

The role of Jose Nepomuceno in the Philippine society

What language did his silent films speak?

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av Nadi Tofighian

Abstract

This paper examines the role of the pioneer Filipino filmmaker Jose Nepomuceno and his films in the Philippine quest for independence and in the process of nation-building. As all of Nepomuceno's films are lost, most of the information was gathered from old newspaper articles on microfilm in different archives in Manila. Many of these articles were hitherto undiscovered. Nepomuceno made silent films at a time when the influence of the new coloniser, United States, was growing, and the Spanish language was what unified the intellectual opposition. Previous research on Nepomuceno has focused on the Hispanic influences on his filmmaking, as well as his connections to the stage drama. This paper argues that Nepomuceno created a national consciousness by making films showing native lives and environments, adapting important Filipino novels and plays to the screen and covering important political topics and thereby creating public opinion. Many reviews in the newspapers connected his films to nation-building and independence, as the creation of a national consciousness is a cornerstone in the process of building a nation and defining "Filipino". Furthermore, the films of Nepomuceno helped spreading the Tagalog culture and language to other parts of the Philippines, hence making Tagalog the foundation of the national Filipino language.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Jose Nepomuceno was born on May 15, 1893, and was still a child when the American-Spanish war resulted in the Philippines becoming an American colony in 1898, after more than three centuries of Spanish rule. One year earlier, January 1, 1897, the Philippines experienced its first film screening, as a Spanish man, Pertierra, introduced the chromophotograph. Half a year later, another Spaniard, Ramos, brought the cinematograph to the Philippines. Around that time, at the age of four, Jose made paper figures which he used for creating his own shadow dramas. His family lived near a theatre, Teatro Oriente, which he frequented during his adolescence and where he watched Spanish dramas (zarzuelas) and, later, European films.¹ As he came from a well off family he had the possibility to study fine arts at San Beda College and electrical engineering at Ateneo de Manila. It was during this time that the Americans Yearsley and Gross made the first feature films produced in the Philippines. They made one movie each about the life and death of the national hero Jose Rizal, both of which were released in August 1912. Three years later, 1915, Jose and his brother Jesus opened a photography store and learned to master the art of photography to such an extent that their operation became the most prominent in Manila. This was the prelude to starting a film company, Malayan Movies, and making the first Filipino film *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden) in 1919, which was based on a popular zarzuela of the time. Today we know Jose Nepomuceno as the Father of Philippine Movies. Yet, not much is known about him and his films, since none of his films are intact.

Nepomuceno sold his prosperous photography studio, and used the capital to buy equipment, books and magazines about filmmaking. Before he started making feature films, he also made subtitles in English and Spanish which he inserted in French and Italian films. As he became an accredited correspondent of Pathé and Paramount News, his newsreels were shown abroad. His newsreels included: the funeral of the first wife of House Speaker Sergio Osmeña Sr in Cebu; filming the wife of the boxer Pancho Villa as he became the flyweight champion; and the earthquake in Japan in 1923 (the first newsreel taken by a Filipino outside of the Philippines). In 1921 Malayan Movies were contracted by the government to make short documentaries of the different industries of the country, such as the production of tobacco, hemp, coconut, hat- and button making. 14 reels of film were used for this purpose in 1921 and 1922, and this was the reason that Malayan Movies did not produce any fiction films during this period. Nepomuceno

¹ Quirino (1983), p. 14.

continued filming news and events of different kinds, for instance he filmed the signing of the Philippine constitution and the signing of the country's fundamental law. During World War II, Pathé News assigned Nepomuceno to film Japanese activities.² Many of these films were destroyed during the war. Besides the destruction in the war, many of his films were destroyed through fires. The studio of Malayan Movies burned down in 1921, and again in 1923, due to the highly inflammable nitrate films. The fire destroyed most of the early documentaries and newsreels of the production company, the cameras, as well as the master prints of the early films.

In the early years of the Philippine film industry, the production system was based on director-producers, such as Jose Nepomuceno (Malayan Movies, 1917), Vicente Salumbides (Salumbides Film Corporation, 1927) and Julian Manansala (Banahaw Pictures, 1929). As the pioneer Filipino filmmaker, he had more experience than the other early Filipino filmmakers that emerged in the 1920s and he was therefore often involved in their productions either as a producer, cameraman or technical advisor.³ Nepomuceno founded at least Malayan Movies (1917), Malayan Pictures Corporation (1931), Nepomuceno Production (1932), Nepomuceno-Harris-Tait Partnership (1933), Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Inc. (1935), X'Otic films (1938) and Polychrome Motion Picture Corporation (1946).⁴ Malayan Movies (and later Malayan Pictures Corporation) was the major domestic film producer during the era of silent films. In 1932, Malayan Pictures Corporation produced 12 out of the 23 films that were made that year. The following year they produced their last film. Two years later, 1935, Nepomuceno had gathered enough capital to build a new sound studio and formed the production company Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Inc. Nepomuceno and his partners ended up in a battle for control over the production company, as they had different aims, artistic versus business. After being ousted, Nepomuceno formed X'Otic Films in 1938. Nepomuceno continued directing and producing movies, and passed away at the age of 66 on December 1, 1959.

The Philippines consists of many different ethno-linguistic groups (Tagalog, Ilokano, Visayan etc.), and the official national language was therefore the language of the coloniser – first Spanish and then English. Ten percent of the population of Manila were foreigners, primarily Chinese, American, Spanish and Japanese. Jose Nepomuceno made silent films from 1919 to 1933; during a time when the national forces for independence from the United States were running strong, and the country was in a nation-building state. During the American occupation, the Americans

² Ibid., p. 81.

³ He was a camera- and laboratory man in Vicente Salumbides' *Miracles of Love* in 1925, and a technical advisor in Julian Manansala's *Patria Amore* in 1929.

⁴ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 7 and Lent, pp. 151 f.

naturally claimed the highest political positions in the Philippines. The governor-general was American, and Americans also headed the executive departments. The American occupational government tried to silence and dampen the forces of independence with different means, which resulted in artistic, intellectual and political opposition. Nepomuceno showed his resistance by making films with stories that portrayed Filipino customs and traditions. He also contributed greatly to the spread of Tagalog language in the country through his movies. The Tagalog language later became the basis for the official Filipino language in 1946.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, to depict and assess the role of Jose Nepomuceno and his films in the Philippine quest for independence and in the process of nation-building. In order to do this, three main research questions had to be answered: What did the Filipino newspapers write about cinema and Nepomuceno during the silent era? What did the Philippine society look like, and how did Nepomuceno affect it? How was the new art form used by Nepomuceno in order to help building a new nation-state? Secondly, to contribute to the research on Philippine film history by rediscovering Jose Nepomuceno.

1.3 Approach and delimitations

The problem with the Philippine film history is that only four films of the around 350-400 films that were made before 1944 are intact.⁵ This does not mean that this part of the Philippine film history should remain blank. As the films of the silent era are gone, we are trying to recreate and understand the films by viewing the historical events of the period. The approach in recreating them is similar to the one conducted by Giuliana Bruno in *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*, a study of early films by an Italian (Neapolitan) filmmaker whose work has been almost completely lost. Bruno recreated the lost films of Elvira Notari by studying the manuscripts and the reviews, as well as the historical and socioeconomic environment of the subjects portrayed in the films. Her study is a cross-scientific method where she draws upon art history, architecture, literature and theatrical traditions in order to explain and explore the contents of the films of Elvira Notari. As the films have been lost, the primary text of analysis has been lost. The text, i.e. the film, therefore must be analysed by investigating its fictional referents, other texts. The approach is therefore like a palimpsest with many sub layers beneath the analysed entity, the film. What complicates the matter further is that it is hard to get

⁵ *Zamboanga* (1937), *Giliv Ko* (1939), *Tunay na Ina* (1939) and *Idang Adarna* (1941).

a grip on how many films Nepomuceno made during his career, since it sometimes can be hard to decipher which films he directed and which ones he produced. The stated numbers vary from around 40 to 100 to 300.⁶ A portrait of Nepomuceno in *Graphic* in September 1931 stated that he had filmed 32 films thus far, without clarifying whether he was the director, cameraman and/or producer.⁷ That number is a good approximate for the number films he made during the silent era, see his filmography in Appendix I.

The past decades have seen a re-writing of early film history with a shift from a mere focus on filmic evidence, to a new perspective where external evidence, such as newspaper clippings and local records, as well as the history of the time were considered. By studying the underlying layers, such as filmic fragments, still pictures from the films, movie scripts, statements from the film crew, novels and plays that the films are based on, newspaper articles and reviews, as well as studying who saw the movies, where they were shown and how they were advertised, the films can be theoretically reconstructed.⁸ Researching about early Philippine film history becomes like an archaeological investigation, where the researcher is looking for traces, pictorial signs and fragments wherewith to recreate the lost objects.⁹ The only remaining visual fragments from some of the films are photographic stills. Furthermore, the approach is intertextual. Other artforms are studied in order to see the effect it has had on the development of film in general and on Jose Nepomuceno's film production in particular. Looking at different pieces concerning the film, a puzzle can finally be built and a bigger picture appears.

Mark Ferro discusses film from the perspective of being a source and agent of history: A source of history by portraying and reflecting time and historical episodes; and an agent of history by contributing to shaping the course of history.¹⁰ As all the films that are of interest for this paper are destroyed, we can not use the extant film as a source of history. By going through the newspapers of the time, we can get an understanding of the extent film functioned as an agent of history. Some of the reviews of *Dalagang Bukid*, connected the advent of Filipino films to the developments of society and the desire of independence, thereby making the film an agent of history. Bienvenido Lumbera wrote that "an art form without a memory is an art form that is doomed to remain in its infancy."¹¹ In order to take the Filipino film out of its "infancy",

⁶ Del Mundo (1998), p. 58, Giron (1994), p. 21, Lent (1990), p. 151.

⁷ *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, p. 12.

⁸ Bruno (1993), p. 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁰ Ferro (1988), primarily the introductory chapter, pp. 14-20.

¹¹ Bienvenido Lumbera, Foreword in Deocampo (2003), p. ix.

research has to be made to recreate the memory and the history. Lumbera himself describes the challenge ahead of the researcher in Filipino film history; an approach I have tried to follow.

Salumbides [a contemporary filmmaker to Nepomuceno who wrote the first book on Philippine film history] has given us the only first-hand account of the early years of filmmaking in the Philippines, and this is the book's value as a historical record. The researcher looking for a fuller account will have to compensate for Salumbides' omissions and inaccuracies by painstaking perusal of Philippine periodicals – particularly those in the vernacular – for news items, publicity write-ups, still photos, movie advertisements, and occasional articles. To supplement what he will find, he will have to obtain the oral histories of actors, actresses, directors, and technical personnel who worked in the industry prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War.¹²

I spent six months in Manila going through archives, doing all the necessary research and writing. Much of the work is based on studying the reception of the films in the newspapers of the Philippines, particularly Manila where all the films were shown. Newspapers from the relevant time period that still are intact on microfilm at the National Library, Ateneo University Library and the Library of University of Philippines Diliman have been analysed in order to find articles about the films of Jose Nepomuceno, and other articles that help define and capture the spirit of the time. Newspapers in English, Spanish and Tagalog were examined. No relevant articles were found in Tagalog, primarily since fewer newspapers are intact from the relevant time period.

Hayden White discusses the nature of a historical study. In a historical study there is always an amount of interpretation of the historical material. This is because the historical record is both too full and too sparse. Too full in the sense that there are always more facts to the story than the historian/researcher can include in his/her representation. The interpretive aspect would then be choosing the relevant aspects and excluding some. Too sparse in the sense that there is always some information lacking when trying to reconstruct an aspect of the past. The interpretation would then be filling in the missing gaps through inference and speculation.¹³ The thesis has two delimitations. Firstly, it focuses on the silent films of Nepomuceno, since by the time sound was incorporated in the domestic films there were many other Filipinos engaged as directors and producers. Secondly, it focuses on Manila. As film technology spread slowly among the Philippine Islands, cinema was mostly confined to the larger urban areas. It was basically only Manila that produced and showed films during the silent era.¹⁴

¹² Lumbera (1983), p. 68.

¹³ White (1978), p. 51.

¹⁴ There was a Visayan cinema as well, based in Cebu.

1.4 Research overview

Considering that Jose Nepomuceno is the pioneer filmmaker and the “Father of Philippine Movies”, not much research has been done on him and his life. Vicente Salumbides, a contemporary filmmaker to Jose Nepomuceno, who wrote the first book on film history in the Philippines in 1952, *Motion Pictures in the Philippines*, was the one who gave Jose the title “Father of Philippine Movies” with the motivation that “it was he, more than anybody else, who built the movie industry from its infancy to the present state of maturity. [...] His success proved that the Filipinos could make their own movies without the help of foreign technicians.”¹⁵ The only extensive piece written about Jose Nepomuceno is Joe Quirino’s book from 1983, *Don Jose and the Early Philippine Cinema*. Quirino’s book has its merits, although it has several academic flaws. Much of the book is based on interviews and conversations that the author had with Nepomuceno some 30 years before the book was published. It is evident that the book is written by someone with a background within journalism and not in history or film studies. Many facts are presented incorrectly and references are totally lacking.

The same year Rafael Ma. Guerrero edited an anthology, *Readings in Philippine Cinema*, where some articles wrote about Nepomuceno. Another anthology that covers early Filipino cinema is a publication that was released for the 75-year anniversary of Philippine cinema in 1994, *Diamond Anniversary of Philippine Cinema*, included a five page article about Nepomuceno by Eric S. Giron. It also has a useful directory of all the Filipino films during the first decades. There are also two Western works on Asian cinema that discuss, or rather mention, Filipino films and Nepomuceno, John A. Lent’s *The Asian Film Industry* from 1990 and Roy Armes’ *Third World Film Making and the West* from 1987. Furthermore we have a chapter written by Augustin Sotto “A brief history of Philippine cinema” in David Hanan’s anthology *Film in South East Asia: Views from the region* from 2001. What all these publications have in common is that merely a few descriptive paragraphs are dedicated to Nepomuceno.

Lena Strait Paneja’s doctoral dissertation from 1998, *Roles and Images of Woman in the Early Years of Philippine Cinema 1912-1941*, helps shed light on one part of Nepomuceno’s work as it discusses how women were portrayed in his films. The two most recent books on early Philippine cinema have been written by Clodualdo del Mundo (*Native Resistance: Philippine Cinema and Colonialism 1898–1941*) and Nick Deocampo (*Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines*). Clodualdo del Mundo claims that the early Filipino filmmakers indigenised a foreign medium,

¹⁵ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 9.

film, by using the theatrical forms that were well known to them, such as *sarswela*, *komedya* and *moro-moro*.¹⁶ In that respect Nepomuceno is mentioned since his first film was a screen adaptation of a zarzuela.¹⁷ Deocampo's work is much more comprehensive, and he assesses the Spanish influences in early Philippine cinema. He sees Nepomuceno as part of the wealthy, educated elite, who favoured the Spanish language and who reproduced Hispanic values and traditions.¹⁸

The Mowelfund Film Institute and its director Nick Deocampo arranged an international seminar on the origins of Asian cinema in July 2005. One of the results of that conference will be an anthology. One of the yet unpublished articles in that anthology was written by Charles Musser, *Long live Titay Molina, Edward Meyer Gross and Filipino Film Culture: or, A reconsideration of early cinema in the Philippines*. In the article Charles Musser puts the Filipino film history into a greater international context, and compares Jose Nepomuceno to the African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux.

1.5 Disposition

The structure of this paper is both thematic and chronological. The paper begins with a section on Cinema and Theatre, which describes the status and the relation of the two art forms in a time when the cinematograph was emerging. The main emphasis is on the first two decades of the 20th Century, and this is also the time when the Spanish influence was prominent. Section 3 is about the colonisation process and its interrelation with the cinema. In this section three of the main colonisation tools will be discussed: Hollywood, language and education. Timewise it covers the years of American occupation, but its main emphasis is on the 1910s and the 1920s, as that was the time when the Americanisation process was at its peak. Section 4 deals with the reaction to the colonisation – the nation-building process, and Jose Nepomuceno's contribution to it. This was an ongoing process that had started already during the Spanish occupation, but the emphasis here is on the 1920s and 1930s when the process was refuelled. One can also see each section as tracing the different cultural influences on Nepomuceno's production: Spanish, American and Tagalog. Section 5 contains conclusions. A filmography is provided in Appendix I.

¹⁶ Del Mundo (1998), pp. 4 f.

¹⁷ Sarswela is the Filipino spelling/version of zarzuela.

¹⁸ Deocampo, pp. 237, 249.

2. Cinema and Theatre

Tom Gunning stated that “Film clearly took the legitimate theatre as its model, producing famous players in famous plays.”¹⁹ In this section the main influence on cinema in the Philippines, theatre, will be discussed. Several questions are posed: What were the stage practices of the time, and how did they influence Nepomuceno? How, when and why did cinema overtake theatre as the favourite pastime of the Filipinos? What was the status of cinema, and how was it influenced by Nepomuceno? In what way was Nepomuceno influenced by his background in photography?

2.1 Stage practices

In the beginning of the 20th Century there were three different distinct theatres in Manila: Spanish, Tagalog and Chinese. The Spanish theatre was mainly for the elite and showed Spanish dramas, zarzuelas, concerts and operas. The Tagalog theatre showed both the moro-moro, which depicted the conflicts between the Christians and the Moors, and zarzuelas. The Chinese theatre was famous for its exotic and colourful performances.²⁰ From around the 1920s vaudeville gained in prominence. The native comedia, or moro-moro, was introduced in the 17th Century and was performed in the native languages in the town plazas. When the natives started writing the plays, the moro-moro became secularised and focused on love stories in a Christian-Moor war setting.²¹ The moro-moro was basically unchanged from 1650 until 1950 in its audio and visual exaggeratory style. Although the moro-moro was an outmoded form of theatre by the time Jose Nepomuceno made his films, he used the moro-moro as a template for his film *Moro Pirates* (1931) and depicted the struggle between the Moors and the Christians in a then spectacular action movie with thousand of extras. The zarzuela was created as a form of royal entertainment in Spain, came to the Philippines in 1848 and started spreading among the masses in the 1880s when Filipino actors were used as cast. Its popularity was to a large extent due to the prevalence of music in the plays; the dialogue was interwoven with songs. The themes were mostly taken from legends, myths, religious plays and situations from contemporary life. The zarzuela became increasingly popular and prestigious to such an extent that wealthy Filipinos frequently financed the trips of Spanish theatrical companies to Manila up until the early 1920s.²² The success of the zarzuela depended on the way it managed to incorporate the romantic aspect of the moro-moro

¹⁹ Gunning (1990), p. 60.

²⁰ Lacónico-Buenaventura (1994), pp. 48-53.

²¹ Lumbera (1997), pp. 105 f.

²² *The Citizen*, October 30, 1919, p. 4.

and relate it to contemporary issues. Tagalog plays premiered almost every week²³, and when a Tagalog zarzuela played at the Manila Grand Opera House, even the lower social levels attended, particularly if it starred Atang de la Rama (the lead actress in *Dalagang Bukid*).²⁴

The struggle for the audience between the moro-moro and the zarzuela that took place around the turn of the century is also a struggle between the culture of the common people and that of the ilustrados. Zarzuela replaced the moro-moro as the main form of theatre, as the urban audience started considering the moro-moro outdated. The result was that the zarzuela dominated the urban stage, whereas the moro-moro was very popular in the rural areas. This explains why Nepomuceno decided to adapt a zarzuela (*Dalagang Bukid*) to the screen as his first film, and not a moro-moro. This had been done before; in 1913 Albert Yearsley made a screen adaptation of Severino Reyes' popular zarzuela *Walang Sugat* (No wound). Around the third decade of the 20th Century, the Tagalog zarzuela started to be repetitious, using stereotyped characters and clichéd situations, instead of being a social commentator and criticiser. Simultaneously, film started becoming a more fashionable entertainment and the prestigious theatre houses gradually began screening films instead of plays. The theatre was still popular in the provinces, but in Manila theatre activities were limited to campus auditoriums at the end of the 1930s, a situation which still has not improved.²⁵

Considering the popularity of stage drama and that films were screened in theatres, it is very understandable that Nepomuceno's first film was based on the famous zarzuela *Dalagang Bukid* and starred the same actors as the play. Cinema depended on the zarzuela for its exhibit venues, actors, stories and audience. Nepomuceno was influenced by the themes of zarzuelas he had seen while growing up. Most of his films revolved around the love story, just as in the zarzuelas and moro-moros. Moreover, judging from the filmtitles, many of his films were about Christian themes. His first film with a seemingly Christian theme was *Krus Na Lihim* (The secret cross, 1925). Another film that had a clearer Biblical theme was *Milagro ng Nazareno* (Miracle of the Nazarene). This film also had a clear local connection to the area in Manila where Nepomuceno was born, Quiapo. The ninth of January is the day of the annual fiesta in Quiapo, when the statue of the Black Nazarene is carried in a procession around the area. The Black Nazarene is a carved hardwood image of Christ bearing a huge cross on his shoulders.²⁶ The film can be seen as a

²³ *The Independent*, December 11, 1920, p.8.

