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From Hostesses to Working Girls: Sex Workers in Late 1970s Philippine Cinema

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Abstract

The depiction of morally wayward women characters as protagonists in Philippine cinema emerged in parallel with the trend in presenting gangsters and so-called bad boys in the late 1950s. Drawing influence from the spread of the French New Wave and its transformation of American cinema into the New Hollywood, the Filipino counterparts (of both genders) required comeuppances that were either tragic or reformist. One other tendency was to provide confederates for these characters, to the point where duos or, more often, groups would dominate the narrative. This article will look at the possible reasons for the narrative strategies used by filmmakers as well as the breakthroughs these characterizations enabled during the late 1970s period of martial law, when the regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos consolidated the militarization of film-censorship prerogatives, resulting in film artists seeking effective ways of presenting social critiques without directly provoking the self-appointed guardians of morality.

Keywords: Golden Ages, "hostess films", Marcos dictatorship, multiple characters, sex-film trends, sex workers, unruly femininity

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About the Author

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revised and updated editions of his earlier books, on his blog); and the forthcoming *Sine*, a decade-in-the-making canon project.

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INTRODUCTION

The depiction in literary and filmic fictions of the Filipina earning her keep by working in the public sphere followed the same general trend observable in Western and Westernized cultures throughout history. Following the rationale imposed by patriarchal logic, the female citizen who defied or forfeited her designation to domestic duties would not only find respectable employment opportunities unavailable to her; she would also be vulnerable to an entire array of persecutions, ranging from legal (suspicions of solicitation) to criminal (human trafficking, white slavery, and worse).

Not surprisingly, Filipino films that opted to portray working Filipinas initially operated on the assumption that these characters were stragglers from (although occasionally, rebels against) the prevalent patriarchal system. (The use of "work" here is in no way intended to denigrate the domestic contributions of the household-bound force, much less accept the traditional perspective that domestic efforts do not constitute real labor; rather, I deploy the term as shorthand for "earning a living"—still a problematizable idea, whose complications will have to be deferred for the moment.)

The emergence of women who opted to remain in the public sphere derived largely from their active involvement in the labor-force adjustments wrought by World War II. In the US, American women were called upon to fill in the jobs that men had to give up in order to fight overseas; a musical film, Joseph Santley's *Rosie the Riveter* (Republic Pictures, 1944), provided both iconography and inspiration for this momentous demographic shift (the gender counterpart of the northward migration of African Americans) in the twentieth century. Upon the surrender of the Axis alliance, American men reclaimed their jobs and engendered a wide-scale displacement of wives, mothers, and sisters, whose memory of relative financial independence would be a motivating factor for the then-still-forthcoming struggle for equal rights.

The Philippine experience drew some parallels with the US's, but with arguably a greater burden for Filipinas. Since the resistance to the Japanese occupation revived the guerrilla strategies used by the population against their Western colonizers (this time with the sanction of the US), enemy officials could easily conclude that, barring any other credible explanation, households whose male heads were absent indicated the members' support for anti-Japanese activities. Hence not only were women entrusted with providing for their families, largely enabled by the safe passage they could be granted within a highly militarized public sphere, they were also vulnerable to the often-inhumane treatment meted out to suspected rebel sympathizers, most graphically realized during the Imperial Army's retreat in 1945.

This accounts for the aspiration of women in both the colonizing and soon-to-be-postcolonial cultures to assert their right to work, matched (at least initially) with a vilification

necessary for the patriarchal order to uphold its prerogatives. This article will look at crucial images drawn from still-existing samples from the studio-dominated post-war era retroactively declared the First Golden Age, through the

collapse of the studio system alongside the emergence of the fascistically inclined yet film-obsessed presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, into the martial law period that was subsequently recognized as a Second Golden Age (David, "The Golden Ages of Philippine Cinema").

PREDICAMENTS

The trouble for most women venturing into what constituted a brave new world for them, is that their spaces, private or public, had to be shared, often conflictually, with men of all types. The many contentious directions that feminist ideas undertook reflected in large measure the confrontation of this problem and how to best arrive at a means of accommodation, if not resolution. Feminist-inspired developments in poststructuralist philosophies acknowledged these ineluctable issues of recognizing and evaluating fluidities and paradoxes, without seeking to return to conventional philosophical measures of reducing any of these to workable-though-idealistic essences.

In "Feminist Sexual Politics and the Heterosexual Predicament," Lynne Segal maintained that "The way to fight the continuing victimization of women cannot be to abandon notions of sexual liberation, or to make women's pursuit of heterosexual pleasure incompatible with women's happiness" (77). She identifies old-school masculinity (with its "fear of real intimacy and a horror of 'weakness' or 'effeminacy'") as one impediment to women's erotic fulfillment, but also, from within the feminist movement itself, "the attempt to identify authentically 'female' experiences" (79). Drawing from prescriptions of the more noteworthy theorists of gender and power, most significantly Judith Butler, Segal enjoins straight women (and presumably enlightened men) to participate in the subversion of gender norms and practices taking place in queer culture.

The Philippine configuration of the feminist predicament proceeds from a markedly different set of assumptions, and has thereby led to a different type of solution in narrative texts on women, as will be apparent subsequently. This can be gleaned from two film samples that may be considered iconic of both their era and their respective studios (Figure 1). *Mga Ligaw na Bulaklak* [*Stray Flowers*, hereafter *MLnB*] (dir. Tony Cayado, 1957) was the breakout role of then-barely legal Susan Roces, cast as a damsel in distress in what was recognizably a film noir, her character maintaining a wholesome innocence while consorting with gangsters and their molls; their interest in her centered on her sellability as object of desire, with her virginity providing them with an irresistible markup. *Malvarosa* [*Geranium*] (dir. Gregorio Fernandez, 1958)

proffered a riper image of womanhood in the fiery and sensual persona of Charito Solis, playing a character whose advancement is held back by her dissolute parents' addiction to gambling and alcohol and her elder brothers' expectation that she should commodify her domestic labor to be able to support them; barely getting by as a laundrywoman, she finds the prospect of secretarial work a more remunerative option, until she realizes her supervisor's motive in hiring her despite her lack of qualifications.

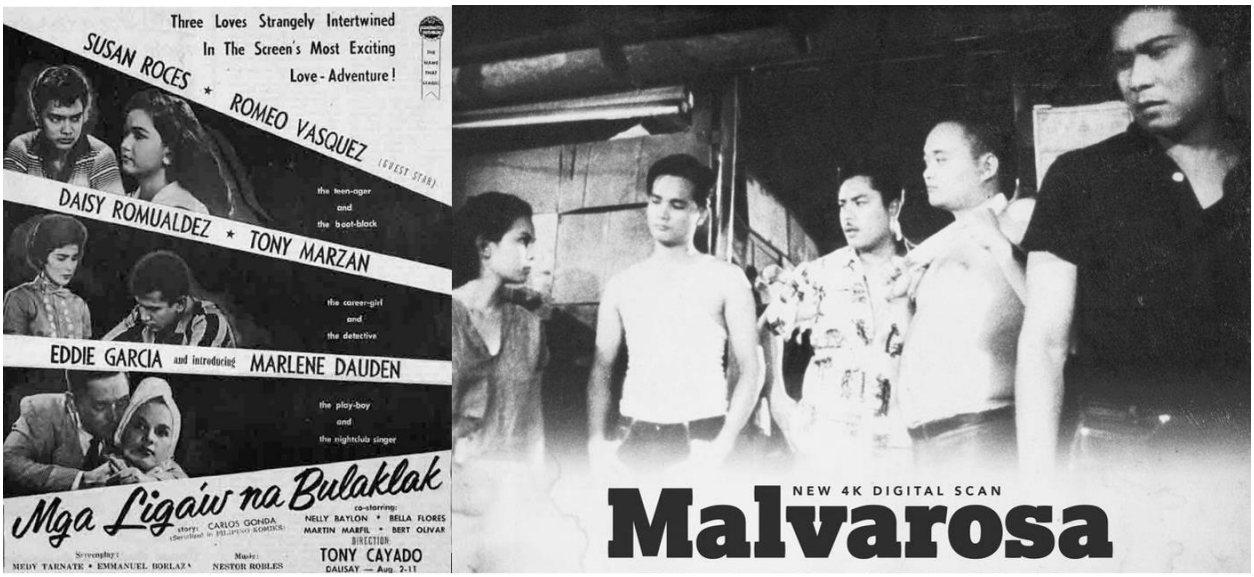

Fig. 1. *Mga Ligaw na Bulaklak* (left), where an ingenue's innocence is endangered; *Malvarosa* (right), where a young maiden is tasked with caring for her mostly unruly and irresponsible brothers. (Sampaguita Pictures layout, left; LVN Productions and ABS-CBN Film Restoration Project, right)

