies. This may seem ironic but, in the context of Southeast Asia, Malaya/Malaysia’s circumstance is not exceptional. As in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia, nation-building and the establishment of national identity had to contend or come to terms with a multitude of cultural and social differences, albeit in differing degrees and contexts. Against this backdrop, nationalists in Malaysia endeavoured of construction of self – that is a polity of people with shared

³⁰⁷ Bauer, P. T. "Nationalism and Politics in Malaya." *Foreign Affairs*. April 1947. Accessed June 8, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/malaysia/1947-04-01/nationalism-and-politics-malaya>.

³⁰⁸ Cheah Boon Keng, *Ethnicity in the Making of Malaysia*, p. 93.

culture and social features—that is to say, to generate the things and ideas that constitute the Malaysian self.

Malaya/Malaysia's quest for nation-building and national identity formation was also directly related to economic transformations. Compared to Indonesia and the Philippines, which obtained independence earlier, Malaya/Malaysia had a considerable amount of time organizing its economic structures with the aid of the British and immense Chinese investments. For the first two national economic plans, the main thrust of the emerging state was to stimulate growth and close the economic gap among the ethnic groups. When the other two countries became liberated, their key political figures had to tackle economic predicaments head on. Indonesia's approach to economic development was rooted in national interests, protectionism, and self-reliance. The Philippines, on account of the vestiges of the war, entered into closer dependent economic relations with the United States. In Malaya/Malaysia, a vibrant export economy was laid out by the British.

Considered a crucial component in the rehabilitation of Japan's economy, Malaya/Malaysia received immediate attention not only from the British but the United States as well. In fact, its rubber industry recuperated almost immediately. In 1946, rubber production surged to about 400, 000 tonnes and after two years, it already exceeded pre-war production levels by around 150, 000 tonnes. In the early 1950s, rubber production continued to be a key sector in the Malaya/Malaysian economy comprising about 20% of the country's work force. Expanding its export-based economy, Malaya/Malaysia diversified its products to palm oil, iron ore, manufacturing, and timber.³⁰⁹ Needless to say, These economic developments were planned and

³⁰⁹ John Drabble, *An Economic History of Malaysia c. 1800-1900: The Transition to Modern Economic Growth*, pp. 149-155.

pursued with the help of the British. Yet poverty and unemployment remained acute problems.

Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Andaya noted, “When the government discussed ‘rural poverty’, it was largely a Malay problem, which could be addressed by land development and the creation of facilities such as roads, schools, clinics, irrigations, and so on.”³¹⁰ This vital issue also became a subject and/or background of some movies of the period. In one of P. Ramlee’s hit comedy movies, *Labu dan Labi*, he probes into the economic dreams and fantasies of the Malay society.³¹¹ The two protagonists named Labu, played by Mohd Zain, and Labi, played by P. Ramlee himself, are lowly servants of a well-off Malay family whose patriarch, Haji Bakhil bin Haji Kedekut, is a penny-pinching and obnoxious businessman. He frequently sneers at the two servants, only gives them leftover food, and does not provide them with decent sleeping quarters. He also resorts to traditional ways of punishment using *ketok-ketampi* and repeatedly insults the two. Nevertheless, Labu and Labi hang around because they are both in love with their master’s daughter named Manisah, played by Mariani.³¹²

One night, as the two are preparing to go to sleep, they engage in a discussion and imagine what they would do if they are rich. In a very comical way, they fantasize about different scenarios where they are affluent and they make fun of their boss. Their stories include their aspiration to be with Manisah, who, like her father, takes on different roles in the series of fantasies concocted by the two. In this respect, this reverie indicates the all-encompassing desire and preoccupation of Malaya/Malaysia to

³¹⁰ Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p. 295.

³¹¹ P. Ramlee also made a sequel to the film entitled *Nasib si Labu dan Labi* (The Fate of Labu and Labi).

³¹² Mariani is P. Ramlee’s sister-in-law in real life.

further its development and address rural poverty. It is also interesting to note that in these musings, Malaya/Malaysia's search for modernity is captured in various forms linked to Western film genres: cowboys, Tarzan, and night-clubs.

To give an example, Labu imagines he is a magistrate while Labi is a medical doctor. They enter a night-club where their boss works as a waiter. In a fashion show that follows, Haji Bkahlil's daughter is among the models. Both Labu and Labi relish the idea of finally being able to observe Manisah and revel in her beauty without restraint or shame (something that is only possible, perhaps, in reverie). In another fantasy, P. Ramlee, in a way exoticizing the Malayan/Malaysian self—depicts Labu as a Malay Tarzan. Labu narrates that he wants to be free in the wild, away from the city. Viewed from this perspective, freedom is portrayed as being stripped off the reminders of city-living. This can be seen as an allusion to the corresponding poverty in the city. In this segment, their boss takes the form of a primate who serves as Labu's helper while Labi is a tiger costume who wants to eat Labu. The two squabble and their excessive noise wakes up Haji Bakhil, who then screams at them to go to sleep.

In another fantasy, the story shifts to a Western cowboy genre plot. Labi announces that he wants to be a sheriff cowboy and Nat King Cole's brother. Labu becomes Jesse Labu, Jesse James' brother. Labi looks for Labu to arrest him and take the reward money amounting to \$5000. Upon meeting, each other in a saloon, a gunfight between the two takes place. Their racketing eventually wakes up their boss again who bellows for them to sleep.

These reveries are very telling. They convey that Malay society, especially the poor, had a desire for modernity and progress. Class division is a fundamental element in the film. Labu and Labi, given their economic standing, do not really have a voice in the household. The only way they can express their aspirations and wishes is through a

series of fantasies and daydreams. In the same way, the goal of nation-building and national identity formation was hindered by class and, of course, racial fragmentation as well as poverty. From this perspective, one way to ultimately attain national unity and establish a robust nation is to, basically, secure economic well-being. As such, economic development programs and other public policies and privileges given to the Malay community were deemed necessary actions for nation-building.

In an interesting twist, Labu finds a room chockfull of wealth. He collects some money and leaves without telling anyone until one day, he sends his representative to Haji Bakhil's house. The representative explains that Labu had received some inheritance and is now a rich man too. Labu then requests to marry Manisah, as if only by becoming rich can he legitimately ask for Manisah's hand. When Haji Bakhil rejects his offer, Labu employs a sorcerer to cast a spell on Manisah. At this point, Labu searches for another sorcerer who hands him a magical stone that he uses to heal Manisah. Jubilant, Haji Bakhil allows his daughter to marry Labu. At the ceremony, Labu appears and puts a sleeping curse on everyone. He then attempts to persuade Manisah to marry him but Labu arrives and the two fight. In the course of the debacle, Labu gets hold of an axe and kills Labu. The film ends when Labu wakes up from his dream (for a moment he does not realize that the whole time he was dreaming about finding the money and getting rich) while he is hitting Labu. Haji Bakhil confronts the two and reprimands them for their unruly behaviour. Labu, still not realizing that he was only dreaming, acts superciliously. It was only when Manisah appears that Labu realizes his blunder.

The film's conclusion is suggestive. After a series of fantasies, the two servants still find themselves in the same position. Even when Labu thinks he is already rich and can do whatever he wants, he wakes up from his dream, and the unreachable goal of

marrying Manisah remains unreachable. As such, it also bares the idea that the quest for national identity is a goal yet to be achieved – if not, unreachable per se. Regardless, P. Ramlee spoke to the discord among the competing goals of economic development, class conflict, and nation-building in Malaya/Malaysia years after independence and just prior to the institutionalization of a regional authority in Southeast Asia.

By 1967, the project of nation-building in Malaysia was still underway. Based on my previous discussions on the cases of Indonesia and the Philippines, the same can be said of them. In other words, upon the establishment of ASEAN, the experiment of nation-building was still continuing across the region. The films examined here reflect this. In 1967, P. Ramlee produced another film that similarly depicted the collision of ethnic groups in Malaysia. *Sesudah Suboh* (After the Dawn) explores the story of Arrifin, a bookshop owner who is married to Salmi and has two kids. He lives a very unhappy and malcontent life. Salmi is too focused on her work and other social activities while his kids are engrossed in their respective activities. Arrifin does not feel like he has a family and finds life at home quite lonely.

In one scene, he strikes up a conversation with Allan, a Chinese, who then gives him movie tickets so he can spend quality time with his family. When Arrifin tells his family about his plan, none of them are willing to watch the movie with him. At this point, an Indian character, Chandra peeps in and sees the whole discussion between Arrifin and his family. For her part, she was raised by her father who constantly tells her to respect her parents. In an unexpected moment, Arrifin meets Alice, a kind Chinese woman, who upon learning about his problems feels sorry for him. She accompanies him to the movies and the two become very close. Alice starts to work with Arrifin in the shop and business improves. Arrifin gets sick and is advised to get a good rest away from work. However, since his wife is busy, he goes to Port

Dickson with Alice instead. They spend quality time together, walking along the beach, and holding hands. Unfortunately, Arrifin's son, Salim, is also at the beach and sees his father. He runs back home and upon his father's return, a heated discussion takes place. He decides to start a new life with Alice in Sabah but in the end, it turns out that it was all a plot to get him back with his family.

Sesudah Suboh embodies the Malaysian government's thrust for national integration. The film consists of various characters from different ethnic backgrounds, which is reflected by the different languages spoken in the movie. For instance, Tamil, Cantonese, Malay, and English are all spoken in the film. In one scene, even Arrifin, played by P. Ramlee, speaks in Cantonese. The film coherently paints a picture of a multiracial Malaysian society, where conflict does not necessarily occur between races. In fact, an intra-ethnic issue was tackled in relation to and with the help of other ethnic groups. For example, there is Allan – the Chinese who generously gives Arrifin movie tickets. In addition, there is the Tamil family who accentuate the importance of love and respect among family members.

In one of his film reviews, Hassan Muthalib noted that the film “probably would draw laughter today with its idea of racial integration.”³¹³ While this might be true, I still maintain that the film epitomises the oscillating and constantly evolving search for a coherent Malaysian national identity. Throughout the complex process of nation-building, it represents the idea of a society where all ethnic groups are represented and visible. Moreover, it suggests that a harmonious society can still be attained. Even if the movie closes when Arrifin gets back to his family, the message remains clear. One does not need to live with one's family or ethnic background to be

³¹³ Hassan Muthalib, Five for the Price of One, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/hassan-abd-muthalib/five-for-the-price-of-one/10202442411516082/>.

able to get a “happily ever after.” At this juncture, you might argue that, well, at the end of the day, it was a mere fantasy. The films that examined here reflect the fantasies, intricacies, and challenges that are part of the nation-building experiment as well. They are, nevertheless, embedded in the social and political realities of the time and are therefore valid references to the connected narratives of Malaya/Malaysia.³¹⁴

From the emergence of embryonic nationalistic fervour up to the launch and implementation of the experiment of nation-building, it is evident from the discussion above how films were crucial in two broad ways. On the one hand, they mirrored the complexities and nuances of the political, social, economic, and cultural milieus of the countries examined in this study. The immediate post-independence economic instability in Indonesia as well as ethnic and religious diversity was captured in various films. The Philippines’ postcolonial relationship with the United States are seen clearly in films. In Malay/Malaysian films, recurrent themes of racial stereotypes and a distinct Malay dominance are cinematic reproductions of actual social realities.

On the other hand, films carry with them a certain level of embedded message – an ideological element that cuts across the plot and is conveyed from the most direct to the subtlest way. In this chapter, this ideological element pertains to the nationalist ideal. National cinemas in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia played a vital role in heralding the nation and portraying not only the ideal nation but the ideal citizen. In Indonesia, the nation is captured in the notion of Pancasila – the five ideals that are recurrently seen, interrogated, and upheld in the films analysed here. In the Philippines, the ideal nation, and therefore the ideal citizen, is one that is in benevolent and intimate amity with the United States while advancing national interests as well. In

³¹⁴ There are a number of studies that explore the correlations between ethnicity and nationalism or ethnic identity and national identity in Malaysia. See for example: Malini Ratnasingam, “National Identity: A Subset of Social Identity?” in Maya Khemlani David, et al. (eds.). *Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building: The Way Forward*, pp. 3-34.