²⁴ Lacónico-Buenaventura (1994), p. 76.

²⁵ Lumbera (1997), pp. 22 f.

²⁶ Ira and Medina (1977), pp. 77-80. The Nazarene was made in Mexico by a Christianised Aztec and came to the Philippines during the 17th Century. It is believed to have healing powers, and another deeply-rooted belief is that

tribute both to his religious background and to the district where he grew up. Nepomuceno portrayed deeply rooted Filipino traditions, and by so doing he revitalised that particular tradition or event. Other films with religious themes (or rather seemingly religious themes, as the proposition is based on the film title) are *La Monjita* (a young person studying to be a nun) in 1931, *Santong Diablo* (A devil saint), *Ang Libim ni Bathala* (Secret of the pagan God, 1931), and *Satanas* (1932).

2.2 Status of cinema

As cinema entered the country, its audience was primarily men from the upper crust of society. The price during the first screenings in 1897 was high since it was a historically unique event that prompted exhibitors to charge higher prices. A cross section of the audience included the native elite, expatriates, foreign soldiers, journalists and government functionaries.²⁷ After the first film screenings film gradually lost its novelty and the admission prices were lowered, thereby securing the patronage of the poorer segments of society. The movie houses had a two-tier system of pricing tickets, which made it possible to attract people from different strata of society. Cinema continued to secure its position as the art and entertainment form with the broadest mass appeal and the biggest influence on popular culture.²⁸ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that the urban elite in the colonised countries increased their association and identification with the coloniser and the Western empire, as a consequence of the cinema-going experience.²⁹ The argument is applicable in the Philippines, as almost all the images that were seen were made through European and American perspectives and since a large part of the audience were Europeans and Americans living in Manila. This situation gradually changed as prices decreased and Yearsley and Gross made their films in 1912 in the Philippines portraying domestic issues. It was however Nepomuceno that managed to break the identification of the elite with the coloniser, whether American or Spanish, and started creating a national consciousness. And as he started to master the artform, his influence grew.

Diagram 2.1 shows that the film industry was gradually growing and that it became increasingly profitable. The increasing number of film producers and film supply dealers shows that the market was getting bigger, and more companies therefore got engaged in the film industry. This

one's commerce would flourish as long as one's devotion to the Nazarene did. In this light, the making of the film can be seen as a way to show devotion, and thereby ensuring the blessing of one's commerce.

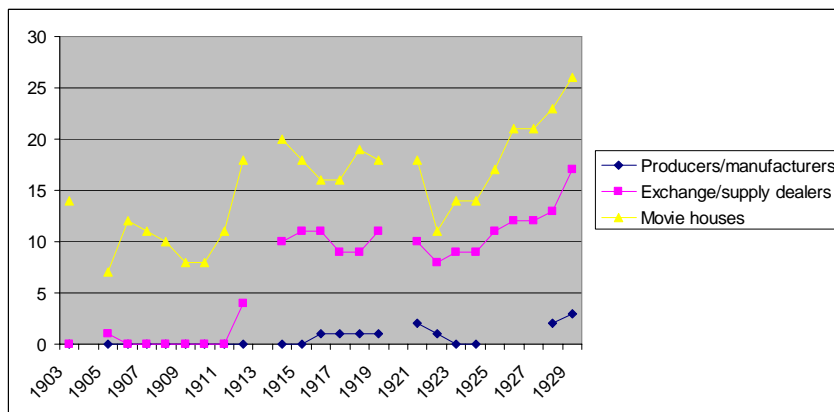
²⁷ Deocampo (2003), p. 297.

²⁸ See Deocampo (2003), chapter 3 and first part of chapter 4, for more information on the initial interaction of theatre and cinema in the Philippines, and how cinema gradually overtook theatre.

²⁹ Shohat and Stam (1994), pp. 102 f.

was a strong development compared to 1910 when Pathé Film was the only Film exchange available. The number of films made in the Philippines also increased, until 1931 it was less than ten movies a year, which prompted the Film Daily Yearbook 1930 to write that “the domestic production of motion pictures is an unimportant factor in the Philippine Islands”³⁰, but in 1932 23 films were made in the Philippines³¹, half of the films were made by Nepomuceno’s film production company, Malayan Pictures Corporation.

Diagram 2.1: Statistical development



Source: Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory

During the early years of film making, the budgets and financial capacity of the film producers were still modest. This resulted in relatively Spartan film production houses. When reporters from *Manila Nueva* were visiting the studio of Malayan Movies in 1920 at “one of the extreme sides of Manila”, they wrote: “It is in a hidden and neglected little street, where in every second house there is a barber shop – those small, identical, very numerous barber shops of Manila. On its facade, low and unpainted, there is a big sign that informs you: ‘Malayan Movies’ ‘Entrance is prohibited’.”³² At its start in 1917 Malayan Movies was capitalised at PHP 100 000. Jose’s brother Jesus, who was the co-founder of Malayan Movies and a leading art director, cinematographer and laboratory man³³, made an eight month study trip to Hollywood in 1927-1928. His conclusion was that the most pressing need of the industry was capital, and that they had to double their capital base to buy new equipment, improve their technology, and train the actors.³⁴ In 1929 the capitalisation amount was still the same as in 1917, indicating a relatively low quality

³⁰ Film Daily Yearbook, 1930, p. 1040.

³¹ *Diamond Anniversary of Philippine Cinema*, p. 57.

³² *Manila Nueva*, February 28 1920, pp 5-7: “Esta en una oculta, descuidada calleja, donde en cada dos casas hay una barbería – estas pequeñas, iguales, numerosísimas barberías de Manila. En su fachada, baja y despintada, un gran cartelón os pone en guarda: ‘Malayan Movies’ ‘Se prohíbe la entrada.’”

³³ Salumbides (1952), Part I, pp. 112, 114 and 125.

³⁴ *Graphic*, October 13, 1928, pp. 4, 5 and 33.

of equipment. The lack of capital also made them risk-averse, and they only dared to make movies that would be box-office hits.³⁵ In order to gather capital Jose Nepomuceno provided technical expertise to filmmakers from other film companies and sold negatives and parts of his movies almost as commodities. *Maria Luisa*, for instance, was sold to Asuncion Leyte. Furthermore, they sought co-financing from other filmmakers in some of their productions, such as *Ang Lumang Simbahan* by Vicente Albo.³⁶

Despite the rise of cinema as a favourite pastime of the people, it was still hard to get actors for the films. As a means of livelihood the film industry was looked down upon, it was especially hard to find actresses as the film industry was preconceived as a dirty business, and that it would be hard later for the woman to find a good husband. It was therefore important to convince the upper crusts of society of the merits of films, and try to lure some of them into acting.³⁷ Nepomuceno primarily used young actresses, often teenagers in his movies. Nepomuceno's wife and partner, Isabel Acuna³⁸, was particularly adept at recruiting actresses by going from door to door to convince parents to permit their youth to perform.³⁹

Studying the reception of the early Filipino films by the newspapers gives an understanding of the early perceived role and status of cinema. An article in *The Citizen* in September 1919, just days after the premiere of *Dalagang Bukid*, by Miguel G. Luna entitled "The Value of the Motion Picture in the Philippines" sees the positive influence and use of cinema:

The moving picture has made a wonderful progress during the last ten years, and it is now steadily assuming more important proportions in our daily life. It is not only an amusement which is indulged in by tens of thousands in the hope of seeing depicted on the magic screen the experiences which they can not live, but also an art interpretative of man's loftiest ideals and most sublime sentiments. The enjoyment it gives to millions and the patriotic and highly humane service it renders is the quintessence of the picture-play. Can any one honestly fail to be impressed at the great role played by the motion picture in helping win the war? [...] This is a splendid example of the far-reaching influence of the so-called silent drama. With this end in view, can the motion picture fail to be of immense value to the Philippines? With the great possibilities and the tremendous influence it will play in picturing real Philippine conditions to the world, will it be a matter of mere

³⁵ *Graphic*, October 13, 1928, p. 33.

³⁶ Giron (1994), p. 20.

³⁷ Quirino (1983), pp. 25 and 29.

³⁸ Nepomuceno met her while shooting his fifth film *Un Capello Marchito* (The wilted rosebud) in 1920 (she was the older sister of the actress Luisa Acunia). She was always by his side when he was making his movies. Initially she was production assistant, later she became the vice-president of Malayan Pictures Corporation.

³⁹ Quirino (1983), p. 16.

speculation to suggest that we start now producing films symbolic of Philippine films and ideals?⁴⁰

Reading *The Independent* in the 1920s gives an indication of the gradual change of attitude toward cinema. At first the attitude was quite negative. An editorial in January 1922 entitled “Degeneration among our youths“ comments on the reading habits of the youth: “In the bookstores and newstand [sic], more copies of ‘Motion Picture’ and ‘Photo Play’ are sold than ‘Noli Me Tangere’, ‘Les Miserables’, or the works of Byron and Shakespeare.”⁴¹ The paper takes this as “a sign [of] intellectual degeneracy.” Three interesting conclusions can be drawn from the paper using ‘Motion Picture’ and ‘Photo Play’ as examples. Firstly, American magazines were imported and were widely read. Secondly, the film interest of the youth was steadily growing and by 1922 it was considerable. Thirdly, among all magazines the film magazines were chosen to portray something “light, frivolous and degenerate”. In February 1926 there was an article entitled “Movies weaken development of mind”.⁴² Although film was gaining popularity, it was still not considered as art and culture. The monthly Spanish paper *Cultura Social*, which was one of the few papers dedicated to culture, writes mostly about literature, music and paintings, thereby indicating the still lingering inferior view on film. The regular item that the paper carries regarding film is a section entitled “Endorsed Motion Pictures”, which is a list of predominantly American films that a Catholic association recommends people to see.⁴³ In June 1930, there is an article “La Censura Cinematografica” that discusses the question of Censorship. The article starts by stating that the paper on several occasions has stressed the importance of censorship as a means to defend the public moral, as well as keeping the innocence of the children.⁴⁴ An article “Censor the stage” in *Graphic* in April 1928 on the other hand pointed out that it was more important that stage performances were censored, since “Filipinos look upon life portrayed in the movies as ‘foreign’ and incur very little danger of being corrupted by lurid suggestive movie themes and scenes.”⁴⁵

An apparent change of attitude towards cinema occurred in the beginning of 1927, where the paper presented two editorials on the film industry in the Philippines. Reading the editorials gives an understanding that this change of view is thanks to the films of Nepomuceno, who have

⁴⁰ *The Citizen*, September 18, 1919, p. 9.

⁴¹ *The Independent*, January 28, 1922, pp. 3 f.

⁴² *The Independent*, February 13, 1926, p. 7.

⁴³ *Cultura Social*, January-December, 1930.

⁴⁴ *Cultura Social*, June 1930, pp. 286 f.

⁴⁵ *Graphic*, April 1928, p. 9.

proved the importance of domestic filmmaking. The first editorial in January 1927 is entitled ‘National film industry’:

The cinema constitutes a lucrative business everywhere and almost all the civilized countries try to have an art of dramatic photoplay of their own as a manifestation of their culture and economic vitality. In the opinion of THE INDEPENDENT, the capital of Forty Thousand Pesos (P40,000.00) destined for this firm [Mayon Photoplay Corporation] is not sufficient to produce a work worthy of being seen. The extension of arguments, the presentation of scenery, the numerous personnel required, seem to demand a much greater sum if a work is to be produced worthy of its authors and public. Otherwise it is better to withdraw from such a promising enterprise. It is therefore, necessary that the capitalists should offer their patronage and cooperation to the Nepomuceno brothers, the originators of this new industry of the country.⁴⁶

The second one in February 1927 is entitled “Philippine Film Industry”:

The efforts of the Nepomuceno brothers to develop the film industry in the Philippines with native elements-atmosphere, characters, episodes, customs, etc. besides the personnel and material – deserve commendation and full cooperation. The films so far manufactured by them are quite acceptable, and show principally the magnitude of their efforts, of the work, and of the large capital invested. The sum total of these efforts and means must be taken into consideration by patriotic citizens, in order that such efforts might not be wasted and that the community might derive full benefits from the introduction of so important and lucrative a business as the movie industry, which involves the cultivation of the dramatic art by the people and the propagation of new ideas and the refinement of the artistic taste of the masses. THE INDEPENDENT pledges its support to this enterprise and any other business established in this country, hoping thus to render some service in its welfare.⁴⁷

Another indication of the status of cinema in society and compared to other art forms is the portrayal of distinguished figures in the Philippine society as outlined by the series “Who’s who in the Philippines” published in *Graphic*. Jose Nepomuceno was portrayed in September 1931, described as “The pioneer Filipino film producer”, and the nature of the task he embarked on when starting to produce films was likened to Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic.⁴⁸ Since the series started in November 1927, it makes him around the 200th person portrayed. This can be compared to the painters Fabian de la Rosa and Fernando Amorsolo, who were mentioned

⁴⁶ *The Independent*, January 22, 1927, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *The Independent*, February 19, 1927, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, p. 12.

already in 1928 as number 24 and 48, and the sculptor Guillermo Estrella Tolentino who was mentioned in 1929.⁴⁹

Studying the newspapers' film announcements of the early 20th Century shows that the films were screened as part of a program where the theatrical play was the highlight of the evening. For cinema to replace theatre as the main form of artistic mass-entertainment, two hurdles had to be overcome.⁵⁰ Firstly, to alter the long theatre tradition in Manila. By penetrating the theatrical space, film steadily gained a larger audience and as the films became more spectacular and better advertised, it replaced theatre as the favourite pastime of the audience. Using the space of the theatre associated cinema with the strong cultural values that theatre carried and it thereby became entertainment for the well-off, unlike Europe and the United States where it was initially known as entertainment for the masses and cheap spectacle. The novelty with film compared to other artistic forms in many of the Western countries was that it was a mass culture, attracting an audience that was not acculturated to the other traditional art forms.⁵¹ This is contrasted with the Philippine tradition where the zarzuela and moro-moro already were a mass culture, and performed and watched in villages across the Islands. As theatre was Spanish or Tagalog, the decline of theatre started as the grip of Americanisation and the English language increased and became dominating. Secondly, to pass the control of cinema and the entertainment business to the hands of the Americans. After World War I, Americans started to take over the film market (its production, distribution and exhibition) in the Philippines as well as on a global scale.

Film and theatre initially helped each other grow, as the competition from cinema helped increase the quality of the theatrical plays. The number of theatres and movie houses were steadily increasing, either by building new ones or by rebuilding and altering the usage of warehouses and other structures. This coincided with the increased American presence in the distribution and exhibition aspect of the domestic film industry. Rosenstock's Manila City Directory (RMCD) shows that the number of movie houses and theatres in Manila increased from 18 in 1921 to 45 in 1932.⁵² Diagram 2.2 shows that the venues with names including Cinematograph (or Cine, Motion Picture, Cinema or Film) were in minority during the teens. This changed during the late 1920s as gradually more movie houses chose to incorporate words that were associated with cinema in their names. Yet, many of the venues still had a name including Theatre or Teatro. This shows that there was a time when both artforms grew and flourished together. The abrupt

⁴⁹ *Graphic*, May 5, 1928, October 20, 1928 and March 30, 1929.

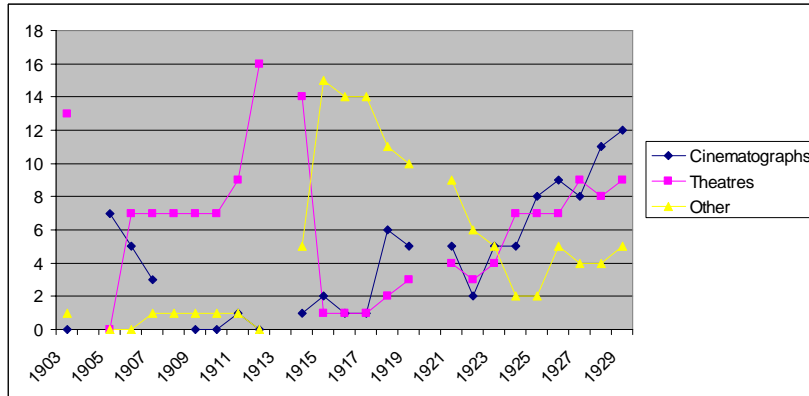
⁵⁰ Deocampo (2003), p. 96.

⁵¹ Gunning (1990), p. 59.

⁵² The RMCD does not cover all the theatres of the city, so the real number is higher.

decrease of names including Theatre around 1915 can be explained by Americans taking over the exhibition venues, and wanting to mark a change from the past.

Diagram 2.2: Names of movie houses



Source: Rosenstock's Manila City Directory

The quality of many of the movie houses was lacking. It was common that they only had one projector, which made it necessary to turn on the lights while changing reels. Moreover, the projectors were operated by hand, resulting in uneven pictures.⁵³ Nepomuceno described the situation of the film goers during his early period by saying that they “sat on uncushioned, bedbug-ridden benches in theatres where the air was hot and stale”.⁵⁴ This is corroborated by an editorial in *The Independent* in May 1928 entitled “Sanitation in the movies”:

... pity the public who go to the movies, where hygiene and health conditions and reasonable comfort are lacking. Generally, the seats are in bad state of repair, so that to use them is a torture. Moreover, there are a horde of insects which are a plague to human beings and are the cause of skin diseases. The first class showhouses have electric fans, but, in general, they are defective. Others have not these aids to hygiene and comfort, but have the defects of being insect ridden, with seats broken and hard and an atmosphere of a stable.⁵⁵

An analysis of the newspaper articles during the late teens and early 1920s shows an erratic description of the development of theatre. An article in *The Citizen* in June 1919, before the advent of the native cinema, claims: “The flative productions have given way before the rapid growth of the moving pictures.”⁵⁶ Other articles are more positive about the development of theatre. In December 1919, *The Citizen* writes: “There is a reawakening, a new impulse that

⁵³ Lent (1990), p. 152.

⁵⁴ Quote in Dizon pp. 10 f taken from Lent (1990), p. 152.

⁵⁵ *The Independent*, May 5, 1928, p. 4. See also article in *Graphic*, October 27, 1928, pp. 2-3, 42.

⁵⁶ *The Citizen*, June 20 1919, p. 20.

foreshadows the beginning of a change, a flowering, as it were, of the long-silent emotions of the race in the new Tagalog dramas.” And in May 1920, *Manila Nueva* writes: “Who said that the Spanish Drama would die in the Philippines? [...] Theatre enthusiasts and the general public that frequent this kind of shows are doing great.”⁵⁷ This shows that the theatre and the cinema can grow and flourish simultaneously, and that the rise of one does not necessarily translate into the decline of the other. On the contrary an editorial in *Graphic* in April 1928 wrote that “the moving picture...came and greatly multiplied the number of theatre fans”.⁵⁸ It thus seems possible that the artistic impulses of different art forms trigger and inspire each other.

In the end cinema prevailed, and theatre sharply declined in popularity. Filipino historians and scholars give different descriptions on when the demise of theatre began, which is understandable after reading the different opinions in the newspaper articles above. The opinions range between calling the 1930s the golden age of the Philippine zarzuela⁵⁹, and stating that by the early 1920s the zarzuela had already declined and eclipsed.⁶⁰ Lacónico-Buenaventura blames the demise of theatre on cinema: “Eventually cinema eroded the active following of *teatro español* and *teatre tagalo*”.⁶¹ The elite in Manila basically decided whether to produce films or theatre plays. The gradual demise of theatre depended on the elite deciding to move their cultural capital to films instead of theatre plays. The performing arts are not only dependent on audience, but also on money to be able to set up performances. The plays did not lose their audience; particularly the provincial audience still had a great predilection for theatrical plays, rather it lost the patronage of the elite. In 1952, Salumbides wrote that cinema “has killed the zarzuelas and pushed to the corner the operas and other stage entertainments. The plan of the government to electrify the whole country will farther strengthen the hold of the movies on provincial inhabitants who are denied the enjoyment of this superb entertainment for lack of electricity in their localities.”⁶²

2.3 Working method

A newspaper article in *Manila Nueva* in February 1920 entitled “Malayan movies en accion” (“Malayan Movies in action”) gives us some insights of the working method of Nepomuceno

⁵⁷ *Manila Nueva*, May 8, 1920, p. 19: “¿Quién dijo que el teatro español moriría en Filipinas? [...] Los aficionados al teatro y el público en general, que se encuentra ávido de espectáculos de este género, están de enhorabuena.”