Both narratives were originally serialized as illustrated stories in local *komiks* publications, which held the distinction of being the most widely read periodicals during the previous century. Not surprisingly, *MLnB* and *Malvarosa* have been downgraded in relation to other surviving entries from the 1950s, despite their vital contribution to class and gender discourse; the fact that some then-contemporary markers of "prestige" were absent led to their relative marginalization: they were made not for Premiere Productions (hallmark of social-problem projects and home studio of Gerardo de Leon) but rather for the Golden Age's other Big Three participants; they relied on star power; and they proffered melodrama, apparently happy endings, and (in the case of *Malvarosa*) sardonic humor.

Film scholar Johven Velasco describes *MLnB* as an instance of "power-sharing onscreen between man and woman" (120), subverting the standard film-noir expectation of positioning at

least one male (the hero, sometimes complemented by an antagonist, similarly male) by demonstrating the plight of women falling into sex work, some of them willingly. In so doing, it justifies the development of the femme fatale (performed by iconic villainess Bella Flores) as a full character, invested initially in the professionalization of the new recruits, but also eventually endangering her situation by helping the system's self-identified victims to escape (122–23). For this reason, Velasco upholds *MLnB*, as well as another movie in his study, *Sino ang Maysala?* [*Who Is at Fault?*] (dir. Armando Garces, 1957), as vital samples of how popular cinema indigenizes dominant Hollywood genres.

Malvarosa, in contrast, is described as an example of "Europeanization as a response to Americanization" during the studio system era, in the sense that it tempers its neorealist "prestige" mark by virtue of its "overreliance on coincidence and the mercurial performative style that characterizes the then less-reputable undertakings of Philippine cinema" (David, "A Certain Tendency" 24). In contrast with *MLnB*, *Malvarosa* surrounds its female character with a father who gets killed early in the narrative, a mother drowning her sorrow by drinking to oblivion, and five brothers—all of whom rely on her focus and diligence to tide the entire household over (42–43). The strategy succeeds in so far as it "promotes an unusual empathy with undesirable social types [represented by the brothers] (the murderer, the pimp, the polygamist, the rapist) through the then-also-unusual strategy of identification with a female character" (44).

The designation of a female sibling as responsible for the upkeep of the nuclear family may seem unusual to Westerners, and is articulated by the central female character at one point: "You've virtually enslaved me, but have you heard me complain?... I'm the youngest in the family, but instead of caring for me, I'm the one you expect to assume the responsibilities of our mother" (Osorio, trans. by the author), but it has prevailed over the years: in turning to remittances from labor export as its primary source of income, the Philippines has been consistently deploying more women than men at roughly a 60–40 proportion (Mapa).

OBJECTIFICATION AS BACKLASH

The collapse of the 1950s studio system (concomitant with the close of the First Golden Age) ironically led to the most prolific period in Philippine film production.

The 1960s was the era when annual film output not only broke the 100-films ceiling that the previous decade could only keep approaching, but also exceeded 200 at several points. The very first was 1965, the year of the presidential campaign that introduced the most film-obsessed among Philippine presidents, which saw both contending candidates commissioning episodic biofilm projects directed by "name" filmmakers: *Tagumpay ng Mahirap* [*Triumph of the Poor*] (Cinema Masters), by Premiere talents (later National Artists) Lamberto V. Avellana, Gerardo de Leon, and Eddie Romero, for then-incumbent Diosdado Macapagal; and *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* [*Determined by Fate*]*: The Ferdinand E. Marcos Story* (777 Films & Sampaguita Pictures), by Conrado Conde, Jose de Villa, and Mar S. Torres.

While it may be possible to speculate that Philippine politicians were attempting to replicate John F. Kennedy's successful exploitation of mass media, certain distinctions mark off these developments from those of other presidential regimes. Sampaguita Pictures was where Imelda Romualdez, as a beauty-queen showbiz aspirant, screen-tested around the time she vacationed in Baguio with Marcos and returned as his wife. During the first administration of Marcos (1965–69), his intervention consisted of nothing further than encouraging the production of a couple more hagiographic films, one of which, *Pinagbuklod ng Langit* [*Heaven's Fate*] (dir. Eddie Garcia, United Brothers Productions, 1969), was intended for his second presidential campaign. The other project, *Maharlika* a.k.a. *Guerrilla Strike Force* (dir. Jerry Hopper, Roadshow Films), was intended to celebrate Marcos's heroic exploits as a World War II anti-Japanese guerrilla; his account, as well as his claim of garnering twenty-seven war medals, was discredited by historians and his commanders, based on first-person testimonies as well as official government records (Maynigo).

Although completed in 1970, *Maharlika* was screened in the Philippines only in 1987, after the expulsion of the Marcoses during the People Power uprising of February 1986. The reason for its interdiction was because its leading lady, an American starlet named Dovie Beams, admitted to conducting an affair with the president and proved her claim by playing an audiotape of their intimate moments that she had surreptitiously recorded (Rotea 143–81). The treatment of Beams turned on the profitability of her narrative as well as her image for media of all political persuasions, with *Republic Weekly*, a pro-Malacañang magazine, reprinting photographs of her—stark-naked in occasionally lascivious poses, with black layer masks obscuring her breasts and genital areas—that were suspected to have been taken by Marcos or upon his instruction (Rotea 206–08). Along with more prominently reprinted poolside (presumably publicity) shots of her, posing or strolling in a bikini, the Beams scandal took its place as the most infamous tabloid material during the first Marcos presidency, exceeding the attention devoted to massacres, sex crimes, celebrity quarrels, and the like.

This atmosphere of permissiveness became fodder for motion-picture projects, with freshly launched actors striving to outdo one another in disrobing and performing then-taboo activities: the first same-sex male kiss, for example, was enacted by George Estregan in *Eric* (dir. Armando Garces, Emar Pictures, 1969), his first starring role, in a film produced by his brother Joseph Estrada, the second Philippine president (after Marcos) to be deposed in a popular uprising (Cuartero 58–59). Progressive historians also point out how this period was marked by an intensifying series of mass protests, culminating in the so-called First Quarter Storm of 1970 as well as the nine-day Diliman Commune (the national university's barricaded campus) the next year (Hedman and Sidel 127–29). Yet a crucial corollary to this set of conditions has been consistently overlooked, possibly because of its association with the profitability and decadence of popular culture.

The aforementioned social phenomenon was occasioned by the final significant batch of migration of working-class citizens from rural areas to what was then known as Manila and its suburbs (now the Metro Manila area). About a decade later, employment opportunities in the

country's urban centers would dwindle because of the Marcos dictatorship's fiscal mismanagement and corruption, and would necessitate the deployment of Filipino workers to overseas labor from that point to the foreseeable future.[1] The impact made on local cosmopolitan culture by the presence of young adults with some measure of disposable income was the equivalent of a pop culture revolution. The then-struggling studios (including Sampaguita Pictures) could insist on launching traditional types of Caucasoid-looking talents and marginalizing the more "native" types who were shorter, darker complexioned and/or Asiatic, also working class in origin. But the mass consumers, as well as the culture-savvy Marcoses, took to the icon of the new star ideal, Nora Aunor, and a rival independent company, Tower Productions, made massive profits for several years on quickie projects by topbilling her and several other similar talents.