Malaya/Malaysia, there persists an underlying current toward multiculturalism and an imperturbable relationship with the British. The national cinemas in the countries examined demonstrate continual upholding of the nation. They exhibit a strong predilection toward wrestling with the idea of a sense of belongingness and imagine a unified community as they navigate the twofold tides of decolonization and the Cold War. They carry with them an ideological impetus to define their national identity. In other words, cinematic trends encapsulated the burgeoning concept of the nation and ideal citizen.

As a consequence of the colonial history of Southeast Asia, a vehement nationalist ideology emerged, lingered, and pervaded both the political and the filmic realities of the region. Cinema became a platform where the nation was constructed and challenged at the very same time that politicians – the leading legislators and foundational fathers of these nations – were formulating what their new nations would represent. The process of defining the nation became a crucial part of the political processes of these countries, particularly in determining how best they could interact, relate, and deal with other states. In this respect, they were formulating how the nation should operate not just within the region but as new members of the international system of nations. In the cinematic realm, filmmakers contributed to the process of defining the nation by sketching various versions of the ideal citizen – in some cases, the ideal citizen not just within the context of decolonization but also the Cold War.

Chapter Six

Unity in Diversity and the Hybrid Communist

“With my own two hands, I had to construct this thing I called ‘I’ – or, rather, make the things that constituted me.”
Haruki Murakami

“The Philippine Government stands for the right of self-determination and independence of all Asian nations; for closer cultural and economic relations and mutual cooperation with freedom loving Asian countries as a group band within the framework of the United Nations; and for the proposition that a return to colonialism, of which the last vestiges are now disappearing from Asia, shall not be tolerated in any form.”
Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay

Cinematic productions and reproductions, and the images and messages embedded in them, provided a means of identifying friends and foes in domestic as well as international affairs. National cinema, as a platform for forming these images, makes it cognitively feasible to develop generalized beliefs and perceptions about the international system and the roles of the US, Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia. As mentioned, policymakers in the region demonstrated a belief in the power of films to inform the public or shape public opinion. What then do national cinemas tell us about the interests and perceptions of Southeast Asian leaders?

It is key to understand that the final ideological element of Southeast Asian strategic culture was the aspiration of Southeast Asians to repudiate the bipolarity of the Cold War. Rather than submitting themselves to the global division caused by the clash between the Soviet Union and the United States, Southeast Asians determined their own approach free from Cold War pressures. From the perspective of the

Southeast Asians, the international system was not divided into two factions determined by external forces. It was an open and plural arena. It was a composite landscape where nationalistic agendas and transnational interests were sufficient to challenge the Western-dominated power structure.

The political climate and cultural terrain of Southeast Asia was then marked by deliberate attempts to cast a third way, that of non-alignment. Having just escaped the spectre of colonialism, Southeast Asians were strongly committed to securing their independence and sovereignty free from external manipulation and hegemony. This ideological element, evident in political rhetoric and filmic representations, became the basis of Southeast Asian Cold War strategy premised on non-alignment. Communism itself was not seen as a monolithic concept or a singular threat. There were blurred lines between a communist guerrilla and a true nationalist fighting for the welfare of his community. In other words, Southeast Asians did not necessarily produce evil depictions of communists. Instead, they envisaged a pluralistic society where communists could also be nationalists and ordinary citizens who lost their way during the post-war confusion and misery. In this respect, Southeast Asia explored the concepts and meanings of Cold War concepts in terms of their own political and cultural understanding, the inclination toward upholding independence and ensuring survival. This reinforced the trajectory toward non-conformity, instead emphasizing neutrality and non-alignment.

A. IDEOLOGICAL CLASH ON INDONESIAN SCREEN

In his exegesis of Indonesian foreign policy, Mohammad Hatta explained that after the acquisition of independence, the next task for the government was to complete

the “twin ideals of social justice and prosperity.”³¹⁵ In order to achieve these ideals, the newly independent country had to participate in international affairs through the United Nations. Certainly, this entailed identifying Indonesia’s interests and objectives in international relations. Having spent the last couple of centuries under Dutch rule, pioneering Indonesian political leaders had to learn how to navigate the international system by actually participating in it.

Indonesia’s foreign policy strategy during the Cold War was entrenched in the first two ideological factors discussed here. From the Indonesian viewpoint, navigating the international system meant on the one hand, the continuity of their revolutionary struggle, of securing sovereignty and independence and on the other hand, the prominence of the nation and the need to assert national interests. Coalesced, these two ideological facets gave rise to Indonesia’s belief in fostering peace in international affairs. As explained by Hatta,

“...the Republic of Indonesia feels it its duty to strengthen the ideals of peace, however weak its voice or feeble its power. It believes that these ideals will become reality in the long run. It believes in the common sense of mankind. The people’s desire for peace, as opposed to their lust for war, becomes stronger from century to century. Evil often prevails over the forces for good and destroys what civilization has built up over the ages. But man, rational by nature, will eventually make a positive and definite choice of good over evil, peace over war.”³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Mohammad Hatta, “Indonesia’s Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 31 No. 3, April 1953.

³¹⁶ Hatta, “Indonesia’s Foreign Policy”, p. 443.

As such, Hatta avows that this was the reason why Indonesia chose not to align itself with either the United States or the Soviet Union in the Cold War struggle. He further remarks that Indonesia also did not want to join any third bloc to balance the other two precisely because doing so could incite additional mistrust and encourage new antagonisms. This approach to the Cold War has been labelled neutrality. Nonetheless, Hatta retorts by expounding on the meaning of neutrality – it entailed impartiality of a state vis-à-vis other confrontational states and that Indonesia's decision was for the purpose of fostering and advocating peace.

Indonesia had assumed an independent and active foreign policy, deliberating opting not to side with either the United States or the Soviet Union. At the very core of this policy was Indonesia's desire to follow its own course in steering through volatile international quandaries. It also implied a vigorous attempt to endorse peace and dissolve the friction between the two blocs. In theory, this policy prevented any direct confrontation or enmity between Indonesia and either bloc and allowed the former to preserve its national interests.

Indonesia's Cold War strategy was intricately linked to its revolutionary zeal and nationalist ideals. As a newly independent nation, Indonesia was staunchly influenced by the pride of winning independence through the revolution and therefore harboured formidable nationalist sentiments. The memory of the anti-colonial movement, the war, and the revolution are quite apparent, as discussed early on. This resulted in a certain level of protectionism – to stay on guard and prevent any form of domination, be it economic, cultural, or ideological. Furthermore, the tendency to advocate for the nation profoundly influenced Indonesia to assert autonomy and independence in foreign policy.

This oscillation of ideas regarding the Cold War and Indonesia's independent foreign policy as starkly marked by non-alignment were also perceptible in the country's national cinema. The recurring themes of peace, social justice, and freedom permeated the realm of filmic reality as they did in the realm of strategic culture. Several films reflect, in one way or another, Indonesia's chosen path during the course of the Cold War struggle. It is key to underline that the ideological battle between the communists and the anti-communists also percolated onto the Indonesian cinematic screen. There were a number of left-wing filmmakers who viewed motion pictures as a way to influence the culture and society of the country. Among them were Kotot Sukardi, Basoeki Effendi, and Bachtiar Siagian who produced various films that deal with class, looming poverty, and social change in Indonesia. For instance, in 1951, Kotot Sukardi made the film *Si Pintjang* (The Lame). The story centres on the life of Gimán, a cripple born into a family of simple farmers. During the Japanese period, Gimán's father and brother are drafted to the *romusha* or forced labourers working for the Japanese. Almost immediately, Gimán's family experiences the miserable effects of the war. When the Japanese withdraw from Indonesia, Gimán's family continues to suffer the consequences of war, now it is the struggle for freedom against the Dutch. In the middle of the skirmishes, his grandmother dies when she is hit during an air strike conducted by the Dutch.³¹⁷

Gimán now finds himself alone and his survival depends solely on him. He wrestles his way into street life and realizes he has to be strong and independent if he wants to endure the hustle and bustle of street life. He encounters many poor people, those living on the streets like him, beggars, and thieves all trying to survive. He eventually finds that their shared experience of bad luck, miseries, and destitution is

³¹⁷ *Si Pintjang* (The Lame), DVD, directed by Kotot Sukardi (Indonesia: 1951).

like a strong glue that generates a sense of solidarity and loyalty amongst them.³¹⁸ In an allusion to the international political environment, the film captures not only the turbulence Indonesia had to go through from the Japanese period to the independence campaign, but it further conveys the enduring level of privation in the country after 1945.

Despite the fact that this film was made by a left-leaning director, it does not aggressively advocate communist ideals.³¹⁹ In fact, its main points indicate inherently nationalist ideals. There are two aspects that are worth noting here. First, the film affirms the independent course of Indonesia's foreign policy. In order to survive, Gimán realizes that he had to support himself and find his own way amidst the chaos of the city. Likewise, in navigating international affairs, there was an inherent conviction that Indonesia's survival rests on charting an autonomous foreign policy. Second, there is a tacit attempt to foster solidarity among the oppressed and poor countries. In the realm of the Cold War, this pertains to the cohesion among African and Asian countries, previously colonized, and like Indonesia, also facing economic, political, and social instabilities in a bipolarized world. While the Bandung Conference took place four years after the film was screened in Indonesia, it is evident that these two principles were present not only in the political discourse but also in the cinematic realm.

In another film, Indonesia's Cold War strategy is also palpable. Basoeki Effendi's film, *Pulang* (Homecoming) made in 1952 won a prize at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in Czechoslovakia. Similar to the previous film, it also sets its story in the

³¹⁸ The film competed at the Karlovy-Vary International Film Festival in (Czech Republic) in 1952, date last accessed: August 3, 2016 http://filmindonesia.or.id/catalogue.php/movie/title/lf-s010-51-399305_si-pintjang#.VEc01LWwrcs.

³¹⁹ Misbach, "The History of Indonesian Cinema," pp. 225-227.

complex period from the Japanese occupation, Indonesian revolution, up until the immediate aftermath of the acquisition of freedom. As discussed in Chapter Four, *Pulang* revolves around the story of Tamin, an ordinary village boy who was entrapped by the Japanese during the Second World War. When the Japanese empire breaks down, Tamin is forced to return to Indonesia and is transferred to the Royal Dutch East Indian Army (KNIL) and supports the Dutch attempt to re-establish their foothold in the country.

Tamin is compelled to be a part of the Dutch forces and fight his own people. But upon the acquisition of sovereignty, Tamin had no other choice but to go back to his own village only to find out that he is now seen as a collaborator for siding with the Dutch. Feeling ostracized, Tamin leaves his village but soon realizes that regardless of his past, there are many ways he can contribute to the new society that he is still a part of.³²⁰ While the film evidently alludes to the task of nation-building as discussed in the previous chapter., it can also be argued that examined against the background of the Cold War. The film has clear references to Indonesia's sense of obligation to play its assumed part in international affairs. This role is the pursuit of peace and stability and to move past historical blunders and mistakes. Like Tamin, Indonesia was jostled into a series of flux – from subjugation under the Dutch and Japanese and then being catapulted into the tussle for independence. Like Tamin, Indonesia eventually came to recognize that the task ahead was to strive to attain development, stability, and sustain peace. Juxtaposed with the prominence of the nation and sovereignty in Indonesia, it is

³²⁰ Film Indonesia, *Pulang*, date last accessed: July 7, 2016, http://filmindonesia.or.id/catalogue.php/movie/title/lf-p006-52-176579_pulang#.VEc1trWwrcs Pulang and Rentjong dan Surat (Machete and Letter) got support from the National Film Company (Perusahaan Film Negara- PFN) as part of a scheme to encourage film directors from the young generation.

then cogent to assert how Indonesia's commitment to peace and stability resulted in an independent foreign policy and, in due course, non-alignment.