⁵⁸ *Graphic*, April 21, 1928, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Deocampo (2003), p. 128.

⁶⁰ Del Mundo (1998), p. 7 and De Pedro (1994), p. 12.

⁶¹ Lacónico-Buenaventura (1994), p. xxi.

⁶² Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 2.

during his early years of filmmaking: “They are taking scenes for various movies: ‘The Black Butterfly’, ‘Now or never, kiss me’, ‘Movie Starlet’. The script of all of them is written mostly by the elder Nepomuceno brother, Pepe [Jose], who has a great capability and a special talent for this.”⁶³ Nepomuceno, thus, was shooting three films at the same time. Although Nepomuceno was a perfectionist with an eye for realistic details, a movie production was a swift affair that sometimes took a week and sometimes a month.⁶⁴ Lent is however wrong when he claims that since “there were not enough foreign films for the half dozen local theatres, Nepomuceno produced his pictures in fast succession”.⁶⁵ As we have seen there were several dozen of theatres, and furthermore Pathe, Universal and other companies had offices in Manila, thereby securing the steady supply of foreign films. Rather his films were so popular that they doubled the prices when his films were showing and yet there were “hundreds of people waiting outside for a chance to shove themselves in”.⁶⁶

Nepomuceno did not only write the manuscripts of the early films (later he started to adapt novels) and direct the films, he was also engaged in the other aspects of the film production such as the make-up and the dressing of the actors, which he had learned during his college plays days.⁶⁷ During the day when the reporter from *Manila Nueva* followed the film production, scenes from two different films, *Estrellita de Cine* and *La Mariposa Negra*, were shot. In the article there are two instances where we are informed of how Nepomuceno directed his actors: “Ready! Come now! Slower! You, Angelita, look at his face, look up with your eyes! Like that! Smile!”⁶⁸ The second instance is a good description of the pedagogical way Nepomuceno directed his actors and actresses, and his knowledge about acting.

Pepe [Jose] Nepomuceno claps and again the presentation starts. Nepomuceno explains first the scene to the actress [Consuelito T.], with words, telling her what she should feel and how. Then he stands in front of her and with the gestures of a professional actor, he represents the actual scene. The actress repeats them right after and in the silent studio the only thing you hear is the characteristic noise of the cinematographic machine.⁶⁹

⁶³ *Manila Nueva*, February 28 1920, pp 5-7: “Están tomando escenas de varias películas; de ‘La Mariposa Negra’, de ‘Hoy o nunca, bésame’, de ‘Estrellita de cine’. El argumento de todas ellas, lo escribe el mayor de los hermanos Nepomuceno, Pepe [Jose], que tiene para eso una fecundidad portentosa y un arte especial.”

⁶⁴ Quirino (1983), p. 77 and Lent (1990), p. 151.

⁶⁵ Lent (1990), p. 151.

⁶⁶ *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, p. 12.

⁶⁷ *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, p. 12.

⁶⁸ *Manila Nueva*, February 28 1920, pp. 5-7: “¡Listo! ¡Venir ya! ¡Más espacio! ¿Vd. Angelita, mírele a la cara; levante los ojos! ¡Así! ¡Sonriendo!”

⁶⁹ *Manila Nueva*, February 28 1920, pp 5-7: “Pepe [José] Nepomuceno da unas palmadas, y comienza otra vez la representación. Nepomuceno explica primero la escena a la artista [Consuelito T.], de palabra, diciéndola lo que ha de sentir y como. Luego se coloca ante ella, y con los ademanes de un actor consumado, representa la escena de que

Nepomuceno was initially still engaged in photography simultaneously to his film engagements.⁷⁰ His talent as a photographer and cameraman is evident as Vicente Salumbides used him as a cameraman in some of his works in the late 1920s (such as *Miracles of Love, Fate or Consequence* and *The Soul Saver*). Due to his background in photography his work as a cameraman was better than his Filipino contemporaries. When Salumbides presents a list of the people working in different creative and technical fields in the early Filipino cinema, Jose together with his brother are the first two mentioned when talking about cinematography.⁷¹ Nepomuceno did not use artificial light sources, but relied on the light of the sun when shooting outdoors. When it was raining, shooting was over for the day, or indoor scenes were shot instead. He used tinfoil as reflectors, which made the lightning better than the early productions of Yearsley and Gross. This idea probably stems from Nepomuceno's knowledge about lightning from his experience from photography. Aside from the superior light control, Malayan Movies used other chemicals to get a proper treatment and exposure of the films. The better light quality is confirmed by P. T. Martin in an article in *Graphic*. Although he says that *Dalagang Bukid* was "of poor quality compared with the highest developments of the time", he complements the photography: "Nevertheless, the result showed better hope for the future than those early attempts, especially in photography. The earlier ones were too blurred and too faint, showing poor control of light."⁷² He used other forms of lighting and different angles in his shots. His use of his knowledge within photography is described by the director Geraldo de Leon: "The quality of his photography was always well in advance of his time and he was probably the first to make a conscious attempt to deliberately produce dramatic effect by visual pattern alone."⁷³

Strait Paneja writes that "the first Filipino filmmakers, Nepomuceno et al, were admittedly imitative in their first film explorations"⁷⁴, which is understandable considering that it was a high risk enterprise and therefore it is wise to imitate some of the successful practices of others. Yet, the article in *Manila Nueva* indicates that albeit Nepomuceno might have been imitative in some respects, the skills he had acquired as a photographer helped him as a director and gave him a

se trata. La artista los repite luego, y en al silencio del estudio, se oye solo el ruido característico de la máquina cinematográfica."

⁷⁰ Between October 1919 and April 1920, they had regular advertisements in the weekly *Manila Nueva* for their photography business.⁷⁰ In 1920 they also advertised in the Spanish section of *The Independent* (*The Independent*, July 17, 1920, p. 21 and September 18, 1920, p. 22).⁷⁰ It is worth noting that in both instances he chose to advertise in a Spanish paper. In RMCD (1921) Jose Nepomuceno is denoted partner of Diana Portrait Studio.

⁷¹ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 114.

⁷² P.T. Martin in *Graphic*, as quoted by Giron (1994), pp. 18 f.

⁷³ Quoted in Quirino (1983), p. 104.

⁷⁴ Strait Paneja (1998), p. 70.

more personal cinematographic style, which can be discerned already in *Dalagang Bukid*: “Its directors and organizers, the Nepomuceno brothers, not only are very recognized photographers whose fame is well established, but also are true artists in their profession, who sense the beauty and know how to find and catch it with the magic of their camera.”⁷⁵ The photography of his films is also what the competitors praise. One of the founders of Oriental Film Company wrote in 1929 that the films of Nepomuceno are internationally competitive in respect to their photography, but “[r]egarding the argument, the story and the development of the films, there is much to improve still.”⁷⁶

Besides making happy musicals, many of his films had sad themes. He was also early in realising the benefits of utilising children in the films. Nepomuceno tried to establish certain actors into specific categories, such as villains, comedians and character actors. He was therefore early in establishing good guys and bad guys as a way to create conflicts. For him conflict was a necessary element in every story, and the bad guys were the ones who made the films more exciting and enjoyable.⁷⁷ In the action movies he made (*Moro Pirate*, *Datu Talim*, *Palaris*), there was seldom any use of weapons. Instead the hero had to rely on his fists to create justice. Nepomuceno had a predilection for special effects, which partly explains why he made many horror movies. In order to create lightning, he painted a yellow line on a black paper and superimposed this shot on a dark cloud.⁷⁸ In the horror movie *Ang Manananggal* (1927), he also had to use camera tricks in order to create the mythic Philippine witch-like female vampire-monster (manananggal), which only has its upper body. He dug the ground beneath the actresses’ legs, and only shot their upper body, and through superimposition he could make them appear as flying. This is confirmed by Salumbides, who described Nepomuceno as one of the “trick masters” in film. The reason trick scenes were popular was that it “arouse the curiosity of the movie-goers and increase the entertaining value of the picture.”⁷⁹ Nepomuceno was sometimes innovative when advertising his films. When he advertised *Sampaguita* (the Filipino national flower) in 1927, he had the whole movie house sprayed with the scent of the Sampaguita flower.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Manila Nueva*, September 13, 1919, pp. 15 f: “Sus directores y organizadores, los hermanos Nepomuceno, son, no solo unos notabilísimos fotógrafos, cuya fama se halla ya bien cimentada, sino unos verdaderos artistas de su profesión, que sienten la belleza y saben buscarla y recogerla en la magia de su cámara fotográfica. No es pues extrañío, que estas inestimables cualidades se observen, en la primera película que “Malayan movies” ha fabricado.”

⁷⁶ *The Independent*, March 9, 1929, p. 20: “Con respecto al argumento, la trama y el desarrollo de las obras filmadas hay mucho que necesita mejorarse aun.”

⁷⁷ Quirino (1983), pp. 91, 93.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁹ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 135.

⁸⁰ Quirino (1983), p. 29.

2.4 *Dalagang Bukid*

Jose Nepomuceno's first film, *Dalagang Bukid*, premiered September 12, 1919.⁸¹ The zarzuela by Hermogenes Ilagan premiered earlier the same year and starred Atang de la Rama and Marcelino Ilagan, as did the film version. The play premiered at the prestigious Teatro Zorilla, and then moved on to the equally prestigious Grand Opera House. Ilagan was part of a Spanish zarzuela group, and in 1902 he formed the first Filipino zarzuela group. He wrote around hundred zarzuelas, many of which were patriotic and nationalistic. Despite his patriotic perspective, he was influenced by the Spanish elements around him, and most of his plays were exploring themes common in Spanish works, such as jealousy, honour, free will and religion.⁸² As Nepomuceno, like the filmmakers of the late 19th Century, entered untrodden ground, he chose to do so by showing something familiar. He chose to adapt *Dalagang Bukid* to the screen as he believed it would be a success at the box office for three reasons: Hermogenes Ilagan was the most prominent zarzuela writer at the time; the zarzuela was a box office hit; and the stars were well known.⁸³ The choice of *Dalagang Bukid* as his first film can be seen both as a low risk enterprise due to the abovementioned factors, and as high risk as the success on stage created higher expectations by the audience and the critics. The adaptation was for instance sharply criticised by Trinidad in *The Citizen*.⁸⁴ The box-office result was very favourable: the production costs of PHP 25 000, resulted in a gross income of PHP 90 000.⁸⁵ The popularity of the zarzuela is made apparent as it was performed over thousand times in different parts of the Philippines. An attempt was made in 1940 to revive the dying art of zarzuela by performing *Dalagang Bukid* at the Grand Opera House with Atang de la Rama as the lead actress.

Dalagang Bukid is a love story about a young flower vendor, Angelita (Atang de la Rama), who is betrothed by her parents to a rich, old man, Don Silvestre, but she loves Cipriano, a law student.⁸⁶ The play consists of three acts and is filled with music (18 songs), which made it suitable for a screen adaptation with an accompanying orchestra. The film showed many of the woes plaguing the Filipino society, as well as issues relevant for the society of the time: gambling, Americanisation, infidelity, poverty, the power of money versus the power of love, parents view on marriage, and corrupt government officials. The parents, who were under the oak of gambling, did not care about the well-being of their daughter and wanted a son-in-law who could

⁸¹ Some historians (Giron p. 18, Deocampo etc) claim that the film premiered September 25, but the *Manila Nueva* article from September 12 shows that it premiered earlier and then moved to a bigger movie house.

⁸² Carpio (2000), chapter 1.

⁸³ Quirino (1983), p. 17.

⁸⁴ *The Citizen*, September 18, 1919, p. 9. See Appendix I.

⁸⁵ Quirino (1983), p. 19.

⁸⁶ For a longer version of the story line, see articles from the press in Appendix I and Carpio (2000), pp. 120-135.

give them financial security. There is a Filipina who married an American because of his money, and who tries to be sophisticated by speaking English with a broken accent. Contrasting the love of Angelita and Cipriano is the love and desire of other characters in the play, where delusion, jealousy and infidelity play major roles. Don Silvestre is part of the upper crust of society, who is used to getting what he wants because of his money. A review in *Manila Nueva* the day after the premiere stated: “The home of Angelita, the pretty heroine, is a correct picture of many Philippine families, although it somehow exaggerates the negative tones.”⁸⁷ Nepomuceno changed the ending of the play. In the play Don Silvestre gives the couple his blessing, and all ends well. The movie ends with Don Silvestre fainting, and one month later the sequel of the film, *La Venganza de Don Silvestro* (The Vengeance of Don Silvestre) premiered. This second part was made especially for the cinema as it was common with sequels during those years.

2.5 Summary

This section showed how the status of cinema started growing as Nepomuceno engaged himself in the art. The newspapers supported his enterprise and understood its importance for the Philippines’ nation-building endeavours. Nepomuceno used themes as well as actors from the zarzuela and to some extent also from the moro-moro. His background in photography gave him knowledge and the sense of aesthetics to be able to catch the beauties of the country.

⁸⁷ *Manila Nueva*, September 13, 1919, pp. 15 f.: “El hogar de Angelia, la simpática heroína, es una pintura acertadísima, de muchas familias filipinas, aunque exajerando algo los tonos pesimistas.”

3. Cinema and Colonisation

Milan Kundera stated: “Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life... When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of organized forgetting... A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self.”⁸⁸ In order to get an understanding of the films of *Nepomuceno*, we have to analyse and assess the environment he worked in; the political and the socio-economic situation of the country as an American colony. The questions that are asked and discussed are: What were the effects of being colonised? How did the culture change? In what way did the American education influence the Filipino society? What was the role of language? How did the role of women change, and how was this portrayed in the films of *Nepomuceno*?

3.1 Impact of colonisation

Using popular culture is an efficient way to spread one’s culture and thereby the domains of an empire. By exporting their theatre practices to the Philippines and giving them a Filipino content, the Spanish had a well-functioning tool to spread their culture, ideology and religion, and winning over the masses.⁸⁹ The Americans also used popular culture to spread their ideology and culture, when the Philippines became an American territory. With the American occupation, another form of stage entertainment gained prominence, the song and dance programs of vaudeville. Deocampo describes the process and effect of having new colonisers: “The string of colonization has created layers of cultural formation and expression. ...each layer of cultural expression was challenged with the entry of other cultural influences.”⁹⁰ In the contemporary Filipino film historical discussion there are two prevailing views on the impact of colonisation on the Filipino cinema. The main proponents of the two differing views are del Mundo and Deocampo. Del Mundo describes the colonized Filipino as culturally estranged⁹¹, and he sees colonisation as a process of adaptation, negotiation and indigenisation, and calls it a process of native resistance: “Resistance, in my view, is innate to the native. The colonized do not merely absorb foreign cultural influences like a sponge. Influence happens through a complex process of adaptation, negotiation, and, eventually, indigenization. I refer to this process as native resistance and we see this in early Philippine cinema.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Milan Kundera as quoted in Velasco Shaw (2002), p. ix.

⁸⁹ Lumera (1997), p. 157.

⁹⁰ Deocampo (2003), p. xviii.

⁹¹ Del Mundo (1998), p. 25.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

This can be compared and contrasted to Deocampo's view that discusses the effect of colonisation on the national cinema by analysing five key words: imitation, indigenisation, parody, acceptance and resistance. Imitation of the western films; indigenising foreign cultural elements and nativising them by giving them a native touch, which was done with the Spanish zarzuela; parodying and distorting foreign films and thereby laughing at the foreign; accepting the impact and influence of foreign cultural elements, and make movies based on that acceptance; and resistance against the foreign coloniser by making films that criticises them ideologically, thematically or through its form.⁹³ The colonisation led to some kind of inferiority complex by the native, which can still be discerned in today's Filipino cinema, for instance casting the leading roles to Caucasian looking actors.⁹⁴ Cinema has from an early age been used for nation-building purposes. Although film, the cinematograph and the chromophotograph, was brought into the country by Spanish and European businessmen, the Americans in the Philippines used motion pictures to persuade people in the States that it is profitable to invest in the country.⁹⁵ Six months after the Treaty of Paris, where the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain, a news article in *Manila Times* stated that the Americans will use the cinematograph to sell the Philippines to the world.⁹⁶

As the Democratic Party won the presidential election in the United States in 1912 and 1916, they appointed the governor general of the Philippines for the first time. Francis B. Harrison was governor general from 1913 until 1921 and started a process of granting more autonomy to the Philippines. The Republicans won the elections in 1921, and General Leonard Wood was appointed the new governor general. He considerably slowed down and tried to reverse the process of independence. This development is important in regard to Nepomuceno as it influenced his filmmaking. As the colonial power tightened its grip on the Philippines, many intellectuals and artists of the country felt the urge to take a clearer political stance. Nepomuceno started stressing the native in his films, and gave a vast majority of his films a Tagalog title. He was afraid of what Susan Hayward refers to as "cultural rape" when describing the process of interrelation between the dominating and the native culture: "...the colonising culture will insert itself into the indigenous cultural body and be reproduced by 'her' – in short cultural rape. But

⁹³ Deocampo (2003), pp. 289-295.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 310.

⁹⁵ Strait Paneja (1998), p. 26.

⁹⁶ *Manila Times*, July 13, 1899.

also cultural erasure ('no memory, no identity, no nation')".⁹⁷ In order to avoid cultural erasure, one has to revive one's native culture.

The tie to the United States was, after around 20 years, already getting stronger than almost four centuries under the Spanish. This was mostly due to the increased dependence on the United States in trade. In RMCD in 1905, the Philippines was described, "...as an American colony, they are the natural market for American goods and the natural field for American investment."⁹⁸ In 1920 United States became the biggest trade partner of the Philippines; a position that it kept enhancing.⁹⁹ During the 1920s and the 1930s, United States was by far the biggest trade partner of the Philippine; an average of 63% of the Filipino imports during the years 1925-1935 were from the United States.¹⁰⁰ By taking charge of the imports, the Americans made the Filipinos more dependent as well as americanising them. As the economic dependence on the United States grew, there was less talk about independence. An article in *Graphic* in May 1929 by M. San Martin entitled "Changing our tune" stated that the politicians no longer demand "immediate and absolute" independence, and rather focus on free trade and economic questions.¹⁰¹

The colonial mentality of the Americans is apparent when reading the publications of the time period. In 1911 RMCD describes the situation of commerce in the Islands, and the motivation that they present for why the Filipinos have given the reins of commerce to the American, Spanish and Chinese is: "No mention has been made of the people of the country, because unfortunately they have been content to leave its business in the hands of outsiders."¹⁰² In October 1919 an editorial in the pro-American *Manila Times* entitled "The Filipino" flag wrote that it is "way too early for independence", and that it is not an option the coming few years.¹⁰³ In another editorial the paper wrote that the flag "...flies today as a ... token of thanksgiving for the unselfish, altruistic labors of a foster father, who for the past 21 years has endeavored to lead a young and inexperienced people."¹⁰⁴ The section in *The Independent* that referred to the American newspapers writing on the Philippines had the heading "The Philippine Problem" and this was a term used elsewhere in the politics as well. An article series "Philippine Independence: Arguments against our aims and their answers" in *The Independent* in April and May 1920 stated:

⁹⁷ Hayward (2000), p. 100.

⁹⁸ Rosenstock's Manila City Directory (1905), "Introduction", p. 14.

⁹⁹ Rosenstock's Manila City Directory (1911), "Manila", p. M.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenstock's Manila City Directory (1936-1937), "Philippine Trade & Economic Condition in 1935", p. 1.

¹⁰¹ *Graphic*, May 25, 1929, pp. 4 f, 43.

¹⁰² Rosenstock's Manila City Directory (1911), "Manila", p. B.

¹⁰³ *Manila Times*, October 24, 1919, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Manila Times*, October 30, 1919, p. 3.