This was in fact the primary causal factor for the emergence of the soft-core sex-film genre (actually a subgenre of melodrama, per critic Bienvenido A. Lumbera).[2] The emergent Western-looking talents could no longer sustain projects unless they agreed to "support" the new mass-preferred teen idols, or agreed to expose more of themselves, as Dovie Beams did in private for Ferdinand Marcos. The question of how far Marcos and his martial law cohorts engaged in social engineering, and whether this included the libertarian minimalizing of film censorship practice, will probably never be answered definitively. All that remains of the regime's historical record, pending further revelations or discoveries, is that Marcos set out to harness the breakdown of peace and order allegedly wrought by increasingly violent clashes with defense forces during left-organized demonstrations, as well as the supposed

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decline in public morals fostered by the proliferation of *bomba* releases, many of which were supplemented by inserts of hard-core scenes.

THE PINAS "HOSTESS" MOVIE

The term "hostess film" was articulated by Korean film scholars in describing, during the military dictatorship of Park Chunghee and his successors, the image of the independent woman for whom sex work was the only viable option. It would of course be unsurprising to find the same phenomenon in Marcos-era Philippine cinema, considering how both countries had several historical parallels and interactions (from foreign occupation through disastrous wars to authoritarian regimes) during the past century. In fact, between the two countries, it was the Philippines that used the word in a film title, in Joey Gosiengfiao's *Huwag Hamakin* [*Not to Be Despised*]*: Hostess!* (JPM Productions, 1978, see Figure 2)—ironically starring the aforementioned top teen idol, Nora Aunor (declared a National Artist for Film in 2022), alongside the top bombshell of the late 1970s, Alma Moreno. One reason why the focus on the female sex worker never congealed in Philippine film studies during this period is the conservative leftism of critics and scholars of pop culture, which regarded the decadence that the profession fostered as contrary to the values of the masses they intended to radicalize. Another reason is that the demand for realism (inflected by Western models and traditions) would be unable to sustain the Korean valorization of sex work as an exemplification of the sacrifice

performed by women for the sake of their families (see Kim and Park).

Fig. 2. A literal "hostess"-titled release during the martial law period, featuring a combination of a "bold" performer and a prestige actress. (JPM Productions publicity layout)

Both authoritarian regimes shared the same motive in tolerating the popularity of films on sex workers. They depicted citizens striving to better themselves and served as cautionary texts for women who might be tempted to stray from the straight (more correctly strait) and narrow. The strongest justification would be the profitability of such samples, since the literalization of the term "flesh trade" ensured the patronage of the period's income earners, who were generally male. In the Philippines, as already narrated, authoritarian plotters could exploit the moral panic that increasingly bold presentations would engender. ("Bold" in fact

was appropriated as a descriptor for the relatively milder sex films marketed by the then-emerging martial law-era studio, Regal Films, which subsequently became the most dominant practitioner in Philippine film history.) Most pop culture historians consistently note the proliferation of sex films before the declaration of martial law in 1972 (as an excuse for ostensibly restoring decency) as well as toward the end of the dictatorship, obviously in preparation for a repeat of the earlier crackdown.

Yet only a few years after martial law, a highly contained period of permissiveness occurred. The game plan was revealed after the film that precipitated the crackdown, *Mga Uhaw na Bulaklak* [*Thirsty Blossoms*], *Part II* (dir. Danilo Cabrera, Lyra Ventures, 1976), was banned, its producers and performers "invited" by the military for interrogation, and its exhibition venues shut down. The authority of the liberal censors chief, Ma. Rocio de Vega, widow of presidential assistant Guillermo de Vega, was diluted by the military, which effectively took over censorship functions, with a presidential decree turning the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures into an interim body tasked with overseeing not only films but also related media including television, radio, and theater. Professor de Vega's husband was assassinated in his office under still-unknown circumstances the previous year; he was also a former censors chief and had written *Film and Freedom*, source of the now-standard speculation that the Marcos regime used libertarian strategies to induce the public to welcome hardline controls on media.

Like the previous team's *Mga Uhaw na Bulaklak* [*Thirsty Blossoms*] (1975), the local iteration of the "hostess" movie acknowledged how sex work could be a fluid, unstable, informal, and exploitative profession. These permutations could be more effectively demonstrated by having several other women in the narrative, where a professional could be contrasted by someone who accidentally stumbled into the life, or who was exploited by her manager or pimp or family, or who was independently wealthy and therefore (mostly) non-working, or who was merely adventurous and/or psychologically unstable. This would have been another reason why the Filipino "hostess" film could not dwell exclusively on regular (female) hostessing. The 1976 *Mga Uhaw na Bulaklak, Part 2*, for example, had an instance of a male character resorting to sex work—not the first time the practice was depicted (Elwood Perez's 1970 debut film, *Blue Boy*, focused on such a character), but definitely provocative in situating the "hosto" (as Filipino male entertainers working in Japan were called) within the women-dominated milieu.

A possible, admittedly facile, and strictly provisional way of regarding this period would be to state that artists and the regime engaged in dialectical interplay, wherein repressive measures would be announced and implemented, with artists finding ways to either circumvent the restrictions or retool them to their advantage. One example pointed out by Lumbera, describing the consequences of the

militarization of film censorship, went as follows: “The censors demanded to see a complete script before they could give a permit for shooting, so they could scrutinize film projects as early as the pre-production stage. Studios turned to journalist and creative writers in order to be able to impress the censors. Young filmmakers and writers saw here an opportunity to break into the industry and inject some seriousness in terms of content” (Lumbera 68). The period may also be revisited and reconsidered within the context of the labor-export strategy later deployed by the Marcos regime as its stop-gap measure against economic collapse, an expediency that turned into a permanent structural program for income generation—the only one that has persisted through several periods of national and global upheavals. Women became the preferred commodity, with over 60% of overseas workers comprising Filipinas; not surprisingly, the inevitable sexual component within this arrangement was accommodated according to varying degrees of acceptability, from migrant-wife procurement through “cultural performer” visas (with dance as the exportable skill) to deceptive pretexts for outright human trafficking.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The martial law era depiction in this period of Philippine cinema of what may be loosely (though unsatisfactorily) termed fallen women strove to avoid stereotyping by acknowledging the several possible permutations of Pinays striving to earn their keep within a still-to-be-dismantled patriarchal system. The primary strategy proceeded from one of the earliest examples already mentioned: the presentation of other types that could qualify or challenge the primary type(s) in the narrative. Not surprisingly, proffering more than just one good-time lady guaranteed increased viewership, and consequently better profits. The more senior audience members would be able to recall the Sampaguita Pictures star-launch gimmick called Stars ’66 (referring to the year of the announcement), when five mixed pairs of aspiring talents appeared, in various configurations, in what the studio termed “smorgasbord movies.”

The prototype for the appearance of a variety of easy-women types was set after the crackdown on more overt presentations during the *bomba* era, with the declaration of martial rule in September 1972. Why during this later period rather than during the window of pre-martial law libertarian permissiveness? The answer lay in precisely the threat of further crackdowns, the first of which was carried out in 1976, as narrated earlier. Projects that set out to recapture the still-enthusiastic and mostly male moviegoers, restive after being deprived of *bomba* fare, needed

to find creative ways to justify their emphasis on sex themes. The most successful early gimmick was anchored on fashionistic premises: the wet look, in which braless women wearing undergarments or flimsy blouses would be provided by the narrative with an excuse to be drenched in water, thus enabling their breasts (specifically cleavage and nipples) to be perceived through the clinging, translucent fabric. The most famous example was Celso Ad. Castillo’s *Ang Pinakamagandang Hayop sa Balat ng Lupa* [*The Most Beautiful Animal in the World*] (Gemini

Films, 1974), wherein two beauty queens, playing small-town rivals, physically struggled over their claims to the same man; the fact that the town happened to be coastal enabled them to wrestle with each other beside a beach, with the townspeople serving as the audience's vicarial oglers.