It is also imperative to accentuate that the Cold War clash of ideologies permeated not only the cinematic realm, but also the industry itself. According to Misbach, "People of the film world [were] divided into two groups: the communist block and their sympathizers, and the non-communist."³²¹ The above-mentioned films are among those produced by one block of the Indonesian film industry while Ismail represents, according to some local filmmakers, the non-communist group who actively promoted American ideals and claimed that their films were for the Indonesian people. The fact that Ismail received further training in the United States only increased the rancour against his films. While it is true that Hollywood influenced Ismail's productions, it is still patent that they also reflect Indonesia's push for an independent course in international affairs. This affirmation of an independent course and non-alignment is distinguished in three of Ismail's films: *Lewat Djam Malam*, *Tamu Agung*, and *Lagi-lagi Krisis*.

Lewat Djam Malam (After the Curfew) follows the familiar narrative of the returning freedom fighter and the difficulties that he faces afterward. War veteran, Iskandar struggles to re-integrate into the society after joining years of struggle for independence against the Dutch. Soon, he realizes that many critical issues still linger in the newly independent Indonesia. Despite being reunited with his girlfriend, Iskandar is unable to "carry the emotional burdens of war, and is haunted by his

³²¹ Misbach, p. 172.

experiences during the revolutionary era.”³²² He attempts to have a normal life by accepting a job at the governor’s office but even that does not work out well for him.

Iskandar runs into his fellow soldiers during the revolution, Puja, Gunawan, and Gafar. Puja got into the business of prostitution and earns his keep as a pimp. Gunawan who was once a brutal revolutionary commander manages to accumulate wealth but uses brute force and coercion against his commercial competitors. Gafar finally owns a construction company. Iskandar’s interactions with these characters forces him to take action, not only to come to terms with his past mistakes and guilt as a freedom fighter but to determine his role in the present society he finds himself in. The story ends in a sort of melancholy way when Iskandar rushes to Gunawan’s home and blames him not only for the blood on his hands but also of his continued use of violence and acts of corruption.³²³

Iskandar points a gun to Gunawan and kills him. He tries to escape and runs back to his girlfriend, only to be shot and killed by the police. While the protagonist faces a tragic end, his quest for independence remains the central theme of the film. After being beleaguered by the war against the Dutch, he confronts another war on the home front. Yet, he endures the challenges and actively pursues autonomy and liberty. He takes matter into his own hands and regardless of the consequences, he resolutely charts his own way through his own recovery. In the same manner, Indonesia was resolved to follow a nonaligned outlook and determine its own foreign policies in the midst of the Cold War scuffle.

³²² <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/24/reviving-usmar-ismail-s-legacy.html>, Date last accessed: March 19, 2016.

³²³ *Lewat Djam Malam* (After the Curfew), DVD, directed by Usmar Ismail (Indonesia: PERFINI, 1953).

In another film, Ismail explores non-alignment and sovereignty as political motifs in international relations. *Tamu Agung* starts with an official on a horse singing his announcement: there is news that an exalted guest is coming to the village. Everyone is excited and prepares themselves by cutting grass and washing clothes. The heads of the villages gather for an urgent meeting. They each complain about their needs for this or that in preparation for the arrival of the guest (the village living highest on the mountain requests more provisions for cloth, another village needs medicine, as well as other needs like salt).

Teachers, all women, arrive to the meeting. When the secretary comments on their beauty, one of the women, the head of the “Pure Women Movement” (clearly a feminist assertion) reprimands the Mr. Wadina and Bapak Midi. The former (a chief) enters and delivers the sad news that the guests will not be coming. He expresses disappointment at the fact that their village will remain forgotten and as such not rise. The latter is tasked with going to the district market to wait for the honoured guest and invite him personally to their village. At the market, he meets a travelling con medicine man and his partner who were following the crowd that was welcoming the guest. The conman, in his demonstration, promises to turn Bapak Midi’s hair black again, but instead he turned it white. Bapak Midi demands that he change it back. However, when someone announces that the guest has arrived, the crowd disappears and once again the conman finds little luck in selling his wares. Bapak Midi invites him to the village, saying that the village was not expecting a guest so he could sell his wares there without people running away.

The conman then agrees and they leave in a fancy car to head to the village. Back at the village the crowds are hopeful and very excited at the thought of an important guest coming to their village. When the fancy car arrives with Bapak Midi,

the entire village mistakenly assumes that the con man was the guest. They welcome him warmly, everyone vying for his attention and treating him like royalty. The conman, surprised at the welcome, accepts and plays the part. The women, especially Bapak Wadina's wife, ridiculously attempt to impress the guest while the men, especially Bapak Wadina, get ignored. Exasperated, Bapak Wadina kidnaps the guest on a horse and brings him to the lake.

He then passionately talks about his hopes and dreams for this village that he had for decades. Meanwhile the guest, exhausted from the attention, stumbles to the edge and falls asleep. Bapak Wadina discovers that the guest is missing, and frantically searches for him. Unsuccessful, he returns to the village to the anger of the villagers who threaten to remove him from leadership for his excessive passion for the village that made him lose the guest. Bapak Midi however, finds the pair of conmen in the forest and demands that they fix his white hair. The con man gives him a small vial of medicine. Happily, Bapak Midi accepts and tries to lead them back to the city market. However, the conman demands to be brought back to the village to continue being the guest. Bapak Midi then leads the conmen into the forest and leaves them lost. He returns to the village to try to convince the villagers that the guests might not be important after all. The villagers do not believe him at first, and goes into the forest to look for the guests. The conmen hide in a tree in fear that they have been exposed. They are also surrounded by snakes from all sides waiting to strike. Finally, Bapak Midi convinces them that they were only con men when he turns his hair dark again using the vial. In the end, they realise that their desperation to receive a guest to feel important led them to foolishness. They find confidence in themselves and in their leader Bapak Wadina. They return back to the village, forgetting about the con men, who run away as soon as the snakes slither away.

While *Tamu Agung* is widely regarded as a political satire poking fun at the enigmatic and charismatic leadership style of the Sukarno years, it also makes reference to the necessity of relying on oneself, to foster independence. The extent of preparations they made for the guest became too grandiose and eventually useless when at the end of the day, they realize that they must find their strength among themselves and their own leader, Bapak Wadina. Yet again, the message is one about looking inwards and capitalizing on the internal capacity and capability of Indonesia.

Even in films that treat the Dutch affably, the tendency for self-determination and self-reliance remain apparent. One of the most prominent films, *Pagar Kawat Berduri*, revolves around the story of the delicate interaction between a Koenen, a Dutch officer, and Parman, an Indonesian freedom fighter. Set at the peak of the fight for independence, a number of fighters are taken as prisoners of war and kept inside a Dutch territory.³²⁴ In order to get key information about the prisoners, Parman establishes an amiable relationship with Koenen. He wants to know about the plot to kill Herman and Toto. The two engage in a conversation about the nature of the war for independence, the differences between their motives, and the plight of their respective peoples.

On the one hand, the Dutch officer realizes the motivations and zeal behind the Indonesian's quest for independence. Nonetheless, he is bound by his own loyalty to his country and people and cannot abandon his obligation. Filled with trepidation about the war, Koenen commits suicide. On the other hand, Parman soon finds out where Toto and Herman are being kept. He gives them a pair of pliers to pierce through the

³²⁴*Pagar Kawat Berduri* (The Barbed Wire), directed by Wahyu Sihombing (Indonesia: 1961).

prison's barbed wire. In their breakout, Herman manages to run away safely while Toto is killed.³²⁵

Controversies emerged because of the way the film portrayed the Dutch. Left-leaning directors and film critics argued that the film stimulated compassion and consideration for the Dutch colonizers. They objected to the universal human values that the film seemed to espouse and therefore argued that it must be banned. They contested the film's suggestion that a level of friendship or comradeship was possible between an Indonesian and a Dutch. The case was filed with the Board of Censors but they did not ban the film. Nonetheless, the issues and controversies lingered. Finally, the issue was taken to the attention of President Sukarno. Regardless of the sensitivity of the matter he decided that the film could be distributed and released for screening.³²⁶

Indeed, the film is important because of its progressive and benevolent portrayal of Indonesia's former colonizers. Koenen's character veers away from the dominant representation of the Dutch as aggressive colonizers who aimed to return to Indonesia and subjugate its people. His ambiguous plight, caught in between his loyalty to his own country and his sympathy for the Indonesian people staunchly committed to emancipation, palpably indicates that the Dutch as also capable of commiserating with the Indonesians. This more nuanced characterization of the Dutch also entails an emphasis on peaceful co-existence – he chose to kill himself rather than to wage an all-out war against the Indonesians. In a rather peculiar way, the message of nonalignment here is contained in Koenen's character. His suicide demonstrates the conscious

³²⁵ Adapted from a short story. After the film is made, Trisnojuwono turns it into a novel. See: A story on Ajip Rosidi's letter containing story and script.; http://filmindonesia.or.id/catalogue.php/movie/title/lf-p017-61-145971_pagar-kawat-berduri#.VEc3vLWwrcs

³²⁶ Misbach, "The History of Indonesian Cinema," p. 226-227.

decision not to align with either side, and to a certain degree, the resolve to choose peace instead.

Bintang Timur, one of the strongest critics of the film opined: “We ask that, Bung Karno (our president) give serious attention to the film, *The Barbed Wire Fence*...brought into sharper focus, Asrul Sani’s view of the Indonesian Revolution... quite clearly, Koenen (a Dutch military officer) was given the pivotal role as an embodiment of the principle of ‘Universal Humanism’ and a ‘hero of humanity’ whose failures cause him, in the end, to commit suicide. The evil perpetrated here is that by using the principle ‘Universal Humanism’ Asrul Sani castrates the patriotism and heroism of the revolutionary fighters.”³²⁷

Bintang Timur dissented with the apparent promotion of universal values in the film and asserted the necessity of upholding the revolutionary ideals of the people’s movement instead. In another newspaper called *Warta Bhakti*, it was stated that, “...the film, *The Barbed Wire Fence*, defenders of imperialists and colonialists. A reassessment is in order before (the film) insults too many people.”³²⁸ By people, though, the newspaper suggests left-leaning film directors and well as the members and sympathizers of PKI.

Indonesia’s nonalignment is intricately linked to its desire to pursue universal peace. In Sukarno’s declaration, the path to international affairs is determined by their resolution to ensure peaceful coexistence among sovereign countries. According to him:

“Peaceful coexistence is not a problem between powers of equal strength, especially because the imperialist forces are using their

³²⁷ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 67.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

strength to dominate the weaker developing countries... There will be peaceful coexistence between developing countries and imperialist states, only when we can face them with equal strength. And that equal strength we can obtain through solidarity among us. Let us make no mistake about that! We have no alternative to solidarity.”³²⁹

This belief that through cohesion among postcolonial and developing countries, international peace and stability could be achieved occupied one of the central themes of Indonesia’s foreign policy. It reached its pinnacle during the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference held in 1955. During this momentous event, Indonesia, together with key countries such as India, opened up the possibilities for a strong non-aligned bloc in response to Cold War bipolarity. For Indonesia, hosting this event was a source of great pride. It essentially embodied their determination to not be swayed or forced to choose between the two dominant sides in the Cold War struggle. It reaffirmed their independent foreign policy, entrenched in their penchant to foster national interests, and maintain their anti-colonial scheme.

The formidable relationship between films and politics continued through 1960s. In his book, Salim Said notes that there is a notion in Indonesia that “politics is the commander of film.”³³⁰ As such, films played a crucial role in the clash between Cold War ideologies. The Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) had its own cultural branch called Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA or the Institute for People’s Culture) established in 1950. Through LEKRA, left-leaning directors, artists, and writers

³²⁹ Reinhardt, p.135, Sukarno, *The Era of Confrontation* (Indonesia: Department of Information, 1965).

³³⁰ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 59.

emphasized social realism in their cultural productions and promoted the people's movement. In 1959, LEKRA launched its very first national conference.

