THE SLUM CHRONOTOPE AND IMAGINARIES OF SPATIAL JUSTICE IN PHILIPPINE URBAN CINEMA

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY

2017

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes that Philippine independent urban cinema reveals imaginaries of spatial justice. The works approached as Philippine urban cinema are independently produced and internationally circulated films that heavily feature or reference Philippine slums as setting, with narratives that centre on the lives of the urban poor. The theory of spatial justice as defined by leading urban theorists argues that social justice has spatio-temporal dimensions. Grounded on this foundational premise, this study approaches Philippine urban cinema in its capacity to foreground and represent the complexities of social justice as contextualised in Philippine urban conditions, with local and global trajectories. Alongside the theory of spatial justice, the dissertation draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "chronotope" (literally meaning time-space) to formulate a theory of the "slum chronotope" as a foundational concept for analysing the ways by which films are able to imagine issues of spatial justice, with emphasis on character configuration and narrative formation. The chapters are structured according to genres and modalities, where other chronotopes that dialogue with the slum chronotope are identified and examined. In the coming-of-age chapter, the study locates "chronotopes of passage"; in the melodrama chapter, the study locates "affective chronotopes" configured by the spatial practice of walking; in the Manila noir chapter, the study locates "chronotopes of mobility"; and in the final chapter, the study locates "chronotopes of in/visibility" in the Overseas Filipino Worker genre. This study offers a novel interdisciplinary framework for analysing Philippine urban cinema, and in the process, makes a case for Philippine urban history as crucial grounds for understanding the global urbanisation of poverty.

<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>

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INTRODUCTION

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IN PHILIPPINE URBAN CINEMA

Close to a billion people now inhabit the slums of the developing world, an alarming figure that has no doubt incited global concern over what has been referred to as the "urbanization of poverty" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003, p. vi). This contemporary phenomenon of "slumification" has compelled scholars from across disciplines to examine the complexities of urban formation in the Third World, with the rise of slums indicating a crucial shift in the development of the modern city. Of equal significance is the urbanisation of poverty's visual turn, as the slums and its inhabitants have become objects of interest for photography and cinema, images that serve to complement and render visible the urbanisation of poverty in the Third World.

Included in the global imaginary of urban poverty are the sprawling slums of the cities that comprise the expanse of Metropolitan Manila. The Philippine capital is bursting with an estimated four million slum-dwellers, a figure that amounts to roughly 37 per cent of the total urban population of 12 million (Ballesteros 2011). As one of the mega-cities of the world replete with slum settlements, it comes as no surprise that Manila's slums and its inhabitants figure prominently in the history of Philippine cinematic imagery, whether they are used as primary setting or are heavily referenced throughout film narratives.

Set against the global and local urbanisation of poverty manifested in the rise of slums, this dissertation examines selected films that can be regarded as contemporary examples of Philippine urban cinema. In roughly the last decade, Philippine cinema saw the unprecedented surge of independent digital filmmaking, which includes the production of urban-based films. The films that

this study will examine as contemporary examples of Philippine urban cinema are independently produced and internationally circulated films that prominently feature, reference, or dialogue with Manila slums as setting.

This study aims to: 1) Offer an interdisciplinary framework for reading films from the emerging genre of Philippine urban cinema that draws from urban studies, film studies, and cultural theory; and in the process, 2) Make a case for Philippine urban cinema, and Philippine urban history in general, as a significant vantage point from which to understand imaginaries of narrative and subjective formation in the age of neoliberal global capitalism. As I hope to show, this study of Philippine urban cinema, while contextualised in local urban conditions, also dialogues with the larger context of global urban development.

In simple terms, this study examines how the spatio-temporal configurations of narratives and characters in Philippine urban films might reveal imaginaries of social justice. In theoretical terms, this study proposes to locate and examine imaginaries of "spatial justice" offered by representative films from the emerging genre of Philippine urban cinema. The theory of spatial justice argues that social justice can be approached from a spatial perspective. For its foundational analytical tool, the study draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "chronotope" (literally meaning time-space) in order to formulate the theory of the "slum chronotope," which I argue to be crucial to the narrative and character configuration of the study's selected films. In the study's chapter discussions, I locate other chronotopes particular to the genres enabled by the slum chronotope, which are able to shore up the different ways by which the film subjects imagine or enact the struggle for spatial justice in and beyond the film worlds. Throughout the chapters, the study further draws from interdisciplinary sources across critical theory, film theory, and urban and space theory in support of the study's general aim of locating spatial justice.

If we are to understand slumification as the materialised urban manifestation of global social injustice, it is possible to approach Philippine urban cinema with the intent of uncovering the spatio-temporal representations of social in/justice. The main question I strive to answer in the chapters that follow is this: **How does Philippine urban cinema imagine "spatial justice" through spatio-temporal (chronotopic) narrative and character configurations?** In doing so, the study is strongly underpinned by the belief in the dialectical relations between cinema and urban space.

In this introductory chapter, I provide the necessary groundwork for my reading of spatial justice in Philippine urban cinema in six sections. First, I briefly locate this study in what has been called the cinema-city nexus and the urban imaginary. The next section explains the study's key theoretical concepts of spatial justice and the chronotope, where I also discuss the emergence of global slums. The third section outlines the contours of what I designate as the slum chronotope, and includes reflections on the study's approach to realism and ethics. The fourth section provides contextual background on the emergence of Manila slums, and looks at how the imaginary of the slum chronotope has figured into the development of Philippine urban cinema. The fifth section notes the study's scope and limitations, while the last section provides an overview of the chapters that will follow.

I.   The cinema-city nexus as urban imaginary

This study of Philippine urban cinema can be located broadly at the intersections of film studies and urban studies, a terrain that takes into account existing forays into the discourse of the cinematic city, or what can be called the "cinema-city nexus" (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001 p. 2). There is a vast source of literature that examines the relations between cinema and the city, with David Clarke's (1997) *Cinematic City* and Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice's (2001)

edited collections arguably being the two most highly influential precursors. The former focuses on European cities, while the latter includes examples from global cities given its contextualisation of the cinema-city nexus in the period of globalisation. Both collections call for the productive linking of film studies with other disciplines, particularly sociology and geography. Clarke (1997 p. 2) notes that in the past there has been a "wilful disregard for such a supposedly tangential topic as film" among urban theorists. Shiel and Fitzmaurice (2001 p. 2) observes that there has been growing interest in the cinema city nexus, and argues that sociological studies and film/cultural studies are mutually beneficial disciplines, as they are both concerned with the "*lived social realities* in a range of urban societies of the present and recent past."

Citing both anthologies in a more recent assessment of the cinema-city nexus, Charlotte Brunsdon (2012) provides an impressive list of scholarship on the "cinematic city" discourse. Brunsdon (2012 p. 221) argues for a more thorough engagement with the role of film studies itself in the cinema-city nexus, as she argues that the study of film remains to be seen as having "much less gravitas" than other disciplines. Nevertheless, she posits that the cinema-city nexus remains a rich area of interdisciplinary studies as she explores how films have been used by other disciplines in recasting seminal concepts in urban studies, such as the figure of the wandering *flaneur*.

It is only relatively recently, however, that the cinema-city nexus has been pursued in the study of films beyond Anglo-American contexts. There has been welcome interest in the study of films in the context of global cities (Krause and Petro 2003; Andersson and Webb 2016). An exemplary work that explores Indian urban experience through cinema is Ranjani Mazumdar's (2007) *Bombay Cinema: an Archive of the City.* There is also much recent interest in East Asian cities and cinema (Braester and Tweedie 2010; Zhang 2010). A more recent publication that converses with my own study is Igor Krstić's (2016) *Slums on*

Screen, where he explores the representation of slum spaces in world cinema, including some examples from this study's scope of films.

Coming from the direction of urban studies, particularly human geography, Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn's (1994) edited collection may be considered the discipline's pioneering step towards actively linking geography with film. Here, Aitken and Zonn call for intertextuality between cinema and geography, particularly in terms of place and representation. They argue: "The very heart of geography – the search for our sense of place and sense in the world – is constituted by the practice of looking and is in effect, a study of images" (Aitken and Zonn 1994 p. 7). Aitken and Zonn (1994) also reference geography's earlier turn towards intertextuality (not limited to the cinema-city discourse) with the very emergence of human geography as a discipline.

This study's foray into the cinema-city nexus activates what David Harvey (1973 p. 24) has called the need for "spatial consciousness" or the "geographical imagination." It can be argued that the notion of imaginative geographies cuts across works of human geography (Massey, Allen, and Sarre 1999). In his ground-breaking work, *Social Justice and the City,* Harvey (1973 p. 24) describes the geographical imagination as the kind of thinking that "enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them."

This study does not use the term imaginary lightly, taking after thinkers who have reinvigorated the concept as crucial to the understanding of the world. As Arjun Appadurai (1996 p. 31) has famously argued: "...the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order." More specifically, this study examines slum films as

forms of the urban imaginary, or what Andreas Huyssen (2008 p. 3) has described as "the way city dwellers imagine their own city as the place of everyday life, the site of inspiring traditions and continuities as well as the scene of histories of destruction, crime, and conflicts of all kinds."

Further, Huyssen (2008 p. 5) formulates urban imaginaries as mediated "sites of encounters with other cities" an approach that allows me to situate the movement and flow of Philippine cinema within the transnational context of cultural production and circulation. The urban imaginary, with its global scope, relates to what Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (1996 p. 14) has called the "transnational imaginary" that refers to the intersections between local and global cultural productions where everyday life is perpetually being reshaped and reimagined. More significant to my own study, Wilson and Dissanayake (1996 p. 11) raise the point that film remains "the crucial genre of transnational production and global circulation for refigured narratives."

Similar to Fredric Jameson's (1995) popular notion of "cognitive mapping" which pertains to the attempt to make sense of one's place in the global capitalist order in geopolitical terms, the transnational urban imaginary resists totalising tendencies in its attempt to unsettle binary oppositions "with a spatial dialectic acknowledging the agency of social imagination and cultural labor" (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996 p. 6). The matter of human social agency is stressed in these reinterpretations of the imaginary as social process, with the concept pertaining to the understanding that "the city is located and continually reproduced through such orienting acts of imagination, acts grounded in material space and social practice" (Çinar and Bender 2007 p. xii).

II.   Routes of reading: Key concepts

The urban imaginaries offered in Philippine urban cinema can be examined as cultural expressions of spatial justice, read through the lens of the chronotope. The following discussion defines the study's key concepts, with the first section on spatial justice including a historical overview of the rise of slums.

A. Spatial Justice

To arrive at a strict definition of spatial justice is not only difficult, it is also impossible and restrictive given that "space" and "justice" are in themselves concepts that can be approached from various perspectives. As the concept's main proponent, Edward Soja (2010 p. 6) does not provide a "cookbook' definition of spatial justice. Soja (2010 p. 1) argues that the premise for spatial justice is that "the spatiality of justice…is an integral and formative component of justice itself, a vital part of how justice and injustice are socially constructed and evolve over time." He goes on to say that there exists a "*socio-spatial dialectic*" in the struggle for justice, which means that social processes are influenced by the production of space and vice versa (Soja 2010 p. 4). Soja's (2010 p. 13) endorsement of the term spatial justice, moreover, does not seek to replace spatial justice with social justice; rather, it pertains to a "particular emphasis and interpretative perspective" of social justice *as* spatial.

In general terms, spatial justice pertains to a *perspective* that social justice has significant spatial dimensions. In outlining the various philosophical definitions of social justice, citing for instance the seminal works of John Rawl's (1973) notion of liberal social justice and Iris Marion Young's (1990) formulation of the politics of difference, Soja stresses that spatial justice does not assume an absolute definition of social justice, something which does not exist in the first place. Soja (2010 p. 74) is careful to point out that "complete justice, like

complete equality, is unachievable. What this realization does is shift attention to the production of injustices and the embeddedness of the production process in the social order."

Mustafa Dikeç's (2001; 2007; 2015) expansion of spatial justice complements Soja's definitions. I can only offer a summary of Dikeç's complex formulation of spatial justice across his works, which essentially expands Soja's theory of spatial justice to emphasise the notion of emancipatory politics. Like Soja, Dikeç (2001 p. 1794) forwards "the spatial dialectics of injustice." Dikeç (2001 pp. 1792–1793) defines this dialectic as such: "…the spatiality of injustice implies that justice has a spatial dimension to it, and therefore, that a spatial perspective might be used to discern injustice *in space*…The injustice of spatiality, on the other hand, implies existing structures in their capacities to produce and reproduce injustice *through* space." From this dialectic, Dikeç defines spatial justice as claiming rights to political participation in the ways the city is shaped, which strives towards the practice of emancipatory politics in and through space.

Soja and Dikeç's formulations of spatial justice owe much to the earlier theories of Marxist geographer, David Harvey. Harvey (1973 p. 98) engages with a spatial definition of social justice succinctly captured in the phrase "a just distribution justly arrived at." It is this formulation of territorial social justice that Harvey (1997, 2000) updates, revises, and expands throughout the years in order to address contemporary concerns such as environmental justice (e.g. new environmental hazards in spaces of poverty) and the politics of difference. Harvey (1997 p. 362) argues that social justice, while a "universal" ideal, must "be construed as a differentiated construction embedded in processes operating in quite different spatio-temporal scales." At the same time, he cautions against superficial claims to identity and difference that obscure the social processes that reinforce inequality and social exclusion (Harvey 1997). Harvey also

champions the call for the "right to the city," derived from Henri Lefebvre, a call essentially tied to spatial justice as it means "The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves" (Harvey 2008 p. 23). Harvey's insights serve to ground the theory of spatial justice as a concept that is best understood when contextualised in specific urban conditions.

Underlying the concept of spatial justice is Henri Lefebvre's (1991) highly influential theories in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre principally argues that: "(Social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre 1991 p. 26). From this, Lefebvre introduces his spatial triad as tools for analysing the production of space. The spatial triad is comprised of "representations of space," referring to "the dominant space of any society" (Merrifield 2013 p. 109); secondly, the "spaces of representation" or the spaces used and inhabited by human beings as part of everyday experience (Merrifield 2013 p. 109); and, "spatial practices" which refer to the means we "structure lived reality, include routes and networks, patterns and interactions that connect places and people, images with reality, work with leisure" (Merrifield p. 110). There is no strict way of delineating the components of Lefebvre's spatial triad, as all three constitute the production of space – but these are the overlapping elements that the study implicitly references throughout. Put simply, spatial justice is socially produced.

The growth of slums globally is a significant aspect of urbanisation that lays bare the social production of space. The production of slum spaces links directly with the concerns of spatial justice, as it is an urban phenomenon that lends itself strongly to the project of unravelling the spatiality of justice and the in/justice of spatiality.

Slums as spatial in/justice

The rise of slums goes back to 19th century Europe where the term "slum" first emerged to mean "racket" or "criminal trade" (Davis 2006 p. 21). The term can be traced to Victorian London, used to refer at first to "a room in which low goings-on occurred" (Dyos 1967 p. 8) or to parts of the city that are rarely frequented. In looking at the historical emergence of slums, what is clear is that there has never been a precise definition or description for these spaces. Even the values ascribed to slum spaces have evolved. As stated in the landmark publication collated by a group of over a hundred international researchers commissioned by the UN, there are two broad categories of slums: "slums of hope" and "slums of despair," the former described as "progressing" settlements, the latter "declining" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003 p. 9). Among urban theorists, some view the rise of slums with optimism, such as the architect Rem Koolhaas (2000) who views the slums of Laos as a model for future cities. Meanwhile, others take a more critical view of the rise of slums, with Mike Davis' (2006) *Planet of Slums* being a prime example.

While spaces that can be called slums do indeed exist in advanced capitalist countries, the slums that the UN is concerned with are those that have become more and more entrenched and visible in cities of the Third World. Consider this description that practically equates the Third World city with slum development: "The extension of slums in developing countries is a product of 20th and 21st century urban growth and represents the very essence of the Third World city" (Bolay 2006 p. 285). It seems that there is a growing sense that the slums of the Third World are far worse than their Anglo-American counterparts. As *City* editor Howard Husock (2015) phrased it in an online piece, with reference to Jacob Riis' photographs of New York slums in the 1880s: "Riis's Manhattan, even at its roughest, was never that squalid. True, some 20,000 shacks once

squatted on the site of what became Central Park. And certainly the Lower East Side was terribly crowded. But even the worst Orchard Street tenements were actual buildings, not tin-roofed shanties with dirt floors."

Slums in cities of the Third World, although different in every context, can be situated in the current age of neoliberal global capitalism, thanks to urban restructuring schemes endorsed by global financial institutions. In *Planet of Slums,* Davis (2006) grounds his analysis of slumification in the conditions imposed by debt-lending institutions to Third World borrowers following the worldwide financial crisis in the 1980s. According to Davis (2006) the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's structural adjustment policies can be blamed for the rise of slums in the Third World and the gradual retreat of the state in providing social services, shifting emphasis on privatisation. Davis echoes the landmark publication of the United Nations, *The Challenge of Slums*, where it is directly stated that: "The main single cause of increase in poverty and inequality during the 1980s and the 1990s was the retreat of the state" (Davis 2006 p. 43), a direct consequence of IMF-WB structural adjustment policies.

The neoliberal project that has seen the unprecedented rise of slums has been deemed part of the evolution of neoliberal global capitalism through the logic of what Harvey (2009) has called "accumulation by dispossession." Harvey describes this process as internal to capitalism's ability to extract value from those it has dispossessed of capital with its drive towards surplus production. As it relates to geography and urbanisation, accumulation by dispossession further explains the ever-present threat of demolitions against slum communities in the cities of the Third World.

Tayabb Mahmud (2010) explains that capitalism's accumulation by dispossession relates to the overproduction of labour, or what has been called

"surplus humanity" (Davis 2006 p. 174) – those who now constitute the informal economy of the urbanising world. As the world's source of surplus labour, the informal economy of slum inhabitants has become an integral part of capitalist survival, even though slum dwellers are relegated invisible and are not recognised as full citizens of the state (Mahmud 2010). The city's paradoxical dependence on the dispossessed literally sustains accumulation, as the invisible spaces of the slums become the vast source of cheap labour that keeps cities alive (Mahmud 2010). Mahmud (2010 p. 144) argues that: "Rapid urban growth triggered by globalized economic circuits, along with diminished state capacities and resulting civil strife, is the recipe for mushrooming slums in the global South." Related to the significance of slums to the workings of accumulation by dispossession, philosopher Slavoj Zizek (2009 p. 424) has argued that slums are '"the true "symptoms" of slogans such as "Development," "Modernization," and the "World market": not an unfortunate accident, but a necessary product of the innermost logic of global capitalism.'

B. The theory of the chronotope

A term Bakhtin borrowed from physics, the chronotope ("time-space) is a concept that refers to spatio-temporal configurations in literary texts through which narrative meanings are created and derived. In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin (1981 p. 84) describes the chronotope as the artistic form where time/space conjoin: "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history." For Bakhtin, chronotopes are crucial to narrative formation, functioning as "the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events…the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981 p. 250). As spatio-temporal forms of imagination, chronotopes are "the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a centre for concretizing

representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel" (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981 p. 250). Bakhtin cites examples of places that can function as chronotopes, such as the road, the castle, the salon – forms which give rise to genre formation. For instance, he describes the chronotope of the castle to be "saturated through and through with a time that is historical" (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981 p. 246) so that it features prominently in the historical novel.

As well as being constitutive of narrative and genre formation, chronotopes have significant representational value. Fictional narratives are constantly engaged in dialogue with actually existing time-spaces, without which the imaginary time-spaces would not have been imagined. The chronotope follows the same principle of Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism" that recognises that there is a "constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981). As Bakhtin (1981 p. 253) has powerfully argued: "Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work." At the same time, Bakhtin (1981) warns that there is no direct correspondence between reality and artistic expression. The meaning/s that the chronotope may enable are generated only upon reading, which is what I take Bakhtin to mean when he said that the chronotope is "almost like a metaphor (but not entirely)..." (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981 p. 84).

Related to this mediation of reality via the chronotope is its historical nature as a textual and contextual tool. Bakhtin recognises that time and space, real or imagined, are never static. As leading Bakhtinian scholar Michael Holquist (2002 p. 138) explains, to view the chronotope as dialogic means that "…the time/space relation of any particular text will always be perceived in the context of a larger set of time/space relations that obtain in the social and historical environment in which it is read." Moreover, to view chronotopes as dialogic

means that their meanings have the potential to change across time (Morson and Emerson 1990).

Many Bakhtinian scholars (Clark and Holquist 1984; Morson and Emerson 1990; Montgomery 1993; Holquist 2002; Bemong 2011) have pointed out that Bakhtin never actually formulated a strict definition of the chronotope, which could also be why the term is underused relative to other Bakhtinian concepts like dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnival. Despite and because of the lack of a strict definition, however, the chronotope has productively been used as a theoretical tool beyond literature. As Neal Bemong (2011 p. 5) has argued: "This lack of analytical precision has led to a proliferation of heterogeneous chronotopic approaches to literature, and more generally, culture."

A growing number of studies use the chronotope in film analysis, although understandably, there remains far more in literary studies. Film critic Robert Stam (1989 p. 11) can be credited for his endorsement of Bakhtinian theories in film analysis, with the theory of the chronotope being "ideally suited" for film analysis. The film product is a literal encapsulation of the taking place of time, the film screening itself an event through which "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole" (Stam 1989 p. 11).

An early study on the chronotope in film analysis is that of Michael Montgomery (1993 p. 5), where he formally defines chronotopes as "any topological pattern in the artistic work that possesses the characteristics of a semantic field or grid." In a later work, Paula Massood (1998, 2003), a student of Stam, examines what she identifies as the "antebellum chronotope," "the black city ghetto chronotope," and the "hood chronotope" in her study of the historical development of African American films. Sue Vice (1997), in her introduction to Bakhtinian theories, reformulates the "chronotope of the road" in her feminist reading of the popular Hollywood film, *Thelma and Louise* (1991), which she

approaches as a road movie. Martin Flanagan's study (2009) examines the reworking of classic Bakhtinian chronotopes at play in contemporary Hollywood genres. In a reading of lesbian spaces in cinema, Lee Wallace (2011 p. 11) suggests the examination of the "apartment chronotope" in selected narrative films as "the privileged marker of lesbian possibility."

Two works on the chronotope and textual studies relate more closely to how I deploy it in this study. In terms of generic and representational significance, I look to Vivian Sobchack's (1998) frequently cited essay on film noir and Hamid Naficy's (2001) study of exilic cinema.

Sobchack (1998) identifies "lounge time" as the "master chronotope" in classic American film noir. What she calls the chronotope of "lounge time" is derived from the time-space configurations of actually existing spaces of non-dwelling (bars, saloons, brothels, hotels) that configure the narratives and characters in American film noir. Sobchack (1998 p. 148) argues that the chronotope of lounge time configures the very genre of film noir: "Cinematically concretized and foregrounded, they [these spaces] both constitute and circumscribe the temporal possibilities and life-worlds of the characters who are constrained by them – and they provide the grounding premise for that cinematic grouping we have come to recognise as noir."

Sobchack (1998 p. 150) further explicates the chronotope's value in establishing the mutually constitutive relations between film representations and the world they represent, with chronotopes serving as "the spatiotemporal currency between the two orders of existence and discourse." I take this to mean that chronotopes serve to link text and context, whose meanings actively dialogue with audience reception and expectations. Moreover, Sobchack reiterates the chronotope's representational significance in terms of how it enables the configuration of genre expectations:

"Never merely the spatiotemporal backdrop for narrative events, they provide the literal and concrete ground from which narrative and character emerge as the temporalization of human action, significant in its diacritical marking of both cultural and narrative space. It is in this diacritical valuation of concrete space and its circumscription of temporal activity that chronotopes are not merely descriptive but rather constitutive of what we apprehend as genre." (Sobchack 1998 p. 151).

Next, I turn to Naficy's (2001) usage of the chronotope for textual analysis in his readings of "accented cinema" or films by exilic filmmakers. According to Naficy (2001 p. 153), the chronotope operates as the "optics with which we may understand both the films and the historical conditions of displacement that give rise to them." In his textual readings, Naficy reads into the "structures of feelings" (following Raymond Williams' theory) that are enabled by certain chronotopes. For example, "open chronotopes" of nature, mountains and monuments are imbued with temporal feelings of introspection and nostalgia related to imaginaries of the homeland. In contrast, some exilic filmmakers use "closed chronotopes" of prisons or jail cells connoting times of claustrophobia and panic. Some films under the genre of accented cinema might also use "border chronotopes," the middle ground of open and close chronotopes where narratives depict journeys and border crossings. In locating chronotopes in his case studies of accented cinema, Naficy (2001 p. 153) points out that these chronotopes are "mutually inclusive", such that they may "reinforce, coexist with, or contradict one another" (Naficy 2001 p. 153).

Having addressed the chronotope's value as generic and representational tool in textual analysis, it becomes possible to link the chronotopic approach to this study's overall aim of locating imaginaries of spatial justice in film texts. For this, I turn to Julian Murphet's (2001) chronotopic study of representations of space in novels set in Los Angeles.

According to Murphet (2001 p. 24): 'The tradition in structuralist thought of presenting cultural forms as '"imaginary resolutions to real contradictions" acquires a new potency when these contradictions are grasped as *spatial*.' This is an assertion that directly links with the theory of spatial justice. Murphet proceeds to develop this spatial approach with Lefebvre's production of space, emphasising that Lefebvre's spatial triad "can hardly be thought of as fitting into some agreeably harmonizing palimpsest of totality" (Murphet 2001 p. 24). According to Murphet, Lefebvre's understanding of the production of space does away with dilemmas of authenticity in representation, with the premise that "the 'real' is always and already shot through with representationality" (Murphet 2001 p. 28).

A chronotopic approach means examining cultural texts "not as mirrors held up in nature, but as acts of appropriation of social space" (Murphet 2001 p. 28). As Murphet (2001 p. 28) argues, chronotopic representations can be read "as a series of enactments of spatial appropriation by individuals (and their group affiliations)." I pursue this assertion further in this study, where the struggle for spatial appropriation reveals imaginaries of spatial justice. Similar to Murphet, in my own chronotopic readings of spatial justice in Philippine urban cinema, I am not out to prove authenticity, or even to evaluate filmic realism (an issue which I address more in the next section on the slum chronotope). Chronotopic readings already assume that reality is always mediated in artistic expressions. Rather I am interested in how films are able to offer imaginaries of spatial justice through close readings of how narrative and character configuration may enable and offer moments of spatial appropriation.

A chronotopic approach to spatial justice mines texts for instances in which characters — these "subjectivities commensurate with their social spaces and times" (Murphet 1998 p. 30) — struggle against modes of injustice within their

milieu.[1] In seeking spatial justice in these visual narratives, emancipatory potentials can be gleaned from strategies that attempt to reveal and/or suppress modes of domination and repression through their use of space in the time of narrative unfolding. From the perspective of this socio-spatial dialectic, slum films can be more productively evaluated in terms of the ways they are able to use space towards instances of emancipatory politics. Even if the ideological closure of the film narratives may at first glance be taken to mean the absolute absence of hope, this does not mean the films do not reveal moments where the social agents enact desires toward justice configured by the slum chronotope – the specific chronotopic form that I turn to next.

III.   The slum chronotope

The slum chronotope that I locate as the organising centre of Philippine urban cinema, to borrow Vice's (1997 p. 201) words, "may be puzzling or hard to grasp because it seems omnipresent to the point either of invisibility or extreme obviousness." Most of the films analysed in this study are set within, reference, or dialogue with the imaginary of Manila slums. If we understand the term "slum" as referring generally to spaces of urban poverty, it would be reasonable to expect narratives and images that revolve around the theme of poverty. As Montgomery (1993 p. 5) puts it: "The chronotope references real-life situations rife with everyday associations for audiences, helping to create a sense of shared place." Beyond this commonsensical view, the slum's chronotopic function significantly locates these narratives in the here and now of Manila's urban history, emplacing the genre in the local and global urban imaginary. It is in unpacking the spatio-temporal specificities of the slum chronotope, and the meanings they generate in relation to genre, that slum spaces function beyond

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[1] Murphet (1998) earlier used the theory of the chronotope in a compelling essay on film noir, where he reads the absence of the feminine and black spaces in the genre as projections of a certain racial unconscious. He also cites Sobhack's essay on noir as informing his understanding of the chronotope. See MURPHET, J., 1998. Film noir and the racial unconscious. *Screen*, 39(1), pp. 22–35.

mere setting, that is, chronotopically. As the slum chronotope organises narrative unfolding, so too, can it potentially organise our ways of thinking about the times and spaces we live in.

I deliberately invoke the term "slum" in my designation of the slum chronotope to enter the various discourses that this word has generated in its very usage, or the discomfort that the term invokes in both commonsensical and academic terms. Alan Gilbert (2007) all but denounced the use of the term "slums" by the United Nations and Davis, calling it a dangerous resuscitation of the term. Gilbert (2007 p. 701) argues: "What makes the word 'slum' dangerous is the series of negative associations that the term conjures up, the false hopes that a campaign against slums raises and the mischief that unscrupulous politicians, developers and planners may do with term." Relatedly, Jeremy Seabrook (2009) argues in a Guardian column that the slum term is a problematic, colonial British term, saying that it assumes homogeneity of slum formation and development. For Seabrook (2009): "…the word "slum" is a treacherous term. Since slums have all but disappeared in western cities, this suggests they are an inescapable phase of progress, and will, in due course, also vanish from Kinshasa, Cairo and Nairobi."

The unfavourable commentary surrounding the slum imaginary recalls the strong accusations of "poverty pornography" surrounding films like *City of God* (Meirelles and Lund 2004) set in the slums of Rio de Janeiro and the remarkably successful film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle 2008), set in the slums of Mumbai. Novelist Arundhati Roy's harsh critique of *Slumdog Millionaire* provides a succinct description of poverty pornography: "Politically, the film de-contextualises poverty – by making poverty an epic prop, it disassociates poverty from the poor. It makes India's poverty a landscape, like a desert or a mountain range, an exotic beach, god-given, not man-made" (cited in Vohral 2009). Philippine urban cinema's success in the international circuit coincides

with the production of these other "slum films" (for lack of a better term) – with Filipino filmmaker Brillante Mendoza's Best Director triumph at the Cannes Film Festival for the film, *Kinatay* (2009), occurring in the same year as Danny Boyle's triumph for *Slumdog Millionaire* at the Oscars.[2]

This charge of poverty pornography ascribed to slum films is actually what piqued my own interest in developing this study, prompted as well by the criticism of Philippine slum films by Filipino academics. In an early critique, Gary Devilles (2008) comments on the "poverty of pornography" exhibited by Philippine indie films seemingly made for the voyeuristic consumption of an international audience. Similarly, filmmaker and academic Eulalio Guieb (2012) argues that many of these films fail to recognise and represent the political structures that produce and sustain Philippine poverty. In a critical essay that informs my selection of Philippine urban cinema, Patrick Campos (2011 p. 13) notes the thorny issue of "pornography" in "new urban realist films" in terms of how they have "capitalised on 'regressive discourses' about its own culture." More recently, leading Filipino film scholar Rolando Tolentino (2014) calls the recognised look of Philippine independent films as the new mainstream and challenges indie filmmakers to go beyond what he deems predictable representations of poverty.

On the ethics of realism

The charge of poverty pornography ascribed to slum films implicitly situates the recent products of Philippine urban cinema within the longstanding discourse of realism and the related issue of ethics in film studies. The question of the "real"

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[2] It is also worth noting that the very use of the term "pornography" in evaluating these slum films situates them fairly recently in the 1980s. According to Nandita Dogra (2012), the term was popularised by Jørgen Lissner, and later gained currency among academics and aid workers who critiqued the use of images of starving African children in fundraising campaigns led by international non-government organisations. See DOGRA, N., 2013. *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs*. Reprint edition. London: I.B.Tauris.

hovers over the sinuous issue of how to represent poverty in films, with the poverty porn charge bearing with it not just a sense of falsity, but more significantly, violence and exploitation of the film's marginalised subjects and subject matter. Mendoza, when asked to respond to accusations of poverty porn, insists he only seeks to show the reality of Philippine poverty. In one interview, he denies the criticism that his films glorify poverty and throws the question back to his critics: "Why are we embarrassed to show the truth, if this is really truthful, if this is what's really happening?"[3] (Mendoza cited in ABS-CBN News 2012). In a New York Times interview, he remarks: "So is it poverty porn when you are telling stories of society?" (Mendoza cited in Qin, 2016). And in a more recent interview, he says: "It just so happened that the characters, the people in my films are poor. But I don't show poverty. Mahirap lang sila [They are poor], but the stories are not about poor people. Those are stories of people who happen to be poor" (Mendoza cited in Afinidad-Bernardo 2017).

The issues surrounding poverty pornography invoked by the slum imaginary in films warrant some remarks on the ethics of realism. Although the study does not dwell fully on the aesthetics of film realism given the arguably more productive route towards imaginaries of spatial justice, this does not mean that the notion of the real is absent in the films – most of which, after all, take place on location in actual slums. As argued in the previous section, the study thinks through realism via the chronotope, which assumes that the "real" is always mediated in artistic expressions. The theory of the chronotope acknowledges that mediated artistic expressions are derived from "actual chronotopes of the world" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 235) – the slum chronotope could not have been imagined if not for the actual existence of slums. It remains useful, however, to briefly situate Philippine urban cinema in the realist discourse as it relates to filmic representations.

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[3] Translation from Tagalog mine.

It is by now generally acknowledged that film realism does not simply pertain to the naive mechanical recording of reality by the camera. André Bazin's (1967, 1971) seminal writings on film realism remain highly influential in contemporary film analysis. The foundational premise of his arguments is the notion that the camera, by adding duration to the technology of photography, is uniquely capable of rendering reality compared to other arts. From his extensive works, Bazin's (1971) endorsement of realist aesthetics such as the long take and deep focus are often rehearsed. Lauding the advent of Italian neorealism, Bazin (1971, p. 26) expressed the enduring paradox that "…realism in art can only be achieved in one way – through artifice."

It is not difficult to see some of the elements associated with Bazianian realism, largely based on his writings on Italian neorealism, in Philippine urban cinema. Emerging post World War II, Italian neorealist films, primarily represented by *Rome, Open City (Rossellini 1945)* and *Bicycle Thieves (De Sica 1948)* are known for the use of location shooting, non-professional actors, and documentary-style aesthetics (Fabe 2004; Shiel 2004). Italian neorealist narratives are also known to focus on working class protagonists and their struggle against material and social conditions (Fabe 2004; Shiel 2004). In terms of setting, neorealist films are set in bleak and impoverished post-war urban spaces, with Robert Stam (2000 p. 73) describing post-war realism as emerging from the "smoke and ruins of European cities." Not limited to Italian cinema, neorealist elements have been redeployed and reconfigured in the cinematic traditions of other national contexts with more overt socio-political motivations, such as the Cinema Novo in Brazil and the Third Cinema movement in Latin America (Giovacchini and Sklar 2012).

In a recent study on the visual representation of slums, Igor Krstć (2016) suggests approaching neorealism as a transnational style of filmmaking that has been adapted and reconfigured in other urban centres of the world, citing

some of the Philippine films included in this study as examples of "digital realisms" (Krstć, p. 164). Krstć (2016) describes digital realism as a new mode of neorealism enabled by the digital turn in filmmaking set in the built environment of slums. Echoing Lucia Nagib (2011) who remarks that the digital medium has allowed access to locations that were once inaccessible, Krstć notes how the digital turn has enabled shooting in difficult spatial environments such as urban slums. With this new mode of production, Krstić (2016) underscores the constant shifting of fictional and factual worlds in the films, as shooting on location captures the lived reality of slum life and its inhabitants in the films' fictional narratives. Krstić (2016 p. 172) regards the turn to digital realism with optimism, remarking that this mode of filmmaking "puts faith into the creative energies of ordinary people, but also into the liberating forces of independent filmmaing."

Nagib's (2011) formulation of the "ethics of realism" is useful in thinking through the value-laden visual rendering of the slum imaginary.[4] In *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism*, Nagib (2011 p. 10) defines ethics not in the moral sense, but as "realist modes of production and address, typical of new waves of new cinemas…" For instance, Nagib (2011) examines the filmic presentations of the act of running in selected films, a physical performance laden with contingencies, as a kind of physical realism which reveals the power of the camera to film reality just as it exposes its own artifice. Nagib (2011, p. 10) argues further that: "…to choose reality instead of simulation is a moral question, but one that concerns casts and crews alone in their drive to merge with the phenomenological real…" She argues that when the cast and crew demonstrate fidelity to the act of capturing physical reality in films – "this commitment translates into ethics" (Nagib 2011, p. 32).

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[4] Nagib makes a distinction between presentation and representation, with her study being more aligned with presentational cinema, or what she calls "presentational ethics." Drawing from Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions", Nagib explains that the difference lies in cinema's "ability to 'show' rather than 'represent' it" (Nagib 2011 p. 5).

While this study is aligned with Nagib's work in some of the ways I analyse physical realism, or the filmic presentation of the built environment of slums and urban spaces (especially the kind of reality produced through and because of contingencies while filming), I approach ethics not just in the sense of presentations of physical reality, but also in the philosophical sense of moral codes and imaginaries of social justice visually rendered through the socio-spatial dialectic. Nagib is careful not to define ethics in the philosophical sense; this study, however, with its aim of locating moments of spatial justice, aligns itself with other attempts at "cinematic ethics" (Sinnerbrink 2016), which recognises the value of cinema as "a medium of ethical experience" (Sinnerbrink 2016, p.). I share the belief of philosopher Alain Badiou (2010, p. 211) when he argues that cinema serves a moral purpose in its capacity to represent "great figures of humanity in action." Although it is beyond my scope to delve further into Badiou's inspiring philosophical reflections on cinema, it is worth quoting Badiou's (2013, p. 232) powerful remarks on the ethics of cinema as it can be linked to the abject realities imagined in slum films: 'Cinema… says in its own way: "There are victories even in the worst of worlds."' This is not to say, however, that this study embarks on a sort of moralising quest; it does, however, raise and touch upon issues of morality in its readings of narrative and character configurations aimed at understanding attempts at representing social agency and subjective formation through spatial appropriations.

On the ethics of realism as it relates to poverty pornography in my chosen films – while I do not completely disagree with the existing critique of Philippine urban cinema as poverty porn, I also do not believe that the discourse should be limited to questions relating to degrees of poverty representations. My own view is that dismissing these films solely as poverty pornography, self-exoticism, or romanticism, has become a rather limited and limiting way of apprehending them, especially given the continued production and circulation of these kinds of films despite and because of these representational readings. By this I mean

that it is becoming almost futile – a trap, even – to categorise one film as poverty porn and the other as not quite poverty porn, as though it is a matter of judging just how much poverty is too much poverty.

I contend that Philippine urban cinema, particularly independent films set in Manila slums, remain a productive scope of inquiry if we attempt to locate different, and hopefully supplementary, routes of reading. Thus this study's proposal of the slum chronotope is rather like a necessary detour from poverty porn, as it attempts to track alternative routes of reading in what I argue to be productive examples of urban cinema. As a point of clarification, this study is not arguing that all films charged with poverty porn are potentially progressive; nor am I saying that the films I have chosen to examine here absolutely radical or subversive. While taking care not to overplay the politics of Philippine urban cinema, I am starting from the position that these films are not completely devoid of hope, dignity, and imaginaries of social justice as they might initially seem.

A number of non-Western thinkers have critically engaged with the slum imaginary, while being wary that this is a provisional term. Vjyayanthi Rao (2013) for instance, is known for proposing the "slum as theory." She describes "the particular understanding of slum as theory or [slum] as imaginary, rather than merely as empirical object" (Rao 2013 p. 681) in figuring the emplacement of the megacity in the global city. Ananya Roy (2011 p. 225) has also argued, while proposing new subaltern concepts to think through the megacity, that "it is necessary to confront how the megacity is worlded through the icon of the slum." Although this study's theory of the slum chronotope is aligned with the slum as theory approach, I also take heed of Pushpa Arabindoo's (2011 p. 643) warning to "restrain it from becoming a rhetoric linchpin that dehistorcises and depoliticises the experiences of the urban poor" – which is why I strive to contextualise the study's film texts in Philippine socio-political conditions.

In general terms, the slum chronotope is what I deem to be the privileged structuring artistic expression that enables narrative unfolding in Philippine urban cinema. The slum chronotope operates as the organising centre of film narratives on two levels: as that which 1) constitutes and circumscribes (taking after Sobchak) the emerging genre of Philippine urban cinema; and 2) as the mediating form that bridges the real and imaginary worlds of slums. Like the very concept of slums, what I designate as the slum chronotope as imagined in film texts takes on specific configurations only when located in historically-specific urban contexts. This means that the slum chronotope can potentially be used as a tool for analysis in films in other urban contexts. The choice and/or simulation of the Philippine slums as setting and space of reference in the narrative films included in this study, is generative of particular thematic concerns and characters and is the connective thread that runs through the emerging genre of Philippine urban cinema.

The slum chronotope relates to genre in two ways: First, as a tool for identifying the generic markers of what I consider Philippine urban cinema (similar to Naficy's approach to accented cinema and Sobchack's approach to film noir). In doing so, I am well aware of the limiting dangers of genre analysis in that it "attempts to reduce and to channel the free play of meanings in certain predetermined manners" (Naficy 2001 p. 3). However, these pitfalls can be managed if sensitive to historical and cultural specificities in classifying films especially from non-Western contexts, and with the view that genres are never static. Second, I use genre as a structural guide for the study's progressive chapter discussions. The slum chronotope produces and comes into dialogue with the genres of coming-of-age, the modalities of melodrama and noir, and what I introduce as the Overseas Filipino Worker genre in the last chapter. Looking at how the films' plots and character configurations dialogue with

established genres and modalities enrich my textual analysis as I am able to identify similar, yet culturally specific modes of representation.

IV. Contextual background

This section provides an overview of: A) the rise of Manila slums, and B) the traces of the slum imaginary in Philippine cinema. It should be noted, however, that each chapter of the study provides further contextualisation for the films as they dialogue with more specific genre traditions, spatial formations, and social issues.

A. The rise of Manila slums

In 2014, Metropolitan Manila was ranked 18th in the world's most populated urban populations, with an estimated 12 million residents (United Nations 2017). As noted, there are roughly four million slum-dwellers residing in the 17 cities and districts that comprise Metropolitan Manila (Ballesteros 2011). This number of slum inhabitants is expected to grow by 3.4 per cent annually, with figures projected to reach 6.5 million in 2020, and a staggering 13 million in 2050 (Ballesteros 2011). Latest figures show that one out of 10 people live in Manila's slums (Ballesteros 2011). While there is no strict definition for Philippine slums, some general markers have been identified, which essentially refers to inadequate living conditions: "Slums are defined as buildings or areas that are deteriorated, hazardous, unsanitary or lacking in standard conveniences. These are also defined as the squalid, crowded or unsanitary conditions under which people live, irrespective of the physical state of the building or area" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003 p. 215). In terms of location, Manila slum communities are "generally dispersed, located wherever there is space and opportunity" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003 p. 215).

In contrast to the *favelas* of Brazil, the *kampungs* of Malaysia and Indonesia, or the *aashwa'i* of Egypt, the most popular word for slums and slum inhabitants in the Philippines remains the English term, squatter, converted phonetically into Tagalog as "iskwater." As Erhard Berner (2000 p. 556) has found in his longstanding research on Philippine slums, the terms "slum," "squatter," and "urban poor" blend into each other in actual usage. More specific Tagalog words for Manila slums might refer to location or spatial description, as quoted below from the UN special report on global slums:

- *iskwater* (a physically disorganised collection of shelters made of light and often visually unappealing materials where poor people reside);
- *estero* (narrower than sewers and associated with a bad smell);
- *eskinita* (alleys that fit only one person at a time);
- *looban* (meaning inner areas where houses are built very close to each other and often in a manner not visible to the general view of the city);
- *dagat-dagatan* (areas frequently flooded);
- *"Bedspacer"* (subtenant occupants of bunk bedding rental accommodation, four or six to a small room, usually young women who have come to the city looking for work. (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003 p. 10)

It is important to note that not all those who live in slums can be classified as poor, especially given their inclusion in the formal and informal economy. Berner (1997) notes the diverse composition of the urban poor in Manila:

"The so-called urban poor – i.e., people living in slums and illegal settlements' – include not only the unemployed, underemployed and members of the informal sector but also major sections of the middle classes, like policemen, teachers, nurses, office clerks, and sales personnel, among others. Simultaneous inclusion and exclusion characterizes the urban poor's relationship with the metropolis." (Berner 1997 p. 124).

The production of urban slum spaces in the Philippines reveals a history of spatial injustice with its history of colonial occupation and segregation. We can trace this development from the period of colonial occupation up to the present period of stark inequality among Manila's urban inhabitants. As with many cities of the Third World, colonial occupation is embedded in the urban development of Metropolitan Manila. As Epifanio San Juan (1990 p. 189) powerfully notes: "For the truth is that it was not through the clearing of wilderness to establish guilds and market-fairs, but through organized violence and the forcible imposition of feudal Christianity and theocratic authority that the scaffolding of the Philippine cities –not just Manila – was erected."

The construction of Manila was ushered in by the establishment of the "walled city" of Intramuros, which became the fortress of the Spanish colonial rulers from 1571. The configuration of spaces around Intramuros indicates social segregation during the colonial period (Reed 1978; Alcazaren et al. 2011). Outside the walled city—aptly called Extramuros—the *indios* (Filipino natives) were segregated along with other non-European inhabitants of Manila (Lico 2003). The streets of Extramuros were racially segregated: "Dilao for the Japanese, Parian and Binondo for the Chinese, and Arrabales for the indios" (Lico 2003 p. 22).

The Spanish colonial period saw the forging of Manila as the Philippine archipelago's economic and political capital, with the surrounding areas of Intramuros serving as the main port for the galleon trade (Arn 1995). As Manila became the country's entrepot centre for economic activity and international relations, more and more people took up residence in the city (Arn 1995). A century after Spanish occupation, Manila's population rose from 2,000 to a hundred thousand residents (Arn 1995). The population of the *arrabales*

(suburbs) outside the walls of Intramuros steadily grew in spaces near port and factory areas (Doeppers 1984; Alcazaren et al. 2011).

Upon American occupation in 1898 following a mock Spanish-American war, Manila remained of prime importance to the new colonisers. In 1905, American architect Daniel Burnham, with his partner Pierce Anderson, proposed to configure Manila under a "City Beautiful" plan, which "focused on the creation of a strong central civic core, from which radiated an enlarged and ordered city linked by grand radial and axial boulevards and embellished by plazas, fountains, parks, and playgrounds" (Alcazaren et al. 2011 p. 5). The plan arguably "sought to portray the colonial capital as an ordered, hierarchical, formal, and therefore a civilized city" (Cabalfin 2014).

While some aspects of the Burnham Plan for Manila were initiated such as new residential areas in the suburbs, informal settlements and crowding started building up around the port areas of Tondo. It was in the 1930s that the American colonial government identified Manila slums, areas that were described in official documents as "breeding grounds for disease, crime, and sedition" (Alcazaren et al. 2011 p. 9). According to Cristina Evangelista Torres (2010 p. 71) the Burnham plan essentially addressed the needs of Americans living in the Manila, arguing that:

> "Nowhere in the plan was there mention of upgrading Manila's slums where people, living in bamboo and nipa huts, were vulnerable to fire and epidemic outbreaks. Manila's poor were to remain in their wretched homes while government funds were spent on the upgrade of infrastructure for business, improvement of government buildings, and creation of rest and recreation facilities that ordinary Filipinos were probably too poor to afford and enjoy." (Torres 2010 pp. 71–72).

The succeeding years saw the steady rise of slum communities in Manila, which American officials and the Philippine Commonwealth responded to with slum-

clearing and relocation projects, interrupted by the destruction of the capital during World War II (Alcazaren et al. 2011). The post-war years and the granting of Philippine independence from the United States in 1946 resulted in the surge of even more migrants to the capital (Alcazaren et al. 2011). The ruins of Intramuros, which were completely destroyed by bombings in the war, became a popular squatting site for rural migrants, "which provided settlers with ready-made walls via the ruins of old Spanish-era convents and churches" (Alcazaren et al. 2011 p. 62).

The state of Manila slums as most residents recognise it today was profoundly shaped by the rapid urbanisation in the 1960s and the modernising projects launched under the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos (Caoili 1988; Pinches 1994; Shatkin 2004; Ortega 2016a, 2016b). It was during the Marcos regime (1965-1986) that the 17 cities and districts that now constitute Metropolitan Manila was consolidated in 1975 (Caoili 1988; Alcazaren et al. 2011). The popular slogan, "Marcos means more roads!" captures the spatial urban development associated with the Marcos period (Alcazaren et al. 2011). Upon declaring Martial Law in 1972, Marcos railroaded urban modernising projects with the aim of attracting multinational investments (Naerssen 2003). It is significant to note that the Marcos urban projects were supported by a huge $2.5 billion loan from the World Bank (Naerssen 2003; Ortega 2016b).

Squatting was criminalised during the Marcos period under Presidential Decree 772 (repealed in 1997), which justified the government's aggressive mass relocations and evictions (Arn 1995; Berner 2000). Davis (2006) cites the case of Manila as exemplary in the regularity and scale of squatter evictions during the Marcos period. Mass evictions were infamously carried out during international events, such as the 1974 Miss Universe Pageant and 1975 World Bank-IMF conference (Arn 1995; Davis 2006). Compared to the $13 million spent on housing construction in 1976, the Marcos administration allotted $360

million for the World Bank-IMF conference towards the construction of new hotels for the international delegates (Arn 1995). First Lady Imelda Marcos, who became Governor of Manila, thought of squatters as eyesores and as "plain landgrabbers" (Berner 2000 p. 559).

The Marcos years laid the foundations for the state of Manila at present, as well as the very configuration of the Philippine economy as oriented towards exports and dependent on foreign loans and investments (Naerssen 2003). Succeeding administrations continued to ramp up projects that aimed to make Manila a global urban centre at the expense of displacing the urban poor (Shatkin 2004). Gavin Shatkin (2004 p. 2479) notes the neoliberal vision that underpins the government's urban policies: "The Philippine government has cut its budget, decentralised the provision of infrastructure and services, and focused on attracting investment through the development of trunk infrastructure." Similarly, Arnisson Andre Ortega (2016a p. 35) argues that the development of properties financed by local and international developers in recently gentrified districts of Manila is intertwined with the decline of informal communities in these areas. The global facelift of Manila, according to Ortega (2016a p. 36), is inseparable from the state's "urban warfare against informality."

Alongside the state's violent efforts to rid Manila of slums, it is important to note that slum inhabitants constantly stake their right to the city by strongly resisting demolitions. Noteworthy anthropological studies (Jocano 1975; Berner 1997; Antolihao 2004; Lagman 2012) emphasise that slum inhabitants are not just victims of the state, but consistently stake their claims to inhabit the city. In recent history, a memorable display of the urban poor's collective force, regarded with disdain by the middle and upper classes, was the urban event called "EDSA 3." In this 2001 uprising, the urban poor took to the streets to protest the ouster of populist President Joseph Estrada whose persona was imagined to be pro-poor (Garrido 2008). Paradoxically, the urban poor is a huge

resource that politicians tap for votes during election season (Hutchison 2007), even though their land rights are largely ignored. Despite the state's efforts to eradicate squatter settlements, these spaces have become integral to Manila's urban landscape, and in fact, to its very survival. As Berner (1997 p. 169) puts it, Manila slums and its inhabitants are "…fundamental rather than marginal. The globalized metropolitan economy is heavily subsidised by the existence of squatter colonies, and cannot function - let alone be competitive - without this subsidy."

B. Philippine cinema and traces of the slum chronotope

Film historian Nick Deocampo (2007a; 2007b; 2011) describes the development of Philippine cinema as taking shape through a "trialectic of cultural influences," with the combination of Hispanic, American, and Filipino influences. Motion picture was introduced in 1897 in Manila while an insurgency was being waged against the weakening Spanish forces (Del Mundo Jr. 1999; Deocampo 2007b). Cinema was subsequently used for colonising purposes by the Americans (Flores 1998; Deocampo 2007b; Deocampo 2011) followed by efforts by local elites to indigenise the new technology (Lumbera 1983; Del Mundo Jr. 1998). This triad of influences remains evident in the films produced at present. On a related note, Jose Capino (2006) suggests viewing Philippine films as a rich cinema of hybridity that has shown how a local industry appropriates foreign traditions in filmmaking, particularly in terms of genre films.

Canonical literature on the development of Philippine cinema generally recognises two "Golden Ages" (Guerrero 1983a; Tiongson 1983a; David 1990). The first is dated to the 1950s studio-system era that produced genre films, while the second golden age – which will be referenced heavily in this study – covers the period of 1970s to the 1980s during the Marcos dictatorial regime

(Tiongson 1983a; David 1990).[5] The present period that has seen the rise of digital independent cinema is what some have touted as the third golden age.

Nicanor Tiongson (2013) dates the rise of "the new wave indie film" in 2005, citing the following reasons for its emergence: the advent of cheap digital technology, the faltering of the local film industry, the establishment of new local film festivals (particularly the Cinemalaya Film Festival), the resurgence of patronage of indie films by the "educated middle class," and the entry of a new class of indie filmmakers. The Manila-based Cinemalaya film festival numbers indicates the gradual rise of Philippine independent cinema: from 30 features and six shorts in 2005, the festival produced 75 full features and 110 shorts in its tenth year (Zulueta 2014).

The rise of the digital independent wave in Philippine cinema comes at the heels of a struggling mainstream film industry (Hernandez 2014), with the steady decline of films cited as indicative of the slump. From an average of 140 local film productions annually from the 1960s to 1999, only an average of 73 per year were produced in the following decade (Virola 2010). The rise in ticket costs, rampant piracy, competition from foreign films, government censorship, and state-imposed taxes are some of the reasons behind the decline of the Philippine film industry (Whaley 2012; Del Mundo Jr. 2013a, 2013b). Philippine independent cinema, according to its proponents, is the local filmmaker's welcome response to the dying film industry (Tioseco 2007; Del Mundo Jr. 2013a; Tiongson 2013), even as the films remain limited to a middle-class audience.