The template for the presentation of multiple female types may be seen, to cite a still-available sample, in such a film as Elwood Perez's *Isang Gabi ... Tatlong Babae!* [*One Night ... Three Women!*] (Juan de la Cruz Productions, 1974). Three episodes, each written by a different writer, depict the lives of women from various class positions, unified at the end when the working-class lady delivers the laundry of a socialite (who had just committed suicide in a swimming pool) as a social-climbing fashion model drops by. Although none of the characters was a sex worker, all three were motivated by their love for their respective and generally undeserving male partners, who thereby benefited from the women's income or wealth.

The attempt to minimize the artificiality of enabling the major characters to encounter one another may be seen in how Japanese filmmakers of an earlier generation handled the challenge (and from which the Korean hostess movie may have drawn inspiration): by emphasizing locale, inasmuch as commercial spaces tend to cluster according to profession. Specifically, the short-lived cycle of *akasen* or red-light district films—with Mizoguchi Kenji's last work, *Street of Shame* (Daiei Studios, 1956), considered a definitive and outstanding sample, as indicated in its Japanese title *Akasen Chitai*—conditioned the audience to expect to witness not just a "hostess" but also her co-workers, employers, and customers.

In the Philippines, the so-called slum films (usually identified as Tondo, Manila but also in unnamed districts meant to evoke Tondo's lumpen culture) allowed for the appearance of prostitutes or hostess-like characters. Lino Brocka's slum-set *Insiang* (Cinemanila, 1976) focused on a mother and daughter openly competing for the affection of an alpha male, reminiscent of how nightclub entertainers might quarrel over loaded johns; but it also showed an occasional sex worker returning from work in the early morning, at around the same time that the daughter sets out to do her laundry duties. Even in the aforementioned *Malvarosa*, the older brother who convinces a wealthy businessman to hire his sister as his "special secretary"

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encourages the latter to put out for her boss, so that the rest of her family may benefit from the extra income her additional efforts may bring.

A few entries opted to identify these work spaces outright: *Beerhouse* (dir. Elwood Perez, Regal Films, 1977), derived from an Anglicism that might have been part of military slang during the US's early 20th-century war of colonization; *Beerhouse Dancers* (dir. Danilo Cabreira, JPM Productions, 1980); and *Iwasan ... Kabaret* [*Avoid ... (the) Cabaret*] (Danilo Cabreira, Joey Gosiengfiao, Elwood Perez, Regal Films, 1978). The preference, however, was to use either of two occasionally overlapping options:

- raising an issue: *Ang Isinilang Ko Ba'y Kasalanan?* [*Did I Beget a Sin?*] (dir. Nestor U.

Torre, 1977); *Bago Kayo ... Ako Muna ang Mag-aasawa* [*Before You (Marry) ... I Should Be First*] (dir. Luciano B. Carlos, 1976); *Basta Kabit, May Sabit* [*Affairs (Only) Bring Trouble*] (dir. Luciano B. Carlos, 1978); *Lalaki, Babae Kami* [*Men, We Are Women*] (dir. Danny L. Zialcita, 1977); *Magsikap: Kayod sa Araw, Kayod sa Gabi* [*Persevere: Toil in the Morning, Toil at Night*] (dir. Luciano B. Carlos, 1976); or

- resorting to metaphorical or literal description: *Hindi Kami Damong Ligaw* [*We Are Not Wild Grass*] (Danilo Cabreira, 1976); *Isang Pag-ibig, Isang Pangarap, at Isang Bulaklak* [*A Romance, a Dream, and a Blossom*] (dir. Junn P. Cabreira, 1976); *Kapag Tumabang ang Asin* [*When Salt Loses Its Flavor*] (dir. Danny L. Zialcita, 1976); *May Isang Tsuper ng Taksi* [*There Was a Taxi Driver*] (dirs. Luciano B. Carlos, Joey Gosiengfiao, Elwood Perez, 1975); *Mga Rosas sa Putikan* [*Roses in the Grime*] (dir. Emmanuel H. Borlaza, 1976); *Pang-Umaga, Pang-Tanghali, Panggabi* [*For Morning, For Noon, For Evening*] (dir. Luciano B. Carlos, 1977).

The commercial success of what may be termed group presentations was so prevalent during this period (roughly the late 1970s) that promotional layouts made sure to suggest that several performers would have prominent roles in their presentations, even when a star or two had been cast (see Appendix A). The beneficial byproduct of this approach was twofold: the creative team of the period would ensure meatier roles for as many members of the project as they could work out, and several new (usually female) performing talents could be discovered. The demand for fresh new talent would burgeon so robustly that the major production houses, and later talent managers, would start packaging prospective stars in batches, using the previous decade's Stars '66 model initiated by Sampaguita Pictures.

UNIFYING THE COLLECTIVE

Though still prevalent, the episodic presentation's disadvantages were starting to become apparent. Commissioning more than one set of talents for a single project called for additional financial outlays and extended production schedules. Audiences could take their pick of which episodes they favored, which meant they could stop watching if they did not feel engaged by a succeeding episode, thereafter spreading negative word-of-mouth responses about the film (effectively compromising the rest of the production). Moreover, weekly drama anthologies centered on popular prestige talents (always young female performers) were serving the same function on television, usually with shorter running times than regular movies, but continuing for extended runs.

Since these projects that featured more than one lead performer were unified by theme and locale, if not by profession, it made sense to follow the characters' narratives within one consolidated framework. The standard pattern would be to present the major characters in the beginning, focus on one of them, then take up the next character's story after the resolution of the first character's plotline. Several issues raised by this approach would be immediately obvious. If all the characters were to be invested with equal importance (measured in terms of

screen time, among other factors), then the choice of which character to emphasize at which point would smack of arbitrariness. Furthermore, the narrative would be in danger of meandering, since an earlier character's concerns would be abandoned just to be able to follow those of another one. Finally, the Aristotelian ideal of providing a narrative with its own conflict, rising action, and catharsis would be violated; save for the last, each narrative climax would turn out to be an anticlimax, since another plotline, the next character's, would emerge after the previous one had just been resolved.

This template had been in place even in classical literature—in the texts adapted by Pier Paolo Pasolini for his Trilogy of Life, for example (Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, 1971; Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, 1972; and the Middle Eastern *Arabian Nights* collection, 1974), as well as Arthur Schnitzler's 1897 play *Reigen* (adapted as *La Ronde*, dir. Max Ophüls, 1950). Classical Hollywood film practice, however, hewed close to Aristotelian unities since these ensured a swift, focused, and elegant narrative engine capable of delivering the engaged viewer directly from opening crisis to final resolution with a minimum of deflection. Deviations from this principle could only be productively attempted in European productions, until the influence of the French New Wave managed to successfully challenge Classical Hollywood cinema.