Filmmaker and politician Djamalludin Malik organized the conference and, despite coming from a different political strand, afforded the PKI and its sympathizers, including Bachtiar Siagan, Amir Jusup, Kastari and S.F. Mendur a key place...³³¹ Just before its dissolution in 1965, LEKRA held its last national conference on the theme 'Literature and Revolutionary Art' on September 2, 1964 in Jakarta. An estimate of around five hundred members and sympathizers took part in the event. During the conference, LEKRA asserted that politics should be the main foundation of any creative and artistic work, including films, of course. The assembly agreed on five guidelines for creative and artistic works: "The unify, to expand and to improve, the quality of ideology and the quality of artistry, the revolutionary tradition and the contemporaries of revolution, individual creativity and the wisdom of the masses, and revolutionary realism and romanticism."³³²

Many Indonesians criticized LEKRA's core tenet. One of them was Nugroho Notosusanto, who would eventually become a key officer during Suharto's New Order administration. He asserted: "We all know what the communists, LEKRA included, meant by 'Politics is the Commander', that being that all creative activities in the field of art, literature, philosophy, etc. must be subject to the directives, decisions and prohibitions of the Party, i.e. the Communist Party. What is not in line, and especially what is against the Party line, is to immediately be prohibited and eradicated."³³³

³³¹ Ibid., p. 64.

³³² Ibid, p. 59.

³³³ Ibid., p. 59. [See Nugroho Notosusanto. *Bidang Sosial-Budaya dalam Rangka Ketahanan Nasional; Lembaga Sedjarah Hankam* (Jakarta: Department of Security and Defense, 1968), p. 12.

Certainly, this strong statement indicates the entwining of politics and culture in a decolonizing, newly independent state. The political strain became so severe that throughout the 1960s members of LEKRA not only produced films premised on their guidelines. It also condemned those made by right-leaning directors.³³⁴ More specific for directors, LEKRA members including Basuki Resobowo, Amir Pasaribu, and Bachtiar Siagan, became outwardly political in filmmaking and founded a new association called *Panita Seniman Untuk Film* (The Artists' Committee for Film). Sharing his views on PKI's engagement with the film industry, Salim Said notes:

“PKI began its political offensive with due consideration and the first sector it target was ‘culture’ and, more specifically, ‘film’. The choice of film as the starting point was apparently based on the consideration that the party had no steadfast enemies in the film world. Most artists were apolitical at best; moreover, the film world was in the midst of turmoil...Disorder in the film world, which increased with the closure of the studios, was paralleled by worsening conditions in the political sphere. The growing strength of PKI, garnered from its cooperation with Sukarno in opposing protests from MASYUMI, PSI, separatists and the army, soon made itself apparent in the film industry as well. Leftist newspaper and communist party sympathizers began to launch personal attacks on Usmar Ismail and Djamalludin Malik.”³³⁵

Said's remark not only describes the disarray in politics and film, it also reveals how intense Cold War clashes penetrated the film industry, causing *ad*

³³⁴ Heider, *Indonesian Cinema*, p. 17.

³³⁵ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, pp. 61-63.

hominem attacks against certain Indonesian directors. According to Djauhari Effendi, “There is a certain group, outsiders, exploiting artists for the specific purpose of raising havoc in the film world. Gradually they have shifted the focus of the upheaval from the closing of the film studios to the person of Djamalludin Malik, to other film personalities, and to management policies in their film companies. Round after round of slanderous accusations and insinuations are being hurled at them.”³³⁶

There was also a huge clamour to ban the screening of United States Information Service (USIS) shorts in Indonesia. In lieu of those, left-leaning Indonesians recommend the screening of brief documentary films about Sukarno’s visit to China and the Soviet Union.³³⁷ In July 1961, LEKRA promulgated a resolution demanding the Sukarno government disband The American Motion Picture Association of Indonesia. They assert that it “has a monopoly not only on the import of American and European films but a monopoly on Indonesian cinemas as well.”³³⁸ This tension escalated such that on May 9, 1964, the Committee for the Boycott of American Imperialist Films (PAPFIAS) was established. Left-leaning film directors and producers viewed American businesses and Hollywood as remnants of colonialism and imperialism, and thus, wanted them out of Indonesia. This scalding tension only fizzled out in 1965, with the outbreak of the communist purge.

Recognizing the significance of films in politics, the Sukarno government instructed government-owned banks to offer special financial assistance to Indonesian filmmakers. In an effort to institutionalize the film industry, it was placed under the authority of the Ministry of Information in March 1964. In this respect, the Sukarno

³³⁶ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 61

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

government's political manifesto also became a core tenet for art and film. As Sitor Situmorang pointed out: "MANIPOL must be our basic scenario. MANIPOL is a bundle of artistic dynamite which, with mental understanding followed by concrete social and artistic action, will act as a most explosive material for all forms of arts... As far as I know *Tangan Yang Kotor* (Dirty Hands), was the first Indonesian film to translate in consistent fashion the essence of Revolution, i.e. its social core (MANIPOL) into a work of art."³³⁹ This supports my previous argument regarding the prominence of the spirit of revolution in Indonesian films.

Even Usmar Ismail became a target of criticism from the PKI. In 1964, PERFINI requested some journalists and reporters attend the screening of Ismail's *Anak Perawan di Sarang Penjamun* (Trapped in a Robber's Lair). The film was loosely premised on a novel written by Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana. The story revolves around the love affair of Medasing and Sayu. The former is the leader of a group of bandits while the latter is the daughter of a rich businessman who was ransacked by Medasing's group. Sayu is found hiding and is taken back to the group's den.

As the story proceeds, Sayu realizes that regardless of the fact that Medasing exudes a fierce exterior, he is innately a good man. She is treated well in the gang's hideout and is permitted to do as she pleases. The relationship between the two develops until, in the end, Medasing decides to abandon his illicit ways and become integrated once again in society. After the exclusive press screening, various PKI members and sympathizers reacted negatively towards the film and criticized Ismail himself. They argued that Ismail's movie should be banned because of the fact that it was based on the novel of an author who had "deviated from the revolutionary path."³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

In another instance, the prominent left-leaning film director Bachtiar Siagan reproached Usmar Ismail for “leaving the Republican area to make movies in Dutch-owned studios.”³⁴¹

In response to the growing political tension a group of neutral artists issued the ‘Cultural Manifesto’ (Manifesto Kebudayaan) which was later known as MANIKEBU. These artists did not, as they mention in their carefully-worded manifesto, “regard any one sector of culture as superior to other sectors of culture. All sectors work together for this culture to the best of their ability.”³⁴² These artists challenged the Marxist ideal of culture as the only one valid for Indonesia. This was enough for them to be seen as opponents of the PKI. A day before the establishment of PAPFIAS, when President Sukarno banned circulation of the Manifesto, the months-long effort by the PKI against the Manifesto culminated in victory. This came as a great boost for PKI and its affiliates. In due course, even the term “Manikebu” was used by the PKI as an epithet against their political enemies irrespective of whether they supported the manifesto or not.

As mentioned, PKI affiliates also initiated a campaign to eradicate American films. This caused a drastic decrease of film screenings across the whole archipelago. Many movie houses were forced to close down as business was bad. Furthermore, there were not enough Indonesian films that could cater to the needs of the Indonesian populace. Despite the efforts of LEKRA and the PKI to lure the public away from Hollywood, nothing really worked. Films from China and the Soviet Union were seen

³⁴¹ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 70.

³⁴² Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 69.

as “nothing more than propaganda for foreign ideologies.”³⁴³ Said further opines, “Some of the films even go so far as to mock and insult religion and are, therefore, unacceptable to the majority of Indonesians who have their own philosophy of Panca Sila which exalts the existence of God.”³⁴⁴ This is noteworthy. While films served as an operational space where competing ideologies were portrayed, distorted, and challenged, the Indonesian public had an affinity for Hollywood. This was evident in the lower number of cinema goers when American films were getting less screenings in the country.

The films created an emerging geopolitical imagination that, eventually, was instrumental in the process of foreign relations. To illustrate, in Usmar Ismail’s film entitled *Krisis*, the main protagonist Jaka epitomizes Indonesia’s vision of a new world order dominated by different groups and communities. As Jaka realizes that after the war, his house has changed and he had to deal with the new occupants, Indonesia too, after acquiring independence, realized the necessity of respect, tolerance, and openness to other beliefs, cultures, and peoples both within its own territory and out in the international arena.

In the same way, Indonesian political leaders placed high regard for tolerance for diverse beliefs amidst the ideological battle of the Cold War. For instance, Hatta stressed that one of the objectives of Indonesia’s foreign policy was “to place emphasis on initiating good relations with neighbouring countries, the majority of which have in the past occupied a position similar to Indonesia and seek fraternity among nations through the realizations of the ideals enshrined in the Pancasila.” By 1964, Sukarno asserted a clear picture of his world view: “A new world of free, independent nations, a

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen*, p. 70.

new world of brotherhood of man, a new world of friendship, a new world of lasting peace, a new world where there does not exist exploitation of man by man or exploitation of nation by nation.”³⁴⁵ This coherent perspective eventually served as a focal point for the non-aligned movement and, in due course, formed a part of the basic tenets of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In the political milieu, the same questions also prevailed. Indonesia’s political pioneers, Sukarno and Hatta, who played seminal roles in the newly independent country’s domestic and international dealings, also shared the same ideological predilection as Ismail’s film. Despite the fact that there were ideological variations among different political groups during this period, upholding self-determination in the conduct of foreign affairs was a primary objective for all. In advocating nationalistic foreign policy, Hatta stated:

“When the Government stated that its conduct of foreign affairs would be in an “independent” manner, the underlying idea was to make it clear that, in face of the fact that there are two opposed trends in international circles which have given rise to two blocs – the Western bloc with the United States and its allies, and the Eastern bloc with its adherents – the Republic of Indonesia has decided to adopt an independent attitude in the sense that:

(a) It does not permanent take sides by pledging itself to either of the two blocs which are in controversy with each other;

³⁴⁵ Istana Negara, Djakarta, August 25, 1964.

(b) It does not pledge itself permanently to keep aloof or to remain neutral in every incident which may arise out of controversy between the two blocs.”³⁴⁶

As a state with newly obtained independence, Indonesia was still trying to define its role in the international arena and how to navigate the Cold War. The permutation of ideas in films were also reflected in the political dynamics of the country. The outbreak of the Cold War coincided with Indonesia’s nationalist movement and, consequently, the nascent formation of the Indonesian state. As explained by Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “the Cold War provided the overarching framework within which the competing ideologies fought for dominance, which at times also led to open conflicts.”³⁴⁷ Although it can be argued that the Cold War did not determine Indonesia’s national interests and objectives, it is safe to say that it had a huge impact on Indonesia’s domestic politics and foreign policy trajectories. After spending years under colonial supremacy, Indonesia refused to be pulled into the Cold War clash. Instead, Indonesia reacted to the bipolar international structure by insisting on an ‘independent’ policy and non-alignment.

This fervent desire to assert a nationalist foreign policy premised upon independence and sovereignty was re-asserted by Sukarno in his speech at the Afro-Asian Congress of Pediatrics in 1964. He maintained that the “Indonesian revolution is aimed at establishing...an independent Indonesian state. Independent, free from any bondage, free from any domination by other nations.” Along these lines, Hatta conveyed that, “the independence, sovereignty, and territory of the state will not be infringed upon, or threatened, and that the Republic of Indonesia does not become

³⁴⁶ Hatta, “Indonesia’s Foreign Policy,”

³⁴⁷ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, *Indonesia Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

involved in any armed conflict except for the defence of its independence and sovereignty against a direct attack launched from without or within.” As Iskandar, in Ismail’s film, navigates through life after the war and tries to independently ascertain how to adjust to the new Indonesian society he finds himself in, the chief foreign policy architects of the country asserted an autonomous and sovereign route in international affairs.

The need for tolerance, understanding, and openness to heterogeneity was one of the dominant ideological elements circulating in Southeast Asia. Certainly, this was seen frequently in the cinematic world across the states. Another aspect defined the outlook of Southeast Asian states towards other countries - one based on openness, mutual respect, and tolerance for cultural diversity. This ideological component was seen in Southeast Asia. Being a largely heterogeneous region and the states within also being characterized by a multiplicity of ethnic groups, languages, and religions, it was extremely de rigueur to inculcate a level of respect and tolerance for differences. Simultaneous with nation-building, Southeast Asian states placed high importance on accommodating the diversity both inside and out their own territorial boundaries.