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[5] Joel David notes the government's inclusion of an earlier golden age in the 1930s as outlined in a government-commissioned encyclopledia, which is not really generally recognised by film scholars. See DAVID, J., 2014. Millennial Traversals – The Golden Ages of Philippine Cinema: A Critical Reassessment. *Amauteurish!* [online] [viewed 26 Jun 2016]. Available from: https://amauteurish.com/2014/03/17/the-golden-ages-of-philippine-cinema-a-critical-reassessment/

While film practitioners have generally been optimistic about the new wave of Philippine indie cinema (Tioseco 2007; Tiongson 2013), some scholars approach this recent development with a grain of salt. Foremost Philippine film scholar Joel David (2014) seems hesitant to dub the current period, or "the self-valorization of independent (now synonymous with digital) contemporary film artists," as the new golden age. Since the digital wave took off, the notion of independence has become more flexible, as local networks and corporations started funding so-called independent films (Tiongson 2013; Hernandez 2014). Tolentino (2014 p. 13) also harshly criticises the new breed of films for its lack of aesthetic diversity and the establishment of its own internal hierarchy, with internationally-acclaimed filmmakers on top: "Some ten years of Philippine indie cinema has achieved what probably took mainstream cinema a hundred years to develop – to become his own hegemony."

The Philippine independent industry itself seems aware of the charges of formulaic aesthetics and subject matter in films that feature urban poverty. An interesting mode of self-criticism comes in film form, with the film *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank (The Woman in the Septic Tank)* (Rivera 2011). The film is a satirical movie-within-a-movie take on the exploitative inclinations of Philippine independent cinema. A memorable scene features the fictional film crew's search for the perfect slum location for an award-winning film. Interestingly, the film won major awards in that year's Cinemalaya Film Festival, including Best Film.

While there are a number of Filipino filmmakers who are now "regular fixtures on the foreign festival circuit" (Zafra 2017), the filmmaker that I consider to be at the forefront of Philippine independent urban cinema is 2009 Cannes Palm D'or winner Brillante Mendoza. Mendoza is the first Filipino filmmaker to have been nominated in the prestigious category. He won for directing *Kinatay (Butchered)* (2009)*,* one of the films that will be examined in this study. *Kinatay* opens in

Manila slums and unravels to track the brutal abduction and murder of a prostitute by a gang of dirty cops. A number of Mendoza's films produced prior to and after *Kinatay* are set or heavily feature Manila slums, while all of his films to date tackle difficult subjects on Philippine society. As earlier noted, Mendoza consistently denies the charge of poverty porn. He also admits that while his films feature fictional characters that depict the urban poor, his films are for students and the middle class (Baumgartel 2012; Valerio 2012).

Mendoza's kind of urban cinema can be placed into dialogue with highly acclaimed films from the first and second golden ages. From the first golden age, Lamberto Avellana's *Anak Dalita (Child of Sorrow)* (1956) might be an early example of a film grounded on the slum chronotope. The film, awarded Best Film in the Asia Pacific Film Festival, is set in the ruins of Intramuros and tells the story of a prostitute and a war veteran's involvement in crime. More significant to this study, however, are the social realist Manila-set films from the second golden age, which can be considered precursors of contemporary Philippine urban cinema. Lino Brocka's *Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag (Manila in the Claws of Light)* (1975) and Ishmael Bernal's *Manila By Night* (1980), also known as *City After Dark*, are regarded as some of the most significant films from that period. Brocka and Bernal's films challenged the urban imaginaries of the Marcos era. *Manila By Night*, an ensemble narrative that privileges the marginalised characters of the city at night (e.g. prostitutes, addicts, queers, etc.), changed its title because Imelda Marcos thought the film showed the capital in a bad light (David 2012). Brocka's *Manila in the Claws of Light's* narrative is now considered the prototype of the narrative of the rural migrant swallowed by the darkness of the city.[6] The film follows the story of Julio Madiaga, a fisherman who ventures into the city in search for his beloved, Ligaya (Joy), who was forced into prostitution.

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[6] The film is actually adapted from a Tagalog novel written by Edgardo Reyes.

It is not difficult to glean traces of the slum chronotope in these second golden age canonical films. In Tolentino's (2014 p. 110) monograph on Brocka films, he analyses Brocka's use of "squatter colonies" in his city films as "sites of disruption in the ideal transnational space that seeks both to erase poverty as development utopia as much as it was engrossed in poverty for the continuous supply of urban surplus." Meanwhile, Campos (2011 p. 5) identifies *Manila in the Claws of Light* as "the pioneer urban realist film." Campos (2011) argues that Brocka and Bernal's urban realism – in foregrounding the slums and the urban poor – directly countered Marcosian urban projections.

Among the filmmakers in the second golden age, Brocka is undoubtedly the most highly regarded, and was an active proponent of social realism (Guerrero 1983b; Tolentino 2014). Among his many accolades, Brocka was the first Filipino filmmaker to have a film screened at the Cannes Film Festival. His large body of work has set the standards by which new Philippine films are measured against in terms of subject, style, and a host of other factors. Despite the difficult subject of some of his films, Brocka is lauded for his commercial success and his exceptional retooling of Hollywood genre conventions in his own films (Capino 2006, 2010). New Filipino filmmakers, Mendoza especially, are often touted as "the next Lino Brocka."

Although the late Brocka is revered among local and international critics, he has not escaped the charge of exoticising Philippine poverty for foreign audience consumption (Capino 2006; Tolentino 2014), I note that the Brocka film screened at the Cannes Film Festival, *Insiang* (1976), strongly dialogues with Philippine independent urban cinema's use of the slum chronotope, given its privileging of the slums of Manila as setting. *Insiang* is a family melodrama about a young woman's struggle to escape the oppressive slums of Tondo, Manila, and might be considered Brocka's most internationally acclaimed film next to *Manila in the Claws of Light*.

In contrast to the urban imaginaries offered by representative films from the second golden age, what are the new aesthetics offered in contemporary Philippine urban cinema? Campos (2011 p. 9) identifies spatio-temporal markers as the distinguishing features of urban realist films from the Philippine independent wave: "1) the radical emphasis on milieu as primary locus of narrative knowing and 2) the appropriation of real-time visual narration." For Campos (2011), while these aesthetics are not new in world cinema (comparable to Italian neorealism), they are arguably new in Philippine cinema if compared to Brocka's brand of realism. Relatedly, academic and filmmaker Alvin Yapan (2008) identifies three aesthetic elements of Philippine independent cinema that has to do with its mode of production: first, single location shooting (which he argues Brocka has already done); second, the "singularity and presence of the involved camera"; and third, the use of time "set not only in the present, but in the quotidian." [7] These general aesthetic markers of contemporary Philippine urban cinema lend the films to the chronotopic readings I deploy in this study.

V.   Scope and limitations

The nine films analysed in this study stand out from the growing body of work comprising the still-emerging Philippine indie wave in terms of subject matter, aesthetics, and local and international acclaim. While other Manila-set indie films might have been included in the study, I have chosen the films that are arguably more well known, as evidenced by local and international accolades and the frequency of references in existing literature.

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[7] In this short paper presentation, Yapan also cites Bakthin's essay on the chronotope, but he quotes Bakhtin's description of exoticism rather than the theory of the chronotope.

Three other factors influenced the scope of the study: First, the privileging of the slum space as setting or as point of reference – this means that the slum setting is fundamental and not just coincidental to the film narratives. My second consideration is international circulation, in order to support my assertion that these films can be emplaced in the larger frame of the global urban imaginary. This second consideration immediately excludes the social epics set in rural Philippines of Lav Diaz and historical fictions of Raya Martin – two Filipino names who are often placed alongside Mendoza in the foreign festival circuit. Third, the films examined are all full-length narrative films, which lend themselves more fruitfully to the study's theoretical framework. Thus, I have opted to exclude the experimental works of prolific filmmaker Khavn Dela Cruz, even though a number of films from his vast body of work are set in the slums of Manila (e.g. *Squatterpunk* and *MondoManila*).

VI.   Chapters

In each chapter I begin by looking at how the slum chronotope serves as the organising centre of the film narratives, then proceed to examine the films more closely by locating other chronotopes within the particular genre through which the films are framed. Each chapter builds upon the next and progressively expands the grounds covered by the slum chronotope, from the slums of Manila to the export of Manila's urban imaginary in the migrant narrative examined in the last chapter.

The first chapter examines two coming-of-age films, *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros)* (Solito 2005) and *Tribu (Tribe)* (Libiran 2007). In these films, the time of childhood takes place in the slum spaces of a *looban* and the labyrinthine streets of Manila's Tondo district. In both films, I locate what I call "chronotopes of passage" that serve as key moments in the narratives that facilitate the young protagonists' transition from

childhood to adulthood. The two films imagine opposing outcomes for the child protagonists. *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* depicts a narrative of escape while *Tribu* offers a narrative of entrapment. However both films arguably portray the struggle for spatial justice through the ways the children appropriate spaces in carving out their future. I also examine how the two films imagine the potential for these "children of the slums" to find space for themselves in the city beyond the slum chronotope.

The second chapter is framed through the modality of melodrama in its examination of three female-centred films: *Kubrador* (Jeturian 2006), *Foster Child* (Mendoza 2007), and *Lola* (Mendoza 2009). In these films, I locate what I call "affective chronotopes" configured by the spatial practice of walking, and framed through the mode of melodrama. I examine how the abject female characters appropriate space through their affective encounters and the spatial practice of walking, as the camera follows their movements within, through, and away from the slums. I argue that the films are powerful depictions of resilience through the spatial practice of walking, which dialogues with the subjective power of affective labour embodied in the films' female protagonists.

In the third chapter, the male-driven narratives of *Kinatay* (Mendoza 2009), *Metro Manila* (Ellis 2013*)* and *On the Job* (Matti 2013*)* are viewed through the lens of film noir. The films in this chapter cover even more ground in the urban space, as the male characters are shown to move to and from the slums. If the first two chapters are focussed on characters with limited mobility, the men in Manila noir are shown to struggle over the production of space through the politics of mobility. In all three films, I locate what I call "chronotopes of mobility" in scenes of transit (i.e. car chases, running scenes) in which the male characters aspire to master the urban space. I argue that these examples of Manila noir offer imaginaries of spatial injustice, as the narratives reveal

masculine anxieties in the ways the characters are able or unable to map urban space.

While the first three chapters are confined to the urban spaces of Manila, the fourth and final chapter expands the coordinates of the slum chronotope in the study's examination of the migrant melodramatic narrative of *Transit* (Espia 2013). I argue that the slum chronotope can productively dialogue with what I locate as "chronotopes of in/visibility" in the Overseas Filipino Worker genre. I read the film as exemplary in revealing the migrant worker's struggle for spatial justice in the foreign space, delinked from the rhetoric of national sacrifice.

In the concluding section, I restate my central argument that pushes for the value of studying Philippine urban cinema through the lens of spatial justice, especially considering the state's heightened assaults against the urban poor. I outline the study's contributions to the cinema-city nexus, and recapitulate the arguments raised in each chapter. I also raise recent developments in Philippine cinema, which could be potential areas for future research.

CHAPTER 1

KIDS IN THE HOOD:

Coming-of-age and chronotopes of passage in *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros and Tribu*

> *"The street is the heart of slum life. The common expression "anak ka ng kalye" (child of the street) metaphorically exemplifies the importance of the street to the lives of the people in Looban." – (F. Landa Jocano 1975 p. 37).*

I.   Introduction

This chapter examines the slum chronotope and its configurations of spatial justice in two exemplary coming-of-age narratives in Philippine urban cinema. The films to be examined are *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (*The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros)* (Solito 2006) and *Tribu (Tribe)* (Libiran 2007), two films that exemplify different imaginary routes of spatial justice grounded on the slum chronotope. My interrelated aims in this chapter are: 1) to examine how the slum chronotope dialogues with the coming-of-age genre; 2) to locate and examine what I call "chronotopes of passage" in the films, which pertain to key transitional moments within the narratives, and 3) to examine how these chronotopic configurations reveal imaginaries of spatial justice in Manila's urban context.

I argue that these two films bring to light the complexities of spatial justice in the time-space of childhood, with one suggesting a narrative of escape and the other suggesting a narrative of entrapment. The chronotopes of passage I identify in the films serve to reveal how the films' social agents (in this case, the child protagonists) struggle with issues of in/justice as manifested spatially in

the course of the narrative. Although through limited means, the child protagonists should be viewed as social agents who have the capacity to enact their stakes in the production of space, and consequently, their futures.

This chapter begins by introducing the films and exploring how the slum chronotope dialogues with the coming-of-age genre, followed by analysis of the films in separate sections. Throughout the discussion, this chapter juxtaposes the different means by which the two films strive towards imaginaries of spatial justice, as grounded strongly in the context of Manila's slum formation.

II.   The slum chronotope and the coming-of-age genre in *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* and *Tribu*

In terms of plot development and character focus, both *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (henceforth *The Blossoming)* and *Tribu* arguably belong to the coming-of-age genre. The conventional elements of the coming-of-age genre are anchored on the choice of young characters, usually male, who undergo a significant transition from innocence to a level of maturation (adulthood or the beginnings of it) in the course of the narrative.

The coming-of-age narrative model I refer to as a starting point derives from the German literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman,* generally referred to as the novel of formation or the novel of development. Jerome Buckley's (1974) classic study, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, provides a broad outline of the genre's traditional properties and plot structure. Buckley's (1974 p. 17) frequently cited plot outline for the *bildungsroman* notes the curtailment of the child's imagination and a movement towards maturity, with this opening line: "A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination." Bakhtin is also known for an unfinished essay on the

Bildungsroman where he uses the term chronotope (but does not define it) and analyses the narrative development of different types of novels. He argues that the *bildungsroman* is concerned with the theme of "…the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel" (Bakhtin 2010 p. 19). Among contemporary studies on the genre, Franco Moretti's (2000) critical analysis in *The Way of the World: Bildungsroman in European Culture* argues for the genre's significance as European modernity's symbolic narrative form. Morretti (2000 p. 5) essentialy argues that the youth is modernity's protagonist of choice: "Youth is, so to speak, modernity's 'essence', the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the *future* rather than in the past."

While the above are very useful models for comprehending the coming-of-age narrative, they have also been rightly challenged for their male-centric and Eurocentric inclinations. In an article proposing a reading of *counter-bildungsroman*, Rahul Gairola (2005 p. 22) puts it succinctly: "Moretti's historical rendering of the bildungsroman is conspicuously Western, white, and, given its romantic marriage plots, heteronormative." Western feminist literary scholarship has also responded to the male-centric nature of classic *bildungsroman* by shifting attention from heroes to heroines (Feng 1998; McWilliams 2009).

Although clearly a European concept, I cite the *bildungsroman* conventions here as a means to think through my analysis of the coming-of-age narrative in my chosen films given the concept's emphasis on the subjective formation of children as central characters. These generic conventions surrounding the development of narratives focussed on children guide initial expectations from films like *The Blossoming* and *Tribu.* I find that it is productive to use the coming-of-age concept in this study in order not to lose sight of the films' preoccupation with the time-space of childhood. The age of the protagonists is of crucial to both narratives, as I argue that the child protagonists are the primary social agents seeking spatial justice in the films. Equally important is

the slum setting, as it immediately lays the grounds, literally and figuratively, for the journey that the slum child must go through, key narrative moments that arguably lead up to the threshold of adulthood.

In film studies, the term "coming-of-age" seems to refer more often to plot description; sometimes it is considered a sub-genre of the "teen" film (Shary 2003; Driscoll 2011). There are, however, a number of recent studies that focus on the "Bildungsfilm," most of them still limited to the American and British context (Tolchin 2007; Brown 2013). One such attempt that relates to my aims is Paul Dave's (2013) analysis of what he calls British working class *bildung* films. Drawing from and reconfiguring Morretti's study of coming-of-age literature, Dave (2013 p. 7) argues that "coming of age is inevitably a class experience." Using films that focus on young male British working class characters (films include those directed by Danny Boyle, Shane Meadows, and Ken Loach), Dave (2013) suggests the possibility of tracing a working class *bildung* marked by class struggle, crisis, and trauma, quite different from the conservative maturation towards modernity that Moretti has identified in the classic examples of British *Bildungsroman*. This is a useful model for my own purposes as it shows how the *bildungsroman* narrative conventions can be transposed and reformulated in different cinematic traditions, featuring young characters that belong to a particular class situated in abject conditions.

Studies on the figure of the child in cinema are also useful in apprehending the elements of the coming-of-age genre. In European cinema, the image of the child emerged from the ruins of World War II in Italian neorealist films and German rubble-films (Fisher 2007; Sorlin 2000; Wood 2006). Historian Pierre Sorlin (2000 p.109) notes the "invention" of childhood in European films in the 1940s, and suggests that before then, the presence of children in films were marginally used to reinforce the ideas of masculine superiority and the nuclear family.

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's (2013b) formulation of the child-as-seer in Italian neorealist films remains the most influential in its initial characterising of the child figure's function in post-war cinema. According to Deleuze, the child-as-seer is a passive character whose sensory motor-skills are rendered immobile by deep trauma. For Deleuze (2013b p. 3): "in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing." The child seer for Deleuze is not an image of movement or action, but is an image of time that belongs to "a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent" (Deleuze 2013b, p.2).

Deleueze's foundational account of the child as seer has since been challenged for its configuration of a mere passive figure. Jaime Fisher (2007 p. 33) argues against Deleuze's characterisation of the child figure as weak, saying that this "reeks of an imaginary discourse about youth." Fisher's account is premised on his assertion that neorealist films, or what Deleuze has characterised as the shift from movement-image to time-image signified through the emergence of the child figure, is actually more reflective of the loss of traditional male agency rather than child's weakness. This lament for weak masculinity, according to Fisher (2007), explains why in most German rubble films and Italian neorealist films, the child figure is male. Fisher (2007, p. 33) goes on to argue that child characters reveal:

> "an oscillation of the child between active agency and passive observation: at times, the child is inscrutably and passively observant, manifesting the acquiescent behaviour suggestive of the current meek state of the male. At other times, however, the child acts in a manner markedly more effective than the male protagonists, such that its activity elucidates male lack and even threatens the central male figure. In both cases, the presence of the child highlights the limits of the male, the horizons of his effective agency, and the twilight of his conventional role in the masculine action-image." (Fisher 2007, p. 33).

This sentiment of the image of the child as a complex figure of agency in films – as opposed to being an absolutely helpless victim – is what underlies my analysis in this coming-of-age chapter. As I will discuss further in this chapter, the image of the child, and the concept of childhood, inherently bears with it the promise of the future. As Robin Wood (2007, p. 190) puts it in his description of "the neoralist child" – "the precarious, shifting balance of despair and hope for renewal is repeatedly poised in the lives (and deaths) of children." Related to the child figure's creative represenation in film narratives, Karen Lury (2010), argues that the child's position as the "other" of the supposedly rational adult often situates the figure in alternative spaces and temporalities where "the child must work with and against their imperfect ability to speak of their experience (Lury 2010, p. 1). In a discussion of the archetypal use of the setting of the forest and the fairytale narrative mode in war films, Lury (2010 p. 125) examines how child figures are able to provide " for a sensual impression and response that takes the viewer beyond meaningful/meaningless silence to a more visceral or haptic confrontation with the violence of the war-time environment." The same emphasis on the child's experience as "other" might be said of the films I examine here, although of course, instead of the forest, the child figures are situated in culturally and historically specific slum spaces.

Beyond European cinema, Igor Krstić (2016, p. 108) cites the image of "the street kid" as a new recognisable character in neorealist world cinema, with Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950) as a pioneering example. Krstić differentiates the figure of the street kid in world cinema from the "criminal, orphaned or abandoned 'slum child'" (Krstić 2016, p. 109) in Victorian literature or films like Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921), whose narrative closures offer a way out of the slums for its abject characters through literal or symbolic "re-education" (Krstić 2016, p. 110). Krstić aligns world cinema's street kid with Italian neorealist films, which he generally characterises as ending in tragedy.

In his overview of the emergence of the figure of the street kid in neorealist world cinema, Krstić also cites João Luiz Vieira's (2009) identification of the "street urchin film" as a new transnational genre from the cinemas of Mexico, Brazil, India, and Argentina. Vieira (2009) presents a survey of what he considers "street urchin films" and looks at aspects of representation in relation to production and consumption. For Vieira (2009 p. 228), street urchin films "deal with fundamentally similar situations in which youth are undervalued and, as a result, they perceive their daily lives as senseless and often engage in criminal behavior that ultimately leads to a dead-end future." More interestingly for my purposes, he cites the possibility of bringing in recent films from Philippine independent cinema into this grouping, citing both *The Blossoming* and *Tribu* as examples of "a sort of genre of favela cinema" (Vieira 2009 p. 243).

It is not at all difficult to see how the films to be examined in this chapter align with the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* narrative and the figure of the child in European and world cinema neorealist films. However, as I will discuss, these films reconfigure the genre through its dialogue with the slum chronotope that yield imaginaries of spatial justice. Both films are set in the impoverished slum spaces of Manila. Both films are focussed on the experience of its young characters, specifically 12-year-old Maximo or Maxi in *The Blossoming* and the 10-year-old Ebet who keeps company with the youth gang members in his community in *Tribu*. There is a clear separation between the children and adult characters in both films, although their roles are not at all fixed according to the generally accepted behaviour of parents and children, a facet that is explored differently in each film. Compared with films that depict children roaming in large urban spaces, *The Blossoming* and *Tribu's* child protagonists move within much more contained spaces, with the narratives mostly taking place in their immediate slum communities.

In Philippine literature and cinema, it can certainly be argued that the character of the orphaned child or the street urchin has been used time and again in popular works. In Lino Brocka's body of work, for instance, film historian Rafael Guerrero (1983b p. 235) notes the presence of "orphans or at least children deprived of a normal daily life…" Among the film titles Guerrero (1983b p. 235) mentions, it is useful to note *Lumuha Pati ang mga Anghel (Even the Angels Wept*) (1971)*,* which features "a ragtag band of street urchins fending for themselves." Guerrero also notes that this film pays tribute to another classic Philippine film centred on an abused child heroine, *Roberta* (La Torre 1951).[8]

A notable title that features a child protagonist in mainstream production is the tearjerker *Magnifico* (Del Mundo Jr. 2005), which is about a young boy's struggle to care for his dying grandmother and disabled sister. *Magnifico* was penned by Michicko Yamamoto, the same screenplay writer for *The Blossoming* (she also co-wrote *On the Job*, a film discussed in Chapter 3). From the independent scene, several films screened at the Cinemalaya Film Festival might be considered along the lines of the coming-of-age genre, foremost being the whimsical musical, *Pepot Artista (Pepot Superstar)* (del Mundo Jr. 2005) which won Best Picture in the first Cinemalaya festival the same year *The Blossoming* was screened. In recent years, notable indie titles that feature child protagonists dealing with difficult subject matters might include *Sampaguita: National Flower* (Pasion 2010) and *Children's Show* (Cabrido 2014). The first features a group of street kids who peddle garlands of *sampaguita* for livelihood, while the latter deals with children who are forced to fight in undergound wrestling. The most recent film that might be included in the independent coming-of-age genre that deal with urban poverty is *Pamilya Ordinaryo (Ordinary Family)* (Roy Jr. 2016), which is about teenage parents and their newborn who dwell on the streets and sidewalks of Manila.

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[8] Interestingly, both *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel* and *Roberta* were based on the stories of Mars Ravelo, a popular comic book cartoonist. He is perhaps best known for creating the character of the Philippine female superhero Darna, which has also been adapted into several films.

In what ways does the slum chronotope configure coming-of-age narratives centred on the slum child protagonist? As coming-of-age narratives generated by the slum chronotope, there is a specific period — the time of childhood — that is spatialised in these narratives. Vieira's (2009) description cites the significance of the future in street urchin films, which can also be said of the Dickensian tradition of slum narratives in the Victorian age. Writing about conventions in slum narratives in European literature, Matthew Kaiser (2011) remarks:

> "…the middle-class authors of Victorian slum narratives are deeply invested, for the most part, in the political fantasy of the child as a redemptive agent, a symbol of possibility. Thus, they depict a nightmarish world in which children – stabbed, raped, beaten, deformed, starved, neglected children – have no future, indeed, are detached from teleological causality itself, from the inexorable march of bourgeois time." (Kaiser 2011 p. 64).[9]

Sharon Stephens (1995 p. 8) uses an interesting turn of phrase in her overview of the growing body of work on the politics and cultures of childhood, in that they address subjects that can be considered "assaults on the space of childhood." She goes on to say that: "The theme of lost childhoods includes not only physical assaults on and threats to children's bodies, but also the threatened spaces of an ideally safe, innocent, and carefree domain of childhood" (Stephens 1995 p. 9). She also highlights that some children — street children — are perceived not to be as vulnerable as others. On the contrary, children who loiter on streets, spaces considered to be outside their spheres of safe socialisation *are* the risks – these are children who are literally and symbolically "out of place" (Stephens 1995 p. 13). Stephen's powerful description is quoted below given its relevance to the discussion that follows:

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[9] Kaiser's study examines the slum narrative at work in the groundbreaking HBO series, *The Wire*, set in urban spaces of Baltimore.

> "There is a growing consciousness of children *at risk.* But…there is also a growing sense of children themselves as *the risk* — and thus of some children as people out of place and excess populations to be eliminated, while others must be controlled, reshaped, and harnessed to changing social ends. Hence, the centrality of children, both as symbolic figures and as objects of contested forms of socialization, in the contemporary politics of culture." (Stephen 1995 p. 13).

The Blossoming and *Tribu* are two sides of the same coin when it comes to the configuration of the space of childhood in the slums. In the first, Maxi is portrayed to be at risk, as his world in the slums close in on his childhood; in the latter, the character of Ebet, and the members of the violent gangs he follows around his slum community are shown to be those posing the risks as the criminal thugs of the slum district of Tondo.

The slum chronotope configures coming-of-age narratives that, from their very conception, already assume the formation of children that are already out of place and out of time, whether they are at risk or they *are* the risks. Because they are out of place and out of time, the slum chronotope makes possible the configurations of a space of childhood that is not aligned with the liberal formulations of innocence and play, as Stephens has pointed out. It is in this way that we can understand the slum space to be a space of injustice particularly for children — they are spaces of domination and suppression in that living in the slums severely limit a better life in the future.

And yet, by choosing to anchor narratives on children, coming-of-age narratives that take place in the slums also inherently express a desire for the future. Children occupy a paradoxical position in slum spaces, in that their presence in such dire conditions is deemed atrociously unacceptable, and yet they also keep the slum space alive, in a manner of speaking. Mike Davis (2006 p. 186) for instance, has remarked that child labour in slums all over the world

"constitutes an important sector of most informal urban economies." Studies on child poverty in the Philippines often find that children are compelled to work to help their families survive — a fact that has undoubtedly made its way in Philippine visual representations. The presence of "kids, kids everywhere" (Rodriguez 2014) in slum spaces all over the world point to the possibilities of a future generation, at the same time that it projects the impossibility of that future given that their childhood will take place in the hopeless conditions of the slum space.

In short, at the heart of the coming-of-age narrative configured by the slum chronotope is the implicit desire for the future – which is why I would argue that the slum child remains a figure that constantly strives for a semblance of child-like innocence even as the figure is socialised in dangerous and abject spaces. Throughout the narratives, the child figures exhibit what Fisher has described as the oscillation between active agency and passivity, punctuated with the hope that there are time-spaces to look forward to when they grow up and out of the time-space of childhood. The slum chronotope configures coming-of-age narratives where children set out on a journey of seeking a place for themselves in the future. To claim time, or to claim a future, the slum child must find spaces in the slums where time exists. And in attempting to appropriate spaces that are simultaneously attempts to find time, the slum child protagonist is actually engaging in spatial practices aimed towards a sense of justice. Kaiser (2011) raised a similar point in his characterisation of time-space in slum narratives:

> "When people have no future, no time to call their own, space becomes all the more meaningful to them, the very foundation on which they cultivate a sense of self. If slum-dwellers seem excessively territorial, obsessed with controlling a particular street corner to the point of death, it is because the control of space provides what little ego-gratification is available within a slum. The slum intensifies the experience of space." (Kaiser 2011 p. 72).

While comparable to the child figure in Italian neorealist and world cinema, the child protagonists in these Philippine urban films are distinct as they move within the built environment and cultural dynamics of Manila slums, which in turn influence the narrative strategies deployed. For instance, there is an obvious absence of panoramic or wide shots in both *The Blossoming* and *Tribu*. The absence of wide shots can be linked directly with the constricting spaces of the *looban* (as decribed in the introduction, *looban* refers to sprawling inner area slums), which is a form particular to Manila slums. *The Blossoming* was shot in the filmmaker Aureus Solito's own neighbourhood, with some of the scenes shot in Solito's own home (Alba 2006). On the matter of filming with digital technology, Solito (cited in De La Cruz 2010) remarks: "You're entering now into a place that you couldn't enter before. I can also film in a more intimate community. Like when we shot Maximo in my street, it was very easy. The people weren't even looking. Versus a big crew and a 35mm camera and you couldn't get in the neighbourhood." Meanwhile, *Tribu* director Jim Libiran (cited in Staufer and Christopher 2011 p. 69), emphasises the significance of the Tondo district, the place where he himself grew up in, as the film's setting:

> "For me, the cinematic challenges doesn't come from using Tondo as a location. The harsher challenge here is coming up with a film about Tondo and bringing it to a dreamy audience. By dreamy, I mean those audiences that expect to be lifted at least two inches or more away from their own reality…For me, personally, shooting in an artificial non-living environment would be quite horrific. Everything will have to be created, imported, employed, and therefore, paid in cash…"

The Blossoming was shot in and around a *looban* in Sampaloc, Manila, while *Tribu* was shot in some areas of the slum district of Tondo, Manila. In *The Blossoming*, Maxi's home is located within a *looban. Looban* is an interesting label given how it denotes literal and visual segregation. *Loob* (inside) is separated from *labas* (outside), which makes spatial sense given that the expanse of most *loobans* are hidden from view to those who live in the non-

slum spaces surrounding them. *Tribu*, on the other hand, is set in Tondo, which in the Philippine context is automatically equated to squatters. Both films also make use of *eskinitas* (extremely narrow alleys) in the course of the narratives. Film locations built around *loobans* and *eskinitas* are prevalent in all the films included in this study.

We can situate the production of *The Blossoming* and *Tribu*, and the emergence of contemporary Philippine urban cinema in general, within the backdrop of the Philippine state's continuing efforts towards making the capital globally attractive to foreign investors. In the year *The Blossoming* was released, the Metro Manila Development Authority launched the urban beautification project called "Metro Gwapo" (Handsome City). It was essentially the government's renewed campaign to rid the metropolitan space of "eyesores," which meant the reinvigoration of sidewalk-clearance efforts, squatter evictions, and graffiti removal, among other means. According to Boris Michel (2010), Metro Gwapo was really aimed at making the capital ripe for global investment. Part of its aims was to literally clear the way for potential investments through the improvement of the "Investor's Route" — which is why this project is now remembered for improving roads connected to the capital's international airports (Michel 2010). Michel notes:

> "Metro Gwapo's stated aim was to erase what might contradict the image of a promising site for investment and, like street vendors, what do not fit the image of a modern and successful global city. …The underlying idea was that a clean and orderly city would be a good city, good for its inhabitants as well as for investors. Physical improvements were thus said to bring about behavioral progress…" (Michel 2010 p. 393).

Metro Gwapo can be viewed as a reincarnation of the state's anti-poor urban beautification projects that intensified from the time of the Marcos dictatorial regime, as outlined in this study's introduction, when Manila's slums were

hidden from view upon the directive of First Lady and Governor of Manila Imelda Marcos, whose vision of the city excluded the urban poor. It is against the backdrop of Metro Gwapo, a continuation of the state's efforts to project a handsome and orderly city, that the films *The Blossoming* and *Tribu* can be emplaced. These films, while set in *loobans*, are assertions of visibility in light of the state's attempts to eradicate the urban poor from globalising visions of the city's future.

Referring to European neorealist films*,* Sorlin (2000 p.109) argues that they are historically valuable in their capacity to reveal "accidental information" through the ways the film locations capture the physical ruins of war as the films follow the child protagonists through the "squalor of ruins" (Sorlin 2000 p. 109). He cites, for instance, the devastation of London and Berlin captured by the camera's tracking of the child figures in the British film, *Hue and Cry* (Chrichton 1947) and the German rubble film, *Somewhere in Berlin* (Lamprecht 1946). Sorlin (2000 p. 110) argues: "these images have a strong emotional impact, all the more powerful that the evocation is direct and unemphatic." In the same vein, *The Blossoming* and *Tribu* (and indeed, all the films in this study) are valuable in the ways they document the inhabitation of spaces particular to Manila's slums, deploying neorealist aesthetics in imaginaries emerging from the productive tension between real and fictional spaces and subjectivities.

What I want to look at more closely in the succeeding analysis of both films is how the slum chronotope and what I identify as chronotopes of passage dialogue to configure the subjectivities of the films' child protagonists. In doing so the films are able to reveal imaginaries of spatial justice, building up to the two films' different narrative routes of escape and entrapment.

III.   The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros

In gist, *The Blossoming* is about a gay child's coming-of-age in the slums, a description that captures the two elements that makes the film distinct in my view: 1) the choice of the young gay protagonist, which at the time of the film's release was unprecedented in Philippine cinematic history, and 2) the choice of the slum setting. [10] The succeeding analysis is informed by these two elements that are configured by the slum chronotope. Indeed, the film's promotional material, and almost all reviews of this film highlight these as its distinguishing factors.

The metaphor of flowers/blossoming is apt not just for the subject of the film, but for what *The Blossoming* signaled in Philippine digital independent filmmaking. It is impossible to downplay just how important this film is in marking the emergence of the current wave of digital filmmaking in the Philippines. It is considered a breakthrough film in the rise of the indie new wave not just for the numerous international laurels it garnered, but more so for how it managed to gain audience beyond local cinephiles (Tioseco 2007; Tiongson 2013). It competed and won the Special Jury prize in the first Cinemalaya Film Festival, the local festival that eventually became the go-to space for aspiring independent filmmakers. The film also made waves in the Berlin Film Festival, and garnered nods in international festivals located in Spain, Canada, and Singapore to name a few. While the slum child is clearly not new in the Philippine cultural imagination, *The Blossoming* is the first feature Philippine film centred on the character development of a young gay protagonist in the slums.

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[10] This is not to say that the homosexual character (particularly the "*bakla*") has never been featured in Philippine films prior to *The Blossoming*. See for instance, BAYTAN, R., 2008. Evolving Identities in Philippine Cinema. In: F. MARTIN, ed. *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press. pp. 181–196.

It is not an overstatement to say that before *The Blossoming* was released, there was really nothing else like it in the history of Philippine cinema.

In the spirit of coming-of-age narratives, *The Blossoming* is anchored on an important "first" for the young protagonist — Maxi's first love. The film narrates how Maxi falls in love with Victor, a police officer. This event becomes the film's central conflict, given that Maxi's father and two brothers make their living through petty crime. The conflict thickens when Maxi accidentally discovers that his older brother, Boy, has killed someone while stealing a mobile phone. As Maxi becomes closer to Victor, he is faced with the dilemma of choosing between his love for his family, or his affection for Victor. The story unfurls inside Maxi's immediate *looban*, with brief moments where he is shown to venture outside in his pursuit of Victor, leading up to the memorable ending, which I will discuss at length later in the chapter.

The opening montage sets the stage of Maxi's slum space in which the story will unfold. The film opens with a series of images signifying squalor: plastic floating along an *estero* (sewage) lined with a mountain of garbage, kids mindlessly playing with dirty water, a jeepney passing through the facade of a derelict house, all set to a popular local song with the lyrics: "This is my country, Philippines." The contrasts established in this opening scene — a flower among the rubbish, Maxi's clean feet, an immaculate pink dress hanging next to tattered clothes hung to dry — effectively establishes Maxi's inclination to keep himself beautiful in the midst of the dirt and grime surrounding his slum community. The final cut of the opening montage is of Maxi flashing a smile directly at the camera, with a flower he picked up from among the rubbish tucked behind his ear. In these opening scenes that ends with Maxi's smiling close-up, the film already signals its desire to reimagine a popular stereotype of

the squalid street kid selling flowers on Manila's streets, transposed into a slum community in the character of 12-year-old Maxi.[11]

Filipino scholar Jeremy De Chavez (2016 p. 45) makes an excellent case for reading *The Blossoming* as film philosophy, arguing that the film enables its audience to think about the concept of love through "moments of cinematic interruption." For instance, De Chavez (2016) productively reads the final shot in the opening sequence as an act that destabilises, without necessarily threatening, the male gaze: "It is presented as it *is*: as a look that returns the gaze. But rather than disrupting the look and triggering the shame that accompanies failed voyeurisms, Maxi smiles at the camera, putting into question the antagonism that exists between bearer of the gaze and object of the gaze" (De Chavez 2016 p. 54). This gaze, De Chavez argues, is important as it prompts viewers to consider what the smile means and how we should respond to it.

While De Chavez pursues a philosophical reading, I take a different route by approaching this opening scene spatially, reading it as the film laying the groundwork for enactments of spatial appropriation. What is striking about the overall representation of the slum space in *The Blossoming*, right from the opening sequence, is that the film does not portray the slums to be an overtly oppressive setting particularly in terms of Maxi's socialisation. In fact, the film's opening strongly suggests Maxi's familiarity and sense of belonging in his slum community.

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[11] The image of the miserable street kid selling garlands of *sampaguita* for measly change, risking life and limb on the busy highways of Manila, is quite popular in Philippine literary and visual imagination. A poem in English by Filipino poet, Marne Kilates, captures this image vividly in the following lines: "Merchants of poverty, dodgers of death,/They cheat mad chance in the flash of chrome,/In the glint of the fume-choked sun/Caught on the grime of the windshield glass,/In the storm-sunset on the fender-shine, offering/Flowers, appeasements for our own stale airs." See KILATES, Marne. 1988. *Children of the Snarl: & Other Poems*. Aklat Peskador, p. 91.

The opening sequence that features "real" footage of everyday life in the capital works to locate the narrative in the lived reality of Manila's inhabitants, at the same time that it signals the beginning of the film's fictional narrative – a shot that reveals the film's proclivities towards an ethics of realism, as defined by Lucia Nagib (2011). As raised in the study's introduction, the ethics of realism refers to the film cast and crew's commitment to a kind of physical realism as its chosen mode of address (Nagib 2011). Maxi's gaze in the final shot of the opening montage momentarily breaks the artifice of realism as it beckons the audience; it is a direct invite for us to follow his tracks into the physical reality of the *looban*.

The opening scene facilitates our entry into Maxi's *looban*; the tracking shot invites us to follow Maxi's footsteps as he takes us further inside the sprawl of his slum community. This street is the space that divides the *loob* (interior) from *labas* (exterior), at the same time that it signals the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction throughout the film's overall realist aesthetics.[12] If in popular imagination the *looban* is supposed to be a dangerous space, Maxi's opening saunter destabilises this preconception. Maxi's opening walk further serves to introduce Maxi's character as a child of the slums who insists on standing out in this space of squalor through remaining beautiful.

The choice of the gay hero adds to deconstructing the *looban* as a foreboding space, just as it speaks to the film's engagement with the politics of identity and difference shown immediately through Maxi's insistence on finding beauty in the midst of squalor. Filipino critic J. Neil Garcia (cited in De Chavez 2015, p. 53) reads Maxi as a postcolonial hybrid subject and reads the film as an exemplary national allegory, arguing that Maxi "lives in the liminal space between maleness and femaleness, childhood and adolescence, and between the

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[12] In his article, De Chavez identifies this street as Kalye Guipit in Sampaloc, Manila. The street has since been renamed Sta. Teresita St.

"goodness" of filial and romantic loves." In a more recent article, Yvette Yanwen Lim (2016) reads *The Blossoming* in terms of how Maxi's embodied movements demonstrate queerness that actually parallel the shifting spaces that he moves in within his slum community. Lim (2016, p. 97) argues: "Just as he tries to balance or find a way to navigate between light and darkness, so is his body trying to find a way to navigate between its gendered performances.

While I am unable to fully enter the discourse of national allegory and queer subjectivity, De Chavez, Garcia, and Lim's positive readings are useful springboards for my own analysis of Maxis' struggle to attempt and negotiate enactments of spatial appropriation in what I consider the narrative's "chronotopes of passage." As I hope to show, exploring *The Blossoming* as a coming-of-age narrative that makes careful use of chronotopic spaces serves to strengthen its value as a film that surfaces the complexities of justice in the spaces that Maxi's queer character inhabits.

A. Chronotopes of passage in *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*

The chronotopes of passage I locate in *The Blossoming* and *Tribu* are time-spaces within the narratives that facilitate the central characters' coming-of-age, the key moments that lead towards enactments of spatial justice. I use the term "passage" as it denotes both time and space related to the notion of transition. I also take upon the notion of "rites of passage" with my term of choice. As Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather (1999) argues, in undergoing rites of passage, the body inhabits space towards certain transitions. In other words, chronotopes of passage are times and spaces in the narratives that literally and symbolically channel the characters' coming-of-age.

Teather (199) also notes that rites of passage are linked with thresholds and crisis, which I take after in suggesting that the films' chronotopes of passage

lead up to threshold chronotopes — the crucial moments where the characters transition into adulthood. Bakhtin (1981 p. 248) himself uses the term threshold, and describes threshold chronotopes as "highly charged with emotion and value." Bakhtin further describes threshold chronotopes as the "…places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 248). The chronotopes of passage dialogue wth the threshhold chronotopes in that they facilitate the character's transition from innocence to another level of maturity in spatio-temporal terms. All the while, the chronotopes of passage and threshold chronotopes remain in dialogue with the slum chronotope as the film naratives' organising centre.

There are three chronotopes of passage that can be said to structure Maxi's coming-of-age: the alley in the film's opening sequence; the staircase leading up to his home; and the makeshift cinema space Maxi frequents with other children in the neighborhood. In these chronotopes of passage, Maxi gradually comes to terms with modes of in/justice leading to certain breakthroughs in his character formation. If the immediate setting of the *looban* configures a small world for Maxi*,* literally and figuratively, the film's chronotopes of passage serve to open up Maxi's limited world, facilitating Maximo's coming-of-age.

Maxi's alley

The ally I locate as Maxi's primary chronotope of passage is used in the beginning as well as towards the end of the film. It is just a bit wider than an *eskinita* as it can fit slightly more than one person. As used in the film, it is the alley Maxi seems to have walked through countless times before. The alley is of prime importance to Maxi's mobility in his slum community, as it functions as the entrance and exit to the *looban*. Moreover, it is the alley that leads to other important spots inside the l*ooban*, such as the stretch of neighbourhood *sari-*

sari (variety) stores that contain other alleys, where Maxi interacts with other members of his community.

Even more crucial to the narrative, this is the alley where Maxi first encounters the rookie cop, Victor, who becomes the object of Maxi's affection. It is this crucial encounter that sets off Maxi's imagination that in turn propels the entire narrative. The scene is shot in a particularly interesting manner that plays with light and darkness. It is dark as Maxi makes his way home. He walks through the familiar alley where he is assaulted by two men who tease him for "looking pretty." In the darkness, Maxi struggles to fight off the men who strip off his clothes. The struggle itself is shown with a combination of close and medium shots, as well as a shot from above that serves to establish that escape can only be found at either end of the alley. Suddenly, with a shot from behind Maxi's shoulder, Victor dramatically interrupts the encounter, his voice and silhouette breaking through the alley's darkness under the light of a lamppost.

This is the first scene where the violence surrounding Maxi's immediate environment is revealed. It is clear from Victor's manner of entry in the narrative that he is supposed to function as the beacon of light in the darkness of the slums in the eyes of Maxi. Following Maxi's rescue, Victor carries Maxi on his back and takes him home, where the film makes use of the chronotope of the staircase.

The staircase

The form of the staircase in just about any narrative derives its symbolic function from its literal function, that is, as a spatial form that serves to connect different levels of space. The staircase that serves as chronotope of passage in *The Blossoming* is the one that leads up to Maxi's home, which is framed from below or above in different instances of the narrative. Maxi's home is located on the upper floor of closely built shanties, which is clearly portrayed to be the safe

space Maxi shares with his father and two brothers. Their home space is on higher ground from the dangers of the streets, and it is this space that Maxi is portrayed to occupy and inhabit in a domestic capacity. In the absence of a mother figure in the film, Maxi, the youngest among three brothers, has taken on the feminine roles in their home: he is shown to be in charge of preparing food, of mending clothes, and keeping house for the family.

The narrative's main conflict is channelled powerfully in Maxi's occupation of the staircase in two separate instances. The first instance is shot from below. Victor is carrying Maxi through the staircase to deliver him to the safety of his home. This is also the scene that initiates the meeting between Victor and Maxi's family. The second important staircase scene occurs towards the end of the film. This time, the shot is from above. The camera is placed behind Maxi's shoulder as he looks down at his father who tells him Victor has sold them out to the police.

The second staircase encounter is significant in its examination of justice as it dramatises the main conflict that Maxi has to contend with as a child of the slums. The dialogue that ensues between Maxi and his father is powerful as it captures the ambiguities of morality that play out differently in Maxi's immediate slum space. Leading up to this confrontation, Maxi's other brother, Bogs, decides to take the heat for the oldest brother, Boy, who is charged with murder. Paco wants to send Maxi to relatives in the province to protect him while the situation remains unresolved. Just as Maxi is following his father down the staircase, they have a heated exchange that reveals how Maxi is beginning to comprehend that his family are complicit with the violence surrounding him:

> **Paco:** *There's trouble, Maxi. People are getting caught. People are squealing. They've arrested your Kuya (older brother) Bogs.*
> **Maxi:** *What happened?*

> *Paco:* What happened? Your brilliant Victor put him in jail. But I'll think of something.
> *Maxi:* You'll beat him up again?
> *Paco:* No. We're not going to beat him up.
> *Maxi:* You're going to kill him?
> *Paco:* They're charging your Kuya Bogs with murder! They say they have a witness.
> *Maxi:* But it was Kuya Boy who did it!
> *Paco:* Did you tell that policeman?
> *Maxi:* I'm not leaving.
> *Paco:* No, you're going. You'll be safe there. Let's go.
> *Maxi:* They're not going to arrest me. I'll watch over you.
> *Paco:* Watch over us? You'll watch over your Victor!
> *Maxi*: I didn't do anything. It's your fault!

This conversation that takes place on the staircase reveals the first time that Maxi realises that his father and brother are capable of committing crimes beyond petty thievery. More importantly, it is in this scene that Maxi articulates his own sense of injustice when he exclaims: "I didn't do anything. It's your fault!" The entire scene is shot in a locked frame, as though held in suspension: a full descent would have signified Maxi's complicity in the criminal acts his father and brothers have dragged him into. The scene, however, ends with Maxi refusing his father's order as demonstrated by the act of moving up the staircase. This act shows Maxi exercising his own decision to stay in the safety of his home.

Another set of stairs can be brought into dialogue with Maxi's staircase. At the police station, a staircase serves as the backdrop for the scene where Victor breaks his connection with Maxi. Victor's words are loaded: "Maxi, go home. Find someone your own age. I don't have time for you." Here is the only instance in the film where the issue of age is raised — a pronouncement that comes rather late in the narrative. Victor's ascent on the staircase is an act that creates literal and symbolic distance from Maxi, as well as asserts a sense of moral highground.

The makeshift cinema space

The film suggests that the makeshift cinema space, a small ground floor room operated by a neighbor, is the place where Maxi acquires knowledge about the world as a substitute for going to a formal school. There are two instances in which the makeshift community cinema is used in the film. In the first instance, just as Maxi exits the cinema space, he encounters a group of peers coming home from school. There is obvious tension in the encounter as one of the boys sneer at Maxi for watching a film at the makeshift cinema space. This insult is immediately countered by Maxi who asserts his monetary capital, as he offers to buy iced water for all the other kids, including the boy who insulted him. The gesture is capped off with Maxi saying pointedly: "*Schoolboy can't afford water.*" In the second instance, Maxi earnestly watches a romantic film in which the characters do not end up happily ever after. Maxi complains about the ending, revealing his lofty, innocent ideas about love, which he projects upon his object of affection. These innocent expectations are clearly overturned upon the narrative's resolution where Maxi's break with Victor takes place.

The makeshift cinematic space that serves as Maxi's space of informal education converses with other instances in the film that highlight the other ways he has had to acquire knowledge without access to formal schooling. The cinema space is a space of leisure as well as learning for Maxi and the other kids in the *loboban*; in the two instances the space is shown in the film, the audience in this alternative cinema is comprised of children.

Interestingly, Maxi is portrayed to exercise a degree of choice when it comes to the matter of education, although this is obviously influenced by the adults in his family. As suggested in his encounter with peers, Maxi seems to think that having money is more important than getting a formal education. This is also something he reiterates when he insists on paying for Victor's food, even saying that his father probably earns more money than the cop. The chronotope of the

makeshift cinema space can be placed into dialogue with an earlier scene that reveals the pitfalls of Maxi's lack of formal schooling. In this scene where he is watching a film at home with his family, Maxi struggles to read the title on the cover of the pirated DVD case. His brothers try to correct him, but they also mispronounce the word. Maxi's lack of formal education signalled by the chronotope of the makeshift cinema space also dialogues directly with the film's resolution, where Maxi is shown to exit the *looban* in his school uniform.

The film's chronotopes of passage configure Maxi's coming-of-age, serving as key moments that gradually push Maxi to the wall, so to speak, with each moment expanding the limited corners of his *looban*. Through each chronotope of passage, Maxi's blossoming becomes less of a delicate affair. The chronotope of the alley portrays Victor as the light opposed to the darkness of the slums. The staircase also demonstrates this opposition spatially, with the difference between ascending to a higher moral plane or descending into crime. Meanwhile, in the brief moments that Maxi inhabits the makeshift cinema space, the narrative signals a step towards the film's resolution that sees Maxi exiting the *looban* to pursue formal education as his way out of his childhood in the slums.

B. Seeking spatial justice in *The Blossoming*'s narrative of escape

That Maxi was drawn to a policeman, a figure of state authority, is the initial basis for the film's moral crux. In the beginning, what is moral is defined as what is legal, given the function of Victor as the just figure in the midst of a space of thieves. Justice, then, is set up as the potential of holding Maxi's family accountable for their crimes. The central conflict that is grounded on Maxi's choice between his family and Victor can easily be read as the choice between a life of crime versus a life within legal means, or a life as an upright citizen. In one scene, Victor's discord with Maxi's family is visualised spatially on the

slum's *eskinitas*, where Victor had to secede to Paco and his sons for right of way. The scene shows Maxi caught in the middle of the collision, where Maxi had to get out of the way of the encounter through exiting the film screen.

However, the film's initial suggestion of a strict binary opposition of right and wrong, legal versus illegal, becomes more and more unstable as the narrative progresses. Maxi's family takes issue with Victor not so much because he is a policeman, but because he is an outsider to the looban. Because he is *taga-labas* (from the outside) — as *looban* residents would call him — he refuses to turn a blind eye to the everyday practices of petty crime in the slums. Victor is removed from the production of space in the *looban* which Maxi and his family are embedded in. For Victor, the slum space can be regulated, or it can be subjected to governmental notions of peace and order. He insists that Maxi give up his brother because that is the "right" thing to do. Victor moreover refuses to recognise the position of respect that Maxi's father, Paco, occupies in the slum community, something that even the police chief upholds as captured in the scene where the chief dines and drinks with Paco.

Victor soon realises that a different code of conduct operates in the *looban* when Maxi's father and brothers beat him up. Victor's seemingly virtuous nature blurs upon the arrival of the new police chief, Dominguez, who viciously targets Maxi's father. The film's threshold chronotope can be located in the sequence where Victor plunges into darkness and Maxi crosses over from childhood into adulthood, which I turn to in the next section.

C. Passing through the threshold

All roads lead to the film's threshold chronotope – the sequence that culminates in the death of Maxi's father. This confrontation scene between the father, Paco and Dominguez, the new police chief, stands out in terms of style, from the

camera movement to music. Stylistically, this is the only time that the camera movement departs from the aesthetics of neorealism applied for over a third of the film. Victor arranges a meeting between Paco and Dominguez, the new police chief. Paco, who is expecting to settle things with Victor in order to get his son out of jail, is surprised when Dominguez steps out of the shadows. Although no specific explanation is provided, it is revealed in the encounter that Paco and Dominguez are old foes, and this is the moment the cop is to exact his revenge.

This scene governed by threshold time provides pause as it confuses who among the two is the more convincing figure of justice, serving to blur the lines between the cop and the criminal. The confrontation's *mise en scène* invites closer inspection to prove this point. The beginning of the encounter establishes just that, with the alternating close-ups of Paco and Dominguez. But a spatio-temporal break occurs with the next cut of a medium shot of the moon through Paco's gaze. The next shot dramatically zooms out from a close-up of Paco's face staring into Dominguez's, moving to a medium shot from behind Dominguez that now includes Victor in the frame. Although visibly surprised by the police chief's actions, it is at this precise point that the film turns Victor from a figure of justice to one who is complicit with injustice.

Accompanied by intense guitar strumming, the camera moves back to a close-up of Paco's face, cut abruptly with a quick montage of Maxi running towards the scene. In the act of running, Maxi's panic is captured in a three-shot montage that could very well be read as the film's definitive chronotope of passage – a medium close-up of Maxi's face, a medium shot of him emerging from the backdrop of the slums, an inverted view of Maxi reflected in the sewer water of the slums space. In this series of shots Maxi's character is shrouded in the darkness of the slum space.

Maxi arrives at the scene at the sound of gunshot, with the camera placed behind him. The scene is rendered in a deep focus frame that places Maxi and Victor at each other's direct view, separated at a short distance, just as Maxi's father falls to the ground. This shot, by capturing all the characters involved and showing their positions in space, facilitates symbolic lines of intersection, suggesting a crossing-over of the figures of justice and injustice. A second and final gunshot is followed by close-up shots of Maxi and Victor looking at each other from across the distance, with Maxi looking stunned and Victor looking forlorn. Victor exits the scene into the shadows. The scene ends with a medium shot of Paco's bloodied body in the foreground, and the camera slowly tilting up towards the night sky, in the process catching a view of Maxi's silhouette blending into the backdrop of the slum space.