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In any case, the requisite of providing audience identification proved to be one of the most difficult conventions to dismantle. Even the process of shifting gender identification outside of melodrama (so called "women's films") had to constitute innovations that required careful and long-term preparation, as described in studies by feminist authors like Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane. In Philippine cinema, the challenge of attempting multicharacter narratives and streamlining these to minimize extended episodic presentations focused on individual characters was taken up by the same circle of aforementioned filmmakers, with theater-trained talents like Elwood Perez, Joey Gosiengfiao, and Nestor U. Torre providing notable samples, and film and literature trainee Ishmael Bernal taking the lead in methodically exploring possible permutations, starting with triple-character exercises.[3]

THREE THE HARD WAY

Ishmael Bernal's initial explorations in multicharacter narrative cinema partook of the smorgasbord pattern popularized by Sampaguita Pictures. He had, in fact, one Sampaguita project, *Huwag Tularan: Pito ang Asawa Ko* [*Bad Example: I Have Seven Wives*] (1974), although his experience with the studio led to a falling out when the producer shot additional scenes without his permission (Carballo 33). The smorgasbord system was premised on a multiplicity of available performers, all minor stars; the studio had launched five pairs of men and women the year after Ferdinand Marcos first won the presidency—hence their collective appellation, Stars '66.

The very first smorgasbord film, *Maraming Kulay ang Pag-ibig* [*Love Has Many Colors*], was produced by VP Pictures, a subsidiary of Sampaguita, in 1966. The new stars were

paired off and provided with one episode each, handled by separate directors and scriptwriters. Obviously, this approach could not be sustained, for the reasons already enumerated in the discussion of episodic presentations. Thus, subsequent smorgasbord projects featured singular narratives with some combination or other of the stars; then again, since the principle of singular identification still held sway, these narratives would eventually collapse and focus on the most popular or most senior performer or couple.

This approach characterized Bernal's earlier multicharacter attempts, including his Sampaguita project, where the narrative eventually focused on the promiscuous stud. *Daluyong!* [*Surge!*] (Topaz Film Productions, 1971) focused on the travails

of a bourgeois couple confronted by the consequences of the US-exported sexual revolution, while *Ligaw na Bulaklak* [*Wildflower*] (Crown Seven Film Productions, 1976) featured the sexual awakening of a nymphet whose surrogate father, a school gardener, had to contend with the attention of a persistent suitor as well as his own repressed desire for his charge. This was the first starring role of the aforementioned Alma Moreno, whose character is torn between the school where she studies and resides with her possessive "father," and the town *kabaret*, actually a taxi dance hall where her "sisters" (called *baylerinas*, from the Spanish) expose her to the seedier realities of erotic employment; the film subtly but persistently erases the moral differences between the two locales.

From this point onward, Bernal embarked on a series of what may be loosely termed love-triangle filmic discourses, probably realizing in retrospect the dramatic potential he could have exploited if he had given the nymphet's suitor in *Ligaw* a more prominent role. His next project for the same producer, *Nunal sa Tubig* [*A Speck in the Water*] (1976) was an ambitious epic set on an island community of fisherfolk, with the story turning on the choices made by a young man who betrays a conservative maiden by messing around with a health worker, who (unlike the barrio lass) presumably knows how to make use of contraception. In the next couple of years, Bernal devoted himself to more domestic-set love triangle scenarios, with a single woman torn between two men in *Dalawang Pugad, Isang Ibon* [*Two Nests, One Bird*] (Lea Productions, 1977) and in *Isang Gabi sa Iyo ... Isang Gabi sa Akin* [*One Night with You ... Another Night with Me*] (AA Productions, 1977); and with a return to the male-centered triangle in *Ikaw Ay Akin* [*You Are Mine*] (Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions, 1978), whose disappointing box-office performance, like that of *Nunal sa Tubig*, encouraged the director to focus on women-centered stories for most of the rest of his career.

EQUAL-OPPORTUNITY DEPLOYER

The difficulty of flattening, so to speak, the arcs of the participants in a love triangle in order to ensure equal emphasis for the characters figuring in the conflict, tends to lead to unsatisfactory results, at least in so far as Bernal's attempts have demonstrated. The person caught between two desirable options de-facto becomes the focal point, and her or his selection of one of them results in the exclusion of the other, thus turning the story into a more-or-less standard romance. In the

women-centered triangles previously enumerated, the male options are rejected—which again makes the middle term the narrative center. In the male-centered examples, Bernal attempted more novel measures—Jamin in *Nunal sa Tubig* has to temporarily leave the island for a short-term employment opportunity

elsewhere, while Rex in *Ikaw Ay Akin* opts to resolve the conflict between his lovers by arranging with them to reconcile with each other, thus presumably maintaining the configuration. A more logical but necessarily singular pattern was realized later in a Japanese youth movie, Hashiguchi Ryosuke's *Nagisa no Shindobaddo* [*Like Grains of Sand*] (Toho, 1995), where a high-school abuse victim prefers the company of her gay best friend, who longs for their straight loner classmate, who in turn nurses a crush on the girl (Bernal was mostly inactive by the time the film came out, and died in 1996).

A female-centered smorgasbord-type project, *Menor de Edad* [*Underage*] (Seven Stars Productions, 1979) provided Bernal with an opportunity to work with a large cast playing college classmates, although the narrative's final couple acquired significance because of the female character's lower-class circumstance, thus lending to their story an urgency that was missing in the other pairs. Inevitably, and logically, the hostess movie model ensured for Bernal that a triple-character situation could maintain comparable significance for everyone. In the sample, *Aliw* [*Pleasure*] (Seven Stars Productions, 1979, see Figure 3), the three characters have a variety of partners, either as customers or as lovers. Ironically, the closest they get to a long-term arrangement is when a john "parks" them (in Filipino, the term "*garahe*," from the Spanish for garage, refers to both the automotive shelter as well as the act of stationing the vehicle). This results in a profound conflict between the women's personal and professional relationships that leads to various ways of coping, all of them unsatisfactory.

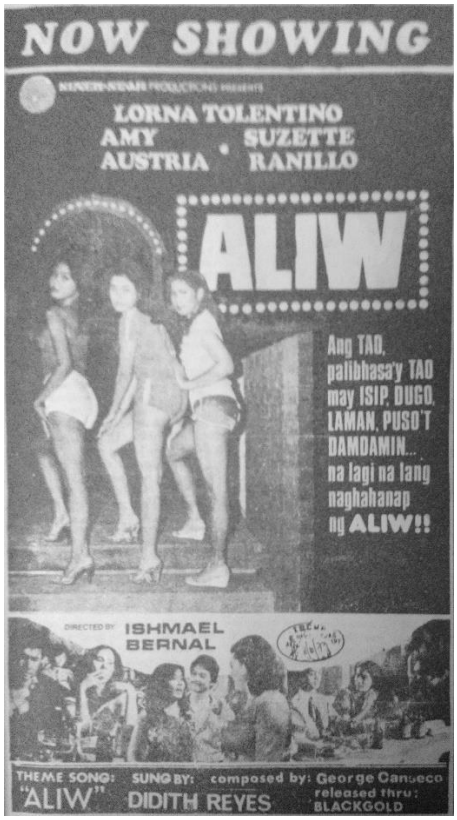

Fig. 3. *Aliw* (1979), a "hostess" film that also proved to be the country's first successful multicharacter-narrative movie. (Seven Stars Productions layout)

Ayet, the most pragmatic of the three, augments her income by hawking cosmetic goods to her colleagues as well as to her customers; she falls for an earnest but poor working student, who jeopardizes her live-in arrangement when he visits her, and she consequently winds up getting battered by her sugar daddy and losing her residence. Esper, a single mother supporting her shiftless family, gets impatient with her daughter's father, who keeps promising to provide her with full support; the man's wife creates a public scandal when she sees them together, while the neighborhood slacker who says he loves her gets hitched with a more eager-beaver woman, so she seeks solace in alcohol, aggravating her customer for the night and leading to a general dressing-down by the nightclub manager. Lingling (Ling for short), Ayet's bumpkin cousin, keeps falling for and living with a succession of charming but irresponsible men; when she finally succeeds in convincing a customer to "park" her, she realizes she could not live with his terms of exclusivity and winds up leaving him as well.