“One thing should not be overlooked: the sooner independence is granted to the Filipinos the stronger will be the ties that bind them to the American commonwealth and to the American People.”¹⁰⁵ An editorial cartoon in *The Independent* in May 1920 depicts a common view among the emerging population who has received their education during the American occupation. It is a picture of an American and a Filipino holding hands across continents, under the title ‘Friends for Ever’. The accompanying editorial states:

...our lot as a free and independent people is intimately linked to the power and glory of the greatest Republic on the globe. [...] ...we especially greet this most loyal and generous ally which any people could have in the history of the human race, this ally and friend which transplanted to our country its political, social, and cultural institutions for our good and as sure pledge of its friendship and protection, converting into a liberating and humanitarian action foreign intervention in weak countries, and teaching that the customary colonial policy of European powers ought to be cooperation, production and emancipation.¹⁰⁶

Although Nepomuceno is portrayed as a nationalist that tries to show the typically Filipino, he also was influenced by being colonised. For instance in the two pictures we have of him, he is wearing the Western suit with a tie, instead of the domestic Filipino clothing, the *barang*. In this respect the parallel that Charles Musser makes between Black cinema and Filipino cinema is relevant. Charles Musser compared Jose Nepomuceno to Oscar Micheaux.¹⁰⁷ There are many similarities as well as disparities between the two and their surroundings. The similarities that Musser points to is that they are both prolific, that they foster controversy to ensure success at the box office, and that they were criticised for their low production quality, and that both grew up and can be considered as a search for an alternative “national” cinema.¹⁰⁸ Taylor analyses black cinema from the perspective of it being an underdeveloped cinema, as it did not have the same financial possibilities (limited production money, and limited number of theatres playing the films). Both the early Filipino films and the films of race cinema was compared by the press to the films made in Hollywood, and was therefore seen as lacking in production value. That films from Hollywood were the benchmark is understandable however, as the Hollywood productions were dominating the world scene post-World War I. There are other parallels as well, not only between Nepomuceno and Micheaux, but also between the Filipinos and the African-Americans. For instance, in the films depicting the Spanish-American war and the Filipino insurgents, such as *Battle of Manila Bay* (1899), African-Americans are playing the Filipinos, thereby showing how

¹⁰⁵ *The Independent*, May 29, 1920, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ *The Independent*, May 8, 1920, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Musser (2005), p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

white America viewed the minorities and the colonised. The description that Vicente Salumbides made when explaining the motivating force behind the early Filipino filmmakers, could have been a description of the early African-American directors as well:

The ambition of some enterprising Filipinos who had 'equality complex' led them to study and master this most difficult and complicated technique to prove that an art is not the exclusive ownership of a race, and that what an American or European has accomplished, a Filipino can also do. Considering the fact that the Filipino directors, artists, and technicians, with few exceptions, did learn their jobs in the University of Experience, and that the equipment they use is not as good and complete as those being used in Hollywood, the pictures they produced are not far behind Hollywood pictures.¹⁰⁹

Although ideologically they may have shared many common features, there were significant differences in their environment and surroundings. Whereas Micheaux lived in the centre of the film producing country (not in Hollywood though) and had many contemporaries in making race movies that he could share his ideas with, be influenced by and get feedback from, Nepomuceno was the pioneer filmmaker in the Philippines and did not have any colleagues during the first five or six years (seen in quantity, there were around 500 race movies between 1910 and 1930¹¹⁰, and only 20-30 made in the Philippines in the same period). Other differences are that Oscar Micheaux was much more controversial in his filmmaking. His *Within Our Gates* (1920) was strongly anti-racist, had a lynching scene, an attempted rape and also portrayed ministers in a negative light; *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920) was about the Ku Klux Klan and racial identity; *Body and Soul* (1925) included violence against women; many of his films were about racial intermarriage and miscegenation. Furthermore Micheaux's films were often facing censorship¹¹¹, something that Nepomuceno's films did not. In a larger picture, although both African-Americans and Filipinos are being prejudiced and colonised, the difference is that Jose Nepomuceno is part of the majority being suppressed by the minority, whereas Oscar Micheaux is a minority suppressed by the majority.

3.2 Changes in culture

The end of the 19th Century with the Spanish-American war and the Filipino-American war, was the starting point for a period with many changes in culture, as the native, the Hispanic and the American cultures met and in some instances clashed. Especially the period immediately

¹⁰⁹ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Taylor (2001), p. 4 and Bowser and Spence (2001), pp. 87 f.

¹¹¹ Taylor (2001), p. 5.

following the First World War was a time when the American culture, strengthened by being on the winning side of the war, grew stronger and more aggressive in its spreading. This was felt within the Philippine society. The change of occupational power led to many changes in culture and traditions, from a conservative catholic view to a more liberal American perspective. Furthermore, the norms, values and authorities (formal and informal) were scrutinised and questioned. This was reflected in the papers. An article “Our Changing Customs and Traditions” in *The Philippine Review* in October 1920 based on a survey with around hundred Filipino university students analysed the cause and effect of the changes. “There is a feeling of regret on the part of some people over the fact that our customs, manners, beliefs and traditions have been changing rather rapidly since the American occupation... [since] we are losing our beautiful native customs.”¹¹² The article however found the changing customs a positive development as “change is a necessary condition of progress” and links it to better education in schools, as well as the home, the church and the government. Most of the changes mentioned by the students are listed in the article, and many of them seemed like outdated superstitions. Relating all the changes to the past twenty years of American occupation can however be misleading as changes in culture and tradition is generally a long and arduous process. 350 years of Spanish influence can not be erased in a period of 20 years. Education is probably the most efficient way to replace traditions, especially getting rid of the superstitious ones. The education from schools and the government has been altered under American occupation, but tracing the changes to the education in homes and in the church seems a little premature as changes in such institutions often take longer time.

During the 1920s the changes continued. An article “Western Traditions invading Filipino society” in *Graphic* in January 1928 that was about the introduction of Valentine parties in Manila and in the provinces stated: “We are fast adopting American customs. This is true in government, in manners of living and in society.”¹¹³ With all these changes in mind, *Graphic* planned an article series “The Revolt of Youth. Fact or Fiction?” in the beginning of 1929.¹¹⁴ Rafael Palma, President of the University of the Philippines, was the first (and seemingly the only one) to answer, and he acknowledged the profound changes in the youth which he described as “a radical departure from traditional beliefs and rules of action”. He continued: “All the fundamental beliefs in religion, politics, government and sociology have changed and, accordingly, the customs

¹¹² *The Philippine Review*, October 1920, p. 664 (the article continues til p. 671).

¹¹³ *Graphic*, January 28, 1928, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ The series was based on three questions that they sent out to leading educators in the country. The questions were: “1. Is there a youth’s revolt in this country? 2. Are the youth of today less respectful towards their parents than the youth of yesterday? If so, who is to blame, the home, the church or the school? 3. What are the principal virtues and the main defects of the modern Filipino youth?”

and practices of the youth have also undergone alterations.”¹¹⁵ Another article “Catholic social customs in Philippines tradition” written by Paz Gloria the same year, criticises women and youth for all their changes and entreats them to maintain the good virtues of the past.¹¹⁶ T H Pardo de Tavera described the view current among the educated in the country regarding the Filipino mentality: “This new mentality [mentality of examination, reasoning, discussion of beliefs and principles] has not as yet penetrated the whole people... The educated and cultivated portion of our society is what characterizes to day our mentality and such portion has abandoned sentimental logic to adopt the logic of fact.”¹¹⁷

The change of culture can also be seen in how people spend their evenings and nights. An article “Saturday night in Manila” in *Graphic* in February 1928 sums up the change: “Gone were the days when the whole town goes to church. Instead, we have busy and eventful Saturday nights, attending cockfights, boxing bouts, card games, dances and what not.” During 1922 *The Independent* had a number of articles commenting on the (modern) dancing practices of the youth. It was described as “the evils our modern dances inflict on girls and boys.”¹¹⁸ Two editorials were about the practice of students of arranging dance parties on all occasions, and the plea for moderation.¹¹⁹ Another editorial points to the total change in fashion that has occurred during the last 10-15 years. Overall, all these events are evidence that “the Filipinos are becoming occidental, adopting American habits and norms of conduct”.¹²⁰ An editorial “Adultery and divorce” in May 1928 is a good example of the battle between two different cultures and social orders: “The Filipinos should not care what is the moral standard in America... where despite their material progress, they have much to learn from us in the social and moral order”.¹²¹

Like in the rest of the world, European films were dominating the screenings up until the First World War, thereafter American films dominated.¹²² Naturally, Nepomuceno and other early filmmakers were influenced by the films they were viewing as they were growing up. Vicente

¹¹⁵ *Graphic*, February 9, 1929, pp. 4 f.

¹¹⁶ *Graphic*, March 2, 1929, pp. 6 f, 43.

¹¹⁷ *The Independent*, December 23, 1922, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ *The Independent*, January 28, 1922, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ *The Independent*, February 4, 1922, p. 4 and November 25, 1922, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *The Independent*, December 30, 1922, p. 3.

¹²¹ *The Independent*, May 5, 1928, p. 4.

¹²² Salumbides wrote: “From 1904, when visual entertainment was introduced in the Philippines, to World War No. I, European pictures dominated the movie shows of the country. From that war to the advent of Tagalog talkies in 1934, the American pictures were absolute rulers. But from 1935 to the present time [1952] the Tagalog pictures have slowly and steadily crowded out the American pictures from weekend to midweek programs except in the first-run and second-run movie houses in Manila, Cebu and other large cities where many foreign elements reside. However, so long as English is an official language of the Filipinos and is taught in their schools, American movies will never leave the Philippines. The people will continue to see both.” (Salumbides (1952), Part II, p. 2.)

Salumbides was a Filipino filmmaker trained in Hollywood, and when he returned in 1924 with Hollywood know-how, he and Nepomuceno became friends and were partners during a period (1924-1928). He describes his collaboration with Nepomuceno and the division of labour, while they were making *Miracle of Love*: “Salumbides applied the techniques which he learned from Hollywood in photoplay writing, make-up, acting, directing and editing, while Nepomuceno concentrated his work on the improvement of cinematography, laboratory, and setting.”¹²³

The Nepomuceno brothers also looked toward Hollywood and tried to improve their filmmaking by learning therefrom. Jesus went there in 1927, whereas Jose did not go to there until the 1950s during the end of his career. In the film reviews the domestic films were compared to films from Hollywood, which were seen as the benchmark. *La Mujer Filipina* was described as “the Manila-made film which convinced you and me that Hollywood has no monopoly on good productions” in *Graphic* in 1928.¹²⁴ The weekly *Graphic* started in July 1927 and contributed much to the glorifying of stars, as it had pictures and notes on film stars from its inception. Each number contained an average of four pages on movie stars, which were almost exclusively Hollywood stars. In October 1927 Elizabeth “Dimples” Cooper (from Nepomuceno’s *Ang Tatlong Hambog*) wrote an article in *Graphic* from Hollywood, entitled “Meeting the stars in Hollywood”, which she described as “a place to realize one’s dreams” and whose stars she glorified.¹²⁵ In other articles Hollywood is referred to as “the Mecca of film” and “the Mecca of the Seventh Art”.¹²⁶ When *Graphic* tried to get more subscribers, they offered an album with pictures of film stars for free, for those who got a one year subscription.¹²⁷ The focus on Hollywood is also valid for *The Sunday Tribune*, which in the late 1920s and early 1930s had a section on movies “Screen Buzz-z”, where movies were equalled to movies from Hollywood.

3.3 Education and language

The Philippines was primarily an agricultural society, where the majority of the population was working either with agriculture or as fishermen. The primary instrument that the Americans used to enforce their culture and influence was education. In this way, the Americans tried to integrate and assimilate the Filipinos. The Americans undertook an ambitious plan of mass-education, both in order to develop human resources but also to subdue and control the colonised. The

¹²³ Salumbides (1952), Part I, pp. 8 f.

¹²⁴ *Graphic*, September 22, 1928, p. 2

¹²⁵ *Graphic*, October 22, 1927, p. 4.

¹²⁶ *Philippine Free Press*, February 15, 1930, p. 56: “Hollywood, la Meca del Séptimo Arte”

¹²⁷ *Graphic*, April 27, 1929 and also the subsequent issues.

Filipino historian, Renato Constantino, wrote that “the most effective means of subjugating a people is to capture their minds. Military victory does not necessarily signify conquest. [...] The molding of men’s minds is the best means of conquest. Education, therefore, serves as a weapon in wars of colonial conquest.”¹²⁸ The Americans sent over ships of teachers to educate the Filipinos in the “right way” by dampening their feelings of nationalism and creating “little Americans” who aided by American textbooks learn to think and act in the same manner as their colonial masters and who become a “carbon copy of his conqueror”.¹²⁹ This is confirmed in a letter from ex-governor Harrison to Commissioner Gabaldon quoted in an editorial “The present young generation” in *The Independent* in June 1928: “Of course the public school system was designed to Americanize your young people, and in so doing to destroy utterly your own culture, but one might have hoped that in the University there would survive the real cultural traditions of your people.”¹³⁰ The first step in the Americanisation process was the use of English as the language of education. The new language created a barrier between the younger and the older generation, and explains many of the changes in culture described in the previous section.

The question of language held a prominent position in the public debate. Interestingly enough, the question was always whether to use English or Spanish, there was rarely any serious discussion about using one of the vernaculars. An editorial cartoon in *The Independent* in November 1920 is indicative of the climate. It is a picture of Maria Clara (i.e. the Philippines) telling two young boys “My sons, to understand each other you must learn both languages.” The accompanying editorial “The language question” depicts the Philippines as a bilingual country and describes the importance of mastering both English and Spanish.¹³¹ *The Independent* held Spanish under high esteem. In an editorial “Spanish in the public schools” in November 1922 it described Spanish as “one of the valuable elements in our tradition and in our history...[which]...distinguishes us from the other peoples of Asia and the Oceanic islands.” It also describes the Spanish language as “this beautiful Philippine language”.¹³² With this background it is very understandable that Nepomuceno gave all but one of the six movies he made during 1919-1920 a Spanish title. There are many other editorials that deal with the issue of the importance of the Spanish language.¹³³ The one in October 1926 describes Spanish as “the best weapon of resistance for our country against said absorption”.

¹²⁸ Constantino (2002), p. 178.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 179-181.

¹³⁰ *The Independent*, June 16, 1928, p. 4.

¹³¹ *The Independent*, November 20, 1920, pp. 7 f.

¹³² *The Independent*, November 11, 1922, p. 4.

¹³³ *The Independent*, March 1, 1924, p. 4; October 23, 1926, pp. 3 f; September 1, 1928, p. 4; September 29, 1928, p. 4; and May 23, 1929, p. 11.

Most of the newspapers portrayed Spanish as the keeper of the native culture, whereas English was seen as a way of americanising the people and rub them of their old traditions. An editorial “Spanish prevails” in *The Independent* in June 1927 summed up the view: “The English language has come with the mission of denationalizing the Filipinos and to Americanize them. Spanish, in the opinion of THE INDEPENDENT, performs providentially and without the deliberate volition of men, the mission of keeping alive the spirit of country traditions, and among them the Catholic religion of our fathers.”¹³⁴ In a speech in 1928 Jorge Bocobo, Dean, College of Law, U.P., told the Hispano-Filipino Society: “We should not only look at the Spanish language from its cultural and sentimental aspects but treasure it as an effective means of national defence. Subject peoples to maintain their nationality never give themselves up entirely to the culture and the civilization of the sovereign power.”¹³⁵ As can be seen the identity of the ilustrado was closely linked to the Spanish language. Ironically enough, using and promoting the colonial language of Spain, can be seen as a way to “give [oneself] up entirely to the culture and the civilization of the sovereign power”, which is what Bocobo warns against.

The American publications gave another picture of the matter. In 1911, RMCD wrote: “The Spanish language, which was confined to a few, and distinguished classes...has been succeeded by the democratic English spoken by the mass of the youth of the country, and seek to unite the people whom Spain ruled by keeping divided. The English spoken is becoming their natural tongue.”¹³⁶ Despite all these articles and editorials in favour for Spanish, there were signs of an impending crisis for the Spanish language. The demand for Spanish books dramatically decreased. An editorial cartoon in *The Independent* showed the burial of the Spanish language, and wrote that “the Spanish language is disappearing and will, in all probability, disappear with the present generation”.¹³⁷ Gradually, it did disappear, and today it is a forgotten language. English on the other hand prevailed and is still the main language in schools. The editorials that thought speaking English was a transitory phenomena were wrong: “The day we shall be liberated from the alien master who imposes his own language, this language will disappear as does the mist in the sunshine.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ *The Independent*, June 4, 1927, p. 4.

¹³⁵ *The Independent*, August 4, 1928, p. 8.

¹³⁶ Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory (1911), “Manila”, p. I.

¹³⁷ *The Independent*, October 23, 1926, pp. 3 f.

¹³⁸ *The Independent*, November 11, 1922, p. 4.

Despite the focus on the languages of the colonisers, the language of the films was clearly Tagalog, and Tagalog was also the language spoken on the streets and in the markets in Manila. During the silent era this is evident as most of the films had Tagalog titles, and when the talkies came, they were made in Tagalog (and the talkies in Cebu were made in Cebuano). Nepomuceno made the first all-talking movie with *Ang Punyal na Ginto* (Golden Dagger) in 1933, and it was in Tagalog. It was a big success and was still showing in some provinces two years after its release. The incorporation of sound led to an increased domestic share of the market that had been increasingly dominated by films from Hollywood. The sound film also underlined the importance and need of a native, national language.

3.4 Portrayal of women

Nepomuceno started making films at a time when woman suffrage relatively recently had been applied in some of the (Western) countries of the world. In the Philippines women got the right to vote in 1933. The status of women and the question of suffrage was therefore one of the most frequently discussed and debated topics in the Philippine papers in the 1920s, matched only by the question of independence and language. Both *The Independent* (“El Mundo de la Mujer” (The World of the Woman)) and *Sunday Tribune* (“Modern Woman”) had a regular section in their papers to discuss issues relevant for women. An article (“What women talk about”) by Virginia Pradas in *Graphic* in March 1928 delineates the most popular topics among Filipino women as being babies, education and dresses.¹³⁹ In May 1928 *Graphic* started an article series called “Famous Filipino Women”. There are several other articles that year that discuss the changing role of women.¹⁴⁰ In March 1929 the first woman was presented in the section “Who’s who in the Philippines”¹⁴¹, followed by two more women in May 1929.¹⁴² An article (“What other women think of morality campaign”) in *Sunday Tribune* in December 1929 reports on moral crusaders who have “indignation meetings” on the “anti-vice activities of ‘their sisters’”, and gets opinions from regular women on the street.¹⁴³ Even Elizabeth “Dimples” Cooper’s article from Hollywood included a comparison between the Filipino and American women. She concluded: “I’m certainly proud of the modest little Filipino girls we have here!”¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ *Graphic*, March 3, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ See *Graphic*, August 18, 1928 and August 25, 1928, p. 15 and *The Independent*, November 24, 1928, pp. 7 f.

¹⁴¹ Mrs. Sofia Reyes de Veyra, president of the National Federation of Women’s Clubs of the Philippines. *Graphic*, March 9, 1929.

¹⁴² *Graphic*, May 4 and 11, 1929.

¹⁴³ *Sunday Tribune*, Dec 15, 1929, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ *Graphic*, October 22, 1927, p. 5.

Broadly speaking the debate can be divided into two positions, one that hails the advance of women, and the other that feels that it is disruptive and hails the woman of yesterday. In the first category *Graphic* had an article (“The changing status of the Filipino woman”) in December 1927, where Mrs Ildefonsa c. Osias relates that the contribution of women to society has increased, and for this we owe “the advance of education” as well as “the Christian religion”.¹⁴⁵ This article is followed by three articles (“Is Woman Man’s Inferior?”, “Is the modern Filipino girl as bad as all that?” and “Can women succeed in business?”) in 1928.¹⁴⁶ And the presented answer is ‘no’, ‘no’ and ‘yes’. Still, even the positive articles sometimes refer to women as the ‘weaker sex’.¹⁴⁷ This brings us to the second category, which is here exemplified by an article “Women suffrage synonym of divorce and flapperism” written by Amparo M. Neri in December 1927. The article starts by positioning the woman; “Creating woman out of man’s rib, God meant us to be subject and inferior to our strong and gallant males.” It continues in the same vein:

If I were asked who is the better, wiser, happier woman – the brilliant, business-like, independent, modern suffragist, or the maternal domestic, normal old-fashioned woman with home and babies – I would certainly answer that it is the latter. [...] Women in politics? What mess it would be! Woman suffrage is nothing more than a synonym of divorce and flapperism – cosmetics, bob-hair and short skirts – and all that are revolting o our old customs and traditions. [...] Let us have suffrage when the majority of our women shall have reached the stage of development where they are equipped with the necessary requirements for the intelligent exercise of that right; and when also the majority of us are really earnest and sincere in our demands for that right. [...] I would like to have all the women in the world to be ever delicate, sweet, lovable, yielding and obedient to man.¹⁴⁸

Nepomuceno’s *The Filipino Woman* (1927) can be seen as his contribution to the public debate about the status and role of women. He often showed two different portraits of women in his films in order to contrast the heroine with the other woman, and thereby make the qualities of the heroine more conspicuous. *The Filipino Woman* compared the Filipina of yesterday (during Spanish occupation) with the one of today (during American occupation), where the former was shown in a much better light by connecting bad traits to the latter.¹⁴⁹ In the movie ads, the viewers were warned about the danger of being too modern. The Filipina was played by the seventeen-year-old debutant Eva Lyn (who did not make any more movies afterwards). She played three parts in the film: Laura, who was brought up in the Spanish tradition, being soft-spoken, modest and fragile, and who became an ideal wife and mother; Laura’s daughter, who

¹⁴⁵ *Graphic*, December 17, 1927, pp. 10 f.