B. FILIPINO COMMUNISTS AS HEROES

For the next two decades after the granting of independence by the Americans, the Philippines was preoccupied with securing political stability amidst armed insurrection and political coups. Coming out of the Second World War with almost no government funds, the country forged into re-building its economy and infrastructure. The Philippines initiated its nation-building experiment and developed its international relations and participation in global institutions. Nonetheless, several predicaments persisted. Election related violence and issues persisted. Graft and corruption seemed to

worsen. Anti-American sentiments escalated. The acquisition of independence itself left critical problems including back pay, war damage compensations, and political and ideological debates that scarred the mentality of people. Despite all of these, the Philippines confronted the Cold War with a ferocious revolutionary zeal and a predilection to advance national ideals, which resulted in a penchant for non-alignment.

Two things broadly characterize the Philippines Cold War strategy. On the one hand, in the larger frame of international relations, it was closely and publicly tied to the United States. This is understandable as the United States was perceived as the most strategic ally following the Second World War. As a new state, the Philippines had weak military forces. It relied on the United States for security. Moreover, the United States was the only major source of funds for rehabilitating the economy after the devastation of the war. On the other hand, the Philippines, exultant with its newly acquired independence after a long revolutionary struggle and acquiescence under American political tutelage, had placed high emphasis on self-determination and national interests. These two points are not necessarily contradictory. Throughout the Cold War, the Philippines positioned itself to balance its cordial relationship with the Americans and its own national interests. This is clearly seen in the way the Cold War and its clash of ideologies were perceived and interpreted in the Philippines. In the cinematic realm, this sort of dynamic relationship between the Philippines' national interests and loyalty to the United States is detectible. In representing the Cold War and the battle between communists and anti-communists, Philippine national cinema offers a multiplicity of images that challenges the seemingly binary and clear-cut categorization perpetuated by the West. There was no simple division between the communists and the anti-communists. In fact, as will be explained later on, the communist, in the Philippine context, is a Filipino nationalist pushed to choose the

revolutionary or armed way in order to attain a stable and good life. In this sense, the communist is not exactly an enemy. There are various films where the protagonist adheres to communist ideals for noble and nationalistic reasons, and they received a rather positive treatment.³⁴⁸

Shifting to the realm of politics and international relations, the same nuanced interpretation of the Cold War was also palpable in political rhetoric and discourse. Leading the country as Cold War tensions escalated, President Elpidio Quirino reflected on the Philippine worldview:

“You need not necessarily agree with the Indians, the Burmese, the Chinese, the Pakistanis, the Ceylonese, the Indonesians, or indeed the Filipinos, but you do need to know what makes them tick... You must understand the deep psychological scars left by the generations of a now-dead Western colonialism. You must understand the frame of mind of peoples who having thrown off foreign rule are flexing their muscles for the first time. You must understand the terrible tensions created by the jump, overnight, from the darkness of subjugation to the blinding sunlight of independence in a world of electronics and atomic energy. You must understand the grinding power of poverty, which has new meaning every mealtime to angry human beings who care little for ideological disputes when their stomachs are empty. You must understand the heritage of pride and resentment, the curious mixture of self-reliance and inferiority

³⁴⁸ Natalia Ma. Lourdes Morales, PhD, *The Foreign Policy of Elpidio Quirino: Professorial Chair Papers*, Paper presented for the 1994 Elpidio Quirino Professorial Chair Lecture at the University of the Philippines.

complex, the dreams of glory and the days of disappointment, the ambition and the fatalism, which are combined in the Asian world.”³⁴⁹

Placing high regard on accommodation and tolerance, Elpidio Quirino announced during the Honolulu Press Conference, “Let China go Communist. Let Japan go Communist. We don’t care. We will respect whatever form of government any of our Far Eastern neighbours choose to have... We are not Anti-Communist. We are Non-Communist. What we in the Philippines are interested in is our economic prosperity and our happiness.”³⁵⁰ Two key things need to be understood in Quirino’s statements. On the one hand, the Philippines recognized the deep historical baggage carried by postcolonial or decolonizing states. Quirino understood the pragmatic and immediate needs of newly independent countries wedged in between the clash of ideologies between the two big powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he understood that ideological tendencies are inimitable in societies and that they are embedded in the unique historical, economic, and socio-cultural premise of that society.

At the end of the day, what is apparent is that beneath the official political stance of the Philippines in the Cold War bipolarity, within its political and, as will be discussed later, in its cinematic milieu the clash of ideologies in the Cold War struggle was not as straightforward as it was deemed by the West. Many decolonizing states adopted communist ideals in their national revolutions and many contemporaneous insurrections adhered to the more pragmatic goals of a communist society. In the

³⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

³⁵⁰ Elpidio Quirino’s Inaugural Remarks delivered on December 30, 1949 cited in Natalia Morales, *The Foreign Policy Vision of Elpidio Quirino*, p. 7.

following films, the complexity of images and narratives pertaining to the Philippines Cold War strategy, non-alignment, and interpretations of communism are examined.

One of the rare pre-war films that survived is Octavio Silos' *Pakiusap* (Plea). The film was shot in the year 1940 while the country was under the Manuel Quezon era of the Commonwealth government. It is a story about an eternal love and the conflict surrounding every romantic story.³⁵¹ The film revolves around a beautiful barrio lass named Amparing. She is being torn between numerous suitors because of her stunning and magnificent beauty. The most prominent of her suitors are father and son, Don Andres and Enrico, who badly want to gain her attention and endearment. Don Andres used every trick he has in his sleeve to send his son far away from the eyes of his love Amparing. He used every wit and treachery he has in his attempt to secure the love of the beautiful maiden.

Enrico on the other hand, used only his pure intentions and true love as Amparing grew fonder and fonder of him as days passes by. Their love grew deeper even more intimate amidst the eyes of the sly Don Andres. Every scene of the movie was imitations of American romantic stories. The plot of love that conquers the world, the American cinematic formula was evident and even the touch of musical numbers within the movie were borrowed from the Hollywood blueprints. Amparing might be a representation of the beauty of the Philippine islands and its richness. Don Andres might be the representation of the former colonizer Spain, as he tried to gain the love, even through the darkest of means, of the beautiful main character. Enrico, Amparing's knight in shining armour, symbolizes the United States, the hero of the damsel in distress; the hero that would fight till the end for his long true and pure love. It can be argued that the story is an imagery of the "true love" of the United States and the

³⁵¹ *Pakiusap* (Plea), streaming, directed by Octavio Silos (Philippines: 1940).

Philippines. It is to show this relationship that would emerge victor against every dark corner of the world. A true and real partnership that would stand the test of time and conquer anyone who would stand against it; it might be the playful imagery of the story that shows the perfect love of Luzviminda and Uncle Sam.

The 1950 film *Genghis Khan* is another example of a Philippine film that reveals a perspective of the world through the Filipino lens. Having discussed the film's summary in the previous chapter, I will just emphasize here that through the main character, Manuel Conde's film explores the unique historical greatness of in the non-Western world. Confronted with the deluge of Hollywood movies, Conde's film provides a glimpse of how Filipinos view the world. Temujin's heroism and image not only contends against Western perspective, it also indicates the prominence given by Filipinos to non-western cultures. Glorifying non-western heritage and history is a reflection of the tendency of the Philippines to circumvent the dominant western-dictated framework of the Cold War. Instead, the country emphasizes the necessity of looking at other contexts. In this case, the Filipinos interpreted non-western culture through their own perspective. As mentioned, *Genghis Khan* is an expression of identity, the Filipino touch, against the deluge of Western cinema. Furthermore, it offers an alternative to Western-dominated structures by underscoring Asian heroism.

The Philippines also had to contend with the Communist-led Hukbalahap. The group started as an armed resistance against the Japanese until left-leaning leaders took the reins of the group after the war. Their objective was to establish a new republic for the people and instigate a social revolution to reach a communist utopia. According to Jose Lava, "Should they succeed, the diplomatic revolution in Manila from the Western to the Communist alignment would parallel the change in China when Mao tse-tung

replaced Chiang Kai-shek.”³⁵² The election of Ramon Magsaysay to the presidency weakened the Communist movement in the Philippines, but the hard core continued to be active both in guerrilla warfare in the jungles and swamps and in the effort to infiltrate important groups in the country. Very little help reached the Philippines from external communist groups. But, the ideological support remained constant. Hukbalahap propaganda reflected the usual Communist approach of accusing the United States of being an imperialist power bent on starting a third world war.”³⁵³ Criticism has been directed especially at the American military bases in the archipelago. In June, 1957, President Garcia signed a bill outlawing the Communist Party in the Republic.”³⁵⁴

Another film that reflects the Philippines’ more nuanced view of communism is Lamberto Avellana’s magnum opus, *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay*. Avellana relates the narrative of Carding, a former Filipino guerrilla who fought the Japanese, as he struggles with his new life after the war. In trying to rebuild his life with his wife, he worked the land, pinning his hope on the belief that his destitution would be alleviated by his “backpay” for fighting during the war. But his friend, a communist guerrilla commander cheats him of his backpay so as to intensify Carding’s anger against the Philippine government. When his land, his only source of income, is sequestered due to his inability to pay his loans, Carding loses all hope. With the persuasion of his communist friend, he joins the Huks.

³⁵² Jose Lava, *Basic National Problems and an Outline of Viable Solutions*, January 14, 1954.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, p. 99.

The Cold War struggle is portrayed in its local context with critical details. For instance, Carding's decision to join the Huks/local communist movement was not motivated by his adherence to communist ideology. Instead, Avellana depicts him as a nationalist who chose armed struggle because of the failure of the government to deliver its promises of land reform and backpay. When he was captured and sent to a resettlement area given to peasants and Huks who surrendered, he finally decided to make a living for his himself and his family. In the particular situation of the Philippines, the struggle between the government and the communists was not so much an ideological battle but a product of the twin dilemma of the government's incompetence and the enduring, seemingly unending poverty of many Filipinos.

This image of the Philippines as poverty-stricken and full of gangs is definitely not far from the realities of the country. This enormous problem was one of the factors that sealed the close partnership between the Philippines and the United States even after the announcement of independence. The Philippine economy suffered greatly during the Japanese occupation. Without any other viable option, the country looked toward the United States for support and aid. On April 30, 1946, the Bell Trade Act was signed and sealed the economic relations between the two countries. For the next 28 years, trade between the US and the Philippines was regulated, the Philippine peso was pegged to the US dollars, and a parity clause bestowed the rights to Americans in developing the natural and mineral resources of the country.³⁵⁵

In the film *Huling Mandirigma*, yet again, the emphasis to pursue peace and stability amidst the chaos and turbulence of the Cold War by through going back to the local heritage and ethnic composition of the Philippines. Through the main character, Malik, the director presents a more nuanced notion of communism – one that seeks to

³⁵⁵ Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia* p. 64.

find peace and prosperity and abhors violence. Confronted with a serious threat, Malik was only compelled to use force. In the end, he was able to achieve what he initially wanted for his tribe – the opportunity for modernity and progress. In the realm of Cold War politics, the film reveals that behind the ideology of communism, in the context of the Philippines, was a desire for peace and modernity. In the larger Cold War perspective, communists are characterized as evil and prone to violence. However, in this particular film, the last warrior, the hero of the movie, in fact, pursues peace only to be driven to utilize force to achieve his noble goals. This reflects the political reality of the Philippines during the Cold War as well, particularly the fact that it had to officially align itself to the United States in order to secure its national interests. It also alludes to the Philippine's multifarious notion of communism as an ideology.

Almost three years after the Korean War, its legacy remained in the minds of Filipinos. As an American ally, then President Elpidio Quirino approved the sending of Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK) that reached Korea in August 1950. The contingent was comprised of around 7,000 members and played a crucial role in the Battle of Yultong as well as the Battle of Hill Eerie. To put it simply, in the Korean War, the Philippines displayed its official stance concerning the Cold War. This does not entail that the Korean War was seen in black and white – in point of fact, Filipinos reaction towards it reflected the variegated interpretations of Cold War anxieties.