This traumatic encounter that results in the death of his father and the death of his lofty notions of love prompts Maxi's movement away from the space of childhood into another time-space, that is, the space of adulthood. The death of Maxi's father, who up to this point, embodied the clear delineation between adulthood and childhood, is the crucial prompt for Maxi's coming-of-age.

In this crucial scene, I want to pay closer attention to the shots that feature Maxi and Victor, or the visual exchange that occurs after the second shot. These close-ups recall Giles Deleuze's (2013a) movement-image system, where we are shown scenes from the perspectives of characters (perception-image), followed by images of affect (affection-image) particularly the close-ups, which precipitates what happens next (action-image). Following the intense gaze captured by the close-ups of Maxi and Victor, Victor moves into the shadows while Maxi remains transfixed. Maxi's action-image, then, is non-action: time stands still. The close-up of Maxi's face in this traumatic scene dialogues powerfully with his close-up in the film's opening montage where he invites us to follow his tracks inside the looban. His facial expression is almost blank, devoid

of joy, a challenge to the audience to behold the violence of the scene that just transpired.

The pause provided by Maxi's action-image lends this scene to a reading of Gilles Deleuze's (Martin-Jones 2011 p. 135) "any-space-whatever" — "where space becomes divorced from the defining coordinates of action." This does not of course mean that the space suddenly loses any meaning, but that in this scene the space becomes open to other meanings. Read along with affect-images (that is, the close-ups of Maxi and Victor which the next cut establishes as them looking at each other from a distance) — this any-space-whatever can "express powers or qualities, existing as pure potentiality, rather than end results of actions" (cited in Martin-Jones 2011 p.135).

Understanding this random encounter as paving the way for "any-space-whatever" carves out a time for Maxi to appropriate space for justice, although the outcome of this process is revealed only in the film's resolution. First, a compression of time occurs following this crucial scene: Maxi is shown to grieve, Victor broods, the brother who is in jail is released and suggests revenge along with other brother although they are not shown to do anything (a loose end which is never tied). This series of images lead to a loaded exchange between Maxi and Victor where the film offers a nuanced understanding of justice, within the world of the narrative. Space plays a crucial role in this post-death encounter. Maxi foregrounds the frame and his figure is caught in the sunlight as he turns his back on Victor, prompting this exchange:

> **Victor:** *"This world is full of evil men, Maxi. Sometimes you have to play their game. Or else nothing will change. Do you understand?"*
> **Maxi**: *"Yes. There are many evil men. But I only had one father."*

This is Maxi's strongest articulation of his stakes in what Victor calls the world of evil men, which is also Maxi's strongest articulation of agency. Maxi's response is powerful in its complexity — a statement that is both an acknowledgment that "evil" exists, at the same time that it displaces the definition of "evil" according to his own social positioning motivated by filial piety. I take this as Maxi's demonstration of his newfound access to a level of maturity and capacity to negotiate and stake his claims on what in/justice means. The visual rendering of the scene clearly shows empathy towards Maxi as the film's protagonist, or the one who has a stronger claim to justice compared to the figure of authority.

D. Maxi's exit

The way the final scene plays out suggests that escaping the slums is *The Blossoming's* imagined resolution, or what I view as the film's offering of spatial justice. In terms of narrative structure, the film resolves its conflict spatially by showing Maxi's exit from *looban*, in contrast to his entry into *looban* as shown in the film's exposition. Leading up to this exit, it is suggested that events have turned out all right for the Oliveros family, and that they are no longer involved in crime. Maxi's brothers send him off to school by preparing his breakfast and uniform, while hinting that the brothers have also changed their ways: "*Pay attention in class. Money is hard to come by these days,*" the older brothers tell Maxi.

The camera is positioned outside the *looban*, welcoming Maxi's departure from the alley that takes him outside. In contrast to the opening sequence, this time, Maxi exits the *looban* at daybreak in his school uniform, walking at a slow and even pace, suggesting a claim to space outside the crime and violence of the slums.

The film's final scene that references *The Third Man* (Reed 1949) confirms the above reading of Maxi's coming-of-age as marked by his recognition of his own agency. Victor, driving his police jeep, spots Maxi and follows him to a point where he can step out to position himself for an encounter. The whole scene is framed in the same manner as in *The Third Man*'s final sequence, although it is not as extended here. Maxi's figure emerges from afar while Victor leans on his car in anticipation. Just as Anna decisively walks past Holly to the tune of zither music in *The Third Man*, Maxi pays no attention to Victor as he walks steadily towards the screen. Maxi pauses slightly, but he smiles as he keeps walking until he exits the frame.

Ultimately, *The Blossoming* offers a narrative of escape as its imaginary of spatial justice. In chronotopic terms, this final scene tells us that Maxi chooses to join the time-spaces operating outside the space governed by the slum chronotope. While this resolution of going to school is a bit of a safe route, and somewhat glosses over the violence that the film effectively renders in the threshold chronotope, Maxi's exit beyond the screen space imbues the film with lasting potency. His exit from the screen takes him to the world beyond the slum chronotope, establishing a dialogue between the film's fictional world and the world beyond it.

IV. *Tribu*

From the tender story of *The Blossoming* that offers a coming-of-age narrative of escape from the slums, I turn to *Tribu* as an example of a narrative of entrapment. The film, mostly told through the perspective of 10-year-old Ebet, revolves around the cycle of gang wars in the notorious district of Tondo, the largest and the most densely populated district in the City of Manila.

Tribu won in the Best Film, Best Actor (ensemble), and Best Music categories of the 2007 Cinemalaya Film Festival, and is heralded as the first non-European film to win in the Festival Paris Cinema. Its success in local and international festivals was a continuation of the momentum that Philippine independent cinema sparked in the year that *The Blossoming* made waves. There is truth in one foreign reviewer's observation that aligns *Tribu* with earlier offerings of Philippine urban cinema in terms of its stylistic depiction of the slums: 'If you've seen the recent spate of Philippine indies doing their festival rounds, you might walk into "Tribe" (Tribu) wondering if you're still navigating the set of "Kubrador," "Slingshot" or even "The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros"' (Lee 2007). Like *The Blossoming, Tribu* mostly uses tracking shots to follow its characters around the *eskinitas* that make up selected areas of Tondo, although on occasion some establishing shots are used to signal shifts from day to night, or shifts in location within the immediate community.

Written and directed by broadcast journalist Jim Libiran, who himself grew up in Tondo, the film boasts of casting real-life gang members as its fictional characters. Part of the intrigue behind the production is its "real" actors, a fact that's emphasised in all reviews: six actual "Tondo Tribes" put their differences aside while the film was being made, with Libiran calling the film a "tool for conflict resolution" (cited in Conde 2007). Libiran has always been outspoken about his pedagogic motives behind the making of the film, even screening it in a number of public schools. In his acceptance speech at the Cinemalaya awards, he said: "To the Manila police, the kids you regularly round up are now Best Actor awardees. There are other ways to stop riots in Tondo and other Tondos in the Philippines. Please don't kill these kids. They might be future National Artists" (cited in Atanacio 2007).

Tribu's narrative tracks the intersections of three fictional gangs, who are colloquially referred to as Tondo Tribes: Thugs Angelz, Sacred Brown Tribe

(S.B.T.) and the Diablos. Ebet is shown to hang around with the first two and is tasked to spy on the Diablos. The film's narrative is spurred by the murder of an S.B.T. member supposedly carried out by the Diablos. A group of Thugs Angelz come across the dead body while roaming the streets, just as policemen arrive at the scene. Predictably enough, the narrative is propelled by S.B.T.'s desire to avenge the death of their member. A member of the Thugs Angelz is mistaken for the murderer, leading to an alliance between S.B.T. and Thugs Angelz. Ebet becomes involved in the gang wars as he is tasked to spy on the Diablos as the other gangs plan the big hit. Everything comes to a head in the bloody ambush that S.B.T. wages against the Diablos. The film's events take place in the course of two nights: it begins on the night of the murder and ends on the night of the clash.

The film also showcases the rap culture that these gangs have embraced, an aspect that some reviewers have highlighted as the film's unique offering of Pinoy rap.[13] In addition to the rap performances, interspersed with the general narrative are performative scenes of slum life in Tondo: a sudden outburst of a wife threatening a cheating husband with a knife along a narrow street for all the neighbours to see; an electricity inspector being heckled by residents; a street corner vendor breaking into poetry. These scenes that take place during daytime interrupt the violence of the film's narrative of gang wars that are captured at night. I will have more to say about the function of these scenes later, as they dialogue usefully with the film's chronotopes of passage.

Tondo

Before proceeding further, it is worth describing Tondo as a specific locality in Manila's urban context. In the Philippine imagination: "Tondo denotes slums, squatters, gang wars, and crime" (Hollnsteiner 1972 p. 31). In the 90s, Tondo was the location for what was then called "Smokey Mountain," an urban landfill

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[13] Pinoy means Filipino in Tagalog slang.

that remains a powerful symbol of the poverty and squalor of Manila. Although the landfill has since been relocated to another area of the capital, and while the expanse of Tondo is not entirely comprised of slums and squatters, the notion of Tondo as *the* definitive squatters district in Manila remains strong in popular imagination.

Tondo's development into a slum district arguably peaked in the 1960s with the Marcos dictatorial regime's urban modernisation plans underway. In a 1968 government report, Tondo is unequivocally identified as being the "biggest problem" (Special Committee Report 1968 p. 94) in the matter of slums and squatting in Manila: "The physical conditions in Tondo are especially bad. Many squatters live along the district's many esteros [sewerage]…The streets in the district are small, winding and narrow, with numerous pockets (looban) not accessible to motorized vehicles" (Special Committee Report 1968 p. 94). The report also notes the economic reasons behind the concentration of the urban population in Tondo as it is located near other areas where unskilled jobs were available:

> "Squatters and slum dwellers congregate in the Tondo district because there are job opportunities there for unskilled and uneducated people. North Harbor employs many stevedores and laborers. Divisoria and other markets in the area provide livelihood to many kargadores and small vendors. The thousands of factories and little shops also provide job opportunities. The district's proximity to the Sta. Cruz and Quiapo downtown sections, coupled with the cheapness of jeepney transportation, also encourages many poor people who live off the commercial bustle of downtown (sidewalk vendors, scavengers, watch-your-car boys) to live in." (Special Committee Report 1968 p.94).

Researchers have pointed out that Tondo has always had a significant role in the development of Manila. Filipino academic Mary R. Hollsteiner (1972) notes that the Tondo Parish was said to be the most populated Catholic church in the world at the time of its establishment by Spanish colonisers in 1574. She further

notes the significance of Tondo as the point of arrival in the capital: "Serving as the debarkation point of inter-island ships, the railroad line, and almost all provincial buses, Tondo has absorbed large numbers of Manila based migrants" (Hollnsteiner 1972 p. 31).

Because of its strong significance in the national economic and geographical context, it comes as no surprise that Tondo has often been used as location for national literature and cinema that thematise Philippine urban poverty. Foremost among the films from the second golden age is Lino Brocka's *Insiang* (1976), a stark melodrama about a young woman struggling to escape her harsh life in Tondo, which also became the Philippines' first entry to the Cannes Film Festival in 1978. Apart from Brocka's well-known melodramas that mark Tondo as a site of moral decay, Tondo has also been portrayed as a site for the stereotypical "tough men," especially at the time that the action genre was quite popular in the local scene. The late Fernando Poe Jr. who was an immenesly popular action star and was known as the "King of Philippine Movies," starred in a number of popular films where he plays the tough guy from Tondo (Flores 2005).

While *The Blossoming* leads us into its unnamed *looban*, *Tribu* immediately situates its story at the heart of Tondo slums. And like *The Blossoming,* the productive tension between the real Tondo and the fictional Tondo is established from the film's introductory images, constantly reminding us that this fictional narrative dialogues with the actually existing communities that inhabit and produce the spaces of Tondo. *Tribu* opens with a series of black and white stills featuring images of poverty and squalor around the slums of Tondo, as well as images of residents who will later appear as the film's main characters. The stills are accompanied with the voice-over of Ebet who introduces the world of Tondo:

> *"I live in Tondo where almost everyone is poor. It's rowdy because there are bums. There are bums because there's no work. No work, so people are poor. But it's cool if you're tough. My father says Tondo is only for the strong. You can't be chicken even if you're a kid…Here, a child can be tough. Here, a child can be a big shot. A child can even be God. The God of Tondo is a child."*

The series of images is set to foreboding opening music with the lyrics that repeats a common Filipino idiom: "*Matira matibay*" which is roughly equivalent to the notion of "the survival of the fittest." The stills are then interrupted with video footage of The Feast of Sto. Nino, an annual Catholic festivity held in the district of Tondo, which pays tribute to the virtues of the Child Jesus. It is widely believed that participating in this festivity where statues of the Sto. Nino are paraded around the district will result in good fortune. The murder that sets off the film takes place on the night of the Feast Sto. Nino, which also sets the stage for the film's focus on its children characters. This choice of festivity also suggests that the child-as-god state of affairs in Tondo is not the exception but the rule.

The film's framing of Ebet as growing up in a violent environment is not at all lacking in subtlety. It is not easy to sympathise with Ebet compared with Maxi given that he is not portrayed to be completely disentangled from the violence around him. If *The Blossoming* introduces an endearing approach to coming-of-age through the somewhat naive character of Maxi, *Tribu's* Ebet, as indicated in the opening, is the kid who is alert to the dangers in his community, which is not to say that he is portrayed to completely comprehend what's going on. The symbolic distinction between Maxi and Ebet is obvious: if in *The Blossoming*, Maximo picks up a flower in the opening, Ebet carries a toy gun as he goes on his neighbourhood exploits.

There is a scene where Ebet plays *baril-barilan* (an idiomatic expression that means pretending to play with guns) with other kids in the neighbourhood,

which ends with a shot of Ebet aiming the toy gun at his mother's lover. This shot is framed in such a way that he is looking directly at the camera, daring the viewers to look directly at this portrait of childhood violence. This shot of Ebet breaking the fourth wall is comparable to Maxi's close-up in the opening of *The Blossoming* in terms of allowing the real and the imaginary to productively overlap in a way that calls attention to the ethics of realism as the film's mode address. The pretend game of *baril-barilan* in this scene adds another layer to the constant blurring of the real and the imaginary in *Tribu,* reminding us that the film is a mediation of the threat of violence surrounding the lived reality of children who reside in Tondo.

A. Chronotopes of Passage in *Tribu*

Ebet is a child of the streets. The *eskinitas,* streets, walls, and corners that lead in and out of Tondo constitute Ebet's chronotopes of passage through the space of childhood. However, unlike *The Blossoming* where Maxi is afforded moments of individual spatial appropriation, the spaces of Tondo are free to be claimed and contested by any and all of the characters in the film. Moreover, the moments in which Ebet is shown to inhabit spaces are not configured to be moments of moral crisis, but are everyday, habitual spaces. There is a sense of singularity in the passing of events in *Tribu* despite the ensemble cast, in that the death in the beginning must naturally beget another death (or deaths). As earlier discussed, *The Blossoming*'s chronotopes of passage provide pause — they are ethically-charged moments that facilitate coming to terms with issues of justice. The chronotopes of passage in *Tribu*, on the other hand, function as channels of violence for its children and youth figures. Ebet's opening lines are reinforced in a rap song reasserted during the credits: "*Matira matibay*" — only the tough survive in Tondo. The chronotopes of passage in *Tribu* can thus be said to facilitate Ebet's transition from a child into a man, specifically his transition into a tough man of Tondo.

It is clear that Ebet is more at home in the streets rather than the small bare room he shares with his mother. Even in terms of screen time, Ebet spends more time on the streets rather than at home. In the few instances that he is at home, he is frequently framed in tight shots and close-ups denoting a sense of unfamiliarity and unease. In these scenes, Ebet is never portrayed to be fully at home in terms of spatial occupation — he leans on corners, he peers through the cloth that serves as the door of the bedroom. Ebet is portrayed to be an outsider in his own home, always standing at a distance, observing his mother sleeping, or sleeping with someone who is clearly not his father.

Although Ebet is not exactly the embodiment of childhood innocence and purity, he is still the film's figure of whatever future is left for the child of Tondo. The distinction between child and adult is still asserted in the characters of Ebet and his unnamed mother. The only instance where Ebet is shown to enter the bedroom was upon the beckoning of his mother. Unmoving from her bed and naked under the sheets, perhaps still high from *shabu* (meth), she berates Ebet for always being out, then softens, asking him to come inside to prepare her food. Without hesitation, Ebet complies. His mother falls asleep again, and Ebet opts to snuggle up to her in what we can consider the film's most tender scene that serves to delineate the child from the adult, a scene that suggests that the child is hungry for his mother's attention.

In the absence of a traditional home, Ebet appropriates the spaces outside the tiny upstairs room as his own, where he freely wanders without any adult supervision. In an early scene, the same night he sees his mother having sex with a man who is not his father (a man we find out is connected with the Diablos), Ebet is shown darting away from their house in the middle of the night. The camera captures his feet as he runs along the streets, panning up to a wider shot as he moves away from the camera to reveal the narrow spaces he

navigates in the darkness – a series of images that exemplify the spaces of Tondo operating as chronotopes of passage. It turns out that Ebet is on his way to watch initiation rites being held by Thugs Angelz. Ebet's familiarity with the Tondo Tribes is apparent in the warm welcome he receives from the gang. Ebet sits amongst the older gang members, and he even raps a little bit, mimicking the words of one of the members. He is coaxed to taste beer for the first time to the delight of the teenagers around him. In this scene, the film is clearly indicating that while Ebet does not undergo physical hazing like the new gang members, he is already partaking in his own mode of initiation.

The spaces that constitute the sprawl of the Tondo slums are not just Ebet's chronotopes of passage — these are the very same routes that earlier generations have walked through and occupied. The camera tracks Ebet tracking the gang members as they walk through the streets of Tondo. The camera is positioned behind Ebet, who in these tracking scenes is always shown to be lagging behind, literally following in the gang members' footsteps. In these tracking scenes where the camera tracks Ebet following the older gang members, the film captures intersections of Tondo children's past and present, spaces of childhood that continuously fold into each other, trapped in the cycle of the Tondo slum chronotope.

That the narrative of *Tribu* is mostly framed from Ebet's line of vision can be linked to the the figure of the child as seer that Deleuze (2013b) has identified in post World War II neorealist films (discussed in this chapter's introduction), a passive character whose sensory motor-skills are rendered immobile by deep trauma. However, the child-as-god theme that runs through *Tribu* reformulates the child-as-seer figure in interesting ways. Ebet is clearly the opposite of immobility, but he does function as seer who is capable of enhanced seeing and hearing. This is not even just a symbolic function in *Tribu,* given that Ebet acts as a spy for Thugs Angelz and S.B.T in preparation for the final ambush. His

effectiveness in this role as spy cannot be attributed to a specific instance of trauma, but to his everyday immersion in the slum chronotope where potentially traumatic moments can erupt at any moment. Hence, Ebet is not the traumatised Deleuzan child seer; he is the desensitised child seer. Ebet's lack of affect combined with his physical smallness allows him to roam the slum streets in a rather carefree, child-like, manner – although his motives run counter to this child-like image.

Apart from growing up in the everydayness of violence, it is striking that Ebet is virtually silent in most of the film, even though his voice-over is what opens and closes the narrative. It is not just that Ebet is physically small that allows him to remain unseen in the slums; it is that he is silent. His silence is a stark contrast to the noise created by the Tondo Tribes with their brand of Pinoy gangster rap. Ebet's silence throughout the film is the symbolic threshold that separates his time of childhood from manhood. The "noise" of rap functions as the distinguishing element of *Tribu* as it invests enactments of spatial justice with the rich dimension of sound. It is in this way that we can understand the explosive ending of the film. Through the rap performances offered in the narrative – a mode of address that relates to the ethics of realism – the film is able to reveal moments of spatial justice, which I turn to in the next section.

B. Seeking spatial justice in *Tribu's* narrative of entrapment

Although *Tribu* grounds itself firmly in Tondo, the film's engagement with the culture of rap simultaneously expands the scope of the social issues the film can be said to converse with. The most obvious would be the film's similarities with African-American "hood films" that became popular in the 90s at the same time that its distinct brand of gangster music was becoming more and more commercially viable. These films generally "detail the hardships of coming of age for their young protagonists" (Massood 1996 p. 85) as well as "place their

narratives within the specific geographic boundaries of the hood" (Massood 1996 p. 85). With its strong resonance with rap and hip-hop culture, it can be argued that *Tribu* is imbricated in what Halifu Osumare (2001 p. 171) has called the "connective marginalities" enabled by Hip-Hop, which refers to "social resonances between black expressive culture within its contextual political history and similar dynamics in other nations." Rap music, recognised to have emerged from the Black and Latino youth inhabitants of the postindustrial impoverished spaces of South Bronx, New York in the mid-1970s has since exploded globally, resonating more powerfully with marginalised youth who infused rap with local inflections (Rose 1994; Osumare 2001).

Rap's global reach easily expanded to the Philippines, given the flow of migrant workers to and from the United States. Today, there is a strong Filipino-American presence in American Hip-Hop culture particularly in the Bay Area (Tiongson 2013; Wang 2015) and the West Coast (Harrison 2012; Weiss 2015). In the Philippines, Pinoy rap slowly began to take root with the breakthrough of the "Father of Philippine rap," Francis Magalona, whose first rap album showcased nationalist and anti-colonial themes. Although rap in the Philippine context is not as dominant (or commercially successful) compared to its position in the American music industry, it remains a persistent part of the local music industry. As everywhere, rap in the Philippine context isn't wholly progressive and is often charged with misogynistic tendencies, however it continues to lend itself to the possibility of aligning with emancipatory politics. In the past decade, the most popular Filipino rapper is Gloc-9, whose lyrics have gradually taken on a radical edge with songs that overtly tackle themes of poverty, nation, and migrancy.

In *Tribu*, Pinoy rap as performed by the real/imagined characters of *Tribu* is a powerful means by which the marginalised youth characters enact appropriations of spatial justice. It is in this way that they make noise, so to

speak, as a way to assert power within their immediate community as they articulate their territorial stakes. The distinct brand of Pinoy rap that is showcased in *Tribu* flows through the film's chronotopes of passage, that is, the concrete spaces that constitute Tondo. Mostly written in Tagalog with a smattering of "tagalised" English words, the three gangs in the fictional world of *Tribu* are provided space to perform, with each gang asserting itself as the strongest in Tondo. These assertions function much in the same manner as Tricia Rose (1994 p. 2) has described rap music's dynamics in the US context: "From the outset, rap music has articulated the pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America. Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or narrator. Male rappers often speak from the perspective of a young man who wants social status in a locally meaningful way."

Of course, the lyrics are undoubtedly violent given the nature of the film's narrative, and I am not saying that the songs showcased in the films are progressive given their extremely violent lyrics. But while watching, there is a sense of energy and spontaneity in these rap performances that make them powerful assertions of identity through the creation of noise. As George Attali (1985) has put it, the creation of noise relates to assertions of power. Noise is "Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it [noise] indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one's sustenance from it" (Attali 1985 p. 6). In *Tribu*, sound is another means through which the gangs appropriate space as their own. A powerful example would be the scene at the wake where S.B.T. members break into a sponteaneous rap performance where they articulate their grief, as well as the desire to avenge the loss of one of their members.

One can also not completely divorce these diegetic performances from the fact that these songs were written and performed by the "real" gangsters of Tondo,

who in subsequent interviews articulate their sense of pride in being *taga-Tondo* (from Tondo). As OG Sacred, one of the gang leaders in *Tribu* said in an interview: "We want to represent Tondo [through rapping], that we're not killers or thieves, we have talent." He continues: "I want to show people that someone from Tondo can get ahead in life, I want to be an example to kids growing up in my community" (ABS-CBN News 2010). So while the closure of the film narrative is that of entrapment in the slums, the story of the film as a cultural product does not stop there, creating tension between the imaginary and the actual grounds of the slum chronotope. In fact, the making of *Tribu* became a springboard for transnational connections for Tondo Tribes through rap. The group and Libiran became involved in a social project called "Rap in Tondo" which allowed them to collaborate with other rappers from Germany, France, and Japan. Although I am wary of how the film's extra-diegetic story can be peddled uncritically as an example of how poverty can easily be transcended, it would be a disservice as well to not recognise how participating in the making of *Tribu* might have actually bettered the lives of the gang members involved in production.

The sinister rap songs, all performed at night, can be contrasted to the film's other performances that take place during the day that I have earlier mentioned in passing: the couple fighting on the streets for all their neighbours to witness; the electricity inspector arguing with residents over their bills; the chicken "pagpag" vendor breaking into poetry. These are moments in the film in which the camera departs from Ebet's point of view and wanders to other moments of "noise" created by Tondo inhabitants. Actual Tondo inhabitants participated in the making of these scenes, particuarly the one where the residents are heckling an inspector about high electricity rates.

One Filipino reviewer thought that: "these vignettes…while documenting the social realities of Tondo, distracts from the dramatization of the flesh-and-blood

stories of the characters. The connection between the social and the personal is not expounded" (Austria Jr. 2009 p. 160). The reviewer ends by saying that the film, while exposing gang wars, "begs for an in-depth investigative report to make sense and give meaning to the complexity that Libiran represents in his film" (Austria Jr. 2009 p. 160).   I find this demand from a film like *Tribu* unwarranted, as this desire for a more in-depth understanding of gang wars is precisely the productive value of the film. The vignettes that the reviewer thought "interrupted" the narrative are positive interruptions, as we are provided with scenes where the inhabitants of Tondo create noise, in the same manner that the youth of Tondo create noise through rapping. These are the moments in which the film reminds us that the imaginary Tondo cannot be reduced to the violence that takes place at night; it is also kept alive day by day by its inhabitants who fill Tondo's spaces with signs of life. Rather than detracting from the narrative, these performative interruptions provide time for assertions of spatial justice by its real/imagined Tondo inhabitants.

C. Passing through the threshold

To return to Ebet. The significance of rap as a means to assert power and identity in a space of injustice that is Tondo becomes clear when considered alongside Ebet's silence in the film, and what he ultimately does to break this silence. Although the violent sequence of stabbing and shooting between S.B.T. and the Diablos is what the narrative sets up to be the film's climax, there is more meaning to be derived from the scenes that follow, leading up to film's ending.

There are casualties for both S.B.T. and the Diablos, but tragically, the S.B.T. members for whom the film shows more sympathy are shot and stabbed to death. The Diablos run after a random S.B.T. member fleeing the encounter. As the Diablos turn a random corner in pursuit, the unwitting brother (who is not

even a gang member) of the leaders of Thugs Angelz is fatally stabbed by the Diablos. Presumably on his way back home, Ebet encounters Pongke, the leader of Thugs Angelz, who learns from Ebet that his brother is dead. In a rage, Pongke runs through a random street only to crash into the Diablo members who killed his brother. Another bout of violent stabbing ensues, this time even more disturbing as it occurs without non-diegetic rock music that was used in the earlier clash.

These final scenes occur in the narrowest of *eskinitas,* the most effective cut being a long shot that frames the scene as though it is happening in the deepest spaces of the *looban*. The shot is locked from the entrance of the *eskinita*, its foreground the corners of the alley from which the camera peers through to see the shadows and hear the sounds of stabbing. The camera remains transfixed until the gangsters exit the *eskinita* as they move casually towards the direction of the screen. As they exit the alley, Pongke, the leader of Thugz Angels whose brother was killed says to another member: "Come on, let's go see Dennis at the morgue. He hates being left alone."

The irony of this final statement is obvious, especially considering that Dennis represents a figure who could have escaped the slums. He was not a gang member and he went to school; in fact, he was killed while wearing his school uniform. What his death does is reinforce the randomness of the everyday violence of the slums and its streets. The streets that constitute Tondo's chronotopes of passage in *Tribu* might be viewed as any-space-whatevers in the purest sense, in that each corner can become a potentially fatal or liberating turn, depending on where one is coming from.

The series of murders lead up to *Tribu's* threshold chronotope, which occurs right after the dark *eskinita* scene. Ebet is framed as if he were just standing outside the *eskinita*, watching the murder. He is not on the streets, but back at

home. The camera frames his face, as he looks at the direction of the street in a medium tight shot. His face is a bit out of focus, caught in the darkness of night, while the interior of the small space leading to his mother's room is sharpened and well lit. In this scene, Ebet finds his voice and takes action.

Ebet's movement into his mother's room is paced by his voice-over and symbolic lighting. His face is in darkness when this voice-over is heard: "This is no place for cowards. Only the tough survive." Red light and the sound of a police siren break the scene, just as Ebet says: "Tondo is only for the brave and tough." Ebet then turns to walk towards the bedroom, each pause in the voice-over building up to the intense final scene: "Here a child can be bad-ass. Here a child can fight." Now Ebet's back is turned against the camera, and he is preparing to go inside the room where we hear his mother and her lover in the act of having sex. Ebet reaches for the real gun he picked up from that night's gang war and enters the the room with the final line — "Here, a child can even be God." The film fades to black and erupts into a rap song as the credits roll, which suggests that the gun was fired, even though the act of killing is not actually shown.

The rendering of *Tribu's* final scene where the young Ebet takes matters into his own hands recalls the chilling effect of the scene in the famous Italian neorealist film, *Germany Year Zero* (Rossellini 1948), where the child Edmund poisons his father. Describing the calm manner that Edmund prepares the poisoned tea and brings it to his father from the kitchen to the bedroom, Sorlin (2000 p. 121) remarks: "There is something very chilling in the simplicity of a domestic routine which is also an execution." Sorlin (2000 p. 120) reads this scene as an example of the ambivalence of youth, who have been abandoned by adults in post-war Europe: "…the boy is able to define his private law, which makes him as powerful as an adult, and allows him to murder his father." This sense of ambivalence can also be said of the character of Ebet in *Tribu*. In spatial terms,

the domestic space and the streets of Tondo fold into each other in this final scene as spaces of violence for the young Ebet.

Tribu's final scene functions as Ebet's threshold chronotope. The moment he enters the room with the gun is the moment he transitions from a child into one of the "gods" of Tondo. The moment he finds his voice is signalled by the voice-over and gunshot/rap. Of course, Ebet finding his voice in the narrative of *Tribu* means getting deeper inside the slum chronotope rather than stepping outside of it, a resolution that suggests that *Tribu* imagines a narrative of entrapment for its child protagonist.

V.   Conclusion

The Blossoming and *Tribu* are valuable examples of films that approach spatial in/justice in Manila slums from different routes, with one moving away and the other moving deeper into the slum spaces. Both films reveal significant moments in which its child protagonists stake their claims in configuring their futures through acts of spatial appropriation. In *The Blossoming*, the notion of justice becomes a matter of aspiring towards a life outside the slums. In contrast, *Tribu* reveals the brutality of injustice that compels children to take matters into their own hands, at the same time that it shows how the youth struggle against being silenced.

In this chapter, I have argued that framing the narratives through the lens of the coming-of-age genre and the ways the narratives dialogue with the slum chronotope enable the location of chronotopes of passage and threshold chronotopes. The productive dialogue amongst these chronotopes reveal how the films are able to raise ethical issues – in terms of the choice of realism as the films' mode of address, as well as in the philosophical or moral sense – through the means by which the child protagonists configure and are configured

by their immediate slum spaces. Locating the slum chronotope more specifically in the context of Manila's *loobans*, *eskinitas*, and the slums of Tondo enables a more critical reading of the films that takes into account the means by which the children protagonists struggle to become active participants in the production of space.

Finally, this chapter has argued that these two exemplary coming-of-age films, while located in the confines of *loobans*, implicitly dialogue with spaces beyond the slum chronotope. Maxi's manner of exiting the frame in the final scene encourages viewers to ask what the world outside the *looban* holds for him. Meanwhile, *Tribu's* use of rap, as well as its mode of production that developed into a kind of community project involving Tondo's young inhabitants, reveal the dynamic potentials of the production of spatial justice within and outside the films.

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CHAPTER 2

WOMEN, WALKING:

Affective chronotopes in the melodramatic imaginaries of *Kubrador, Foster Child, and Lola*

> *"In a post sacred world, melodrama represents one of the most significant, and deeply symptomatic, ways we negotiate moral feeling."* — Linda Williams (1998 p. 61).

I.   Introduction

From the previous chapter that examines films focussed on children characters, this chapter examines the configurations of spatial justice in narratives driven by female protagonists. The films *Kubrador (Bet Collector)* (Jeturian 2007), *Foster Child* (Mendoza 2007) and *Lola* (Mendoza 2010) are about "affected" women who are on the move — their physical movement structures narrative unfolding, mapping the urban space in dynamic ways as they move within, away, and back to the slum spaces they inhabit. Much like the previous chapter, my aims are: 1) to examine how the slum chronotope dialogues with the modality of melodrama; 2) to examine how the spatial practice of walking dialogues with what I call the films' affective chronotopes; and 3) to examine how these chronotopic configurations of female subjectivities reveal imaginaries of spatial in/justice in the Philippine urban context.

Like the previous chapter, the slum chronotope functions to constitute and circumscribe the narratives of these representative films, this time enabling the production of what I call affective chronotopes, which I propose to read along the vein of melodrama. The film narratives in this study easily lend themselves to readings of spatial in/justice: *Kubrador* immediately situates its female

protagonist in the grey zone of ethics with her involvement in illegal gambling; *Foster Child* lays bare ethical tensions behind the monetary value attached to the act of fostering; *Lola* complicates the question of justice in the exchange that occurs between the two women seeking to protect their grandchildren, with one having killed the other. The connective thread that weaves through the narratives' affective chronotopes is the spatial practice of walking, a device that the films use in different ways. In each film I examine how affective chronotopes dialogue with the spatial practice of walking, producing different imaginaries of spatial in/justice.

I first discuss the slum chronotope and its relations to the modality of melodrama as situated in the Philippine context. Next, I develop the concepts of affective chronotopes and the spatial practice of walking. I continue with a discussion of each film and their key chronotopic moments, and end with a synthesis of how these melodramatic films, through narrative and character configuration, produce imaginaries of spatial in/justice.

II.   The slum chronotope and melodrama

There is no dearth of contemporary writing on melodrama in film, television, and literature in the Anglo-American tradition, which in itself attests to the enduring presence of its elements in cultural texts. Most overviews begin with the seminal study of Peter Brooks (1976), *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* in theatre and literature, which heavily influenced the recuperation of this so-called pejorative genre by contemporary scholars initiated by the likes of Christine Gledhill (1986, 1991, 2002a) and Linda Williams (1998). My understanding of melodrama in this study is guided by these foundational definitions, admittedly derived from Western theorisations, but with the aim of understanding how the mode/genre has been deployed in representative Philippine films configured by the slum chronotope.

As with all the chapters in this study, I begin with these frequently cited definitions for the purpose of launching my own examination of Philippine films, but without the assumption that these are the models to aspire to. While I do engage in some comparisons between Hollywood models and examples from Philippine cinema, this is informed by the undeniable history of cinema as colonial technology, with Philippine cinema reconfiguring European and American genres for its own audience and purposes (Del Mundo Jr. 1998). Whether melodrama is a genre or a modality is not a debate this study can engage with thoroughly. The way I use melodrama here slides from melodrama as a genre, which is useful for categorical purposes — to melodrama as a mode of expression that manifests itself across various genres. Gledhill (2000) reconciles genre and mode when she argues that melodrama as modality:

> "…defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades, across national cultures. It provides the genre with a mechanism of 'double articulation,' capable of generating specific and distinctively different generic formulae in particular historical conjectures, while also providing a medium of interchange and overlap between genres." (Gledhill 2000 p. 229).

In "Melodrama Revised," Williams (1998) provides re-readings of Brooks' analysis for film purposes and is an extremely useful springboard for my aims of locating spatial justice in Philippine melodramatic urban films. The most striking principle of melodrama identified by Williams immediately aligns this mode with the aims of locating social justice. Extending Brook's (1998 pp. 51–52) frequently cited assertions on the "absence of moral and social order linked to the sacred" in the context of modernity, Williams states that a "quest for a hidden moral legibility is crucial to all melodrama" (Williams 1998 p. 52). This quest to surface moral legibility, which Brooks called the "moral occult," relates to the aims of locating spatial justice if we consider the characters in

melodramatic narratives as moral agents whose actions produce spaces of in/justice.

Of the elements of melodramatic cinema that Williams (1998 p. 42) has identified, it is the "dialectic of pathos and action" combined with the desire to return to a "space of innocence" (1998 p. 42) that reveals the mode's implicit chronotopic configurations. The pathos-action dialectic, according to Williams (1998 p. 69), is a 'give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time.' In the melodramatic narratives enabled by slum chronotopes, it is the time of "too late" that is more pronounced than "in the nick of time," while the "space of innocence" is not a return to an idealised space, but rather, a "return to repression" that serves to reveal the heroine-victim's hopes and desires. Let me qualify this further.

Regarding temporality, the melodramatic narratives enabled by the slum chronotope in *Kubrador, Foster Child,* and *Lola* all begin in a space where it is already "too late." In developmental theory, slum formation is underpinned with the misguided notion that these are urban spaces that are unable to supposedly catch up with the image of the developed modern city. Slums are sometimes regarded as "unintended cities" (Jai Sen cited in Nandy, 1998, p. 2) — they have already developed to the point that there is no ideal time or place to go back to. It is this temporal configuration of the slums being a space beyond the last-minute/nick-of-time rescue that invokes a view of pathos. As such, Gledhill's (2002b p. 21) identification of a "nostalgic structure" in European nineteenth century family melodramas does not exist in the same manner in the Philippine films in question.

In the melodramatic films set in Manila slums, that or whom must be rescued in the nick of time is already lost; there is really no last-minute rescue to be expected. In *Kubrador,* the protagonist's son whose ghost appears at certain

time-spaces within narrative time can no longer be rescued, because after all, he is already dead. In *Foster Child*, the 24-hour slice-of-life narrative occurs on the day her job ends — the day the foster mother has to hand over the child she reared to his rich adoptive parents. In *Lola*, the narrative begins when the murder of one grandson by the other has already taken place. This is not to say, however, that all hope is lost in these films. Imaginaries of hope remains, as I will touch upon in my textual analysis, but these can be found not in the "exhilaration of action", but in the "paroxysm of pathos," to borrow Williams' (1998 p.58) turn of phrase.

This time of "too late" takes place in slum spaces characterised by excess — which is the stage for what I refer to as affective chronotopes. Like the films in the previous chapter, *Kubrador* and *Foster Child* are set in sprawling *loobans,* while *Lola* is set on and along the *esteros* (water ways) and shanties comprising a squatter settlement called *Sitio Ilog* (which literally translates to river site) in Malabon city, a city north of the capital of Manila. In Holywood melodrama, the "space of innocence" to return to is often thought to be the domestic (private) space of the home, or any space that somehow suggests a restoration of order. However, in these melodramatic narratives enabled by the slum chronotope, a thin line divides the public and the private spheres. The porous built environment and the density of bodies that inhabit the slum space make it difficult to delineate the private from the public, which in turn makes it difficult to identify spaces of idealised virtue and innocence that belong to the private domestic sphere.

Instead of a return to idealised spaces of innocence, I borrow the idea of the "return to the repressed" that Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2002) used in his famous essay where he relates melodrama to Sigmund Freud's "conversion hysteria." For Nowell-Smith (2002), melodrama is a genre characterised primarily by repressed emotions that the plot struggles to accommodate through action in

the narrative development. Excessive emotions are thus consequently expressed in other filmic devices such as *mise en scène* and music (Nowell-Smith 2002). Nowell-Smith (2002 p. 73) argues that: "In hysteria…the energy attached to an idea that has been repressed returns converted into bodily symptom. The 'return of the repressed' takes place, not in conscious discourse, but displaced on the body of the patient. In melodrama…a conversion can take place into the body of the text."

Although Nowell-Smith's essay is brief, this is a crucial premise for my understanding of melodrama's spatial rendering as configured by the slum chronotope. My argument is that these films' melodramatic excesses can be read in the ways the slum space dialogues with the female body, which is demonstrated exceptionally in the films I have selected. In these melodramatic films, time moves according to the bodily movements of its female protagonists, particularly through the spatial practice of walking. As with the temporal configuration of excessive urban development expressed in the notion of "too late," excess is built into the slum's spatial configuration as containing a surplus of poverty and squalor. The melodramatic element of excess can be found in certain key moments where hysteria is converted into what I designate affective chronotopes.

Before proceeding to my formulation of affective chronotopes and my analysis of how these are used in the films, in the next section, I briefly sketch how melodrama has been used in Philippine cinema. Most Filipino viewers, in my view, would not contest that excess is what characterises traditional Philippine melodrama. As one Filipino scholar has asserted, when compared to those produced by Hollywood, "in the Philippines, the tendency to go overboard seems greater" (Velasco 2004 p. 40).

III.   Philippine melodrama

There is no existing study that focuses primarily on Philippine melodrama as a film genre, although Philippine film critics have provided useful overviews (Reyes 1989; Velasco 2004; Deocampo 2011). Most film critics relate Philippine melodrama to the perceived virtues of Catholicism, particularly the myth of suffering (Reyes 1989; Velasco 2004; Deocampo 2011). Not unlike Brooks and Gledhill's historicisation of melodrama in the European context, Filipino film critic Nicanor Tiongson (1983b) has argued that current Philippine film genre traditions can be traced to theatre, which was introduced to the country during Spanish occupation. Tiongson (1983b) identifies five types of theatrical drama as having "migrated" from theatre to film: *komedya, sinakulo, sarsuwela, drama,* and *bodabil*. Traces of all of these theatre forms have found their way into Philippine films, but perhaps it is the *sinakulo* that comes closest to the possible beginnings of Philippine melodrama (1983b). The *sinakulo* is a musical staging of the story of the Passion of Christ, a practice that continues today in rural and urban Philippines. According to Tiongson (1983b p. 85): "The sinakulo survives most strongly in the Filipino mental framework, or value system, which always favors the underdog. In most Filipino movies meekness, servility and patience in suffering, coupled with the ability to shed buckets of tears, are regarded as obligatory characteristics of leading female and child characters."

In a more recently published work, film historian Nick Deocampo (2011) reiterates the observation that "melodrama is, perhaps, the most durable genre of Tagalog movies."[14] In a section where he provides overviews of American genres reformulated in Philippine cinema, Deocampo (2011) argues that the "core" of most Philippine films is melodrama, because the genre "…has its roots in the country's narrative culture. Centuries of Catholic influence told of the lives

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[14] All Deocampo references are cited from the book's official Kindle ebook format, which does not have fixed pages.

of martyred saints and morality plays, which provided the narrative basis as well as the psychological predisposition for melodramatic elements found in many Tagalog movies." Like its Hollywood influences, Tagalog melodramatic tearjerkers centre mostly on women, launching the careers of many 50s Filipina film actresses in "roles of martyr wives, misunderstood mistresses, ever-patient mothers, understanding girlfriends, or orphaned children" (Deocampo 2011). Deocampo (2011) argues at the end of this section that "melodrama has become the Filipino's common universal film experience, attested by the fact that its conventions of family values and social relations and melodrama's highly excessive emotions and sentimentality" cut across all other forms of Philippine filmmaking.

Deocampo's claim of melodrama being the dominant genre in Philippine films extends to other kinds of popular media, such as television and local advertisements. This claim is further enriched with an understanding that while Philippine melodramas are "women's films" in that they have women protagonists, these are not solely marketed to female viewers (which is not to preclude the possibility that melodramas might appeal more to female viewers). As cultural critic Vicente Rafael (2000 p. 181) remarks: "Within the Philippines itself, the practices of film going have long been class rather than gender specific." In the 70s, there was a certain demographic of the lower class, the *bakya* crowd, who were assumed to be the patrons of melodrama. The *bakya* refers to "wooden slippers worn in lieu of shoes by the poor in the barrios" (Lacaba 1983 p. 117). The *bakya* means "anything that is cheap, gauche, naive, provincial, and terribly popular" (Lacaba 1983 p. 117) — which in the 70s came to mean Tagalog movies versus Hollywood imports. Thus, Philippine melodrama was viewed pejoratively, not just in terms of narrative content, but more so because of its audience.

In more recent years, the term *jologs* functions in the same way. Comparable to the social grouping of chavs in the British context, it is a "word of hatred" (Wood and Skeggs cited in Ong 2015 p. 76) that "identifies cultural objects, properties and embodiments of the lower class in Filipino society" (Ong 2015 p. 76). In his ethnographic study of the representation of suffering in Philippine television, Jonathan Ong (2015 p. 76) explains that his middle-class informants distanced themselves from the *jologs* who watched shows deemed melodramatic for "their aural and visual vibrancy and excess." These shows usually have scenes of "*sigawan, sampalan and sabunutan (*shouting, slapping and hair pulling…)" (Ong 2016 p.76) — which I should point out are acts often only enacted by female characters. It is in this way, perhaps, that we can see how Philippine melodrama is influenced by the soap opera, or more particularly, the aesthetics of the Spanish and Mexican *telenovelas*.

While not primarily focused on melodrama, Rafael Guerrero's (1983c) commentary on the myths propagated in Tagalog cinema also addresses some of the typical character and plot lines in Philippine melodrama. He cites the enduring myth of "machismo and masochismo" (Guerrero 1983c 111-114) that relates to male and female-driven films. According to Guerrero (1983c), machismo can be found in the realm of action films, which I will have more to say about in the next chapter. Masochismo, on the other hand, is the virtue that the ideal female protagonist is expected to uphold, once again derived from the Catholic belief in the virtue of suffering (Guerrero 1983c). Guerrero (1983c p. 114) explains: "…To project the desired image of Filipino woman hood on the screen, it has become necessary to beset her with every conceivable emotional, physical and spiritual dilemma so mush so as to transform our heroines into veritable martyrs. Women in Tagalog movies endure much, because…it is their job."

As for the myth of "class-consciousness," Guerrero (1983c p. 114) outlines the romances that dissolve "capitalist-proletarian dichotomy" into the "morality play" of virtues played out in the love stories between the landlord's son and the farmer's daughter, among other variations. Related to class representations, Emmanual Reyes (1989 p. 33) also notes that in Philippine melodramas where class rivalry is a major plot line, "those who have less in life should have more in characterisation…the poor are depicted as rich in spirit while the affluent are just plain mean."

Once again, the shadow of Lino Brocka looms large over Philippine melodrama. Popular film reviewer Noel Vera (2005) echoes the notion that melodrama is the Filipino genre of choice, and boldly argues that Brocka's "melodramatic realism" contains a "sense of realism and urgency…that sell these melodramas as absolute truth." While I don't subscribe to this totalising statement, it points to the possibility of reconciling the modes of melodrama and realism that the films I examine might be said to engage with. The term "melodramatic realism" raises a seemingly contradictory fusion, as the excesses of melodrama do not seem congruent with the sense of realism as fidelity to verisimilitude. However, it has long been argued that there is an interesting overlap between the two terms, particularly considering how melodrama has been reworked in national contexts beyond Hollywood (Dissanayake 1993). In *Global Melodrama*, Carla Marcantonio (2015) goes as far as arguing that melodrama and neorealism share the aims of moral legibility, paying attention to Italian neorealism's political aims of revealing the suffering of ordinary people's lives in the urban ruins of the second world war. If this is the case for Italian neorealist filmmakers, for Filipino filmmakers from the second golden age, it was the repressive conditions of the Marcos dictatorial period that arguably inspired Philippine urban realism, according to film critic Patrick Campos (2016). Against the global aspirations of Imelda Marcos' "City of Man," filmmakers from the second golden age of Philippine cinema opted to feature the emerging slums of the capital.

Describing Brocka's brand of urban realism, Campos (2016 p. 287) argues that: "The credibility and political potential of his realist imagery, coupled with his keenness on melodramatic conventions, have also become discursively inseparable from the critical milieu of his time."

In particular, cultural critic Rolando Tolentino (2014) has argued for readings of Brocka's films along the vein of social realism, which Tolentino links more strongly with the political goals of Third Cinema. In his analysis of two of Brocka's popular domestic melodramas, *Insiang* (1978) and *Bona* (1980)*,* he reads the female heroine-victims as having recourse to the virtues of the Catholic configuration of martyrdom. However, they find no redemption in the narratives' closures, which Tolentino frames as the failure of the female characters to transcend class, even if they are are able to subvert gender limitations. For Tolentino (2014 p. 145), these films are representative of how Brocka's domestic melodramas dialogue with the "political melodramas" of the nation, with the subaltern female characters imagining a contrast to the elitism of the female political figures at the time the films were produced.

While Tolentino configures Philippine melodrama's female figures as conversing with the discourse of the nation, my reading of these more recent female-centered melodramas takes a more intimate route. While framed within the context of the Philippine urban imaginary, I focus here on how, echoing Marcantonio (2015 p. 2) in *Global Melodrama*: "Melodrama's power and efficacy derive from the ways in which the body and ordinary experience — of those who would become the nation's citizens — come to bear the brunt of signification." What I want to zoom in on are the configurations of Philippine urban melodrama as an expression of excessive emotions, particularly the excessive rendering of suffering of the female abject victim-heroines. This emphasis on suffering as virtue recalls Agustin Zarzosa's (2013 p. 14) argument that melodrama is a modal expression whose "essence" lies in the

"redistribution of suffering; its modal existence refers to the infinite instantiations of this distribution." In the films included here, it can be said that suffering is redistributed (and therefore made legible) through affective chronotopes mapped by the spatial practice of walking, concepts that I turn my attention to in the next section.

IV.   Affective chronotopes and the spatial practice of walking

There is by now a wealth of literature about affect and geography that inform my formulation of what I designate as affective chronotopes. As Steve Pile (2010) has pointed out, citing Liz Bondi, there have been studies in geography dating to the 1970s that explore the relations of place, landscapes, and emotions even though the term "affect" was not yet in fashion. The efforts to connect affect and geography have since taken various routes, such as notions of "non-representational theory" (Thrift 2004) and "haptic geographies" (Paterson 2009). Pile (2001 p. 7) explains that the so-called "emotional turn" in human geography might be attributed to the editorial efforts of Susan Anderson and Kay Smith who argued for the need to examine how "the human world is constructed and lived through emotions." Pile (2001 p. 7) further credits feminist geographers for politicising emotions that paved the way for "illuminating the incoherences, permeabilities, opaquenesses and specificities of human subjectivity."

The affective turn has no doubt also influenced film studies, many of which relating to readings of embodiment and spectatorship. While I am somewhat entering this terrain in my formulation of affective chronotopes, my examination focusses more on representations of embodied geographies in films and how we might approach them productively, rather than the subjective experience of spectators. While spectatorial embodied geographies is no doubt a rich area of study, I am rather wary of the tendency of some works on embodiment and cinema to overestimate subjective experiences of viewing. As Lucia Nagib

(2011 p. 25) has pointed out, such "sensory modes of spectatorship and assessment" is in danger of losing its critical potentials. This is because "…in their thrust to delegitimize all purely objective criticism, they often fall back into its reverse, that is, pure subjectivism through which the films themselves are almost entirely eclipsed."

Now to return to my focus on melodramatic film narratives. In his seminal essay on melodrama, "Tales of Sound and Fury," Thomas Elsaesser (2002) notes how excessive emotions can be displaced in the music and *mise en scène*, among other film devices used in the family melodrama. This parallels Nowell-Smith's (2002) argument of repressed emotions translated as conversion hysteria that can find expression in corporeal gestures. We can see how the translation of melodramatic excess is at work in my chosen melodramatic films grounded on the slum chronotope, where female bodies become the sites in which excessive emotions are played out in crucial moments of narrative unfolding. These instances of embodied excess are what I want to locate and examine as the films' affective chronotopes. But because these urban melodramas are combined with realism, the emotional excesses are somewhat restrained, different from the moments of hysteria used by Brocka and his contemporaries.

Just as how chronotopes of passage function in coming-of-age narratives, I am interested in examining how affective chronotopes move the melodramatic narratives of *Kubrador*, *Foster Child* and *Lola* in order to reveal moments of spatial in/justice. I take my cue from developments in human geography that have attempted to incorporate the theories of affect and embodiment with the production of space and subjectivities. Drawing from theories of affect deployed across areas of cultural studies, I use the term affect here as distinct from emotions or feelings, with emphasis that affect is a capacity that is produced through encounters.

As defined by leading theorists on affect:

> "Affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters, but also, in non-belonging…In this ever-gathering accretion of force-relations (or, conversely, in the peeling or wearing away of such sedimentations) lie the real powers of affect, affect as potential: a body's capacity to affect and to be affected. How does a body, marked in its duration by these various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)?" (Gregg and Seigworth 2011 p. 2).

The above understanding of affect as an encounter is influenced by Brian Massumi's (in Deleuze and Guattari 2004 p. xvii) formulation in his reading of Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza. While there is certainly more nuance in the distinction between affect, emotions, and feelings, it is here sufficient to highlight Massumi's definition that affect is "…an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (in Deleuze and Guattari 2004 p. xvii). In other words, affect is an abstraction that may find specific, subjective expressions in emotions or feelings.

In the films I examine, the spatial practice of walking can be approached as an affective "ability," to use Massumi's term, which can enable the production of emotions and feelings. Recalling Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad, walking as spatial practice is part and parcel of the production of space. To view walking as affective spatial practice aligns with the aims of this chapter to locate moments of spatial in/justice and melodrama's aim of moral legibility. As Andy Merrifield (2013 p. 10) puts it: 'Spatial practices are practices that "secrete" society's space; they propound and propose it, in a dialectical interaction. Spatial practices can be revealed by "deciphering" space and have close affinities with space, to people's perceptions of the world, of their world, particularly its

everyday ordinariness.' As walking is invested with time and space, it might actually be considered a motivic chronotope, but for purposes of clarity and because I propose to read it along the production of space, walking here is approached as spatial practice in the Lefebvrian sense.

The spatial practice of walking dialogues with what I will locate as affective chronotopes, or key instances in the melodramatic narratives invested with emotions that become the kernels of the pathos-action dialectics. In other words, these are the moments in which the films' excesses burst into the narratives, which in turn can be interpreted as the spaces of in/justice — or in melodramatic terms — spaces of moral legibility.