¹⁴⁶ *Graphic*, January 7, 1928, p. 9, January 28, p. 3 and May 26, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ *Graphic*, December 17, 1927, pp. 10-11 and May 26, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Graphic*, December 31, 1927, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ Strait Paneja (1998), pp. 59 f.

was influenced by the modern ways of the Americans; and Laura's granddaughter, who represents the future woman in the Philippines, filled with negative character traits. A review in *Manila Times* wrote: "The Filipina is so changed that one would believe she was a foreigner were it not for the dress she uses."¹⁵⁰ The film was successful, and was shown again in December 1928 under the Spanish title *La Mujer Filipina*.

Nepomuceno was critical to the liberal American view on the role of women in society. In her doctoral dissertation on the role of women in early Philippine cinema, Strait Paneja claims that the image of the Filipina as a martyr, who is meek, patient and suffering started with the silent movies, and that Nepomuceno was its chief proponent.¹⁵¹ I think this is giving too much credit to the movies. This is an image that persisted in the society long before the cinematographic era. However, it is true that it is an image that Nepomuceno recreated and wanted to maintain. This is most clearly seen in *The Filipino Woman*, but also other films made by Nepomuceno project this image. The suffering heroine of Rizal's writings was the model of femininity that Nepomuceno tried to elevate. He adapted Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* to the screen in 1930. Strait Paneja states that "there is something in the representation of women in silent films which has made the movies distinctly Filipino."¹⁵² An interesting statement which unfortunately is not satisfactorily explained, but merely related to flowers and chastity. Strait Paneja concludes that: "Suffering was equated with virtuousness in the early Filipino films. To project the desired image of Filipino womanhood on the screen, it became necessary to beset her with every conceivable emotional, physical and spiritual dilemma which transformed the heroine into a veritable martyr."¹⁵³ Nepomuceno was one of the main architects in creating this image of the Filipina. Already his first work, *Dalagang Bukid*, was about a poor woman in love who faces a dilemma, and this was a theme that continued in many other of his movies. A review of *Pearls of the Marketplace* in *Graphic* describes the plot: "The photoplay vividly portrays the fate of a poor but faithful Filipino woman with a sublime love stronger than death".¹⁵⁴

Although Nepomuceno is considered to have a conservative view on the role of women, he contributed to the (sexual) liberation and modernity of women. According to Strait Paneja the song *Nabasag ang Banga* (Breaking of the clay jar)¹⁵⁵ "signified the beginning of a sexual

¹⁵⁰ *Manila Times*, October 12, 1927.

¹⁵¹ Strait Paneja (1998), p. 144.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁴ *Graphic*, March 2, 1929, p. 52.

¹⁵⁵ The leitmotif of *Dalagang Bukid*.

revolution...[and]...it broke the chastity belt which had girdled the Filipino woman under Spain for almost four hundred years".¹⁵⁶ In later Philippine movies, it was common with the breaking of a jar and a use of the expression *Nabasag ang Banga* when a female character lost her virginity. Nepomuceno refrained from showing sex and violence in his films, but he was the first Filipino including a film kiss in his films. It was in the movie *Ang Tatlong Hambog* (The three humbugs) in 1926. The kiss got different reactions by the audience. Although the Filipino audience generally applauded when seeing film kisses, the public reaction was rather unfavourable and slightly shocking when the kissing couple was Filipinos.¹⁵⁷ The kiss took place against the backdrop of church ruins. The Agustinian friars, to whom the church belonged, did not approve and forbade further use of the church grounds for movies. During the early years of Philippine films, kissing was improper and the actresses (and the actors?) were not willing to kiss for the screen. When Consuelita T., the lead actress in *Estrellita de Cine* (1920), was asked by a reporter from *Manila Nueva* if she, and the Filipinas, would kiss in the movies, she answered "We? In ... the movies... no... The Filipino kiss is very expensive!"¹⁵⁸. This is also amplified by the fact that the hero always had to undergo serious struggles and effort in order to "win" the hand of the lady. That kissing was a big deal in film making is evident by the fact that Salumbides gives a whole chapter to "Kissing in the movies".¹⁵⁹ Sotto also argues the importance of film kisses by claiming that the initial kissing scene from *Ang Tatlong Hambog* proved to be such a success and crowd-drawer that Nepomuceno included kissing scenes in *Hot Kisses*, *Sampaguita* and *Pearl of the Marketplace*.¹⁶⁰ The fact that he named one of his films *Hot Kisses* shows that Nepomuceno could be both controversial and commercial.

3.5 Summary

In this section we saw that the new colonisers were facilitating a change of culture and tried to americanise the Filipinos through education, language and popular culture. The role of women changed, and youth departed from the path of their parents and grandparents. By making films around relevant social issues, Nepomuceno created public opinion and through his popularity he became more influential. In a milieu of cultural change, the population is more susceptible to new influences. This is why Nepomuceno and his Tagalog films had such an impact.

¹⁵⁶ Strait Paneja (1998), p. 43.

¹⁵⁷ Quirino (1983), p. 34.

¹⁵⁸ *Manila Nueva*, February 28, 1920, pp. 5-7: "'-¿Nosotras? En... película... no... ¡El beso filipino cuesta muy caro!"

¹⁵⁹ Albeit his chapters are many and short, Salumbides (1952), Part I, chapter 18, pp. 137 f.

¹⁶⁰ Sotto (2001), p. 37.

4. Cinema and Nation-building

Susan Hayward stated: “The modern nation is built on shared memories of some past or pasts that can mobilise and unite its members.”¹⁶¹ This section analyses in what way Nepomuceno contributed to the nation-building process and the Filipino quest for independence. In order to assess that, other questions have to be discussed: How was the question of independence discussed in the newspapers? How did the different art forms contribute to the nation-building process? In what way did Nepomuceno create a national consciousness? How did the Tagalog culture influence the Filipino culture?

4.1 Forces of independence

Andrew Higson talks about an inward-looking way of creating and defining a national cinema, where one examines cinema’s relationship with the country’s cultural practices, politics, traditions and national identity.¹⁶² Filipino cinema would then be assessed in the context of the Filipino history and its cultural formation. Nepomuceno drew on the existing cultural traditions, picked out the most Filipino and gave them a cinematic form. However, since a national identity did not really exist in the Philippines at the time, Nepomuceno helped creating it through his films. As he was the pioneer filmmaker, he contributed to the nation-building process by putting the cinema in the context of the factors and features of the society that he deemed important through the subject matters of the films.

The forces of independence had been prevalent in the Philippines during long stretches in the 19th Century. At the end of the 19th Century the struggle for independence got a new momentum. Under the American occupation there were new groups fighting, politically and intellectually, for independence. This fight partly coincided with the advent of native films. In this section and the next we will examine what the newspapers of the time wrote about independence and the role played by a national art. Many intellectuals found an arena to protest against the colonisers and fight for independence in the arts, initially primarily through literature and theatre. In December 1919 *The Citizen* wrote that “the great conquests of our leaders in the field of politics are paralleled by the triumphs of our artists.”¹⁶³ The arts became the battleground and venue for

¹⁶¹ Hayward (2000), p. 90.

¹⁶² Higson (2000), pp. 60-62.

¹⁶³ *The Citizen*, December 18, 1919, p. 5.

resistance against the colonial rule. Jose Rizal set the standard in literature already during the Spanish time.

The Independent had a regular feature ‘Self-government in the Philippines’ from 1919 and onward. During 1921 the first article in the paper (after the editorials) was always on Philippine Independence. Several editorial cartoons depicted the situation: Juan standing beside two egg-laying hens representing the Republicans and the Democrats, saying “Republican or Democrat, where is my independence?”¹⁶⁴; Uncle Sam holding a bundle of independence on a stick wherewith he attracts a young boy representing the Philippines, who asks “Uncle, when will you give me what I asked you 26 years ago?”¹⁶⁵; Philippines being chained by the flag asking for independence¹⁶⁶; Philippines being a bird in a cage, under the auspices of Uncle Sam, asking for independence¹⁶⁷; A conversation between Juan and the American congress, where Juan says “The time has arrived to give me independence”, whereby Congress replies “Let me first read these papers, it will take about 30 years only”.¹⁶⁸

An analysis of what the newspapers wrote about the Tagalog cinema and the role of cinema in 1919 and 1920 shows that almost all the articles connect the films to the distinctly Filipino, and often also as a sign that independence is near. Many of the articles can be found in Appendix I. An article by Miguel G. Luna in *The Citizen* in September 1919 entitled *The Value of the Motion Picture in the Philippines* connects the emergence of cinema to the independence; “...this coming of a new industrial enterprise has wonderful possibilities as an aid to the early acquisition of our own sovereignty”.¹⁶⁹ The article continues with:

Then there is the much-talked of Philippine independence. It is trite to discuss it here any further, but the motion picture appears to have some bearing on the subject. It is too well known to need mention that the great bulk of the American people is [are] yet in the dark as to our true conditions. They can not distinguish a Filipino from a Chinese or Japanese. And worst of all, too many of them think we are still a lot of “savages” and “headhunters” incapable of self-government. Such erroneous ideas, common everywhere in America, are a great drawback to our national aspiration.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ *The Independent*, June 19, 1920, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ *The Independent*, April 8, 1924, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ *The Independent*, May 31, 1924

¹⁶⁷ *The Independent*, July 3, 1926, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ *The Independent*, April 30, 1927, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ *The Citizen* September 18 1919, p. 9. The article is under the heading “The Silent Drama and the Philippines”.

¹⁷⁰

Quirino described the element of independence and patriotism in Nepomuceno's films in the following way: "In a manner of speaking, every photoplay produced by Jose Nepomuceno was a propaganda film in the sense that foreigners who viewed it would never fail to note certain facts of life in the Philippines: its customs and traditions, its scenic spots, its people."¹⁷¹ Nepomuceno gave his contribution to the independence movement through his images that helped create a national consciousness. Through his films he showed and documented important aspects of the Filipino culture and development, for instance documenting the production process in important industries, as well as making screen adaptations of *Dalagang Bukid* and Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*.

4.2 Nationalisation of art

In the aftermath of the First World War, many of the arts got a renewed patriotic and nationalistic direction. As seen from the newspaper articles, the early films of Nepomuceno contributed to an increased awareness and new stimuli to the claim for independence and nationalisation. An article in *The Citizen* after the premiere of *Dalagang Bukid*, connects the film to the emergence of a distinctively national cinema. It describes the premiere of *Dalagang Bukid* "...as the forerunner of many more films that have for their motif the depicting of the Philippines life and social conditions obtaining here that make of that life distinctively national and markedly peculiar to the type of our culture and civilization."¹⁷² Moreover, the choice of the popular Tagalog zarzuela *Dalagang Bukid* as his first film can be seen as a sign that he wants to portray what is typical for the Philippines. Also his film *The Pearl of the Markets* (1929) was labelled as a "Filipino Photoplay" and "a film distinctly Filipino with truistic splendour in every respect" with "scenes, so rich in local color and so true to life" in an article in *Graphic*.¹⁷³ Quirino portrays Nepomuceno in a similar fashion: "Entertainment was Don Jose's business... he raised entertainment to the level of Philippine art. And that is Jose Nepomuceno's ultimate glory: that he was a nationalist first and foremost in his work and that he strove to keep Philippine movies faithful to Philippine realities."¹⁷⁴

As there was no domestic competition or regionalisation in film production, there was no need to use local or regional settings to attract a certain audience, instead the focus was on Philippine nature and life which was something everyone could relate to. Nepomuceno travelled throughout

¹⁷¹ Quirino (1983), p. 86.

¹⁷² *The Citizen*, September 18, 1919, p. 9.

¹⁷³ *Graphic*, March 2, 1929, p. 52. The film itself is a love story over social class' barriers.

¹⁷⁴ Quirino (1983), p. ix.

the Philippines to find beautiful views to shoot scenes for his different films.¹⁷⁵ The only film title, among Nepomuceno's silent films, that has a geographical spot named in the title is *Lilies of Benguet* (1931).¹⁷⁶ Other titles refer to non-specific places, such as marketplace (*Mutya ng Pamilihan/The Pearl of the Markets*) and church (*Ang Lumang Simbahan/The old church*, 1928). Strait Paneja claims that since the Philippines had experienced two wars around the turn of the Century, the early films made in the country reflected the people's desire to return to the peaceful idyllic countryside, which can be exemplified with Nepomuceno's *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden, 1919), *Bahay Kubo* (Nipa Hut) and *Ligaw na Bulaklak* (Stray Flowers, 1932).¹⁷⁷ Although there is some truth to that claim, it is more reasonable to believe that the primary reason to show Philippine nature is to make beautiful Filipino sights available for the whole population and thereby start creating a sense of belonging.

Besides those of Nepomuceno's films that were cinematographically patriotic by showing and portraying the country as idyllic, some of the films can be classified as nationalistic based on the issues they portray. One such film is *La hija de revolucion* (Daughters of the Revolution, 1931), and another is *Punit na Bandila* (Torn flag) that depicts the bravery of a Filipino soldier. If we examine the titles of the films, none of the films bear any titles that suggest independence, but many of the films bear titles that refer to typical Filipino phenomena, such as *Ang Manananggal* (1927), *Sampaguita* (1928), *Tianak* (1932), *Ang Magmamani* (The peanut vendor), *Bahay Kubo* (Nipa hut). Furthermore, *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch me not, 1930) is a screen adaptation of José Rizal's patriotic novel. That was the only Nepomuceno film that had problems with censorship. It underwent 15 censorships, despite the fact that Nepomuceno asked the advice of many people, including priests, during the making of the film.¹⁷⁸

This brings to mind Frantz Fanon's colonial-cultural analysis of the role of the native intellectual. He divides the role into three different stages:¹⁷⁹ First, assimilation where the artist learns from the culture of the coloniser. Nepomuceno did this by mastering the arts of photography and film. Second, where he revisits the traditional, native culture. This is what Nepomuceno did during the first decade of his filmmaking with films such as *Dalagang Bukid*, *Bahay Kubo*, *Ang Manananggal* and *Sampaguita* where he showed the Philippine nature and other typical Filipino things. The third stage, which Fanon calls the "the fighting phase", is when the artist tries to awaken the people

¹⁷⁵ *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ Benguet is a region that is located in the midwestern part of Luzon.

¹⁷⁷ Strait Paneja (1998), p. 70.

¹⁷⁸ Quirino (1983), p. 109.

¹⁷⁹ Fanon (1967), pp. 178-180.

and contribute with a national literature (here we use literature in the wider sense). Nepomuceno's films became more political and nationalistic during the first years of the 1930s with films such as *Noli Me Tangere*, *Punit na Bandila* and *La hija de revolucion*.

Nepomuceno is attributed a statement by most Filipino film scholars (Deocampo, de Pedro, Giron, Quirino etc.) that he wanted to produce movies that reflected the conditions and the tastes of the country ("a las condiciones y los gustos del pais"). Although it is possible that Nepomuceno has made that statement, the original source thereof has not been found, or rather it has been found, but it is not made by Nepomuceno. It is from an article in *Manila Nueva*, quoted before in this paper, after the premiere of *Dalagang Bukid*, where they write about the advent of the film industry in Manila: "Era pues lógico que, más o menos tarde, hiciera su aparición la industria cinematográfica en Manila, adaptándola a las condiciones y a los gustos del país."¹⁸⁰ (Of course it was logical that, sooner or later, the cinematographic industry would appear in Manila and adapt itself to the conditions and tastes of the country.) Nepomuceno thereby set some kind of trend. When the Oriental Film Company announced its opening with an open letter in *The Independent*, they used the same patriotic arguments: "As its name calls for, this company will dedicate in character and local arguments to represent the life, customs, behavior and idiosyncrasy of the Philippine society in its present and its past, as it is done in other countries."¹⁸¹

According to Quirino the Nepomuceno brothers chose to call their production company Malayan Movies, as their plan was to make Tagalog movies that could be distributed to all the Malayan countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia.¹⁸² This is not a convincing argument for four reasons. Firstly, this was during the era of silent films, and through intertitles films could be understood wherever they were shown. Secondly, the Philippines did not share the same language or culture with the other Malayan countries. Thirdly, no evidence has been found that Nepomuceno tried to distribute or advertise his films to the other Malayan countries. Finally, there were many other firms in Manila during the 1920s and 1930s with a name including Malaya or Malayan. Most of these were firms that would not be interested in exporting their products. The firms found in RMCD include Malaya Bakery, Malayan Candy Factory, Malaya Drug Store, Malayan Dry Cleaning & Laundry, Malayan Fashion, Malayan Lumber Inc., Malayan Trucking,

¹⁸⁰ *Manila Nueva*, September 13, 1919, pp. 15-16. The italics are made by the present author.

¹⁸¹ *The Independent*, March 9, 1929, p. 20: "Como su nombre indica, esta compañía se dedicara de carácter y argumento locales, que representen la vida, costumbres, manera de ser e idiosincrasia de la sociedad filipina en el presente y en el pasado, exactamente igual que lo que se hace en otros países."

¹⁸² Quirino (1983), p. 86.

Malayan Gentlemen's Hall and Malayan Ladies Hall. Still today many firms can be found with the name Malayan, such as Malayan Insurance Company. It is hence a more likely explanation that the name was chosen as a way to show the origin and independence of the Filipino people from the different powers of occupation. This is also confirmed by the article in *Manila Nueva* quoted previously: "...adapt itself to the conditions and tastes of the country. This is what 'Malayan Movies' is intending to do, as its name indicates."¹⁸³ On the other hand, the inclusion of the name "Hispano" in Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Inc. could have been a way to breaking into Spanish speaking markets, particularly Central and South America. The Mexican Raul Talan came to the Philippines and negotiated to open a branch of the film company in Mexico.¹⁸⁴

Nepomuceno was not alone in this endeavour though. What he did for cinema had its parallels in other artforms. Some of the painters of the time also used beautiful scenic views as the main motive of their art. In an editorial in *The Citizen* entitled *Nationalization of Art* from 1920, Fabian de la Rosas "preference for Philippine scenic beauties as the subject of his art", and Asociacion Musical de Filipinas attempt to "collect typical national music" is seen as "different societies flourishing each with a specific aim in view, but all leading towards the same general goal – the nationalization of our whole social life."¹⁸⁵ In the field of music, kundiman was gaining ground. An article "Kundiman giving jazz the air" by Virigina A. Pradas in *Graphic* in October 1927 writes about the growth of the native song. She defines the phenomena: "The kundiman is the expression of the Filipino soul, the outpourings of its unrealized ideas and aspirations."¹⁸⁶ Nepomuceno made a few musicals. He was fond of the musical genre as it was a means of immortalising Filipino folk songs. One of his films bears the title of a folksong, *Leron-Leron Sinta*. The musical also gave an opportunity to use colourful costumes to set up a happy show for the audience. Allen Chester tries to define the special characteristic of Filipino art in his article "What Manila is not" in *Graphic*:

There is the possibility of an ideal combination of the arts of the East, of the Latins and of the Anglo-Saxons in the national expression of culture in the Philippines. The severely plain art of the Anglo-Saxon, the more expressive style of the Latins and the more dreamy, more mysterious one of the East ought to find a subtle blend which can be made to express an art typical of the Philippines.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ *Manila Nueva*, 13th of September 1919, pp. 15 f: "...adaptándola a las condiciones y a los gustos del país. Esto pretende hace 'Malayan movies' como ya su mismo nombre lo indica."

¹⁸⁴ Deocampo (2003), p. 272.

¹⁸⁵ *The Citizen*, August 27, 1920, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Graphic*, October 29, 1927, p. 3. See also the article "Jazz vs Kundiman" in *Sampaguita*, December 4, 1927, p. 43.

¹⁸⁷ *Graphic*, June 9, 1928, pp. 10 f.

Besides entertainment, Tagalog theatre also fulfilled another purpose. It worked as a vent for the hopes of freedom and independence. Many present day scholars refer to the Tagalog theatre of the first decades of the 20th Century as a nationalist theatre, as it kept the fire of freedom burning in the hearts of the Filipinos. Another editorial in *The Citizen* entitled “For the revival of the native drama” in June 1919 (three months before the first Filipino feature film, *Dalagang Bukid*) writes about the decline of the native drama due to the influence of foreign films, and the importance of reviving the native drama to counter the foreign influences.