In a classic post-war Philippine film entitled *Anak Dalita*, the Korean War is utilized as fundamental background within which the narrative of exploring Cold War rhetoric starts. We see how the Philippines' direct involvement in it was remembered in a kind of ambivalent way. On the one hand, the Korean War veteran is presented as a hero coming back to the Philippines. On the other hand, his fate afterward was

beleaguered with one misery after the other. As mentioned in the Chapter Four, *Anak Dalita* is a story that explores the experiences of a Korean War veteran who returned to the Philippines a hero but was instantaneously confronted with the sudden death of his mother and the appalling situation of the country. As he finds himself living in the slums and in a hopeless situation, he was pushed to illegal activities. In a dramatic twist, the hero turns to a life of crime to the endemic poverty of the post-war situation. The main protagonist eventually realizes the need to put an end to his illicit acts and, in the end, chooses the rightful path.

Examined within the context of the Philippines participation in the Korean War, the film exposes the negative implications of supporting the Americans. The Korean War was not one that directly concerned the Filipinos. Their partnership with the Americans dragged them into the skirmishes. Nevertheless, upon returning, the hero finds himself in a decaying nation beset by various conundrums. In other words, the war did not benefit the Philippine nation. At home front, the battle against poverty, graft and corruption, and political debility, among others, remained unresolved.

In the realm of Philippine foreign policy, the 1950s saw the increasing involvement of the Philippines in regional and international efforts in Cold War issues. During this period, the Philippines struggled to re-define its position within the broader context of the Cold War as a close ally (or more accurately as a dependent) of the United States and as a decolonizing Southeast Asian state. As the films suggest, the image of communism that was known in the Philippines was rather nuanced. The protagonists in *Anak Dalita* and *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* are portrayed as nationalists, not as true-blooded communists. They are painted as heroes who had to turn to violence in order to fight for the needs of their family; to fight for the right of decent living. The films depict the Cold War not as an unyielding struggle between

communists and non-communists but rather, as the failure of the state to provide for the people.

These films depict the complex process of redefining the status, identity, and strategic position of the Philippines at the height of the Cold War. What becomes clear is the innate effort by Filipinos to redefine the Cold War based on their terms and not be swayed by American interpretations. This entails a certain degree of self-assertion despite the binding alliance with the United States. Caught in between its dependence to the United States for economic and military aid and its desire to determine its own independent course in international relations, the Philippines during this period was simultaneously strengthening its relations with other countries, particularly with its neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. To put it plainly, Philippine foreign policy was founded upon intimate ties with the United States of America as well as an adherence to the notion of collective security in the region, support for nationalist movements, establishment of cooperation and ties with other Asian countries, and adherence to the rules of the United Nations.

In March 14, 1947, an agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America was signed giving rights to the US to retain the use of military bases in the Philippines for a period of 99 years. Following the agreement, no third state could acquire the same rights without the consent of both the Philippines and the US. The Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) became heavily involved in the Philippines. This military agreement was central to the overarching foreign policy of the Philippines. As a newly independent state that experienced the remnants of the war, the Philippines was in no position to set up its own defence system. It was dependent on the US for military aid. In accordance with the military

agreement, the Philippines was essentially tied to the American security system.³⁵⁶ While this is true, it did not prevent the Philippines from constructing its own view of the international system. As explained above, Philippine national cinema revealed the proclivity of the Philippines to render communism and the communists through their own lens. The end result was therefore a more composite interpretation of communism.

While recognizing that the Philippine presented itself as a reliable ally to the United States – and in nominal terms, it was given its military support during the Korean War and the Vietnam War, it is also palpable in films that the Philippines had a more complex interpretation of the Cold War and communism. Contrary to the clear-cut bipolarity projected by the United States, in the Philippines, the Cold War was experienced, seen, and depicted through their own lens calibrated by their views on revolution and resolute nationalist inklings. The end result was a strong inclination to champion national interests and profess some form of non-alignment. At this point you will probably object that there is a contradiction in this assessment. While it is true that strategically, the Philippines tilted to the United States, their partnership was perceived and interpreted in a motley of ways by the Filipinos and the films reveal these strands. The principle of non-alignment juxtaposed with nationalism and unfinished revolution, was a coherent ideological facet that is featured prominently in the strategic culture of the Philippines, as reflected in cinema.

C. HANG TUAH: INDEPENDENT, ANTI-COMMUNIST, NATIONALIST

³⁵⁶*Department of Foreign Affairs Treaty Series*, Vol. 1, December 1948, pp. 144-160; See also Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 62-63.

At the end of the Second World War, the British forces returned to the Malayan territories and ordered the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army to surrender their weapons and integrate back into society. The new-found military strength of these soldiers intensified by their war efforts led to the continued the struggle towards independence against the British. As mentioned above, MPAJA consisted of mostly ethnic Chinese members. Soon after, with the leadership of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), war broke out between the Malay and British forces, on the one hand, and the MCP (through their armed group, the Malayan National Liberation Army) and Chinese members, on the other hand. As in the case of other Southeast Asian countries, the clash of ideologies of the Cold War was coherently observed in Malaya/Malaysia.

The fighting between the two sides reached a full-blown skirmish, the Malayan Emergency. The initial sparks of struggle began in 1948 and concluded temporarily in 1960. In 1967, the leader of the Malayan Communist Party renewed the fighting. Malaya's economy deteriorated as a consequence of the Japanese Occupation. Rubber and tin plantations were forced to close due to the war. Farming and agriculture were disrupted. Widespread unemployment, inflation, food shortages, and displacement were among the most critical problem. These economic woes resulted in disgruntled masses and soon enough, several protests were launched. One example is the protest instigated by the MCP on January 29, 1946. At the same time, there was a major push from the British colonial authorities to revitalize the Malayan economy. The United States supported the agenda. They believed that the economic recovery of Malaya was crucial not only for Malaya itself but for the fight against the spread of communism in Asia as well as in the rehabilitation of Japanese economy.

Beyond the political and military scheme, combatting communism in Malaya also meant the utilization of cultural materials and products. The British government,

through the Malayan Film Unit, employed short propaganda films such as *Abu Nawas* (1954) as a part of the psychological warfare against the communist cells in the country. Together with films produced by the American government, these were screened by roving cinemas operated by the Information Department before the main features. These shorts were meant to sway popular opinion about the communists and depict them as nothing more than immoral and deranged bandits. Cold War rhetoric permeated Malayan/Malaysian cinematic settings. The Malayan Communist Party members comprised most of the members of the Malayan People's anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). Due to their strong involvement against the Japanese, MCP became very earnest in pushing for independence and the expulsion of the British. Their clamour compelled the British to ban their party. This tension is reflected in films. A case in point, the Malayan Film Unit produced a wide array of films representing the members of MCP as terrorists and as threats to the stability of the whole of Malaya. In this respect, at the height of the Malaysian Emergency, these films became crucial to the psychological warfare instigated by the British.

For instance, Hassan Muthalib explains how the 1957 film *Abu Nawas* (The Villager) conjures a distinctive image of the communists as a real menace to society. They use despicable strategies to lure the population to their side, including ransacking towns, looting, and coercion of civilians. Muthalib remarks that the film is intended for Malay and Chinese viewership and that it perpetuates the racial stereotypes prevalent at that time. On the one hand, the Chinese are presented as the ones living in cities and big towns. On the other hand, the Malays are supposedly more rural and they reside in villages and countryside. That is also to say that race is intertwined with economic and social categorization.

One of the most distinctive features of Malayan/Malaysian strategic culture vis-à-vis the Cold War: the prevailing theme of racial stereotypes intersecting with anti-communist efforts. Although the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia was also strongly associated with communism, the widespread purging and killing targeting them only started with the breakdown of Sukarno's power – this is immortalized in the communist purge of 1965 to 1966. While the campaign for independence was driven mainly by the formerly MPAJA, comprised of ethnic Chinese, this was not the case in Indonesia. Certainly, the Indonesian revolution witnessed the participation of ethnic Chinese as well but it was not as prominent or decisive as in the case of Malaya/Malaysia. In the Philippines, racial categories also seemed to be not a major factor. This particularity is quite revealing. It reflects the nature of Malaya's society and emerging nation that it was to become – a nation that conjured an image of a society fragmented along racial divide. In such a society, although each group has a somewhat particular place in the society and it can only continue to persist in relative peace and stability through tolerance, and quite ironically, non-alignment.

The Malayan Communist Party was constantly presented in adverse images. When the British banned the MCP in 1948, they declared guerrilla warfare and campaigned for independence. This conflict characterized political and social volatility in the country upon the conclusion of the Second World War. As noted by Hamilton-Hart, "Officially, the Malayan Emergency lasted until 1960, but the insurgency is very much alive in foreign policy circles. As noted by a Malaysian foreign policy academic, "The strongest ideological compulsion driving [Malaysia's] domestic and foreign policies derive from the bitter experience with the communist insurgency from 1948 until 1960."³⁵⁷ Certainly, the level of fighting that transpired between the Malay and

³⁵⁷ Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions*, p. 95; Nathan 1998, p. 50

British forces, on the one hand, and the communists, on the other hand, significantly affected the way Malaya/Malaysia perceived and defined the broader global Cold War struggle. Malaya/Malaysia was *prima facie* non-aligned but it nevertheless gravitated strongly towards the anti-communist camp. This reflects the nuances and complexities of the Malaya/Malaysia's approach to international relations.

What ensued was fervent psychological warfare against the MCP and the communists, in general, which dragged from the early 1950s up until late 1960s. Left-leaning authors were arrested and their publications either banned or seized. Cheah Boon Keng describes this period as the “intellectually arid atmosphere that existed during the Malayan Emergency.”³⁵⁸ That is to say, the British managed to control and pacify the production of anti-colonial discourses across the country. If we take into account the mainstream view of Malaysian history, at this time, narratives were mostly shaped by the official colonial narratives and scholars.

In the wake of independence, local historians and scholars explored other alternative interpretations of the nation's history (and many still within the question of Malaysian nationalism and nation-building). But “mainstream versions did not revise the portrayal of the MCP.” The Malaysian government's denigration and continuous attacks against the MCP persisted. At this point, it is highly imperative to point out that this process of vilification of the communists in Malaysia, in fact, serves as a crucial part of the process of nation-building itself. As Nathan suggests, “Defeating internal communism and containing if not defeating international communism became a cardinal principle of strategy for Malaysian decision-makers entrusted with the security

³⁵⁸ Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions*, p. 96; Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p 50, 48.

of the nation.”³⁵⁹ The very existence and survival of the nation rested on their fight against communism.

The government constantly informed the people of the threats and terror committed by the communists. Thus, creating an image of enemy within – and in due course, strengthening the inward pull among the broader population. In 1969, a government report claims that communists are en route to a so-called path of violence to absolute power. It also cautioned the people that there were many communist emissaries in common spaces such as universities and trade unions.³⁶⁰ Most of the time, issues of nation-building collided and conflated with Cold War rhetoric. Although this is true in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia, Malaysia’s history is more convoluted given the strength of the MCP, the size of the ethnic Chinese population, as well as the historical racial hierarchy that pervaded the country’s colonial and postcolonial context. This can be seen in both the predominant political rhetoric as well as the films of that period. Hamilton-Hart observes that:

“Malaysia’s vociferously anti-communist first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, frequently conflated domestic Chinese, the CPM, and communist China. British counterinsurgency propaganda also emphasized the role of China as the guiding force behind Malayan communism and frequently left it unclear whether “Chinese” was meant to signify ethnic Chinese in Malaya or the PRC. The connection

³⁵⁹ Nathan, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* p. 204.

³⁶⁰ Government of Malaysia, 1969.

between domestic communism and China that was repeated in official statements from the 1950s through the 1970s continues to surface.”³⁶¹

As Nathan maintains, “For Malaysia, the strongest ideological compulsion driving its anti-communist domestic and foreign policies was the bitter experience with the communist insurgency from 1948 until 1960.”³⁶² This is the reason why the expansion of political power of the Maoist revolutionary group in Mainland China was viewed as an indication of a growing threat not just in Malaya/ Malaysia but also in the whole of Southeast Asia. He continues, “The presence of a sizeable ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia fuelled official concern about their potential role as fifth columnists in the service of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and the Communist Party of China (CPC).”³⁶³

As discussed earlier, the Malayan communist group represents the most visible and aggressive anti-colonial force. In fact, one of its core aims was “to carry on the struggle for national liberation, formulate a military program for the overthrow of imperialism and feudal aristocracy and to establish the Soviet Republic of Malaya by the coordinated efforts of the proletariat and peasantry.”³⁶⁴ When the Malayan Emergency broke out, from the perspective of the communists, they were fighting a war for the independence of Malaya and, thus, the end of British colonialism. Yet again, this divergence of interpretation only mirrors the fluidity of the ideology of communism in the context of Southeast Asia. As in the case of Indonesia and the

³⁶¹ Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions*, p. 113; Nathan, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p. 515; see also Tunku Abdul Rahman’s speeches in 1961.