It is but fitting to further relate the melodramatic aim towards moral legibility to the language of walking that Michel De Certeau (2011 p. 97) has poetically theorised in "Walking in the City": "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statement uttered." The spatial practice of walking dialogues powerfully with affective chronotopes, with its creative potential towards contingency and action. My suggestion is that the act of walking is an affective spatial practice that in its enactment and duration invests space with potential meaning/s. Combined with affective chronotopes, the spatial practice of walking that can be seen in the melodramatic films in this study can be positioned as lending themselves to readings of spatial in/justice. Again, De Certeau's insights are on point:

> 'Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks." All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity…' (de Certeau 2011 p. 99).

It is easy to overestimate the spatial practice of walking as a powerful means of subjective formation if not grounded on the intersections of class, gender, and race. For instance, while the act of walking along urban spaces can no doubt be linked to Walter Benjamin's (2003) reading of Charles Baudelaire's 19th century *flaneur*, its early formulations were undoubtedly modelled after the privileged European male. The practice of walking in the then emerging spaces of modernity was the privilege of the male stroller. However, the *flaneur* has since been rightfully subjected to reformulations in order to surface marginalised mobilities on the city's streets. For instance, now we can speak not just of the flaneur, but of the *flaneuse* (Elkin 2017) in urban spaces other than the streets of Baudelaire's Paris. Guillana Bruno (2002 p. 8) has also used the term *voyageuse* for the female traveler, where traveling can be taken to mean the "motion of emotions." In these reformulations, urban spaces are able to offer new insights about the experience of new and emerging cities. In the Philippine urban context, for example, Rolando Tolentino (2001) has argued that flaneuring takes place, not in the uninhabitable highways of Metropolitan Manila, but inside the air-conditioned spaces of Manila malls where the act of window-shopping means being unable to actually purchase the phantasmagoric commodities on display.

Thus while I explore the affective chronotopes paved by the spatial practice of walking in melodramatic films enabled by the slum chronotope, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these narratives take place in the historically and culturally-specific spaces of Manila's slums. In the next section, I begin with the film, *Kubrador*, which is framed by the illegal numbers game of *jueteng* – the theme that situates this narrative strongly in the Philippine context.

V. Kubrador

Kubrador follows the movements of middle-aged Amy as she goes around her slum community taking bets for *jueteng*. As Amy walks through her neigbourhood coaxing acquaintances to place their bets, the film also provides glimpses of everyday life in the slum community. Shot on location in a slum community within Barangay Botocan in Diliman, Quezon City, the film covers three days — the third being All Soul's Day, which in the Philippine context marks an event when people flock to the cemeteries to honour family who have passed away. That the film ends on the day of the dead relates to the haunting presence of the ghost of Amy's son, Eric, throughout the film. Eric, who was a member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and presumably died in combat, appears in uniform in the film's spectral instances.

The film's plot can be approached as a slightly extended slice-of-life narrative that shows the everyday life of a *jueteng* bet collector. In the course of three days, the narrative shows Amy collecting *kubra* (bets) while constantly fearing what she and other collectors call "the enemy" (the police) — or the possibility of being caught in the act of soliciting bets. Amy's mornings always begins with her setting out to work, bright and early, while her husband stays at home to mind their small *sari-sari* (variety) store. Apart from Eric, Amy has two daughters who no longer live with her: one pregnant daughter is shown taking goods from the store, which Amy frowns upon; while the dialogue reveals that another daughter is working in Hong Kong.

Aesthetically, *Kubrador* is mostly comprised of shaky tracking shots characteristic of hand-held camera shooting. Like the films in the previous chapter, *Kubrador* makes use mostly of medium and close-up shots. As Bliss Cua Lim (2011 p. 292) has described it: "*Kubrador* is distinguished by the revelation of space through camera movement." There are a couple of

instances in the beginning and towards the end where wide establishing shots are inserted, which works to remind us that Amy and her immediate community is situated within a larger urban context even as the narrative mostly takes place in the inner areas of the slums. The first captures a wide view of a chase scene on the tightly connected roofs of the slum settlement; the second is a view of the dense crowd in and around the cemetery on the final day covered by the film narrative. In the walking scenes, the camera normally begins by following Amy from behind, establishing real-time pace, turning slowly to the side or front of Amy, and pausing to listen and observe whenever Amy encounters someone familiar. It is also worth pointing out that the film is almost entirely devoid of musical scoring, except for the instances in which the ghost of Amy's son appears — which are the key points I will examine later as the film's affective chronotopes.

As with all the films included in this study, *Kubrador* was well received in international festivals and garnered acclaim from a number of them, including the critic's award from the International Federation of Film Critics and Best Film in the Moscow Film Festival. In the Rome Asiatic Film Mediale Competition, the film won a special jury prize and was lauded for "the extraordinary and seismographic capacity of portraying a social situation through the suffering of one woman" (GMA News Online 2006). On the local front, while it proved unpopular like most indie films compared to big studio films, *Kubrador* was received well among critics and won top awards at the Gawad Urian Awards, considered a critical award-giving body in the Philippine context. Another notable award that *Kubrador* received was the Gawad Lino Brocka award, which aligns Jeffrey Jeturian's work with socially and politically conscious filmmaking.

Kubrador was released at a time that *jueteng* was exposed to be incredibly fundamental to the workings of corruption in the Philippines. From its opening

epigraph that briefly notes the significance of *jueteng* in the Philippine context, the film is overtly framed as an indictment of corruption in the Philippine political system and the church:

> '"Jueteng" is a numbers game in the Philippines. Though illegal, it is popular especially among the poor. Millions of people depend on jueteng for their livelihood. It is so lucrative that the big jueteng operators are said to wield undue influence over politicians, the military, the police, and even the church. In the year 2000, the President of the Philippines was charged with accepting pay-offs from jueteng, and was subsequently deposed. More recently, the current president, her husband and son, were also accused of having links to jueteng.'

As indicated in the epigraph, *jueteng* involvement can be traced all the way to the Philippine presidency. In recent national history, which definitely informs the film's very emergence, then President Joseph Estrada (from 1998-2001) was accused of being on the payroll of the top *jueteng* lords of the country in his impeachment trial, which spurred a massive uprising resulting in his ouster. His successor, then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010) was also implicated as having close ties with one of the country's top *jueteng* lords; her husband and son were said to be regular beneficiaries of *jueteng* payouts (Ramos 2012).

In a two-part report that introduces *jueteng* in relation to *Kubrador,* Stephanie Dychiu (2010a, 2010b) explains that it has long been known as the poor man's game of choice in the Philippines. It is popular among the poor because even a peso is enough to place a bet. The game dates back to the Spanish colonial period, possibly influenced by Chinese traders (Dychiu 2010b). While there are many variations to *jueteng* rules in different regions, it is essentially a game of combinations: a bettor chooses a combination of numbers from 1 to 37. The following description of the game's structure is informed by Dychiu's (2010a; 2010b) report: A draw or *bolahan* is held to determine the winning combination.

The *kubrador* (from the term *cobradores)* earns on commission, around 15 per cent from each bet, but whatever sum is earned by the *kubrador* is paltry compared to those in the higher positions of the *jueteng* organisational structure. The *cabo* who is in charge of the daily *bolahan* might have 25 per cent commission of all the collected bets from numerous *kubradors*. The money is then transferred to the managers, who answer to those on top of the ladder called *kapitalistas*, or in local slang, the *jueteng* lords (Dychiu 2010b).

Jueteng collections amount to a staggering P38 billion per year, a figure that rivals the government-regulated national lottery (Dychiu 2010b). There have been suggestions to legalise *jueteng* over the years, but this has not really transpired into anything beyond that. The Catholic Church in the Philippines continues to approach *jueteng* as a moral issue, condemning it as a vice (Dychiu 2010b). The current Duterte administration subscribes to this view, declaring that the eradication of *jueteng* is part of the government's "moral recovery campaign" (Alconaba 2016).

In an excellent chapter in *The End of National Cinema*, film critic Patrick Campos (2016 p. 289) argues that *Kubrador* is an important turning point in Philippine cinema for its "remarkable originality" that signaled the advent of what he calls "new urban realism." In his discussion of *Kubrador,* Campos (2016) notes that the spatial development of the narrative parallels the workings of *jueteng*'s underground economy, with *kubradors* at the bottom of the rung. He further criticises the Philippine entertainment press for its nostalgic romanticism of Jeturian as a continuation of the Brocka tradition, while virtually ignoring the socio-political commentary expressed in *Kubrador* (Campos 2016).

Among other observations on the development of Philippine new urban realism, Campos raises a passing insight related to its melodramatic nature, which I want to push further in my own analysis. Campos argues that while Jeturian

follows in Brocka's footsteps by choosing the slums of Manila as film location, the character configuration of Amy in *Kubrador* is actually more akin to Brocka's contemporary filmmaker, Ishmael Bernal. Bernal's film, *Manila by Night* (or *City After Dark)* (1980) rivals Brocka's *Manila in the Claws of Light* (1975) in terms of national prestige. Compared to the linear narrative of the latter, *Manila by Night* features an ensemble cast of the city's inhabitants who represent the marginalised sectors that constitute the city. Campos argues that it is productive to view *Kubrador* as progressing from both filmmakers' kind of realism because of:

> "…its resistance to the affect of melodrama, its stylized visual mapping of the mazelike slums of Manila, and its thematic conflation of these spaces with moral agents. That is, relative to Brocka's protagonists who are helpless and tragic victims, Bernal's protagonists are implicated in corruption and, at the same time, imbued with agency to choose life over death. Death, throughout the narrative of Kubrador haunts Amy, given her perilous livelihood and the precarious place in which she subsists. Yet, through it all, she chooses life over death and even stands strong for her neighbors in the community who likewise contend with death, both figurative and literal." (Campos 2016, p.292).

He further suggests that *Kubrador's* spectral elements can be linked to a kind of magical realism combined with Philippine urban realism, akin to another filmmaker, Mario O'Hara, whose style in the film *Babae sa Breakwater [Woman of the Breakwater]* (2003) forwards "a brand of magic realism that depicts vitality amidst everyday deaths…" (Campos 2016 p. 295). While Campos goes on to discuss how *Kubrador* and similar films can be affiliated with developments in cinema in the South East Asian region, I want to further unpack some of the insights he raised in the above passage. In particular, I want to examine what Campos (2016 p. 292) has called *Kubrador's* "resistance to the affect of melodrama" and its configuration of slum dwellers as moral agents. I also want to suggest a reading of the spectral appearances, or the "magical realism" used

in the narrative, that can be enriched alongside the reading of affective chronotopes.

A. Walking in Kubrador

Natural sound accompanies *Kubrador's* introductory notes as they are being flashed on screen, which suggests that the film is framing the narrative against the normalcy of *jueteng* in Philippine everyday life. One can make out the sounds of someone sweeping the streets, men and women calling out to each other, children playing and reciting rhymes, and the sound of footsteps gradually increasing as the film cuts to the feet of a man walking through a busy street of the slums. *Kubrador's* opening long take is rather like a long introduction by way of detour, as it first follows what we might be led to believe as the film's male protagonist. Signs from the film's opening long take situate *Kubrador* in contemporary times. The man is wearing a shirt that reads "*Ituloy and Laban*" (On with the Fight) which was the campaign slogan of 2004 presidential candidate, Fernando Poe Jr., who was very popular among poor voters.[15]

The camera follows the male *kubrador* to a *bolahan*, but a police raid quickly interrupts the scene. The camera then runs after the man as he attempts to escape, a pursuit that leads to a chase on slum rooftops built close enough to allow such a scene. Following this lively opening chase where the male *kubrador* is caught, the film cuts to Amy in prayer: "Lord, I pray that I don't get caught today." The energy of the opening chase is cut short by this quiet scene that re-channels the film's focus from the male *kubrador* to Amy, the film's middle-aged female protagonist who will not likely be embroiled in such an energetic chase. Instead, she walks.

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[15] Poe, Jr. was a beloved action star and is a legend in Philippine cinema. He also ran for the presidency in 2004, with many believing he would have won if not for massive electoral fraud.

In *Kubrador*, the spatial practice of walking is fundamental to Amy's capacity to labour. To walk is to labour, in a literal sense, given that a *kubrador* has to wander the streets of his/her assigned territory, or "cell" in order to find potential bettors. That walking is crucial to her as means of production is further contrasted to Amy's husband who walks with a limp, which is why he has been relegated to manning the family's store at home. Amy's work entails that she is out on the streets most of the day, something that her husband grumbles about each time she returns home.

The spatial practice of walking does not just function as means of production; it is also a mode of experience that is part of what influences the production of particular times and spaces, as performed by different subjects (Wunderlich 2008). As Tim Edensor (2010 p. 74) has argued: "Though embedded in the average human body's physical capacity to move about, and part of unreflexive praxis in the world, walking is also an irreducibly social and cultural practice that is learned, regulated, stylised, communicative and productive of culturally oriented experiences." As a repetitive bodily movement, walking is a gestural spatial practice that Lefebvre (2013) has cited as an example of dressage, a practice that is not "natural" but is actually learned. For Lefebvre (2013 p. 49): "…Dressage puts into place an automatism of repetitions. But the circumstances are never *exactly* and absolutely the same, *identical*." While Lefebvre's concept of dressage stresses the nature of walking as caught up in the historical structures of discipline, this can be extended when we regard walking as also functioning as a mode of experience. De Certeau's (2011) understanding of walking as tactical spatial practice addresses the limitations of Lefebvre's dressage. More importantly, to regard walking as a kind of experience means linking it with emotions and senses. Experience, as Yi-fu Tuan (2014) has argued, is highly charged with emotions and thought; it is in

this way that the experience of walking can also be considered an affective experience that is produced through sensorial and emotional encounters.

In *Kubrador*, the slum chronotope dialogues with the act of walking in producing times and spaces that correspond to *jueteng*'s demands. By this I mean that Amy's working hours and routes, which the film narrative tracks, are constituted by the structure of the game itself. As a *kubrador,* Amy's act of walking has a clear purpose (to collect bets and deliver them to the *cabo*) and operates within the hours before the daily *bolahans* (which in most cases takes place thrice a day). However, while it may seem that the *bolahan* generally provides Amy with a daily schedule and route, the narrative reveals that Amy's days are anything but predictable because there is always a chance that she will get caught. It is important to note, especially in locating spatial justice, that Amy's walking, while structured by *jueteng*, is also laden with contingencies. Her route within her territory also has a dimension of day-by-day randomness as she scours the streets for potential bettors. Moreover, her senses are almost always heightened, through corporeal expressions remarkably acted out by the lead actress. There are times when Amy's body becomes tense, in moments when she is on the lookout for police. Her generally jovial facial expression and demeanor changes into nervous glances and calculated steps when she feels the enemy might be near. In terms of spatial maneuvering, Amy is shown to avoid larger streets that can accommodate police vehicles, or spaces that make her trade more visible. At one point, another *kubrador* warns Amy to steer clear of the highway: *"May kalaban"* (The enemy is there), the man warns; to which Amy scoffs in what can be taken as an expression of nervous defiance: *"Palagi naman eh"* (That's always the case, anyway). Thus, like the main principle of *jueteng*, Amy's daily walks are laced with a strong element of chance.

Amy is not the sturdiest of walkers due to age and her incessant smoking. Occasionally, she would use her umbrella as a cane. As she sets off to work

following an early morning spat with her husband and a tender moment with her grandchild, she walks like someone who knows the streets and its inhabitants by heart, but her pace denotes a sense of caution. Because of the element of chance that governs her walk as a *kubrador*, the rhythm of Amy's walk is infused with the twin affects of fear and familiarity. By rhythm, I reference Lefebvre's (2013) suggestion that rhythm can be found in gestures and patterns of movement, such as the repetitive movement of walking. As Lefebvre (2013 p. 30) phrased it, rhythm is expressed "everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy." Although Amy knows her territory, there is always a chance that something will turn awry. This is foreshadowed just a few minutes into the film. She begins her day on a happy note as she takes her first bet of the day, even expressing her gratitude out loud as she walks on. But just seconds after her *buena mano*,[16] Amy unfortunately steps on shit. The camera follows her walk at eye level, but she suddenly stops, looks down (the camera follows) and exclaims displeasure at her early morning misfortune. The camera lingers a bit on this shot of Amy's feet, capturing her footsteps as she walks to the corner to wipe the shit off her slipper on the pavement.

The overall rhythm of Amy's walking in *kubrador* expresses a steady "expenditure of energy" (to borrow Lefebre's words) which is what I deem to be a key element in *Kubrador's* understated melodrama. The same can be argued for the other films included in this chapter, given the dominance of long takes and tracking shots that constitute the narrative development. The absence of explosive bursts of energetic movement (brisk walking, or running such as in the previous chapter), and the domination of the monotonous rhythm of the steady practice of walking gives the impression that *Kubrador* leans more towards the expression of realism over melodrama. I am inclined to agree with Campos' observation that *Kubrador* is a different kind of Philippine melodrama,

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[16] This means good luck granted by the first customer.

as it does away with the overstated hysteria of Philippine melodrama in the absence of the tropes of screaming, hair-pulling, etc. However, this is not to say that elements of melodrama are absolutely absent; rather they are more strategically deployed, or to borrow from Zarzosa, the moments of suffering are distributed, rather than hammered through and through in the film. In these contemporary melodramas of Philippine urban cinema, what we see are tactical implosions of affect rather than explosions. These brief instances of affective implosions within the narrative are crucial to a reading of *Kubrador* as a film that reveals moments of spatial in/justice.

B. Affective chronotopes and spatial in/justice in *Kubrador*

I locate *Kubrador*'s affective chronotopes in the four instances of the film narrative in which the ghost of Amy's son, Eric, appears within the frame. These are the only instances in the film where musical scoring is used, which harks back to the commonsensical understanding of melodrama as "a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects" (Elsaesser 2002 p. 50). But while classic melodrama might have used music throughout the film to heighten emotion, music is used sparingly in *Kubrador*. This functions to convert the melodramatic hysteria that the film successful restrains or tempers throughout, until it reaches a crescendo in the film's final scene, which is also the ghost's final appearance. These ghostly appearances are intensely chronotopic and affective at the same time. They are moments that show the collision of multiple times and spaces, encounters that in turn prompt Amy's affective responses that rupture the otherwise understated emotions in the film.

The musical score that accompanies Eric's appearances can be described as soft, haunting music; it almost sounds like the opening notes of a police siren. The music is a combination of organ and guitar music beginning at a slow

tempo that becomes slightly faster the longer it plays out. The spectral appearances progressively become longer, just as the musical accompaniment is played longer, spilling into the rolling of the credits after the final scene. The first time Eric's ghost appears is the morning of the first day, where he is shown shaking his head and smiling fondly at Amy's morning spat with her husband. This scene lasts a little over ten seconds, and functions to introduce the spectral presence that will run through the narrative. This music will serve to signal Eric's spectral appearance, denoting that he is a disjointed presence in the film. This music alerts us to the ghostly nature of Eric, who could have otherwise blended in as just another body among the throng of slum inhabitants.

The second instance lasts longer, a tender moment that is preceded by the sound of Amy's heavy breathing overlaying a shot of Eric's framed photo. Having come home from a long day of walking, Amy is exhausted and feverish. From Eric's picture the film pans to a medium close-up of Amy being comforted by Eric who massages her forehead. From Amy's close-up the camera pans to the face of Eric affectionately looking at his mother. In this scene, the film suggests that Eric is a constant presence and source of comfort for Amy. Once again, the scene is accompanied by the same ghostly music, only this time playing longer, just as the scene with Eric's ghost lasts longer than the first.

These first two instances of Eric's appearance take place in the immediate vicinity or inside Amy's home, with each appearance breaking through the time-space that Amy inhabits with the spectral time-space that Eric's ghost inhabits. Each spectral appearance creates affective chronotopes in the narrative as a product of the encounter of different time-spaces, and as moments in between the film's walking scenes. The first two instances can be described as affective chronotopes that produce emotions related to feelings of sadness and longing, especially if we are to consider that Eric's ghost is a projection of Amy's desire to see her son. It is as if the memory of Eric is what keeps her going and what

gives her strength. This is reinforced by the shot of Eric's picture before his ghost appears in the second spectral scene. Amy refuses to eat upon returning home, rejecting her husband's suggestion, and goes to sleep instead, turning to the ghost of her son for comfort.

The third and final spectral appearances amplify Amy's emotions in scenes that dialogue powerfully with the spatial practice of walking. I say this because these affective chronotopes are enabled by the act of getting lost and being disoriented in space, producing affective chronotopes of fear that in turn generate feelings of alarm and anxiety (Tuan 1980). Affective chronotopes are different from passage and threshold chronotopes in the previous chapter because these scenes do not actually signal a turning point or change in narrative development; rather, these scenes allow a deeper understanding of the affective labour of the female subjects in the film narratives. The affective chronotope of fear produced by the experience of getting lost or encountering a dead-end is actually chronotopic as it is an experience tied to a sense of disorientation in space in the present and the future. Indeed, the affect of fear, according to Sarah Ahmed (2014) is an experience in the present that inherently points to a future in which one anticipates harm. Although the subject of analysis relates to the politics of racial affects, Ahmed's description of fear as embodied experience relates to the ways feelings and emotions of fear are projected into the future:

> "… the feeling of fear presses us into that future as an intense bodily experience in the present. One sweats, one's heart races, one's whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis…" (Ahmed 2014 p. 65).

Kubrador presents the spatio-temporal configurations of fear in Amy's embodied experience that takes place in the affective chronotope of Eric's third spectral

appearance, which occurs in a labyrinth of *eskinitas* that Amy gets lost in. It is a scene shot in real-time taking up to over three minutes of screen time. Amy departs from her house, absent-mindedly calculating the amount of bets on a piece of paper she holds as she walks. She takes a wrong turn and reaches a dead-end, but manages to go back to the alley's entrance as the first turn only covered a short distance. She resumes her calculations and absent-minded walking and takes another turn, which brings her to another dead-end. It is here that the music turns up gradually, which effectively projects the state of fear that is beginning to grip Amy. She turns around and hurriedly enters another *eskinita* as the music keeps with the pace of her panicked walking. Here is where we see the silhouette of Eric enter the frame, shot from behind as Amy scampers away to enter another eskinita. The camera follows with tight medium shots that spans the width of the *eskinitas* Amy treads, alternating shots from the front or from behind, or encircling her in continuous shaky takes.

The same haunting music continues to play as Amy encounters one dead-end after another. She is completely unfamiliar in the space she finds herself in, where not a soul in the otherwise dense slum community can be found. It is as if the spaces encapsulated by the *eskinitas* Amy loses herself in have been transformed into a ghost town. This phrase bears metaphoric weight when Eric reappears in the frame at the point when Amy hits yet another dead-end. In a memorable tight long shot, the camera captures Amy's anxious expression as she looks straight at the dead-end, while Eric enters the scene behind her, moving from the shadows from one *eskinita* to another. Amy's change in expression indicates that she might have sensed this spectral presence, which is expressed through the shift in relatively faster tempo of the music. The guitar accompaniment becomes faster and more urgent, as she moves swiftly to follow through the *eskinita* that Eric's ghost walked into. The camera moves to the front of Amy, capturing the intensity of this walking scene as though Amy

were walking out of a tunnel. The music stops as Amy reaches the end of the *eskinita*, the camera moving out of its claustrophobic gaze.

This scene that lends itself to affective chronotopic reading is a powerful visual and aural rendering of spatial justice as enacted by Amy. It is a scene that layers multiple chronotopes: the time-spaces of *jueteng* fold into the time-spaces of Amy's personal life, which folds into the time-spaces of memory and haunting expressed through the son's ghostly presence. In doing so, the scene is ripe for reading as the unfurling of affective chronotopicity embodied in Amy's drive to re-appropriate the claustrophobic labyrinth of *eskinitas* that engulfs her. It is a scene in which conversion hysteria takes place, not overtly, but by means of spectral haunting and aural accompaniment. It is telling that this scene occurs shortly after Amy visited the wake of a neighbour's son who died in a random hit and run, triggering the memory of Eric. The weight of her son's death is what Amy has been repressing all throughout the film, which is what the film ushers in through the affective chronotopes of Eric's spectral appearances. Whether Eric is a projection of Amy's memory or whether it is a "real" ghost in the world of the film does not change the reading of Amy's agency, given that the overlapping times and spaces rendered in this affective chronotope came into fore through the mode of walking enacted by Amy. This is perhaps the most powerful scene in the entirety of *Kubrador,* even more so than the final scene because it is able to capture the socio-spatial dialectic that Amy navigates on a daily basis, and how she wills herself to push through the fear of losing her footing in the face of poverty, sickness, and death.

While Campos (2016, p. 292) considers the spectral dimension in *Kubrador* as a "subplot" even as he reads the film as a representation of Amy's moral agency, I argue that this spectral dimension bears equal weight in the film's socio-political agenda. My analysis is more in line with Lim's (2011 p. 55) brilliant analysis in which she argues that *Kubrador's* "spectral resolution

reveals the fillmaker's interest in illuminating the inextricability of life and death in the story world." I extend this further by arguing that it is through the film's affective chronotopes, scenes that accommodate time-spaces and emotions expressed by memory and haunting, that the film is able to foreclose melodrama's agenda of moral legibility, offering moments of spatial appropriation. The third spectral appearance in particular demonstrates this remarkably — especially as Amy was literally writing and calculating *jueteng* bets when she got lost in space. Her life as *kubrador* is one that is replete with the endless possibility of wrong turns and dead-ends (demonstrating the spatiality of injustice/injustice of spatiality), but she actively labours through these spaces because of her will to survive, keeping the thought of family and community at heart. It is in these understated affective moments that Amy's repression of grief and sadness is allowed to break through the realist inclinations of the film.

The final spectral appearance occurs in the larger space of the cemetery where Amy joins the throng of people commemorating All Soul's Day. The sea of crowds surrounding and occupying the cemetery space is in itself the film's assertion of life in the midst of a space of death. Recalling Michel Foucault's (2002 p. 234) notion of the cemetery as an example of a heterotopic space, he remarks that the cemetery signals a break in everyday time as it begins with the "loss of life" that strangely signals the "quasi eternity in which her [the individual's] permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance." But the cemetery in *Kubrador,* and in the Philippine context in general, does not exactly constitute a space outside of everyday lived time. On the contrary, cemeteries are the sites that allow the co-occupation of the living *and* the dead. While still functioning as the site of the dead, cemeteries in the Philippines are known to be inhabited by the living even beyond All Soul's Day. In fact, cemeteries in Philippine urban spaces have become sites occupied by squatters in recent years. Although the film moves outside the slum space in the last minutes of

screen time, the narrative signals a continuity of the slum chronotope (within the spaces of the cemetery) governed by contingency, signaled by the scene where Amy accidentally steps into mud (recalling the stepping on shit scene) as she walks towards Eric's tombstone.

In *Kubrador*, Eric's spectral appearances signal a rupturing of time and space to allow moments in which Amy embraces her grief at the loss of her son. When the rest of her family joins Amy near Eric's tombstone, Amy moves away to have time for herself. This solitary move is also explained by her understandable annoyance at her husband's major blunder the night before, which resulted in Amy having to bury herself in further debt to her *cabo.* Tania Modleski's (1984 p. 24) remarks fits Amy's role in the family, at the same time that it points to the repressed emotions that Amy has had to carry throughout: "Women in melodrama almost always suffer the pains of love and even death…while husbands, lovers, and children, remain partly or totally unaware of their experience. Women carry the burden of feeling for everyone."

While alone, a random altercation occurs on cemetery grounds that Amy finds herself drawn to. Two motorists involved in a collision of vehicles exchange profanities. One retrieves a gun and shoots towards the other running away, which also happens to be towards Amy's direction. The bullet hits the man standing behind Amy, but not before the bullet hits the surface of her shoulder. In what can be considered a melodramatic scene of excessive emotions, Amy cries for help for the man who was shot. There is a frenzied energy surrounding this scene that is exacerbated by the noise produced by the surrounding crowd. It is only at the point when Amy stands up and realises that there is blood on her shoulder that the haunting music turns up again, with the camera zooming out to include Eric in the frame. He watches with concern as Amy stares at her bloodied hand with a pained and fearful expression. Her heavy breathing and moaning overlay the music. Once again, the affect of fear surfaces in this

scene, with Amy realising in that very instance that she narrowly escaped death. Whether or not this scene could be interpreted as Eric's ghost saving his mother is a matter of debate; but what is important in my own reading is that Amy's near-death experience forced a full expression of emotions from the film's protagonist. As Lim (2011 p. 295) has argued: "*Kubrador's* penultimate scene thus drives home what we know to have been true all along: Amy's precarious life is constantly grazed by death."

From this near-death scene, the film offers what can be deemed the narrative's open closure. While still visibly shaken and caught up in the throng of people descending upon the man with the gun, Amy picks up her umbrella and her hand towel, and walks away, exiting the frame. The film then briefly lingers on Eric, who is shown to follow Amy's exit from the screen. The film ends with a shot of bodies whose backs are turned to the camera, as they watch the police car drive away with the suspect in custody, just as the film fades to black and the same haunting music is played throughout the credits. I want to emphasise that Amy's final act is to pick herself up and walk away; and this time, it is the ghost of her son that follows in her tracks. It is in this final scene that she demonstrates how in the face of death, she chooses to just keep walking.

Modleski (1984) cites Helene Cisoux's gendered reading of "mourning" in order to suggest that melodrama might offer a revised reading of hysteria. Cisoux's (cited in Modleski, 1984, p. 27) poignant remarks resonate with what I believe *Kubrador* is able to do by way of affective chronotopes: "…When you've mourned it's all over after a year, there's no more suffering. Woman, though, does not mourn, does not resign herself to loss. She basically *takes up the challenge of loss*…seizing it, living it…It's like a kind of open memory that ceaseless makes way…"

Fredric Jameson (1999 p. 99), explaining Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, has remarked that spectrality is not about believing in the existence of ghosts; rather: "all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be, that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity which might under exceptional circumstances betray us." By locating *Kubrador's* affective chronotopes in the spectral appearances in the narrative, the film opens itself up to a reading of spatial justice where the spatial practice of walking becomes a means of spatial appropriation, no matter how limited. Thelma walks away from death, presumably to return to the tombstone where her family is honouring the life of her son, where she will once again manage her emotions, or "take up the challenge of loss" (Cisoux cited in Modleski p. 24) in order to keep on living.

VI. Foster Child

Like *Kubrador*, an overall sense of emotional restraint runs through the narrative unfolding of Brilliante Mendoza's *Foster Child*. The film tracks a day in the life of Thelma, a foster mother living in the slums of Manila. The narrative takes place on the day she is set to "discharge" her three-year-old foster child, John-John, for formal adoption to an American couple. Like *Kubrador*, the film is built through and around the movements of Thelma in the final hours she spends with her latest ward who has been under her care for three years. It is revealed that Thelma has been in the business of fostering for eight years; pictures of different children adorn a wall in the shanty house she shares with her family. More than half of the film takes place in Thelma's slum community, while roughly a third of the film takes place in the commercial district of the capital where John-John's discharge takes place.

There was much more fanfare surrounding the release of Mendoza's *Foster Child* in comparison to *Kubrador* given its premier at the Cannes Film Festival's

Director's Fortnight. With *Foster Child*, Mendoza joined the prestigious list of only four Filipinos to have screened their works in the category, which includes Lino Brocka, Mike De Leon, and Mario O'Hara. In an interview, the film producer, Robbie Tan, articulated that they made the film with Cannes in mind (cited in Cruz and San Diego Jr. 2007) – the festival that would in 2009 herald Mendoza as the first Filipino filmmaker to receive the Best Director award for full feature film. As part of its international success, national press articles pointed out that *Foster Child* received a 5-minute standing ovation from the Cannes film festival audience (Carballo 2007; Dimaculangan 2007). The film was also generally received warmly among film critics on the local front (Flores 2007; Franciso 2007).

In *Foster Child,* Mendoza highlights how his characters are caught, accommodated, or displaced in space. Using real-time tracking shots, the camera deliberately displaces the characters from the frame, in some scenes including only the lower half of the body, or maybe an arm or a leg of a character being followed, resulting in an oddly imbalanced inhabitation of the screen. Unlike the previous films discussed, *Foster Child* mixes a variety of deep focus shots and wide shots, while still keeping with its overall neorealist inclinations — the style that Mendoza claims he was aiming for in the making of the film (San Diego Jr. 2007). What is immediately noticeable is how the film shots become wider in the scenes that take place outside the slum space. Interestingly, *Foster Child* is often thought to have been shot with a digital camera, but it was shot with 35mm, with Mendoza insisting that he was going for a certain detailed texture for the film (San Diego Jr. 2007). Like *Kubrador*, the film makes ample use of natural sound and is devoid of music except for two scenes, which I elaborate on later in my location of the film's affective chronotopes.

The film is inspired by real accounts of a largely unfamiliar program of foster care in the Philippines. Licensed by the Department of Welfare and Social Development, *Foster Child* specifically references an organisation called *Kaisahang Buhay* (which can roughly be translated to "One Life") Foundation that facilitates foster care and adoption programs of abandoned infants. The process behind taking in a foster child is laid bare in the film through dialogue and shifts in setting, particularly in the scenes that take place at the foundation centre and the orphanage before John-John is transferred to his new family. While the foundation also facilitates domestic adoption services, the film covers the foundation's "intercountry" adoption service that links with agencies overseas, including the United States. (Kaisang Buhay Foundation n.d.).

Thelma, her husband, and her two sons dote on John-John; their morning activities revolve around taking care of his needs. The older brother rushes off to buy diapers, while the husband and the younger brother shower John-John with attention. At breakfast, Dado is the first to demonstrate anger and frustration at John-John's impending transfer, especially as he did not realise this is the family's last day with the boy. Dado walks away to wash his hands, his back turned to the camera and his face hidden in the shadows. He raises his voice in response to the social worker who tells him he should have been ready for this day: *"Yes, I know! But it isn't all that easy."* The film never shows his face, but he lingers at the sink, his hands reaching towards his face in a gesture that suggests he might have quickly stopped himself from weeping. When Dado turns back to face the screen, his face betrays no emotions, but he hurriedly sets off to work without saying goodbye to his family, or to John-John. In contrast, Thelma betrays no sense of sorrow even as she goes about the rest of her day preparing John-John for discharge. She talks excitedly to the boy about his new parents, and she even tells a number of neighbours that today is when John-John leaves her charge. Thelma's energetic, even joyous, chatter and

demeanor suggest that for her, today is just like any other day — it is business as usual.

There is, after all, money to be made in fostering, although the sum of P1,500 per month provided by the government is a paltry amount for the labour of care that Thelma provides for John-John. The act of fostering is Thelma's job, and she is very good at it judging by the plaques of appreciation she has received over the years for her services to the foundation. The film reinforces that Thelma's act of caring is her form of labour when a scene where Thelma sits down to eat a humble lunch with John-John and her son, Yuri, is cut by a scene of Dado hard at work at a construction site. The affects involved in the labour of foster care are what the film is able to temper and keep at bay throughout. This tempering of melodrama, however, does not mean that the film does not surface the ethical dilemma that underlies the entire narrative; the dialogue provides brief but sharp jabs at the uneasy nature of the "discharge" that will take place. For instance, when the social worker, Bianca, comments at how John-John seems to have gained weight, Thelma remarks jokingly: *"Of course, that's because he's being spruced up for his new parents."*

The conflict of the film lies not in the act of fostering per se. Rather, the discomfort lies in the unequal relations that are brought to light by the stark contrast that the film is able to establish between the foster family and the adoptive parents. That the adoptive parents in the film are American is suggestive of the film's not-so-subtle allegorical potentials as illustrative of unequal power relations between the coloniser and the colonised. This is not to say, however, that the adoptive parents are portrayed as villains. However, it is Thelma's encounter with the adoptive parents in *their* territory that gradually pushes her emotions to the brink. In what follows, I explore how walking is used in the film, and later examine how this spatial practice dialogues with the

affective chronotopes that take place in "pissing" scenes that recur throughout the narrative.

A. Walking in *Foster Child*

Like in *Kubrador*, the act of walking is used to reveal the production of space in *Foster Child.* It is the spatial practice that first introduces the labyrinthian space of Thelma's *looban*. The opening of the film, however, initially provides a panoramic view of the city skyline at daybreak, which tilts down to reveal a stretch of shanty roofs that make up Thelma's slum community. From this wide shot, a small figure enters the frame. This is the film's introduction of Thelma — the woman steadily walking on her roof as though she were walking on a street. She walks with familiarity and control over her space. Thelma hangs clothes to dry, and is joined shortly by her husband, Dado, and her younger son, Yuri, who both have their own morning activities on the roof. Yuri checks on pet pigeons, while Dado does some carpentry. The sound of John-John crying disrupts the family's morning activities, and one by one, the members of the foster family come to the boy's aid.

The film cuts to a woman in casual business clothes walking towards one of the *eskinitas* that lead into the deep *looban* where Thelma's family lives. The woman turns out to be the social worker, Bianca, who is a familiar figure in the *looban* despite clearly being an outsider. It is through Bianca's walking that the film initially introduces the slum community. The social worker's walk reveals the spatial construction of the *looban* that she seems to have entered many times before. The camera follows her through the sprawl of *eskinitas* where she encounters mothers and children at just about every turn. All the mothers and children seem to know her. At one point, Bianca even stops to chat with a pregnant woman to ask how she is doing. Via Bianca's walking, the film

introduces this particular slum community as brimming with the energy of mothers and children.

Although Bianca clearly has a destination, her steps convey a sense of uncertainty, especially when she goes through narrower alleys. There are curious scenes in which the camera captures only the lower half of Bianca's body, giving more attention to her feet as she carefully makes her way into the slums. She reaches Thelma's home where her agenda is to check on John-John, and to make sure everything is sorted for John-John's discharge later in the day.

While Bianca's walking scenes map the slum space as a figure from outside, Thelma's walking enacts a movement away from the controlled world of the slums to the expanse of the urban space outside, as Thelma takes John-John to his final activities as a child of the slums. Thelma gives him his final bath on the unpaved street next to her house where the community's water pump is located. Later, the film documents in real-time how Thelma, Yuri, and John-John walk towards the narrow opening that will take them to the highway that serves as the *looban's* link to the larger urban space, signified by access to public transportation.

The shift in the rhythm of Thelma's walking is evident in the shift in spaces, from the slum space to the commercial district. If she walks confidently in the seemingly confusing maze of the slums, her disorientation is palpable in the uncertainty of her steps when she enters the commercial district where the American couple's hotel is located. She nervously tugs at her shirt as she follows Bianca who leads the way to the hotel entrance ridiculously guarded by S.W.A.T. Police. Before entering, Thelma's bag is checked where she unearths items meant to serve her foster child's needs: a baby bottle, a banana, a comb.

When Yuri suggests he will just wait at the lobby, Thelma, in mild panic, says he has to come up with them.

It is impossible not to notice the stark difference in spatial configuration between the slums and the hotel. Thelma's walk away from the *looban* is the flipside of her walk into the interiors of the posh hotel space. She holds the hand of her foster child for comfort while following Bianca whose role throughout this film is to serve as middle woman for the adoption process. In real-time, the camera follows Thelma as she marvels at the grandeur of the hotel lobby and glances at its inhabitants who are completely foreign to her. If in her *looban*, with its unpaved and uneven surfaces, Thelma walks with complete ease greeting friends stationed at familiar corners, the situation is clearly reversed in the hotel space where security is tight. She self-consciously tugs repeatedly at her clothes and tries to fix her hair. From the hotel entrance to the reception area, it is Bianca, in her capacity as middle-class middle-woman, who leads the way, speaking and gesturing on behalf of Thelma's odd presence. *"The Stewarts are expecting us,"* Bianca tells the woman at reception. Only upon the woman's confirmation were they allowed to get into the lift. The people in the hotel space are not at all depicted as hostile towards Thelma, but their disinterest reinforces the casual nature of the transaction that will take place once Thelma discharges John-John to his new adoptive parents. In this hotel interior walking sequence, Thelma's gestures powerfully reveal that she feels out of place.

Like Amy in *Kubrador*, Thelma makes use of the spatial practice of walking to embody a sense of moral agency. In the next section, I locate the affective chronotopes that build up to the powerful moments leading up to the film's narrative resolution.

B. Affective chronotopes and spatial in/justice in Foster Child

While more than half of *Foster Child'*s screen time offer scenes that take place in *looban* spaces that Thelma navigates with ease, the film's spatial shifts from the point that Thelma exits the *looban* to discharge John-John signals the emotional build-up towards the film's final affective moments. I locate the film's affective chronotopes in the spaces outside *looban* that offer glimpses into Thelma's repressed shame, and the emotions this affect generates, on the day she lets go of her foster child. These affective chronotopes build up towards the powerful affective walking scenes that take place in the last few minutes of the film.

Elspeth Probyn (2004 pp. 330–331) has explored the affect of shame as embodied in the everyday, arguing that "shame always plays on the doubledness of the public and the private, the extraordinary and the mundane. It is perhaps the most intimate of feelings but seemingly must be brought into being by an intimate proximity to others." This is how Probyn explains Walter Benjamin's reading of shame in *The Trial,* where Benjamin argues that shame has a "dual aspect." For Benjamin (cited in Probyn, p. 331): "Shame is not only shame in the presence of others, but can also be shame one feels for them." The affect of shame plays out in interesting ways in *Foster Child's* affective chronotopes, which can be understood more fully along the lines of the Philippine values *hiya* and *amor propio* (self-esteem)*.*

An oft-cited study on the notion of social acceptance in the Philippine context (Lynch 1962), while suspect to blanket generalisations because of the lack of historicisation, cites *hiya* and *amor propio* as twin values that many Filipinos consider necessary for maintaining smooth personal relations, ultimately aspiring for social acceptance. Between the two values, *hiya* roughly translates to shame, which refers to feelings of inadequacy and "awareness of being in a

socially unacceptable position, or performing a socially unacceptable action" (Lynch 1962 p. 97). To be accused of being *walang hiya* (having no shame) is to step outside one's place, or social position. *Amor propio,* on the other hand, "is not aroused by every insult, slighting remark, or offensive gesture. The stimuli that set it off are only those that strike at the individual's most highly valued attributes" (Lynch 1962 p. 97). What needs to be stressed is how shame in the Philippine context is strongly tied to one's class standing/social position, and is further configured by social relations. In another study, for instance, *hiya* is defined as:

> '…a painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one's ego. It is a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed, unprotected, and unaccepted. It is a fear of abandonment, of "loss of soul", a loss not only of one's possessions or even of one's life, but of something perceived as more valuable than life itself, namely the ego, the self.' (Bulatao 1964 p. 428).

Foster Child, seen as melodrama, makes legible the affect of shame that may be said to drive the film's narrative development. The practice of foster care itself is laden with the "dual aspect" of shame: there is immense dignity in caring for a child not your own; at the same time that the practice exposes the shameful reality of the existence of abandoned children. There is immense unqualified dignity in the foster care practice, at the same time that the act of caring for a child is uncomfortably tinged with monetary value.

The ways that *Foster Child* proffer and engage with the affect of shame can be read in its affective chronotopes, which I locate in the film's interesting "pissing" scenes that subtly run through the entire narrative. These pissing scenes lay bare the complexities of the affect of shame that quietly underline the narrative. In earlier scenes set in the slums, it is implied that John-John has no comprehension yet of what it means to piss in public — he has not developed a

sense of shame when it comes to this private act. This is why Thelma's oldest son rushes off to get diapers in the beginning of the film. John-John pisses when his foster father tries to stop him from crying that morning. John-John does the same thing when Bianca was holding him, resulting in Bianca having to clean up her blouse. In the scene where Thelma washes him in the slum's public bathing area, there is a rather humorous scene where John-John playfully urinates, completely unmindful of the fact that he is in a public space. In all of these scenes, Thelma and her family react with fondness or laughter; they don't really find the childish act of pissing in public obscene, in the same way that there is no shame in bathing in public if the only source of water is in a public space. In these scenes where John-John pisses in the presence of his foster family, the film suggests that there is no shame — inversely, there is dignity —in how John-John has been socialised in impoverished conditions.

When the narrative shifts to the space of the foundation centre, Yuri takes John-John to the lavatory where they pass by a foster mother about to hand over an infant to a Caucasian couple. The camera lingers in this scene for a moment, temporarily losing sight of tracking Yuri and John-John, in order to capture the performance of "discharge" between a Filipina foster mother and foreign adoptive parents. As the white male figure speaks, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Yuri and John-John in the lavatory where they take turns to piss with the door open. The camera captures this pissing scene from a safe, unobtrusive distance in real-time, keeping the audio of the discharge process overlaid while Yuri helps his foster brother with washing his hands. So while they piss, the "discharge" process happening in the nearby room is folded into the pissing time-space. A brief tender moment is captured when before heading back to rejoin Thelma, John-John absent-mindedly gives Yuri a hug. The brothers head back in time for the infant's actual physical transfer into the arms of the foreign adoptive parents. This whole scene functions almost like a split-screen, establishing a parallelism between the act of pissing and the

performance of "discharging" a foster child, surfacing a sense of perceived discomfort and impropriety of both acts.

In *Foster Child*, pissing scenes are affective chronotopes that stand for John-John's socialisation—the ways of slum life that he has learned under Thelma's care. Pissing in public spaces, divorced from an understanding of slum practices, recalls the perception of slum inhabitants as having no regard for privacy, hygiene, and cleanliness. It is a misconception that can also be linked to the false dichotomy of the civilized coloniser and the barbaric native. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) points out, for instance, that dirt has served as a metonym for the perceived backwardness of the colonised, with colonisers citing images of garbage and open sewers lining streets where natives walk barefoot.

In Philippine colonial history, this false notion of the "dirty" native goes back to the American colonial period. According to Filipino historian Merce Planta (2008) the "civilizing mission" of the United States included the actual teaching of proper hygiene practices to schoolchildren as part of the curriculum. The institutionalisation of health and hygiene practices was patterned after American standards, without consideration of practices in the tropics that the Americans considered unsanitary. Some examples of these health practices include the use of utensils instead of hands for eating, as well as the discouragement of the sharing of plates and glasses. Planta (2008, p. 131) further explains that: "Most importantly, every home was to have a toilet. These new and proper ways of hygiene, sanitation, better diet, and good behavior were to be enacted through the guidance of teachers and health officials who were considered role models." The same perception of the "dirty slum dweller" applies to the slum inhabitants of Manila, where the lack of proper toilet facilities and sewerage system is all too obvious, and "open defecation" has been identified as a pressing problem by government institutions and international organisations (Ballesteros 2010). While indeed steps must be taken to provide modern facilities in slum

communities, these views reinforce notions of "backwardness" attached to slum dwellers, when in fact, there are many reports that document how they strive to keep their spaces habitable in the absence of government support (Alcazaren et al. 2011). When contextualised in this imagined binary of the "clean coloniser" as opposed to the "dirty native," the affective chronotopes of pissing in *Foster Child* stand for the practices that John-John has to unlearn once he is transferred from a life of poverty to that of affluence.

The most uncomfortable affective chronotopes in *Foster Child* can be located in the hotel suite where John-John's transfer takes place, a sudden change of venue justified by the adoptive mother's sprained ankle. There is terrible cruelty in this shift in space that literally and symbolically pulls the rug from under Thelma. Normally, the middle ground of the foundation centre serves to soften the blow of the discharge process. But this shift in time-space tips the balance even more against Thelma, who could not protest when the social worker said they would have to go to the hotel themselves instead of postponing. Via taxi, the group comprised of Bianca, Thelma, Yuri, and John-John traverse the highway that paves the way from poverty to affluence, with streets widening into roads as they approach Manila's commercial district.

It is already over an hour into screen time when the film finally takes us to the hotel suite, where the American couple welcomes the group. In this space of affluence, the contradictions of class, race, and gender erupt in silent gestures, such as Thelma's slightly hunched back, her incessant nodding, and the embarrassed smile she makes in order to compensate for her inability to communicate in fluent English. Bianca zealously compliments Thelma when she is introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Stewart, saying Thelma is the foundation's best foster mother. The Stewarts are portrayed as well meaning, but what I want to point out is that they are also unapologetic about this shift in venue, completely

uninformed and disinterested in the time and effort it took for Thelma to even be there.

It is in the last few minutes of the film that take place in the oppressive time-space of the hotel suite that Thelma's movements begin to reveal the workings of her affect of shame. When Thelma enters the affective chronotope of the hotel suite's bathroom, which is more spacious and luxurious than her house in the slums, Thelma's shame begins to push through, initiated by her hesitation to even step inside the pristine bathroom. Her facial expression conveys a mix of awe and embarrassment — a perfect illustration of *hiya* and *amor proprio* based on a sense of class deference prompted by the encounter with the rich American couple who will take her place in John-John's life. The whole scene lasts over three minutes, the real-time rendering adding more depth to the surfacing of shame. Thelma scratches her head before entering the toilet space, where she pisses with the door ajar, all the while still marveling at the luxury around her. She makes herself up as best she can by washing her face and fixing her hair, and stares at herself in the bathroom mirror with the same mixture of expressions before the film cuts away to a view of the city skyline at night that implies she is really out of her comfort zone.

In the next few minutes, the narrative allows for an exchange of pleasantries, both endearing and unsettling in their over-politeness. Thelma tries to feed John-John while he sits on his new father's lap on the dining table. While Thelma shows pictures of John-John growing up, the inevitable happens: John-John pisses on Mr. Stewart's lap. Thelma immediately apologises and scrambles to the bathroom to clean up her ward where once again, she is confounded by the space in which she doesn't know how to operate. She laughs embarrassingly at her own ignorance as she asks the social worker for help when she accidentaly turns on the shower. Although a seemingly light-hearted scene, it is actually loaded, once again, with the affect of shame as it

puts Thelma in a position where she knows nothing. The affect of shame translated as *hiya* and *amor propio* is reinforced in Thelma's final moments with John-John, whom she cradles while Bianca gently bids her to leave. Bianca's affectionate remark recognises that this is actually a hugely affective moment. To Thelma, Bianca says: "*Let's go, or you might cause a scene."*

The affective chronotopes of pissing in Foster Child recall the desettling scene in Luis Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) where the acts of dining and defecation are turned over. In the film, eating is portrayed as a shameful act that one should do in private, while defecating is a perfectly acceptable social act enacted with dining chairs replaced with toilet seats. Buñuel's famous scene has been interpreted in various ways, but relating it to Foster Child helps explain the unease conveyed by the scenes that take place in the hotel suite — that all the pleasantries exchanged is a farce that conceals the real exchange that will take place by the end of that night: the transfer of the foster child from a space of poverty to affluence. As one reviewer puts it: "As Picache [Thelma] fumbles with the shower in a failed attempt to clean the boy after he urinates over his new family, and she searches desperately in the hotel suite for a toilet, leaving the door open as she goes, the film turns out to have a message after all: about that which is organic and that which is institutionalized. All this civilization and order and sense, says Foster Child, so that men can piss in dignity" (Phelps 2008).

That the whole thing is really a polite business transaction makes itself apparent in the scene where the American father leads Thelma and her "real" son out of the suite. The American tells her to get in touch if she needs anything, not directly, but through the social worker. Before Thelma steps into the elevator, Mr. Stewart hands Thelma some money which she tries to refuse, but ultimately accepts. In response to Thelma's initial refusal to take the money, Mr Stewart's

parting words convey that Thelma is no longer needed: *"Not another word. Ok. Have a great life."*

I must stress that the film does not rid Thelma of dignity, even though it also does not completely grant her a full sense of agency. What it is able to do, through affective chronotopes, is to show how Thelma strives to hold her own in her struggle to assert her subjectivity. The film is a thoughtful rendering of how Thelma, in the film's affective chronotopes, recognises that her strength lies in her ability to care — caring is her labour capital and her subjective power. There are moments when Thelma asserts herself through her knowledge of caring for John-John that the adoptive parents have no access to. One instance where Thelma asserts herself is in the dinner scene where she affectionately speaks to John-John in Tagalog, asking if he is enjoying the food. Mr Stewart, clearly at a loss, quickly remarks that John-John should learn how to speak English soon.

Thelma clearly recognises that caring is the best labour she can offer. Bianca asks Thelma, in a poignant scene where she is cradling John-John for the last time*: "If you can relive your life, will you choose to become a foster mother?"* Thelma replies, smiling, and with no semblance of apprehension or irony: *"Yes of course, Ms. Bianca. That's all I know how to do."* And while this scene does not leave the hotel suite, Thelma can productively be situated as a local articulation of the global network of feminised domestic labour inhabited by thousands of women who work in the care industry as nannies and caregivers overseas (an issue which will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter 4). Thelma's work as foster mother negotiates and even elides the operations of global capital. As Neferti Tadiar (2009) argues in her reading of poetry that engages with the kind of labour offered by Overseas Filipina ("Pinay") workers:

> "Pinay's ability to care and extend herself in fact does constitute her labour-power as a yaya [nanny], one of her functions as a domestic helper, and thus from the standpoint of her buyers/employers she

can be seen to be already commodified. However, it is also subjectively (from her standpoint as living labour) the activity that remains beyond the purview of exchange. As this uncommodified activity, Pinay's experience is a power of her own. It is the site of her 'free' activity and thus the site of her potential freedom…In other words, by enduring her fear, her torment and her longing, in her willingness and desire to free herself and her family from their indebtedness (their bondage), Pinay aids in her own processing as desirable worker." (Tadiar 2009 pp. 139–140).

Thelma's moral agency is rendered in the final sequences, where the film redeploys the spatial practice of walking, this time to reinforce Thelma's alienation in the time-space of the commercial district that is a world away from the slums. The loss of her latest foster child is translated into the literal state of Thelma getting lost. With her son, Yuri, Thelma walks aimlessly through the pavements of the commercial district, passing through massive posters displayed on the windows of malls, advertising products Thelma would not be able to afford. In the walk along these billboards with the sillhouette of mother and son, the film briefly turns up a few notes of a lullaby, revealing the sorrow repressed by the act of walking. The music abruptly stops, and when Yuri finally asks where they are going and why they are walking in circles, Thelma's emotions break into her mask of control as she insists on going back to see John-John. When Yuri pleads with her to stop, Thelma's repressed affect of shame finally erupts when she exclaims she does not know where they are going. Finally, she stops at a corner in a fit of hysterical sobbing.