It would be erroneous to presuppose that the principle of equal emphasis could be implemented in terms of more-or-less identical screen time. Bernal's study of foreign samples, notably his acknowledged primary model, Robert Altman's *Nashville* (American Broadcasting Co. & Paramount Pictures, 1975), would have completely disabused him early enough of the advisability of literalizing the temporal prominence of all the protagonists in a multicharacter text. In fact, a quantification of the characters' appearances per sequence in *Aliw*, as enumerated in Appendix B, demonstrates certain technical strategies that were already apparent in *Nashville* and that would be amplified in the interactions of the dozen-plus major actors in Bernal's next multicharacter project, *Manila by Night* (Regal Films, 1980). These involve the appearance of more than one major character in several scenes, as well as the provision of several sequences (in the beginning and toward the end) where all the major characters appear.

SIGNIFICATION MATTERS

Counterintuitively, one of the characters, Esper, appears in close to half the number of sequences that feature Ling (fifteen and twenty-six in total respectively). These arrangements correspond roughly to the characters' functions and journeys: Ayet, the most level-headed of the three, figures midway between the other two (with eighteen sequences); she appears in several scenes with Ling, which enables both of their stories to unfold simultaneously during these occasions. Ling undergoes the farthest progression of the three, from a childlike underdressed waif that the men around her target for freeloading, to a sharply dressed (and just as sharply observant) cynic who doesn't hesitate to determine what males want out of her and insists, though unhappily, on her own terms of freedom.

Esper serves as a cautionary example to the other two, with her complicated backstory making the addition of more of her sequences unnecessary: foolish enough in the past to allow her heart to dominate her decisions, she now has to cope as a single mother saddled by dependents who've learned to count on her rather than earning for themselves—a condition that persists in the typical narratives of overseas Filipina laborers. Her few shots at happiness (her former lover's prospective support cut off by his wife's discovery of their illegitimate offspring, her neighborhood suitor falling for a more easily available woman) get jettisoned in quick succession (Figure 4), leading her to act out while at work.

Fig. 4. Left: Esper is unable to reclaim the married man who fathered her baby; right: she tries to maintain her composure after her long-term suitor introduces his new wife. (*Aliw*, dir. Ishmael Bernal, 1978, Seven Stars Productions; video file courtesy of Jojo Devera, screen caps by the author)

Only one sequence, close to the beginning, features none of the major characters. This arrives after Ling's first boyfriend, a band performer, picks her up from the famed Perpetual Help Church (where one of the girls prays for more Japanese customers), and they hang out at a nearby beach resort. When the band player returns to the nightclub, his friend-with-benefits Wengweng—the local slang equivalent for "stoned"—confronts him about his hooking up with a newbie, but he manages to appease her and she winds up sharing some meth with him, prior to their making out on a stairwell. Toward the end of the narrative, plainclothes police bust Wengweng for drug possession; when the club owner calls for a general meeting to remind the girls to avoid bringing their personal issues to work, he mentions Wengweng's drug habit as an example. Although as much a minor character as everyone else outside of the three protagonists, Wengweng intersects the lives of the three—as Ayet's good-time cohort, Ling's secret rival, and Esper's example of an irresponsible lifestyle she has to avoid (Figure 5).

Fig. 5. Left: Wengweng amuses Ayet, her young suitor Nilo, and their mahjong buddies by cooling her rear end in their presence; right: after Ayet is beaten up by her sugar daddy for entertaining another man, she returns to the dormitory to tell Lingling to go back to her aunt's residence while Wengweng unsuccessfully attempts to extract her story. (*Aliw*, dir. Ishmael Bernal, 1978, Seven Stars Productions; video file courtesy of Jojo Devera, screen caps by the author)

The improvisational method utilized in *Aliw* made it possible (to the chagrin of the credited scriptwriter) for Bernal to draw directly from the habitus of people who belonged to a milieu presumably removed from his own—although an associate of his, Bibsy Carballo, eventually wrote that it was "within the environs of [Manila's working-class districts] where he would spend nights of decadence experiencing everything from drugs to prostitution" (36).[4] Nevertheless, Bernal's technique drew from the extensive academic and practical training he had in documentary film, specifically by asking real-life subjects the conditions they faced and how they would respond (David, *Manila by Night* 97–99). This enabled *Aliw* to harness a fly-on-the-wall aesthetic that complemented its modest production budget as well as correlated with parallel exercises in overseas Third cinema.

The series of films initiated by Bernal with *Aliw* provided Filipino practitioners with a productive template—not just for hostess films, but for works that sought to present a cross-section of contemporary society, mostly comprising women: middle-class feminists in Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (Seven Stars Productions, 1982), unruly maidens in Joey Gosiengfiao's *Underage* (Regal Films, 1980), rural nymphets in Celso Ad. Castillo's *Virgin People* (Topaz Film Productions, 1984), exuberant young men in Maryo J. de los Reyes's *Bagets* (Viva Films, 1984).

Of Bernal's similar works, only *Working Girls* (Viva Films, 1984) proved to be as profitable as *Aliw*. In a departure from expectation, *Working Girls* presented the

lives of several types of women in the country's business district, only one of whom detours into sex work after accumulating debts she could not pay. In further contrast with *Aliw*, *Working Girls* was executed more conventionally, Bernal having abandoned his documentarian approach after film reactors proved incapable of appreciating the spontaneity and narratological innovations he introduced.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of stories of "hostess" characters in Philippine cinema provides a handle for scholars of popular culture to track the development of the Filipina's engagement in the public sphere, preceding other national cultures in the region in narrowing the gender gap. This may appear paradoxical in terms of the country's failure in attaining developed status during its authoritarian experiment, since the Asian Dragon and Tiger economies were able to equitize social relations after their countries were able to afford introducing social innovations. Yet from another perspective, the triumph of women in the Philippines proceeds from precisely the failure of patriarchy, with Ferdinand Edralin Marcos configuring his snap-election campaign as his right to restore his female challenger Corazon Cojuangco Aquino to the domestic space where she supposedly belonged.

These shifts in Philippine social relations still have to be historicized more extensively and definitively, but certain markers affirm the trends reflected in national cinema, specifically the willingness of Filipinas to work overseas, climb the corporate ladder, run for public office, and (more specific to mass media) increasingly encroach on the once male-dominated areas of investigative reporting, documentary filmmaking, and periodical editing. The earlier stigmatizing of independent-minded women as "hostesses" has led, ironically and with a certain inevitability, to the original sense of hostessing, of a woman taking charge of a complex and difficult social occasion involving her social equals.

The crucial strategy by which Philippine filmmakers made this shift in imaging was made possible by emphasizing the sororal aspect of women at work. In an early period when only a few, and only the most disadvantaged, had to resort to earning their keep, the local flaneuse could conceivably seek shelter in a movie theater, and therein witness not only a version of herself but also others like herself. This process is of course still continuing, with more types of Othernesses (including male ones) showing up in multicharacter movies after the success of the early batch of "hostess" films inspected in this study.

Notes

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1 A useful recent summary of the origin of the phenomenon was provided by Caroline Hau of Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies: "Through its New Labor Code in 1974 and bilateral labor agreement with Iran in 1975, the Philippine state under Marcos played an active role in promoting and regulating the export of Filipino labor abroad. The government had originally viewed the labor export program as a 'temporary measure' to ease underemployment…. But as the political and financial crises (triggered by the global debt crisis and the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr.) worsened in the early 1980s, the Central Bank turned to labor export as a stop-gap measure, tapping the remittances of Filipino workers to improve the balance-of-payments position. The globalization of Filipino labor and diaspora (as distinct from the earlier periods of migration mainly to the US) is a consequence of this development…."

