

Badjao: Cinematic Representations of Difference in the Philippines

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This article examines the cinematic representation of identity through an analysis of the well-known Philippine film, Badjao. Produced in the late 1950s, Badjao successfully commercialized the idea and expression of conflict between the Tausug and Badjao ethnic groups. The study focuses on how the enactment and enunciation of identity through difference presented itself in cinema and how such representations, imbued with stereotypical cultural and religious codes, were re-formulations within nationalist discourses in the Philippines.

[Foreword]

*This is the story of the Badjaos
 A pagan tribe that roams the seas
 Deep to the south of the Philippines
 They live upon the sea
 And find refuge in its vastness.
 It is also the story of the Tausugs
 The proud and fearless race of Moros
 Who live upon the land . . .
 Here are two peoples
 Geographically the same
 And yet forever to be divided
 By custom and by faith
 This is a moment . . .
 In the ever-changing present
 An unchangeable moment
 That today joins the past.*

[Postscript]

*Is it one race
 Or faith
 That divides us?
 What can unite us
 The right to build a future*

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*Free
Together
Whether Muslim, Christian,
Brown or White.*¹

This paper is an exploration into how the concept of ‘ethnic’ difference was visually presented in Philippine commercial cinema during the 1950s. Such an inquiry is somewhat problematic, given the multiplicity of approaches with which the concept has been applied to diverse groupings of peoples, revealing the historical conjunctures and societal tensions within Philippine colonial and postcolonial histories. The film *Badjao* successfully commercialized the idea and expression of ethnic conflict between Tausug and Badjao, and it is this work that forms the basis of my inquiry into the presentation of difference through the visual arts. Its cinematic visibility continues, in part through its inclusion in retrospective screenings and its recognition as an important work by Filipino filmmakers and film critics.² My interest relates to how the enactment and enunciation of difference were presented in cinema through the deployment of conventional representations of Otherness in the visual arts. The popularity of the film *Badjao* was partly attributed to its realistic depictions of Tausug and Badjao social life in the Sulu Archipelago. Historically, the Tausug, Sama, Badjao (Sama-Bajau) and the Iranun were integrated into the centralized polity of the Sulu Sultanate. While the Badjao were the most subjugated of the groups, they were incorporated (at some level) into this hierarchically ordered world. The film’s interrogation of subjugation through ethnic identity and conflict contributed, I suggest, to the re-formulation of ‘ethnic’ difference in nationalist discourses in the decades following the Pacific War.³

The expression of identity and difference

The significance of the visual arts in Philippine culture – particularly architecture, sculpture, painting, photography and cinema – is in part a consequence of the appreciation of figurative representational forms. This appreciation arises through the recognition of creativity, innovation, skill and cultural knowledge that are embedded in the process of making, whether the act itself takes the form of a material object or a performance. What exactly is entailed in the nature of this appreciative act has been the subject of ongoing discussion by Filipino artists and critics. Reflecting on the debates regarding a ‘distinctive’ Filipino aesthetic and the internalization of artistic norms under colonialism, Bienvenido Lumbera comments that such inquires should also address the question of what norms are recognized as the criteria for validating artistic expression. A more productive inquiry, he suggests, would ascertain the characteristics consistently manifested in the artistic production of Filipinos since the sixteenth century. He identifies four sources: ethnic heritage; the assertion of the traditional *vis-à-vis* the culture of the

1 From the film *Badjao* (1957), directed by Lamberto V. Avellana.

2 Joel David, *Fields of vision: Critical applications in recent Philippine cinema* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1995), pp. 125–36. I have adopted the conventional spelling of Tausug in the paper. ‘Badjao’ as a term is currently being conventionalized to ‘Bajau’ in the Philippines, but I have chosen to use ‘Badjao’ to minimize confusion in referencing.

3 Similar questions are raised by Homi K. Bhabha in his discussion on Otherness in Bhabha, *The location of culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66–84.

colonizers; Christian religious culture; and Western popular culture. Lumbera asserts that the issue is not whether such characteristics are of foreign derivation, but how these sources were 'indigenized over time by historical action and by the practice of generations of creative artists'.⁴ Such concerns encompass not only the act of creativity and audience reception but also the hegemonic processes that normalize and valorize artistic expression and conventions of representation and production in the visual arts.

Historically, the visual arts, particularly painting and photography, have played an important role in the production, replication and celebration of ethnic and cultural difference. Considerable attention has been focused on late nineteenth-century photography and how studio portraits, postcards and snapshots were reproduced in authorized colonial records, scholastic texts, popular magazines, travelogues as well as coffee-table books on heritage and indigenous art. Photographs taken by colonial officials during the early twentieth century, archived in national or American museums and libraries, have been subjected to intense critique, leading to a deeper awareness of the complex relations between visual representation, ideologies of race and rationales of governance.⁵ Initially referred to as *Indio* by Spanish explorers and colonial administrators, the peoples of the archipelago were subsequently typologized by European and American ethnologists as a subset of the 'Malay race'. The German scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt writing in the late nineteenth century, and American colonial administrators such as Dean Worcester, were particularly influential in formulating differences on the basis of racial classifications, i.e., the Negritos and the Malays.⁶

The aestheticization of colour – in this case skin colour – as a signifier of difference was tied to evolutionary preconceptions of physical and cultural development expressed through the ethos of 'civilization' or lack thereof (wildness). Evolutionary beliefs linked the prehistory of the Philippines to patterns of wave migration, resulting in the codification of racial and ethno-linguistic difference through temporal and spatial frames. The Negritos, identified as the original inhabitants of the archipelago, were positioned at the lowest level (or the first migratory wave) based on the criteria of their smaller physique, darker skin colour and (lack of) material culture. Ethnological and anthropological practices were subsequently institutionalized by the American colonial state. Such techniques of identification and display, particularly the census, the museum and the exhibition, 'not only mapped the structure of racial difference, [they] also established a particular race to determine the border of these differences'.⁷

4 Bienvenido Lumbera, *Writing the nation/Pag-akda ng bansa* (Diliman: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), pp. 9–12; quotation from p. 12.

5 See, for example, Benito M. Vergara, Jr., *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and colonialism in early 20th century Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995).

6 Ferdinand Blumentritt, *An attempt at writing a Philippine ethnography with an appendix: The Spanish maritime discoveries in Philippine Archipelago*, tr. Marcelino N. Maceda (Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1980 reprint, orig. ed. 1882); Dean Worcester, *The Philippine Islands and their people, a record of personal observation and experience, with a short summary of the more important facts in the history of the Archipelago* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1899).

7 Vicente Rafael, 'White love: Census and melodrama in the United States colonization of the Philippines', *History and Anthropology*, 8, 1–4 (1994): 278. Geoffrey Benjamin, writing on the Malay world, refers to a somewhat similar racial codification process as *kuih-lapis* (layer cake) drawn from a folk scholarly ethnology; Benjamin, 'On being tribal in the Malay World', in *Tribal communities in the Malay World: Historical, social and cultural perspectives*, ed. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou (Singapore: ISEAS, 2002), p. 12.

The conceptual slippage among the terms ‘race’, ‘tribal’, ‘ethnic’ and ‘folkloric’ commonly encountered in Filipino historical documents is indicative of the tensions and contestations in the deployment of such categories. The recognition of the ‘folkloric’ as a marker of cultural difference can be traced back to the tripartite classification of the European folklore system developed in the nineteenth century, although antecedents are found in missionary writings and travel diaries. As a marker of difference, the folkloric retains its significance as it reveals the imagining of the traditional within Philippine modernity. Identity differentials that were previously delegated to folklore studies – such as dance, music, costume, architecture, food and oral literature – are now incorporated into cultural and interdisciplinary studies and refashioned to align with state-sponsored ‘ethnic’ heritage programmes. While the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘tribal’ are often used interchangeably, in anthropology they refer to different processes – namely, identity differentiation and socio-political structures that emerged within specific historical contexts, often with the rise of centralized polities.

Differentiation on the basis of ‘race’ was institutionalized under the Spanish colonial government by means of the legal distinction between *mestizo* (a person of mixed European and native Filipino ancestry) and *Indio* (a native Filipino), although this distinction was later subsumed by the homogenous category of Filipino. Interestingly, ‘race’ and ‘tribe’ were also deployed to distinguish between people categorized as non-Christianized *Indios* – namely, Muslim Filipinos, who were referred to as ‘Mohamedans’ or ‘Moros’ (after the Spanish ‘Moors’), and the pagan tribes (who were neither Christian nor Muslim). Spanish missionaries struggled to stabilize and thus essentialize the category ‘Moro’ through ideas of blood (and distillation theories), yet were reluctant to completely exclude the possibility of conversion. The instability within the category ‘race’ is indicative of this ambivalence. Moros, along with nearly all other Filipinos, were considered as belonging within the racial category ‘Malay’; thus difference turned to other identity markers that have come to be associated with the ethnic. Moro resistance to Spanish and later American colonial rule tended to accentuate difference, and this in turn was re-codified through essentialist ideas of innateness. The foreword in *Badjao*, which describes the Badjao as a pagan tribe and the Tausug as the proud and fearless race of Moros, reveals the ambiguities embedded in these concepts and the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses through which identity construction has been shaped, contested and refracted within the histories of colonialism, nationalism and imperialism. The circulation and adoption of such ways of thinking ethnicity, alerts us to how ideas of alterity draw on and indeed affirm difference.⁸ How then was difference naturalized, attenuated and essentialized through cinema?

The role of national cinema in the Philippines

The Philippines has a strong cinematic tradition dating from the beginning of the twentieth century. Cinema’s inception in the archipelago is linked to its duplicitous

8 At the risk of reductionism, alterity refers to difference or otherness in our relations to others and secondly, our relations to ourselves. I am interested in how certain varieties of alterity are constituted in the film. This is not the type of alterity discussed by Emmanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida, but an alterity that has some resonances with Paul Ricoeur’s ideas. In the paper, I examine how the sense of self and other are mutually constitutive through accounts of recognition (i.e. Georg Friedrich Hegel’s master and slave) and Bhabha’s deployment of Jacques Lacan’s account of desire (see Bhabha, *Location of culture*, pp. 66–84).

representation of Filipinos in American propaganda films of the Philippine–American War.⁹ In an interesting deployment of the aesthetics of colour to signify alterity, African-Americans were cast as Filipinos, as if one could not recognize the Other except through the replication of an Otherness already known. Initially American companies dominated film production and distribution in the Philippines. Two American theatre owners, Albert Yearsley and Edward Gross, produced early films based on historical figures and events. Gross produced *La Vida de Jose Rizal* (The Life of Jose Rizal, 1912) and *Noli Me Tangere* (1916), while Yearsley also focused on Rizal's life in the film, *El Fusilamiento del Dr Jose Rizal* (The Shooting of Dr Jose Rizal). Jose Nepomuceno, a photographer by profession, embarked on a career of filmmaking in 1919 with his feature film *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden) based on a popular *sarswela* (a form of musical theatre). Vicente Salumbides, who had previously worked in Hollywood, collaborated with Nepomuceno on a number of films and is thought to have adopted Hollywood filmic conventions such as the close-up and melodrama for use in Filipino cinema. Another early filmmaker was Julian Manansala, who dealt with nationalist themes in his first film, *Patria Amore* (Beloved Country, 1929). Other filmmakers working during this period were Carlos Vander Tolosa, Eduardo de Castro and Manuel Silos.¹⁰ The production of Filipino films during the early period was sporadic, in part a consequence of the decision by Hollywood companies to establish distribution offices in Manila. Competition in terms of distribution, coupled with a duty exemption on American films, effectively ensured that 90 per cent of films screened in 1937 were American-produced.