The power of this melodramatic scene is precisely in its delayed eruption and its overall restraint — to the point that it almost leaves the viewers wanting for more. Here, the film closes firmly on Thelma's side as the film's unquestionable heroine who, in the face of injustice, wills herself to move forward. At the same time, however, the closing of *Foster Child* subtly credits Yuri, Thelma's son, for being his mother's true ally and inspiration for her affective labour. Thelma wills herself to stop crying upon Yuri's gentle prodding. The young man takes his

mother's hand and leads her up to the overground train, which will take them away from the oppressive spaces of the commercial capital, back to the space of the slums heavily invested with Thelma's subjective labour power of care.

VII. Lola

The third and last film included in this chapter is *Lola* (Grandmother), another Mendoza film released two years after *Foster Child*, and in the same year that Mendoza won the the Best Director award for the film *Kinatay* in the Cannes Film Festival. The film follows the movements of two elderly women who are both intent on seeking justice for their grandchildren, but whose aims are at opposing ends: Lola Puring's grandson was killed in a mobile phone theft by the godson of Lola Sepa. As Puring collects money for her grandson's burial, Sepa collects money in the hope that she can negotiate settlement for her grandson's release from jail.

Fresh from the buzz generated by Mendoza's 2009 Cannes Film Festival win, *Lola* competed in the Golden Lion category of the Venice Film Festival in the same year. It later won awards in other international festivals, such as festivals in Dubai, Fribourg, and Sydney. In the Philippines, like previous Mendoza films, *Lola* was received warmly by film critics (Alfonso 2009; Bolisay 2009; Medel 2017) even as it was unable to generate local box-office success.

It is perhaps a welcome coincidence that *Lola* premiered in the Venice Film Festival given the film's use of a location that is also submerged in water. Lola Puring resides with her family, comprised of her daughter and two young grandsons, in a perpetually flooded area referred to in the film as *"Sitio Ilog"* (river site). The flooded area is in one of the barangays of Malabon City, an area known to most Manila residents as one of the most flood-prone cities in the

metro. The city of Malabon has always been prone to flooding as one of the areas below sea level in the coastal parts of Metropolitan Manila.

Although it is not specifically referenced in the film, the flooded site that contains the submerged houses and buildings used as setting in the film is known as the Artex Compound, which stretches up to a thousand hectares, located in Barangay Panghulo, Malabon. The Artex Compound is known to some as "The Venice of Malabon" or the "Venice of the North" (of Manila), precisely because of its flooded state that became permanent when floodwaters did not recede following a typhoon in 2004 (Villegas 2010; Moya 2014). The compound is inhabited by families of former workers who staged strikes over low wages against the Artex Yupangco Textile Mills Corporation in 1984 (Villegas 2010; Moya 2014). As flooding in Malabon got worse, the company shut down in 1989, with workers opting to continue occupying the compound as part of ongoing demands for backwages (Villegas 2010; Moya 2014). This labour dispute remains unresolved until today, with families choosing to stay in the seemingly uninhabitable compound, partly because they cannot afford to move elsewhere (Villegas 2010; Moya 2014).

In contrast to Venice, the spaces of *Sitio Ilog* offer different images floating along its murky waters. In place of gondolas are small, rickety wooden boats; in place of majestic cathedrals is the sorry arch of a forgotten church; and instead of quaint residential houses, there are weary upper floors of dilapidated two-storey houses, the ground floor of these houses submerged in water. *Lola's* scenes in this Third World Venice are what arguably make this film stand out amongst other films in Philippine urban cinema.

If Lola Puring, grandmother of the deceased grandson, struggles with the waters of *Sitio Ilog*, Lola Sepa resides in an ageing, run-down house in a bustling, dense area of the city, presumably also within Malabon. During the

day, Sepa sells various vegetables on the city's sidewalks along with another grandson. They do this without a permit, at the risk of being caught in random police raids. This happens once in the film narrative, with Sepa struggling to collect the coins scattered all over the street. At night, Sepa and her godson return home where Sepa's disabled husband is waiting to be fed.

Mendoza's penchant for laborious, unstable tracking shots runs through the film. Like in *Foster Child*, the camera patiently follows the grandmothers as they move around their spaces. Relative to *Foster Child*, however, *Lola* makes more use of facial close-ups, paying close attention to all the signs of ageing conveyed by the grandmothers. The overall pace of the film is also very slow compared to *Foster Child* and *Kubrador*, as it keeps with the slow pace of walking by the two *lolas* who are often assisted by their younger relatives.

In a compelling essay on "remaindered life-times" in the global neoliberal order, Neferti Tadiar (2013 p. 23) cites *Lola* as an aesthetic project that can help us think through "the time of social reproduction that lies beyond contemporary modes of exploitation of life as living labour." Framed as a product of the neoliberal restructuring of human experience embodied in the "disposable" (Tadiar 2013 p. 24) futures of the "urban excess" (Tadiar 2013 p. 24), Tadiar reads the excessive use of real-time in *Lola* as the film's capacity to enjoin its viewers to labour in the act of watching. While Tadiar acknowledges this real-time aesthetic as perhaps aimed at gaining international festival attention, the execution of time in *Lola* can also be usefully viewed as "a form of training that makes us sensorially participant in the practice of producing the very time to be expended" (Tadiar 2013 p. 24). Similarly, Jonathan Beller (2012 p. 15) cites *Lola* as an aesthetic endeavor that deploys what he calls the "aesthetics of survival." In an essay that examines the harnessing of attention as a form of capitalist labour, Beller (2012 p. 23) reads *Lola* as a depiction of subaltern struggles where "one utilises all of one's resources, resources of interpretation and of

action, of decoding and coding, of affect, expressivity, movement and *endurance* in a wager of one's very life-energy and life-time."

My own reading of *Lola* is certainly line with Tadiar and Beller's insights, particularly in realising the film's capacity to offer life-times of persistence in the face of urban poverty. I propose to examine the film further by looking at how the aesthetics of survival rendered through the endurance of time is at the same time concretised in the endurance of space.

More than anything, it is the choice of ageing female bodies as bearers of the burden of justice – which to them means saving their grandchildren — that lends *Lola* to chronotopic affective readings. There is something excessive about the choice to dramatise the frailty of the criminal justice system through frail bodies of ageing women, with the almost invasive facial close-ups that reveal the marks of struggle and pain in the eyes of old women, combined with the overemphasis of their inability to move at a fast pace. The film's melodramatic agenda of moral legibility is written on the faces of the ageing female characters, and tracked with their slow movements that map spaces of in/justice in the urban space. The spatial practice of walking takes on an extremely slow and laboured rhythm in the ageing female bodies of Lola Puring and Lola Sepa in distinct but ultimately similar ways, which I explore more in the next section.

A. Walking in *Lola*

While the rhythm of walking in *Lola* is slow and laborious, it is also very careful and calculated. Most importantly, walking is never without a sense of direction, or a sense of purpose. The frailty of the women's bodies is of equal measure to the strength of their resolve to redeem their grandchildren. The strength of their determination is tested against the containment of the spatial construction of the

urban space, compounded by the force of nature. As they walk, the grandmothers face the overwhelming expanse, noise, density, and chaos of the urban space in the midst of monsoon season, with water serving as a recurring motif throughout the narrative.

Typhoons are a way of life in the Philippines, but it becomes more urgent when it affects the capital. In September 2009, the same year Lola was released, Typhoon Ketsana struck Manila enough to cause national uproar, as even the affluent residents of gated communities were affected by flooding (Tharoor 2009). An all out state of calamity was declared in the whole of Metropolitan Manila and surrounding provinces (Olan 2014). National press were keen to point out how this particular typhoon had an "equalising" effect, highlighting the acts of heroism that were documented during the storm, and even in its aftermath (Boehringer 2009). But despite the heartwarming stories that took place spurred by the shock of Ketsana, compassion for those who were truly affected quickly dissipated, when the national government pointed to slum-dwellers and squatter communities along *esteros* as the source of flood congestion.

Arnisson Andre Ortega (2016b pp. 237-238) points out that: "The knee-jerk public reaction was to blame slum dwellers for the metropolis' environmental issues." Citing subsequent government demolitions of slum communities targeted at those along river banks, Ortega (2016b) notes the elitist discourse that the typhoon prompted, which resulted in the forced eviction of thousands of informal settlers boosted by World Bank support of up to $1.5 million. This bourgeoise discourse has, to my mind, evolved into a narrative of "resilience" that simultaneously praises those most vulnerable to disaster at the same time that it keeps them at bay. Resilience - while a positive value, also serves to justify the lack of inaction by authorities even after the devastating effects of natural calamities. Resilience is a concept that has been used and abused in

recent years to describe how Filipinos survive typhoons, particularly the most recent devastation wrought on the city of Tacloban by Typhoon Haiyan in 2012. One of the most circulated tag lines at that time promotes the notion of resilience in the face of typhoons: "The Filipino spirit is water proof" (Villanueva 2012) — a statement that while well-meaning glosses over the long-lasting effects of disasters epecially to the most vulnerable members of Philippine society.

The spatial practice of walking in *Lola* embodies resilience but not along the lines of banal nationalism. It is clear that water is used in the film as a dual symbol. Mendoza himself said as much in explaining the symbol in his film: "Rain is a metaphor for life and for death. It is the source of life but at the same time it can be the source of destruction and catastrophe" (Phillips 2010). But when juxtaposed with the narrative of "resilience" in the wake of national calamities, the use of water in *Lola's* walking scenes bears more meaning; the surfaces of the city, its gutters and sewerage, are battered by typhoons in the same way that the ageing women brave wind and water for the sake of their grandchildren. The concept of resilience is not at all taken lightly in the film given its patient and careful tracking of the grandmother's movements during the time of a storm. This cautious exploration of resilience takes after Beller's (2012 p. 13) argument that *Lola* should not be taken as simply endorsing "universal expressions:" He notes in a striking passage:

> "…we may learn from Mendoza's extraordinarily caring, patient and exploratory tribute to slum-lives lived beyond the frame, made in and indeed with and of life in the slums of Manila, that one struggles for principles, not because they are universals, but precisely because they are a matter of dignity and of life worth living, which, in a manner of speaking is to say of survival." (Beller 2012 p.13).

Against torrential rain and murky floodwaters, the spatial practice of walking in *Lola* is a means of survival that, because it is embodied in the frail bodies of elderly women, takes a more intense sense of urgency compared to the two other films in this chapter. These *lolas* are women who are running out of time. Lola Sepa, in appealing for her grandson, does not justify the crime, but wagers her limited time as appeal for her grandson's future: "*I'm already old. I would like to see my grandson set his life straight before I die.*" The poignance of an early sequence, where Lola Puring is presented with a choice of caskets for her grandson resounds all throughout the film — that the grandson ran out of time earlier than the grandmother, a reversal of fates that is cruel in its randomness. It is this tension between running out of time and the glacial rhythm of the act of walking across the urban space that gives this film its affective potentials. And like Amy in *Kubrador* and Thelma in *Foster Child*, Puring and Sepa's spatial practice of walking serves as means of production and affective labour. They walk to collect money, no matter how small, in order to give their grandsons a shot at dignity: a burial for one, and another shot at a future for another.

B. Affective chronotopes and spatial in/justice in Lola

If in *Kubrador* and *Foster Child*, affective chronotopes serve to gradually surface repressed emotions, the key moments I locate in *Lola* serve to harness the mixed affects of grief, rage, regret, and love embodied by the parallel movements of the grandmothers. The melodramatic moments in *Lola* quiet down as the narrative unravels, but not because affect dissipates; rather, they are tactically managed to meet the ends of survival.

While the film initially privileges Lola Puring in her pursuit of justice for her grandson who is murdered, it unravels to provide almost equal screen times and spaces for Lola Sepa's struggles to earn money for her grandson's release. Their aims, while indeed opposed, are both subject to the demands of monetary

capital, which is their shared struggle that ultimately compels the kind of justice offered in the narrative's resolution. In what follows, I locate the film's affective chronotopes in the scenes where the grandmothers' struggles are rendered through space, leading up to the film's concluding scenes where justice is served through the containment of affect.

The film opens by tracking Lola Puring's movements, devoting almost twenty minutes to her quiet grief at the death of her grandson. The opening scene shows Puring's struggle against strong winds and rain just to be able to light a candle at the random street corner where the murder took place. In these establishing sequences, I locate two staircase scenes that function as affective chronotopes, which warrant ascending movement through a flight of stairs to highlight Puring's struggles to contain her grief.

The first scene takes place after she places a candle at a street corner. Accompanied by her young grandson, she motions upwards and articulates her choice to take the concrete stairs leading up to a bridge. The view is menacing, with the camera capturing a wide shot of the height that Puring has to scale. But with the aid of her grandson, she persists and makes her way up, struggling to hold open a flimsy umbrella against wind and rain. They make their way to the funeral parlor where the second affective chronotope is materialised in a staircase leading up to the cheaper set of caskets. On the ground floor, the funeral director leads Puring, her daughter and two kids to a room where expensive caskets line the walls. The director rattles off the cost of caskets in a business-like tone, the camera framed to offer glimpses of Puring's anxious expression at being unable to afford them. The funeral director, without pausing to consult the group, then proceeds to lead them upstairs where the cheaper caskets are located. As they carefully make their way upstairs, it is Puring's daughter who articulates her anxiety at how expensive everything is.

The stairs in both scenes are symbolic of the struggles that Puring sets out to overcome in order to come to terms with her grandson's untimely death. Her movement in the act of climbing, although slow, is resolute as she voices no complaints. The staircase scenes are characteristic of the overall restraint of affect that Puring manages through movement. Shortly after Puring gives a meager downpayment for the funeral, the narrative provides space for her grief to emerge in a walking scene towards the back of the funeral parlor where she catches a glimpse of a cadaver. The scene is briefly accompanied by haunting music that punctures her sense of control over her emotions. She backs away from the view of the corpse, and steadies herself on a concrete wall as she tries not to weep. Her daughter comes to her aid and leads her back through the same dark passage, until they emerge into the brightness of the streets. The camera, all the while following Puring from behind through the dark passageway, turns to close in on Puring's face that by now reveals a more controlled and resolute expression following the brief traumatic encounter inside the funeral home. This is the only scene in which Puring overtly expresses grief and sorrow, but even here she demonstrates restraint.

Like Puring, Lola Sepa only overtly demonstrates excessive sorrow when she is first introduced by the film in the space of the police station. She urgently asks the policeman at the desk about her grandson, and when she is taken to see him behind bars, Lola Sepa's voice cracks as she speaks. This scene is brief and cuts abruptly to a wide shot outside the police station, with Lola Sepa's small figure making her way through torrential rain. It is as if the sorrow she expressed at the police station for her grandson is displaced and expressed through the downpour.

The staircase also functions as affective chronotope for Lola Sepa, with a recurring scene of her climb to her second-level run-down home. As the staircase that leads her home, it is an affective chronotope that serves to

temper her grief at the plight of her grandson, because she has to be level-headed in order to care for her disabled husband. On her return from the police station and after a failed attempt to get help from a local official, she proceeds to prepare vegetables for selling the next day.

The narrative proceeds to emphasise how the grandmothers show control over their respective spaces, which is also how they manage the affects of grief and mourning. The film unravels slowly to track the grandmothers' resolute spatial movements aimed at their mission to save their grandsons. Lola Puring is shown to supervise the setting up of the wake on the second level of her home, the ground floor submerged in water. Later, she climbs another flight of stairs on the way to an office where she sells her pension for credit. Similarly, in a demonstration of strength, Lola Sepa determinedly carries an old television set through the neighbourhood streets for pawning, as part of her efforts to raise money towards a settlement with Lola Puring.

The grandmothers' struggle over space, moreover, parallels their struggle over their ageing bodies. Their bodies falter in two instances that symbolically take place in the vicinity of the courthouse. Lola Puring embarrassingly soils herself when she could not find a working toilet; in another scene, Lola Sepa massages her foot in a bout of rheumatism. These scenes suggest that the court cannot accommodate their quest for justice, as it is a space that is not equipped to welcome the demands of these poor, elderly women.

And so, these women find respite elsewhere, in spaces of poverty that are rich in communitarian spirit. This is captured by the picturesque funeral procession of small wooden boats floating on murky floodwaters, foregrounded by the one occupied by Lola Puring, the matriarch at the head of it all. The members of the community of ageing shanties submerged in water contribute whatever they could when Lola Puring went house to house, asking for *abuloy* (donations) — a

scene that is devoid of shame. Similarly, when Lola Sepa visits distant relatives in a rural town in the outskirts of the city for help, her relatives welcome her kindly and give her food and poultry to take home with her as a gesture of support.

After the funeral procession scene, the film cuts to Lola Sepa visiting her grandson in jail. Here I locate a final staircase scene that functions as affective chronotope, which I read as the direct inverse of Lola Puring's affective chronotope in the film's opening sequence. In a brief visit, Sepa assures her grandson that she is doing everything she can to get him out. The film then tracks Sepa's departure from the visit in a locked frame shot of the staircase, depicting her laborious descent in the shadows of the prison staircase. Lola Sepa's descent through this particular staircase towards the end of the film dialogues with Lola Puring's ascent in earlier scenes, suggesting an intersection of struggles. This staircase scene that channels Sepa's descending movement signifies her encounter with Puring's ascending movements in the concrete staircase near the scene of the murder, the event that prompted the unfortunate meeting of the grandmothers. It is this scene that signals that whatever justice the narrative offers will be something arrived at by the grandmothers themselves, not by the state's figures of justice. Sepa's descent is followed by her decisive move to put up the land her derelict house stands on for credit – her land in exchange for her grandson's life.

The closing sequences of *Lola* show a compassionate, yet unromanticised, final encounter between the grandmothers that are almost completely stripped off of melodramatic affect. After much contemplation, Lola Puring decides to drop the case against Lola Sepa's grandson, not so much out of a whimsical notion of forgiveness, but because it is the only option left in a country where justice is rarely granted to the poor. In their final encounter, the grandmothers calmly talk about the physical pains of ageing, and after Lola Sepa casually hands over the

small sum of money she struggled to collect as a gesture of contrition, there is nothing left to be said. This scene calls to mind Georg Simmel's (2014) classic characterisation of indifference, or blasé mentality, as the way urban inhabitants protect themselves from the chaos of metropolitan life. The exchange of money depicted in *Lola*, however, demontrates a kind of indifference infused with class consciousness—the knowledge that the grandmothers and their grandchildren come from the same class of the "living dead" (Zizek 2011 p. 456), and the only way to survive the city is to try to keep on living. The film ends with the grandmothers parting ways as though they had never met.

VIII. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the dialogue between the slum chronotope and the melodramatic mode prompts the location of affective chronotopes, as configured through the spatial practice of walking. The films offer explorations of spatial justice through its careful and laborious tracking of how the female protagonists move within, through, away, and back to the slum spaces they produce and inhabit.

Like the films in the previous chapters, these melodramatic films are able to the move beyond the fictional worlds configured by the slum chronotope. The chapter contextualised the slum chronotope in socio-spatial conditions particular to Manila slums, allowing a more critical understanding of the spatial meanings that can be derived from these films. In *Kubrador,* the politics of *jueteng* configures Amy's daily movements; in *Foster Child*, the ethical dilemma that underpins the affective labour of care drives Thelma's movements in the city's spaces of poverty and spaces of affluence; and in *Lola*, the grandmothers' laboured movements parallel the resilience of slum communities struggling to stay above water.

Read as contemporary expressions of Philippine melodrama that exercise restraint in depicting excessive emotions, I have argued that these films enact the tactical distribution and displacement of the affect of suffering through the spatial practice of walking that configures distinctive affective chronotopes. Walking in these films becomes a means of producing space, justice, and survival, no matter how limited. In *Kubrador*, the affective power of grief, manifested in spectral encounters, compel Amy to continue living. In *Foster Child*, the affect of shame is countered by the subjective power that Thelma derives from her affective labour of care. And in *Lola*, the mixed affects of grief, suffering, mourning, and love are tempered by the grandmothers' persistence towards a semblance of dignity for themselves, and for their family. Ultimately, in this chapter, I have argued that these contemporary examples of Philippine urban melodrama are valuable in their rendering of women who wield subjective power through affective labour in the abject spaces of Manila slums.

CHAPTER 3

MEN ON THE MOVE:

Chronotopes of mobility in the noir imaginaries of *Kinatay, Metro Manila,*
and *On the Job*

*'Manila is where I was born, a city of heat and shadow and secrets,
perfect for this genre we call noir." – Jessica Hagedorn (2013 p. 9).*

*"But isn't every square inch of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a
culprit?" – Walter Benjamin (2005 p. 527).*

I.   Introduction

In contrast to the female-focussed narratives in the previous chapter, this
chapter examines male-driven narratives that I propose to frame along the vein
of noir. This chapter explores the movements of male characters and their
struggle for spatial justice in three films: Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay
(Butchered)* (2009), British filmmaker Sean Ellis' *Metro Manila* (2013), and Erik
Matti's *On the Job* (Matti 2013a). Unlike the films in the previous chapters,
these noir films can be said to cover more ground as the characters move into,
away from, and around the slum chronotope, mapping other "dark" spaces in
the urban space through what I designate as "chronotopes of mobility." As in the
previous chapters, my aims here are threefold: 1) to examine how the slum
chronotope dialogues with the genre of film noir; 2) to locate and examine
"chronotopes of mobility" that can be said to configure the masculine
subjectivities in these films; and 3) to examine how these chronotopic
configurations of male subjectivities reveal imaginaries of spatial in/justice in the
Philippine urban context.

I propose to frame these films along the lines of noir to surface the films' parallel configurations of the "darkness" of urban spaces and the anxieties of its male leads. *Kinatay*'s literal and figurative darkness is a visual rendering of the protagonist's descent into criminality; *Metro Manila* shows how the city tests a man's virtues in desperate times; *On the Job* attempts to map the spaces of power and corruption in the capital through the intersections of prison inmates and law authorities. In these examples of Manila noir, the slum chronotope dialogues with other "dark" spaces of the city through chronotopes of mobility that facilitate narrative unfolding. These chronotopes of mobility materialise in vehicles that function as significant kernels of action in each film: In *Kinatay,* the van that takes the protagonist to the scene of murder; In *Metro Manila,* the armoured truck that is used for the heist-gone-wrong; In *On the Job*, the chase scenes that lead to collisions among the narrative's male noir figures. These chronotopes of mobility become the means of producing instances that threaten the configurations of masculinity embodied in the movements of the films' anti-heroes through urban space. The instances where masculinities are threatened are instances in which the sense of law and order of the urban space are challenged, revealing negotiations of spatial in/justice in the struggle over spatial occupation and appropriation.

Like the women in the previous chapter, the male characters in these noir narratives function as moral social agents through their movements in urban space. What I seek to uncover here, however, is not so much the redemptive potentials of the narrative resolutions in these films, even though a semblance of hope might be gleaned in some of the narratives. Given the films' noir dispositions, they offer almost no redemption for their noir heroes especially in contrast to the resilience offered by the female characters in the previous chapter. Rather, the value of these films lie in the narrative unravelling — chronotopes of mobility become the means through which characters struggle

for a sense of justice in spaces of injustice, even as they ultimately fail in this quest.

I will develop this chapter by first discussing the relations between the slum chronotope and film noir, before locating film noir in the context of Philippine cinema. I proceed with a discussion of chronotopes of mobility and their masculine permutations. I then discuss each film, locating the chronotopes of mobility and the imaginaries of spatial in/justice that the narratives offer.

II.   Film noir's "darkness" and the slum chronotope

To rehearse the familiar trajectory: the beginnings of what we regard as film noir can be traced to post World War II American films said to be indebted to German expressionism, later on dubbed "film noir" by French critics (Silver and Ursini 2006; Luhr 2012; Spicer and Hanson 2013). There is a wealth of literature on the seemingly endless debate as to whether film noir is a genre, style, or cycle, which will not be rehearsed extensively here. For this chapter's overall aim of locating spatial justice mapped by the male characters of Manila noir, it is useful to cite some of the seminal works that pay attention to elements of noir that enable a reconfiguration of noir's theme of "darkness" in narratives organised by the slum chronotope.

James Naremore's (2008) relatively recent arguments remain the most productive starting point for approaching film noir as it manages to think through the definition dilemma that noir has been subjected to. He states that the category "has no essential characteristics" and "it is not a specifically American form" (Naremore 2008 p. 5). Rather than chasing an elusive definition, Naremore examines the genre's very historical development and all the haziness surrounding it.

For Naremore (2008), film noir is:

> "An ideological concept with a history all its own, it can be used to describe a period, a movement, and a recurrent style. Like all critical terminology, it tends to be reductive, and it sometimes works on behalf of unstated agendas. For these reasons, and because its meaning changes over time, it ought to be examined as a discursive construct. It nevertheless has heuristic value, mobilizing specific themes that are worth further consideration." (Naremore 2008 p. 6).

What initially prompts my noir framing of the films in this chapter is the idea of the city as crime scene that runs heavily in *Kinatay, Metro Manila,* and *On the Job*. Indeed, the criminal underpinning of film noir is an oft-repeated thematic preoccupation of the genre, if we look back at the foundational essays from the noir French critics. Nino Frank (1946 p. 15), who coined the term itself, underlines the subjective nature of crime in film noir compared to traditional crime narratives: "They belong to a class that we used to call the crime film, but that would best be described from this point on by a term such as criminal adventures or, better yet, as criminal psychology." Taking after Frank, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton (2012 p. 19) argue in their foundational work on film noir that: "It is the presence of crime which give *film noir* its most constant characteristic." They proceed to distinguish film noir from the "crime-documentary," saying that the former privileges the point-of-view of the criminal rather than the police. Undoubtedly, however, the theme of crime in film noir is wide-ranging. Willam Lhur's (2012 p. 6) description provides a concise generalisation, which raises the related notion of crime and injustice: "Film noir invoked dark forces, from within individuals or from criminal conspiracies or social injustices, but rooted those forces in the everyday contemporary world of domestic or business antagonisms, psychic disturbances, criminal schemes, and political machinations."

Noir's wide-ranging crimes generally take place in urban spaces. Most studies agree that the city is film noir's setting of choice (although recent scholarship has also pointed out that noir narratives are not at all limited to urban space). The city in film noir is often characterized as a "vortex of corruption" (Naremore 2005 p. 87), its mean streets and alleys filled with smoke and shadows. In noir, the city is a space of darkness, which can mean "alienation, isolation, danger, moral decay, and a suppressed but very present sexuality" (Mennel 2008 p. 49). I defer my thoughts on the notion of suppressed sexuality in the next section on chronotopes of mobility; for now I want to examine how the darkness ascribed to the urban space can be extended to include the darkness of slum spaces, no longer limited to the mean streets of American cities.

As noir's origins are consistently interrogated, critics have expanded the term to register noir as a global concept (Fay and Nieland 2009; Broe 2014; Pettey and Palmer 2016). Whether it is considered a genre, style, or movement remains unsettled, but recent scholarship has fortunately opened up new paths of approaching film noir that moves beyond its restrictive American mythology. David Desser (2003 p. 531) is frequently cited for making a case for "global noir" as he argues that '…we need not debate the existence of film noir, its purity, or its hybridity, but rather admit that both filmmakers and film consumers have acknowledged a kind of "noir" and that this noir has a global dimension and impact.' Similarly, in a recent anthology titled *East Asian Film Noir*, it is argued that an expanded view of noir can lead to more productive lines of inquiry:

> "Approaching noir as including only films about private eyes in fedoras and trench coats bedeviled by amoral femme fatales, then, results in a quite limited global definition, based chiefly on homologies and transnational borrowings. On the other hand, figuring noir as comprising a downbeat sensibility and tonality suggests many different pathways that a noir cinema may follow, not restricted to contemporary urban crime stories but open to many

local narrative types, thematic preoccupations, settings, and iconographies." (Shin and Gallagher 2015 p. 6).

This global framing of noir enables my turn to Manila noir, which unlike canonical American film noir, is arguably grounded on the slum chronotope. If American noir is invested in returns to the past, Manila noir's darkness can be derived from the fear underlying representations of slum cities as cities of the future. I take my cue from Gyan Prakash (2010) who suggests in *Noir Urbanisms* that the phenomenon of slumification across the globe has added a dystopic dimension to the imaginaries of urbanisation in the Third World. Prakash (2010 p. 2) borrows the cinematic concept of noir, recognising how "the practitioners in other disciplines deploy it metaphorically to refer to a grim, dystopic reality." In an essay included in the same collection, Jennifer Robinson (2010) criticises the way thinkers in urban studies, particularly Mike Davis and architect Rem Koolhaas, have framed the process of slumification as narratives of urban dystopia, arguing that: 'The urban dystopia genre depends on recounting the characteristic (stereotypical) features of "Third World cities" as indicators of this futuristic present—features such as extensive poverty, informality, economic decline, infrastructural decay, and failures of collective provisioning.'

The slumification of the urban space expands the notion of "darkness" previously limited to the mean streets of American cities to include the dystopic narratives set in Third World cities. The "noir-ness" of the urban space in slum cities like Manila can be configured along the lines of urban dystopia, which puts emphasis on the future rather than the past. I posit that slum noirs are the flipside of industrial urban dystopias; they are like *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) in reverse. In slum noirs, the darkness of the future is not cast by imposing skyscrapers or flying cars as signs of extreme urban modernity; instead, the darkness of slum noirs derive from the overwhelming presence of slums. As writer Rana Dasgupta (2006) has exclaimed following the success of *Slumdog*

Millionaire: "Perhaps the Third-World city is more than simply the *source* of the things that will define the future, but actually *is* the future of the western city." This poignant description relates to the temporal configuration of slum noir narratives as trapped in the what Robinson has called a "futuristic present."

The characterisation of slum cities as urban dystopia is supported by an understanding of dystopia as "a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society" (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash 2010 p. 1). A similar notion of "dystopic modernism" also runs through American noir and neo-noir, which Lhur (2012 p. 15), citing Raymond Chandler, relates to "a world gone wrong." In elaborating the relationship between the ideas of utopia and dystopia, Gordin et al (2010 p. 2) argue that dystopia "bears the aspect of lived experience" because it is much more frequently imagined:

> "Whereas utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now. Thus the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare, also beg for inclusion together…The chief way to differentiate the two phenomena is with an eye to results, since the impulse or desire for a better future is usually present in each." (Gordin et al 2010 p. 2).

How can we understand this notion of the "futuristic present" in urban noir narratives organised by the slum chronotope? If in American noir, the narrative is disrupted by returns to the past in order to resolve narrative crisis, in Manila noir, the slum chronotope enables narratives, and protagonists, that are heavily invested in changing their conditions *in the present* as they strive towards a better future. Let me explain this further by returning to classical film noir's spatio-temporal configurations and its re-workings in Manila noir.

As discussed in the study's introduction, Vivian Sobchack (1998) argues that film noir is constituted and circumscribed by what she calls the chronotope of

"lounge time" — the impersonal and transient spaces that recur significantly in noir narratives. Lounge time can be located in "…the cocktail lounge, the nightclub, the bar, the hotel room, the boarding house, the diner, the dance hall, the roadside cafe, the bus and the train station, the wayside motel" (Sobchack 1998 p. 130). Sobchack convincingly argues that these actually existing spaces in post-war America were transposed and hyperbolized onto screen in film noirs, revealing the "structuring absence" (Sobchack 1998 p. 144) of home or domestic spaces that suggest dwelling in their narratives.

While lounge time makes sense of the absence of spaces of dwelling within and beyond the world of films in the American context post World War II, R. Barton Palmer (2004 p. 58) has pointed out that Sobchack 'never comments on how time is structured in film noir. We gain no sense therefore of how the represented world she describes takes shape, how time becomes "palpable and visible."' In response, Palmer (2004) offers a useful sketch of noir's temporal configurations in his reconsideration of Sobchack's lounge time. This proves useful to this study's purposes, especially as his formulation relates to both narrative and character configuration.

Palmer (2004 p. 58), through his analysis of *Out of the Past* (Tourneur 1947), argues that noir's heroes are often characterised as having dark pasts "which are frequently explored in some form of backward turning that is motivated by a present crisis." This crisis in noir, which is what drives the narrative, is disrupted and resolved by frequent returns to the past. Palmer thus argues that the noir narrative is temporally configured by contingencies. Palmer's idea is not far from Paul Schrader's (1972 p. 58) thoughts in "Notes on Film Noir," where he argues that film noir's general theme denotes "a passion for the past and present, but also a fear of the future. The noir hero dreads to look ahead, but instead tries to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, he retreats to the past." The quote below provides an interesting summary of how time slides from

the present to the past (based on an imaginary future) in the noir protagonist's narrative development, according to Palmer:

> 'Lacing a moment of reformative turning, the film noir juxtaposes the false promise of a future with the reality of a present that, instead, turns back to the past, trapping the protagonist "between times" and in a multiplicity of irreconcilable spaces….such protagonists ordinarily come to their end "in transit," attempting to save what they never can, which is themselves.' (Palmer 2004 p. 63).

Following Sobchack and Palmer's arguments, it can be said that American film noir's chronotopic configurations lies in its "dark" urban spatiality laced with contingencies, rendered in its constant "backward turning." It can be argued, then, that American film noir is a genre that almost always disavows the future as it looks back to the past for resolution. More importantly, Palmer's description of temporality can be read as chronotopic when he raised the notion of transit, although this motif of what can be considered "death in transit" is not developed further in the essay.

One final note on the classic film noir hero's subjective formation: Winfried Fluck (2001) argues that the determination of the noir hero's guilt in the enactment of crime is crucial to understanding film noir, especially as it relates to justice. Fluck (2001 p. 383) argues that what differentiates film noir from the crime film, specifically the gangster film, is that the "ordinary citizen" as opposed to the "professional criminal" is the one embroiled in crime. For Fluck, this notion of the ordinary citizen's guilt is what makes film noir ripe for reading. He argues:

> 'Seen "objectively," from the point of view of the law, his or her crime seems inexcusable; seen subjectively, we begin to understand the unfortunate events that have led to the violation of the law (or the— false — accusation of having violated it) and feel inclined to acknowledge that the question of guilt is a much more complicated one than the legal system allows. In this sense, the question of justice is an important issue of film noir. Film noir can

be seen as a genre that attempts to do justice to individuals who have become guilty.' (Fluck 2001 p. 390).

This shift from the professional to the guilty ordinary citizen is apparent in all three films in this chapter, which yields different readings of culpability in the enactment of crime. A chronotopic reading of the films reveal the complications of guilt and the spatio-temporal means that facilitate the enactment of crimes. To investigate, I turn to the films' chronotopes of mobility in Manila noir, the means through which the narratives move towards what I consider "returns to the present" instead of returns to the past that probe instances of spatial justice.

But before moving to the section where I discuss what I mean by chronotopes of mobility, it would be useful to sketch how noir has figured into Philippine cinema, and how this might be linked to the slumification of Manila.

III.   A case for Manila Noir

While there is no existing literature that focuses specifically on the concept of noir in Philippine cinema, some elements of film noir fall under the genre of Philippine action films, also called *bakbakan* (fighting) films. According to film historian Nick Deocampo (2011) "Almost any film that depicted strong male characters and a lot of action (such as warring tribes, war scenes, high-speed chase, bloody murders and sinister plots) were lumped together as action films."[17]   Film historian Agustin Sotto (1987 p. 2) contrasts American film noir with the emergence of the Tagalog action film, listing "the strict form of morality, the idealism of the honor code, the set attitudes, the traditional values and the folk thinking" as what makes action films "very Filipino in character" (Sotto 1987 p.2). In his informative survey, Sotto (1987) suggests that Filipino action films might be traced to the themes of the *moro-moro* play during the Spanish period,

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[17] There are no page markers in the book's official Kindle version.

a "morality play" that pitted Christians against Muslims that featured battle scenes where the Christian characters emerged victorious. Sotto (1987) goes on to trace the formulaic elements of the action film in the emergence of the male "action stars" in the late 50s: from the gun-slinging local version of the Western hero (Fernando Poe Jr.), the working class hero who hails from the slums (Jose "Erap" Estrada), and the criminal-hero (Ramon Revilla).[18]

Not unlike melodramatic films that are marked with excess, the typical Philippine action film is known for hyperbolic displays of masculinity through violence. Critic Emmanuel Reyes (1989 p. 52) echoes Sotto, describing the typical action film as "an ultraviolent genre that dwells on stories of revenge, insurgency, gangland mayhem and police operations." He underlines that a common theme in action films is distrust against figures of law and authority. Reyes (1989 p. 52) suggests that the male protagonist in Tagalog action films is a common citizen reacting to societal woes: "Usually operating outside of the law, the hero of the action genre believes in dispensing his own brand of justice in the bloodiest manner imaginable." Rafael Guerrero (1983a) similarly identifies the action film as a genre centred on the theme of vengeance that serves to project the Filipino myth of "machismo" in response to the emasculation of Filipino men during the Spanish colonial period.

Although there are similarities in subject matter between American film noir and the Philippine action film, the aesthetics of darkness is rendered in a different manner in the latter. In a brief description of the action film, Joel David (1995) comments on the absence of the typical (American) noir look in Philippine cinema. Referring to Schrader's noir aesthetics of darkness and shadows, David (1995 p. 13) explains that: "Essential to this definition is the climatic properties of the temperate countries where film noir flourished – the misty

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[18] All three of these action film heroes became politicians. Revilla served in the senate, Estrada became President (and was later on ousted), while Poe Jr. ran for the presidency.

atmosphere and grimy surfaces caused by fog and pollution that tended to acquire brightness and sharper detail in tropical settings." David (1995 p. 13) credits late Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka for bringing film noir to Philippine cinema, saying that the filmmaker "settled for a less authentic (relative to the foreign example) version, retaining the shadows but dispensing with the haze, in what has now become the industry norm for gangster films." This fog and pollution is of course something to be expected from the dense and labyrinthian streets of the urban sprawl of Manila.

From the above description of Philippine action films I derive a strand that might be called Manila noir: male-centred crime films set in the urban space, which are configured by the slum chronotope. If American film noir sensibilities emerged post World War II, it is possible to argue as well that the post-war period in the Philippines saw the emergence of Manila noir, given the heightened visibility of slums in the ruins of the capital. Although the emergence of slums can be traced back to the colonial occupation of Spain and the United States, the post-war destruction of the capital of the Philippines ushered in a wave of rural migrants to the ruins of the capital of Intramuros, turned to rubble in the aftermath of American bombings. A prime example might be *Anak Dalita (Child of Sorrow)* (Avellana 1956) one of the most lauded films of the 1950s directed by Lamberto Avellana, set in the ruins of Intramuros. As mentioned in the study's introduction, the film might be considered an early example of Philippine urban cinema. *Anak Dalita* might also be an early example of Manila noir given the theme of crime that also runs through the film.

In the films I approach as examples of Manila film noir, the city in the shadow of the slum chronotope is configured as a space where crime lurks at every corner, and is an experience that is part of the everyday. While it might have been possible to group these films according to the genre of crime films, to approach them as noir highlights the dystopic "darkness" offered by the use of

the slum chronotope, at the same time that noir puts emphasis on the urban context. Moreover, it is useful to recall that in the Philippines, the term *ikswater* is widely used to refer to slum inhabitats regardless of technical differences between squatters and slums, emphasising the discourse of criminality that is associated with slum dwelling. Recalling the contextual notes in the study's introduction, the criminal discourse of squatting in the Philippines provides the state with the legal and moral justification to enact squatter demolitions, which became a frequent occurrence when the Marcos administration criminalised squatting in 1975. Although this Presidential Decree was repealed after two years because of clamor from civil society, the repeal did not actually mean the complete nullification of the imposition of sanctions against squatters.

The precarious practice and experience of squatting lies not just in the location and dangerous conditions of the spaces they occupy — it is also because as illegal occupants of urban space, squatters are always in danger of eviction. According to geographer Erhard Berner (1997 p. 171): "For the squatters, renters and sidewalk dwellers who are the majority of Manila's population, eviction is a permanent threat and insecurity of tenure the most severe problem." This "permanent threat and insecurity of tenure" that underpins the criminal discourse of slum dwelling relates directly to the slum chronotope's configuration of Manila noir narratives with an overall sense of impermanence and insecurity.

While there are similarities to classic noir's configuration of its male characters as always looking to the past, slum noir's anti-heroes are heavily invested in the futuristic present. What I mean is that the narratives in Manila noir do not return obsessively to the past; what matters is the present moment that looks to the future. Instead of a return to the past, Manila noir's characters labour in the present, with a view to the future. Recalling urban dystopia's taking place in the "futuristic present" it might be argued that in Manila noir, what frequently occurs

are "returns to the present" rather than returns the past. This is different from the configuration of what we might refer to as a "vicious cycle" because, as I will discuss in my textual analysis, these representative film narratives do not simply go full circle but actually suggest a degree of striving towards the future, usually motivated by the family or the will to survive.

To read noir figures as constantly returning to the present with a view of a better future is a more productive way of interpreting Manila noir narratives as embroiled in the day-to-day, even minute-to-minute politics of survival, despite its oftentimes-fatalistic projection of the future. Manila noir's returns to the present might actually be related to Richard Dyer's (1993 p. 53) suggestion that "The basic structure of film noir is like a labyrinth with the hero as the thread running through it. He starts out on a quest…Yet the road that he chooses, or is chosen for him, does not lead directly [to that quest]." There is constant movement in these Manila noir narratives that strive towards locating exits from the labyrinth, even though these movements often prove futile.

It is the male characters' relatively increased mobility that differentiates Manila noir narratives from the subjects of the previous chapters. If chronotopes of passage are located in key moments that compel transitions into adulthood, while affective chronotopes are located in moments of excessive emotions, chronotopes of mobility can be located in the moments of transit that engage the myths of masculinity, which in turn reveal imaginaries of spatial in/justice. I discuss this assertion further in the next section.

IV.   Chronotopes of mobility and noir's masculine subjectivities

Film noir has been immensely useful to gender studies, with its complex representations of tough guys and femme fatales. E. Ann Kaplan's (1996) anthology, *Women in Film Noir,* and Mary Ann Doanne's (1991) *Femme Fatales*

are just two prime examples from the long literature on female representation in film noir. Homosexuality in noir is another dimension that has been explored by queer scholars, prompted by Dyer's frequently cited essay on the subject. As for masculinity, foremost among noir's seminal literature on the subject is undoubtedly Frank Krutnik's (1991) psychoanalytic approach in *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity.*

Krutnik (1991) frames his analysis of the noir hero in the context of the Oedipal myth of the Law of the Father being inherited by the son. There is no need to belabour Freudian theory here; suffice it to say that Krutnik (1991) argues that film noir effectively represents the myth of masculine superiority. Krutnik (1991) describes the variations of the "masculine hero" from the 1940s as someone whose masculinity is put to the test throughout the noir narrative. He argues: "…it is through his accomplishment of a crime-related quest that the hero consolidates his masculine identity. Through his mission, the hero is defined in relation both to the legally defined framework of law and to the law of patriarchy which specifies the culturally acceptable positions (and the delimitation of) masculine identity and desire" (Krutnik 1991 p. 86).

The literal embodiment of masculine anxiety in classic film noir is the character of the femme fatale, a figure generally considered a response to shifting gender roles during and after the second world war as women actively entered the work force (Krutnik 1991). According to this socio-economic reading of the femme fatale, "real women's newly acquired social and economic independence was transmuted into a fantasy of their fatal sexual power. Because she is both desired and feared, the femme fatale is the cynosure of imperiled masculinity" (Fay and Nieland 2009 p. 148). The presence of the femme fatale is marked by the absence of traditional female archetypes like the figure of the mother and wife, which is related to Sobchack's (1998 p. 144) point raised earlier about the

"structuring absence" of the space of home or domestic spaces in noir narratives.

Film noir's representation of masculine anxieties is useful in my analysis of Manila noir, in which similar dynamics of "testing" are undergone by the male lead characters as they are thrust into the urban space of crime and violence. However, it is clear that the femme fatale is not the primary female figure in Manila noir, and that the structuring absence of home is configured differently. In fact, it might be argued that home is a "structuring presence" in Manila noir given that family and its related concept of dwelling hovers significantly throughout the narratives of Manila noir. The primacy of the family and the figure of the mother can actually be seen in traditional Philippine action films, despite the hypermasculine representations of the male heroes (Sotto 1987).

While I focus on masculine subjectivities in Manila noir, this is not because I consider these films essentially masculine in orientation. I am careful not to make the false assumption that film noir is the 'antithesis of the "woman's film"' as Elizabeth Cowie (1993 p. 126) has warned against. My framing of Manila noir as focused on male masculinities does not seek to endorse the myth of masculinity, but to uncover the gendered dimension of the production of urban space that these male-centred films are able to map. In contrast to the children-focused and women-focused narratives in the previous chapters, it is obvious that the films in Philippine urban cinema that focus on male protagonists are granted different means of spatial practice that enable them to map a larger expanse of the urban space. It is from this premise that I propose to locate instances of spatial in/justice through "chronotopes of mobility" that drive narrative development and character configuration in significant examples of Manila noir.

By mobility, I refer to geographer Tim Creswell's (2012) argument that movement is part of the social production of space. If movement refers to the abstract notion of getting from point A to B, mobility refers to the representational potentials of movement. Creswell (2012 p. 3) understands mobility in three interrelated ways: as "brute force" or as something that can be "measured and analyzed"; second, as an act that can be represented through various cultural forms, such as film; and third, as an "embodied experience and practice." Creswell's (2012 p. 4) description of "movement" is certainly chronotopic, when he defines it as "the spatialization of time and the temporalization of space."

Creswell (2012 p. 165) points out that mobility, or the lack of it, might be studied to reveal issues of social justice, as "uneven geographies of oppression are also evident in people's differential abilities to move." He directly relates his discussion of mobility to spatial justice as achieved through an understanding of the "politics of mobility" (Creswell 2012 p. 168) citing the remarkable example of the successful case of the Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles (also referenced by Edward Soja in *Seeking Spatial Justice*). The union filed a class suit on behalf of minority groups against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, which successfully halted a planned fare hike (Creswell 2012). The union successfuly argued that the proposed fare hike was an assault to civil rights given that a large majority of the commuters who will be affected are people of colour from impoverished sectors of the city (Creswell 2012).

It is useful to combine Creswell's politics of mobility with the insights of foremost feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) who has argued that:

> "…Space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through. Moreover they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this

gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live." (Massey 1994 p. 186).

Massey's arguments on the gendered constitution of spaces play out in classic examples of Americal film noir. In classic film noir, the act of driving is considered a masculine act and experience, while its associated spaces are masculine sites. For instance, Mark Osteen (2008 p. 184) explores how the vehicle in classic film noir functions as "alternative homes" and "amoral spaces where laws and social arrangements —marriage, class hierarchies—are suspended." In some cases, the car is where the "crisis of masculinity" (Osteen 2008 p. 189) occurs when someone else (like the hitchhiker) other than the male lead takes over the wheel. Similarly, Erik Dussere (2013 p. 66) argues that symbolic mobility is offered by the space of the American gas station where noir allows "male bonding" to take place.

In Manila noir, the politics of mobility play out in similar but culturally specific ways when contextualised in the urban spaces of Metropolitan Manila, where the everyday experience of traveling is a test of patience and where modes of transit reveal stark socio-economic and gendered distinctions among inhabitants. The capital is infamous for heavy traffic with commuters taking hours to travel relatively short distances, such as through the 23-kilometer main thoroughfare called EDSA (Epifanio De los Santos Avenue). In a recent opinion piece called "Metro Manila is Dying" published in the national broadsheet, what the writer bemoans is no exagerration: "When it takes three hours after just a one-hour rain to drive, or ride, in Metro Manila, then the hard question about the quality of life has to be asked. Traffic is not mere traffic, traffic is not about vehicular movement—traffic is about people living in dangerous density" (Montelibano 2014).

Public transportation in Metrolopolitan Manila is inefficient even as there are different modes of transportation available, from tricycles, jeepneys, and coaches. The two overground train lines only have a number of stops and can get absolutely crowded during rush hour. In recent years, the Metropolitan Rail Transit has been the subject of much public outrage, with upgrading plans constantly being derailed by issues of corruption and government bureaucracy (Docena 2014). Among all of these modes of transportation, the private car is arguably the king of the road, its occupants setting themselves apart in terms of monetary capital from those who can only afford the dismal services of public transportation. A 2016 report suggests that the worsening traffic in the last few years can be blamed on the increase of car ownership, interpreted as middle-class aspiration:

> "…the biggest reason Manila's roads move so slowly is that so many people now drive. The economy of the Philippines grew by 5.8% last year, and a swelling middle class is buying lots more cars… Driving, nicer and often quicker than public transport, is encouraged by minimum-parking rules, imported from America, which oblige developers to provide lots of parking spaces. Cars are thought to carry about 30% of people in the metropolis but account for 72% of traffic." (The Economist 2016).

That the vehicle and the act of driving is not a value-free spatial form and spatial practice can be traced as far back as the history of colonial occupation and the rise of motorisation in Manila. In a highly informative essay, Filipino historian Michael Pante (2014) argues that the introduction of the electric street car and the automobile by American colonisers in 1905 gave rise to a "collision of masculinities" in urbanising Manila. According to Pante (2014), the motorised vehicle was one of the ways the American colonisers insisted on their "civilizing mission" in the Philippines, in contrast to the *bancas* (canoes) and the *kalesas* (horse-driven carriages) that were the mode of transportation in the Spanish period. Pante (2014) explains that becoming a driver or working for the transportation system at that time was constructed as a public display of

masculinity, with car-owning and driving becoming a means to subscribe to the white male construct of modern masculinity. The masculine performances among Filipinos were varied and based on socio-economic viewpoints, with a marked difference between Filipino male elites, drivers, and transport workers (Pante 2014). Pante further argues:

> "When the Filipino elite asserted their masculinity and modernity through motorised transportation, it was assertion through conspicuous consumption. It involved buying flashy vehicles to display their licence plates or to frequent Manila's cabarets. In contrast, workers tried to establish their own masculinity and modernity mainly by harnessing the knowledge they acquired as part of the transport sector's labour force." (Pante 2014 p. 269).

Time and again, urban policies aimed at instilling law and order are enacted through masculine rhetoric, such as the *Metro Gwapo* (Handsome City) campaign (2008-2010) mentioned in Chapter 1 — where becoming "handsome" was translated into violent squatter demolitions and street-vendor dispersals (Michel 2010). The alarming spate of extra-judicial killings under current President Rodrigo Duterte is the most recent and most overtly violent manifestation of the state's hypermasculine approach to cleaning up the city and the entire country. Duterte's campaign during the 2016 presidential race was largely based on an anti-crime crusade, in which he outlandishly promised to 'kill 100,00 criminals in his first six months in office and dump so many bodies in Manila Bay that "the fish will grow fat"' (Whaley 2016).

While the masculine permutations of urban policies in Manila are apparent, this is not to say that masculinity is a fixed concept. As Pante has argued, there is not just one masculinity, but various masculinities. In an oft-cited study on Manila's modernist aspirations, Neferti Tadiar (2004) has argued that state policies aimed at maintaining urban order through regulating movements of the informal economy vacillate between masculine and feminine sexualisation.

Writing at the time of Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim's (2007-2013) anti-prostitution drive that targeted feminised labour in the informal economy, Tadiar (2004) theorised that there is "gender trouble" (taking after Judith Butler) reflected in the state's policies for establishing law and order in the capital. The compelling quote below captures this tension:

> "…while capital demands an 'open-economy' — meaning a feminine, permissive and porous metropolitan body, a national identity based on masculine ideals of power and selfhood demands a centrally-controlled, self-protective economy — meaning a contained and disciplined metropolitan body. In other words, the metropolitan state is hailed to be this body at the same time that it is hailed to possess (and control) this body, to be a pliant, porous feminine people, or a strong-willed, self-disciplined masculine nation-state…Such is the gender trouble of the state, one that is completely predicated upon the heteronormative political-libidinal dynamics of capitalism and nationhood..." (Tadiar 2004 p. 96).

In Manila noir, it is clear that increased mobility is granted to the male lead characters in their scenes of transit. Like the act of walking enacted by the women characters in the previous chapter on melodrama, driving in Manila noir functions as spatial practice. In contrast to the embodied spatial practice of walking, however, the men who move in Manila noir are transported throughout the city through the act of driving, even though not all of them are the ones behind the wheel. In Manila noir, driving is imagined as masculine spatial practice, as it is ascribed to masculine constructs such as the violence in *Kinatay* and *On the Job*, and the field of security in *Metro Manila.*

In tracking the chronotopes of mobility of male characters in Manila noir, I am interested in the ways the films simultaneously reinforce and problematise the configuration of male subjectivities, particularly in the films' key instances of transit. While I focus on male subjectivities here, this is not to say that increased mobility is an inherently masculine capacity, but that the films in question expose and dramatise this assumption. I locate chronotopes of mobility in key

scenes of transit. These chronotopes of mobility literally and symbolically drive narrative development and reveal critical moments where the male subjects of Manila noir are put to the test, revealing different negotiations and imaginaries of spatial in/justice.

V.   *Kinatay*

I begin with my analysis of *Kinatay* as a prime example of Manila noir, with more than half of its screen time taking place in the darkness of a van that takes the main character from the city to its outskirts, like a road movie shrouded in the darkness of murder.

Kinatay follows the 24-hour ordeal of a young criminology student who finds himself participating in the violent murder of a prostitute by a gang of dirty cops. While not wholly set in the slums, *Kinatay* begins and ends in the slums, in this sense a literal deployment of the slum chronotope constituting and circumscribing the narrative. *Kinatay* opens with establishing scenes of the slum community where the main character, Peping, resides. The film then moves through and away from the city with a long driving scene, which ultimately leads to Peping witnessing the horrific slaughter and dismemberment of the prostitute.

As the film that garnered the country's first Best Director nomination and award for a full-length feature in the Cannes Film Festival, the significance of *Kinatay* in Philippine cinematic history is undeniable. Mendoza, who only began making feature-length films in 2005, seemed like an unlikely contender against the established filmmakers nominated that year, including the likes of Pedro Almodavar, Ang Lee, and Quentin Tarantino. Mendoza's unforeseen triumph was as controversial as his film's subject matter, with venerable film figures expressing contrasting reviews. In a scathing review, American critic Roger Ebert (2009) called *Kinatay* the "worst film" in the history of the festival, and

characterised Mendoza as "a director whose Idea takes control of his film and pounds it into the ground and leaves the audience alienated and resentful." Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, Mendoza received affirmation from fellow nominee, Tarantino, who after all is known for showcasing his own style of violence in his grindhouse films. In a personal letter, Tarantino (cited in Lodge 2009) praised exactly what Ebert denounced, citing the film's effects on its viewers as its strongest feature: "Bravo on your difficult troubling work…I felt it was completely a [sic] eyewitness account of a horrible murder. I believed everything I saw. Your point wasn't to dramatize it. It was to capture it."