³⁶² Nathan, “National Security Conceptions and Foreign Policy Behaviour: Transcending the Dominant Race Paradigm?”

³⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 204.

³⁶⁴ Nathan, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p. 204; Hanrahan (1971), p. 43.

Philippines, what we see in the situation of Malaya/Malaysia was the morphing of nationalist tendencies and communist ideology. This is a far cry from the American and Western perspective of communism.

In the realm of cinematic images and narratives, myriad images and interpretations of the Cold War and communism are depicted as well. Among the films examined in this study, one of the most prominent tendencies is the assertion of national interests and the advocacy of non-alignment. *Penarik Becha*, P. Ramlee's directorial debut, depicts the class and economic grief prevalent in Malaya/Malaysia. The trickshaw driver reflects the situation of many individuals and families in the country during the turbulent period of the Cold War, decolonization, and the Malayan Emergency. Viewed through a Cold War lens, the film explores class dynamics through the love story between the poor trickshaw driver and the daughter of a rich Malay businessman and the need for self-reliance in navigating the turbulent Cold War period.

In a series of conflicts, the trickshaw driver had to prove his own strength. He had work hard to be worthy of the love of the rich woman but also be had to be self-reliant in order to provide for himself and his mother. Several shots in the film focus on the state of the trickshaw driver's house – a meagre shanty that looked like it was about to collapse. As such, he was compelled to rely on his own wit and strength in order to survive. According to Amir Muhamad, “Just as he needs to be self-reliant, Malaya was also on the road to self-governance. The Alliance led by Tunku Abdul Raman would be contesting in the first nationwide elections the same year. The British wanted to see how much support they had before granting Independence.”³⁶⁵ Nationalism and independence were both interrogated and explored in this particular movie. Beyond

³⁶⁵ Amir Muhammad, p. 95.

that, the strategic culture of non-alignment is projected throughout the film. In the process of establishing an independent Malaya/Malaysia, the necessity of concentrating on their own capacity and interests became even more significant. Through the character of the protagonist, the humble trickshaw driver, we see the weight given to non-alignment – to not rely or align with the rich in order to prove himself worthy. Instead, the film emphasizes to look inward and make use of one’s own assets and interests.

The thrust towards non-alignment can also be seen through the character of the Saadiah – the rich man’s daughter. She contests class hierarchy by choosing to be with the trickshaw driver. From her seemingly sheltered life, she transcends the class boundaries and runs away from her home in order to escape being coerced to marry Ghazali. The daughter, once again, displays an act of resistance to her father’s authority. Likewise, despite fostering cordial diplomatic relations with the British, Malaya/Malaysia managed to sustain its preference for non-alignment. This preference eventually was solidified in 1963 through the ratification of the Manila Accord, which states:

“The Ministers were of one mind that the three countries share a primary responsibility for the maintenance of the stability and security of the area from subversion in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their respective national identities, and to ensure the peaceful development of their respective countries and of their region, in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples.”³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ “Manila Accord,” Signed at Manila, July 31, 1963, date last accessed, April 12, 2016. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20550/volume-550-I-8029-English.pdf>,

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the film *Hang Tuah*, starring P. Ramlee. I have expounded on the nationalistic messages embedded in the transforming of this Malay legend into the cinematic realm. The film emphasizes not only the rich tradition and heritage of the Malays but also the values and strength of the Malay community. The hero eventually goes on to travel to different places in combatting evil forces. The main character, Tuah epitomizes the highest icon of Malay culture and tradition. It is quite fitting then that it was P. Ramlee, the man who would eventually become the most important icon in Malay film industry, who played the part.

Analysed against the backdrop of the Cold War and the struggle against communist groups in Malaya, the film *Hang Tuah* reflects the determination to rely on the Malay strength. In his struggle, Hang Tuah valiantly subdues his enemies. In the same way, Malaya/Malaysia was committed to asserting its national interests and not being pushed to alliance with any side. The only genuine side in this case was the Malay side. It is also salient to underline the “famous oath attributed to Han Tuah the legend, ‘Takken Melayu hilang di dunia (The Malays will never vanish from this world.)’ is nowhere present in the movie. This line has since been appropriated by the ethnonationalists of UMNO...”³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this statement captures the core tenet of the film as it conjures the high regard placed on the character of Hang Tuah by the Malays. The character himself is the apogee of Malay pride and inner strength. Amidst the tumultuous situation in Malaya/Malaysia with the internal communist, anti-colonial struggle, and decolonization on one side and the bigger scope of the Cold War on the other side, Hang Tuah affirms Malaya/Malaysia’s thrust toward self-determination and autonomy in international relations and the emergent strategic culture of non-alignment it shares with the Philippines and Indonesia.

³⁶⁷ Amir Muhammad, p. 100.

By early 1960s, Malayan/Malaysian films persist to foreshadow non-alignment and self-rule. P. Ramlee's 1962 film entitled *Ibu Mertuaku* suggests the unrelenting the unrelenting process to poise in between two clashing sides of the Cold War. The theme of non-alignment can also be seen P. Ramlee's film entitled *Madu Tiga* (Two Wives). The story revolves around a rich business man, Jamil, married for twelve years to Latifah, the daughter of his business partner. Realising that his marriage to her has gone stale, he decides to take on a second (younger) wife, Hasnah, in secret. He throws a big party lasting three nights, but Latifah finds out about it and surprises him on the third night, causing a big fight. Jamil runs away from the party for three nights, not returning to any of his wives.

Latifah's father, who secretly approves of his second marriage, helps him to hatch a plan that would appease both wives. He pretends to have met an accident, and returns home to his first wife and says he has divorced his 2nd wife. Similarly, he goes to his 2nd wife and says that he has instead divorced his first wife. Jamil returns to work, and Latifah's father also helps in the plan by telling each wife that Jamil has to work overtime at the office 3/4 nights a week and as such will not be home. Jamil then goes to collect debts owed by an old man (Pak Ali). There he meets Rohani, Pak Ali's daughter, and quickly realises that he wants her as his third wife. A wedding is arranged, and he moves Pak Ali and Rohani to a big house by the sea. By chance, Latifah and Hasnah meet at a jewellery shop. They burst out into a big fight when they realise that they are still married to the same person. Rohani, who also happened to be there, tries to stop them from fighting and plays the role of a mediator. She reminds them that they are strong independent women who should not be fighting over a man. She also invites them to her seaside home. They agree to part on civil terms.

Hasnah and Latifah end up visiting Rohani's home. There they find out that Rohani is also married to Jamil. Although enraged, Rohani reminds the women to direct their anger towards Jamil instead, who is really the one at fault. They chase the fleeing Jamil to a bridge, where in desperation Jamil jumps but is met with a muddy puddle. He surrenders and admits to his mistakes and asks for divorce from them. However, no one really wants to divorce him, because they still love him. Rohani then suggests that Jamil shares his time with his 3 wives equally. They all agree to live peacefully together. Similar to the case of the Philippines and Indonesia, it is evident that Malayan/Malaysian films placed high regard on maintaining peaceful existence and an independent course in politics.

Despite the variance in the official stance as well as in the *prima facie* alliance of these countries, there remained a shared penchant for self-determination – for autonomy in navigating the Cold War and in interpreting the clash between communists and anti-communists. Films from Indonesia reveal the imperative of a strictly independent foreign policy. This was eventually captured in the participation of Indonesia during the Bandung Conference in 1955. Though Suharto stood with the anti-communists and began the widespread purge of communists and their sympathizers in 1965, Indonesia's non-aligned status remained strong as ultimately reflected by Indonesia's participation in the ASEAN and the declaration of the end of *Konfrontasi* against Malaya/Malaysia.

Although officially aligned with the United States the Philippine films reveal that the Cold War and the discord between communism and anti-communism were perceived in a more complex way than the clear-cut view of Westerners. The movies indicate that the communists themselves were not bad – they were not exactly a threat to the Philippine nation. In point of fact, they were portrayed as nationalists forced to

take up arms in order to continue the struggle for development, peace, and social equality. The ideal Filipino could be a nationalist turned communists who eventually went back to society and worked for the nation. In this respect, ideological commitment is more elastic and changeable – one uses it in order to suit one’s context and conveniently takes it off once the need vanishes. What appears to be focal nevertheless is the proclivity towards an autonomous path in international relations and to uphold non-alignment within the Cold War chaos.

Offering an altogether unique context, Malaya/Malaysia was not even a full-pledged independent state during this period of the Cold War and the films taken into consideration in this study reflect the tendency to maintain a degree of independence. The films advance a cultural narrative of precluding total submission or conformity to Western geopolitical trajectory. There is a coherent theme that comes through, again and again, in Malayan/Malaysian films on the prominence of the national interest and autonomy. In the context of the Cold War, this was translated into the inclination for non-alignment. Despite the irrevocable influence of the British colonizers, once Malaya/Malaysia was out of the former’s arch of power, the leitmotif of non-alignment only became more clear-cut with the country’s momentous participation in the establishment of ASEAN.

Epilogue

From the Cold War to ASEAN Regionalism

“...perceiving is not enough. It is how the past is used that matters...’look out for the ways perceptions might have determined uses’, as well as ‘for the times when the way the past had been used had delimited the range of perception’.”
Wang Gungwu

“For the founding states, the Declaration was essentially an expression of their determination not to allow their disputes to develop into conflict...avoid getting dragged into the quarrels of the great powers then jockeying for the position in Southeast Asia, and thus seek to take the regional destiny into their collective hands.”
Rodolfo Severino

In September 2002, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies organized a two-day conference entitled “Nation-building Histories: Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.” Various scholars were invited to engage in challenging discussions on the processes of nation-building in the countries mentioned including the issues, strategies, approaches, and concepts they employed. One of the most revealing conclusions from their exchanges was that Southeast Asian states only shared very few commonalities with regards to “broad generalizations about overcoming colonialism and building nation-states on more or less Western models.”³⁶⁸ This conclusion is quite revealing. As a conglomeration of states previously under the auspices of Western colonizers, postcolonial Southeast Asian regimes greatly varied in their domestic and foreign political trajectories.

Although many scholars have established that prior to the arrival of the Westerners, there were vibrant commercial exchanges, cultural flows, and human mobility within the region, the arrival of colonialism greatly diminished this. The

³⁶⁸ Wang Gungwu, ed. *Nation-building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, pp. 2-3.

spread of colonialism, and their employment of *divide et impera* approach, pushed Southeast Asian societies to be isolated from one another. As a consequence, their experiences of acquiring self-determination and the contexts of their state formation processes were disparate as well.

Indonesia, backed by its Japanese-trained military forces, o launched a national uprising against the Dutch. Filipinos' nationalist quest began in the late 19th century, but was truncated by the arrival of the Americans. Malaya's state formation took a relatively diplomatic and peaceful route. These divergences, although crucial to the development of the nature of regionalism in Southeast Asia, were also complemented by the three ideological facets that characterize the shared strategic cultures that emerged in the region, which were discussed in-depth in the last three chapters. Needless to say, the colonial regimes as well as the nature of these state's anti-colonial movements, in essence, determined the profile of what eventually became Southeast Asian nations.