Clodualdo Del Mundo notes that during the 1930s and 1940s, the Philippine film industry became increasingly viable following the establishment and dominance of Malayan Movies and Philippine Films. Other film companies such as Parlatone Hispano-Filipino, Sampaguita, Excelsior X'Otic and LVN were also to play an important role in the industry. During the mid-1930s filmmakers such as Mar Esmeralda, Fermin Brava, Tor Villano, Gregorio Fernandez and Carlos Padilla were producing works for local audiences. Well-known filmmakers who dominated the industry after the war had already commenced their careers, including Ramon Estella, Gerardo de Leon, Lamberto Avellana and Manuel Conde. De Leon explored nationalistic issues through his films *Noli Me Tangere* (1961) and *El Filibusterismo* (1962), based on Rizal's well-known novels. In another film, *Ang Daigdig ng mga Api* (The World of the Oppressed, 1965), he examined class inequality through land reform, a long standing socio-political issue in Philippine society. Other filmmakers such as Avellana used the revolutionary figure, Macario Sakay (1870–1907) to explore the ideas of national identity and resistance to American colonialism in his film, *Sakay* (1940).¹¹

9 Clodualdo Del Mundo's discussion of 19 films produced by Edison Manufacturing Company and the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company during 1898 and 1904 (held by the Paper Print Collection in the American Library of Congress) is very helpful in exploring the issues of representation under colonialism: Del Mundo, *Native resistance: Philippine cinema and colonialism 1898–1941* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1998). A number of films included recreated scenes of the Philippine-American War as well as shots filmed in the Philippines. Rolando Tolentino also addresses the politics of representation at this period within the confluence of capitalism, geopolitics and American imperialism; see his 'Introduction' in *Geopolitics of the visible: Essays on Philippine film cultures*, ed. Roland B. Tolentino (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. vii–xxi.

10 Del Mundo, *Native resistance*, pp. 58–9.

11 Ibid., pp. 60–3.

As Filipinos themselves turned to cinema production they faced the challenge encountered by other filmmakers: how to produce a visual language that was readable to a diverse and heterogeneous audience. In part, they relied on the filmic stylistic conventions developed in Europe and Hollywood, but they also turned to local theatrical and literary traditions to explore and present popular themes in cinematic form. While Philippine cinema has become the fourth largest film industry in the world, its history has been almost exclusively associated with a select series of high-quality filmmakers including Avellana, Gerardo de Leon, Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Mike de Leon, Marilou Abaya-Diaz and, more recently, producers such as Raymond Red and Nick Deocampo. Aesthetic evaluations and judgements of these filmmakers' works positioned them not only within a personal career trajectory but also within the history of cinema itself in the Philippines. The idea of a national cinema should, as Patrick Flores suggests, be understood in terms of its logic: namely, local Asian culture with its claims of cultural authenticity and in relation to international interests that position it as Third World cinema (a derivative of Hollywood).¹² These tensions were already established in the 1950s when Filipino directors and film studios, constrained by limited funds, industry practices and competition (particularly from America), sought national and international acclaim by incorporating popular local forms as well as Western themes into their productions.

Differences emerged between the more prestigious 'art' films and films produced on low budgets for popular consumption. Some directors were reputedly dismissive of the Filipino public's (lack of) appreciation of 'quality' films; Avellana apparently coined the phrase '*bakya* crowd' as a euphemism for an audience in ignorance of the requisite sensibility needed to appreciate 'quality' films. (*Bakya* are the wooden slippers that were worn by the poor in the countryside.) José Lacaba untangles the meanings of *bakya* through a critique of taste, inverting the derogation of the rural poor to a valorization of Filipino culture.¹³ His critique also has relevance to the thematic interests of specific directors and the reception and censorship of their works. Avallana's recognition as a national film artist must be contextualized in this debate given the privileging of his work *vis-à-vis* the works of other renowned and popular filmmakers such as Gerardo de Leon whose films were often social critiques of Filipino life.

The significance of cinema is that it is 'one of the structures that transmits and promotes the dominant ideology and creates and preserves for it a consensus of support', although, as Pam Cook notes, such consensus is always contested and debated.¹⁴ Writing on the role of cinema in Asia, Wimal Dissanayake comments that imbricated with national myth-making and ideological production, it seeks to transmit, reinforce and strengthen the hegemony of the nation-state through ideological strategies whereby

12 Patrick D. Flores, 'The dissemination of Nora Aunor', in Tolentino ed., *Geopolitics of the visible*, p. 86. Flores cites Krishna Sen, *Indonesian cinema: Framing the New Order* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1994) in the context of this observation.

13 Jose F. Lacaba, 'Notes on "*Bakya*": Being an apologia of sorts for Filipino mass cult', in *Readings in Philippine Cinema*, ed. Rafael Ma. Guerrero (Manila: Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, 1983), pp. 117–23.

14 Pam Cook, *Fashioning the nation: Costume identity in British cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 18.

imagined communities are given essentialist identities. This delineation of difference within the narration of nation produces identities through alterity drawing on historical and cultural specificities to signify belongingness. In his exploration of identity and subject positions in cinema, Dissanayake draws on Homi Bhabha's writings to discuss how national cinema serves to delineate alterities and legitimize selfhood, in part through the production of nation through narration. 'Cultural differences mark the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification through processes of regulation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself'.¹⁵

This crafting of nation formation within mainstream Philippine cinema in the decades after the Pacific War drew on traditions in the visual arts that Lumbera categorized as 'ethnic', namely the cultures of the non-Christian Filipinos found in Mindanao, Palawan and northern Luzon. In contemporary political discourse, Lumbera's deployment of 'ethnic' would more aptly be applied to indigenous cultures. The appeal of the 'ethnic' was its association with exotic societies 'untouched' by Spanish and American colonial rule. Creative artists such as film producers turned to the 'ethnic' when they 'wanted to imagine a "pure" people that could be portrayed to contrast with Westernized Filipinos who have been "corrupted" by materialist greed and commercializing urbanization'.¹⁶ Major Filipino directors, such as Gerardo de Leon (*Ifugao* [1954] and *Banawe* [1975]) and Lamberto V. Avellana (*Lapu-Lapu* [1955], *Badjao* [1957], *Wayawaya* [1981]), deployed the 'ethnic' as allegorical statements on societal concerns.¹⁷ As there were so few alternative representations of indigenous cultures during this era, films such as *Badjao* continue to be remembered more as authentic depictions rather than as stylized cinematic allegories of nationalistic concerns popularized by specific film directors and producers. The commercialization of 'ethnic' difference through cinema raises interesting issues, as the production of alterity in narratives of nationhood is often premised on the recognition of spatial and temporal ruptures, thus alerting the viewer to the politics of representations inherent in this medium and possible contestations in the readings of such films.¹⁸

15 Homi Bhabha, *Nation and narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 297; quoted in Wimal Dissanayake, 'Introduction: Nationhood, history and cinema: Reflections of the Asian scene', in *Colonialism and nationalism in Asian cinema*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xiii.

16 Lumbera, *Writing the nation*, p. 13.

17 Lumbera (*ibid.*, p. 13) describes *Wayawaya* as an allegory for present-day Filipinos and their aspirations for freedom using an imaginary ethnic community in precolonial times with unmistakable 'indigenous' identity.

18 David (*Fields of vision*, p. 15) comments briefly on the inclusion of tribal/exotic content in a number of films during Marcos' rule such as Pamos' *Ang Babae sa Ulog* (1981) and Lito Tiongson's *Hubad na Gubat* (1982). *Zamboanga* (1937), the recently rediscovered Eduardo de Castro film produced by Philippine Films, apparently also focused on ethnic conflict between Tausug. As I have not yet seen the film and as the details printed in the press release do not reveal the ethnic identity of the protagonist, Danao (acted by Fernando Poe), I am unable to ascertain whether he is Tausug or Sama. The plot revolves around Danao, a pearl fisher who marries the village chief's daughter Minda (Rosa del Rosario). The pirate, Hadji Razul, kidnaps Minda, inciting a tribal war that ends only when Danao kills Hadji. The film was to be distributed internationally; however, it disappeared into obscurity soon after its release in the USA. See *The Malaya*, 5 Feb. 2004, <http://www.malaya.com.ph/feb05/ente1.htm>.

Badjao

Directed by Lamberto V. Avellana (1915–91), *Badjao* is regarded as one of the classic films of Philippine cinema, receiving both local and regional acclaim during its screening. Philippine cinema flourished during the post-war period and retained its appeal and popularity in the 1950s, despite changes in film production and studio ownership. Of the six active film companies operating in the 1930s, only two resumed after the Pacific War: Sampaguita Pictures Inc. and LVN Pictures. These two companies and the newly established Premiere Production Inc. emerged as the most influential until their demise in the 1960s. Avellana directed *Badjao* while under contract to LVN, which in turn raises interesting questions regarding his signature as director and LVN's studio stylistic form (noted for its costume designs and sets). The studio system, with directors employed under contract, necessitated long-term planning of film production to ensure financial return on investment outlays. Directors and film production studios sought national and international recognition and they in turn were influenced by Hollywood conventions and popular culture. *Badjao* was one of a number of Filipino films with 'ethnic/oriental' themes produced during this era; the best known was the highly successful *Genghis Khan*, produced by director Manuel Conde, which was shown at the Venice Film Festival in 1950.

Filmed in black and white, *Badjao* straddled the defined conventions of the popular and the artistic, attracting both a mass audience and critical approbation. All the major actors in the film – Tony Santos (Hassan), Rosa Rosal (Bala Amai), Joseph de Cordova (Datu Tahil), Leroy Salvador (Asid) and Vic Silayan (Jiriki)¹⁹ – were stars at the time of the film's release, with the exception of Silayan, as *Badjao* was one of his early films. Santos and Rosal had co-starred with Silayan in Avellana's *Anak Dalita* (Child of Dearth) in 1956, and with Salvador and de Cordova in LVN's *Biyaya Ng Lupa* (Bounty of the Earth) three years later.²⁰ The use of well-known actors in lead roles, the reliance on the conventional heterosexual romance theme and a large advertising budget assured the film's popularity, while the representational forms of ethnic difference (architecture, costume, dance, etc.) were amenable to aesthetic management and presentation. Translation is an important issue in the film, although I do not comment on translation and translatability except in specific instances. In terms of the presentation of difference, the movement between languages reveals the nationalistic and imperialistic violence inherent in the logic of national cinema: one language spoken (Tagalog), one scripted through sub-titles (English) and two silenced (Tausug and Sama-Bajau). The foreword and postscript are also in English.