The reception of Mendoza's international success at the local front is interesting as it is perhaps a prime example of how independent cinema fares in the Philippines. Despite Mendoza's international success, his victory was largely ignored by the general public, with the exception of academic/intellectual circles and local cinephiles who generally gave favourable reviews. Shortly after the festival, *Kinatay's* first local screening at the University of the Philippines Film Institute was almost blocked by the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board who raised concerns about the film's graphic subject-matter. The board, after speaking with Mendoza, approved the film for screening with no cuts (Villasanta 2009). One can surmise that Mendoza's international success largely influenced this decision. Ironically, then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whose administration was arguably part of the subject of *Kinatay's* critique, released a statement congratulating Mendoza for his award, saying that the film "depicts social realities and serves as an eye-opener for moral recovery and social transformation" (Agoncillo 2009).

Film critic Patrick Campos (2016) argues that *Kinatay* is a film that evokes paralysis from spectators given its brutal rendering of murder, a reaction that mirrors the main character's paralysis in the face of violence. In a description that interestingly lends itself to noir readings, Campos (2016 p. 320) explains

that in the film, "…the naïve police cadet Peping is swept unprepared into the world of violence and finds himself, with arresting indecision, a castrated accomplice to the butchery of a middle-aged woman…too absorbed with his own thoughts to do anything willful." He goes on to argue that: "In such films, there can be no heroes, neither triumphant nor tragic. Violence, not heroes, defines such films" (Campos 2016 p. 320). Campos (2016) further argues that this paralysis extends to film criticism itself that echo either Ebert or Tarantino's sentiments which both fail to invoke political readings.

While I do not disagree with Campos' point that the film might invoke paralysis, I disagree that this precludes political readings. If paralysis is understood as the inability to move, the film can still be read along the politics of mobility, or in this case, immobility. While I will not argue that the film's main character is a heroic figure, I also do not think that the film is defined solely by violence, as Campos has suggested. Campos' reading of *Kinatay* is actually slightly ambivalent, in that it is unclear if he thinks *Kinatay* is a film that can be interpreted beyond the obvious theme of violence.

My own reading tends more towards art critic Patrick Flores' (2012) reading of *Kinatay.* Although Flores only briefly comments on *Kinatay* in an essay that examines the use of the long take in representative Philippine films, he convincingly argues that the film is "irreducibly political" (Flores 2012 p. 84). Flores finds value in reading *Kinatay*'s long driving scene as akin to the long take, which enables the political unfolding of time and space. He argues that apart from serving to surface the character's inner turmoil, the long scene works "to aestheticize the time of the trip from the city to its outskirts, from the center to its limits, as a spatial proposition. It is the highway of Manila, along which the monorail runs, that morphs as the form of the journey, the ritual between life and death" (Flores 2012 p. 82). Flores moreover argues that *Kinatay* yields a critique of urbanisation, especially as the use of the long take in the film's night-

time drive "invests in this tedium and attenuation a perfect foil to the alacrity of incessant development and the commodification of space…" (Flores 2012 p. 83). Flores makes a case for a political reading of the film in its rendering of the loss of life and humanity via the long take, which transforms the device "from a teleological tool to a biopolitical feeling" (Flores 2012 p. 84). This biopolitical feeling, which Flores extends to a reading of the "anatomy of a salvage" (Flores 2012 p. 83), is what I take to mean as the film's capacity to invoke human experience in the urban space as the narrative unfurls, particularly in its scenes of transit.

A. The slum chronotope in *Kinatay*

Kinatay's opening is deliberately deceptive, comprised of a montage of images of life. It is morning, the city's inhabitants are bustling to begin the day's work: the wet market is open, sidewalk vendors abound, commuters set off to work. The scene cuts to the main character, Peping, as he comes down from his shabby house with his wife-to-be and newborn child. Through a window, the audience is offered a view of the crudely assembled houses that line the urban poor community. Peping and his partner leave their child with an aunt for the day and board a jeepney, where the dialogue reveals that they are on their way to civil court to get married.

Because the film opens and ends with a departure and return to the slums, it is not difficult to see how the slum space serves as the film's organising centre. The slum chronotope configures Peping as a slum inhabitant, first by showing him inside his community, followed by the camera's tracking gaze as he descends to join the throng of other inhabitants who comprise the city. The choice of daytime images is significant in the configuration of the slum chronotope as the narrative's organising centre, and already plays with generic expectations from a narrative set in such a context of poverty: crowds, garbage,

noise, traffic — all signifiers of the abject conditions of the Philippine capital. Although the film's period is not actually specified, there are certain signs that signal the contemporary period: billboards, buildings, and of course, the very look of the slum space itself. One US-based review expressed generic expectations from this Mendoza film upon its opening: "The first 15 minutes or so showcase what Mendoza does best: capturing the chaos of life in the teeming slums and streets of Manila" (Weissberg 2009).

The slum chronotope in *Kinatay* dialogues with the modes of transit that interestingly structure the narrative, with spatial mobility signifying social mobility. From their house in the slum community, the couple board a pedicab that takes them to a wider street where they hail a jeepney. While in the jeepney on their way to court, 20-year-old Peping excitedly tells his 18-year-old fiance that their *ninong* (wedding sponsor) might gift him with a motorcycle, which he intends to use for extra money. After the wedding, Peping and his family board the *ninong*'s van on their way to the mall, where they are treated to lunch. Peping marvels at the newly purchased van, saying in half-jest that he would gladly take the van if his *ninong* ever gets tired of it. This bright scene in the *ninong's* van would later serve as stark contrast to the utter darkness in the other van that Peping boards, not knowing that the night of his wedding day will initiate him into the darker facets of manhood.

B. Chronotopes of mobility and spatial injustice in *Kinatay*

The daytime scenes paint a bright picture of Peping entering manhood as a new father and husband. But the narrative shifts gears when night falls and *Kinatay* shifts to the darkness of film noir. Peping, who is studying to be a cop, meets up with a friend in a public park in the heart of Manila, where he collects drug money from street vendors to earn small change. When Peping hands over the money, his friend, Abyong, tells him that "Kap" wants him for a "job" that night.

Peping agrees jovially, upon the promise of easy money. However, once Peping mounts the van, the film's mood turns sinister, conveyed immediately through darker lighting and soft foreboding scoring. Peping's figure dissolves into a shadow in the back of the van. What follows is an uneasy silence as the van moves through the dark roads leading to the red light district where the group of men pick up the prostitute, Madonna, who apparently owes Kap a huge sum of drug money.

From this point, the van that becomes the vehicle of murder functions as *Kinatay's* most prominent chronotope of mobility, occupying more than half of the film's screen time. Flores has already pointed out how this long scene of passage through the city allows the dramatisation of Peping's state of mind, at the same time that it is a critique of the urban space. I propose to think through this idea further through the lens of noir and the chronotope of mobility.

The time of the futuristic-present governs the testing of Peping's masculinity as the van moves through the city's roads. What I mean is that the van, and the violence it channels through its movement through the city's main artery, is in these moments traversing the path towards Peping's projected future as a corrupt figure of authority. It is no coincidence that Peping is studying to be a cop and that the men in charge of this operation is referred to by their roles in the police force, "Kap" and "Sarge". In later dialogue, it is revealed that Peping's father was also a cop. Historian Alfred McCoy (2000a) has argued that the Philippine action film draws heavily from military configurations as the ideal model of masculinity, which extends to political figures who have either military or police backgrounds. McCoy (2000b) also notes that the Philippine Military Academy is known for initiation rites such as physical hazing, an open secret that is not condemned but rather considered a valuable test of one's worth in joining the ranks of the military. This same idealisation of the man with the gun,

as it were, as the figure of masculinity, runs through *Kinatay* and the other films in this chapter.

The dialogue in *Kinatay* suggests that the figures of authority targeted Peping as someone worthy of recruiting into the operation, which means that this particular night serves as Peping's initiation into the world of corruption within the police force. This is a world that is extremely masculine; misogynist jokes regularly creeps into the dialogue, which Peping at some point also participates in as a sign that he belongs. It is not that Peping is wholly innocent — this is established in the daytime scenes where he nicks the tip left at the food court and in the scene where he expresses his desire to have a gun. It is not that Peping is innocent; it is that he is not *yet* that corrupt. This time of "yet" is the time that hovers in the narrative's futuristic present, rendered through the unfolding of the narrative as Peping is gradually shrouded in the darkness of the impending murder.

In a way, *Kinatay's* long driving scene makes use of the classic chronotope of the road, where space covered is time spent (Pühringer, Ganser and Rheindorf 2006). The tough men in charge of the operation are literally taking Peping on a road test. Each second in the van is part of the test of Peping's masculinity, which in this narrative is measured by his participation in the crime of murder. He survives most of the transit scene by hiding in the darkness and by keeping silent. More significantly, Peping is shown to be alert to his testing. When "Kap" suddenly clobbers Madonna, he demands that someone hand him a handkerchief to stuff in her mouth. Peping hands him a handkerchief. At some point, Peping looks at his phone — then catches himself and quickly says out loud that he was just checking the time even when nobody calls him out. To the tough guys in the van, the horror in Peping's eyes is not visible; to the camera, however, Peping's panic is slightly more apparent as it moves into close-ups of Peping's face in the claustrophobic space of the tinted vehicle.

The transit through the city accommodates and is accommodated by the disruptions of the actual built environment of Manila traffic, prolonging the time of transit, which hammers in the notion that this time on the road is the time of the present. The disruptions throughout the time of passage are what can be deemed "returns to the present" according to the demands of the urban experience through the traffic of EDSA. At one point, the driver off-handedly comments: *"Traffic is always so heavy here in Cubao, no matter what time it is"* — referring to a node at EDSA that is notoriously known for bottleneck traffic given the convergence of smaller streets and flyovers. While the van is stuck in traffic, the camera captures views of the billboards that line the highway. Kap and Sarge talk about one of their sons who work at a call centre where fluent English is required. These casual comments serve to make the experience of the drive all the more disturbing, as if having a woman tied up and gagged in the van is but an everyday occurrence. At the same time, the call-centre comment and the billboard views that disrupt the long driving scene make the van a chronotope of mobility that is able to channel global time-spaces through the spatial practice of driving, as it reveals the commodified urban space lined with 24/7 advertisements, the highway functioning like an outdoor mall.

In terms of framing, the camera shifts from darkly lit tight shots of the van's passengers and a view of the road from the back of the van, as though we are seeing the road from Peping's perspective. Recalling Edward Dimendberg's (2004) reading of LA noir as offering "automobile-framed views," Susie Jie Young Kim (2010) offers the notion of "driving views' in her reading of South Korean noir. For Kim (2010), "driving views" are comprised of the select images one sees through a car window, views that are ultimately marked with ambivalence. She argues that in the views one sees while driving, "…the cityscape is not to be fully digested for enjoyment or forging connections, but rather, it is meant to be passed by — driven by — just like nameless pedestrians or anonymous cars on the street. Seen in this sequence as a blur in

the background, the cityscape is perceived not as stationary and fixed but as comprised of fleeting images drifting by and in constant flux" (Kim 2010 p. 125). Peping's views in *Kinatay* are even more limited and targeted, because, after all, he is not the one behind the wheel. In fact, at this point in the narrative, he doesn't even know where the journey will take him. His select views of the cityscape are not just signs of ambivalence, but of exclusion from the mastery of urban space that the senior figures of masculinity exhibit.

The views of the road from Peping's seat in the van can also be invested with the affects of fear and panic, as each mile away from the city centre means Peping becomes more and more trapped in the operation he unwittingly became a part of. These affects are conveyed in Peping's furtive glances at the men around him, his brows furrowed, as though searching for some sign that these men are not as tough as they seem. The growing sense of fear and panic is further conveyed in Peping's selected driving views such as road signs that signal departure from the city centre. When the van crosses the tollgate and they enter the city outskirts, the camera frames Peping taking note of the bus terminal that might offer him escape.

Mendoza, reacting to negative reviews of *Kinatay*, explains that outrage is part of his intended effect. According to Mendoza: "My intention with Kinatay was to slowly bring the audience into the van and take them along to witness a monstrous crime…" (cited in Zafra, 2009). He continues: "I think I managed to manipulate the audience without their being aware of it. They get trapped in the film. That's why it angered many viewers. They say, 'You trapped us. You didn't give us a choice'" (cited in Zafra, 2009). This sense of entrapment is indeed conveyed through Peping's journey through the van, however, contrary to Mendoza's claim, there is a scene that momentarily provides a degree of choice for Peping and the viewers: the scene at the bus terminal where Peping is tasked to run an errand before going to the house of murder.

In the terminal, Peping actually boards a bus with the clear intention of leaving. In this scene, we realise that Peping had a choice, which is why I disagree with Campos' description that Peping is caught in "arresting indecision" throughout the narrative. The exact moment when Peping makes the difficult decision to stay with the group is depicted in a deep focus shot, his face blurred in the foreground while the van is sharply in sight through the bus window. His phone suddenly rings, which he picks up to say: *"I just took a piss. I'm on my way back."* With that, he dismounts the bus and makes his way back to the van. If the film's scenes of transit are chronotopes of mobility, this particular scene in the liminal space of the bus terminal, and inside the unmoving bus itself, might be read as a chrontope of immobility. Peping's inability to literally drive away is what made him decide to become accomplice to the crime. His inability to move is what compelled him to decide to return to the van. I am not saying that Peping made this choice without difficulty, but that in this scene the film demonstrates Peping's comprehension of the difficulty of this choice. In this chronotope of immobility, Peping realises that his life depends on the death of the prostitute.

The graphic scenes of sexual abuse, murder, and the chopping up of the woman's body that occur in roughly 15 minutes of screen time is interspersed with Peping bearing witness from a window outside the house, his facial expression and heavy breathing conveying utter horror and disbelief. There is clear parallelism between the complete desacralisation of the woman's body and what has earlier been referred to by Campos as Peping's symbolic castration in these "chop-chop" scenes.[19] In an earlier scene, Peping and Madonna stare at each other in the basement, both bearing expressions of terror at the violence of it all. In the entire film, it is only Madonna who bears

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[19] In the Philippines, the term "chop-chop," and the story itself of *Kinatay*, recalls sensationalised urban crimes of "chop-chop ladies" reported in tabloid news. There were a number of popular "massacre" films in the 90s based on these reports. See for instance, "Massacre Era" at http://www.pep.ph/lifestyle/16650/massacre-era (accessed 31 May 2017).

witness to Peping's castration, or his inability to measure up to masculine violence. Campos does not explain what he meant by castration in his description; but it would do well to link it more specifically to a reconfiguration of Laura Mulvey's (1975) male gaze where Peping seems to be the male subject gazing at the dehumanised female object. However, contra Mulvey, Peping's male gaze is completely devoid of pleasure. Peping is not looking at the murder from a position of male power, but from a position of castration anxiety. During the actual murder, Peping's spatial position of bearing witness to Madonna's murder from outside the house masks his fear from his male superiors, at the same time that his experience of terror is visible to the viewers. He scrambles to regain composure when Sarge asks for bags for the severed body parts, and acts swiftly during clean-up.

The final scene of transit reinforces Peping's descent into corruption. He hails a taxi after collecting his money. It is dawn, and traffic is already starting to build up. Just as Peping closes his eyes, the taxi's tire bursts. He opens his eyes in mild panic and checks if the gun he received as a gift from Kap is still in his bag, as if he were afraid that the sound of the burst tire is actually gunshot. He gets off the taxi in the middle of the highway, trying in vain to flag another one. When the driver manages to replace the tire and motions for him to get back in, Peping, after a moment's hesitation, complies. This scene that takes place at daybreak is a clearer signal of his decision to take the ride, as it were, not because he wants to, and not even because there are no other options. He takes the ride because it guarantees a safe journey home — just as staying to finish the job in the company of tough men guarantees his survival. There are no grey zones in *Kinatay*, but there is no "right" way either. For Peping, the only clear way through the test is the one that will get him home.

In *Kinatay*, the slum space serves to bookend the narrative, but its significance in the beginning is different from its meaning at the end of the film. In the

opening sequence, Peping is tracked along the duration of the day, moving away from the slums on a hopeful note. In the final sequence, Peping is returning home to the slums, bearing the knowledge of violence required for him and his family to survive. I many instances, Peping looks at his wedding ring, such as the scene in the toilet of the food place the group stops at before Peping decides to head home. He stares at himself in the mirror then looks at his wedding ring as he aggressively washes his hands, as though trying to rub away the violence of the night, lest his new wife sees through him. Each scene where he looks at his wedding ring is a reminder that he has a family to return to, which is why he must survive. If there is a sliver of justice to be found in *Kinatay*, it can perhaps be gleaned from Peping's return to the slums in the film's final scene, with his wife holding their child while cooking breakfast as a new day breaks. This final scene, sans Peping, denotes what I have earlier referred to as the structuring presence of home in Manila noir, in that Peping's descent into darkness can only be explained — if not justified — by his desire to ensure a future for his family. Peping's immersion in the violence of the city is the cost of keeping his wife and child away from it.

VI.   Metro Manila

Metro Manila tells the story of a peasant family trying their luck in the big city, only to find themselves ensnared by crime and corruption. The main character, Oscar Ramirez, takes a job in security as an armoured truck driver tasked with transporting money within the city, but is later compelled to carry out a heist to ensure his family's survival.

Admittedly, I include *Metro Manila* with caution in the emerging genre of Philippine urban cinema, given that it was directed by British filmmaker Sean Ellis. Any reading of the film is informed by the fact that it was directed by a non-Filipino, which makes the film even more suspect to the charge of poverty

pornography. However, I think it is worth including here as what can be considered a British-Filipino film, given that the film's cast is comprised entirely of Philippine actors who certainly had a hand in the film's production. Ellis wrote the film's script in English, while the task of translating it into Tagalog was in the hands of the cast (Wise 2013). It is to Ellis' credit that he attempted to immerse himself in the slum spaces of Manila as part of the process of filming. Ellis' gamble to shoot in what to him is the foreign space of Manila paid off in terms of critical acclaim in the international scene. The film premiered and was warmly received at the Sundance Film Festival. It was also critically acclaimed at the British Independent Film Awards (BAFTA), where it won Best British Independent Film, Best Director, and Best Achievement in Production. It was also nominated in the BAFTA in the category of Best Film Not in the English Language.

In the Philippines, reception of the film was rather mixed. While mainstream entertainment press expressed warm reception for *Metro Manila*, critic Joel David's (2015) brief yet on-the-mark comments on *Metro Manila* manages to summarise the reservations of Philippine cinephiles about the film. David (2015) compares Ellis' attempt at representing Philippine poverty to what he considers the failed attempt of Danny Boyle in making *Slumdog Millionaire*, as someone with an outsider's perspective. Essentially, David (2015) faults *Metro Manila* for its misappropriation of Philippine social realism. I quote David at length below as he pinpoints the nuances that are more apparent to a Filipino audience, including the jarring effect of the English-speaking rural native:

> "What Ellis and his team missed out on was the home-based critique of this tradition [of social realism]. Even worse, they subject the Pinoy psyche to a distinctly Western temperament, when the movie's central figure (who's male rather than female) feels shortchanged by the trader who buys his harvest, and decides to trek from faraway Mountain Province to Metro Manila, where he knows no one, bringing his entire family with him. To make things worse, everyone who meets

him treats him worse than his rural boss, with a room-for-rent swindle serving as the proverbial last straw; no one even thinks of extending a hand, much less uttering a sympathetic word, at the plight of an incredibly naïve rural migrant – who it turns out can even speak fluent English! Midway through the movie the narrative veers into film-noir territory, so if you can sit out the first hour, you'll finally be able to appreciate certain developments made more recognizable because of their generic properties." (David 2015).

Similar sentiments are echoed by some foreign reviewers, such as one that argues that the film is "an exploitation movie masquerading as social drama" (Tobias 2014). But the reviewer, like David, becomes a bit more forgiving when he suggests in the end that "the film improves greatly when Ellis drops the miserablist tone and lets the dormant crime picture within take over. Ellis seems much more at home down the stretch, as Metro Manila loses its dicey ambitions to social realism and his technical bravado takes over, leading to shootouts and a heist sequence that plays to his strengths" (Tobias 2014).

The images that Ellis chose to include in his introduction of the Philippines is what makes the film an open target for charges of poverty porn, given that they might be said to reveal a tourist gaze. In the countryside, the panoramic view of Benguet resembles postcard views of rice paddies and farmers hard at work. Arriving at the city, the family wades through the throng of bodies in Manila's annual Black Nazarene Catholic procession, which again betrays a rather wide-eyed fascination on the part of the camera given the wide framing of the crowd.[20] This distanced framing of the Nazarene scene might be contrasted to

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[20] The feast of the Black Nazarene is a remarkable annual procession that Catholic devotees participate in with the belief that doing so will grant miracles. The statue is carried through the streets of Manila in a procession that takes place almost the entire day. Apart from extensive television news coverage, the procession has been used in a number of Philippine films. An example is the opening of Linoa Brocka's *Bona* (1980), which according to Bliss Cua Lim reinforces the mass appeal of the film's female lead, veteran Filipina actress Nora Aunor. See LIM, B.C., 2012. Fandom, Consumption and Collectivity in the Philippine New Cinema: Nora and the Noranians. In: *Women and the Media in Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. pp. 179–203. Available from: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137024626_10 [Accessed 1 Sep 2017].

the immersive and intrusive approach that Mendoza employs in *Tirador* (2008)*,* for instance, which takes the view of a devotee deep in the throng of bodies. But even as I raise this contrast between Mendoza and Ellis' approach of filming this particular urban procession, I am well aware that my reading of *Metro Manila* is already influenced (perhaps unfairly) by the knowledge of Ellis' outsider status.

In what follows, it is not my intention to fully absolve *Metro Manila* of exploitative tendencies, which the reviews above have already pointed out. However, I don't think it is productive to dismiss the film outright, especially given its international acclaim. Even though it is not the most radical representation of the urban underclass, *Metro Manila* is not entirely devoid of imaginaries of spatial justice, especially in its configuration of the male protagonist. My intention, as with all the films in this study, is to find a more productive route in thinking through the ethical issues shored up by the narrative. As with *Kinatay,* I locate *Metro Manila's* chronotopes of mobility in scenes of transit, which in this case is rendered prominently in the transit scenes of the armoured van throughout the city.

A. The slum chronotope in *Metro Manila*

Metro Manila opens and ends with a sub-story that parallels the themes of survival and desperation that Oscar encounters in the city, told through his own voice-over. The sub-story is about a man who jumps off a plane mid-air, having robbed the plane's passengers. I will return to this curious story within a story later, as this adds another layer to Oscar's configuration as criminal in the film's closure. This sub-story might also be said to make use of the plane as a chronotope of mobility that dialogues with the chronotope of the armoured truck in the film's main narrative.

First, the primary narrative: *Metro Manila* can be approached as a migrant tale of survival in the city, with the Ramirez family's transit from rural to urban space setting off the narrative. The film tracks the family's departure from the idyllic mountain province of Benguet, prompted by insufficient funds for harvest. The act of departure from the countryside is captured with remarkably picturesque wide and medium shots, dwarfing the family as they make their way through the rice paddies to a dirt road where they mount an uncomfortable journey to Manila via jeepney.

The first quarter of the film establishes how *Metro Manila* attempts to follow in the footsteps of the second golden age of Philippine social realism, ala Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal, in its use of the narrative trope of the "typical provincial figures who for one reason or another associated with modernization can no longer sustain themselves in their traditional communities move to the metropolis in pursuit of survival, a better life and, of course, their dreams" (Beller 2008 p. 440). The stark contrast between the rural and the urban space is made apparent once the family arrives at the city. The camera moves frantically, darting to and from the bewildered and awestruck faces of the Ramirez family. In contrast to the panoramic shots of the rural space, the camera introduces the city through a montage of modern images: billboards, footbridges, skyscrapers, all surrounded by a steady stream of bodies.

The hapless family, homeless and penniless after being conned shortly after arriving in the city, find themselves seeking shelter in the slums lining the waterways of Tondo. Even as the film does not linger in the slums in terms of screen time, the scenes of the family's entry into Tondo is more than enough to ground the narrative in the slum chronotope (recalling the significance of Tondo in Manila's urban imaginary discussed in Chapter 1). This shift from rural to urban space signals the arrival of the time of the futuristic present in this urban noir that configures the narrative once the family find themselves without

dwelling. The slum chronotope hovers throughout *Metro Manila* as the time-space that the family struggles to escape from, or the space that should *not* be inhabited, with the urgent search for an inhabitable home serving as a structuring presence in the narrative. The foreboding presence of the family's uncertain future is reinforced when the couple find out that Mai is pregnant with their third child.

B. Chronotopes of mobility and spatial injustice in *Metro Manila*

Metro Manila achieves the noir look and mood in the spaces of masculinity offered in the narrative: the van itself, and the darkly lit underground space where the security firm's armoured vans are parked and the "debriefing room" is located.   Among these noir signifiers, the armoured van serves as *Metro Manila's* prominent chronotope of mobility, given its significance to the configuration of both Oscar and Ong's masculine subjectivities. The times they inhabit the van strengthen their male bonding, starting with the scenes in which Ong teaches Oscar to drive. In another early scene, Ong drives to a vacant lot outside the city centre, where both practice shooting with the armalites they carry with them on duty — a scene that adds to the performance of masculinity and male boding between the two. More significantly, it is in and through the van chronotope that both men reveal masculine anxieties. Oscar's anxiety is easy enough to identify as his inability to perform his role as provider for his family, an anxiety that runs through the entire narrative. Ong, on the other hand, reveals his guilt at his inability to save his former partner who died in the line of duty. While driving, Ong's recollection of the death of his previous partner is revealed in a violent flashback: Ong's partner is gunned down in an ambush by a group of criminals as they were transferring moneyboxes in a bank.

Like the configuration of masculinity in *Kinatay* modeled after the idealised image of the military or police*,* Oscar is configured as ex-military. This personal

history lands him the job in the security company, when by chance, a guard spots his army tattoo while he was queuing for an interview. The interviewer, Ong, and everyone else present in the room, guarantees the job of van driver to Oscar when he proves his military experience, even though he does not even know how to drive.

It is clear that Oscar does not measure up to Ong's masculinity, symbolised primarily by Oscar's inability to drive. The narrative development shows an uneven relationship between the two men, configured through spatial association. The other men in the security company pejoratively call Oscar "Oscar-the-peasant", while Ong stands for the male figure who has mastery over urban space. Like in *Kinatay*, driving in *Metro Manila* is a spatial practice that signifies the potential for social mobility. It is Ong who teaches Oscar how to drive, a seemingly kind act that ultimately serves to put Oscar in Ong's debt. As the narrative moves closer to the heist, it turns out that Ong has been grooming Oscar to become his unwitting partner-in-crime.

To be sure, there are no exciting vehicle chase scenes in *Metro Manila*, which corresponds to the limitations of the actual urban environment of heavy traffic. The absence of explosive driving scenes also corresponds to the physical composition of the armoured van, as well as adds to the film's slow pacing. In lieu of space and means for vehicular chase scenes, the film conveys tension through scoring that accompanies the tracking shots of the armoured van, shot either from behind or in front as it drives at a steady pace mostly through the EDSA highway. The scenes where the van departs from a straightforward route signal that something might go wrong. The false alarm of robbery in an early scene foreshadows the twist that will occur in the last quarter of screen time.

In *Metro Manila*, masculine mobility means mastery of the urban space. This aspiration to master the city is captured in a critical scene that dialogues with

the chronotope of mobility and the slum chronotope, where both men behold a view of the Manila skyline at night, a view that Ong has access to in his balcony. Ong remarks, gesturing at the view: *"Look at that…Metro Manila. Quite a sight. This is where I come to think."* Ong's self-perception of his mastery of the urban space, in contrast to Oscar's lack of mobility, is reinforced when he chides Oscar for squatting in Tondo: *"You work for an armoured truck company. That slum is a haven for the worst type of criminals."* Following this conversation, Ong offers to let Oscar and his family stay in his spare apartment. Oscar gladly accepts, not knowing this offer is actually a trap.

Ong's perceived mastery of the urban space extends to the heist he imagines. According to Daryl Lee (2014 p. 9), heist films invest its protagonists with the capacity to imagine, in many cases examining "creative activity by encoding the values of imagination and creative effort into criminal activity." Although Lee is commenting on mostly American heist films, this theory very well applies to a film like *Metro Manila* where the successful enactment of a well thought-out plan creates the myth of "the law-breaking criminal genius…displaced from a moral or criminological plane onto an aesthetic one" (Lee 2014 p. 9).

The film deliberately withholds the heist from view for over an hour of screen time, before it shifts to reveal Ong's master plan. The chronotope of mobility collides with the threshold chronotope of an alley that takes Oscar, and the film narrative, into the film's pathway into spatial injustice. By this I mean that Ong's deception is exposed when Oscar finds the nerve to get out of the van and follow Ong into the alley where the latter was meeting with accomplices. This particular alley operates as a threshold chronotope, where the time of Oscar's ethical crisis takes place. Here is where the heist is explained and Ong's true motives are revealed, and here is where Oscar's virtue is put to the test. To cite one reviewer who phrased it in spatial terms: "*Metro Manila* is so spellbound by its setting that it is a good hour before we discover what kind of film it is going to

be. It begins as a swirling drama of survival in the Filipino capital — but then suddenly it slips off down an alleyway, only to emerge a scrupulously engineered, Christopher Nolan-ish crime thriller" (Collin 2013).

It turns out that the ambush that led to the death of Ong's partner left him with an unopened moneybox. Ong needs to fake another ambush so that Oscar can gain access to the processing centre that holds the key to the moneybox. More importantly, Ong plans to frame Oscar for the crime if he refuses to participate. Ong explains where Oscar needs to go, with very specific instructions, in order to retrieve the key in the processing centre. Ong forces Oscar's complicity in a significant line that dialogues with the film's main chronotope of mobility, a command that makes Oscar part of the crime whether he likes if or not: "Ok. You drive."

As with most heist narratives, something in the masterplan goes awry. While Oscar is behind the wheel and Ong dismounts to stage the fake ambush, Ong is unexpectedly killed by the same thug that shot his ex-partner. The sudden entry of this assassin from Ong's past is somewhat absurd; his motivations for killing Ong is never explained and what I consider one of the film's narrative gaps. Putting that aside, however, Ong's death allows Oscar to emerge as the film's unlikely noir anti-hero. Ong's death was supposed to signal Oscar's literal and symbolic immobility — but it instead, this drives Oscar to act on his own terms. Ong's last words demanding that Oscar take the wheel takes on more significance – it is a demand that Oscar "man up," so speak, that he overcome his masculine anxiety in order to do the job.

Metro Manila's last few minutes compresses time and space in its rendering of the heist. The day turns into night through tracking scenes of the armoured van as it moves along the main highway, similar to the tracking shots used earlier in the film when Oscar was just beginning his journey in the big city. When the van

returns to the processing centre, Oscar stages his one-man heist. There is something rather crude about the mechanisms of this heist, far from the technologically advanced stunts in Hollywood heist films. The processing centre itself isn't exactly a sophisticated fortress. Oscar, using a torn up strip of cardboard and tape manages to keep the door to the processing centre unlatched when someone exits. When he enters, the noir elements of suspense and darkness are ramped up through claustrophobic shots and intense scoring. The film tracks Oscar through the dimly lit hallway and stairway leading to the room that holds the literal and metaphorical key to his family's survival. The heist culminates in Oscar's death when he is shot in a bloody scene by security.

The last few scenes reveal Oscar's creative efforts in reconfiguring Ong's heist. As explained by Ong in earlier parts of the film, Oscar's death guarantees the transfer of his belongings to his wife, Mai. When Oscar died, he was wearing a locket containing an imprint of the key that will open the moneybox. During the heist, Oscar grabbed a decoy key number so that the security company will no longer track the moneybox in his family's possession.

The imprint is hidden behind the image of the Virgin Mary inside the locket, an allusion to the film's interlocked themes of faith and survival. These values are much more embodied in Mai's character rather than Oscar's. Her character trajectory in this film is quite sparse, an aspect that this film falls short on. Mai's role in this narrative, it seems, is to reinforce Oscar's emasculation given his inability to provide for the family. In fact, as part of blackmailing Oscar, Ong's strongest taunt directly challenges his masculinity: *"What kind of man lets his wife whore herself out in a bar?"*

It is in this sense that Mai somewhat functions as a reformulation of the femme fatale in the form of the suffering female, sans deception. When Oscar finds the moneybox in the apartment and tells Mai about the fouled plan, she demands

that Oscar return the box. When he says he might be blamed for his partner's robbery, Mai's reply pushes him over the edge: "*We can't stay here. We have to escape…We made a big mistake coming to Manila*." Mai's defiance in this last statement is even more understandable if we link it to the scene in the bar earlier that night, where the pimp suggested that her young daughter could be offered to special clients. Ultimately, then, it is Mai, not Ong, who sets the narrative's final test of masculinity, which Oscar satisfies through death.

What are we to make of the sub-story that unfurls in *Metro Manila?* As I suggested earlier, this sub-story that takes place in a plane can be considered another chronotope of mobility that dialogues with the van chronotope, with Oscar having more control over the imaginary plane's transit. The story of Alfred Santos is used to bookend the film with Oscar's voice-over, presumably reading his farewell letter to Mai, where he explains his self-sacrifice. Desperate after the family business goes bankrupt, Alfred robs fellow plane passengers mid-air, inspired by a dream that he could escape with a homemade parachute. Oscar likens his own story of escape to Alfred's story, which both ended in death. Unlike Alfred, however, Oscar asserts that his plan was not based on a dream, but "on the reality that there was no other way out."

In contrast to *Kinatay*, there is a small sense of justice to be found in *Metro Manila's* closure, but it is one paved by the protagonist's death, and one that signals departure from the city. Oscar contrasts Alfred's story with his own decision to take the similar route as one of redemption rather than hopelessness. Moreover, the film's opening lines preface Oscar's death as masculine sacrifice, contrary to the notion of endurance ascribed to a church proverb: "*There's a Filipino proverb. No matter how long the procession it always ends at the church door. I prefer the version we learned in the military. If you're born to hang, you'll never drown.*" Oscar's death might have been inevitable, but the proverb suggests that the film imagines his agency through

his capacity to set the terms of his death. By taking over the heist, Oscar successfully hijacks the masterplan from Ong, ultimately redeeming his masculinity in death by providing a way out of the city for his family. The film closes on a somewhat hopeful tone. Mai and her children, carrying with them a bag full of money, are boarded on a moving bus – suggesting a possible return to the countryside. In a way, the Ramirez family got the relief they came for in making their way to the big city, but in exchange the city took Oscar's life.

VII.   On The Job

If *Kinatay* and *Metro Manila* feature male noir figures in the process of being corrupted by the city, *On the Job* presents characters who are already in too deep. Established Filipino filmmaker Erik Matti's *On The Job* takes us deep into the labyrinth of the city as crime scene. Among the films in this chapter, *On The Job* lends itself most overtly to the noir narrative of the crime thriller, with its cops versus criminals and whodunit narrative trajectory.

Inspired by true events, as announced by the film's opening scenes and the use of actual news footage, the film tracks the movements of two prison inmates who are regularly contracted as hitmen by powerful clients. The movements of the prison inmates parallel the storyline of the detectives who are investigating the murder that sets off the narrative. The question of who is responsible for ordering these hits is the enigma that the narrative uncovers, an investigation that implicates top state officials in crime and corruption. The narrative unravels through the intersections and collisions of the killers and the detectives, which take place in the urban spaces of Metropolitan Manila whose roads, streets, and alleys are rendered confusing and practically un-mappable by the film.

Unlike the other films discussed so far, *On the Job* is a film backed by a major studio, Star Cinema Productions, in partnership with Matti's own independent

production company. Its budget of PHP45 million certainly sets it apart from the modest budgets of earlier Philippine indie films (*The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* was made whith a budget of roughly one million). The film, which premiered in the Director's Fortnight at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, generally received warm reviews in both the local and international scene. For foreign reviewers, the film's appeal lies in its jarring true-to-life premise of prison inmates doubling as assassins, set in the sleek and gritty portrayal of the city. There is a sense of surprise in many of the favourable reviews given that Philippine action films are not known for fast-paced crime thrillers. In the absence of precedence from Philippine cinema, some foreign reviews (Tobias 2013; Toro 2013) could not avoid comparing *On the Job* to regional counterparts, particularly to the Hong Kong noir, *Infernal Affairs* (Lau 2004). Another reviewer ventured a Hollywood comparison in saying that: "*On the Job* owes as much to Scorsese as it does to Philippine current events" (Haar 2013).

Despite these comparisons, *On the Job* grounds itself strongly in the urban spaces of Manila, and is effectively able to navigate the city's built environment in ways that produce suspense and tension through its visual and aural elements. This is a mean feat on the part of the film's producers, as the search for investors for a Manila noir police-detective story proved challenging according to their accounts. In an interview, Matti recounts how foreign funders were hesitant to finance this film. He explains:

> "We sent it around for foreign financing, but at that point, everyone was thinking that they really loved the script, but the whole idea is kind of new for a Filipino movie. It feels very much like a Hong Kong movie. They said that if it was this kind of movie, but set in Hong Kong and with Chinese actors, we could easily finance it, but as a Filipino movie, there was nothing coming out anything like this, so we didn't get any funding internationally." (cited in Boo 2013).

Already a well-known filmmaker prior to the digital turn, Matti sets himself apart from Philippine indie auteurs in terms of visual style. He is known for co-writing the popular film *Magic Temple* (Gallaga and Reyes 1996), which is a fantasy film, while the heavily CGI-ed film that preceded *On the Job* called *Tiktik: The Aswang Chronicles* (Matti 2012) can be categorised as a mix of horror and fantasy. In an *Esquire* interview, Matti quipped that he was not brought up watching Iranian films, a possible jab at the Philippine indie look. Regarding *On the Job*'s portrayal of Manila, he said: "It didn't intend to be a Brockaesque homage. It never was…It was more of a John Frankenheimer kind of thing, *di ba*? [right]? *Na parang* [Like] Manchurian Candidate…" (cited in Gomez 2013).

At the local front, *On the Job* is commendable for appealing to mainstream viewers and film critics alike, comparable to, and arguably even more successful than *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*.[21] A review published in a national broadsheet generously claims that the films "is a new standard for the Filipino noir film" describing it as "Dark, brooding, muscular and visceral, yet complex and concise in its story-telling" (Cu-Unjieng 2013). What is more interesting, the review articulates what I have also observed to be a popular comment about *On the Job*: "It's so good, it doesn't seem like it's a Filipino film" (Cu-Unjieng 2013).

Film critic Joel David (2015b) explains what this off-hand comment might mean, which has to do with the film's narrative and visual complexity that is not often offered in local film productions. David (2015b) states that the film is indeed "a qualitative leveling up" in Philippine cinema given its successful rendering of the urban space in order to represent the "proliferation of dramatis personae representing various social strata and performing diverse conflicting functions" (David 2015b). For David (2015b), Matti was able to do this by "fusing a

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[21] In April 2016, it was announced that a film sequel, as well as a six-part series of *On the Job* is already in the works.

complex, raging narrative voice with a patient and keenly observed documentarian style, his on-the-prowl camera constantly encircling his major characters the same way that new media (in the form of CCTVs and satellites and camera phones, e.g.) ensure that our private moments might be shared by a voracious viewing public."

Building upon the above reviews, I posit that *On The Job* sets itself apart through its thoughtful use of space, particularly in the configuration of the prison space as slum chronotope. The slum-prison chronotope dialogues with the film's scenes of transit that operate as chronotopes of mobility. Like in the previous films in this chapter, the chronotopes of mobility in *On The Job* produce what might be considered the collision of masculinities in the narrative. In addition to vehicle chase scenes, it is also useful to locate chronotopic value in the memorable running sequences in the film, leading up to the explosive car chase sequence that occurs before the film's ending.

A. The slum chronotope in *On the Job*

The slum chronotope runs through the narrative of *On the Job*, not just through the scenes that occur in slum spaces when the prison inmates venture beyond the prison space, but also through the configuration of the prison space itself. The slum chronotope in the film literally configures the city as a space of crime, with the prison space and the slum space constantly overlapping. The city as prison space runs strongly throughout the entire narrative. In fact, I argue that the prison space can actually be read as a simulation of the overcrowded, self-sufficient, makeshift nature of the slum space.

Contrary to the notion of prisons as spaces of structure, discipline, and surveillance, prisons and jails in the Philippines are infamous for being chaotic, undermanned, dirty, and most of all, overpopulated and congested (US State

Department 2013; Commission on Human Rights - Philippines 2015). Human rights violations are rampant in the seven national prisons and over 400 jails in the Philippines. There is a huge lack of basic services like food, clean water, and toilet facilities (US State Department 2013; Commission on Human Rights - Philippines 2015). In the most recent available data from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (2017), the congestion rate for jails in the National Capital Region is at a staggering 547 per cent. Put another way, jails with an "ideal capacity" of 4,801 inmates actually contain 31, 043 (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology 2017). According to Carlos Conde (2016), researcher at Human Rights Watch Philippines: "Many detainees have been in jail longer than the maximum sentence for the offense with which they were charged, with some people spending as long as 14 years in detention before being convicted or released by the courts."

In August 2016, just three months after the current Duterte administration launched its war on drugs, the state of Philippine prisons made international headlines when the Agence France-Presse (Celis 2016) published photos of the "hellish" conditions at Manila's Quezon City Jail, a jail initially made for 800 bodies crammed with almost 4000 prisoners. The images are harrowing, with the photographer describing the scene as "the closest I've ever been to hell" (Celis 2016). In a related CNN report (McKirdy 2016), it is said that Duterte's bloody war on drugs that has seen summary executions on the streets of Manila has led to a spike in the number of prison inmates, with some inmates claiming they are safer inside than on the streets. In Quezon City Jail, the body count rose from 3600 to 4053 within seven weeks of Duterte's anti-crime campaign, with only 20 guards tasked to secure the place (McKirdy 2016).

It is no wonder that overcongestion and the lack of police figures have produced some form of self-regulation among prison inmates. The CNN report (McKirdy 2016) identifies the gang system that exists inside the Quezon City Jail: "These

gangs hold considerable sway inside, and each run sections to which their members naturally gravitate. Colorful murals on the walls proclaim territory, although guards say that out of sheer necessity there is a de facto truce between the groups." These group dynamics exist in prisons and jails across the country. For instance, in an earlier study, sociologist Filomina Candaliza-Guttierez (2012) identifies *pangkats* or gangs that operate in the New Bilibid Maximum Security Compound, citing ethno-linguistic similarities as basis for belonging. Candaliza-Guttierez explains how the formation of gangs has influenced the spatial distribution within the compound. She notes:

> "The prevailing sense is that the compound is organized according to the *pangkat* society: buildings are apportioned to enclaves of 12 gangs and a few marginal non-gang groups. The hospital, kitchen, educational and training centers, churches, civic foundation offices, sports facilities, recreational facilities, *talipapas* (wet market), and food stalls give a sense of shared spaces." (Candaliza-Guttierez 2012 p. 203).

The view that prisons are self-contained spaces that produce particular socio-spatial relations makes it possible to liken prisons communities to slum communities. The prison space as depicted in *On The Job* resembles and functions in similar ways to slum communities, particularly *loobans.* Like *loobans,* the prison space is literally hidden from view, and yet, it is a space teeming with human activity precisely because of its invisibility. *On the Job* certainly attempts to imagine the congestion and squalor in Philippine prisons through its mounting of the film's *Bagong Yugto* (New Chapter) City Jail. Matti captures the social dynamics that are produced in these jails as a result of over-congestion. Consider Matti's (2013b) description in his Cannes statement about *On The Job* that can be likened to the description of Philippine slum communities. Noting that the self-sufficient nature of Philippine prisons might be surprising to an international audience while it is actually common knowledge locally, Matti provides more details:

From our research, the jails in the Philippines are like little cities. There are mini-zoos, wet markets, tennis courts and even massage parlors. Prisoners are allowed to do business inside the prison. Having entrepreneurial prisoners mean more business for the jail officials as well. Those who can afford can open small cafes and serve sandwiches, even sell phone credits (even if mobile phones are supposedly illegal). One can rent rooms for their wives and girlfriends to stay overnight. For those who want long term, they can rent a more permanent room where one could bring their spouse to live indefinitely. But, of course, for every perk, you pay." (Matti 2013b).

Michel Foucault's (2002) theory of heterotopia — rather than his famous subjectivising theory of the panopticon — is more useful in understanding the workings of *On the Job's* prison space (like the cemetery in *Kubrador).* Foucault (2002 p. 235) cites the prison space as an example of one of the principles of heterotopia as always being able to "…presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time. Usually, one does not get into a heterotopian location by one's own will. Either one is forced, as in the case of the barracks or the prison, or one must submit to rites of purification."

A memorable three-minute sequence that tracks Daniel's swagger through the prison designed as slum space captures the heterotopic dimensions of the imaginary Manila prison space in *On The Job*. It is a space that is both isolated but penetrable, both closed (to everyone else outside) and open (to everyone inside). If not for the presence of guards and passing views of cell bars, it is possible to forget for a moment that this particular scene is set inside a prison. In the absence of wide establishing shots of the prison interiors, this particular scene introduces us to the spatial and social dynamics of the prison space, as it follows Daniel walking through the prison after his latest hit. Comparable to the tight tracking shots executed in *loobans* in the previous chapters, this long take reveals the nature of the prison space as the camera tracks Daniel's walk.

Throughout this sequence the camera moves from behind and around to a front view of Daniel, as if trying to catch up with him as he saunters along the prison hallways in what can be described as a performance of masculine mobility. He is carrying a small load of clothes and is making his way to the laundry area of the jail. He calls out and gestures to friends along the way. There are bodies everywhere. As he walks, the camera reveals different areas of the prison such as a games station with a ping-pong table, followed by the kitchen area, until he reaches the laundry area. Here, Daniel asserts his masculinity when he hands over his laundry to gay prison inmates, who are assigned the feminine role of doing the laundry and ironing clothes. Unprovoked, he calls out: *"The hell you looking at, faggot?"*

The slum-prison chronotope organises time in the vein of the futuristic-present in relation to the workings of prison time. For the inmates, their time depends on the duration of their sentence or their time outside the prison while on the job. Prison time, it seems, is not fixed — it can be negotiated. The inmates subject themselves to these negotiations at present in order to provide for the future of their families. The ageing Mario is about to be released from prison which signals the end of his hitman days, while the youthful Daniel is eager to take Mario's place as top hitman. The slum-prison chronotope also configures the inmates' relations with other characters: the guards and warden who allow the inmates to go in and out of prison within a negotiated period; and with Thelma, the femme fatale middle-woman or contractor who arranges the hitmen's pick-ups and returns, also within a negotiated time. Mario's visits to his family and Daniel's phone calls to his mother are determined by the time allowed through these negotiations. The slum-prison chronotope also configures the character configurations and relations of the policemen and detectives, given that the investigation gains more urgency with each murder.

What *On The Job* is able to execute through the prison-slum chronotope, is a complex dialogue with other chronotopes that structure the narrative according to the movements of the characters. The inmates find themselves in-between times as they move from inside and outside the prison space, in the process revealing the power structures that allow for such a guns-for-hire system to exist. The film explains how the system works in a manner that reveals the contradictions in the seemingly porous movements of the inmates from inside to outside the prison space. The way the scheme works is explained through the voice of an ex-cop about halfway into the narrative, a spiel that is visualised by a sequence that shows Mario and Daniel getting ready to leave the prison space:

> "*That's why I retired early, this business pays well. When they ask for a hit, we use prisoners. We bring them out to kill the target, then we bring them back inside. No one will ever suspect them. It's not only one group. There's a lot. There's one in Bicutan, there's one in Bulacan, there's also one in Pampanga. The person inside takes care of bringing them in and out. Money runs everyone.*"

The above passage, while explaining how the system works, also begs more questions by explaining that the scheme extends far beyond just one prison. "There's a lot" is perhaps the most unsatisfying answer to the question of who is behind the scheme. The only definitive clue in the above explanation is the last statement: "Money runs everyone." In the course of the narrative, a finger is pointed to an actual mastermind, however, that is not really the end of the story, as I will explain later in the analysis of the film's narrative closure.

B. Chronotopes of mobility and spatial injustice in *On the Job*

Masculine authority is embodied in the police and military figures in *On The Job,* just as in *Kinatay* and *Metro Manila*. It is revealed that General Pacheco,

introduced earlier on in the narrative, is the top man behind the orders to kill. The foiled plan was to groom Francis Coronel, a rookie agent, into the youngest National Bureau of Investigation Chief to serve the political aspirations of the general's entourage – which includes Coronel's father-in-law. Coronel is characterised as having graduated top of his class in the Philippine Military Academy, where his late father was also educated. If the military men are at the top of the chain, the contract killers, Mario and Daniel, are at the bottom. However, the hitmen are actually key players in the corrupt system. The contract killers, hidden from view, are the ones who carry out the dirty work in order to sustain the system of corruption embodied by General Pacheco and the men who support him. What places the prisoner-hitmen at the bottom of the power scheme is that fact that their lives are dispensable.

Like in *Kinatay* and *Metro Manila*, chronotopes of mobility in *On the Job* take the form of the private vehicle, where scenes of transit signal social mobility. The vehicle in *On the Job* is a clear assertion of symbolic power given that the private vehicle that takes Mario and Daniel from the prison to their targets bears a police license plate (PNP 111). In the Philippines, displays of authority through commemorative plates and stickers on vehicles are not unusual (Avecilla 2014). The intention is to signal authority and to gain special treatment from traffic enforcers. These shameless displays of authority through vehicle accessories such as police sirens and government plates is such a well-known practice, that then President Benigno Aguino III (2010-2016) used the siren (*wang-wang),* often used in convoys for officials, as a metaphor for corruption in his first State of the Nation Address (Dizon 2011). This symbolic value of vehicle plates is captured in *On The Job*. Just before Mario and Daniel dismount the vehicle on their second assignment, the camera cuts to a shot of the license plate, revealing that this hit is enabled by police corruption.

For Coronel, the film's naive detective figure, the private vehicle also functions as chronotope of mobility in that it signals the potential beginnings of his entry into political corruption. At the start of the investigation, Coronel's congressman father-in-law gifts him with a new Range Rover, which he reluctantly accepts upon the prodding of his wife. Later, when Coronel decides to arrest his father-in-law and General Pacheco, he returns the Range Rover as a symbolic gesture of turning away from corruption. As with the other films in this chapter, the private vehicle is a space of masculinity and social mobility, especially in Coronel's character configuration whose acceptance of the Range Rover is linked to his role as a good husband and a good son-in-law.

In contrast, the chronotope of mobility ascribed to the hitmen is the domain of the female contractor who the film introduces as the chain-smoking, red-lipped Thelma, the film's femme fatale. Thelma's character is shrouded in darkness; she sees no evil, in a manner of speaking, as symbolised by the fact that she wears sunglasses even during scenes at night. Thelma is never fully revealed in visual terms in the film. In the scenes shot inside the Pajero, she is always framed from behind, or from the side. Even in the opening scene where we are shown a medium body shot of Thelma, she is shrouded in shadows, leaning on a corner smoking a cigarette as she monitors Mario and Daniel's moves. In *On the Job*, the femme fatale calls the shots, to some degree. Her role as contractor means she has a say in approving or disapproving special requests from the hired guns, such as asking for payment in advance or getting an extra day outside the prison space. Thelma is the one who articulates that Daniel is ready to take over Mario's place as main contract killer. In *On the Job*, the femme fatale embodied by Thelma is the middle-woman — all business, completely unsentimental.

The presence of the femme fatale in the vehicle occupied by Mario and Daniel serves to temper their masculinity, which has little effect in the face of a female

figure who holds monetary capital. Daniel is slightly embarrassed when he asks Thelma for money in advance, which Thelma graciously accedes to. Thelma's tough femme fatale character can be juxtaposed to the alluring character of Nicky, Coronel's wife. Although she is portrayed as a sweet character in the beginning, she turns out to be the real danger to her husband later on, when she questions his loyalty to her and to her father. Her complicity with corruption is signified through her prodding that her husband not return the Range Rover as this would be offensive to her father. And towards the end, Nicki's decision to choose her father over her husband can be considered a symbolic collusion (rather than collision) with Thelma, who hands over the envelope with Coronel's picture, making him the target of the film's bloodiest scene.

Along with scenes of transit involving private vehicles, *On the Job's* chase scenes done on foot can also be said to operate as chronotopes of mobility. These critical chase scenes are instances ignited by a collision of masculinities, which in this narrative is also a collision of ethics. These chronotopes of mobility are instances that test not just the male figures' capacity to move, whether on foot, or through the act of driving, but also the capacity to make moral choices. The first chase sequence occurs in two parts, spurred by the shooting of the ex-cop, Paul: the first part of this sequence occurs in the maze-like alleys of a *looban* and tracks the characters as they move towards larger streets; the second part of the chase occurs after a hospital shootout, and tracks the male characters as they move towards other urban spaces (a construction site and scenes inside Mania's overground train). Meanwhile, the second chase sequence is the final car chase spurred by the bloody shoot-out that results in the death of Coronel.

Much like the heist in *Metro Manila*, there is a sense of realism in the chase scenes in *On the Job* — which is not at all to suggest that it is lacking in thrill or suspense. What I mean is that the energy of the chase scenes are devoid of

obvious special effects; instead they rely on the classic interplay of light and darkness, as well as effective scoring to aid the creation of suspense. There are no overtly grand spectacles or enactments of death-defying stunts, other than the sheer force and energy generated by the act of running after someone, or running away. In this sense, the editing in *OTJ* can be likened to chase scenes in classic film noir. According to Place and Peterson (1972):

> "What moving shots that were made seem to have been carefully considered and often tied very directly to the emotions of the characters. Typical is the shot in which the camera tracks backward before a running man, at once involving the audience in the movement and excitement of the chase, recording the terror on the character's face, and looking over his shoulder at the forces, visible or not, which are pursuing him." (Place and Peterson 1972 p. 69).