But the great majority of our people recognize no other stage names or heroes, except Chaplin, Max Linder and Nick Carter. The personages in “Walang Sugat” [one of the most renowned Tagalog zarzuelas] and the characters typical of the native drama are forgotten in the rush of an endless demand for the exotic. The flative productions have given way before the rapid growth of the moving pictures. However, the native play and the photo drama should claim equal interest. The former should serve to mirror our own manners and the idiosyncrasies of our native customs and traditions, and to discourage the tendency to adopt every thing foreign either by ridiculing such an attitude or by portraying the beneficent results of preserving the simple virtues of our fore-fathers; while the latter should remain as a means to reflect a contemporary cosmopolitan art that has all the attractions of the varied picturings of life, of its foibles and its beauty.¹⁸⁸

This situation was something that changed. An editorial “The new triumphs of the native drama” in *The Independent* in December 1920 applauds the vernacular stage dramas that “have given life to Filipino dramatic art and captivated the public” by “portray[ing] purely native customs and idiosyncracies”.¹⁸⁹ An article in *The Citizen* in December 1919: “So the Tagalog dramas that today have earned deserved popularity, are those which, in the portrayal of characters, reflect the reality of our life and touch this reality with the poetry of our native ways.”¹⁹⁰

Despite this development and the gradual reflection of the nation-building process in the arts, the public did not seem to appreciate the local artists. Fabian de la Rosa said that “in the Philippines art is generally an undervalued human endeavour.”¹⁹¹ An editorial “Protection for the arts” in *The Independent* in July 1927 writes about the fact that the domestic painters only sell their arts to foreigners, whereas rich Filipinos buy foreign art, and concludes with a question: “when will our artists, painters, sculptors, architects and musicians have the patriotic patronage of the Filipino public? This should be answered and done right now for the prosperity and honor of our

¹⁸⁸ *The Citizen*, June 20, 1919, p. 20.

¹⁸⁹ *The Independent*, December 11, 1920, p.8.

¹⁹⁰ *The Citizen*, December 18, 1919, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in *The Independent*, November 16, 1929, p. 18.

nation.”¹⁹² Another editorial “Art in the Philippines” in November 1929 wrote about an art exhibition that failed since people were not interested in seeing and buying any painting due to the fact that they were made by Filipinos: “This indifference is reflected not only with regard to art, but also to literature and other artistic manifestations of the Filipino genius. No wonder we don’t progress in art or in letters, yet the state of civilization and a culture of a people is mainly based upon art and literature.”¹⁹³

An editorial in *The Independent*, also entitled “Art in the Philippines”, in April 1921 implicitly connects this non-appreciation of Filipino artists to being colonised: “What actually happens is that we think that as Filipinos we are inferior to the foreigners. Let us be just to ourselves. Let us be proud of the best that we have and we know. Let us bow to no superior.”¹⁹⁴ Foreign artists on the other hand were well appreciated by the Filipino audience. The same editorial describes the view of the Manila audience as an “excessive liking for the exotic”. The article states that “Manila is generally the Mecca of artists who have more or less of a reputation in their own country” since “anything that comes from abroad, imported, however ordinary it may be, takes on an appearance of novelty, of the sublime”. An editorial in *The Independent* in 1920 observes that the rich Filipinos do not attend vernacular dramas, but when foreign artists come they not only attend but also present “gifts that cost thousands of pesos”.¹⁹⁵ Rich Filipinos even spent fortunes to bring in foreign artists, a practice which was supported by an editorial “Why not Caruso?” in *The Citizen* in October 1920 as it would gain the attention of the world and thereby “reassert in a definite manner our culture. And for other people to be convinced that we are a cultured people is a great thing.”¹⁹⁶

It is precisely this opposition and non-appreciation of the great Filipino artists in the fields of art and literature that gives Nepomuceno his special distinction. In contrast to them, the early Filipino films, i.e. the films of Nepomuceno, had the support and patronage of the native population. Furthermore, his films were seen by Filipinos from all social strata of society, which helped create a national consciousness.

¹⁹² *The Independent*, July 23, 1927, p. 4.

¹⁹³ *The Independent*, November 16, 1929, p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ *The Independent*, April 30, 1921, p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ *The Independent*, December 11, 1920, p.8.

¹⁹⁶ *The Citizen*, October 30, 1919, p. 4.

4.3 Creating a national consciousness

What the artists in fact were doing was to create a national consciousness, which in turn is one of the factors needed in nation-building. The images that Nepomuceno's films spread throughout the islands were imperative in building up this national consciousness by realising the shared origins of its inhabitants. This is the basis of Benedict Anderson's claim of how imagined communities are created. The community is created when the inhabitants get a sense of belonging to each other. In Anderson's view this has historically been done through print-capitalism; novels and newspapers have the prime responsibility in creating a national consciousness.¹⁹⁷ The vernacular novel, particularly the Tagalog, became common in the beginning of the 20th Century. The subject matters were either romantic and sentimental in character or they were about social ills plaguing society. Some of the themes in the most distinguished novels of the first decades of the 20th Century were: the love stories of two friends, one with a happy marriage and one with a troublesome; a young woman whose heart is broken; the struggle between labour and capital; the greed and corruption of the ruling class and the social inequities that resulted from modernisation; and love between two people from different social classes.¹⁹⁸ These issues were the same as the ones depicted in early film. *The Citizen* described the work of the native writer as "sentimental and poetic"¹⁹⁹. Moreover, the themes were meant to educate and not only to entertain. Already in December 1920 *The Independent* stressed the importance for stage dramas to educate the masses: "...they should choose themes that impart moral lessons, on one word [sic], it should be remembered that a drama aims not only to entertain, but also to teach, to combat social ills."²⁰⁰

The modern version of print in the developing countries was the movies. Jose Nepomuceno contributed to the promotion of literature, as well as an increased national consciousness, by adapting many Tagalog novels to the screen: *The Pearl of the Markets* (1929) was based on a novel by Remigio Mat. Castro; *Ang Lumang Simbahan* (The old church, 1928) was based on poems by the poet Florentino Collantes, who chanted the poem at most of the screenings; *Sa Pinto ng Langit* (At heaven's door, 1932), which was advertised as the first talkie²⁰¹, was also based on a poem, by Jose Corazon de Jesus; *Sa Landás Nang Pagibig* (The Road of Love, 1929) was based on a novel by Deogracias A. del Rosario; and Nepomuceno's first talkie, *Ang Punyan na Ginto* (The Golden

¹⁹⁷ Anderson (1991), pp. 44 f.

¹⁹⁸ Lumbera (1997), pp. 24-27.

¹⁹⁹ *The Citizen*, October 9, 1919, pp. 3 and 15.

²⁰⁰ *The Independent*, December 11, 1920, p. 8.

²⁰¹ It was not a talkie though. The sound was put on afterwards by having a gramophone doing some of the dialogues simultaneously.

Dagger, 1933) was an adaptation of Antonio G. Sempio's novel that was written the same year. Other works that were filmed in the early 1930s by Nepomuceno were Julian Cruz Balmaseda's *Ang Anak sa Ligaw* (Child out of wedlock, 1930), F.J. Galauran's *Dr Kuba* (Dr Hunchback, 1933), and Lazaro Francisco's *Sa Paanan ng Krus* (1935). *Dr Kuba* was even written upon the order of Jose Nepomuceno, who needed a good screenplay.²⁰² The movies of Nepomuceno gave an increased national consciousness among the different ethno-linguistic groups of the country. His film *Noli Me Tangere* (1930) was advertised as "Made in the Philippines by Filipinos". These films contributed greatly to a sense of nationhood, not least among the Filipinos who were overseas, particularly in Hawaii whereto the films were exported.²⁰³

Jose Nepomuceno and his films did what the great Filipino novels did not manage to do, since his films were more accessible than the novels as they were not based on literacy (although there were intertitles). In 1930 Nepomuceno adapted Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* to the screen, and thereby visualised many of the inequalities created by the coloniser (whether it be the Spanish or the Americans). Edward Gross had previously made screen adaptations of both Jose Rizal's famous novels, *Noli Me Tangere* (1915) and *El Filibusterismo* (1916). Maybe that's why they stressed "Made in the Philippines by Filipinos" in the advertisement of Nepomuceno's version. Comparing the teens to the 1920s and 1930s, we see a movement from screen adaptations of zarzuelas to adaptation of novels.

The influence was however reciprocal. Film influenced the vernacular literature to a large extent. Resil B. Mojares argues that cinema overall had a negative effect on the development of Tagalog literature. Maybe it contributed to an increased quantity, but the quality declined as the literature became too cinematic with too much sensationalism. Novels were commissioned by film producers, and novels serialised in newspapers were bought before they were finished, leading to novels that adjusted their plot to the screen and to characters made to fit certain actors.²⁰⁴

Was Nepomuceno inspired by the paintings of contemporary artists in the way he shot, i.e. the cinematography, his films? On a general level, the Philippine paintings of the early 20th Century were very naturalistic and realistic, and so were the early films of Nepomuceno. Of course, as an artist and photographer, one is either consciously or unconsciously influenced by paintings and other cultural art forms, since the art of the past and present is in our collective memory and

²⁰² Mojares (1998), pp. 300 f.

²⁰³ *Graphic*, October 13, 1928, p. 33.

²⁰⁴ Mojares (1998), p. 301.

consciousness. On some level the painter Fabian de la Rosa and his motives can be seen as a parallel to the themes depicted in the films of Jose Nepomuceno. *Graphic* describes the art of Fabian de la Rosa, "...it has become a passion to him to portray through the magic of his brush, native scenes, native life...".²⁰⁵

In an article in December 1929, the artists De La Rosa, Amorsolo and Tolentino criticise the lack of appreciation from Filipinos when it comes to art, and point to the fact that they are much better appreciated by Americans and Europeans, than Filipinos.²⁰⁶ This lack of appreciation of domestic art is reflected in the domestic newspapers. An editorial in *Graphic* in March 1929 entitled "For Art Lovers" states that "[t]he chief criticism against the Philippines is that it is like unto the Sahara Desert when it comes to the arts", but instead of propagating the domestic arts and artists, they claim that the solution is to support big foreign artists ("Here, at least, is a beginning. If the populace will only support the few artists who come to our shores, we may expect them more frequently, and in greater numbers.").²⁰⁷

In *Images of the nation*, Anthony D. Smith argues that films (as well as other art forms) contribute to creating a vision of a nation by showing myths, histories, rituals, symbols and traditions. These national mythologies are used by the ruling elites to influence and affect the emotions and the shared memories of the masses.²⁰⁸ In the Philippines, myths and mysticism played a great role, especially among the older generation. An article series by Professor Luis Rivera in *The Philippine Review* in November 1920 discusses mysticism when analysing the intellectual and moral characteristics of the Filipino people, "...mysticism in the Philippines can never be absolutely eradicated".²⁰⁹ Although there is and has been an influence both from the Americans and the Europeans, Rivera concludes that part of his article by stating that in the final analysis it is the native, and the most ancient, culture that prevails: "The spirit of our forefathers being the ever present motive of our conduct, no Americanization, no Europeanization, would calm its desire to adjust the government, morality, and social principles and conventions to the very needs, desires, and interests of Filipinos."²¹⁰ Mythology and folklore play a prevalent role in the Filipino society, even more so during the first decades of the 20th Century. Philippine folk stories are filled with ghosts and monsters. Each region of the Philippines has its own mythical monsters: dugang and

²⁰⁵ *Graphic*, May 5, 1928, p. 12.

²⁰⁶ *Graphic*, December 4, 1929, pp. 12, 49.

²⁰⁷ *Graphic*, March 2, 1929, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ Smith (2000), pp. 45 f.

²⁰⁹ *The Philippine Review*, November 1920, pp. 741-758. p. 745.

²¹⁰ *The Philippine Review*, November 1920, pp. 741-758. p. 757.

al-alia of Ilocanos; asweng and manananggal (portrayed in the film *Ang Manananggal* described above) of Visayans; other local monsters are dwende, tiyanak, kapre, cama-cam and tikbalang. Nepomuceno made a couple of horror movies depicting local, folkloric monsters. His film *Tianak* (Ogre, 1932) is about babies that die without being baptised and therefore turn into some kind of monsters. Again we return to Smith:

This is why nationalist intellectual seek to rediscover and authenticate pre-existing collective myths, symbols, values, memories and traditions of ‘the people’, and to locate the ‘old-new’ nation they seek to recreate within its evolutionary ethnic framework. The artist and the writer alike have been at the heart of this project of popular national representation and renewal, clothing the ideal of the nation and its historical myths, memories and symbols in palpable, dynamic forms which are easily accessible to the mass of the ‘national’ membership.²¹¹

Andrew Higson described the process of nationalist mythmaking as a way of “setting one body of images and values against another”.²¹² As Nepomuceno was the pioneer Filipino filmmaker, the images that he reproduced had a time-advantage and he thereby managed to influence the viewers by sharing his vision of Filipino characteristics. However, he was looking at the Filipino culture with a Tagalog bias, which affected his perception of Filipino that he reproduced and spread in his films.

4.4 Tagalog and Filipino

It can be hard to define Nepomuceno’s films as either Filipino or Tagalog. Cinema can not reflect all the aspects of a national culture and identity, especially when the culture is not homogenous and consists of many different ethno-linguistic groups, who are linguistically united through the language of the coloniser. As Manila was the political as well as cultural capital of the country, it gradually spread its Tagalog culture to other parts of the islands. A catalyst in this process was the cinema, and particularly the films of Nepomuceno, which with its pictures (and later sound) spread the Tagalog culture and language.

The vernacular languages had been suppressed during the Spanish times; only one novel is known to have been published by a native writer in any of the vernacular languages during that time.²¹³ As newspapers started becoming commonplace around the turn of the century, more venues were created for writers, especially in Tagalog as most of the papers that were not printed

²¹¹ Smith (2000), p. 48.

²¹² Higson (2000), p. 54.

²¹³ Lumbera (1997), p. 24.

in Spanish or English, were printed in Tagalog. An editorial “Vernacular publications” in *The Independent* in November 1926 reported that newspapers in native dialects steadily increased, and that the illustrated weeklies, many of which specialised in love stories, were the most popular, and helped spreading culture: “Reading or fondness of reading, is being developed among the masses, and the newspapers are used as simple and easy means of spreading culture.”²¹⁴ *Graphic* gave a report “The Philippines Language Problem” from a seminar held at Santo Tomas University early 1929. The general view at the seminar was that there was a need of a local national language, and that Tagalog was the most suitable as it is the language that has the most words and more published materials. The report also stated that the Filipinos in the United States and Hawaii spoke Tagalog, even if there were more Ilocanos.²¹⁵ As Tagalog became the main vernacular language in printed novels and newspapers, it also led to its contribution to a national identity, and as a reward it became the basis of the national language, Filipino.

The spreading of one of the vernaculars, through printed materials, within a country is one of the factors that Benedict Anderson points out as essential in creating a national consciousness.²¹⁶ Anderson however talks about a top-down approach when creating the European nations a couple of hundred years ago. Nepomuceno and the other early Filipino filmmakers managed to do the same with their Tagalog films, which spread within the domains of the islands, and thereby not only created a national consciousness, but a national Filipino-Tagalog consciousness.

Many scholars argue that the spread of Tagalog, and it becoming the national language, was due to the movies. Quirino wrote that the talking Tagalog movie “inculcated upon the people the love for their national language. Even non-Tagalog learned the national language by merely seeing Tagalog talkies.”²¹⁷ When Nepomuceno started making films, he had to convince the theatre owners to show the Tagalog pictures, as there was a prejudice against locally made products.²¹⁸ After the success of his pioneering work, the theatres opened up for locally made films. Basically all of the early film producers were based in Manila. This naturally gave the Filipino cinema a Tagalog identity. Manila was also the place in the Philippines where the Hispanic influence was the biggest, and where the American cultural influence first prevailed. Deocampo gives an explanation of how the regional Tagalog culture became synonymous with the national culture. As capital, technology and power had its base in the capital, the relationship

²¹⁴ *The Independent*, November 13, 1926, p. 4.

²¹⁵ *Graphic*, February 2, 1929, p. 48.

²¹⁶ Anderson (1991), pp. 40 f.

²¹⁷ Quirino (1983), p. 44.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

between Manila and the Philippines became metonymic. The Tagalog culture of Manila became the (self-proclaimed) representative of Filipino culture – a culturally advanced urban area represented a poor, rural-based country.²¹⁹

This is further evident by studying the reactions of the newspapers during the advent of Filipino films. An article in *Manila Nueva* used Manila (and thereby the Tagalog culture) as a metonymy of the Philippines: “Of course it was logical that, sooner or later, the cinematographic industry would appear in Manila and adapt itself to the conditions and tastes of the country.”²²⁰ The described process is hence that the film industry appears in Manila, and from Manila it becomes accessible to the rest of the country by “adapt[ing] itself to the conditions and tastes of the country”. Another example of the interchangeable usage of Tagalog and Filipino is an editorial in *The Independent* in 1920: “For us who love everything that carries the impress of what is Filipino, there is much cause for rejoicing over the recent triumphs on the stage of many Tagalog dramas. The production of some local vernacular writers, recently staged, have given life to Filipino dramatic art.”²²¹

The Americans saw Manila as a symbol of the Philippines: “The history of the Philippines is little more than the story of the ancient and picturesque city by the Pasig [Manila] whose favorable situation for commerce long ago led it to be called ‘the Pearl of the Orient’”²²² More specifically however, the Tagalog elite in Manila are a metonymy of what Filipino is. When they change their culture regarding different levels of foreign influence (Hispanic and American), what is considered to be “Filipino” changes. The Tagalog elite can be seen as the body, and when the body moves, the tail (i.e. the provinces) is affected and will sooner or later move as well. The elite have the finances to produce films and set up plays, and they therefore are responsible for what kinds of art are produced. The Filipino society around the turn of the century consisted, roughly speaking, of *illustrados* (the elite) and *indios*. Norman Owen defines the *illustrado* as consisting of three main components: education, personal ties, and wealth²²³; all of which *Nepomuceno* possessed. *Nepomuceno* had a Spanish background meaning that he was part of the (lower) elite of the society and had access to the best education.

²¹⁹ Deocampo (2003), p. 21.

²²⁰ *Manila Nueva*, September 13, 1919, pp. 15 f: “Era pues lógico que, más o menos tarde, hiciera su aparición la industria cinematográfica en Manila, adaptándola a las condiciones y a los gustos del país.”

²²¹ *The Independent*, December 11, 1920, p.8.

²²² Rosenstock’s *Manila City Directory* (1911-1921), “Introduction”, p. 1.

²²³ Owen (1971), pp. 1 f.

Most of Nepomuceno's early films had Spanish titles, but during the later period of his filmmaking the vast majority of his films were Tagalog. When movies started to "talk", the dominance of Tagalog (language and culture) increased. Salumbides writes that Parlatone Hispanico-Filipinos "greatest contribution to the movie art and industry was its pioneering work in bringing the Tagalog pictures closer to the hearts of the people even in the non-Tagalog regions."²²⁴ The native cinema that was created, was however not native by representing the whole country, it was the elite's view of what constitutes the native. Table 4.1 gives a clear indication of Nepomuceno's increased use and spread of Tagalog, by looking at the language of his film titles. It also shows that Deocampo's claim that Nepomuceno favoured the Spanish language is only valid during his first few years of filmmaking. At a time when the newspapers were discussing whether English or Spanish should be the national language, Nepomuceno made a vital push for Tagalog.

Table 4.1: Language of the film titles

	1919-1925	1926-1930	1931-1933
Tagalog	2	10	13
Spanish	5	1	2
English	0	3	3

The film *The Filipino Woman* (1927) was premiered first with an English title, and later re-premiered with a Spanish title (*La Mujer Filipina*). The film *Maria Luisa* (1930) is not classified in any of the categories, as it is a name.

4.5 Summary

In this section we saw that the question of independence was frequently discussed in the press. Nepomuceno was part of a group of native intellectuals that amplified the intensity of the forces of independence through their artistic endeavours. By portraying Filipino views, lives and circumstances Nepomuceno and the other artists created a national consciousness, which contributed to the nation-building process. In many ways Nepomuceno was more influential than the other artists, since his films were viewed by people from all social strata across the islands, and since he adapted important Filipino works to the screen. By making and spreading Tagalog films and culture, Nepomuceno contributed to the convergence of Tagalog and Filipino culture.

²²⁴ Salumbides (1952), Part I, p. 19.

5. Conclusions

Jose Nepomuceno is an important personage and filmmaker, not only for film scholars but also for historians interested in the forming of a national Filipino identity. He has somewhat fallen into scholarly oblivion as all his films are lost and his work and impact therefore are hard to assess. In order to write this paper I have therefore submerged myself in old newspapers to get an understanding of the importance that Nepomuceno played, both for the future of cinema in the country and, more importantly, for the nation-building process of the colonised Philippines.

First of all, he brought self-confidence to the Filipinos by showing them that a Filipino can master the art form that had, since its inception, been seen as Western, firstly European and then American. He showed that the colonised can do what the coloniser is doing; master the same technology and tell stories from a Filipino perspective. These were also the main arguments of the contemporary Filipino newspapers, when they commented the pioneering efforts of Nepomuceno. His early films can be seen as the artistic parallels to the Filipino politicians showing the colonisers that they can govern the country as well as they can.