In many respects, *Badjao* does conform to the Philippine derivative of classical Hollywood narratives with the plot's resolution centred on the actions of the hero/protagonist and the villain/antagonist. There are two narrative strands in the film's plot:

19 Jikiri is the more conventional name in the region, but in the film the character's name is given as 'Jiriki'.

20 Directed by Manuel Silos, the film received both national and regional recognition, winning the Asian Film Festival award in 1960; Mel Tobias, *One hundred acclaimed Tagalog movies: Sineng Mundo, best of Philippine cinema* (Vancouver: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1998), pp. 51–3. In an interview with Emmanuel Reyes, Vic Silayan reminisced about his friendship with his classmate Totoy Avellana, the younger brother of Lamberto. Students at Ateneo de Manila University in the late 1940s, they were active in the Ateneo Players Guild. Silayan and the Avellana brothers also performed soap operas in Tagalog on a local radio station, DZFM. See Emmanuel A. Reyes, *Notes on Philippine cinema* (Manila: De la Salle University Press, 1989), pp. 155–96.

the conventional romance between Hassan, the son of a Badjao headman, and Bala Amai, the niece of a Tausug *datu*; and the enmity between Tausug and Badjao. It is the protagonist Hassan who interweaves these narrative strands, as it is his actions that challenge the social inferiority of the Badjao. The film centres on the character goal of Hassan, who through his desire to marry Bala Amai, relinquishes his identity and becomes Tausug, only to realize the impossibility (falsity) of this quest. While *Badjao* follows the classical narrative tradition, linearity is dealt with in a more complex manner. Avellana uses techniques such as constant crosscutting of scenes and jump-cuts to enhance audience suspense. The film is framed by the dramatic opening scene (the arrival of the Badjao at their mooring site) and the closing scene (the departure of the Badjao to the open sea). Within these highly stylized frames (shots of Badjao houseboats [*lepas*], the immersion rite of the newly born child and the blowing of a conch shell, the heraldic emblem), are numerous scenes of arrivals and departures that mimic the ebbs and flows of waves on the seashore.

While Avellana crafts the filmic narrative to conform to the conventional format, the narrative is ruptured by pivotal scenes that highlight ‘ethnic’ identity contestation or ‘ethnic’ violence in order to intensify the film’s dramatic impact. Editing techniques such as jump cuts subvert the concealing effect inherent in classic Hollywood narrative as they fictionalize the realism of the structure for emotive affect. The first jump shot is one of the crucial scenes in the film; its significance lies in the tension instigated through a temporal disjuncture, from pre-marriage to post-marriage, as it is in this scene that Hassan both affirms his love for Bala Amai and relinquishes his identification with the sea by agreeing to live on land (Figure 1). The second jump cut – the burning of their seashore house – recalls a previous act of violence, the burning of Hassan’s *lepa*. The scene of the torching of their house by the followers of Datul Tabil is doubly important to the plot as Bala Amai, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, is forced to seek safety aboard



**Figure 1 Seashore Scene:
Hassan (Tony Santos) affirms his love for Bala Amai (Rosa Rosal)**

Hassan's *banca* (boat). The repetition of this scene later in the film heightens its dramatic quality, as the birth of their child signifies the triumph of love over the destructive power of Datu Tahil and precipitates the film's climax, the renunciation of Moro rule (i.e., the Sulu Sultanate).

Cinematographic conventions are effectively used by Avellana to represent a sense of realism in the film. Indigenous dance and music can convey a reality effect as they suggest to the audience the real inherent in the enactment of custom, such as the Tausug wedding (Figure 2). The representation of such cultural performances (associated with ethnic identity differentiation) draws on the aesthetics of the spectacle that places the viewer as a witness to, but not a participant in, the event. The film's orchestral soundtrack (nondiegetic music) provides a distinctive dramatic feel to the opening and closing scenes and attenuates the tense and conflictual nature of the encounters between Tausug and Badjao.²¹ Other techniques such as the close-up shot/reverse shot and the



Figure 2 Wedding Scene:
2nd row: Hassan (Tony Santos), Bala Amai (Rosa Rosal) and Datu Tahil
(Joseph de Cordova)

21 Jerrold Levinson, citing Noël Carroll, deploys Aaron Copland's distinction of the function of music in cinema to argue that the underlying characters' psychological states are clearly assigned to the cinematic narrator, while other functions (such as creating atmosphere, providing background filler and building a sense of continuity) evoke an emotional experience in the viewer rather than defining or delineating the film's fictional world. See Jerrold Levinson, 'Film music and narrative agency', in *Post-theory: Reconstructing film studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 257, 277; Levinson cites Noël Carroll, *Mystifying movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 216.

jump-shots discussed previously create a sense of intimacy and emotional intensity that is suggestive of melodrama.²² Lighting is also used to convey suspense and heighten the emotional effect of role characterization in specific scenes. This is particularly noticeable in those scenes in which Bala Amai plays a significant role. For example, she travels at night to the Badjao mooring site, she flees their burning house at night, and she gives birth at night. That the only female character in the film is connoted with darkness or poorly lit interior shots is instructive, as it suggests that while she may precipitate action, the feminine is associated with feelings of fear and uncertainty.

Interestingly, the film differs from the stylistic conventions of Hollywood classic cinema as it utilizes a range of Filipino theatrical traditions. What is significant for my argument is that the representability of 'ethnic' difference is drawn from well-established theatrical characterizations of Muslim Filipinos as depicted in *Moro-Moro* plays, which were originally derived from Spanish vernacular theatre but acquired their own local forms and interpretative contexts after their introduction into the Philippines. *Badjao* is not unusual in this respect, as these themes were incorporated into a number of local films including *Princess Tarjata* (1931), *Kamoning* (1940), *Datu Talim* (1940), *Tarhata* (1941) and, perhaps, *Moro Pirates* (1931) and *Prinsesa Urduja* (1942).²³ While the origins of the *Moro-Moro* play are contested, it is known to have been introduced to the Philippines during the sixteenth century and was staged to celebrate fiestas and Catholic liturgical events. The genre is one of the *komedya* dramas that drew on narrative versions of European metrical romances usually set in the time of the Crusades. Nicanor Tiongson notes that *komedya* performances conform to traditional theatrical staging, including formulaic gestures and greetings, rhetorical speech (in verse form), elaborate costumes and weapons, dance scenes, military processions with accompanying band music as well as scenes depicting diplomatic missions between the Christian and Moorish courts. These theatrical performances, with their stylized enactments of violent religious encounters within a conventionalized love story (Moorish princess and Christian suitor/soldier), invariably end with the triumph of Christianity. Resil Mojares' analysis of the *komedya* in Valladolid, a *barrio* in southern Cebu, places the *Moro-Moro* as a dramatic form, encapsulating through hegemonic means the moral order of the social world.²⁴ *Badjao* also engages with this issue but in this instance, it is the Tausug social world that is rejected for an (unstated) alternative moral order.

Two important theatrical traditions identified with melodramatic conventions in Philippine cinema are *sarsuwela* (musical theatre) and *sinakulo* (passion plays). The *sarsuwela*, a popular form of entertainment in the early twentieth century, was one means of disseminating anti-imperialistic and nationalistic themes to an appreciative audience,

22 Reverse shot: editing two figures in face-to-face interaction, the camera shows each one alternatively, with either the other character absent or only partly visible; the filmmaker cuts from one shot to another, following the flow of the conversation and facial response. David Bordwell, 'Convention, construction, and cinematic vision', in Bordwell and Carroll ed., *Post-theory*, p. 87.

23 Del Mundo, *Native resistance*, p. 88.

24 Nicanor Tiongson, 'Dulaan: An essay on Philippine theater', in *Tuklas sinig: Essays on the Philippine arts*, ed. Nicanor Tiongson (Manila: Sentong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1991), p. 66; Resil B. Mojares, *Theater in society, society in theater* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1985), p. 100.

while passion plays provided a range of character roles that were subsequently incorporated into melodrama.²⁵ *Badjao* does draw on certain melodramatic filmic conventions to convey character depth and heighten the emotional involvement of the audience. This raises some extremely interesting questions as to how melodrama may inform the work of history production, and offers possible insight into why the heroic figures so prominently in Philippine nationalism. Ethnic markers – particularly dance (the *pangalay* is a recognizable dance style of the Sulu Archipelago), music and costumes – are also effectively deployed in the film as a communicative signature of difference between the two groups, Tausug and Badjao, as well as between the ‘ethnic’ as exotic Other and the audience.

As a marker of the ethnic, costume may also serve narrative’s purpose, alerting the audience to changes of a particular character. Thus, dress can be read as an external indicator of the inner self.²⁶ Avellana does use costume to intensify narrative rupture and character development in *Badjao* to dramatic effect. At one level there is an eroticization of the male body, as Badjao men (who in daily life have a choice of attire) in the film wear only loose trousers and occasionally a colourless tailored jacket. However, nakedness or semi-nakedness is often codified as uncivilized in the Philippines. In this instance, the simplicity of Badjao apparel signifies ethnic, status and class difference but also alludes to the possibility of identity transformation. Hassan’s donning of a finely made round-necked shirt, loose trousers with an elaborate floral design and a decorated cloth worn as a sash (*siyag*) signifies not only appropriate apparel for an important ritual event (his wedding) but also a social distancing from his previous way of life.

While *Badjao* retains a theatrical look through lighting of interior shots, entries and exits of actors and the centrality of the actors within the scene, a sense of realism is created through enactments of rural life and the elaborately designed sets. This sense is enhanced by the numerous shots of the mooring site and the Badjao houseboats, ensuring that the presence of the sea pervades the film. *Badjao* was considered by many critics to be a ‘documentary-like’ film, a reference to the cinematic enactment of Tausug and Badjao social life as an authentic re-presentation of the ‘ethnic’. This aesthetic of naturalized realism can only be a crafting of the fictive, however. I have not located film reviews published by Tausug or Badjao critics about the authenticity of this cinematic ‘story’ of ethnic conflict, although Ma. Luisa Aguilar-Cariño’s exposition on the problematic of representation eloquently encapsulates one such reason. Writing on the ramifications of American colonialism on the Igorots of the Cordillera in northern Luzon, she notes: ‘having themselves no power to appropriate the lexicon of the recognized language and through it speak for themselves, they unwittingly came to exhale the aura and substance of legend’.²⁷

Clearly, similar critiques apply in this instance, although Flores’ comment on the historical specificity of the spectator’s point of view is suggestive of alternative readings and (mis)interpretations by audiences with different social capitals.²⁸ When *Badjao* was

25 On passion plays, see Lumbera, *Writing the nation*, p. 316; Rafael, ‘White love’, pp. 287–9, discusses *sarsuwelas*. The other important form of melodrama that emerged in the 1970s was the *bomba* (erotic) film (Lumbera, *Writing the nation*, p. 333).

26 Cook, *Fashioning the nation*, p. 15.

27 Ma. Luisa Aguilar-Cariño, ‘The Igorot as Other: Four discourses from the colonial period’, *Philippines Studies*, 42, 2 (1994): 195.

28 Flores, ‘Dissemination of Nora Aunor’, p. 88.

screened at a Manila-based Workshop on Indigenous Rights in late 1999, the Badjao and Sama audience expressed their interest and enjoyment in the film. No one had previously seen the film and many were unaware of its existence or its impact in shaping perceptions of difference in the Philippines. Intriguingly, their recognition of the *fictio* inherent in its making leads not to a challenge of the real as represented but to conversations on material culture such as costume, architecture and boat design, as well as changes in fishing technology. For many of the elderly women, the film did evoke nostalgia for the past that can no longer be lived except through memory, while for the younger members of the audience, particularly the children who had spent most of their life in urban centres, the film re-presented a past as imagined through the recounted memories of others. Interestingly, when I asked non-Sama and non-Badjao peoples about their memories of the film, their responses related to the realist claims embedded in it in order to seek clarification on the veracity of specific actions of the characters, but they did not question the authenticity of the ‘story’ itself.