The above description is certainly visible in the running chase scenes in *On the Job*. However, because there are many figures involved in the chase, the camera cuts from one to the other, ascribing panic not just to the figures fleeing but also to the figures chasing after the former. The effect is what I view as the dispersal of audience excitement and sympathy, as well as the dissolution of the moral roles of the chaser versus the chasee. This sort of frenzied camera work that also uses quick cuts and shaky effects encourages the shifting of allegiances from the audience; with us simultaneously rooting for the latter to catch up, and the former to get away. This effect of dispersing audience sympathy is accomplished in the first chase sequence in *On the Job*, in which the film makes use of the slum's *eskinitas* as the space in which the two sets of partners - the cops and the killers - literally collide for the first time.

In the chase sequences done on foot, the male figures themselves function as embodied chronotopes of mobility. This first chase sequence occurs after Paul, the ex-cop, reveals how the killing system works, in a desperate attempt to solicit police protection now that he knows he is next on the kill list. The political

motive for the recent spate of hits is revealed: General Pacheco wants to get rid of his contractors to make sure there are no lose ends for his senatorial bid. Coronel and company arrive at the mouth of the *looban* just before a gunshot is heard, spurring the first part of the chase. The first part makes use of the alleys of the looban as channels of mobility, which means that the figures who *know* this terrain more would more likely get away. And so Mario and Daniel, men of the street who don't own private vehicles, manage to get ahead in the chase scenes within the *looban*.

The second part of this chase sequence paints a clearer intersection of *On the Job's* male noir figures, with the father figures (Acosta and Mario) and the son figures (Coronel and Daniel) taking different routes, at the same time depicting the playing out of two different times and spaces through quick cuts and jerky framings. Acosta chases after Mario through a construction site, while Coronel chases after Daniel into a memorable scene inside a train carriage. What this second part of the chase sequence is able to do, especially the train scene (which is also featured in the film's promotional poster) — is to ground this narrative of corruption even more so in Manila's urban context.

Reference to David Martin-Jones' explanation of any-space-whatevers will be useful to better explain the significance of this chase sequence. The grounds that the chase sequences cover in *On the Job* can be approached as "any-space-whatevers" (as discussed in Chapter 1). Martin-Jones (2011 p. 156), citing Michael J. Shapiro's (2008) *Cinematic Geopolitics*, explains that a shift from a "focus on the aesthetic rather than the psychological" can yield productive geopolitical film readings. Using a chase scene that takes place in a shanty town in the Hong Kong-based film, *Ging chaat goo si* [*Police Story*] (1985), Martin-Jones (2011 p. 156) argues that the sequence can be read in the Deleuzeian sense of activating the potential of any-space-whatevers "in which characters practically disappear in order to foreground the spatial narrative." In

the chase sequence, Martin-Jones (2011 p. 156) argues that: "we are watching the transformation of 'a' space into *this* space, a process in which the territorializing power of action becomes divorced from human co-ordinates, becomes simply spatialized images, or any-space-whatevers." This means that the space that is initially presented as just any shantytown can be read as a shantytown firmly grounded in Hong Kong.

Similarly, in *On the* Job, the running sequences are able to foreground, as the camera chases after the male figures on the move, images that stand particularly for Manila's urban landscape — the streets, the jeepneys and cars in the night-time traffic, the construction site, the overground train. These are Manila-specific images that are not foregrounded in the same manner in any of the other films included in this study, precisely because of the faster rhythm of running offered in *On the Job*. Mario and Daniel, the ones being chased, make full use of the any-space-whatevers they find themselves in, attempting to blend into these spaces in order to lose their trackers. In their attempts to disappear into space, we pay more attention to the spaces they occupy, much in the same manner as the cops whose gaze attempt to seek out potential hiding places. This chase sequence proves critical to the film's most naive detective figure, Coronel, who then drives to confront his father-in-law about his possible involvement in the guns-for-hire system. What this chase sequence does, then, is urge Coronel (and the viewers) to cast a wider net of investigation, beyond the killers he was chasing after, in order for him to finally realise that the real culprits behind the system are those right at the top.

From the running sequences, I turn to the film's dramatic car chase sequence which functions as its final chronotope of mobility. This particular car chase literally depicts a collision of masculinities through the collision of vehicles, overcast by a flurry of gunshots. The chase sequence is prompted by the assassination of Coronel in the hands of Daniel, a symbolic turning over of the

role of prime hitman from Mario to his protégé. The femme fatale drives Daniel to Manila City Hall, where he waits for his target. Meanwhile, Coronel drives in his old Honda to the site, not knowing that his wife has condemned him to his death by relaying his plan to arrest the general and his men. Coronel's assassination by Daniel signifies the collision of masculinities of these younger male figures in the narrative, with Coronel at the losing end. Daniel shoots quickly, and the scene cuts to a wide shot from above showing Acosta bleeding out in the square, emphasising the young man's tragic end. That this scene was staged outside Manila City Hall, a site recognisable to the Filipino viewer, strongly signifies the political motivations behind this death.

Coronel's murder spurs his stand-in mentor figure, Acosta, who has not been shown behind the wheel at any point in the narrative, to get into his beat up car in order to intercept the General's convoy. It is in this final car chase sequence ignited by Acosta's impulsive lone chase of General Pacheco's convoy that the film somewhat grants Acosta the role of the film's unlikely noir hero, at least within roughly three minutes of screen time. Unlike the edgy tone of the running scenes, this car chase sequence is accompanied by a tragic song, which suggests that Acosta's attempt to apprehend Acosta for his crimes is futile. However, the camera cuts to a dialogue between the general and the congressman inside the car, who have just been informed of Coronel's death. "*This is not right,*" says the congressman, to which the general replies: *"We can never hold him by the neck. It's better to have him killed while he's powerless."* Shouting accusations of murder as his old car catches up with the general's larger vehicle, Acosta swerves to block the latter, dismounts, and starts shooting in vain at the bulletproof vehicle.

The camera cuts from medium to wide shots during the shoot-out, with the wide shots showing Acosta quickly being surrounded by several armed security men. He takes cover inside his car, which is the riddled with bullets. Throughout this

entire scene, the congressman and the general never step outside their vehicle. When the rain of bullets cease, a curious gesture marks the end of this chase: a tight shot of Acosta's raised bloodied middle finger as proof of life and act of defiance, even though he has actually been cornered by the powers-that-be.

In contrast to Acosta's act of defiance, his counterpart, Mario, enacts a fatalist end for himself. Two more plot twists drive this point home. The first occurs on the eve of his release from prison, where Mario kills Daniel just when the latter was bidding his affectionate farewell.[22] Even though Mario weeps after stabbing Daniel, he strives to contain his emotions because killing Daniel is an act of self-preservation. He knows that the syndicate will add him to the kill list once his services are no longer required outside the prison. The second twist shows Mario shooting his wife's lover in front of her and their daughter. The structuring presence of home for Mario is no more, and he returns to the private vehicle to get on with the job of living, even as he has no one else to live for but himself. It is inside the private vehicle that Mario's fate is sealed, in a final scene where he defiantly looks straight at the camera through the clatter of rain on the car's windshield.

The windshield scene is the final cut in *On the Job*'s international DVD and streaming versions. In the version screened earlier in Philippine cinemas, the film's final scene shows the late Coronel's young partner retrieving the mobile phone that contains a recording of Pacheco's involvement in the guns-for-hire syndicate[23]. The international version's ending might be said to drive the point of Mario's fatalistic closure; the Philippine version's ending puts emphasis on corruption within the system. These two endings, in my view, do not drastically

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[22] Citing this scene of weeping, US-based film scholar Jasmine Trice suggests viewing *On The Job* as "crisis melodrama" in her talk at the 2016 Association for South East Asian Cinemas Conference in Kuala Lumpur.

[23] There are a number of deleted scenes in the international DVD version of the film compared to the Philippine release, which includes sex scenes and some scenes related to Acosta's family life.

alter the film's overall capacity to reveal imaginaries of spatial in/justice through the movements of its male subjects, whose collisions gradually build up to reveal that corruption extends far beyond the hitmen's prison spaces. The final car chase sequence powerfully demonstrates the culpability of the state and its institutions for enabling a kill-or-be killed system that relies on its underclass in order to survive.

VIII. Conclusion

Kinatay, Metro Manila and *On the Job* are examples of male-driven narratives that can be approached as Manila film noir grounded on the slum chronotope. Such an approach enables the productive exploration of chronotopes of mobility, or scenes of transit that drive narrative and character configuration. Read through the dialogue of the slum chronotope and film noir, I have argued that it is possible to locate moments in which the male noir figures struggle for spatial justice even as they ultimately fail in the films' narrative closures. It has also been noted that unlike classic noir, the structuring presence of home runs through Manila noir, as the desire for a better future for the family drives the male characters' crimes.

Framed as Manila noir, this chapter explored how masculine anxieties are spatially conveyed, as contextualised in Metropolitan Manila's urban spaces where spatial mobility is strongly linked with the desire and potential for social mobility. This reading forecloses the construct that driving is imagined to be a masculine spatial practice, at the same time that this spatial practice is ethically-charged given the theme of crime that underpins the narratives. In these representative films, the struggle for spatial appropriation is signified by who is able to literally and symbolically sit behind the wheel.

The act of driving is never granted to the male lead in *Kinatay* who finds himself an unwilling passenger in the van that ultimately tests his will to survive for the sake of his family. In *Metro Manila*, a sense of moral agency is granted to the male lead who decides to take the wheel in enacting the heist that leads to his death, so that his family can escape the same tragic fate. Meanwhile, *On the Job* configures the slum chronotope as prison chronotope, which further grounds the narrative in Manila's socio-political conditions. The film, through literally covering more ground in Manila's urban space, offers a relatively more complex narrative depicted through the intersecting paths of its male figures. Through the film's chase sequences, the film offers ethically-charged collisions of masculinities, leading to tragic ends for all but the male political figures of state corruption. The film's narrative closure undoubtedly indicts the state as responsible for the crime and corruption that permeates the city.

In this chapter, the study moves beyond the immediate slum spaces of Metropolitan Manila, with the slum chronotope remaining as its organising centre. Generally, in this chapter I have argued that the chronotopes of mobility in Manila noir reveal the male figures' tragic struggle for spatial justice, prominently signified by the act of driving that indicates the in/ability to map or master the urban space. Despite the darkness of Manila noir, it is possible to examine the means by which the films' tragic male characters are configured as the films' moral social agents, at the same time that their masculine anxieties are revealed and challenged.

CHAPTER 4

MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT:

The slum chronotope and chronotopes of in/visibility in the

Overseas Filipino Worker genre

> *"The OFW may be the most intriguing spectacle of this new millennium."* – (Epifanio San Juan Jr 2009 p. 122).

> *"The OFW film, at best, is an ironic genre; at worst, a genre – perceived from another time and place – that never should have existed, but does."* – (Patrick Campos 2016 p. 531).

I.   Introduction

In this final chapter, I push for expanding the scope of the slum chronotope in order to place it in dialogue with the "chronotopes of in/visibility" enabled by a genre that is arguably distinct in Philippine cinema. Here I explore how the slum chronotope in Philippine urban cinema expands its coordinates to create a dialogue with the configurations of spatial in/justice in the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) genre through a reading of Hannah Espia's *Transit* (2013). If in the previous chapters, the men, women, and children of Philippine urban film narratives navigate the urban spaces of Metropolitan Manila, the migrant characters in the ensemble narrative of *Transit* navigate the spaces of the foreign city of Tel Aviv. My aims in this chapter are: 1) to establish what I argue to be the slum chronotope's inevitable dialogue with migrant narratives of the OFW genre 2) to locate and examine "chronotopes of in/visibility" in *Transit* framed along the lines of the OFW genre; and 3) to examine the imaginaries of spatial in/justice offered in the chronotopic narrative and character configurations of the film.

In *Transit*, I propose that the slum chronotope can productively be placed into dialogue with the OFW genre's preoccupations with depicting the migrant figure's struggle over space in foreign urban landscapes. While the film does not take place in the spaces of Manila, it is still possible to approach *Transit* as a product of Philippine urban cinema in its capacity to take into account the spatio-temporal configurations of Filipino migrant subjectivities and spatial practices in the foreign urban spaces of Tel Aviv. If the films in the previous chapters pivot around the movements of men, women, and children as central narrative figures, *Transit* tracks the fragmented narratives of the members of a Filpino migrant family in Israel who navigate the foreign spaces through strategies of visibility and invisibility to escape the perils of deportation. As they struggle through space each character contends with the complexities of subjective formation not limited to national identity.

The slum chronotope's productive dialogue with the OFW genre underscores the global scope of the urbanisation of poverty – aligning the OFW class with the global underclass who stake their claims for spatial justice in global spaces of development where migrant labour is considered both a necessity and a threat. The production of *Transit* at the heels of the films I have so far approached as Philippine urban cinema might be considered the logical expansion of the coordinates of the slum chronotope, as the figure of the OFW in the global context is comparable to the urban refugee in the local context – both figures of the contemporary world who are compelled to create spaces of dwelling in spaces of injustice for the sake of survival. Like all the characters in the urban films discussed so far in this study, the migrant figures in this chapter are moral social agents who grapple with issues of social justice through the production of space.

What I intend to examine in this chapter is how *Transit* is able to depict the struggle for spatial justice enacted by the OFW figure in chronotopes of in/visibility, at the same time that it is able to reformulate the melodramatic mode associated with the OFW genre. This chapter begins by establishing the dialogical intersections between the slum figure and the OFW (as configured by the slum chronotope and the OFW diaspora), along with a discussion of the significance of the OFW diaspora in the Philippine and global urban imaginaries. I will then proceed with a discussion of the OFW genre and chronotopes of in/visibility, followed by my analysis of *Transit* as a film that effectively surfaces issues of spatial in/justice in the production of migrant urban spaces.

II.   The slum chronotope and the OFW diaspora

While the films discussed so far in the previous chapters are grounded on the slum chronotope located within the coordinates of the urban imaginary of Metropolitan Manila, a closer inspection reveals that the potential for expanding the coordinates of the slum chronotope in the global urban imaginary can already be gleaned in some of the narratives. The notion of the OFW diaspora surfaces at certain points, often through dialogue, pointing to the everydayness of the migrant experience in Filipino life. In *Kubrador*, for example, it is mentioned that the female protagonist's eldest daughter works in Hong Kong, presumably as a domestic helper, whose *amo* (boss) dislikes calls from her family in the Philippines. In *On The Job*, one of the contract killers is imprisoned for killing an illegal recruiter who foils his plans of working in Dubai. If there are no other specific references, at least the fantasy of going abroad is mentioned within some of the films. In *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*, for instance, one of the neighbours is said to have run away with an American lover, and in *Foster Child*, the dream of a better future for the child means moving overseas with his new American adoptive parents.

In proposing the productive dialogue between the slum chronotope and what I call chronotopes of in/visibility (which will be discussed in the next section), I draw attention to the global scope of the phenomenon of slumification and the OFW diaspora. This is not to say, of course, that the slum inhabitant and the OFW figure share homogenous struggles and experiences. However, it is not difficult to cite elements of similarity – or in line with my study's agenda – elements of solidarity between the two figures, as both are subjects and subjected to spaces of in/justice brought about by urbanisation in the age of neoliberal global capitalism. I am choosing to use the term solidarity in linking the slum inhabitant with the OFW, in order not to dissolve the experience of injustice among different marginalised groups as homogenous, at the same time that productive connections can be made along the lines of spatial injustice. As eminent Filipino-American academic Epifanio San Juan (2009 p. 121) puts it in his estimable essay on the OFW diaspora[24]: "Homelessness and uprooting characterize the fate of millions today—political refugees, displaced persons, émigrés and exiles, stateless nationalities, homeless and vagrant humans everywhere. Solidarity acquires a new temper." San Juan (2009 p. 122) further maps the global urban spaces in which female OFWs are known to gather, prefaced with a grim description: "Most of the migrant female Filipinos are modern slaves, at best indentured servants. They can be seen congregating in front of Rome's railway station, London parks, city squares in Hong Kong and Taipei, and other open public quarters of newly-industrialized societies. They are the plebeians and proles of the global cities."

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[24] Researchers of OFW studies have characterised Philippine labour migration as diasporic. The nuances of the concept of the diaspora will not be covered here, but it is sufficient to point out two elements that relate to OFW movement: 1) diaspora as exile from the homeland of a particular group of people, and 2) the diasporic group's continued links with the homeland even while in exile. Rachel Salazar Parreñas (2001) points out that the OFW labour migration conveys both aspects. San Juan (2009) also explains that diasporic studies emerged as a new sociological approach in the 80s and 90s, related to the study of international migration and assimilation.

If slumification across the globe saw the emergence of the new urban poor, so too can the OFW figure located in urban centres everywhere find solidarity with figures of the global underclass.[25] Barbara Schimmter Heisler (1991) suggests a perspective of the underclass in the American urban context, which I borrow here to approach this new global underclass where the slum dweller and the OFW might be linked. Heisler (1991 p. 47) argues that the underclass can be conceptualised "in terms of the processes of social and political dislocation and separation produced by the intersection of significant inequalities of class and substantial deficits of citizenship rights, in particular social citizenship rights."

Apart from solidarities in terms of class formation, the dialogue between the slum chronotope and chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW narrative can be established along spaces of occupation. Like the subjects grounded on the slum chronotope, the migrant figure finds himself or herself performing place-making strategies in seemingly hostile and uninhabitable spaces, or in spaces of informality. In other words, both figures might be said to inhabit spaces of injustice. According to a report on environmental changes and migration: "Migrants often settle in slums where they establish a social network necessary to find employment, earn wages, and send remittances home to support family members" (Warner 2010 p. 2). In many cases, the choice of spatial location, for both the slum inhabitant and the OFW, are global urban centres that promise economic and social returns despite the physical and emotional risks taken to get there and stay there.

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[25] It is important to point out that the Filipino migrant class is not all homogenous. For instance, Filomeno Aguilar Jr. (2003) – who also refereces Heisler's notion of the underclass and partial citizenship – explains the complex "national" ideology that prevails among OFWs as something that both legitimises partial citizenship in the country of destination, as well as reinforces internal class divisions among Filipino migrants themselves. See AGUILAR, JR., F.V., 2003. Global Migrations, Old Forms of Labor, and New Transborder Class Relations. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(2), pp. 137–151. Similary, Vicente Rafael (2000) examines the configuration of the Filipino contractual migrant worker versus the figure of the "*balikbayan*" or expatriate, with the latter perceived as the more privileged cosmopolitan figure. See RAFAEL, V.L., 2000. Your Grief is Our Gossip: Overseas Filipinos and other spectral presences. In: *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History.* Durham: Duke University. pp. 205–227.

In the Philippine urban context, Neferti Tadiar (2004) argues that rural migrants in Manila, or the "urban excess", can be considered urban refugees. Their movement to the cities are prompted not just by economic need but the need to flee the dangers of military counter-insurgency operations against revolutionary groups in the countryside (Tadiar 2004). Tadiar (2004 p. 81) argues: "Much of the urban poor therefore can be rightly viewed as refugees. Their 'refuge' is the streets of Manila, paths strewn with waste — refuse like themselves — which many of them live off. In other words, the human flood engulfing Manila is a wave of capitalism's contradictions demanding accommodation." The same economic and social motivations can be attributed to the migration of Filipino workers to urban centres in economically advanced countries. In a study on the citizenship status of Filipino domestic workers abroad, Rachel Salazar Parreñas (2001) introduces her essay by citing popular cities of destination: "Located in more than 130 countries, migrant Filipina domestic workers have settled in the cities of Athens, Bahrain, Rome, Madrid, Paris, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Singapore."[26]

To summarise, it is possible to establish a dialogue between the slum chronotope and the chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW migrant narrative, given the grounds of solidarity between the socio-spatial configurations of the slum figure and the OFW. Both figures stand for the emergence of a new global underclass in the spaces of exclusion and informality produced within the current age of global capitalism. In this sense, both are figures of spatial in/justice as they occupy informal spaces in relation to the concept of partial citizenship, a concept which I will expound on in the section on chronotopes of in/visibility.

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[26] The number of countries of destination for OFWs has since increased to 170.

Before explaining how the slum chronotope dialogues with the chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW film genre, it would first be useful to historicise the emergence of the OFW diaspora.

III.   The OFW diaspora

Like the rise of slumification, the emergence of the OFW diaspora was driven by the demands of neoliberal global capitalism. Although the Philippine government denies the existence of an official "labour export policy", it is undeniable that existing policies and institutions absolutely encourage labour migration. In fact, Robyn Rodriguez (2010) characterises the Philippines as a "labor brokerage state" because of its central role in facilitating the global mobility of its migrant workers. I quote Rodriguez (2010) at length below in a description that I think raises the spatio-temporal configurations of the OFW phenomenon (imagined as a temporary period of labour away from the homeland), just as it provides a sketch of its actual operations:

> 'Labor brokerage is a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which the Philippine state mobilizes its citizens and sends them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a "profit" from the remittances that migrants send back to their families and loved ones remaining in the Philippines. The Philippine state negotiates with labor-receiving states to formalize outflows of migrant workers and thereby enables employers around the globe to avail themselves of temporary workers who can be summoned to work for finite periods of time and then returned to their homeland at the conclusion of their employment contracts. As Antonio Tujan of IBON (a nonprofit research-education-information development institution), a longtime critic of the government's labor export program, puts it, the Philippine state engages in nothing more than "legal human trafficking."' (Rodriguez 2010 p. xii).

Next to Mexico, the Philippines is the world's largest source of labour globally (San Juan 2009), with an export labour policy that is often referred to as "a

successful overseas employment program (Abella 1993 p. 250). It is estimated that there are 10 million OFWs across the globe, roughly ten percent of the national population (Philippine Statistics Authority 2013). Migrante International (2015a), a progressive organisation that advances Filipino migrant rights, estimates that there are actually 12-15 million OFWs if undocumented workers are included.

The figures illustrating the extent of OFW deployment are staggering. In 2015, it was estimated that 1 out of 10 Filipino households has a member working overseas (Mangahas 2015). Each year, the number of OFWs deployed steadily increase. For instance, in 2010, an average of 4,018 were deployed on average per day, which increased to 6,092 in 2015 (Migrante International 2015a). In 2014, the POEA reached a "record high" of 2.4 million employment certificates issued, with 1.8 million successfully deployed overseas that year (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2014). At the same time, the amount of OFW remittances has grown steadily, for instance, from $18.8 billion in 2010 to $27 billion in 2014 (Migrante International 2015b).

Maruja M. B. Asis (2008 pp. 80-81) has identified four distinguishing characteristics of Filipino labour migration. First, they are "more widely distributed" globally; second, the have a "wider range" of skills, but have "secured a niche in nursing, seafaring, and domestic work"; third, Filipino workers are said to be relatively more educated than other Asian counterparts. The fourth distinguishing characteristic of OFWs is the centrality of female migrants, considering the "feminine" nature of the jobs available to them.

Indeed, the OFW phenomenon is emblematic of the "global feminization of labour" (Standing 1999). Tadiar (2004 p. 114) emphasises how Philippine migrant labour has indeed acquired "a female profile, specifically the profile of the domestic helper." At the same time, the Filipina OFW is indicative of the

workings of the international division of labour in the globalisationg of care (Yeates 2009) with care work having become a marketable commodity. The "unskilled" work that Filipina migrant workers enter abroad – domestic labour, caregiving, nursing – enter the "global care chain" (Hochschild 2000), a component of global capitalism that has seen what Arlie Hochschild (2000) views as the displacement of surplus emotions from poor mothers from the Third World for the families they are tasked to care for in rich destination countries. OFWs engage in care work, or what can be viewed as immaterial or "affective labour" (Hardt 1999) that essentially means labour that has affective potentials. As Helma Lutz (2011 p. 6) has put it: "Care…is not just an activity (taking care of) but encompasses an emotional component (caring about)." Parreñas (2000 p. 561) calls the emergence of female OFWs in care work as the "international transfer of caretaking," whereby "migrant Filipina domestic workers hire poorer women in the Philippines to perform the reproductive labor that they are performing for wealthier women in receiving nations" (Parreñas 2000 p. 561).

Although the Philippines has had a long history of labour migration which can be traced back to the Spanish and American colonial period (Aguilar 2003), most researchers agree that the present OFW phemenon traces its roots to the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986). Having declared Martial Law two years prior, Marcos issued the 1974 Labour Code, which essentially aimed to "promote overseas contract work and reap the economic benefits to be gained from the outflow, especially in terms of foreign exchange and employment" (Gonzalez 1998 p. 163). This was Marcos' response to growing international debt and unemployment in the country. Through this issuance, agencies providing the mechanisms for overseas contractual work were established. These were the Overseas Employment Development Board, the Bureau of Employment Services, and the National Seamen Board (Gonzales 1998 p. 163). Under the Marcos period, Executive Order 857 actually required

workers to remit a percentage of their earnings to Philippine banking systems, ranging from 50 to 70 percent of their total salary depending on their occupation (Rodriguez 2010). The agencies regulating OFWs were merged to become the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) in 1983, which remains the dedicated OFW agency until today. The POEA is 'literally considered a "model" apparatus, in that government officials around the world, including Bangladesh, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Eritrea, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka have received orientations on POEA operations' (Tyner 2013 p. 55).

The labour export policy was initially designed as a temporary measure for national unemployment; however, it has now turned out to be the "cornerstone" of the Philippine economy (Rodriguez 2010 p. xvii). Following the Marcos ouster in 1986, the suceeding administration of Corazon Aquino continued encouraging labour migration, but attempted to differentiate itself from the previous regime by legislating more protection for OFWs (Rodriguez 2010). Most significant from this period, however, was how it agressively linked the OFW phenomenon to nationalist discourse (Rodriguez 2010). It was Aquino, in an infamous speech delivered in Hong Kong, who dubbed Filipino migrant workers *bagong bayani* or the "new heroes" (Rodriguez 2010). As Rodriguez explains: "...Aquino portrayed international migration as a voluntary act of self-sacrificing individuals living in a democractic society rather than a kind of forced conscription under a dictatorial regime...a sacrifice that requires some degree of suffering but ultimately advances the greater national good" (Rodriguez 2010 p. 84).[27]

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[27] Carlos Piocos III (2016) examines the affects of suffering, sacrifice, and mourning that are at play in configuring the OFW imaginary through his study of filmic and literary representations. See PIOCOS, C.I.M., 2016. *On being moved : affect and politics in women's narratives of Southeast Asian migration*. Hong Kong University.

The succeeding administrations sustained this nationalist discourse of OFWs as the country's "new heroes" (Rodriguez 2002, 2010; De Guzman 2003; Encinas-Franco 2013). Following Aquino, it was under the Fidel Ramos administration known for its pro-globalisation stance that the landmark case of Flor Contemplacion, a domestic worker who was executed in Singapore for killing her abusive employer and another migrant worker, brought to light the perilous conditions that OFWs face overseas (Gonzalez 1998; Rodriguez 2002, 2010; De Guzman 2003). Contemplacion's case is significant especially in terms of cultural representations in Philippine cinema, which I will discuss more in the next section. Following the national uproar over Contemplacion's execution, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 was signed into law, which remains in effect until today (Gonzalez 1998; Rodriguez 2010).[28] It is in this law that the shift of terms, from Overseas Contractual Workers (OCW) to OFWs, came into place, emphasising the patriotic role that the state has ascribed to migrant workers, even including rules for conduct when employed overseas (Gonzalez 1998; Rodriguez 2010).

The short-lived Joseph Estrada administration pushed for "greater institutionalization of migration" (Duaqui 2014 p. 86), and dubbed migrant workers as the "economic saviors" that kept the country afloat in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis (Duaqui 2014 p. 87). Following Estrada, the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo administration is remembered for approaching OFWs as OFIs – or "Overseas Filipino investors", with the president urging migrant workers to invest in national projects using their overseas earnings. It was also during the Arroyo term that the state played an active role in recruiting migrant workers through the infamous "supermaids" program, which was rightfully

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[28] It is in this act that the state denies the existence of an active labour export policy. In the law's "Declaration of Policies," it states: "While recognizing the significant contribution of Filipino migrant workers to the national economy through their foreign exchange remittances, the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development" (cited in Gonzales 1998, p.167-168).

condemned by migrant groups (Guevarra 2014).[29] The Benigno Aquino administration that followed sought to amend the Migrant Act of 1995 to strengthen protective measures for OFWs at the same time that it saw the largest number of OFW deployment since the 1970s (Migrante International 2015b).

At present, the Duterte administration is attempting to differentiate itself from its precursors by promising the establishment of a Department of Overseas Filipino Workers (Bueza 2017). As the candidate who garnered a landslide win among overseas absentee votes in 2016 (Hegina 2016), Duterte remains popular among OFWs for being a vocal defender of migrant rights, at least through lip service, compared to previous administrations (Billones 2017). Early in his presidency, in a speech addressing a crowd of OFWs in Bangkok, Duterte expressed his "dream for the Philippines…in about 10 years, you won't have to go abroad to work" (Corrales 2017)**.**

Like the urban centres of the narratives in the previous chapters governed by the slum chronotope, the OFW's country of deployment is a space of imagined, but oftentimes unfulfilled, prosperity. Contrasting OFWs to middle-class migrants, Vicente Rafael (2000) argues that OFWs are well aware of the risks of going abroad, but brave these risks more for economic gain rather than for patriotic or overtly political purposes. According to Rafael:

> 'It is perhaps for this reason that OCWs often refer to their travels
> as a kind of "adventure," or in Tagalog, as *pakikipagsapalaran* and

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[29] In 2006, then-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo appeared in an advertisement alongside a "successful" Filipina migrant worker, to promote the "supermaids" program. The ad boasts that Filipina maids are top notch: "Most of them have secondary or third degree educational background. With a good command in English, they can be an English tutor for young children" (cited in Guevarra 2014 p.130).   See GUEVARRA, A.R., 2014. Supermaids: The Racial Branding of Global Filipino Care Labour. In: B. ANDERSON and I. SHUTES, eds. *Migration and Care Labour*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 130–150.

pagbabakasakali. To go abroad is to find one's fortune (*palad*) as well as to take risks (*magbakasakali*). One seeks to convert the products of one's labor into gifts with which to endow one's kin at home, thereby gaining their respect and recognition. At the same time, one also risks uncertain conditions and the prospect of becoming alienated abroad and at home.' (Rafael 2000 p. 210).

From the above historical overview, what I wish to emphasise is how the unprecedented development of the OFW phenomenon is inarguably indicative of the significance of the Philippines in global capitalism, inextricably linking Philippine development with neoliberal global development. As Rodriguez (2010) has argued in characterising as well as criticising the Philippine state's neoliberal strategy of labour brokerage, the discourse of migrant labour as nationalist sacrifice is an example of the kind of "flexible" workers that global capitalism demands. And as one of the world's largest sources of migrant labour export, it is clear that the Philippines is, as Tadiar (2004 p. 5) has argued, "a constitutive part of the world-system."

To return to the dialogue I am establishing between the slum chronotope and the OFW genre, I once again reference San Juan (2009), who establishes a strong link between the urban spaces of Manila and the global urban centres OFWs struggle to occupy. San Juan (2009 p. 122) suggests a parallelism between the foreign "metropole" and the "almost but not yet globalized city of Metro Manila", spaces in which the OFW figure cannot fully belong other than through consumerist practices. Commenting on the "intriguing" (San Juan 2009 p. 122) position of the OFW at home and abroad, San Juan continues with what I take as a figuration of the OFW in urban space:

> "Articulated with this transnational flux of labor, the urban experience of Filipinos at home replicates and also parodies that of residents in the global metropolis: segregation, fissured communities, ethnic tensions, and so on. Whether conceived as machine or text, Metro Manila becomes a carceral site for OFWs killing time while waiting for the next contract, the next passage of recruitment. It is also an

inhospitable conduit for commodified bodies and other damaged goods of neocolonial production/reproduction. In their alienation and deprivation, our brothers and sisters in diaspora, "slaves" of uneven globalization, may constitute the negativity of the Other, the alterity of the permanent crisis of transnational capital. I don't mean a global or international proletarian vanguard, but simply a potentially destabilizing force—they act as the dangerous alien bacilli, eliciting fear and *ressentiment*—situated at the core of the precarious racist order." (San Juan 2009 p. 122).

The OFW's position as a kind of mobile subject of the global underclass as represented in the OFW film genre, moving to and from local and global urban spaces, is what I explore further in the next section.

IV.   The OFW genre and chronotopes of in/visibility

In a New York Times article, political scientist Mon Casiple (cited in Margalit 2017) comments that instead of the typical film and television narrative of "the girl who went to Manila, got rich and came back to the barrio. Now the theme is the poor girl who becomes a domestic helper outside the country and comes back with lots of money." This is one way to locate the emplacement of the OFW genre in Philippine urban cinema. However, this observation needs further qualification in Philippine cinema studies, which this chapter attempts to initiate through the slum chronotope - OFW genre dialogue. While there is massive scholarly work on the subject of OFWs in the area of social sciences both from Philippine and international scholars, there remains a need to consolidate research on the OFW in Philippine cinema studies.[30] Selected works by leading Filipino cinema scholars, however, have certainly touched upon the subject of

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[30] In canonical Philippine literature, the OFW figure has appeared in a number of notable novels, although not necessarily as the main protagonist. A recent example is *Ilustrado* by Miguel Syjuco, which won the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2010 (a first for the Philippines). Historian Caroline Hau has explored the representation of the OFW in the novel. See HAU, C.S., 2011. 'Patria é intereses': Reflections on the Origins and Changing Meanings of Ilustrado. *Philippine Studies*, 59(1), pp. 3–54.

the OFW diaspora in critical essays, which I draw from in the succeeding overview of the OFW genre in Philippine films.

Joel David (2013a), for instance, edited a special issue of the international journal, *Kritika Kultura,* on the subject of "OFWs in Foreign Cinema." The essays included in this issue approach the OFW diaspora from different perspectives, but they all highlight that the OFW figure, whether in international films or locally produced films, is almost always the female/feminised domestic helper. In David's (2013b) absorbing essay, "Panthoms in Paradise: A Philippine presence in Holywood Cinema," he examines the "diasporic helper" in the 1967 American (queer) film, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* through a reformulation of the Filipino diasporic subject according to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. The film includes in its cast an almost forgettable Filipino character who plays "the effeminate and unruly domestic helper that a homecoming American military couple would bring from the Philippines" (David 2013b p. 566). In his analysis of this early diasporic figure, David argues that the strategies of survival by the the migrant worker can be viewed as spectral: "Tragically, this condition takes its toll first and foremost on the worker-as specter, recultured and deracinated, alienated from both host country and home nation" (David 2013b p. 565). David offers a truly radical reading of the Filipino diasporic figure in this film as a "resistant subject" (David 2013b p. 575) who initially surrenders (or disappears, in spectral terms) for survival, but resurfaces when it is tactical to act against the hostile foreign space.

Included in David's edited journal is the earlier published version of Patrick Campos' (2013) essay titled "Ghostly Allegories: Haunting as Constitution of (Trans)National (Cinema) History" which has been expanded to a more comprehensive book chapter in 2016. Campos examines the ghostly presence of Filipina domestic helpers in two internationally circulated horror films that "in the process of haunting the transnational screen, illuminates the modern drive

to maintain state sovereignty…Eminently, the ghost in the midst of transnational exchanges embodies the ideals that nation-formation ought to aspire for" (2016 pp. 541–542). He also provides a critical overview of the OFW genre that frames his spectral reading (different from David's) of the Filipina migrant worker, which proves useful to my own study.

Campos' (2016) overview of the OFW film is an extremely useful take-off point to identify the typical space and time markers of the genre. He dates the genre's emergence from the 1990s – 2000s, describing the OFW film as generally a tragic narrative of migrant workers "before, during, or after their stay in another country" (Campos 2016 p. 528). He further argues that 'The OFW film is a uniquely Filipino (i.e. national) genre, unlike films that have been categorized as "cross-culture," "accented," "exilic," or even "diasporic"…With very few exceptions, the OFW film is a national assemblage: produced by the local industry...' (Campos 2016 p. 530). Campos further notes that studio-backed OFW films, particularly the remarkably succesful Rory Quintos film, *Anak (Child)* (2000), proved so successful in the domestic and international market that they arguably served "another lifeline for the dying industry of the late 1900s" (Campos 2016 p.531).

As a genre, Campos (2016 p. 532) views the OFW narrative as something "that should never have existed, but does." This means that the genre's emergence relies heavily, and problematically, on the suffering of Filipino migrant workers in the homeland and in the host country. It is significant for my study's purposes, that many of these films are titled, with the names of the cities/countries of destination, as if these are enough to signify the OFW's global distribution. Some of these films include *Milan* (2004), *Dubai* (2005), *Barcelona* (2006) *Katas ng Saudi (Fruits of Saudi)* (2007) , and most recently, *Barcelona: A Love Untold* (2016). If the earliest examples of OFW films – '*Merika* (1984), *Sana Maulit Muli* (1995) – portray migrant subjects wanting to to return, later films

portray subjects struggling to stay permanently in their countries of destination, or at least struggling to stay until they have earned enough to go back permanently.

While David and Campos focus on the Filipino migrant's spectral represenation in films circulated overseas, Rolando Tolentino (2009) examines OCW films produced by female filmmakers in "Globalizing National Domesticity Female Work and Representation in Contemporary Women's Films." Opting to use the term Overseas Contractual Worker (OCW) over OFW, [31] Tolentino (2009 p. 426) identifies the OCW film as a "sub-genre of Philippine melodrama that deals with the social anxiety of the female OCW." He traces the OCW film from the immensely successful film feature based on Flor Contempacion's execution in Singapore – *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995) – which yielded four other related films.[32] Tolentino (2009 p. 426) argues that the "OCW film was the female response to biographical movies typified by male heroism." He further argues that the OCW film can be approached as feminist texts in terms of subject matter, as well as the fact that the three most successful studio-backed OCW films were directed by the "three out of thirteen female directors in the entire history of Philippine cinema" (Tolentino 2009 p. 426). In his readings of *Anak* (2000) and *Milan* (2014), Tolentino argues (2009 p. 439) that these films are in the end "in dialogue with the official experience of the nation-state, echoing and humanizing its rhetoric for the contemporary audience." The films do this by utilising the mode of melodrama and using the iconic "star power" of its female stars. Tolentino argues:

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[31] Tolentino does not explain why he opted to use the former term OCW (Overseas Contract Worker) in this essay, but I presume this is to highlight the temporary nature of the labour migration policy.

[32] On the four film versions of the Contemplacion story, see GUILLERMO, A., 2000. The Filipina OCW in extremis. In: TOLENTINO, R. B., ed. *Geopolitics of the visible: essays on Philippine film cultures.* Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. pp. 106-124.

"Melodrama echoes the centrality of the family unit, the sacrificing mode of the OCW character, the reiterative scope of overseas contract work, and the spectacularization of domestic work. Iconic stars act out OCW characters, invigorating the reproduceability of OCW in audiences – themselves potential OCWs – witnessing their future foretold and unfolding." (Tolentino 2006 p.439).

All of the above accounts strongly point to the chronotopic configurations of the OFW genre where space and time are fleeting, which in turn enable the creation of an OFW feminised mobile figure whose positioning can only be described as neither here nor there. The contradictory location of the OFW as a mobile figure is what informs my examination of what I call chronotopes of in/visibility. Moreover, the use of the melodramatic mode (discussed in Chapter 2) in the OFW feminised genre configures the OFW figures as moral agents, with the genre working towards uncovering "a hidden moral legibility" (Williams 1998 p. 52) through its narratives laced with the affects of female suffering.

V.   Chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW genre

What I locate as chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW film genre is akin to Hamid Naficy's (2001) conceptualisation of "open," "close," and "border" chronotopes in his well-known study of "accented cinema," which in general terms are films produced by exilic postcolonial filmmakers. As discussed in this study's introduction, Naficy (2001 p. 153) uses the theory of the chronotope much in the same way I have been using it all throughout, as "the optics in which we may understand both the films and the historical conditions of displacement that give rise to them." In his study of accented cinema, he links these chronotopes with corresponding, but not mutually exclusive, "structures of feeling" (following Raymond Williams). Naficy (2001) identifies utopian and dystopic themes in accented cinema, which in turn privilege open and close chronotopes respectively. Open chronotopes usually invoke natural and wide locations, conveying introspection; while close chronotopes often convey a sene

of claustrophobia through tight shots and small interior locations (Naficy 2010). Meanwhile, border chronotopes, or "third space" (taking after Soja) chronotopes, are located in spaces of transit, such as borders, trains stations, and airports (Naficy 2010).

What I call chronotopes of in/visibility in the OFW genre encompass Naficy's open/close/border chronotopes, functioning similarly but ascribed here to a more particular exilic narrative. These chronotopes of in/visibility, in the way that I'm formulating it here, might be more easily located in OFW films that are set outside Philippine spaces, such as in the film *Transit*, where the OFW figures struggle with issues of home and belonging in the foreign space. However, it is possible as well to develop it further to consider how this chronotope operates in OFW films that revolve around narratives of return – although this is beyond the scope of what I explore here.

I propose to locate the chronotopic configurations of in/visibility in the OFW genre, instances within the narrative structure that surface the contradictory positions that OFWs occupy in the global landscape. Chronotopes of in/visibility are what I will locate as key scenes in the OFW narrative as moments where the OFW figures enact or articulate imaginaries of spatial in/justice in a space where their very survival depends on how they are able to slip from visibility to invisibility. I locate these moments in the film's emotionally-charged scenes, where the characters are compelled to come to grips with their subjective struggles in the foreign spaces of injustice.

With the mode of melodrama present in the OFW genre, chronotopes of in/visibility are also invested with affective capacities, which is often linked to the nationalist discourse of suffering. As Tolentino and Campos have argued, Rory Quintos' *Anak* (2000) is the best example of how melodrama works effectively to romanticise and legitimise the state's nationalist discourse that helps sustain

the country's labour export policy. In my discussion of *Transit*, however, I examine how the melodramatic mode is reconfigured in a way that it disassociates sacrifice/suffering from the nationalist drive of previous OFW films. I further want to suggest that the narrative's melodramatic excesses are displaced onto the film's recurring use of wide establishing shots of Tel Aviv which are contrasted with the way migrant spaces are portrayed, particularly the tenement where the family lives.

My conceptualisation of chronotopes of in/visibility is influenced by the view of the OFW figure as "partial citizen" (Parreñas 2001) whether they are at home or overseas. I also take after the use of invisibility as a common idiom used to characterise the marginalised conditions of migrants in host countries. The temporary nature of the OFW in the host land makes it rather distinct in that they might be viewed as being in a constant state of visibility and invisibility – they are there, but they are not there. Their presence is necessary in the host country, which is dependent on their cheap labour, and yet they are not recognised as full citizens. My understanding of the OFW's in/visibility or "partial citizenship" is different from Tolentino's (2009 p. 433) characterisation of the domestic worker as "partial citizen in the homeland, and an absent citizen doing domestic work in the host land," as I am more interested in the practices of social agency that migrant workers enact in the host land. The notion of "partial citizenship" sheds light on the contradictory configurations of the OFW figure in actuality and in cultural represenations, such as the spectral presence examined by David and Campos.

According to Parreñas (2001 p. 1130): "Partial citizenship broadly refers to the stunted integration of migrants in receiving nation-states…" She explains the ironic logic behind partial citizenship, as such: "…globalization stunts the political, civil, and social incorporation of low-wage labor migrants – both male and female – inasmuch as it increases the demand for their labor" (Parreñas

2001 p. 1134). However, despite and because of this position of being partial citizens whose rights (for instance, the right to residency) are always in question, migrants find means to negotiate and lay claim to the right to belong in the host country. In other words, they find means to become visible while remaining invisible. In her study of *Tinig* (Voice) *Filipino*, a magazine based in Hong Kong and Italy that features articles written by OFWs themselves, Parreñas (2001) powerfully illuminates the strong sense of agency that OFWs express, despite their precarious conditions overseas. One of the striking findings raised in this study, in my view, is how OFWs themselves articulate critiques of the state's nationalist rhetoric in representing them as "new economic heroes" (Parreñas 2001 p. 1141). They also articulate solidary with fellow migrants workers around the world as a way to establish an imagined community, given their partial citizenship in their host country (Parreñas 2001).

The spatio-temporal configrations of the OFW genre that enable chronotopes of in/visibility depend on where it is set, and what strand of OFW narrative it belongs to (biographical/fictional/diasporic). Like the melodramatic mode's "return to innocence" (raised in Chapter 2), I propose that the OFW genre is governed by the "structuring presence of return," be it to the homeland or to the host country, or back and forth. *Anak*, for example, narrates the return of the OFW figure to the homeland, but the female lead's narrative is often interrupted by flashbacks of her suffering as a domestic helper in Hong Kong. The narrative then moves back and forth in terms of time and space, ultimately ending in the OFW's decision to return to the host country when her savings run out. The character's movements shift from visibility in the homeland to invisibility in flashbacks: visibility when she reconnects with her family, and invisibility when she returns to Hong Kong. Contrary to the film's exposition, the OFW figure returns not to the homeland but to the host country, with the film's ending suggesting complicity with the state's policy of labour brokerage.

The flipside of OFW films like *Anak* are films set in the host country where time and space are also fleeting and threatened by the time of return to the homeland. *Transit* is an example of this kind of OFW film, being mostly set in Tel Aviv. The migrant figures are often confronted by the threat of abuse, deportation, and even death. Because time and space can run out any moment, the affects of suffering and sacrifice provided by the melodramatic mode can be coupled with the affect of fear. The irony is that the migrant figure strives to remain in the precarious foreign space, for fear of returning home without economic gains. The time of return that is feared, in this sense, is the time of *premature* return. It is in OFW films set in the host country where chronotopes of in/visibility play out as enactments of spatial appropriation, as imagined in the ways the migrant figures attempt to circumvent the threat of deportation.

In line with this study's overall aim of locating spatial justice, I am interested in examining how a film like *Transit* grants time and space to enable its migrant figures to exercise agency through spatial appropriation.

VI.   Transit

Among recent offerings of the OFW narrative in Philippine independent cinema, *Transit* is arguably the most successful in terms of national critical acclaim and international circulation.[33] The first feature film of Hannah Espia, the film received the Best Film award at the Cinemalaya Film Festival, competed in the Busan International Film Festival, and was the country's entry for the Academy Awards in the category of Best Foreign Language Film. Espia was awarded

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[33] There are other independent OFW films within the Philippine indie scope, but *Transit* stands out as the most popular, as well as the most exemplary film that lends itself to readings of spatial justice and dialogue with films set in Manila slums. Other independent OFW films from the 2000s possibly include *Cavite* (Neil Dela Llana and Ian Gamazon 2005), *Fidel* (Mark Bacolod 2009), *Halaw* (Sheron Dayok 2010), *Migrante* (Joel Lamangan 2012)*, Edna* (Ronnie Lazaro 2014), and *Magtanggol* (Sigfreid Barros Sanchez 2016). It may also be possible to include acclaimed filmmaker, Lav Diaz's earlier film *Batang Westside* (2001), which takes place in New Jersey. Interestingly, Brillante Mendoza has yet to make an OFW film.

Best Director in Cinemalaya and the Gawad Urian Awards, a valuable addition to the small number of established female filmmakers in Philippine cinema.

Transit is told through the intersecting vignettes of its five characters, set roughly during the period that Israel issued a new law that sought to deport migrant worker's children below the age of five (roughly 2009-2010). There's middle-aged Irma, the domestic helper whose work visa has run out, and her teenage daughter, Yael, who is half-Israeli and does not comprehend Tagalog. The other set in the cast of characters is father and son, Moises and Joshua. Moises is Irma's younger brother who works as a caregiver, while the four-year-old Joshua is his Hebrew-speaking son from his estranged Filipina partner. Finally, there's Tina, a newly arrived domestic worker whom Irma helps settle into Tel Aviv.

The film has generally received warm reviews abroad, especially in terms of portraying the difficult subject of migration. One noteable review raises the moral issue that underpins the narrative as well as the film's potential as transnational product: "Thought provoking and carefully constructed to expose the complexity of the matter at hand in an encompassing fashion, Espia's film delves into a defining part of the modern Filipino identify, one that affects those abroad and in the island nation. Giving each of the participants a particular voice paints a broad picture which questions the morality of the policy at the center of the story" (Aguilar 2013). It is not just the morality of the policy, however, the *Transit* is able to surface, but the morality of the characters in their individual struggles with the implications of the new deporation policy.

By using a non-modular narrative format, the film already attempts to distance itself from the typical OFW film narrative, inviting a complex reading of the different ways by which the five characters negotiate their precarious emplacement as members of the OFW diaspora. Each vignette adds more

depth to the characters' individual conflicts as they contend with the implications of the new deporation law. The film is bookended with scenes at the airport, with the vignettes gradually coming together to reveal how Joshua is discovered by immigration police. The vignettes are told from the perspective of the oldest character to the youngest, with the story of the newcomer Tina's episode serving as the film's halfway mark.

Apart from the non-modular narrative structure, *Transit'*s choice of filming in Israel is new in the OFW genre. Saudi Arabia remains the most popular country of destination for labourers and engineers because of the high demand and the high rates of pay, while the United States arguably remains the promised land in the imagination of many Filipinos given its enduring colonial influence (Abacan 2015; Gavilan 2015; Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2015). The number of OFWs in Israel is not large relative to the estimated 2.4 million in Saudi Arabia – there are an estimated 31,000 OFWs in Israel (Philippine Embassy in Israel n.d.), not counting those who have overstayed their visas. Despite the relatively low population compared to top OFW destinations, since Israel started to import more workers in the 90s, Filipino caregivers have become a recongisable migrant group in the country next to Romanians who work in construction and Thais in agriculture (Bartram 1998 p. 314). The Hebrew word for "care-giving" (*metapelet)* has come to stand for Filipina in Israel (Margalit 2017), just as Filipina is defined in the Greek dictionary as "domestic servant" (Aguilar 2003; Tolentino 2009). In Hong Kong, Filipina has come to mean maid, while in Canada, Taiwan and Italy, it has come to be synonymous with nanny (Tolentino 2009).

OFWs in Israel

Before turning to the film's chronotopes of in/visibility, some background on the OFW community in Israel is necessary. Israel's relative unpopularity as OFW destination can be partly explained by the fact that Filipinos are restricted to

working in the country as care givers to the ageing Israeli population. Israel is also imagined as the relatively safer country of destination in the Middle East, compared to the risks involved in going to Saudi Arabia, which can certainly be traced back to the lasting impact of Contemplacion's execution. As Claudia Liebelt (2011 p. 3) has argued in her remarkable ethnographic research on Filipina caregivers in Tel Aviv (which I reference frequently in this section), in the global heirarchy of destinations: "Israel now holds a middle position, above most Asian and Middle Eastern destination countries, where many women were employed before coming to Israel, but clearly below Western Europe and Northern America, to which many dream of going." In some accounts, OFWs who have previously worked in other countries in Asia and the Middle East express desire to work in Israel, seeking more "humane" conditions (Willen 2003).

In a recent visit to the Philippines, the Israeli minister of Foreign Affairs, Mark Sofer (cited in Diola 2015), differentiates Israel from other host countries as being a safe place for OFWs. He claims: "We treat—we feel that we do, and we do—[Overseas Filipino Workers] with the highest legal system that we have in place, the wages that we have, they don't suffer" (cited in Diola 2015). Sofer also said: "Any other areas around us where Philippine workers may not have the same—I'll stop there without completing that particular sentence. But in Israel, there is never that feeling at all" (cited in Diola 2015). While there are certainly no landmark cases of abuse of OFWs in Israel comparable to Contemplacion's execution, the foreign minister's claim that "they don't suffer" is a clear overstatement, beginning from the very status of documented OFWs as dependent on their Israeli employer. The very nature of the caregiving profession as a 24-hour cycle, on-call job, also raises questions about workers' rights, which is part of the reason that this consuming round-the-clock profession was outsourced to foreign workers. The formal system of foreign careworkers "enabled the employment of a worker for incomparably more

hours" (Jackson 2011 p. 57) than Israeli workers. Some studies have also raised the experience of isolation that care givers are bound to contend with (Ayalon and Shiovitz-Ezra 2010; Ayalon 2012). Bringing family members from home is forbidden during the migrant worker's period of stay (normally lasting a few years until the employer dies) in order to emphasise the temporary nature of the job (Ayalon and Shiovitz-Ezra 2010).

It was in 1993 when *ovdim zarim* or non-Jewish "foreign workers" started arriving in Israel following a recruitment campaign in response to the shortage of workers (Bartram 1998; Jackson 2011; Liebelt 2011). In the 1960s, Palestinian workers dominated the 3D (dangerous, dirty demeaning) jobs in Israel, following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Bartram 1998). This need for non-Jewish foreign workers in Israel is generally dated to the gradual removal of Palestinian workers from the Israeli labour market following the 1987 Palestinian Intifada (Bartram 1998; Jackson 2011; Liebelt 2011). Some of the policies that the Israeli government have formulated for foreign migrants were derived from restrictions made on Palestian workers, such as carrying work permits that bear the name of the worker's Israeli employer. Liebelt (2011) explains that the Israeli Ministry of Health specifically targeted the recruitment of Filipino workers in 1995, with the desire to shift nursing care work from public care institutions to private homes in order to cut costs. This recruitment drive was actually named the "Filipino Plan" which "points to the policy-makers' ethnic preference for carers" (Liebelt 2011 p. 28).

The Filipino carers community in Israel gradually grew, along with other *ovdim zarim* (Bartram 1998; Liebelt 2011). What the Israel government did not anticipate was that despite the temporary nature of the international labour recruitment policy, many foreign workers would overstay their visa and would seek to reside permanently in the country, albeit illegally. The visible core of international labour migration in Israel is undoubtedly Tel Aviv, with a quarter of

the city's overall population now made up of roughly 60 to 80,000 migrant workers (Willen 2003). The neighbourhoods in the southern areas of Tel Aviv, particularly Neveh Sha'anan where the Central Bus Station is located, are now known as the parts of the city where Filpino migrant workers gather when they are able to take time off from their employers (Willen 2003; Liebelt 2011).