2 In "Patronage, Pornography, and Youth," Vicente L. Rafael suggests that the desirability and exhibitionism of Imelda Marcos was a factor in the emergence of the *bomba* trend (136). This would hold minimal significance, even if we consider the Marcos connection with Sampaguita Pictures. If, after her screen test, she had remained single and was launched as a film talent, she would have been able to thrive during the last few years of the studio system. The star power and charisma she manifested during her campaign for Ferdinand Marcos's first presidential term would have been congruent with her maturation and intensive (supposedly traumatic) training at that point.

3 The involvement of women directors in this arena of discourse arrived late, after the debuts of Marilou Diaz-Abaya (who was mentored by Ishmael Bernal) in 1979 and Laurice Guillen in 1980. The most active woman director prior to this period was Susana C. de Guzman, who had already retired in the mid-1960s. In the 1970s, the most active women directors were Maria Saret, who focused mainly on action films, and Lupita Aquino-Kashiwahara, who had trained in television and became more involved in opposition activities for the sake of her brother, Benigno S. Aquino Jr., the ex-senator whose assassination in 1983 made him the rallying figure for the anti-dictatorship movement. Also worth noting is that the majority of directors who specialized, in varying degrees, on this mode of filmmaking (see Appendix A) were openly queer.

4 In an interview quoted in his biography, Bernal cited radical Japanese director Oshima Nagisa, whom he recollected "at the open forum of a film festival in Hawaii, [when

Oshima] was asked why he did a film. He said, ‘Because I don’t understand it.’ I’ve done many films for the same reason. For example, I did *Aliw* because I wanted to explore the lives of the hostesses of Roxas Boulevard,” which was a former red-light area for tourists (Bernal et al. 101).

Appendix A
A Sampling of Multicharacter Hostess Films

Kritika Kultura 40: 302.

Newspaper layouts of hostess-themed Filipino films that demonstrate a preference for multiple-character presentations, with similar samples before and after the coverage period of 1974–81. The most productive entity in this group was Regal Films, despite starting only in 1976; the other active producers were Juan de la Cruz Productions and JPM Productions (associated with Elwood Perez and his circle), Alaminos Films (owned by Danny L. Zialcita), and Crown 7 and later Seven Stars of independent producer Jesse Ejercito. Images were drawn from the social

media pages of *Video 48* and *Baul ni Juan*.

First row: *Hidhid* [*Selfish*] (Danny L. Zialcita, 1971); *Bawal: Asawa Mo, Asawa Ko!* [*Forbidden: Your Spouse, My Spouse!*] (Elwood Perez, 1974); *Isang Gabi, Tatlong Babae!* [*One Night, Three Women!*] (Elwood Perez, 1974); *Laging Umaga* [*Always Morning*] (Danny L. Zialcita, 1975); *May Isang Tsuper ng Taksi* [*There Was a Taxi Driver*] (Luciano B. Carlos, Joey Gosiengfiao, Elwood Perez, 1975); *Bago Kayo...Ako Muna ang Mag-aasawa* [*Before You (Marry)…I Should Be First*] (Luciano B. Carlos, 1976).

Second row: *Hindi Kami Damong Ligaw* [*We Are Not Wild Grass*] (Danilo Cabreira, 1976); *Isang Pagibig, Isang Panagarap, at Isang Bulaklak* [*A Romance, A Dream, and a Blossom*] (Junn P. Cabreira, 1976); *Kapag Tumabang ang Asin* [*When Salt Loses Its Flavor*] (Danny L. Zialcita, 1976); *Mga Rosas sa Putikan* [*Roses in the Grime*] (Emmanuel H. Borlaza, 1976); *Nunal sa Tubig* [*Mole on the Water*] (Ishmael Bernal, 1976); *Ang Isinilang Ko Ba'y Kasalanan?* [*Did I Beget a Sin?*] (Nestor Torre, 1977); *Babae!* [*Woman!*] (Joey Gosiengfiao, 1977).

Third row: *Lalaki, Babae Kami* [*Men, We Are Women*] (Danny L. Zialcita, 1977); *Pang Umaga, Pang Tanghali, Panggabi* [*For Morning, For Noon, For Evening*] (Luciano B. Carlos, 1977); *Basta Kabit, May Sabit* [*Affairs (Only) Bring Trouble*] (Luciano B. Carlos, 1978); *Iwasan...Kabaret* [*Avoid…[the] Cabaret*] (Danny Cabreira, Joey Gosiengfiao, Elwood Perez, 1978); *Bedspacers* (Joey Gosiengfiao, 1979); *Menor de Edad* [*Underage*] (Ishmael Bernal, 1979).

Fourth row: *City after Dark* [censored version of *Manila by Night*] (Ishmael Bernal, 1980); *Si Malakas, si Maganda, at si Mahinhin* [*The Strong, the Pretty, and the Timid*] (Danny L. Zialcita, 1980); *Temptation Island* (Joey Gosiengfiao, 1980); *Under-age* (Joey Gosiengfiao, 1980); *Tambay sa Disco* [*Disco Denizen*] (Cloyd Robinson, 1981); *Heartache City* (Danny L. Zialcita, 1985).

Appendix B
Aliw List of Sequences

Extracted by the author from a video copy provided by the always-supportive Jojo Devera. Sequence number is followed by description. Numbers at the end indicate how many of the three main characters appear in the sequence. The film's credits announce it was "written by" Cecille Lardizabal, although Ishmael Bernal wound up improvising most of the scenes and lines of dialogue. When the film was nominated for critics' prizes, Lardizabal issued a statement claiming the director bowdlerized what she had written and denounced the critics for their appreciation. The screenplay nomination went to Bernal and "script consultant" Franklin Cabaluna.

Seq. 1—Ayet tours Ling at Valiente "Super Club," introduces her to the manager, who sets down

work policy; Ayet tells Ling she has to live with her aunt until she (Ayet) can get "parked" by (i.e., live in with) a customer; Atab sees Ling and flirts with her. **2**

Seq. 2—Ling's first night—Japanese greetings can be heard, there's live band music with Atab playing; girls show off in the so-called "aquarium" while playing *pekwa* (fan tan or card dominoes); Esper leaves her baby formula at the counter as Ayet sells cosmetic goods. **3**

Seq. 3—At the dormitory cum beauty parlor next morning, Weng downs some pills while Ayet practices Nihongo; the girls collect rent and payments from colleagues as a student asks for tuition from his gay beautician keeper. Ling arrives and Ayet introduces her to the other residents. **2**

Seq. 4—Esper wakes up from her morning rest because her kid is crying; she fetches Boy (her brother) while mother gossips; Esper scolds Boy for idling around and quarrels with her neighborhood suitor. **1**

Seq. 5—Ayet impresses her Japanese customer with the Nihongo she practiced; the girls then take a short leave because of Wednesday religious service. **3**

Seq. 6—At the red-light district's Baclaran Church (the National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help), a prostitute asks for more Japanese customers as Atab arrives to invite Ling to a date. **3**

Seq. 7—At a nearby beach resort, Ling fends off Atab's advances but gives in in the end. **1**

Seq. 8—Back at the club, Weng confronts Atab over Ling; he tries to appease her and she provides him with meth for both of them to sniff; when they get high, they make out. **0**

Seq. 9—In a native dance workshop (where prospective nightclub workers train so they can enter Japan as cultural talents), the instructors criticize Ayet for being less graceful than the other trainees. They bring up the issue of her being a sex worker. When one dancer similarly insults her, she slaps him and leaves. **1**

Seq. 10—Ayet beds a Japanese customer, using Nihongo for pillow talk. Afterward, she negotiates with him over payment, reminding him of extra fees he forgot to pay for; she tries to sell him perfume but he declines. **1**

Seq. 11—Esper calls at the corner-store phone (implying that she could not afford her own connection) and asks to see her kid's father, who's unavailable. Her neighborhood suitor tries courting her again and witnesses her scolding her mother for lounging around; the suitor criticizes her quarrelsome attitude. **1**