*‘This is the story of the Badjaos/A pagan tribe that roams the seas/Deep to the south of the Philippines
They live upon the sea/And find refuge in its vastness
It is also the story of the Tausugs/The proud and fearless race of Moros/Who live upon the land...’*

The Badjao refer to themselves as *Sama Dilaut* or ‘people of the sea’. Badjao-speaking peoples belong to a much wider grouping of Sama peoples that includes not only boat-dwelling and former boat-dwelling groupings but also shore- and land-based peoples. Sama speakers live in scattered settlements over a maritime area encompassing the Sulu Archipelago, northern and eastern Borneo and eastern Indonesia. In the Philippines, ‘Badjao’ has been used to refer to boat-dwelling and formerly boat-dwelling peoples while ‘Sama (Samal)’ as an ethnonym designates the more sedentary of the Sama-speaking groupings. Traditionally, the Badjao lived in family groupings on small houseboats and have sometimes been described as ‘sea gypsies’, a term still used to connote a way of life that relates to movement and homelessness. There is a Western perception of romance associated with nomadism, conceptualized as an idyllic way of living at sea, which is popularized in travel writing and tourist promotional materials. The Badjao in the northern region of the Sulu Archipelago have opted, for a variety of reasons, for a sedentary lifestyle although their livelihood is still heavily reliant on the sea. Today, they work in a diversity of occupations including subsistence fishing, seaweed farming, foraging and collecting items for trade, fish vending and unskilled or semi-skilled labour.

The Tausug of the Sulu Archipelago are one of the well-known ethnic groups in the southern Philippines. The rise of the Sulu Sultanate integrated the Tausug, Sama, Badjao and Iranun (to differing degrees and at different times) into the centralized polity by means of complementary relations of trading and tribute. Thomas Kiefer dates the establishment of the Sultanate from about the mid-fifteenth century and estimates that by the 1850s approximately 400,000 people were under its suzerainty.²⁹ The renown of the

29 Thomas M. Kiefer, ‘The Tausug polity and the Sultanate of Sulu: A segmentary state in the Southern Philippines’, in *The Muslim Filipinos: A book of readings*, ed. Abdullah T. Madale (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1981), pp. 65–6.

Tausug and the Sama (particularly the Sama Balangingi) derived from the Sultanate's ability to repulse Spanish incursions, their military and raiding success and their extensive regional trading relations. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Badjao were involved in the extensive trading activities of the Sulu Sultanate, procuring for their land-based patrons a variety of sea products like tortoise shell, pearls, pearl shells and dried fish in exchange for vegetables, fruits, clothing, textiles and other land goods, as well as protection of their mooring rights. While the Badjao were the most subjugated of the groups, they were incorporated (at some level) into the Sultanate through these complementary trading activities. As Geoffrey Benjamin has noted, the positioning of boat-dwellers as outsiders through exclusionary protocols places them not in slavery but in lower status relations within this hierarchically ordered centralized polity.³⁰

Tausug hegemony over the Sulu Archipelago was effectively challenged by Spanish military excursions and trade blockages during the mid-nineteenth century. As regional maritime trade was circumscribed and increasingly controlled by the colonial state following the demise of the Sulu Sultanate, social and political relations were also realigned in response to the violent transition from Spanish to American rule.³¹ In the early decades of the twentieth century the Muslim elite negotiated with the colonial administration for regional autonomy; however, their overtures were rejected and instead centralist economic policies were vigorously pursued under the rhetoric of assimilation. By the 1950s, the peoples of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago had endured decades of Christian-Filipino migration that resulted in the loss of their traditional territories. Large areas of land were cleared for settlement and agriculture while exploitative industries such as logging had resulted in widespread deforestation. Muslim Filipino resistance to national governance has to be understood in this context and while the film focuses on the articulation of Badjao identity within Tausug hegemony, it can also be read as the ethnic struggle against metropolitan hegemonic practices. Organized and systematic resistance to centralized state policies, Christian evangelization and discriminatory practices in education and employment, compounded by the effects of extractive industries, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s – a situation described by the state as the 'Moro problem'.³² To identify Moros as *the* problem within the nation necessitated an identification of the Other through the recognition of ethnic and religious difference.

In the discourses of nationalisms within the Philippines, Muslim Filipinos – the most known groupings being the Tausug, Maranao and Maguindanaon – occupy a

30 Benjamin, 'On being tribal', pp. 35–6.

31 An insightful analysis of the Bajau-Laut fishing economy and societal structures in the Semporna District of Sabah is in Clifford Sather, *The Bajau Laut: Adaptation, history and fate in a maritime fishing society of south-eastern Sabah* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997). H. Arlo Nimmo has also written extensively on the Sama Laut living in the Sulu Archipelago: Nimmo, *The Sea People of Sulu: A study of social change in the Philippines* (London: Intertext Books, 1972) and Nimmo, *Magosaha: An ethnology of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001). The patrons included some land-dwelling Sama village headmen but mostly Tausug local leaders or *datus*.

32 An excerpt from the Congressional Committee of 1954 which conducted a study on the Moro problem stated that 'if the Muslims had been prepared and their ignorance which is the root cause of their problem had been wiped out by education . . . [this would have done] away with all the barriers between the Christians and Muslims. . .'; quoted in Abdullah T. Madale, 'Educating the Muslim child: The Philippine case', in Madale, ed., *Muslim Filipinos*, p. 271.

position of ambivalence. While they self-consciously identify themselves as ethnic Filipino within the politics of the nation-state (at certain times), their religion signifies their difference to Christian Filipinos. While the categorization of ethnic difference is formed through the complex yet not exclusive criteria of religion, culture and language, it is religion that has become the marker of alterity. Historically, Catholic missionaries separated the Moro infidel and the pagan from the Christianized *indio*, and this distinction was legitimated and rationalized by the American colonial state in the early decades of the twentieth century with the creation of separate administrative districts in Mindanao and Sulu. This distinction continues in the present day with separate government offices for Muslims and Indigenous Peoples. Within these interstices are the Badjao. Although many may live within the geographic boundary of Muslim territories and hence are considered as under the administration of the Office of Muslim Affairs, their contemporary place in terms of geographical locale and religious beliefs (animist) positions them as more aligned with other Indigenous peoples in the Philippines.³³ Many Sama and Badjao are unaware of how discursive practices have led to a politicking of classification between government departments or the ramifications of this in terms of financial assistance, although they confront the ramifications of discrimination, social exclusion and indifference in their daily lives.

In the film, the hierarchical social relations between Tausug and Badjao are positioned within a more encompassing Moro regional hegemony. The narrative tension is based on Badjao grievances of property damage and theft and the question of whether their claim of entitlement to the resources of the sea is recognized by the Tausug. It is the (implicit) Badjao challenge to this hierarchical social order, and thus to the Tausug moral order, that instigates the possibility of conflict. The film maps the site of Badjao resistance and their struggle for political autonomy. The audience's sympathy towards their plight is aroused when Hassan, the leading character in the film, is accosted by a small group of Tausug men who claim ownership of the sea, confiscate his property and torch his houseboat. Upon returning to the Badjao mooring site, he relates what has occurred and asserts that now 'is the time we Badjao strike back' but is cautioned by his father, the headman, to desist from violence. Instead, their entitlement to the bounty of the sea on the grounds of livelihood is enunciated: 'They cannot deny us our life – the sea'. During their petition to the Tausug ruler (*datu*) of that place, they reiterate the rightfulness of their claim to the resources of the sea. Seeking justice with the question: 'Do all men stand equal before the Koran?', Datu Tahil's response is that of a ruler who has the right and the power to adjudicate over his subjects. Exercising his *noblesse oblige*, he grants the Badjao delegation their 'freedom to roam' at sea without fear of Tausug molestation. However, the question of the possibility of equality for all, and what this equality implies, remains unanswered.

'Here are two peoples/Geographically the same/And yet forever to be divided/By custom and by faith.'

33 As a consequence of the issuance in 2004 of Executive Order No. 364, the National Commission on the Indigenous Peoples, the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor and the Department of Agrarian Reform have been incorporated into the newly named, Department of Land Reform. Delegated to handle all asset reform programmes including agrarian reform, urban land reform and ancestral domain, it is unclear at this stage the extent to which such administrative changes will impact on Indigenous peoples.

In the film, the Tausug and Badjao are situated in a geo-spatial cultural zone of the timeless-present together yet forever divided by custom and religion. Coupled with the idea of 'forever', the conceptualization of division between two different peoples is suggestive of ethnicity as an ontological state. It is the recognition of 'ethnic' difference that creates and maintains their separateness rather than the complementary relations established through trade. Status difference within and between groups is commonly expressed through terms of address, intonation and gesture, while markers of ethnic difference are delineated through familiar binaries: cleanliness/dirt and high/low. Idioms of pollution are used very effectively in the film to mark this difference such as when Datu Tahil taunts Hassan by denigrating his Badjao identity: 'As low as the dust I step on. As cheap and dirty as the spittle I throw'. The pejorative terms *pala'au* or *luwa'an* connote dirtiness, poverty and ignorance (connoted with both a state of being uneducated and ignorance of Islam). In the anthropological literature, such terms evoke ideas of pollution or a state of being unclean. Spitting in particular linguistic contexts relates to an agentive state that is brought forth and remains beyond the boundaries of the social body. (These issues are not examined in this paper except as they relate to stereotypical representations of difference.)

The depiction of 'ethnic' difference in the film utilizes visual, theatrical and literary techniques encountered in the discourses of Orientalism that circulated in the Philippines over many centuries. Thus, we can ask how in the film *Badjao* the process of subjectification is made possible (and plausible) through the stereotype with its antecedents in Orientalism. For Homi Bhabha, the stereotype involves an ambivalent, psychological process of identification.³⁴ His interrogation of this process alerts us to how the articulation of difference may draw on deeply held anxieties and fears that are held collectively yet remain unspoken. In the collective memory of Christian Filipinos, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enslavement narratives have entered into the popular imaginary. Muslim Filipinos with their diverse histories, remembered as the Moro pirates, have assumed a phantasmatic role.³⁵ Imagined as the 'snatchers of children', as 'duplicious, treacherous and untrustworthy', as Filipinos *and* as Muslims, they were and remain today, the foreign internalized within the borders of the state.

Drawing on Jacques Lacan's schema of the Imaginary, Bhabha suggests that the stereotype is a form of knowledge difference that is always threatened by 'lack'. He conceptualizes this as a process of repetitive signification which through a metaphorical 'masking' inscribes on a lack which must then be concealed. The stereotype is not a simplification of a false representation of a given reality but an arrested, fixated form of

34 Bhabha, 'Other question', pp. 67–9.

35 Studies focused on the folkloric aspects of Tausug culture provide important materials on the linguistic and cultural aspects of Tausug and Sama culture. While Cesar Majul's writings on Muslim identity under Spanish colonialism, Kiefer's ethnography on Tausug law and politics, and particularly James Warren's writing on the Sulu Zone have been crucial texts for Philippine studies, these works date from the 1970s onwards. See, for example, James Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898: The dynamics of external trade, slavery and ethnicity in the transformation of a Southeast Asian maritime state* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985); Kiefer, 'Tausug polity'; and Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999). Warren's discussion of the experiences of captives during the Sulu Sultanate (pp. 237–51) is perhaps one of the best known in terms of his incorporation of these statements into the Sulu polity.

representation.³⁶ It is this arrested form at the particular historical conjuncture as represented in *Badjao* that makes this film such a significant work. The realistic attributes of the film with its documentary-like style and an audience unfamiliar with Tausug and Badjao cultural practices ensured that representations of ethnic difference served to reiterate the already-known of the Filipino Muslim world.