The migrant spaces of Tel Aviv is indicative of the larger social divide within the city, particularly between the affluent spaces in the "White City" (areas north of the city) and the impoverished spaces of the "Black City" (south of the city) in terms of built environment (Rotbard 2015). Sharon Rotbard's (2015) recently published study on the development of Tel Aviv's urban spaces harshly deconstructs the myths behind the state's construction of the "White City" which was granted the status of UNESCO heritage site in 2003 (World Monuments Fund n.d.). According to Rotbard (2015), the White City covers neighbourhoods north of Tel Aviv where 4,000 buildings stand for the modernist Bauhaus architectural style. It is also a metonym for the projection of Tel Aviv itself as a modern city through what Rotbard (2015 p.25) calls its "architectural narrative." The "Black City" which covers the southern parts of Tel Aviv and the once Palestinian-inhabited area of Jaffa now stands in direct contrast to the White City, "an out-migration of middle-class residents, a public image of crime and insecurity, infra-structural neglect and a generally low standard of living" (Liebelt 2011 p. 131).

It is within the Black City spaces of Tel Aviv that OFWs produce their own Philippine spaces: in their shared rented rooms in abandoned old tenements, in the Central Bus Station (CBS) that Filipinos called *takana,* the shortened and "tagalised" version of the Hebrew word for the station, and more significantly, a passage in the shabby CBS building that is now referred to as "Manila Avenue" (Liebelt 2011 p. 129). CBS, according to Leibelt's (2011 p. 149) research, is "the most important space for sociality of Filipinos in Israel."

From the above account, what I want to emphasise is the transposition of the urban imaginary of Manila, including its slum imaginaries, into the foreign city of Tel Aviv through the production of spaces initiated by the very presence of OFWs. Manila Avenue, as the name suggests, attempts to recreate the imaginary of Manila in this passage of the CBS building where stalls sell Filipino products like magazines and DVDs of Filipino movies, as well as homemade Filipino food (Liebelt 2011). Most of the interviewees in Leibelt's research expressed that Manila Avenue "feels" like being in Manila (Liebelt 2011). It is also significant to note that Manila Avenue is not regarded as a beautiful space even by the Filipinos who spend most of their weekends there. In Leibelt's interviews with OFWs, they often compare CBS to poor provincial *barrios* (towns) in the Philippines. One interviewee who previously worked in Japan expressed disappointment when she first arrived at the bus station: "…when I came from the airport and came here, I thought: it's not so beautiful. I thought Israel was a very developed country" (cited in Leibelt 2011 p. 152).

The spaces of migrant workers in the Black City became targets of the state's deportation campaign that gradually took effect (Willen 2003; Jackson 2011). In response to the unprecedented presence of foreign workers in Israel, the state created new measures against undocumented migrants, which led to massive deportations (Willen 2003). The state ramped up its anti-immigration policies in 2002 under then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (Willen 2003). It was during this year that Immigration Police was established, as well as other agencies dedicated to deportations (Willen 2003). The deportation campaign was partly justified by the state as a measure against unemployment and the protection of the country's Jewish identity (Willen 2007). The deportation campaign saw the initiation of several techniques, which includes police surveillance, racial profiling, and the setting up of an "information hotline" where illegal migrants can be reported (Willen 2007). In 2009, Israel's deportation measures targeted

the estimated 1,200 children of undocumented foreign migrants below the age of five (Guarnieri 2010), which serves as the backdrop of *Transit's* narrative.

The intensification of Israel's attitude towards foreign workers has created what Leibelt (2011 p. 144) calls a "topography of fear," at the same time that it creates a "temporalization of presence." Moreover, Israel's deportation policies have instigated a sense of "fatalism" given the ever-present "realization that one's stay in Israel could end at any moment" (Liebelt 2011 p. 144). More significantly, according to Sarah Willen's (2007 p. 23) ethnographic research among illegal migrants in Israel: "Changing configurations of illegality in Israel have reshaped not only migrants' experiences of embodiment and time, but also their experiences of space." Migrants have had to learn to behave in certain ways in order to avoid suspicion, with illegality "incarnated" (Willen 2007 p. 19) in the ways migrants "use, move around in, and present – or hide – their bodies" (Willen 2007 p. 19).

It is within the precarious conditions outlined above that the migrant narrative of *Transit* takes place. *Transit* is an exceptional visual narrative that is able to represent how migrant workers in the particular context of the city of Tel Aviv learn to survive, despite and because of the ever-present threat of deportation. In the next section, I turn to the film's chronotopes of in/visibility to examine how *Transit* surfaces the various means through which the migrant figures approach subjective formation in the foreign spaces of injustice.

VII. Chronotopes of in/visibility and spatial in/justice in *Transit*

While composed of vignettes, the narrative structure of *Transit* might be viewed as progressing from the past to the future of a migrant family, as it begins from the perspective of the oldest character and ends with youngest. In terms of screen time, Joshua's final story occupies the longest, making him the

privileged character in this narrative told through the mode of melodrama. In other words, Joshua is the character who needs to be saved from deportation. His potential deportation is the overall narrative's core conflict, the point where all the other narratives converge. It is Joshua, after all, who is in the most danger of deportation by virtue of his age.

What is immediately noticeable in the first viewing of *Transit* is the regular use of wide establishing shots of the city's skyline as transition markers, which contrasts with the more prevalent use of tight framing throughout the film, especially in scenes shot inside the migrant family's apartment. The wide shots of the sky, rooftops, roads, and coastline, all serve to signify the available spaces in the city. These are not necessarily spaces of affluence, but spaces that convey a range of positive values like beauty, peace, joy, and justice – that this migrant family do not regualry have access to because of their difficult emplacement between visibility and invisibility.

I proceed in the succeeding discussion by analysing chronotopes of in/visibilty as configured by the characters that can be usefully be contrasted in terms of how they navigate through the difficulties of partial citizenship. I contrast the character configurations of Irma and Moises, the parental figures of the narrative, followed by a discussion of the young female characters, Tina and Yael. I then examine Joshua's character who serves as the film's most radical figure of spatial appropriation, even though this attempt ultimately fails. Finally, in the last section, I will examine the montage of spaces that the film uses in its concluding scenes, up to the rolling of credits where the father and son are waiting for their luggage at the Philippine airport.

This chapter argues that *Transit* is an extremely valuable contribution to the development of Philippine urban cinema, as it offers productive imaginaries of

spatial in/justice that are ultimately disassociated from the melodrama of nationalist sacrifice traditionally prescribed in the OFW film.

A. Irma and Moises

Irma and Moises can be juxtaposed in terms of how they choose to navigate the foreign spaces of Tel Aviv given the similarities and differences of their subject positions. Both of them have made the conscious decision to remain in Tel Aviv, with some degree of assimilation signified by their ability to speak Hebrew. It is also clear that both have chosen to continue raising their children in Israel despite the new law aimed at deporting children below the age of five. While both are employed in care work, the most striking difference between the two is that Irma's visa has run out, while Moises is a documented caregiver. In the succeeding discussion, what I want to show is how both characters stand for migrant parents who stake their claims in the foreign space in order to pursue a better life for their children.

Irma, the mother figure, seeks a stronger bond with her daughter who identifies as Israeli. Despite the restrictions she faces as undocumented worker, she expresses an urge to connect with others especially in her efforts to help the newly arrived Filipina migrant, Tina. On the other hand, Moises, who can be considered a "feminised" figure given his job as caregiver, is portrayed to be the more reserved character whose main concern is to keep his child safe by hiding him from authorities. Despite their conflicting means of striving towards spatial justice in the foreign space, they do so out of the desire to keep their family together. Let me explain my assertions further through locating each character's chronotopes of in/visibility that reveal the different means by which these migrant characters stake their claims over the foreign space.

Irma as migrant mother

Transit opens with a wide-framed shot of Joshua's small figure inside an airport, his back turned, looking out towards the airplanes at the tarmac (the same scene the film returns to at the end). It then cuts to a close up of Irma, whose character sets off the film's non-modular narrative. Irma's roughly ten-minute vignette begins and ends with her failing to reach someone on mobile – her teenage daughter who has gone out against Irma's explicit warning to stay indoors. This scene points to Irma's main conflict: miscommunication between her and her daughter who does not speak nor understand Tagalog. This language barrier is just the surface of Irma and her daughter's cultural and social differences, articulated fully in Irma's emotional outburst when her daughter returns home.

Irma stands for the illegal migrant who has opted to overstay her visa and raise her daughter in a country not her own. Informed by this initial characterisation, there are two key scenes that function as Irma's chronotopes of in/visibilty. The first is a sequence leading to a brush with an immigration officer, and the second is a powerful confrontation scene with her daughter.

On the first chronotope of in/visibility: Irma is shown to move cautiously on the streets of Tel Aviv as she makes her way to her employer's house. Unable to leave Joshua with a Filipino neighbour who on that day is already hiding a number of Filipino children in her apartment, Irma opts to take Joshua with her to work. In this walking sequence, Irma's sense of fear can be seen in her gestures. Wearing sunglases, she looks around and carefully chooses which street to walk through. She urges Joshua to walk faster. When stopped by a policeman and asked for her visa, Irma pretends that she left it at home. Luckily, her employer comes out to vouch for her and Joshua. Inside, as Irma starts cleaning as though nothing happened, her well-meaning employer berates her, reminding Irma to think of the safety of Joshua and her daughter.

This scene brings to light the risks that Irma knowingly takes on an everyday basis, as well as the sense of fear she carries with her as she makes her way through the more visibly affluent spaces of the city. Irma's good relationship with her employer is what saves her in that moment of crisis, at the same time that it reveals the servitude on which their relationship is predicated. Irma's employer says to the officer: *"They are with me. I'm Devorah Katz. I'm sorry but they are with me."* By stating her name, Irma's employer asserts the validity of her full citizenship, on which her migrant employee's partial citizenship is based on.

And yet, in the space of dwelling that she shares with her family, Irma slips back into comfortable visibility. Despite the cramped and shabby interior of her apartment, here, Irma is fully in charge. She becomes just one of the many residents of Tel Aviv, as signified by a wide shot of the row of buildings where Irma's apartment belongs, her dwarfed image shown draping the day's laundry on the balcony. Irma also welcomes Tina, the newcomer, with open arms when she arrives at the apartment and is offered a small room to stay. In the kitchen, Irma cooks *adobo*, a Filipino dish, commenting in jest at how her daughter doesn't know how to cook the dish: *"Every Filipina knows how to cook adobo."*

I locate the second chronotope of in/visibility in this vignette's powerful emotional scene, where the dialogue's use of the idiom of in/visibility reveals the depth of Irma's precarious emplacement in the foreign space that she fears she cannot share with her daughter, Yael. Upon her daughter's return, Irma explodes with the following lines, symbolically delivered in Tagalog:

> **Irma** *(in Tagalog): "We didn't know where to find you…We couldn't call the police! What's wrong with you? Don't you understand the situation? How can you be so irresponsible?* **Can't you see me? Here I am. Your mother! Don't you see me?** *Don't you know what I'm going through?"*

This emotional outburst's full force, however, is not conveyed fully to her daughter who can only sense Irma's anger, but fails to grasp the words.

> **Yael** *(sobbing, speaks in Hebrew): What are you saying? I don't understand you.*
>
> **Irma** *(in Tagalog)*: *You don't understand? Why don't you understand? You are Filipino, you should know how to speak Filipino. You are Filipino! You are not Israeli!*

When Yael protests, Irma suddenly slaps her and reiterates: *"Your mother is Filipino. You can't change that."* The scene then abruptly cuts to and ends with the opening scene where Irma fails to reach Yael's mobile.

This powerful chronotope of in/visibility wields the melodramatic mode in a way that reveals Irma's wager in staying in the foreign space where she is not only a partial citizen, but an invisible one given her undocumented status. It is a scene that compresses time and space for this migrant mother, all the years of struggle and hiding in the foreign space where she raised her daughter whose Israeli father has long disappeared (Irma's explanation: *"Let's not talk about that. That's a long time ago").* This affective scene surfaces Irma's fear as a migrant mother—that as she struggles to keep herself invisible as an illegal migrant, she is also becoming invisible to her daugher who is more at home in the foreign space that rejects Irma's presence.

Moises as migrant father

The relative mobility of Moises as a documented worker compared to Irma's illegal status is immediately conveyed through his entry in the narrative. Moses is on board a moving bus, making his way through idyllic coastal scenes from Herzliya, where his employer resides, to join his family in Tel Aviv. Covering twice the screen time of Irma's vignette, Moises' episode is overlaid by his

voiceover that tells the legend of "The Sun and the Moon" which he uses to expose the absence of Moises' mother from their lives.

Even as a documented migrant worker, Moises expresses fear over deportation not so much for himself but for Joshua, who is the target of the new deportation law. In contrast to his older sister, Moises favours a more conservative approach against anti-immigration policies. He dissuades his sister from signing a petition against the deporation law, raising suspicion and resignment. When Irma asks if Tina, who by this time is in danger of being deported, can hide with them, Moises vehemently rejects the request saying it will just cause them more trouble: *"What's with you? Do you want Yael to get in trouble? You want to risk everything because Tina wants to break the law?"* In short, Moises thinks that if they try to keep within the law as best they can by hiding from it, there is a chance they might actually escape it.

The very inclusion of Moises in this migrant narrative as a caregiver is a valuable expansion of the discourse of labour migration that has so far focused on female workers. While not entirely subscribing to post-feminist claims that question the discourse of the feminisation of labour, there is definite value in casting a wider net in migrant studies to include the particular struggles that male migrants contend with.[34] Interestingly, Moises in *Transit* is engaged in care work, broadly considered feminine work, unlike seafaring or construction, which are popular professions for male migrant workers in the Middle East. The character of Moises, and the subjective conflicts he contends with in *Transit*, shores up the possible reconfigurations – although not necessarily progressive values — of traditional gender roles brought about by the phenomenon of global migration. The instances that Moises stands his ground against his older sister's

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[34] See for instance, CRUZ, R.I., 2012. Figures of Migration: Gender, Kinship, and the Politics of Representation. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 60(4), pp. 513–554.

wishes might be considered masculine assertions in a space where he feels emasculated.

This gendered dimension of emasculation that underpins Moises' struggle over space is reinforced in the scenes I locate as chronotopes of in/visibility in his vignette. There are two powerful affective scenes that I explore further: first, the scene where he seeks out his estranged wife, and second, the scene of his emotional outburst at the detention centre where he resists Joshua's deportation.

The emotional scenes that function as chronotopes of in/visibility are preceded by tender moments between father and son, such as a scene of Joshua playing by the port while his father watches, and the two playing in the garden of Joshua's employer. Moises' relationship with his employer, Eliav, is also portrayed as an affectionate one, with Eliav expressing genuine concern for Joshua, although it is one that is still uncomfortably underpinned by money. The conversation that ensues when Moises is pushing Eliav on his wheelchair through an idyllic neigbourhood reveals this employer-employee relationship framed through the economy of care. Eliav finds out that it is Joshua's birthday and insists on giving the boy some money. Eliav challenges Moises' refusal: "*Don't argue with me. I have a lot of money you know.*"

The first chronotope of in/visibility is framed through Moises' voiceover, recounting the legend of "The Sun and Moon" to Joshua as a bedtime story. In gist, the story explains that the Moon had to hide his child from the Sun to keep it from burning. In the encounter that ensues, Moises suggests that the Sun in the legend is Joshua's mother, who left to marry an Israeli man.

The encounter between Moises and Susan (the estranged wife) in a dream-like scene by the coastline is possibly the film's most visually striking moment. The

scene is framed in a wide shot that includes sea and sky, foregrounded by sand, as Moises' small figure approaches a woman standing on the beach. There is nobody else there. The scene then cuts to a medium close up of the two figures in a sparse, yet emotionally-charged, conversation. Moises implores that Susan and her Israeli husband adopt Joshua until he turns five and he's eligible for residency. Susan refuses, followed by an exchange where Susan chastises Moises:

> **Susan:** *"You can't hide him forever Moises."*
> **Moises**: *"He's almost five. Soon he'll be eligible for residency."*
> **Susan:** *"And then what? When he's five, there'd be another law, and you'll hide him again? Have pity on the child, Moises.*

The conversation further reinforces the dialogue between the imaginary of the migrant worker with the urban imaginary of Manila, just as it emphasises that the choice to move and remain overseas is a valid one.

> **Susan:** *"Why don't you just go home to Manila? Get a job there!"*
> **Moises:** *"We have a good life here. And what job will I get there? It's better to hide here than to starve there."*

After a brief pause, Moises pointedly responds to Susan's unflinching stance:

> **Moises**: *"We're not so different. You chose to be imprisoned in your Israeli husband's beautiful house instead of starving with us."*
> **Susan:** *"How long do you plan to do this?"*
> **Moises:** *"As long as I can."*
> **Susan:** *"Moises, you should know when to give up."*

In response, Moises walks away, leaving the small figure of Susan alone on the beach. This dream-like scene is abruptly interrupted by the scene of the second chronotope of in/visibility, where Moises is interrogated by an officer about Joshua. Joshua has been discovered. Moises tries to reason with the officer by

saying that his son is almost five and speaks Hebrew. Moises starts sobbing. The officer abruptly asks about his wife, and when Moises responds that he does not have one, the officer suspects that he might be hiding her identity as an illegal migrant. This provokes an outburst from Moises who shouts, through tears: *"She's not my wife! She's married to an Israeli. She left us, okay? She's not my wife!"* To this, the officer responds definitively that Joshua has to be deported, and the vignette closes with Moises shouting his protests.

Similar to Irma's vignette, the melodramatic mode is utilised in the chronotopes of in/visibility to shore up Moises' masculine anxieties as a significant dimension of his subjective formation. His masculinity is reconfigured in the foreign space both by the nature of his profession and by the absence of his wife, recasting the male migrant figure in a different light that seves to expand the discourse of the feminisation of migrant labour. The short scene with the wife, while brief, also points to the reconfiguration of parenting itself in the migrant space. Migration research has indeed pointed to the emergence of the "transnational family" and the changing nature of childhood and parenting brought about by the OFW phenomeneon (Parreñas 2005; Arguillas and Williams 2010; Madianou and Miller 2013; Nagasaka and Fresnoza-Flot 2015). Is Susan a bad mother in suggesting that Moises stop hiding Moises from the law, or is Moises a bad parent for wanting to hide Moises? The confrontation scene does not offer a definitive answer. Although the film is clearly more sympathetic to Moises, the dialogue that ensues does not absolutely condemn Susan for wanting to have a better life. In fact, the telling of the sun and the moon legend serves to absolve Susan to a degree. The fictional story, just like the dream-like scene, displaces Susan's story to another time and place, far from the struggles of father and son in Israel.

Ultimately, it is the desire to protect Joshua through the strategy of hiding that matters most when Moises is faced with the real threat of Joshua's deportation.

His earlier conservative stance of trying to keep out of sight from the law through the strategy of hiding erupts into outrage when he is told that Joshua has to be go, with his words finally articulating the injustice of the situation: *"No, you cannot do this, you cannot do this,"* he protests, as the screen cuts to black.

B. Tina and Yael

The young female characters in *Transit* can be contrasted in terms of their subjective struggles towards a notion of belonging in Israel. Tina stands for the female foreign migrant who has to learn how to orient herself in the foreign space she has just set foot in, while Yael struggles to assert her Israeli identity against her own self-doubts, as well as against her mother who takes her subjective formation as Israeli citizen as an affront to her Filipino heritage. While these two young female characters take different paths towards their notions of belonging, they are remarkably similar in terms of the aspirational desire to lay claim to a sense of full citizenship in the foreign space. Unlike the older characters, Irma and Moises, Tina and Yael are more defiant in articulating their desire to become visible; their vignettes lay bare the forms of social injustice they face in their own subjective formations in the foreign space.

Tina

While her vignette runs just over ten minutes and is identified in some reviews as a weakness in the narrative, Tina's figure is significant in unravelling the gradual configuration of the new migrant into the foreign time-space. Through Tina, the film shows how the new foreign migrant is compelled to inscribe strategies of in/visibility, contrary to one's good intentions. In a gathering among other Filipino migrants, Tina raises the scarce presence of Filipino children playing outdoors. The migrants explain that this is simply the way of life here, if you want to keep the children from being deported. In this scene, Tina is

cautioned by the older migrants to be careful, as there are cases of migrants themselves snitching on other migrants.

Tina's vignette begins and ends with a medium close up of her walking mindlessly through the city with a dazed expression. As the vignette develops, it is revealed that Tina is pregnant, which according to Israeli law means she will have to be deported. Grounded on this subjective conflict, two instances in Tina's short vignette can be located as chronotopes of in/visibility. The first takes place in her emotional scene with Irma in the small room she inhabits, which transforms from a welcoming space to a foreboding one within the vignette. The second instance occurs when she articulates her desire to stay in Israel by hiding, which Moises staunchly refuses.

The tiny room Tina is offered in Irma's apartment is significant in configuring her desire to belong in the foreign city. From the beginning of her vignette, her aspiration to belong is rendered visually and spatially. She steps foot in the dark hallway leading up to Irma's apartment, but the scene brightens as they ascend the staircase, with Tina's entry taking on a bright and hopeful mood. In a scene overlooking views of the city from the balcony of the apartment, Tina receives specific directions from Irma to her employer's house, suggesting that learning to map the foreign city space is key to assimilation.

This hopeful mood is cut short with a scene of Tina walking in a daze as she makes her way back to the apartment. She ascends the staircase in a mood completely opposite to the brightness of the scene when she first arrives. In this scene that functions as the first chronotope of in/visibility, she is weeping on the bed of her tiny room while Irma listens in silence, the vignette giving Tina time and space to articulate the injustice of her situation which is ascribed a gendered facet: *"I wish I could just lie here. But that's not how it is. Because women can't just lie down."* She continues with a line that signals her desire to

stay, not just in the room, but in the foreign space: *"I don't want to get up. I just want to remain here. But why is that – why is he allowed to stay? They're deporting me…but why only me? The guy who got me pregnant, why doesn't he have to go?"* She further articulates the fear of premature return when she says: *"I haven't earned enough yet."* In the next scene, it is morning, and Tina defiantly stands her ground in her tiny room when she flings open the window that overlooks the city.

The second scene that functions as chronotope of in/visibility once again features a defiant Tina who counters Moises' staunch refusal of her desire to stay in Israel: *"It's all about your children! It's all about you! What about my child? What about me?"* What this scene does is strip Moises off of his moral ascendancy, as his desire to hide Joshua from authorities is not so different from Tina's desire to remain in Israel as an undocumented worker. The highway corner in which this scene is set contributes to the levelling off of Moises and Tina, who are both just trying to find available spaces in the vastness of the foreign city.

Tina's vignette reinforces the film's overall use of the melodramatic mode to surface subjective wagers for spatial justice. Her emotional outbursts grant her time and space to lay claims to spatial justice in her desire to remain in the foreign space, albeit through hiding. The chronotopes of in/visibility succeed in interrogating the ironic grounds of immigration laws, where "these workers provide care for the citizenry of various receiving nations at the cost of the denial of their own reproduction…and membership in the nation-state they are reproducing" (Parreñas 2001 p. 1130).

Yael

Among all the characters in *Transit*, it is Yael who naively believes she can lay claim to full citizenship, not fully understanding the precarity of her situation as

the daughter of an undocumented female migrant. It is useful to contrast her social and cultural embeddedness in Tel Aviv with Tina who is just beginning to emplace herself within the city. That Yael does not speak nor understand any Tagalog is indicative of her distance from her mother's culture, and she also does not express any strong desire to do so. In a scene where she is among other children of Filipino migrants who express thoughts of going to the Philippines given the new immigration laws, Yael retorts in Hebrew: *"That's silly. We passed the residency criteria. I don't think the Philippines is our home."* And yet, in other instances, she reveals a degree of understanding of her precarious position. An example is the scene where her Israeli boyfriend, Omri, suggests that they do something to oppose the new deporation law. Yael replies: "*What can I do about it? Everyone is just scared. We're not Israeli like you…so all we can do is obey the rules or hide.*" As opposed to her Israeli boyfriend, Yael does not consider herself Israeli, but against her mother, she tends to assert her Israeli identity.

The film's fourth vignette opens and closes with a view of Yael from above as she looks up at the sky with a pensive facial expression, conveying her mood as she attempts to understand her situation in Tel Aviv. This rather peaceful scene on the rooftop of the tenement building contrasts with the emotional scene between mother and daughter, staged on the same space the night before.

There are two scenes that function as chronotopes of in/visibility in Yael's vignette. The first is a scene inside the house, where Irma orders Yael to stay indoors. Having come home to see her daughter in a tender moment with Omri just outside their apartment, Irma berates her daughter for her public display of affection*,* but her words obviously belie deeper reasons for her anger that is laced with fear: *"I didn't raise you that way. You have to break up with him. I'm taking you out of school…You will stay home starting tomorrow."* This string of sentences might seem like a completely absurd overreaction to Yael simply

spending time with her boyfriend, but the exchange that ensues reveal that Irma perceives the Israeli boyfriend's presence as a threat to her daughter's security. Moreover, the confrontation confirms the Yael feels her position in Israel is far removed from that of her mother's:

> **Yael:** *But you're being unfair.*
> **Irma:** *You know what's unfair? This new law is unfair. The governemnt is. Life is unfair. What if they deport you?*
> **Yael**: *They won't! I'm qualified to stay.*
> **Irma**: *You're not sure of that! You are Filipino!*
> **Yael**: *No! You are Filipino! I am Israeli.*

This last line from Yael leaves her mother stunned and silenced, at the same time that it reveals the chasm between mother and daughter triggered and exacerbated by the new derportation law. This emotional exchange reveals that Yael considers herself far deserving to remain in Israel, to become visible, which she perceives to be her right to citizenship that her mother is denying her.

Yael stages a defiant attempt to distance herself literally and symbolically from her mother in her foray outside the city of Tel Aviv, risking a trip to Jerusalem's Western Wall with Joshua, upon the invitation of Omri. Skyline views similar to those used in Tina's vignette as she was looking outside her window beckons Yael, as she looks out the balcony from her bed on the day she is forbidden to go out. What follows is a romantic montage set at the Western Wall, overlaid with the voice-over of Omri. Yael affectionately watches Omri and Josua from behind a fence overlooking the male section the wall, where Omri teaches Joshua how to pray. It is beyond my scope to comment on the culturally specific social, religious, and gender divisions that the space of the Western Wall produces.[35] However, as regards Yael's subjective formation, what I wish to

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[35] See for instance, CHARME, S.L., 2005. The Political Transformation of Gender Traditions at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 21(1), pp. 5–34.

note are the ironies in the montage of images strongly associated with Israeli-Jewish identity that Yael does not have access to. Yael gazes at the scenes with a strong sense of longing and even joy, and yet she cannot fully participate in the prayers. Ironically, it is Omri's voice praying for peace that accompanies the beautiful images in this montage.

It is on this day that Yael takes Joshua to Jerusalem that she returns to face her mother's anger. This emotional scene moves to the rooftop that functions as the second chronotope of in/visibility in Yael's vignette, where mother and daughter attempt to bridge their distance. Both are weeping, with the camera showing reverse shots of facial close-ups. The idiom of spatial distance is used in their exchange, as Irma apologises for slapping her daughter. When Yael insists that she wants to be left alone, Irma replies:

> **Irma:** *Leave you alone? I've been doing everything so they couldn't take you away from me. Because for me, nothing can separate us. You may choose to run away. But you will always, always be with me."*

With this, mother and daughter embrace, with the backdrop of the city adding poignancy to the scene. This tearful exchange is, undoubtedly, wrought with melodrama, but is in keeping with the film's overall deployment of affect as a means of surfacing spatial in/justice according to each character's subjective concerns. In this particular scene, Yael's distance from her mother inches closer, although it is not completely closed. Irma's efforts to keep her daughter close become visible to Yael. Most importantly, although Irma's lines invoke the affect of personal sacrifice for her daughter, it is completely devoid of the nationalist discourse of sacrifice typical of mother figures in the OFW genre. This vignette's final scene suggests that there is room for Yael to grow in this foreign space. Joshua exclaims Yael has grown taller when he measures her height on a concrete wall that bear marks of the both of them growing up over

the years. These height marks on the wall are yet another assertion of these migrant children's attempts to make themselves visible in the foreign space.

Both Tina and Yael, despite knowing the risks, articulate and enact their desires to carve spaces and times for themselves in Israel, a country that rejects their presence. Both young women are depicted to be in the process of discovering themselves and their emplacement in spaces of injustice. While their individual vignettes expose the legal difficulties surrounding their struggle for space, the narrative unfolding does not portray their desires as unfounded as they struggle to make sense of the randomness of the law that determines who stays and who goes.

C. Joshua

Finally, we arrive at Joshua's vignette, which takes up the last half hour of the film's screen time. Comparable to the child seer (discussed in Chapter 1), Joshua's character functions to provide an enhanced vision of the overall narrative, as he bears witness to how the deportation law that puts him at risk affects his family members in different ways. Like my earlier discussion of the slum chronotope as constituting and circumscribing the time-space of childhood, the comparable time-spaces of Tel Aviv configure Joshua's subjective formation enabled by chronotopes of in/visibility. As mentioned in a scene where other migrants are gathered, ironically to celebrate Joshua turning four (in Tina's vignette): *"Children who live here learn how to lie at a young age…They lie because their parents teach them. The children here are taught how to hide."*

Learning how to become invisible in the foreign space runs strongly through Joshua's vignette as a normalised practice. He follows his father and aunt's instructions to stay indoors, and does not put up a fuss at being transferred from

Tel Aviv to Hezriyah. This does not mean, however, that Joshua is portrayed without a sense of agency. Joshua is shown to be astute to his older cousin's sadness at remaining indoors, even suggesting he can take care of himself if she wants to go outside. He moreover develops his own practices for turning invisible. In the scene where Irma takes Joshua to her employer's house, she gives him a scarf to wear, telling him it will make him invisible. Joshua takes Irma seriously, and wears the scarf in instances when he wants to become invisible, but not just when he is out on the streets. He puts it on inside the family's apartment, for instance, when he is caught in the middle of the emotional confrontation between his aunt and cousin. Joshua is moreover shown to be aware that it his age that puts him at risk given the new law. This is why he is keen to learn about how boys "grow up" in instances where he asks about whether he will have a Bar Mitzvah, or when he asks about the practice of male circumcision as a rite of passage in the Philippines.

Joshua's interactions with the Israeli characters are disassociated from the state's policy of deportation. His father and aunt's employers are portrayed to be affectionate towards the boy; Joshua's encounters with them suggest his embeddedness in Israeli-Jewish culture. For instance, Irma's employer serves him a piece of Israeli halfa cake. More significantly, Eliav teaches Joshua how to read from the Torah. It is also impossible to forget Joshua's scenes with Omri at the Western Wall, where Joshua is taught to pray.

In relation to the melodramatic mode that sufaces periodically in the film, it is Joshua that the narrative attempts to save in the nick of time for dramatic excess to come to fore. However, the narrative ends not with Joshua escaping the law, but with his discovery and deportation. This is the film's narrative closure, despite his innocence, kindness, and performance of worth as a potential full citizen. And it is this narrative closure precisely that sets *Transit*

apart as an OFW film. Let me qualify these claims in the following discussion of the scenes that function as chronotopes of in/visibility in Joshua's vignette.

Two scenes function as chronotopes of in/visibility in Joshua's vignette, which both reveal the arbitrariness, cruelty, and injustice of the deportation law through Joshua's affective acts of spatial appropriation. These scenes occur towards the end of the vignette, also serving as the film's culminating scenes as a whole. The first chronotope of in/visibility can be located in the scene that opens Joshua's vignette, where he is running through a street with his "invisibility" scarf on; the second is when he sings lines from the Torah in the deportation centre.

The first scene is argubaly the film's most climactic moment, although it's rendering is restrained. Joshua is left alone with his father's employer who falls off his wheelchair, seemingly unconscious. In panic, Joshua grabs his "invisibility" scarf and runs into the streets to find help, but when he turns a corner, a policeman spots him. He freezes as the policeman approaches, his hands on his head wrapped in the scarf as he says in between sobs: *"I'm invisible! I'm invisible!"* The policeman approaches, asking: *"Are you okay? Let me help you."* Joshua decides to reveal himself – he makes a conscious choice to become visible – by removing his "invisibility" scarf. He grabs the policeman by the hand and leads him back to Eliav's house.

From this street scene, the film cuts to the second chronotope of in/visibility, where Joshua is seated across an officer at the detention centre. Moises arrives and pleads emphatically against Joshua's deportation. When Moises starts protesting loudly, Joshua interrupts his father's outburst and starts singing lines from the Torah to everyone's surprise. This is Joshua's assertion of visibility as an Israeli citizen, what can be deemed a literal and symbolic performance of

worth for everyone in the detention centre to see. It is a powerful, even endearing scene – but it does not work to keep Joshua from being deported.

The last few minutes of the film is devoted to Joshua and his father preparing to leave Israel, the interim moments before Joshua's departure. *"Let's go out,"* Moises says, a statement that articulates visibility, followed by him saying that Joshua doesn't need to put on his scarf anymore. They go to the beach, where Joshua fills up a small bottle with sand, his father commenting: *"Put a bit of Tel Aviv inside. So you can bring Israel with you."* This scene on the beach directly dialogues with the scene discussed earlier with Joshua's mother telling Moises to give up his bid to stay in Israel. While this scene does indeed convey a sense of resignation, with father and son preparing to leave Israel, it is not portrayed with a sense of tragedy, but of hope.

VIII.   *Transit's* imaginaries of spatial justice

After tearful goodbyes outside the door of the apartment shared with the female members of the film's migrant family, Joshua and Moises make their way to the airport. Moises is set to come back to Israel in two weeks.

The film's culminating scenes are powerful imaginaries of spatial justice, which is done through a layering of multiple times and spaces that serve to connect this story to the larger story of global migration. The film does this in two ways in its final sequences: through storytelling and a spatial montage.

First, the assertion of the imaginary of a better future is rendered through the fictional story worlds that the migrant parents tell their children. Throughout the narrative, Irma and Moises have been telling the legend of "The Thin Man" to Joshua, a character who sets off on different adventures. The film returns to the opening scene at the airport with Joshua looking out at the tarmac, where he is

joined by his father. When the boys tells his father he is scared of losing his memories of Israel, Moises replies by invoking the story of the Thin Man: The Thin Man finds a beautiful piece of pearl in the belly of an octopus he slays with his sword. A parallel moment takes place between Irma and Yael who are standing in the kitchen of the Tel Aviv apartment. When Yael asks her mother about the ending of The Thin Man, Irma provides a different answer from Moises, saying that the story ends with the Thin Man setting off on another journey to look for a rainbow.

The above exchange shows a close-up of the hopeful facial expressions of mother and daughter, before it cuts to the film's powerful spatial montage that functions as another layer to the multiple time-spaces that the film offers as imaginaries of spatial justice. A montage of static images is captioned with words that explain Israel's deportation policy that target migrant children. These static images are all recognisable spaces used within the narrative: a view of the window in Tina's tiny room, the bedroom facing the balcony that the children play in, the rooftop wall where Yael and Joshua have marked their height through the years; a shot of the door of the tenement building; and finally, a wide shot of the Tel Aviv skyline that is captioned with this powerful line: "*Some of the children are still in hiding.*" The credits roll as father and son arrive at the Philippine airport to join other newly arrived passengers, waiting for their luggage.

The above montage can be read chronotopically as "any space whatevers," in which the captions function as "contextualizing device that would actualize the any-space whatever, transforming it from "a" space into *this* space…defined in terms of their particular use-function within a national, historical or narrative context" (Martin-Jones 2011 p. 136). The emptying of the film's recognisable spaces, devoid of the fictional characters, allows the film to locate these migrant spaces in the actual situation of foreign workers in Israel, paying close attention

to the anti-immigration law that has compelled migrant children to go into hiding. These migrant spaces offered in the captioned spatial montage are invested with affective potentials, evoking a sense of hope as well as quiet rage at the arbitrariness of the deportation law that makes children even more vulnerable.

The film's narrative closure locates itself and its characters within the larger global context of the OFW phenomenon, with the final scene of the father and son's return to the Philippine airport. By ending at the Philippine airport, the film invokes the narrative exposition in the Tel Aviv airport. This dialogue between airports situates this particular OFW film in a global non-place, or what Mark Auge (2009 p. 34) has decribed as "the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked."

The film's final sequence still conveys the affects of sacrifice and suffering ascribed to the melodramatic mode of the OFW film, but siginficantly, *Transit* is able to delink these affects from nationalist rhetoric. None of the characters articulate a romanticised desire to return to the homeland, even as they certainly strive to retain their sense of Filipino identity in the foreign space. Instead, the film links its affective moments to the spatial practice of survival through the thoughtful rendering of emotional moments in the film's chronotopes of in/visibility.

IX.   Conclusion

Transit can be approached as a new type of Philippine urban cinema, as it locates itself beyond the urban spaces of Manila into the foreign urban spaces of Tel Aviv. What I have sought to prove in this final chapter is how the slum chronotope can productively be expanded into dialogue with the chronotopes of in/visibility offered in the OFW genre, a genre that is unique to Philippine cinema. The migrant figure's struggle for spatial justice in the global urban

space is productively juxtaposed with the slum figure's struggle for spatial justice in the local urban space.

Contextualised in the spatial configurations of social segregation in the urban space of Tel Aviv, this chapter's reading of the subjective formation of the characters in *Transit* reveals subjective strategies and negotiations of visibility and invisibility. I have argued that the chronotope of in/visibility can be located in the intersecting vignettes that comprise this OFW film, as the migrant figures contend with deportation as a fact of life in a space that views them as partial citizens. The non-modular narrative of the film shows the different ways this foreign space of injustice configures subjective formation and the struggle for spatial justice.

I have shown the contrasting ways the parents in the film, Irma and Moises, strive to protect their children, emanating from their different positions as undocumented versus legal worker. Irma's character reveals a mother's struggle to remain close to her child who has been brought up in the foreign space, without any knowledge of her mother's country of origin. Moises reveals a father's masculine anxieties triggered by his perceived emasculation, as a single father engaged in what is generally considered feminised labour in a foreign space.

The young female characters, Tina and Yael, can be contrasted in terms of their means of assimilating in the foreign space. Tina articulates a sense of defiance against the injustice of immigration laws particularly against female migrants. Yael struggles with the threat of rejection from the country she considers her home, just as she strives to close the distance between her and her non-Israeli mother. The youngest character of the film, Joshua, can be viewed as the most significant migrant figure in the film, who early on has had to learn spatial practices of invisibility in order to avoid deportation. Despite being born and

raised in Tel Aviv, Joshua is the most vulnerable figure in *Transit.* His narrative exposes the injustice of the immigration given its arbitrariness. No matter how much Joshua tries to prove his worth as a full citizen, he is still not spared from deportation.

Finally, I have argued that *Transit* is a valuable example of a new OFW film that manages to depict the migrant struggle affectively through the reformulation of the melodramatic mode in terms of the politics of survival, rather than through the state's rhetoric of national sacrifice. *Transit* ultimately offers a powerful imaginary of spatial justice through its thoughtful selection and use of spaces and intersecting migrant narratives.

CONCLUSION

"Today, now more than ever, class struggle is inscribed in space."
– (Lefebvre 1991 p. 55)

The past year saw the resurgence of the slum chronotope in the global urban imaginary, not just in films, but in the international media coverage of the spate of extrajudicial killings in impoverished areas of Metropolitan Manila. Shortly after being sworn into office on June 30, 2016 with a landslide victory, President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-crime crusade took flesh, to borrow Bakhtin's words, in his rallying call to wage a war against drugs. During his campaign, Duterte promised a brutal war against drug pushers and users alike: "When I become president, I will order the police to find those people [dealing or using drugs] and kill them. The funeral parlors will be packed" (Human Rights Watch 2017).

Nobody could have imagined that this threat would actually come to pass. In a New York Times article, Filipino novelist Miguel Syjuco (2016) paints a disturbing picture of Duterte's war on drugs, locating it firmly in the slums of Manila:

> "MANILA – Mornings in the Philippines reveal bodies dumped outside slums. Averaging 13 a day, nearly 2,000 in the last two months, the bodies are hung with cardboard labels: purse snatcher, drug pusher, addict. The authorities decline to investigate." (Syjuco 2016).

Subsequent reports in international media echo similar words, locating the growing death toll in the slums of Manila. A CNN (2017) special report titled "City of the Dead" includes a detailed map of a slum neighborhood in Pasay City "where some of the most shocking killings have taken place." Each chapter of

the special report is accompanied by a series of harrowing images of dead bodies on the street, some fresh with blood. Meanwhile, Time Magazine online online posted a special series of photographs with the title: "In Manila, Death Comes by Night" (Nachtwey 2017). In late 2016, a New York Times photoseries on Duterte's war on drugs titled, "They are Slaughtering Us Like Animals," shared widely on social media, won a Pulitzer prize (Berehulak 2016). The online report features a map of the 41 sites of Manila where the photographer captured images of 57 dead. Meanwhile, in a video report, the National Geographic captured footage of blood-soaked *eskinitas* in the wake of five reported killings on one night alone (Hincks 2017).

Duterte's war on drugs is turning out to be a war on the urban poor (Wells 2017). According to reports, the executions are carried out by police and vigilantes alike. Police Station 2-Moriones in Tondo has been identified as the site of the first execution carried out under Duterte's drug war, merely hours after he was inaugrated (Evangelista 2017). Phelim Kline from the international Human Rights Watch organisation reveals that the victims are "the country's poorest, most marginalised, most vulnerable citizens" (cited in Mohan, 2016).

The heightened violence of the state's war against the urban poor is not at all difficult to relate to Philippine urban cinema. The fictional narratives in Philippine urban films assert their dialogic relationship to reality, taking flesh in the rising death toll in the slums. Bakhtin's (1981 p. 235) thoughts on the chronotopic relationship between fictional narratives and the actual world bears repeating: "Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work."

In May 2016, within the same week of the Philippine presidential elections, Philippine urban cinema's frontman, Brillante Mendoza, once again competed in

the Cannes Film Festival with a film about an urban poor family caught up in the illegal drugs trade. The film's lead actress, Jaclyn Jose, won the Best Actress award in the festival – a first for Philippine cinematic history. Set in Manila's slums and focussed on a mother dealing drugs to make ends meet, *Ma'Rosa* (2016), recalls Mendoza's trademark subject and spatio-temporal aesthetics. According to film critic Peter Bradshaw (2016):

> "Ma'Rosa, returns us to the themes of his [Mendoza's] violent shocker Kinatay from 2009 — the cynicism and corruption of the police and the city authorities, the casual violence and the desperation of the ruled-over who must make what accommodation they can with those in power. It is a tough social realist slice of life at ground level in Manila, unfolding in what feels like real time: violent, though perhaps less so than in that notorious earlier movie and with a droll habit of transcribing the banal conversations of police officers as they deal what they consider to be their paperwork." (Bradshaw 2016).

Ma'Rosa could not have been released at a more relevant time, as though foreshadowing the war on drugs, which was about to become the centrepiece of the new administration's urban campaign. But if Mendoza's decision to produce *Ma'Rosa* might have been coincidental, his involvement with some of the early projects of the new administration is more deliberate. Mendoza directed the new president's first State of the Nation Address (Cepeda 2016), and produced two probono short films for the anti-drugs campaign (GMA News Online 2016).

Mendoza's short films backing the new administration's drug war could very well encapsulate the themes of the films examined in this study of Philippine urban cinema. The first film, "Father" (2017a) depicts how a father missed key events in his daughter's life due to drug use. The second film, "Mother," (2017b) shows how a young man buys drugs with the money his mother sends from overseas, where she works as caregiver. The first invokes the masculine constuct of fatherhood; the second is grounded on the politics of sacrifice in the tradition of

the OFW genre. Both films, wielding the affective mode of melodrama, end with a direct call for drug users to change their ways.

The recent developments taking place in Manila's slum spaces and Philippine cinema, as signified by Mendoza's role in rendering more visible the state's attack on the urban poor, reinforce the need to examine the political and social imaginaries brought to light by the cinema-city nexus. The lifeless bodies of the urban poor literally and symbolically mark the streets of Manila's slums as spaces of injustice. At a time when the state's brazen disregard for the lives of the urban poor has become more visible, Philippine urban cinema's imaginaries of spatial justice also become all the more valuable.

This study of the imaginaries of spatial justice in Philippine urban cinema has responded to the challenge to strengthen the cinema-city nexus, or the dialectical relations between urban and film studies. In the matter of human geography, the study has contributed to enriching the discourse of spatial justice as applied to the study of film. In film studies, the study has offered new ways of using Bakhtin's chronotopic approach in the study of film narratives from a particular non-Western context. The study has contributed to the cinema-city nexus in two major ways, which I recapitulate in what follows.

First, this study has offered a novel, interdisciplinary theoretical framework for examining the ways social justice is revealed in and through film narratives set in the particularities of Manila's slums and its larger urban landscape. While recognising the problematic discourse of poverty pornography invoked by the urban imaginary of slums in the Third World, this study has formulated the theory of the slum chronotope as a means to think through the social, political, and ethical issues raised in the films. By formulating the slum chronotope as a theoretical tool towards the purpose of locating and examing spatial in/justice, the study has been able to diverge from the limiting route of poverty

pornography, shifting attention to the ways the narratives are productive in examining the workings of the production of space.

Through its interdisciplinary framework that draws from film, urban, and cultural theories, this study has embarked on close textual analysis of how chronotopic dialogues in Philippine urban film narratives reveal and enable subjective formation through its character configurations, even if this formation is admittedly limited. The films I have analysed arguably provide space and time for its characters to stake their claims in the struggle over the production of space in Manila's spaces of injustice. In all the films, the characters are located in moments and places where they are compelled to make decisions that bring to fore the complexities of justice – and its related moral and ethical considerations – especially when framed within the politics of survival or the desire for a better future.

The study has argued that the slum chronotope enables narrative and subjective configurations which imagine the struggle for spatial justice through tracking the characters' movements. In the coming-of-age chapter, Maximo and Ebet are compelled to pass through the space of childhood, which in the films are sites imagined as chronotopes of passage. Focussed on the movements of the children of the slums, the films reconfigure the space of childhood not just as a time of innocence, but as a period in which children learn to come to terms with violence and injustice in order to shape their futures.

In the following melodrama chapter, the mothers and grandmothers struggle for justice and survival through the spatial practice of walking that dialogues with affective chronotopes, or key moments of melodramatic excess. These affective chronotopes are assertions of life in the face of death, care in the face of oppression, and resilience in the face of injustice. In contrast to readings that might find weakness in the slow, laborious pacing of these restrained

melodramatic films, I have argued that the act of walking as rendered in these films is a form of female affective labour the reveals moments of spatial justice, where women literally and symbolically walk for the sake of their family's survival.

The chapter on Manila noir ventures beyond immediate slum spaces through increased mobility. By covering more ground in the urban space, the chapter examined the male characters' struggle for spatial justice through the politics of mobility, which is also indicative of masculine desires to master urban space. Compared to the previous chapters, the male-centred narratives in Manila noir end in the death of its lead characters (in the case of *Kinatay*, the death of innocence). However, their deaths reveal the injustice of spatiality by suggesting that those who reinforce injustice are the gatekeepers of mobility, or the ones behind the wheel. All three films implicate the state and its figures of authority as those behind the injustice of spatiality.

The final chapter exports the slum chronotope and places it into dialogue with the migrant narrative of *Transit.* The chapter likens the slum inhabitant with the migrant figure, who struggles for spatial justice through strategically inhabiting chronotopes of in/visibilty in the foreign space. I have argued that *Transit* is a significant expansion of the slum chronotope into the OFW genre which is unique to Philipine cinema. The film privileges the politics of survival in the struggle over the foreign space, which is disassociated from the state's rhetoric of national sacrifice that has been used to justify the country's labour export policy.

Second, this study of Philippine urban cinema has argued for the significance of Philippine urban and cinematic development as crucial to understanding the workings of neoliberal global capitalism, gleaned from the narratives of subjective formation in the films set in the backdrop of the urbanisation of

poverty. While firmly grounded on the socio-political conditions of Manila's urban landscape, the study's general contextualisation in the colonial and postcolonial history of slum formation immediately situates the films in the intersections of the local and global production of spatial injustice. The history of Manila's slum formation reveals how the capitalist logic of accumulation by disposession takes place in such a context, creating culturally specific built environments and social conditions that configure and are configured by the city's inhabitants.

All the films included in this study implicitly or overtly dialogue with the transnational urban imaginary not just through the global scope of the urbanisation of poverty, but through the mode of genre analysis enabled by the film's chronotopic readings. In each chapter, I have shown how Philippine urban films inarguably converse and appropriate Western genre conventions in ways that are more meaningful when situated in the Philippine context.

In the coming-of-age chapter, the *bildungsroman* narrative has been reconfigured and grounded in Maxi's *looban* and Ebet's Tondo, prompting a rethinking of what justice means for children who come of age in spaces where childhood is not a time of innocence. Meanwhile, the chapter on melodrama has reconfigured melodramatic excess, as channelled through the spatial practice of walking that tactically displaces emotions in narrative moments that reveal the subjective power of the films' female protagonists. The melodramatic narratives surface affects particular to the social conditions of the female-centred narratives: the fear and grief in *Kubrador* in which the movements of the protagonist are structured by the illegal numbers game and her son's spectral presence; the mixed affects of shame and care that underpins the business of fostering in *Foster Child*; the powerful affects the underscore the resilience of the elderly female protagonists in *Lola*.

The Manila noir chapter has examined the politics of mobility as central to the masculine myths that run through the modality/genre of noir. The crimes in Manila noir strongly locate the films in the Philippine context, implicating figures of state authority as the masterminds behind the male leads' descent into darkness. In *Kinatay*, the male lead's long journey in the van symbolises his future as a dirty cop; *Metro Manila* reconfigures the naïve rural migrant who hijacks the heist for his family's escape; while *On the Job*'s whodunit narrative unfolds through chase scenes that signify collisions of masculinities in Manila's urban landscape.

Finally, *Transit* offers a powerful reconfiguration of the nationalist rhetoric of migrant labour in the Overseas Filipino Worker film, a genre that is unique to Philippine cinema. The film's non-modular narrative and the choice of Tel Aviv as location distinguish the film from canonical OFW films. Following in the tracks of the previous chapters, this final chapter has shown how the struggle for spatial justice exceeds the contours of Manila's slums. The very production of *Transit* alongside the other films in this chapter suggests the inevitable expansion of the slum chronotope beyond Manila's landscape, suggesting the slum inhabitant's potential grounds for solidarity with the migrant figure, as both figures belong to the growing global underclass.

As the indendent wave in Philippine cinema continues to blossom, there are undoubtedly other films that might have enriched this study, if not for the project's limited timeframe. I have already mentioned *Ma'Rosa* as one recent film that follows the conventions of Philippine urban cinema. I have also mentioned the film, *Pamilya Ordinaryo (Ordinary Family)*, as a film that can be approached as a recent product of Philippine urban cinema. The film is about homeless teenage parents who live on the sidewalks of Manila as petty thieves, and won Best Film in the 2016 Cinemalaya Film Festival. While time did not permit me to include a close analysis of these two films, my initial view is that

they showcase Philippine urban cinema's capacity to rise to the challenge of critics who think the indie wave has turned formulaic. Even though the subject of poverty remains central, Mendoza's most recent film can be placed into dialogue with Duterte's current war on the urban poor. *Pamilya Ordinaryo,* on the other hand, with its use of CCTV aesthetics, lends itself to the discourse of state discipline and surveillance over the invisible urban poor. With the continued production of films grounded on the slum chronotope, I posit that this study remains a significant attempt to understand what Philippine urban cinema can offer, through and beyond the discourse of poverty pornography.

As for the study's limitations, I cite three issues. First, the study can no doubt be accused of privileging "Imperial Manila" – a phrase used among Philippine academic circles. While I cannot contest this charge, I am hoping that this study still proves to be a useful contribution to existing literature in Philippine urban and film studies, despite its inherent geographic limitations. My hope is that it becomes a springboard for the study of films beyond Manila. Second, I am fully aware that there are three Mendoza films included in the study – which attests to the filmmaker's significance in what Tolentino has criticised as the new hierarchy in Philippine indie cinema. Finally, I recognise the limited period covered by the films (2005 – 2013), owing to the limited timeframeof the study, as well as the fact that the Philippine indie wave is still in the process of becoming as I write.

In hindsight, the study might have also included a look back at the film, *Engkwentro (Clash)* (Diokno 2009), an early film on the Davao death squads linked to Duterte's time as city mayor. It may well be that other films that deal directly with the Duterte regime's extra-judicial killings will be produced in the coming years. One very recent example is the film, *Madilim ang Gabi (Dark is the Night)* (2017) from independent filmmaker Adolfo Alix Jr., which was first screened at the Toronto International Film Festival (Inquirer.net 2017).

Alongside the persistence of the slum chronotope in recent Philippine independent film productions, the undeniable success of the films of Filipino filmmaker Lav Diaz in the international festival circuit suggests a new route for chronotopic analysis. Diaz locates many of his laborious epic works in rural areas of the Philippine archipelago, which certainly offers different spatio-temporal narrative and character configurations. The slum chronotope can very well dialogue with the rural chronotopes that might be located in the films of Diaz, or even Mendoza's rural-based films that have not been as successful as *Kinatay* or *Ma'Rosa.* The potential for developing a theory of the rural chronotope may also converse with the emergence of regional festivals in the country, which is starting to pick up pace against the dominance of Manila-based festivals, particularly Cinemalaya.

This study's broad interdisciplinary framework linking spatial justice and the theory of the chronotope may also be potentially applied to the study of urban films from other urban contexts. It is possible to locate the slum chronotope in the urban imaginaries of other megacities, in both Western and non-Western contexts. The theory of spatial justice can be located, for instance, in films set in Third World spaces within first world contexts where the built environment of the urbanisation of poverty takes on different spatial forms.

At the heart of this study is the strong belief that films are cultural products that can configure the ways we think about the spaces and times we live in. This project of tracking spatial justice in Philippine urban cinema was borne out of my personal intent to come to terms with the nature of films that Philippine filmmakers are offering to the world. By taking a step back and rethinking my own limited understanding of slums as either spaces of despair or spaces of hope, I reached what I believe to be a more productive perspective, strongly underpinned by the socio-spatial dialectic: Slums are spaces of injustice where people struggle towards justice. With this view, this study makes a strong case

for the significance of Philippine urban cinema as an emerging genre through which we can think through matters of social justice, not just within the Philippine context, but within the global imaginary of the urbanisation of poverty.

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