In his analysis of contemporary Southeast Asian culture and politics, Joel Kahn emphasized not only the diversity within the region but also the impact of cultural variance in states' political configuration. He remarked:

“Contrary to the impression generated by the majority of observers of contemporary Southeast Asia – of a region whose peoples are dedicated entirely to the single goal of economic development – matters of cultural are never far down anyone's agenda. Against the presumption of an earlier generation of “modernization” theorists and political economists, it seems to be that cultural particularistic rather than cosmopolitan goals have come to the fore for a large number of Southeast Asians. There are these days no national leaders who can

avoid, even if they wanted to, cultural issues, most articulating visions of a future shaped by the twin goals of economic growth and moral or cultural integrity, rather than either one of these on its own. And no nation in the region can credibly claim cultural homogeneity. Everywhere, the evidence of cultural diversity is overwhelming, if only because it is forcibly brought to our attention either by political elites, or by the spokespersons for groups disempowered by race, culture, religion, gender or distance from the political centre...it is undeniable that the culturalization of the political landscape, as well as of everyday life for the majority of Southeast Asians, is as much a fact of life in the region as it is elsewhere in the world.”³⁶⁹

Kahn concurs that the contour of Southeast Asian politics is greatly affected and even contingent upon the cultural dynamics of the region. This dissertation illuminates one facet of the intersection and interconnection between politics and culture by examining strategic culture in cinema. This study has cogently established that Southeast Asian national cinemas following the Second World War reflected the ideological maelstrom during that period. National cinemas put forward a cultural narrative about anti-colonialism, independence, and nation-building that produced, affirmed, and reinforced the Southeast Asian strategic culture of non-alignment.

This research demonstrates that national cinemas in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia did not develop in isolation from one another. There were transnational ties that facilitated a shared course of development, mobility of technology, ideas, style, and narratives, and more importantly, served as a prelude to eventual regional integration and the establishment of ASEAN. Moreover, national

³⁶⁹Joel Kahn, *Introduction in Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, pp. 1-2.

cinemas provided the platform within which the ideological facets of Southeast Asian strategic culture were portrayed, contested, and eventually upheld. These ideological elements, as mentioned, constitute the founding principles of ASEAN. More specifically, what came to be known as the “ASEAN way” was a product of the ascendant ideological components of the emerging strategic culture in the region.

The transnational linkages and connections in Indonesian, Philippines, and Malayan/Malaysian film industries were previously discussed. I have illustrated how parallels and connections among these three states’ national cinema fostered a shared outlook about their decolonization and Cold War experiences. These transnational networks operated as conduits for a complex process of simultaneously advancing national cinematic narratives while at the same time fostering a sense of familiarity and shared ideas with the rest of the nascent states in the region.

Three fundamental ideological streams are prominently evident and recurring in the films were examined. Foremost of all, Southeast Asian films reflected the nation-states’ initial focus on anti-colonialism and their independence campaigns. Consequently, cinematic discourse paved the way for a shift towards nation-building. This trend followed the changes in the political attitudes and outlooks in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya/Malaysia. From an anti-colonial stance, there was a shift towards nationalist sentiments and expressions accentuating the construction of a unified, stable, secure, and autonomous nation. The fresh memory of the revolutionary struggle and the quest for independence permeated the cinematic milieu. Coming out of the throes of Western political domination, most Southeast Asian states have experienced, in varying degrees, the brunt of revolutionary movements and armed independence struggles.

Films fit into the framework of nation-building. The process of nation-building was an immediate and imperative project for the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaya/Malaysia. Soon after they gained independence from their colonial masters, the task of imagining and constructing the nation and transforming each and every citizen into national citizens began too. In this regard, films project a wide spectrum of what ought to be the ideal citizen in the postcolonial and newly independent state. In Indonesia, the national ideology of Pancasila and the effort to build a unified nation despite the socio-cultural plurality found a place in cinematic narratives as well.

Nonalignment – the core principle of ASEAN and the region’s strategic culture – and its cinematic representations were also previously discussed. Films at the height of the Cold War served as an operating space where the communist “threat” was identified, interrogated, and confronted. As reflected in films, Indonesia was overtly and quite stridently non-aligned (although during the Suharto regime, a widespread crackdown and genocide of suspected members of the communist party (PKI) was implemented in 1965). As a part of the American alliance system in Asia and the Pacific, the Philippines was anti-communist while at the same time advocating an independent and non-aligned foreign policy course. Malaysia was *prima facie* non-aligned but gravitated towards the anti-communist camp.

From a broader perspective, the Southeast Asian strategic culture of non-alignment was already in its embryonic form even before the setting up of ASEAN. Despite various times when the Bandung Principles have been ignored and violated, the Conference nevertheless provided the ideological foundation of international relations in the region. In 1961, the Belgrade Conference was held. It drew upon the ideology of the Bandung Conference and formed the Nonaligned Movement (NAM). With twenty-

five participating states, the NAM took on a policy of security equidistance between the competing Cold War powers.

In 1963, the budding strategic culture shared by Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia was translated into a union, Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia (MAPHILINDO or the Greater Malayan Confederation) committed to work closely together on a number territorial disputes and transnational concerns. This attempt was eventually discontinued when Sukarno advocated the *Konfrontasi* policy. Despite its short life, it is important to note that MAPHILINDO already reflected aspects of Southeast Asian strategic culture. The joint statement of the three heads of state – Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, President Diosdado Macapagal, and President Sukarno stated that “foreign bases...should not be allowed to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence”³⁷⁰ of their countries. This indicates the significance of sovereignty and self-determination for these countries. Furthermore, their statement reflects the Southeast Asian strategic culture of non-alignment by harking back to the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung. It states, “In accordance with the principles enunciated in the Bandung Declaration, the three countries will abstain from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers.” In this respect, the principle of non-alignment was re-affirmed once again.

In 1967, Southeast Asian regionalism took a very important turn. Five representatives from Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand convened in a beach resort located a few miles away from Bangkok. According to the former ASEAN Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino, the ministers met to “play golf

³⁷⁰ MAPHILINDO Joint Statement, July, 1963.

and tell stories and jokes”³⁷¹ and “they also went about the serious business of founding a new association for Southeast Asia and arguing over the contents of the declaration that would bring it about.”³⁷²

While it is true that the Declaration had no legal provisions, means for ratifications, effectivity stipulations, or binding clauses, the document itself epitomizes the deliberate attempt of the participating states to collaborate on common issues that affected the region and their respective territories. It also mirrors their intention to determine the course of development and politics in Southeast Asia and prevent the region from getting entangled with great power competition and Cold War bipolarity. A closer reading of the document, in fact, offers a lens to the formalization and recognition of a collective strategic culture in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN Declaration distinctly elucidates the strategic culture of non-alignment and highlights the necessity of ensuring “stability and security from external interference.”³⁷³ In fact, foreign-owned military bases are regarded as temporary in nature, thus underscoring the capacity of each state to determine and conduct its own domestic and international relations. The Declaration also repeatedly stresses the prominence of national interests and maintaining peace and freedom. It reflects common values and beliefs in the “ideals of peace, freedom, social justice, and economic well-being.”³⁷⁴ These expressions not only resonate with Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia’s penchant for defining political relations as revolutionary struggles premised on their past independence and

³⁷¹ Rodolfo C. Severino, *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community: Insights from the former ASEAN Secretary-General* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2006), p. 1.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

anti-colonialist movements. They also prove the commitment of these countries to persist or continue defending and protecting their sovereignty and freedom. Viewed from this perspective then, the ASEAN Declaration was an embodiment of the fundamental ideological facets of Southeast Asian strategic culture.

During ASEAN's very first inaugural meeting Philippine Secretary Narciso Ramos explained that the process for drafting and finalizing the ASEAN Declaration was arduous. He claimed that "it is the result of a long and tedious negotiation which truly taxed the good will, the imagination, the patience and the understanding of the five participating ministers."³⁷⁵ He also added that the organization "has become a reality despite all these difficulties only attests to the fact that ASEAN's foundations have been well and solidly laid."³⁷⁶ I would further add that the foundation itself was entrenched in the region's emerging strategic culture, which then defined the structure and norms of the organization.

Thailand's Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman asserted,

"We want to be free, we do not want to be under the influence of anyone, large or small. We do not want to depend on the outside world, we want to depend on each and every one of us. In other words, we try to create conditions of mutual help, to ensure our future destiny, we tried to work out our problems among ourselves. We do not want to be dictated (to) from America, or from Moscow, or from Peking, or from anywhere else."³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Record of the Inaugural Meeting of ASEAN, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 8 August 1967 (ASEAN/DOC/3), as cited in Severino, p. 9.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. Severino, *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community* p. 9.

³⁷⁷ Collected Interviews of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman (Bangkok: Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1967), p. 50 as cited in Severino, p. 10.

Khoman's statement further supports my argument on the emerging Southeast Asian strategic culture's manifestation in the establishment of ASEAN. The characteristic diversity within Southeast Asia juxtaposed with several factors including the volatile political relations among postcolonial Southeast Asian states, their long isolation from one another during the height colonialism, remnants of dissimilar colonial experiences, and different independence trajectories resulted to the formation of a Southeast Asian strategic culture that was robustly anti-colonial and revolutionary, underscores the prominence of intrinsic national interests and individual sovereignty, and most importantly the necessity of non-alignment and the capacity to determine their own policies and assert their national interests.

Rodolfo Severino also elaborated that, "partly because of the discrepancies in their perceived interests as new nations...the relations among the Southeast Asian states, even with Indochina excluded, were fragile and delicate at best."³⁷⁸ Nevertheless, as I have presented in this dissertation, by 1967 a coherent form of regional strategic culture was formed based on three shared ideological precepts. These concepts were reflected often and strongly in the cinematic images and narratives that were produced by Southeast Asian themselves. I have established that films conjure a cultural narrative about anti-colonialism, pursuit for independence, and the complexities of nation-building that engendered and bolstered non-alignment in the region.

Films are more than just the story or the business or the propaganda. While recognizing that films are essentially popular products and targets to please (or to draw in) its audience, it is also imperative to assert that films do tell a story (or stories) about the time they were made. Cinema became an indigenized cultural product (from being

³⁷⁸ Severino, *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community*, p. 7.

a colonial product) utilized by Southeast Asians to conjure the earliest imaginations of their budding nations, the anxieties and equivocality in their decolonization, and their uncertainties about their future in navigating the international system. This work illuminates that the Cold War in Southeast Asia was not just a historical and political process. It also permeated the region's cultures and means of cultural production. Furthermore, films served as a fundamental medium to make sense of the Cold War within the local contexts of the countries examined here. These films reflect the creativity, resilience, and strength of Southeast Asians.

National cinemas contain the prevailing beliefs of Southeast Asian leaders and have clear implications for foreign policy formulation. According to Sean Carter and Klaus Dodds, "international politics operates within and through a whole series of spatial imaginaries and formations."³⁷⁹ This dissertation furthers this argument by regarding cinema as a space for Southeast Asian imaginaries. Overall, an examination of Southeast Asian culture, as manifested in films produced by Southeast Asians, and how it shapes foreign policy during the Cold War is indubitably germane.

First, understanding the cultural dimension that works within a state's foreign policy formulation gives better insight into how the state and its people generally view themselves in comparison to other states or people. In doing so, policymakers get a better sense of the reasons for their attitude and behaviour. Second, understanding culture as it impacts on foreign policy provides a narrower tool by which one can identify the distinctive nuances and peculiarities of a specific country's demeanour in international affairs. Third, it is imperative for policy makers to realize and comprehend how their culture and their personal ideology can influence the way they evaluate issues and problems. Understanding politics in Southeast Asia, or elsewhere,

³⁷⁹ Sean Carter and Klaus Dodds, *International Politics and Film* (London: Wallflower, 2014).

perceptions of reality are just as important as reality itself. This is important so that they will be better equipped to question where their opinions and judgments on foreign policy matters are coming from. Lastly, the study contributes to the growing literature about the Cold War from the Southeast Asian perspective examined through the cultural approach. By shifting to this vantage point, Southeast Asia should not be regarded as a mere arena for great power competition. The region was influential in shaping the dynamics of the Cold War. Finally, it is my hope that by employing cinema as a central primary source, Southeast Asian scholars will exhaust new alternatives of analysing and studying the past through popular cultural materials such as films, novels, songs, paintings, and musicals, among others. Through this minor scholarly contribution, I seek to push the boundaries of historical writing and analysis in our pursuit of reaching a better understanding of the past.

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