The stereotypical representation of the Tausug as the fearless Moro draws on established caricatures from Filipino theatrical conventions such as the *moro-moro* plays. As Tiongson and others have pointed out, these plays reproduced anti-Muslim and authoritarian values in a traditional and conventionalized form. Such values continued to resonate through cinematic representations of the Moro as depicted in such films as *Badjao*. Datu Tahil, the antagonist in the film, conforms to the stereotype of the Moro *datu* as represented in these plays. Describing the physical traits of the *moro-moro* characters, Felicidad Mendoza comments that the sultan's traits display his arrogance, his supercilious and haughty manner; his gestures are brusque, his lines purposely challenging, his delivery strong and despotic.³⁷ In the film, Joseph de Cordova's posture, gestures and behaviour resemble this ideal, intensifying the narrative tension and evoking in the audience a pleasure in the anticipation (and resolution) of conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.

Conforming to the stereotypical characterization of the heroic role, Hassan (and Asid) are cast as brave, sincere and honourable, while Datu Tahil and Jiriki, the antagonists, are portrayed as manipulative, calculating and deceitful. The protagonist and antagonist are metonymic for the two groups, Badjao and Tausug respectively. This representation allows Bala Amai to express her desire for Hassan in terms of her admiration of the qualities she attributes to the Badjao: honesty, generosity and kindness. This interplay between the attributes of a person such as Datu Tahil and those attributed to the group – the proud and fearless Moros – deploys stereotypical portrayals of the ethnic for dramatic effect. Hassan as the heroic figure is the instigator of change. The rightfulness of his challenge to Moro hegemony is grounded in his identity as a Badjao – 'I shall start it. I hope other Badjao will follow' – and as a man, a transcendence of his ethnicity: 'I will dare to love her because I am a man'. To win Bala Amai's hand he must pass several trials, and prove his worth to her Tausug kin. Hassan's bravery is unquestioned: after risking Tausug enmity and his own death for the love of Bala Amai, he endangers his life when he fearlessly dives for pearls, when he returns to Datu Tahil's house after being warned by him that their paths must not cross again, and once more when he renounces his decision to live under the chief's rule. This extraordinary fearlessness works within the representation of the heroic male character. Hassan as a Badjao man is positioned as marginalized in terms of the Tausug polity, yet his challenge to fight for a just cause (i.e., their livelihood), reveals the oppressive conditions and social structures that define Badjao geopolitical relations in the region. It is this recognition, the righteous claim of entitlement to the resources of the sea, which is the initial impetus for political action against autocratic Moro rule.

36 Bhabha, 'Other question', pp. 75–7.

37 Felicidad Mendoza, *The comedia (moro-moro) re-discovered* (Manila: Society of Saint Paul. 1976), pp. 11–12; see also Tiongson, 'Dulaan', p. 69.

One of the more interesting features of the film is how the Tausug political order is represented through the characterization of the antagonists, Datu Tahil and Jiriki. While their rapport – expressed in their avaricious desire for pearls – is established early in the film, their differences are revealed as well. Jiriki is cast as the villain: motivated by greed, treacherous in his dealings with others, aggressive and violent towards Hassan and Asid and ultimately, as in such conventional films, vanquished by the hero. Datu Tahil's characterization is the most complex of all the roles in the film. As ruler of his people, he is both warrior and arbitrator; as Uncle, he is cognizant of Bala Amai's social standing, and his ruling on the grievances raised by the Badjao delegation is just. Yet as the story unfolds, he is revealed to the audience as both instrumental and calculating, epitomizing Machiavellian qualities in his dealings with others. These qualities are accentuated in his business dealings with Ishmael, an Arab merchant, as their negotiations have connotations of intrigue. Their stratagem to obtain pearls (and thus the lore of the sea held by the Badjao) is revealed as duplicitous – a view seconded by Bala Amai, a witness to Datu Tahil's request that Hassan return to the sea to dive for pearls. Silenced by his unwillingness to accede to the chief's request, she intercedes: 'what you did for him was to lead to this end and purpose, my Uncle?' His threats and the subsequent destruction of Hassan's and Bala Amai's seashore house precipitate their rejection of the Tausug way of life. The portrayal of Datu Tahil as the autocratic and immoral ruler, duplicitous and vengeful in his dealings with his subjects, positions him as ruler of a domain in a trajectory of sovereignty that is indubitably linked to nationalism.

'This is a moment . . . /In the ever-changing present/An unchangeable moment/That today joins the past.'

The film creates a multilayering of different time-spaces or chronotopes to inscribe the contours of cultural identities within specific spatial and temporal settings. Hamid Naficy has commented that 'Mikhail Bakhtin proposed the chronotope (literally, "time-space") both as a "unit of analysis" for studying texts in terms of their representation of spatial and temporal configurations and as an "optic" for analyzing the forces in the culture that produce these configurations'.³⁸ Such configurations are also present in films. Indeed, *Badjao* successfully crafts different time-spaces to create and contrast ethnic difference. The foreword invites the audience to adopt an interpretative approach that positions the cinematic spectator as one would anticipate the rendition of a story by a storyteller. The narrative links them to the past through the imaginary space-time of the story-as-told, which through the technology of the film-reel can be endlessly repeated. This linking of story to a past through cinematic technique evokes a sense of repetition of the past as it is already known (conflict through difference) and an awareness of what the future will foretell. The 'cinematic allegorization of history' creates an imaginary space-time-of-the-elsewhere, opening new narrative spaces on identity, difference and nationhood.³⁹

Three spatial-temporal layers exist within the film. The framing of the film as 'story' locates its happenings in the 'timeless-present' that appears to correspond to the era of

38 Hamid Naficy, *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 152.

39 Dissanayake, 'Introduction', p. xxiii.

the sultanates associated with a centralized polity under the rule of a *datu*. The timeless-present is in actuality the recent-past, fixed by fashion. The fashionable Western suits worn by the pearl traders serve multiple purposes, as their costume with the distinctive fez denotes their identity as Arabs and places them in the time of the 'ever-changing present'.⁴⁰ That the pearl merchants are identified as Arab is intriguing as it suggests an affiliation with a more encompassing Islamic world vanquished by the mid-twentieth century – the Ottoman Empire. Placing the Tausug within the *dar-al Islam* (the world of Islam) signifies their alliance and allegiance to the non-Christian world as well as the decline of Islamic geo-political influence (in Europe) and erases the shadow of Cold War politics in the region.⁴¹ The post-war era was a tumultuous period during which ideological conflicts were inscribed onto Asian landscapes, particularly in Indochina, China and Korea. Dissension and conflict also occurred in the Philippines, as peasants and intellectuals sought to overturn inequitable land reform policies by challenging the efficacy of existing political and legal institutions. Decades of insurgency led to the formation and repression of alternative political parties that offered possibilities for societal and political change.⁴² After the Philippines gained independence in 1946, post-war administrators sought to redefine the particularities of the state's internal dissension. In 1954, a Congressional committee was formed to investigate the causes of the 'Moro problem' conceptualized in terms of lagging economic development hindered by tradition. Shaped by modernity's angst as that which was by definition backward and peripheral, the 'Moro problem' was positioned at the interstices of nationhood and history.

The second spatial-temporal layer relates to the 'story' and its association with the traditional or folkloric. Animated through the telling of the cinematic 'story', the Badjao and Tausug are conjured from the mythical 'unchangeable moment' in time, assuming the fantastical qualities attributed to those of legend. Folklore has an established place in mainstream cinema through the adaptation of characters such as Mariang Makiling and Juan Tamad and the incorporation of popular folk themes such as Ibang Adarna. In *Badjao*, the 'story' is located in the non-modern world, a time-space beyond Christian penetration and State rule.⁴³ This recognizable yet temporally distant other-world is

40 In the historical records, writers such as Blumentritt (*Attempt at writing*, p. 139) refer to the headwear worn by Moros as a turban or fez (a brimless, cone-shaped, flat-topped hat made of felt). Colonial studio photographs published by colonial travellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and reproduced in Majul's book (*Muslims in the Philippines*, pp. 216–19) depict important Muslim *datus* in elaborate costumes. Based on the photograph of Sultan Harun ar-Rashid, the fez or *checheya* is more likely to be worn with attire associated with the Ottoman Empire. The fez was also part of the uniform worn by Filipino Muslims who were members of the Philippine constabulary in the early twentieth century.

41 Trade linkages in this region have been dated back to the thirteenth century and trade with China flourished from 1770s through the late 1800s; Kiefer, 'Tausug polity', p. 89; Warren, *Sulu Zone*, pp. 38–66, 104–25.

42 Avellana directed the film *Huk Sa Bagong Pamumuhay* (1953) starring Jose Padilla, Jr., Celia Flor, Tony Santos and Joseph de Cordova. A number of films dealing with the Hukbalahap Rebellion were produced during this period. I have not seen the film, but I would assume that it espoused the benefits/promises of a 'new life' for those peasants who returned to the fold of Philippine society. The Huk movement incorporated peasant resistance concerned with inequitable land ownership and poverty together with political ideas seeking societal restructuring. Benedict Kerkvliet has attributed the decline of the movement in the early 1950s to fatigue after many years of resistance, government promises of tenancy reform and more sustained military operations and attacks against Huk supporters; Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A study of peasant revolt in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), pp. 240–8.

43 Lumbera, *Writing the nation*, pp. 317–18; David, *Fields of vision*, p. 16; Del Mundo, *Native resistance*, pp. 74–85.

evoked through the lack of the modern: the Tausug choice of weapon is the *kris* (a type of dagger) rather than the ubiquitous firearm and their mode of transportation is the traditional sailboat (*vinta*) rather than motorized pumpboat.

Absent from the dialogue is any reference to the centuries of Moro resistance to Spanish and later American colonial and imperial encounters. This places the Tausug and the Badjao in differing positions of ambivalence, situated within – yet not recognizably part of – the making of the modern State. Instead, located in a distant past bound by different customary and religious practices, they are presented as geographically and culturally distinct groups. Religious beliefs and cultural practices that are strategically deployed in the film as a means of signifying ‘ethnic’ differentiation rest on long-held ideas of humanism that were incorporated into higher institutions of learning under Spanish colonialism. The legacy of these ideas can be seen in the film: polytheistic beliefs remain unexplained or mystified, such as the Badjao rite of immersion of the young child. Of all the dramatic moments in the film, it is this rite that provokes curiosity, as can be read not as a rite of passage or the defining moment of the acceptance of the child’s humanity into the group, but as an act of strangeness with connotations of barbarism. Such representations effectively situate the Badjao within the world of nature with connotations of primitivism.