Seq. 12—Esper meets her kid's father at the bayside. He blames his wife for making sure he doesn't stray, and promises that once he gets his act together, he'll make sure to house her and their child and provide for them. **1**

Seq. 13—Atab visits Ling in the slum area and scolds her for playing basketball with neighborhood homeboys. He relates how he had to pawn his guitar but couldn't afford to recover it and will be unable to play at the nightclub without it. Ling forks over the money he needs and gets scolded by her aunt for tolerating a leech. **1**

Seq. 14—The club manager, an elderly former hostess, tells Ling that she heard about her affair with Atab and warns her to avoid dating band members; Wengweng (who presumably informed on Ling) smiles nearby as she listens to Mommy's admonition. **1**

Seq. 15—During a touch-typing class, a working student, Nilo, notices Ayet. After the class, he

invites her for snacks. **1**

Seq. 16—At the club that evening, Ayet agrees to the terms of no longer hostessing laid down by Larry, her prospective sugar daddy; this would be in exchange for being "parked" by Larry in an apartment of her own. **1**

Seq. 17—Ling moves out of her aunt's place to take up Ayet's space in the dormitory, with her aunt nagging her about saving money. At the street corner, Atab awaits her and criticizes the dormitory residence for their decadence and spendthrift habits; he promises to provide a place for Ling when he's been able to save up enough funds. **1**

Seq. 18—The other hostesses play mahjongg at Ayet's new digs as Nilo drops by for a visit. Weng gossips about how some of their has-been colleagues are making pathetic spectacles of themselves at the rural red-light district of the US naval base. Getting higher presumably from drugs she ingested, Weng makes a scene by airing out her butt in front of everybody including Nilo. **1**

Seq. 19—During her first night at the dorm, a homesick Ling wants to sleep beside Weng, but the latter tells her to go to Ruby, who in turn comforts Ling by talking about the forthcoming fiesta in her hometown, where she plans to invite everyone at work. **1**

Seq. 20—When Esper prepares to leave for work, her mother calls for her and Boy to introduce to them her new hubby (and their new stepdad) Polistico, another neighborhood layabout like her. Esper returns to her room with Boy and they bawl over their mother's admission that she needs to have her own source of pleasure. **1**

Seq. 21—A number of Valiente hostesses secure their monthly health certificates at a clinic devoted (per its signage) to "hospitality girls, hostesses, sauna bath attendants, etc." First-timer Ling experiences some discomfort but Weng is already familiar with the process. **1**

Seq. 22—Esper is taken shopping by her child's father at a low-end shopping arcade. She berates him for compensating for his shortcomings by buying her presents. He reminds Esper that his wife's a judge's daughter and suffers from a heart condition, which is why he and Esper have to proceed cautiously. **1**

Seq. 23—At the nightclub, Atab plays with his band as Ling dances with her customer; the pair enjoy their work even if they perform separate from each other. **1**

Seq. 24—Ling checks into a hotel with her john. In bed, in violation of nightclub rules, she relates a sob story about a flood that displaced her family

in her hometown, in effect asking for extra finances so she can help their condition as refugees. **1**

Seq. 25—Esper is fetched by her neighborhood suitor from the club, who makes a pass at her in the taxicab. She resists violently, ridiculing him for being financially unprepared to start a family. **1**

Seq. 26—Nilo visits Ayet, who just finished showering. Larry arrives and behaves rudely toward Nilo, who decides to leave. When he's gone, Larry beats up Ayet for entertaining a suitor; Ayet fights back but proves to be no match for him. **1**

Seq. 27—Ayet returns to the hostesses' dormitory in the early morning and causes an uproar when everyone notices that she's been battered. She tells Ling to return to her aunt so she can reoccupy the space she left earlier. **2**

Seq. 28—Ling goes back to her old place and her aunt tells her to be cautious in selecting sugar daddies; Ling hands over some money for her upkeep. **1**

Seq. 29—Ayet returns to work, where she sees her co-dancer at the culture workshop waiting for her. Annoyed by his empty boasts, she complains to Mommy, the floor manager, about him. Nilo drops by to say hello to Ayet but feels bad that she got beat up. In the aquarium, Ruby commiserates with Esper, who has no customer for the night. **2**

Seq. 30—At a crowded restaurant, Ling exchanges flirtatious smiles with Albert, a mestizo from another table. Atab grows jealous but Weng nudges him to stop him from acting out while Ruby remains oblivious in reading out their horoscopes. When Albert goes to the restroom, Atab follows to confront him. Albert's friends rescue him and Atab leaves with his nightclub group. **1**

Seq. 31—Ling tries to tell Atab how her feelings have changed but he slaps her. She decides to break up but Atab manages to steal her money before she leaves. **1**

Seq. 32—Ling makes love with Albert, who explains afterward how he's unable to make ends meet. He asks for support from her, to which she accedes without much thought. **1**

Seq. 33—Ling's aunt scolds her for moving in with Albert, saying how she should learn from her (the aunt's) example. **1**

Seq. 34—Ayet hangs out at the bayside with Nilo on a street-food date. The latter finally musters courage to confess his love to her. Ayet winds up laughing at the pathos of their situation, which he mistakes for an insult. **1**

Seq. 35—Albert and his gang treat Ling as maid and cook and objectify her in their conversation. Albert's mother quarrels with him for requesting a side dish whose ingredients they can't afford. Her husband tells her (the mother) to stop airing their financial troubles but she complains about having another mouth to feed (Ling's). Ling looks unhappy at the situation she got herself in. **1**

Seq. 36—At the nightclub, a totally stoned Weng goes wild on the dance floor. Ayet entertains the ex-dancer she can't stand. Plainclothes police decide to pick Weng up after finding a packet of dope in her panties. Ling feels sorry for Weng but Esper tells her that Weng told on management about her and Atab because she wanted to keep Atab for herself. **3**

Seq. 37—Esper and her daughter's father (along with their kid) are out walking along Roxas blvd. They run across the man's wife, who causes a scene and badmouths Esper. The man signals to Esper that he can't go with her any longer. **1**

Seq. 38—Ling studies keypunching. After class, her classmates tell her learns about a job at the Philippine National Bank; she asks about the salary but isn't impressed by their answer. **1**

Seq. 39—The ex-dancer keeps coming up with excuses for not providing Ayet with money he promised. She takes him to the club entrance and quarrels with him. **1**

Seq. 40—Esper has asked Boy to call her a cab; before she boards, her neighborhood suitor tells her to wait so he can introduce to her the woman he just married. He explains how they kept making out then got pregnant so they had to tie the knot immediately. **1**

Seq. 41—Esper gets intoxicated from binge-drinking while entertaining a customer, until she falls into a stupor. They take her to the aquarium, where Ayet and Ling ask what happened; another hostess says how Esper kept crying over how she lost the men she was hoping to build her future on. **3**

Seq. 42—Ayet goes to Nilo's campus to visit him there. He's flustered to see her and wants to take her out, but she insists they hang out in the school canteen instead. She finds out

he's a working student still a long way from getting settled; in an inner monologue, she advises herself to give up on him, so she leaves before he could return with their order. **1**

Seq. 43—Ayet returns to Valiente, reluctant but forced by circumstance. Daddy, their manager, lectures the girls to remind them to leave their personal problems and anxieties before they work so they could entertain their customers properly; he references some of the major characters' troubles and mentions Weng's drug bust. Mommy arrives to tell Ling that her john's waiting for her. The customer tells Ling that the pad he prepared for her is ready. **3**

Seq. 44—Dressed fashionably, Ling bids goodbye to her fellow dormitory occupants. **1**

Seq. 45—Ling arrives at her new apartment, opening several gates to enter. Her sugar daddy turns up and sets down strict ground rules, forbidding her from working and entertaining friends. When he leaves, she ponders her situation for a while, then walks out. **1**

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