Secondly, many of Nepomuceno's films can be seen as inputs and contributions to the politically and socially hot topics of the country. He portrayed the same topics that were frequently discussed in the papers. His films revolving around the role of women, independence and nativeness were his artistic and cultural reflections on the socio-political development of the country, and since his films were so popular, his opinion was influential.

Thirdly, at a time when the newspapers were discussing whether Spanish or English should be the national language of the country, Nepomuceno was one of the few who tried and managed to create a national consciousness based on the native culture. His films portrayed contemporary Filipino lives and environments, and he filmed and spread views from all over the islands, as well as adapting great Filipino novels and zarzuelas to the screen. Creating a national consciousness is one of the foundations in the nation-building process. Although there were some American and Spanish influences in his films, his films can still be seen as a step toward being freed from the bondage of colonisation. As his films were screened and viewed throughout the country, the bond between the different ethno-linguistic groups of the country was strengthened and gave them a sense of shared community.

Finally, Nepomuceno's films made the national culture converge with the Tagalog culture. Before the advent of Filipino-made films, the language of the coloniser (first Spanish and then English) became the means of communication between the different native ethno-linguistic groups. The native film industry, which in essence was a Tagalog film industry, contributed greatly to the spread of Tagalog language and culture. Today, there are two official languages in the Philippines: Filipino, which is based on Tagalog, and English.

The other purpose of this paper was to give a contribution in the field of Philippine film history. I hope this paper has renewed the interest in Nepomuceno's filmmaking, as well as other aspects of the film history in the Philippines, since there is still a lot more to be discovered. A filmography of his silent films has been provided in Appendix I, wherein press clips from some of his films can be found. Hopefully the filmography, as well as the paper can be of assistance for future researchers of the film history of the Philippines.

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Appendix I: Filmography of Jose Nepomuceno

The filmography, and the information therein, has been derived from different sources. The greatest source of help has been the filmography in *Diamond Anniversary of Philippine Cinema*. The data there (who made the film, where and when it was shown) has been compared to and complemented with information in newspapers, books and articles. This filmography is however not a finished product, it still needs to be complemented with much data. Moreover, there are still many uncertainties regarding exactly what films Nepomuceno directed. The last film on the list is *Ang Punyal Na Ginto* (Golden Dagger, 1933), Nepomuceno's first sound film. Thereafter 33 other films that Nepomuceno directed or produced are listed; most of which are sound films.

1. Dalagang Bukid (Country Maiden)

Cast: Atang de la Rama, Marceliano Ilagan

Production date:

Locations: From the *Manila Nueva* article from September 13, 1919 two locations of the shooting of the film are clear. First, it is stated that Angelita's younger brothers are working as shoe shiners at the threshold of the Church of the Holy Cross. Second, it is noted that Don Silvestre was able to have Angelita win a beauty contest in "La Vanguardia".

Source: Hermogenes Ilagan's zarzuela *Dalagang Bukid* (1917)

Screenings: September 12-, 1919 in Teatro de la Comedia; September 25-, 1919 in The Majestic.

Press: *Manila Nueva*, September 13, 1919; *The Citizen*, September 18, 1919; *The Citizen*, October 9, 1919; *Graphic*, October 13, 1928; *Graphic*, October 20, 1928; *This Week*, April 20, 1958 (in Lent (1990), p. 152).

Manila Nueva, September 13, 1919, p. 15-16

"MALAYAN MOVIES" - The cinematographer in the Philippines

Manila now has a company that will be in charge of making movies. This initiative is the result of the enterprising spirit of the Nepomuceno brothers, and deserves from the very first moment the sympathy of the audience. Cinematography is one of the inventions that has rapidly developed and become a colossal industry, which in other countries manages millions and pays truly fantastic salaries. Movies are a necessity everywhere, and in the Philippines we are not mistaken if we say that it is much more needed than elsewhere.

Of course it was logical that, sooner or later, the cinematographic industry would appear in Manila and adapt itself to the conditions and tastes of the country. This is what "Malayan Movies" is intending to do, as its name indicates. The directors and organisers, the Nepomuceno brothers, are not only very recognized photographers whose fame is well established, but are also true artists in their profession, who sense the beauty and know how to find and catch it with the magic of their camera. Then, it is not strange that these peerless characteristics are found in the first movie that "Malayan Movies" has created. This film is based on the script of the famous Tagalog operetta "Dalagang Bukid" whose title Heva [?] will premiere tonight at "Teatro de la Comedia" and promises to be a complete cinematographic event. The script could not be simpler; even if it fails regarding originality, the correct exposition and the pure intention from its author has to be praised at least. It is the eternal story of two youth in love, filled with dreams, but with limited resources to be able to sustain each other.

The home of Angelita, the pretty heroine, is a certain picture of many Philippine families, although it somewhat exaggerates the negative tones. Angelita, the flower girl of the Cabaret, the "Dalagang Bukid", loves Cipriano with the sincere and spontaneous passion of her twenties.

Cipriano is a Law student who loves her back equally. The parents of Angelita, without much financial resources, limited in their moral honesty because of the gambling demon, don't see with good eyes the love of the happy couple, where tenderness and affection are abundant but money the great dominating ingredient, is missing. This is why Mrs Biang is inclined into accepting the propositions from Don Silvestre, an old loan shark, rich in aches and gold, who still has a young heart and allows himself to visit the cabarets and buy flowers from the pretty florists [ladies] such as Angelita; this doesn't prevent him from lending money with a high interest, low mortgage, and still give away some money to Angelita's parents, who see in Don Silvestre the source who will let them continue without working, the father spending time in his favourite sport at the "chicken fighting games" and her, the mother gambling.

Meanwhile, Angelita and her brothers, all younger and working as shoe shiners at the threshold of the Church of the Holy Cross, maintain the expenses of the house with their honest and hard work. Don Silvestre, who is a pro in these issues, takes over the will of Angelita's parents and since he was able to have Angelita win a beauty contest in "La Vanguardia" thanks to the power of gold, he requests the parents to have the florist as his wife. They accept and a date is fixed for the wedding, which is the next day of the formal crowning of Angelita as the Beauty Queen. But Cipriano, who just finished his studies brilliantly after many long nights of studying, goes to the home of his beloved in the moment that she is going to get in Don Silvestre's car to be taken to the Crowning ceremony. Already secretly in agreement from the day before, the love birds go in the same car of the old loan shark towards a church where they are wed in holy matrimony by a generous minister of God: having finished the ceremony they go to the Crowning event where the whole world learns about their union. Don Silvestre faints and this is how the movie finishes.

Picture I: Miss Honnorata de la Rama, very notable cinematographic artist who does the role of the main character of the movie *Dalagang Bukid*.

Picture II: Miss Honoruta de la Rama and Mr. Marceliano in a scene of beautiful cinematographic adaptation.

Picture III: A highlight moment in the movie "Dalagang Bukid", which premieres tonight at "Teatro de la Comedia".²²⁵

²²⁵ "MALAYAN MOVIES"

EL CINEMATÓGRAFO EN FILIPINAS

Manila cuenta ya con una empresa, que se dedicará a la fabricación de películas. Esta iniciativa, que se debe al espíritu emprendedor de los hermanos Nepomuceno, merece desde el primer momento la simpatía del público. El cinematógrafo es uno de los inventos que más rápidamente se han desarrollado y convertido en una industria colosal, que en otros países maneja millones, y paga salarios verdaderamente fantásticos. El cine es ya una necesidad en todas partes, y en Filipinas, no nos equivocamos si decimos, que mucho más, que en cualquiera otra parte. Era pues lógico que, más o menos tarde, hiciera su aparición la industria cinematográfica en Manila, adaptándola a las condiciones y a los gustos del país. Esto pretende hacer "Malayan movies" como ya su mismo nombre lo indica. Sus directores y organizadores, los hermanos Nepomuceno, son, no solo unos notabilísimos fotógrafos, cuya fama se halla ya bien cimentada, sino unos verdaderos artistas de su profesión, que sienten la belleza y saben buscarla y recogerla en la magia de su cámara fotográfica. No es pues extraño, que estas inestimables cualidades se observen, en la primera película que "Malayan movies" ha fabricado. Dicha cinta, basada en el argumento de la célebre operata tagala "Dalagang Bukid", cuyo mismo título Heva, se estrenará esta noche, en el Teatro de la Comedia, y promete ser un completo acontecimiento cinematográfico. El argumento, no puede ser más sencillo, y si peca de falta de originalidad, es tan acertada su exposición y tan sana la intención de su autor, que no puede por menos sino alabarse. Es la eterna historia de dos jóvenes enamorados, con un gran caudal de ilusiones, pero con escasos recursos pecuniarios para sustentarios. El hogar de Angelita, la simpática heroína, es una pintura acertadísima, de muchas familias filipinas, aunque exajerando algo los tonos pesimistas. Angelita, la florista de *Cabaret*, la "Dalagang Bukid", ama a Cipriano con la sincera y espontánea pasión de los veinte años. Cipriano, estudiante de Derecho, la corresponde con igual afecto. Los padres de Angelita, no muy sobrados de recursos, minada su honradez moral por el demonio de juego, no ven con buenos ojos los amores de la feliz pareja, donde sobra ternura y cariño, pero falta dinero, el poderoso caballero que todo lo domina. Por eso *ñora* Biang, se inclina más a aceptar las proposiciones de Don Silvestre, viejo usurero que cargado de achaques y de oro, conserva aún el corazón joven y se permite visitar los *cabarets* y comprar allí flores a las floristas guapas como Angelita: esto no le impide prestar dinero a subido rédito,

The Citizen, September 18, 1919, p. 9:
“The Silent Drama and the Philippines”

Ingress: A new industry, it seems, is now bound to find a virgin field in the Philippines. But recently the Tagalog play “Dalagang Bukid”, was flashed on the screen as the forerunner of many more films that have for their motif the depicting of the Philippine life and social conditions obtaining here that make of that life distinctively national and markedly peculiar to the type of our culture and civilization. That this coming of a new industrial enterprise has wonderful possibilities as an aid to the early acquisition of our own sovereignty, is brought out in the following article, entitles “The Value of the Motion Picture in the Philippines” by Mr. Miguel G. Luna. The article follows:

The Citizen, October 9, 1919, p. 3 and 15. (some words are missing)

“Dalagang Bukid”: Drama and Film By Trinidad

There is nothing striking in the Tagalog drama “Dalagang Bukid”, except the _____ of the characters to the facts of life and the truth with which _____ the experiences of _____ girlhood in its endeavor to _____ from the _____ of a guilty people. The drama is the story of _____ with youth, of wealth that _____ poverty into a degrading _____ of an _____ infatuation. Yet youth finds its deliverance in the drama of its own making, and _____ the tragedy of its passion in the reality these dreams. For the world-old situations of the cross purposes of the hopes of those in the dawn of life and of the chimera of those in the decline of matured years, are here drawn with intelligent understanding and presented with true-to-life and true-to-art _____ and characterization. The story is simple, as the heroine of the play is simple with the grace of her rural beauty and the charm of her sylvan home. It has the inevitable touch of the sentimental and poetic that possess the works of the native writers, a suggestion of the blend of civilizations that border on their culture and lift their mood from the memories of the struggles among the _____ of these civilizations.

Yet over it there broods a protest against the ills and the evils of society, against the common views that drag manhood and virginity to the dust. It sought inspiration from the naked shamelessness of dark motives; but to these motives it opposed the ermine character of the “dalagang bukid”. And it is this purity, yielding its gifts only to him for whom her dreams are nurtured, that gives the drama the eternal fascination of woman’s love.

The Heroine of the Play

hacer hipotecas usurarias, y aún regalar algunos pesos a los padres de Angelita, que ven en Don Silvestre la providencia que les permitirá seguir, sin trabajar, dedicándose el uno a su *sport* favorito de la gallera, y la otra, a los azares del *panguingue* y del *monte*.

Entre tanto Angelita y sus hermanos, todos menores que ella, limpiabotas de oficio en el átrio de la Iglesia de Santa Cruz, sostienen con su honrado y penoso trabajo el gasto de la casa. Don Silvestre, que es ducho en estas cuestiones, va apoderándose poco a poco de las voluntades de los padres de Angelita, y a raíz de haber conseguido a fuerza de oro, que Angelita saliera premiada en no (or un) concurso de belleza de “La Vanguardia”, les pide a la florista para hacerla su mujer. Ellos acceden, y se acuerda fijar la fecha de la boda (boda?), para el día siguiente de la solemne coronación de Angelita, como Reina de la Belleza. Pero Cipriano, que ha terminado brillantemente sus estudios después de grandes desvelos, acude a casa de su amada en el momento en que ésta se dispone a subir al automóvil de Don Silvestre, que la ha de llevar a la ceremonia de la Coronación. Puestos va de acuerdo los enamorados desde la víspera, se dirigen en el mismo auto del viejo usurero a una iglesia, donde son santamente casados por un complaciente ministro del Señor: terminada la ceremonia, marchan al lugar de la Coronación, donde enteran a todo el mundo de su enlace. Don Silvestre se desmaya, y así termina la película.

Pic I: Srta. Honorata de la Rama, notabilísima artista cinematográfica, que desempeña el papel de protagonista, en la película *Dalagang Bukid*.

Pic II: La Srta Honorata de la Rama y Don Marceliano, en una escena de bonita adaptación cinematográfica.

Pic III: Un momento culminante de la película “Dalagang Bukid”, que se estrena esta noche en el Teatro de la Comedia.

The great popularity that the drama enjoys today is _____ in the enchantment that the character of the “dalagang bukid” lends to the situation, the atmosphere, the motif of the play. The heroine is a type that _____(falls?) into the fancy of the populace and therein becomes one with the idealized creations of their imaginations. She appeals to the common emotions, and stirs depths of feelings that read their fantasy along the daily experiences of the average man. But she seems wrought out of the perfume and the beauty of the sylvan surroundings of her childhood, a perfect creation of the houris and the dryads and the elfin sisters of fairies and the divinities of fabled lore.

Yet, she clings close to the type from which springs the poetry of her individual charms; she is a picture of the country belle dazzling with dowered delights and with the sense of tremulous virginity. She is a dream on a back ground of reality; a song over the strife and the passion of the drama. However, she touches life with the hopes and the yearnings of her heart, and paints on and the horizon of these hopes and these yearnings the symbols of her individuality.

The Play on the Scene (sic)

But the film adaptation of the drama is all that the play is not. As often as not, the story is an incoherent jumble of scenes that border on the childish and the ridiculous and the exotic. It has all the littleness of puerile imitation and the faults of “a story told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.” The action is of a kind that invites to oblivious slumber. It lags in its own sweet way; it has no continuity; it defies common sense. Facts of Filipino life are there in their true light when these facts are irrelevant to the action; but the details of our life and customs when these details further the action of the play are colored to the verge of the nondescript. There is an effort at a minute representation of scenes that detract from the creation of unified effect. There is everything that drags down the film to the level of disgusting caricature of Philippine life.

Roses for Miss de la Rama

And this criticism does not preclude our saying that the film perhaps owes its popularity to the acting of Miss Honorata de la Rama. She has the guile and the charm and the native ability that give to here impersonation of the “dalagang bukid” the rhythm and the music and the poetry of her own virgin life. She saves the story from the depth of failure and the reflections which that failure would throw on the histrionic attainments of the race. She is a coming queen of the stage in the Islands.

Graphic, October 13, 1928, p. 4, 5, 33

“Making movies in Manila. A review of the pioneer efforts to introduce motion picture production in the Philippines” by M. San Martin.

p. 5: “The first production of the Malayan Movies was based on the popular Zarzuela Dalagang Bukid, the original title being retained in the film version. Honorata de la Rama, star in the stage version also performed the star role in the movie reproduction. The male lead was Marcelino Ilagan, another star performer in the local stage. The first venture while it received flattering comments, was of poor quality compared with the highest developments of the times. Nevertheless, the result showed a better hope for the future than those earlier attempts, especially in photography. The earlier ones were blurred and too faint, showing poor control o flight.”

Graphic, October 20, 1928, pp. 2, 3 and 42.

“Stars that shine in Philippine Filmdom” by M. San Martin

“The female and the male lead for the Malayan Movies’ first production Dalagang Bukid were Honorata de la Rama and Marceliano Ilagan. “Atang” was the toast of the Tagalog stage and Ilagan was not very far behind her in popularity. There was no doubt of their ability to act. But

came the filming of *Dalagang Bukid*, and “Atang” and Ilagan failed to register, to borrow from movie parlance. [...] Mr Nepomuceno’s *Dalagang Bukid* was interesting simply because it was a novelty.” (excerpt)

This Week, 20 April 1958, pp. 10-11 (in Lent p. 152).

“Jose Nepomuceno” by D. Dizon.

“It was a silent picture, for that was the era of silent movies. But one thing peculiar about it was that it was the first musical silent picture. The same orchestra that appeared in the movie appeared in the pit... and it played the theme of ‘*Dalagang Bukid*’ as the movie was flashed on the screen. Atang de la Rama herself was there behind the screen. At appropriate moments during the showing, she would sing the songs she sang in the film. No, there was no attempt at all at synchronisation. She simply sang behind the stage to heighten the emotion. The film was filled beyond capacity every day during its ten-day run.”

2. *La Venganza de Don Silvestre*

Cast: Atang de la Rama, Marceliano Ilagan

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Sequel to a zarzuela (*Dalagang Bukid*)

Screenings: October 1919

Press: *Manila Nueva*, October 18, 1919, two pictures from the film.

p. 7 (text under picture): *La Venganza de Don Silvestro*. One of the central scenes in the Nepomuceno brothers’ new film.²²⁶

p. 13: The second production of “Malayan Movies”. One of the outstanding moments of this interesting Filipino film.²²⁷

3. *La Mariposa Negra (Black Butterfly)*

Cast: Juanita Angeles, Andres Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Venue: Lux

Screenings: 1920

Press:

4. *Hoy u Nunca Besame (Now or never kiss me)*

Cast: Juanita Angeles, Andres Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1920

Press:

²²⁶ *La Venganza de Don Silvestro*. Una de las principales escenas de esta nueva pelicula de los hermanos Nepomuceno.

²²⁷ La segunda produccion de “Malayan Movies”. Uno de los momentos culminantes de este interesante *film* filipino.

5. Un (El) Capullo Marchito (A wilted rosebud)

Cast: Luisa Acuna

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: April/May 1920

Press: *Manila Nueva*, 17 April, 1920

p. 7: Text under picture: "Cinema in the Philippines. Interesting scene from *El capullo marchito*, the new production of the Nepomuceno brothers."²²⁸

p. 9: Text under picture: "Malayan Movies. Scene from the nice movie *El capullo marchito* that will premiere soon in Manila."²²⁹

6. Estrellita del Cine (Movie starlet) [or Estrella de cine (Movie star)]

Cast: Consuelita T

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1920

Press: *Manila Nueva*, February 28, 1920, p. 5-7

When resting, he introduced us to some of the artists and we spoke a while with one of them, Consuelito T. the main character of "Estrella de cine". She is only eighteen years old, she is pretty and gracious, with that childhood grace, somehow wise and somehow a little girl of the Filipino women.

- Do you like this work? – we asked, to start a conversation.

- Oh yeah! I love it! Cinema has always been one of my favourite hobbies and to be able to be in the movies, has been a golden dream of mine.

- Then, when acting as the main character of the film "Estrella de cine" are you representing your own life on the screen?

She laughs and lowers her sight. In her hands are various cinematographic magazines that she has been looking at while acting.

- Why an artist? Do you have any preference? For Mary Pickford for example?...

- Oh no! I find the Americans too... energetic, less... feminine... I prefer the French or Italians, Pina Menichelli is perhaps the one I admire the most.

In all this Jesus Nepomuceno, with the camera in his hand, comes closer to us and "place us" for some instantaneous takes.

- Like this...! As in "The Audacious Knight"... turn your face –telling to Consuelito- and glancing as answering a question.

Her beautiful eyes look up to us and in a second we see ourselves in the black matte of her pupils. Her red lips are because of the paint on that white face of the artist, as a divine temptation to sin.

- So you don't like the American actresses? What a shame! We love their freedom, the openness of their movement in the films, and how they run, and jump, and shoot guns, and fight with men, and... they hug them... and they... kiss them...

- Oh, how terrible! – she states with a fine smile

- So what, you don't kiss?

- We? In ... the movies... no... The Filipino kiss is very expensive!

And her pupils of a black matte were again staring at us for a moment.²³⁰

²²⁸ "El cine en filipinas. Interesante escena de *El capullo marchito*, la nueva producción hermanos Nepomuceno."

²²⁹ "Malayan Movies. Escena de la bonita película "El capullo marchito" que se estrenará en breve en Manila."