This valorization of Badjao cultural practices draws on ideas of romantic primitivism, personified through the idea of the noble savage that emerged during the Enlightenment. William Adams comments that ‘the noble savage is the embodiment of romantic primitivism associated with a heightened emotional and aesthetic sensibility: an appreciator and lover of that great natural order of which he saw himself as part’.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the idea retained its salience in films such as *Badjao*, as it was used both as an expression of the exotic and as a marker of ‘ethnic’ difference. It is Hassan who epitomizes romantic primitivism, through his gifts of pearls and coral to Bala Amai (which he himself admires for their natural beauty) or in dialogue with Asid on the bountiful riches of the sea. Associating him with the qualities of the noble savage allows his characterization as Badjao to take on other valorized attributes associated with this ideal state, the moral community. As the narrative develops it replicates many of the ideas that Michel de Montaigne and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (in his early writings) propounded about the superiority of primitive societies, uncontaminated by the corrupting influences of the then contemporary world.⁴⁵ In the film, it is the Badjao who live in nature and whose way of life is corrupted by an immoral order. While the film thus valorizes the simplicity of their way of life, it nevertheless affirms their possible encompassment within a compatible but unnamed State. Their departure from their mooring site at the close of the film signifies this possibility. Casting off from the timeless-present, their journey, now imbued with temporality, anticipates their arrival in the present.

The third layer of time-space is the coeval worlds of the Badjao and Tausug: geographically the same but forever divided. The foreword places the two groups in a shared (or the same) geographic world, yet they live in separate social realms divided by custom and religion. While sameness connotes equivalence and equality, the film’s attention

44 William Y. Adams, *The philosophical roots of anthropology* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1998), p. 93.

45 The theme is found in Montaigne’s ‘Essay: Of cannibals’, I.31, pp. 1578–80 (<http://www.best.com/~glad/montaigne>).

to spatiality within the physical landscapes in which they live serves to emphasize the asymmetrical relations between them. Spatiality is also stressed through camera position (high and low), shot/reverse-shot and lighting. Their coeval geographical yet separate social world is accentuated at the commencement of the film. The dramatic opening scene of the Badjao *lepas* (houseboats) arriving at their mooring site is one of the most beautifully choreographed scenes in the film. The sense of fluidity and movement conveyed through the camera scan, the positionality of the camera's shots and the orchestral score intensifies the drama of arrival.

Temporality is underscored by the Badjao headman's announcement that they will stay here 'now'; the 'now' evokes a sense of their non-permanence, their transience. As roamers of the seas, as wanderers through vastness, the Badjao are positioned in an unnamed and unknown seascape as nomads. The imagery of the sea, accentuated through the metaphorical and symbolical language in the film, connotes difference through spatiality: sea is the refuge of the Badjao, and land is the abode of the Tausug. The boundaries of the realms are continuously reiterated in the film. To transverse this spatially dichotomized world is a potentially transgressive act, such as when the delegation of Badjao are shunned and accosted as they pass through the Tausug village. The constant journeying from mooring site to village also conveys the spatial distance between these different worlds and heightens the audience's awareness of cultural difference and danger.

Within this chronotopical configuration of sea and land, three images assume a special significance: the boat (*banca*) that moves between land and sea, the bridge/stairs as a metaphor that surmounts the ethnic chasm, and the seashore as a visual metaphor of liminality, the state of being betwixt sea and land. In Philippine culture, the symbolism of the boat is a pervasive one. Henry Scott observes that *barangay*, the term for political organization, is derived from the Tagalog *balangay* (common to all the major languages in the Philippines, meaning both boat and the smallest politico-social unit).⁴⁶ In the film, the boat connotes the feminine: Bala Amai travels to the Badjao community by boat; the boat is where she gives birth after their house is burnt; and Hassan, accompanied by his wife and their newborn child, returns to the Badjao mooring site by boat.⁴⁷ Bridges and stairs codify the arrival and departure of the actors from specific locales as the bridge is oriented towards the land and the stairs symbolize both the Tausug village, the house of Datu Tahil and the hierarchal ordering of the Tausug (higher) and Badjao (lower) social worlds.

Avellana deploys the imagery of the sea as it breaks and recedes on a sandy beach, as a key motif in the film. The seashore shot is used at the beginning of the film as a backdrop to the foreword. As a recognizable yet unnamed space, it becomes a persuasive image as the narrative unfolds. For Hassan's father, it represents the space of social death,

46 Henry William Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth century Philippine culture and society*, 3rd edn (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997), pp. 4–5.

47 The symbolism associated with the boat in Sama Laut culture is especially meaningful. Sather, *Bajau Laut*, deals with this in some depth. At the beginning of his discussion on house groups he cites the Bajau Laut riddle '*Pasod ka ebétong enggo "nu – luma"*' (Mother into whose womb you are delivered – the house) (p. 134). Traditionally, when the head of the household died, the boat would be dismantled and buried with his body.

like flotsam, 'dead wood left on the seashore'. Cast aside, isolated and rejected, this liminal space between land and sea is the space of solitude and abandonment. For Hassan, the seashore signifies the fecund space of conjugal possibility. It is the place where he builds his home, a symbol of his new life with Bala Amai yet its proximity to the sea is a reminder of his previous life. Their home, neither in the realm of the Tausug village or the Badjao mooring site, accentuates their conjugal bond with the possibility, speculates Hassan, that his children will be the 'bridge of peace'.⁴⁸ It is also a place of violence as the anticipated fight between Jiriki and Hassan occurs on the seashore. When Hassan pushes Jiriki's unconscious body into the sea, the sea assumes an ominous and agentive form. In death, Jiriki's body straddles both land and sea. The seashore is also the site of destruction. The setting alight of Hassan's and Bala Amai's house by the followers of Datu Tahil reminds the audience of an earlier act of violence when Jiriki and his companions torch Hassan's *lepa*. The destruction of their home is one of the film's pivotal scenes as it ruptures the linearity of the narrative, yet its repetition later in the film by means of the jump-cut pushes the narrative towards resolution.

'Is it one race/Or faith/That divides us?'

Identity in the film is constituted as fundamentally relational mediated by negation and opposition. This process of identity construction structures the two plot strands in the film. The conventional heterosexual romance plot probes the possibility of the resolution of ethnic division through the conjugal union, while religious conversion offers the resolution of difference by becoming Muslim. The plot lines are interwoven and animated by Hassan when he embarks on his quest to live as a Tausug in order to marry Bala Amai, the niece of Datu Tahil. As the plot lines become irrevocably intertwined, the audience's interest coalesces on the marital act, and what it precipitates, namely conversion to Islam and acceptance of Tausug rule. The narrative suspense does not arise from his rejection of Badjao religious and cultural beliefs *vis-à-vis* those of the Tausug as his disavowal is perceived as a strategic decision in order to obtain the object of his desire. His conversion to Islam, however, signals not only the possibility of acceptance as an eligible suitor by Bala Amai's kin (placing him in a relation of indebtedness to Datu Tahil), but also the relinquishing of his previous life. Animated by desire, the plot focuses on Hassan's conversion and marriage, his subsequent rejection of Tausug rule and the affirmation of his Badjao identity.

Conversion is an extremely interesting issue as it draws on memories of conflicts expressed through religious and ethnic categorizations, namely 'Christian' and 'Muslim' or 'Moro'. In the history of Christian evangelization in the Philippines, the best-known and most controversial instance of conversion to Christianity was the Sultan of Jolo, Sultan Ali Mudin in the mid-eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The largely Christian Filipino audience would have been sensitive (and perhaps ambivalent) about Hassan's conversion to Islam, as the act implicitly implies an identification with the Moro. For Hassan,

48 The Mat Salleh legend in Sabah draws on similar ideas; Mat Salleh, the son of a Tausug father and a Bajau mother, overcame ethnic difference (Muslim and non-Muslim) to resist European domination.

49 According to the historical records, Sultan Ali Mudin (also known as Sultan Azim ud-Din) was baptized in Paniqui, Luzon, on 28 April 1750 (Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, pp. 259–89). The best-known convert to Islam in the Philippines today is Robin Padilla, an action movie star, who converted during his imprisonment for illegal possession of firearms in the late 1990s.

conversion is a pragmatic act. His decision, based on expediency, effectively denies the religiosity of the act, relegating its significance to that of law rather than belief. This is perhaps the remarkable import of the film in that it reduces conversion solely to ethnic identity transformation. The significance given to conversion in the film also understates Badjao religious practices. Polytheism remains unexplored, its absence read as lack (of religious beliefs), a lack that re-returns to an identification and oneness with the sea.

Hassan's aspiration to become Tausug necessitates not only his conversion to Islam but also the rejection of his previous identity, familial ties and love of the sea. The audience's unease regarding the implications of conversion is intensified when Hassan's relatives express similar concerns. Hassan's father speaks of conversion as an act of separation and of loss: 'once you become a Muslim . . . you will never be able to return . . . when you have married her, she will keep you on land. Away from the sea, for she is of the land'. Hassan's espousal of the Tausug way of life angers and alarms his relatives. While Asid, his close friend, questions the grounds on which Tausug claim their superiority over the Badjao and thus the nature of ethnic difference, Hassan's father prophesies a dire fate for those who embark on such a quest. 'The lessons of life are clearly shown by the tides of the sea. You are like a piece of dead wood that raises with the tide – but once the tide recedes you will be left on the seashore and quite alone'. Despite their misgivings, Hassan pursues his quest to win Bala Amai, a decision that necessitates not only his self-transformation to become a Tausug but recognition by others of the possibility that such a transformation can happen. Datu Tahil alludes to this possibility when he states, 'This man is a Badjao but his valour is that of a Tausug. I cannot help but admire his bravery; he has earned my respect'. This recognition of valour and bravery – behaviour commensurate with being Tausug (but also of being Other) – signifies a possibility of becoming and draws on an understanding of transformation wherein 'some actuality is always prior to any potentiality'.⁵⁰

Identity construction in the film works through the idea of memory, to become the Other is to forfeit one's past or in the words of Hassan's father, to 'forget us'. When Datu Tahil signifies his agreement to Hassan's request to marry Bala Amai, he states: 'You must cease being a pagan. You must forget your past. Forget you are a dirty Badjao'. Yet, the act of forgetting requires the relinquishment of love. The (im)possibility of forgetting is evoked through the lure of the sea, codified as mother-nature and as love-object. If memory is conceptualized as the remembering of and longing for one's previous identity, then memories are endowed with the power to evoke this loss. In *Badjao*, identity is embedded in the contradictory impulse of forgetting, but the memory of one's loss and of what one has forgone in the desire of transcending ethnic difference harbours the possibility of redemption. Hassan's uncertainty over his identity serves as a constant reminder to the audience of the pain and anguish inherent in this process of relinquishment. His feelings of confusion and uncertainty are suggestive of a more complex psychological figure than the formulaic portrayal of the protagonist often encountered in films of this period. As the story develops, we learn that he does follow the Tausug way of life to live upon the land, yet he expresses his ambivalence about his newly acquired identity by his claim that 'I am still a Badjao'.

50 Ronald de Sousa, 'Learning to be natural', in *Being humans: Anthropological universality and particularity in transdisciplinary perspectives*, ed. Neil Roughley (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), p. 291.

The ambiguities inherent in identity transformation are further revealed when Datu Tahil requests that Hassan dive for pearls on his behalf. Hassan's dilemma is one familiar to the audience: loyalty to one's patron as against betrayal of one's principles and one's kin/class affiliations. Hassan stands by his principles – in this instance, his promise to Bala Amai to forsake a life at sea and, implicitly, the protection of Badjao lore. Ethnic difference is accentuated through the behaviour of the protagonist and the antagonist, a difference which is doubly affirmed by Datu Tahil's words: 'My making you a Tausug has not changed your person in any way. As low as the dust I step on. As cheap and dirty as the spittle I throw. I take away everything from you, even your life!' Hassan's refusal to betray his principles effectively undermines his previous acts of religious conversion and identity transformation, thus demonstrating the impossibility of living under a Tausug (Islamic) moral order. This realization leads to the dramatic climax of the film, namely the affirmation of his morality as Man (and implicitly an identification with the Badjao as a moral community).

Interestingly, the film's depiction of desire, self-sacrifice and morality has resonances with melodrama. Historically, melodrama's subject has been women's protest against evil and their demand for justice, a positioning that lends itself to a critique of societal norms. In the film it is the Badjao who are subjugated by a despotic ruler and Hassan who claims social justice. His desire is ennobled through the ideal of self-sacrifice when he states his refusal to marry if such an act, through the payment of bride-price (in pearls), leads to the betrayal of the Badjao lore of the sea. The didactic form of the story reveals Hassan's moral intent by means of an emerging awareness of his own subjectivity as Man with the transitional points of self-consciousness conceptualized through the dialectic. In identifying melodrama, film and literary critics note the 'public recognition of, and spectacular homage to virtue, the fundamental bipolar contrast and clash, the irreducible moral Manichaeism, the emotional excess and situational extremis and the trajectory of peripeteia punctuated with "moments of astonishment" that identify the melodramatic form'.⁵¹ Admittedly, *Badjao* does not conform to many of these central melodramatic strategies. It does, however, evoke a key trope of melodrama, the externalization of emotion through familial conflict, transgressive desire and identity ambivalence. Hassan's feelings do not assume an intensity of emotionalism that exceeds the codes of realism or the limits of the representable. Instead, such emotional expressions are externalized and transferred onto the body of Bala Amai. We read the externalization of his despair and disillusionment through the loss of her beauty ravaged by the pain of familial conflict and violence.⁵²

Hassan's fears and desires draw on recognizable melodramatic elements, namely the affirmation of oneself through identity loss within a familial context. Writing on Lino

51 Wang Yuejin, 'Melodrama as historical understanding: The making and unmaking of Communist history', in Dissanayake ed., *Melodrama and Asian cinema*, p. 76.

52 This process of the recognizable through the presentation of cultural codes in film bears a remarkable similarity to themes raised by Martin Jay in his discussion on the mediation of identity and objectification through the production and reproduction of images. His thoughts on Cindy Sherman's self-portraits are particularly instructive regarding visual codification practices; see Martin Jay, 'Posing autobiography and the subject of photography', in *Autobiography and postmodernism*, ed. Kathleen Ashley (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 195–8, and Cindy Sherman, *Cindy Sherman* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987).

Brocka's use of melodrama, Jonathan Beller refers to the process through which the 'individual' emerges dialectically in the passing of the particular through the universal that raises it to the individual.⁵³ This aspect of melodrama can be applied to the film's characterization of Hassan. His recognition of the (im)possible, the satisfaction of erotic desire through marriage, negates his subjugation to Tausug rule, yet he rises through his identity crises to that of an ethical individual through his redefinition of his previously repressed identity. In this instance, Hassan's transgressive desire assumes melodramatic overtones as it is through the objectification of desire that the intensity of his emotional state is revealed, his anguish and anxieties externalized and his identity affirmed. Erotic desire connotes the idea of the agentive as it propels Hassan to overturn the hierarchical ordering of the social world – i.e., Badjao subjugation to Tausug rule.

Desire, suggests Alexandre Kojève in his exposition of Hegel's writings, accounts for dialectical advancement. Nathan Widder notes that for Kojève, desire exceeds the desire to have the object, as it becomes the desire for desire, that is, the desire to be the desire of another, to be held as an object of value, rather than simply to value an object.⁵⁴ Such a reading positions desire in a complex interplay of the agentive in the 'story' – Hassan's desire for Bala Amai, his self-conscious desire to be recognized by others as a (moral) Man and as belonging to the ethical community of the Badjao. Hassan-as-individual may be understood as both a consequence and an agent of historical change as the (im)possibility of his desire for Bala Amai precipitates the film's climax, the repudiation of Tausug superiority and the search for an alternative social order. Transgressive desire, the ambivalence inherent in religious conversion and the re-affirmation of one's identity through negation and opposition alert the audience to the irreducible division between Badjao and Tausug.

'What can unite us?'

While the theme of conventional heterosexual romance is one of the narrative strands in the film, it is the conjugal union that holds the promise of a more encompassing unification. Although love and desire are used interchangeably in the Philippines, desire towards the Other is often rationalized by the belief in the power of seduction that the other holds or arouses. Such powers can be inherent in the person or procured through amulets and charms or additives (for consumption). When Jiriki informs Datu Tahil of Bala Amai's surreptitious visit to the Badjao mooring site (to warn them of Tausug enmity), he suggests such an act could only be explained on the grounds of enchantment. Datu Tahil's dismissal of this suggestion with the comment that he does not believe in superstition is telling since it signifies his rejection of the possibility of irrational, compulsive desire. Thus, we learn that Bala Amai's regard for the Badjao and thus for Hassan is a consequence of her attraction towards the qualities of the 'ethnic' group as a whole. Hassan's appreciation of her beauty, while logical within the story's plot as the motivation for his desire, is not predicated solely on her receptiveness towards him; as he explains to his father, 'I will dare to love her because I am a man'.

53 Jonathan Beller, 'Orapronobis against Philippine totalitarianism', in Tolentino ed., *Geopolitics of the visible*, pp. 26–7.

54 Alexandre Kojève, *An introduction to the reading of Hegel*, tr. James H. Nichols Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), ch. 1–2; cited by Nathan Widder, *Genealogies of difference* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p 31.

Despite Hassan's affirmation of agency, his father speaks of the incommensurable difference between the two groups. 'You are a Badjao, my son, and Bala Amai is a Tausug. Happiness can never be yours. . . . Though it hurts to admit it, the Tausug feel superior to the Badjao, to them we shall always be slaves . . . they, our masters'. This comment on slavery, while not directly acknowledged by Hassan, is recalled in subsequent scenes to denote Badjao subjugation to Tausug rule.⁵⁵ However, slavery is also used to position women's (natural) subjugation to the patriarchal order. In terms of a realistic depiction of the possibility of marital relations between the niece of a Tausug *datu* and the son of the Badjao headman, the credibility of the plot wavers as it reverses socio-historical relations between these groups: Sama/Badjao women were often forced to live in relations of concubinage with Tausug men. The most likely occurrence in this scenario would have been elopement.

In the film, the love expressed between a Badjao man and a Tausug woman is transgressive as it is erotic desire. Hassan's father, counselling his son on the impossibility of happiness between Tausug and Badjao, refers to the chronotopic figurations of land and sea to signify an aesthetic of social distance through spatiality: 'She will keep you on land, away from the sea. . .'. For both his father and his friend Asid, marriage signifies Hassan's rejection of his ethnic and filial duties and obligations. 'Your way of life will be mocked. Your every secret probed . . . I need you, we need you'. For Hassan, marriage inaugurates a new history, the bridging of the chasm of ethnic difference: 'I will be the first to change their feelings towards us. Someday we'll have children, the Tausugs and the Badjao – they will be the bridge of peace'. Expressing his wish to 'improve one's life', to become Tausug, he requests a keepsake – 'the Badjao fishing spear' (Sama-Bajau: *pogal*), which also serves as a weapon. In an earlier scene, Asid hands the spear to Hassan, cautioning him to 'never go on land without this [weapon]' in recognition of the potential dangers that a Badjao man may encounter when away from the sea. When Hassan announces his wish to become Tausug and asks for the 'symbol of the sea', a 'reminder of my humble beginnings', Asid snatches the spear and breaks it, recalling both his earlier gesture of protection and the rupturing of his friendship, his 'unworth[iness] to carry the symbol of our tribe'. Asid's actions symbolize Hassan's estrangement from the Badjao realm; in the words of his father, 'let us forget each other'.

As the heroine, Bala Amai fulfils the conventions of heterosexual romance expected in films produced during this era. Interestingly, there are no other female characters; instead, the sea is cast as the feminine Other, as haven, as provider (the bountiful riches of her waters) and as fecund womb (pearls taken from the womb of the sea). The competing love object for Hassan's desire is not another woman but the sea, a desire that is externalized through the gaze. In one of the significant scenes early in the film, Hassan stands on the seashore and looks away into the distance. Bala Amai's complaint that 'you look . . . beyond me, you can never forget the sea' evokes the singularity of his love: 'it is only you I love'. The emotional moment is intensified through Avellana's deployment of the jump

55 According to Kiefer ('Tausug polity', p. 71) the Tausug used a number of terms for slave: *banyaga*, *ipun ammas*, *bisaya* (people captured in raids and their offspring) and *kiapangdihilan* (debt slaves). Warren, *Sulu Zone* remains one of the most detailed analyses of slavery within the Sulu Sultanate. The Badjao, while perceived as socially inferior and described historically as occupying a pariah-like status, were not enslaved by the Sultanate.

cut. It is in this seashore scene (Figure 1) that Hassan renounces his love of the sea and affirms his love for Bala Amai. She in turn renounces his past life – ‘you are no longer a homeless Badjao’ – and obtains his acquiescence to live on land. The relinquishment of his life at sea ‘to become one of us’ establishes his new identity through her enunciation of this idea. This state of being is fraught with uncertainty and anxiety, however, as the sea is ever-present and her fear of the sea’s lure is continuously reiterated. This fear of abandonment – ‘I dreamt that you left me for the sea’ – provokes his affirmation (yet again) that he will never forsake her (and her unborn child). His response can be read not only as the expression of his love and his confirmation of their marital bond, but also as a valorization of his yet unstated role as ‘father’.

The expression of heterosexual desire conforms to the filmic codes of the period, such as close body proximity, gifts of affection and the gaze of desire. Their marriage (Figure 2) seals the conjugal bond, with the sexual act evoked through the striking of gongs and the fecundity of their marital union through the familiar agricultural metaphors of impregnation and growth. While the imagery of the feminine in the film is signified through the sea and the interiority of the house, it is the pearl with its connotations of desire/treasure that so obviously reveals the positioning of women. Hassan’s promise to procure pearls as bride-price (‘When I come again, I will bring the treasures of the sea’) and Datu Tahil’s avarice for such an agreement (‘When you return you may take the treasure of my house’) signal the possibility of the (im)possible, the marriage of the niece of a *datu* to a Badjao man. In this exchange between men, pearls/women – the symbolism of love and avarice – accentuate the differences between the values of the Badjao and Tausug. The character development of Bala Amai is restricted to the recognizable female roles of *dalaga* (unmarried woman), *asawa* (spouse), *buntis* (pregnant wife) and *ina* (mother), refiguring onto the female reproductive body a recognizably – and in one scene, suffering – Madonna-like form. Avellana relies on Christian motifs to idealize the conjugal bond through the ‘simplicity’ of marital life and, perhaps unwittingly, ruptures Islamic-gendered spatial conventions. Christian religious symbolism is effectively deployed to convey to the audience an idealized depiction of family life. Through costume, posture and behaviour Bala Amai’s eroticized ‘feminine’ look at the commencement of the film is de-eroticized as she becomes adjunct to Hassan’s role.⁵⁶ As the narrative unfolds, so does the depth of her role characterization, flattening her image to that of the icon.