7. *Krus Na Lihim* (The secret cross)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1925

Press:

8. *Ang Pagtitipid* (The Economiser)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1926

Press:

9. *Ang Tatlong Hambog* (The three humbugs)

Cast: Luis Tuazon, Elisabeth (Dimples) Cooper

Production date:

Locations: Guadalupe church ruins (the kiss scene)

Source:

Screenings: September 28 – October 2, 1926 in Majestic

Press:

²³⁰ “En un momento de descanso, nos presenta a algunas de los artistas y charlamos un rato con una de ellas, Consuelito T. la protagonista de “Estrella de cine”. Tiene apenas diez (dici?) y ocho años: es linda y graciosa, con esa gracia infantil, un poco sabia y un poco niña de las mujeres filipinas.

-¿Le gusta a Vd. este trabajo? –decimos para interesarla en la conversación.

-¡Oh, sí! ¡Me encanta! Siempre ha sido el cine una de mis aficiones favoritas, y el llegar a representar películas, uno de mis sueños dorados.

-Entonces, como la heroína de su film “Estrella de cine.” Esta Vd. representando ante la pantalla su propia vida.

Ella ríe y baja los ojos. En sus manos tiene varias revistas cinematográficas que ha estado hojeando durante la representación.

-¿Por qué artista, siente Vd. preferencia? ¿Por Mary Pickford, acaso?...

-¡Oh, no! Encuentro a las americanas demasiado... enérgicas, Poco... mujeres... Yo prefiero las francesas o las italianas; Pina Menichelli, es quizá una de las que más admiro.

En esto Jesús Nepomuceno, cámara en mano, se posa cerca y “nos coloca” para unas instantáneas.

-¡Así...! Como *El Caballero Andaz...* Vuelva Vd. la cara Vd. – se dirige a Consuelito – mirándole, como si respondiera a una pregunta.

Ella levanta a nosotros sus bellos ojos y nos miramos un segundo en el negro mate de sus pupilas. Los labios rojos por el colorate, son en el rostro blanco de la artista como una divina tentación al pecado.

-¿De modo que no le gustan a Vd. las artistas americanas? ¡Que lastima! A nosotros nos encanta esa libertad, ese desenfado con que se mueven en los *filmas*, y corren, y saltan, y disparan tiros, y luchan con hombres, y... los abrazan... y los... besan...

-¡Ay, que horror! – dice en una fina sonrisa

-Pues que, ¿Vds. no besan?

-¿Nosotras? En... película... no... ¡El beso filipino cuesta muy caro!

Y las pupilas de un negro mate, se quedan de nuevo un momento fijas en nosotros.”

10. Mary, I love you (The miracles of the Virgin of Antipolo)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: December 14-19, 1926 in Majestic

Press:

11. Ang Manananggal (The witches)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1927

Press:

12. Hot Kisses

Cast: Georgianna Hollis, Conchita Young, Hector Nieto, Luis Tuazon, Salvador Zaragosa, Gregorio Fernandez, Georgina Hernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: June 24-30, 1927 in Majestic

Press:

13. The Filipino Woman/La Mujer Filipina

Cast: Eva Lyn, Juanita Angeles, Gregorio Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: October 11-14, 1927 in Majestic

Press: *Graphic*, September 22, 1928; *Graphic*, October 13, 1928; *Graphic*, October 20, 1928

Graphic, September 22, 1928, p. 2

“She named the Metropolitan”

“...and she has already starred in a picture film! Impossible? Of course, not. Ask Mr. Nepomuceno of the Malayan Movies who was the mujer in *La Mujer Filipina*, the Manila-made film which convinced you and me that Hollywood has no monopoly on good productions. Eva Lyn, Mr Nepomuceno says? That is her, Evelyn Thorstensen; artists have stage names some times, don't you know? And was she not a wow in that Filipino dress.

Graphic, October 13, 1928, p. 4, 5, 33

“Making movies in Manila. A review of the pioneer efforts to introduce motion picture production in the Philippines” by M. San Martin.

p. 5: “In spite of the serious drawbacks, lack of capital and accidents, the Malayan Movies has managed somehow to carry on and to date has to its credit a number of creditable productions. Two of these, the *Filipino Woman* and *Sampaguita* are considered good enough for exhibition anywhere in the world, without fear of arousing much unfavorable comment. Mr. Nepomuceno reports that these two productions have been advertised in Europe and the United States. [...]

The progress so far made in local moving pictures is illustrated in the contrast between a view from Dalagang Bukid and another from a recent production, *Filipino Woman*. The improvement in the latter over the former is so marked, it need no further comment.”

Graphic, October 20, 1928, pp. 2, 3, 42 and 43.

“Stars that shine in Philippine Filmdom” by M. San Martin

p. 3: When Mr. Jose Nepomuceno, at the suggestion of Mr. Jose Gaskell of the Majestic Theatre, called on fifteen-year-old Eva Lyn, it was an excited girl, who met the Filipino movie magnate. Mr. Nepomuceno was looking for the stars for the cast of *Florante and Laura*, later known as *La Mujer Filipina*. Miss Lyn is the type the movie director was looking for, but the fact that her hair is bobbed almost spelled disaster to her movie career. “I almost lost out,” to use her very words. But Mrs. Nepomuceno came to her rescue by suggesting that she wear a wig, and she landed the job. The finished production with Miss Lyn starring was adjudged the best local movie product ever made up to that point.

p. 43: Eva Lyn acted three different parts in *La Mujer Filipina*: As Laura’s mother and as a bad girl. Asked which of these three parts she liked best, she preferred Laura and that of mother and did not like so much the part of the bad girl. ‘You have to act it and that means smoking and the rest of the things associated with the bad woman.’

14. *Sampaguita*

Cast: Gregorio Fernandez, Naty Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: May 4-14, 1928

Press: *Graphic*, October 20, 1928 and *Graphic*, February 16, 1929.

Graphic, October 20, 1928, p. 43.

Text under picture: A group scene from “*Sampaguita*”. While the costume is typically Filipino, the features of players may not seem as typical, imparting an atmosphere of the Occident rather than the Philippines.

Graphic, February 16, 1929, p. 52.

Picture from *Sampaguita*. Text under picture: “A scene from *Sampaguita*, one of the successes of Philippine-made films. The close-up is of Naty Fernandez, the star of the play and Gregorio Fernandez who took the role of villain.”

15. *Ang Lumang Simbahan (The old church)*

Cast: Sofia Lotta (Miss Cotabato), Naty Fernandez, Gregorio Fernandez, Mary Walter, Juanita Angeles, Aniceto Robledo.

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Poem by Florentino Collantes

Screenings: 1928

Press: *Graphic*, December 1, 1928 and *Philippines Free Press*, January 4, 1930.

Graphic, December 1, 1928, pp. 7, 43 and 46:

“Moro Girl making good in the movies”

p. 43: She [Sofia Lota] returned to Manila in time for the filming of *Lumang Simbahan*. Again she landed the star part, and for the second time Gregorio Fernandez was her leading man. “Such a sincere, convincing, powerful yet natural, performance has seldom been seen, even in great

American productions, in which prominent players of world-wide fame take part. Combining with the most consummate art the elements of tragic drama and the most winsome, delightful humor, she seems to live her part – a difficult one, and one that would tax the genius of the most famous actress... Excellent work by every member of the cast distinguishes it as a drama of genuine merit. But it is Sofia Lotta who is the star.” Thus runs the comment of both the Tribune and the Herald on the acting of Miss Cotabato. And the Times: “...The work of the youthful star, in fact, does much to establish the picture as a masterpiece of stirring, moving melodrama... Her part alone makes the picture worth seeing.”

p. 46: “There was a scene in Lumang Simabahan that I could not make to the satisfaction of Mr. Nepomuceno. We tried it many times and still the results were unsatisfactory. Then I told Mr. Nepomuceno: ‘Please leave me alone for five minutes and let me think.’ He left and came back after a short while, and the result satisfied him. In another scene I was supposed to be kissing the leading man, Gregorio Fernandez who was on his back on the grass. I felt I was making a realistic interpretation of my part but again and again the director wanted the scene retaken. I did not know what the matter was until I saw Gregorio Fernandez looking at three girls who were watching the filming instead of minding his part. A pinch cured him.”

Philippines Free Press, January 4, 1930, p. 58

New Occupation For Local Writers. Preparing “scenarios” for local movies – The best paid piece “Ang Lumang Simbahan” from Collantes – The triple Zobel Price

The pen workers, who frequently have to confront the money collectors and hunger, maybe much more than any other place, they have found recently a new mine, apparently more abundant and promising, than those with which they have been working with so far. We are referring to the scenarios or “scripts” for the cine-dramas, where the vernacular writers have prompted forward to those who cultivate foreign languages –as in any other activities in literature.

Currently, the best paid script is *Ang Lumang Simbahan* (The Old Church), Florentino Collantes’ poem, the [citareda] of *Pagkakaisa*, who received a total amount of P 1,500 for the filming copyrights for his piece from the company: the triple Zobel Price, disputed between the Spanish speaking authors every year, and 50% more than the price given by the FREE PRESS to the best script in English last year. For this amount though, the author had lost his voice and almost his life, since he was obligated to chant the poem –in a respectful tone- at least three times a day and in various cinemas in the capital city and close by provinces, during a month and simultaneously with the presentation of the tape and during the breaks. The protagonists of this movie were Mary Walter and Sofia Leta. This last one [Sofia Leta] appeared again as the “star” of *Mutya Nang Pamilihan* (The Pearl of the Market), whose author, Remigio Mat. Castro, received for it the amount of P400.

The third local production, based on a contemporary piece of the vernacular author, was *Sa Landás Nang Pagibig* (Through the Path of Love), a novel of the chief composer of the Taliba, Deogracias A. del Rosario, who received for the copyrights P600. Before filming, it was published in the *Limayway*, in twelve parts, P12 each piece; for the publication of the total script the cost was of only P144. Annie Harris y Paquito Villa acted as the lovers in that movie. The last Tagalog novel in the movies was *Nanay Ko* (My Mother) from Gregorio C. Coching, who was paid for the author’s copyrights an amount of P500. The protagonist of the film was again Mary Walter.

Text under picture I: A scene of Ang Lumang Simbahan, representing a “declaration of love” by Castiga, in a classic game of clothes.

Text under picture II: DEOGRACIAS A. DEL ROSARIO. *Author of "Through the Path of Love"*²³¹

16. Mutya ng Pamilihan (The pearl of the markets)

Cast: Sofia Lotta, Juanita Angeles, Paquito Villa, Maneng Eloriaga, Paco Zamora and Francisco Varona.

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Remigio Mat. Castro

Screenings: March 1929 at Palace Theater

Press: *Graphic* March 2, 1929, p. 52.

"The Pearl of the markets" Filipino Photoplay by Pablo T. Anido.

"The Pearl of the Markets" is a pictorial adaptation of a novel by the well-known vernacular writer Remigio Mat. Castro. The Central Film Exchange of which Mr. Petronilo Tolentino is the president, has at last succeeded in presenting to the public a film distinctly Filipino with truisitic splendour in every respect. Heart hunger and spiritual thirst for sympathy are reflected in composition of vivid dramatic power. The scenic presentations are exceptionally allegoric in portraying the great suffocating sacrifices and loneliness that depress humanity when deprived of life's greatest comfort – true and undying love that recognizes no social strata, ever powerful, dominant and conquering, - a note so vibrant and appealing to all humanity. The film depicts life's dominating emotions – happiness and sorrow.

In producing "The Pearl of the Markets", director Jose Nepomuceno and the artist have employed their full power of art to entertain and enlighten. Its scenes, so rich in local color and so true to life contain the visible reflections and vivid suggestions of deserving hearts, unreasonable pride, and later on parched souls. Superficially, the story is a simple one that will open your heart – because what happened to Clarita and Albino could happen to anyone. The photoplay vividly portrays the fate of a poor but faithful Filipino woman with a sublime love stronger than death and that of a scion of a wealthy family whose love was also true to the very

²³¹ "Nueva Ocupación para Escritores Locales. Preparando "scenarios" para películas locales – La obra mejor pagada 'Ang Lumang Simbahan' de Collantes – El triple del Premio Zobel

Los obreros de la pluma, que aquí inter nos suelen andar con harta frecuencia a tropicón limpio con los cobradores y con el hambre, quizás más que en ningún otro lugar, han tropezado recientemente con una nueva mina, al parecer una vena más abundante y prometidora, que cuantas vienen usufructuando basta ahora. Nos referimos a los escenarios o 'argumentos' para cine dramas, en el que los escritores vernaculares, como en muchas otras actividades literarias, se nos han adelantado a los que cultivamos extrañas lenguas. En la actualidad, la obra mejor pagada en este sentido es *Ang Lumang Simbahan* (La Vetusta Iglesia), el poema de Florentino Collantes, el citareda del *Pagkakaisa*, quien recibió por los derechos de filmación de su obra la suma total de P1,500, de la compañía productora: el triple del Premio Zobel, que se disputan los literatos de habla cervantina cada año; y cincuenta por ciento más que el premio concedido por el FREE PRESS al mejor cuento inglés del año saliente. Por esta suma, empero, el autor no pudo menos de declarar que perdió la voz y casi la vida, por haberse obligado a declamar a poema – que abarea(z) un tomito bastante respetable – o al menos, parte de el, por tres veces diarias, y en diferentes cines de la capital y provincias limítrofes, por espacio de un mes, en combinado con la cinta y come especie de intermedio. Fueron protagonistas de esta película Mary Walter y Sofia Leta. Esta última volvió a figurar como la 'estrelia' de *Mutya Nang Pamilihan* (La Perla del Mercado), cayó autor Remigio Mat. Castro recibió como tal la suma de P400. La tercera producción cinematográfica local, basada en una obra contemporánea de autor vernacular, fue *Sa Landás Nang Pagibig* (Por la Senda del Amor), novela del redactor jefe del Taliba, Deogracias A. del Rosario, que recibió por derechos de filmación la cantidad de P600. Antes de filmarse la misma, se publicó en *Livayway*, en doce inserciones, a P12 cada inserción. Por la publicación, pues, de la obra, sólo cobró un total de p144. Annie Harris y Paquito Villa fueron los amantes, en dicha película. La última novela tagala peliculizada (¿) fue *Nanay Ko* (Madre mis) de Gregorio C. Coching, a quien se pagó por derechos de autor, la cantidad de P500. La protagonista del film fue otra vea Mary Walter.

Picture I: Una escena de *Ang Lumang Simbahan*, representando una "declaración de amor" par castiga, en el clásico juego de prendas.

Picture II: DEOGRACIAS A. DEL ROSARIO. Autor de "Por la Senda del Amor".

core of his heart. Pure love defeats the unreasonable pride of an aristocratic mother who at the end realizes and recognizes her own mistake.

The cast includes such local screen stars as Sofia Lota (Miss Cotabato), Juanita Angeles, Paquito Villa, Maneng Eloriaga and Paco Zamora, the last gentlemen being well-known sports and society men of Manila. And as Somebody once remarked, Paquito Villa resembles Ramon Novarro and Maneng Eloriaga is some Roy d'Arcy. Indeed, you never can tell about what film-fans are apt to remark! Noteworthy also is the fact that Maneng Eloriaga has seen the hows and whys in Hollywood filmdom. More or less Mr. Eloriaga's acquired experience might have given his a few pointers at least on how to act as a sort of Roy d'Arcy. Representative Francisco Varona who has been the Director-General of the Charity Fair Carnival held near the Jones Bridge, of the last Carnival Flower Parade and of Miss Philippines' appears also in the film. Night scenes at the Auditorium are also included in the filming of "The Pearl of the Markets". Two orchestras will play alternately, music specially adapted for the film when this is screened at the Palace Theater some time this month.

Text under picture: A scene from "The Pearl of the Markets" with Miss Cotabato and Paquito Villa.

17. Sa Landas ng Pag-ibig (The Road to Love)

Cast: Paquito Villa, Annie Harris, Domingo Prinsipe

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Deogracias A. del Rosario

Screenings: July 11-22, 1929 at Palace

Press:

18. Luha ng Ina (Tears of a mother)

Cast: Armando Crisostimo

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: 1930 [or 1932]

Press:

19. Maria Luisa

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: June 17-20, 1930 at Palace

Press:

20. Ang Anak sa Ligaw (Child out of wedlock)

Cast: Rosita Rivera, Nena Linda, Gregorio Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Julian Cruz Balmaseda

Screenings: September 19-23, 1930 at Rialto

Press:

21. Noli Me Tangere (Touch me not)

Cast: Celia Marcaida, Chito Calvo, Patrocinio Carvajal

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Jose Rizal

Screenings: October 31-November 10, 1930 at Rialto Theatre

Press: An ad reproduced in Diamond Anniversary

Jose Nepomuceno presents

The immortal masterpiece of Dr Jose Rizal

Noli Me Tangere

A Malayan Movies super-production

Like a dream but it's real.

Made in the Philippines by Filipinos.

22. La hija de revolucion (Daughters of the revolution)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: February 7-9, 1931 at Rialto

Press:

23. La Monjita (Ang Monghita)

Cast: Rosa Rivera, Antonia Santos

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: April 17-21, 1931 at Tivoli

Press:

24. Lilies of Benguet

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: July 1-5, 1931 at Tivoli.

Press:

25. Moro Pirates

Cast: Nena Linda, Eduardo de Castro, Gregorio Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: August 18-25 at Lyric and October 9-11, 1931 at Tivoli

Press:

26. Dalaga (Really)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: October 31-November 2, 1931

Press:

27. Ang Multo sa Libingan (Close to the cemetery)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: December 4-7, 1931 at Tivoli.

Press:

28. Ang Lihim na Bathala (The secret of the pagan God)

Cast: Gregorio Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: December 31, 1931-January 6, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

29. Sa Pinto ng Langit (At heaven's gate)

Cast: Jose Corazon de Jesus, Alma Bella, Juanita Angeles

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Jose Corazon de Jesús

Screenings: February 19-25, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

30. Pugad ng Pag-ibig (Nest of Love)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: March 11-14, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

31. Satanas

Cast: Rosa del Rosario

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: May 6-9, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

32. Mang Tano: Nuno ng mga Aswang (Old Man Tano: Vampire's Forbear)

Cast: Salvador Tinsay, Salvador Zaragoza

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: June 24-28, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

33. Luha (Tears)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: September 2-6, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

34. Ligaw na Bulaklak (Stray flowers)

Cast: Rosa del Rosario, Tina del Rosario, Rogelio de la Rosa, Gregorio Fernandez

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: September 16-18, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

35. Tianak (Ogre)

Cast: Rosa del Rosario, Salvador Tinsay

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: September 30-October 1, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

36. Mali-Mali (Wrong)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: October 14-, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

37. Lantang Bulaklak (Wilted flower)

Cast: Rosa del Rosario

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Sequel to *Ligaw na Bulaklak*

Screenings: November 11-15, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

38. Over the hill, Filipino (The sufferings of a mother)

Cast:

Production date:

Locations:

Source:

Screenings: December 16-17, 1932 at Tivoli

Press:

39. Ang Punyal na Ginto (Golden Dagger)

Cast: Alma Bella, Carlos Padilla, Paco Zamora, Tina del Rosario, Naty Bernardo

Production date:

Locations:

Source: Novel by Antonio G. Sempio

Screenings: Lyric, March 9-, 1933

Press: Ad

Punyal Na Ginto is a magnificent, highly romantic and sentimental story of two lovers – such as will grip the souls and passions of the young people of today and whirl them into the realities of life. Highly realistic acting and artistic photography, coupled with expert directing by Mr Nepomuceno's nearly 15 years' connection with the moving picture industry, will make this picture rival the best – if not beat the best Filipino picture ever produced.

And remember: It's a Jose Nepomuceno Super-Production.

If You Want The Best Filipino Pictures watch the releases of the Malayan Pictures Corporation.

Other Nepomuceno films:

Luksang Bituin, Ang Magmamani, Tinangay ng Apoy, Bago Lumobog ang Araw, Ruben, Bahay Kubo (Nipa Hut), Biyuda Alegre, Makata at Paraluman, Dasalang Perlas, Isang Halik Mo Lamang, Binahug Bukid, Ulong Inasnan, Ang Kalbaryo ng Isang Ina, Ang Itinapon, Anak ng Kadiliman, Lagablab ng Kabataan, Ang Lihim ng Lumang Simbahan, Tatlong Pagkabirhen, Santong Diablo (Sainted Devil), Ang Maya, Leron-Leron Sinta, Kung Kita'y Kapiling , Datu Talim, Palaris, Punit na Bandila, Ang Kambal, Diwata ng Karagatan (Goddess of the Sea), Milagro ng Nazareno, Ramona, Sawang Palad (The Loser), Doctor Kuba (Doctor Hunchback). Kamay ng Diyos, Krus na Bato, Sawing Palad.