This representational style is not unusual for films of this period. As Marilou Diaz-Abaya remarks, women in early Philippine film were portrayed as one-dimensional figures, invariably characterized as either the heroine or the anti-heroine. While she identifies Brocka and Bernal as the first Filipino film directors who introduced emotional depth and character complexity to women’s roles, her own films (*Brutal* [1980], *Moral* [1982], *Karnal* [1983]) are well known for exploring the complexity of women’s lives, often through melodramatic forms.⁵⁷ Laura Mulvey’s influential article on spectatorship,

56 The process of the codification of gender stereotypes draws on Martin Jay’s comments in ‘Posing autobiography’, pp. 191–211.

57 Marilou Diaz-Abaya, ‘Images of women in Philippine cinema’, in *Political and social issues in Philippine film; Two perspectives* (Canberra: Australian National University Department of Political and Social Change Working Paper, 1995), pp. 23–6.

in which she theorizes on woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness', is helpful in understanding how the role of the heroine works in certain genres of film. She argues that the audience's identification with the female figure is through the male protagonist's gaze. It is her presence that inspires the protagonist's love or fear, and it his feelings for her that make him act in the way he does. Despite the critiques levelled at Mulvey's work, particularly the passivity she attributes to the heroine's character, Rosal's performance in *Badjao* does conform in many respects to what she identifies as the presence of women as an element of spectacle in narrative film.⁵⁸

The confluence of sexuality and ethnicity in the character of Bala Amai evokes not only the objectification that is inherent in the act of spectatorship, but an awareness of the implications of the male gaze. As a Tausug woman of royal blood, she is positioned in a superior social ranking to Hassan, the son of a Badjao headman. When Hassan after his conversion and marriage reveals his doubts to Bala Amai that he is 'still a Badjao', he expresses the audience's dissonance with such a marital alliance and what it entails, namely both religious conversion and a rupturing of social ranking. Significantly, she does not question this statement of social inferiority; instead, she reaffirms the rightness of their union by referring to the 'naturalness' of male-female relations. By positioning herself as the subjugated other, as wife and as woman, she confirms the domestication of desire within the patriarchal order: 'You are a man, I am a woman. You are my master.' This subordination is repeated in a later scene when, following the destruction of their home (and way of life), she asserts: 'I will follow you wherever you shall go. I forced our way of life on you. That was my mistake. It is my duty as your wife to follow and obey you. To serve and cherish you'. Erotic desire with its connotations of disorder is tamed through dutiful servitude. This denial of women's agency except as an adjunct to the male heroic figure reaffirms the 'rightful' subordination of women within conjugal relations.

'The right to build a future/Free/Together/Whether Muslim, Christian,/Brown or White.'

Badjao is not a historical film in that it does not claim to present an enactment of a specific historical event. Instead the film is positioned within a trope of narrativization: the 'story', which holds specific claims of veracity to a *factio* past, thus creating an expectation of a certain type of knowledge production. The didactic form inherent in the story, a cinematic telling infused with drama and fantasy, shapes the audience's receptiveness towards a particular way of imaging the emergent narrative of the nation. The story's claim to veracity works through the visual aesthetics of naturalized realism that convey through cinematic projection the merging of the real and the fantastic that one encounters in the other-world of legend. Costume, music and lighting are used emotively to create a sense of the past as an arena for heroic action against Tausug oppression. This idealized story of ethnic conflict may appear to have little to do with the real, yet the 'truth' of the past is altered through our perceptions of this past. The reconstruction of the past through story evokes a doubling of the imaginary, the celluloid dreamtime of the cinema and the otherworldly time of 'story', obscuring colonial conflicts and the hidden violence of nationalism. Why is this presentation of the past so appealing and how did these modes of representation inform and shape popular imaginings during the late

58 Laura Mulvey, *Visual and other pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 19.

1950s? What was this past that the film asked the audience to relive through their participation as spectators in the filmic moment? Possibly the appeal of the film lay in the pleasure of reliving the already known within the 'story' as projected. Cook, commenting on the historical film, suggests that the past as known is altered through the retelling. Remembering difference differently, refashioning the historical origins of nationhood through the conventions of the 'ethnic' – perhaps this was the appeal of *Badjao*.⁵⁹

Badjao situates the 'ethnic' (from a space-time-of-elsewhere) within the encompassing narrative of nationhood; as Dissanayake remarks, 'identity and difference is at the heart of nationhood'.⁶⁰ The film's postscript appeal for the right to build a future is the call of nationhood, the rightfulness of the possibility of a future-state-of-existence. This fantastical/mytho-poetic state of freedom-with-togetherness is premised not on Tausug and Badjao unity through the erasure of racial and religious difference, but on a rejection of the latter's subjugation within a Tausug realm. The collapsing of the hierarchal ordering of *datu* rule is enacted through the articulation of a claim of equality, the levelling of difference. This enunciation of sameness is thus a plea for the unity of peoples within the borders of the realm, but what is significant is that this freedom-in-togetherness is symbolically located in the other-world of the non-Muslim. This representational ambivalence of Muslim-Filipinos draws on the recognition of their positionality as Moros in the Philippine past yet denies them the possibility of presence in this promissory future, of freedom-with-togetherness.

In terms of the themes raised in the film, it is that of mastery and enslavement that is the most significant as it is linked to the complex histories of colonialism and nationalism in the Philippines. This period, unstated yet so pervasive, was the time of Spanish colonialism during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries when Christian Filipinos of the Visayas lived in fear of Muslim raiding parties. *Alipin* ('slave') is the term used in the film, but in Tausug one of the terms for 'slave' is *Bisaya*, signifying both a place (the Visayas) and a slave from that place.⁶¹ This 'forgetting' of the subjugation of Christians in the history of Philippine nationhood has been reworked through acts of transference, such as when specific *datu*s, previously demonized, are recast as heroic in their resistance to Spanish incursions or in the *moro-moro* plays that celebrate the triumph of Christianity. While the representation of *datu* autocracy in the film is one of moral degeneration, the depiction of the old Sulu order with its duplicitous leader also allegorises the contemporary political elite of Philippine society. Interestingly, there is no nostalgia for a time of pre-industrial innocence; instead, a time of dissonance is revealed through the film's tension between narrative (decaying social order) and image (spectacular, unchanging, timeless). The simplification of complex practices of enslavement with different subject positions serves to strengthen the incommensurable differences between Tausug and Badjao, positioning the former as masters but also as enslavers. Terms such as *kuta* (fort or fortified structure), with its connotations of conflict, and the dramatic musical score that accompanies the unannounced arrival of the Tausug *vintas* at the Badjao mooring site evoke memories of such histories.

59 Cook, *Fashioning the nation*, p. 26.

60 Dissanayake, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

61 It was a practice to rename individuals captured in raiding parties; such people were apparently named for the place from which they were taken (see Warren, *Sulu Zone*).

What is interesting is that subjugation conceptualized as enslavement can be read allegorically as the enslavement of Christians by Tausug raiders displaced onto the collective identity of the Badjao, hence the possibility that the (Christian) audience could identify with the Badjao's rejection of their own subjection – technically not enslavement but depicted in the film as placing them in the relational position of master-slave with the Tausug. This transference of subject positions is crafted through the deployment of key motifs in the narrative: religious transformation (the immersion rite of the newly born child and the rejection of Islam), marriage (the ideal family) and agriculture (the 'honest' labour of the peasant⁶²). Hassan's figuration of the heroic male expressed through the ideals of valour, self-sacrifice, loyalty and trustworthiness in his encounters with the Tausug (an identification constantly used to signify resistance to colonial and imperialist oppression in Philippine theatre and film) is transferred onto the body of the Badjao. This strategy positions the Badjao not only as Other to the Tausug Muslim, but as Badjao-as-like-Christian through the valorization of dignity, justice and truth. This is clearly revealed in Hassan's rejoinders to Datu Tahil: 'You can take away everything except a man's honour and self-respect . . . I am not afraid of death. To remain alive without truth, that is what I fear the most'.

The interpellative power of this narrative performance directs the audience's identification with the Badjao cause. Hassan's ethical avowal (precipitated by the immorality of the Tausug social order), his refusal to live as 'a slave forever shackled to [Datu Tahil's] greed' and his claim of equality through the concept of sameness are legitimized through his denial of the morality of the Other. 'Our ideals are as lofty as yours . . . and yet we are equals, I could not rise to your heights, you have descended to my depth'. These enunciative acts reveal the constitutive process within which self-consciousness of one's identification emerges through the master/slave dialectic. Hassan epitomizes the new model of the ethical Man, who has the freedom to choose and the right to build a future. This actualization of the recognition of identification mediated through negation is visually created by means of an aesthetic effect of abstraction as the audience observe, through the camera's bird's-eye-view shot, the Badjao exodus to the open sea.

This possibility of emancipation expressed through the visual metaphor of departure from the domain of Datu Tahil is open to other readings. The return of Hassan with his family to the Badjao mooring site, while providing the narrative with closure through the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, also reveals the duplicity of the film's promise of emancipation through the valorization of 'family' values within the social order. When Hassan passes his child from the arms of Bala Amai to those of his father, there is in this act of transference an unstated acknowledgement of the headman's authority. This authority is immediately demonstrated when Hassan's father subjects the child to the rite of immersion. It is Asid, Hassan's former friend, who successfully retrieves the child from the sea, an act that symbolizes their reconciliation. The acceptance of the child as a member of the 'tribe' can be read metonymically as the aggregation of the 'family' into the community. Welcomed by the headman/Hassan's father as 'my children', their acceptance signifies their return to the embrace of the Father and the return to Law.

62 This theme has been explored in a variety of ways within the visual arts in the Philippines, particularly in the paintings of Amorsolo, whose works depict romantic pastoral scenes.

Endings

Badjao – the ‘documentary-like’ film, the not quite ‘true’, where fantasy merges with the real – is one of the multiple ways through which the presentation of the representation of ‘ethnic’ difference can be explored and critiqued. When we look at such films to reveal the ‘cinematic allegorization of history’, we enter into the discourses of history, nationalism and identity formation.⁶³ Local histories do not fit so easily within the history of the nation, and if nationhood is constructed through ideas of sovereignty that in the process of its making foster a collective identity that produces ‘Others’ located within the interstices of its borders, how can alterity be turned onto itself to heal the wounds of its making, the ‘Moro problem’? *Badjao* festers in this wound. Its modes of representations of difference are located within a knowledge-production that inscribes the ethnic at the interstices of history and the pre-modern nation, the geopolitical imaginary of the elsewhere. How do Tausug and Badjao de-privilege these legitimating and unified narratives of nationhood? And do such strategies de-essentialize ethnicity and thus discrimination, or do they foster other claims for essentialism under the rhetoric of autonomy and statehood? What type of nationhood and what memory-work are involved in such an enterprise? And what of the ‘ethnic’ in the contemporary world?

In the popular imaginary of many Christian Filipinos, Islam has come to occupy a particular positioning of incommensurability with specific connotations of violence and political instability. The realm of Datu Tahil, the unruly zone within the nation that is the Sulu Archipelago, has become the sign of political ineffectiveness and instability, the arrested moment of the non-modern. Bhabha would argue for a form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference so as to liberate the signifier (religious difference) from the fixations of degeneration/violence. Yet how does this work within the stereotype of the negative? Perhaps one way of rethinking the presentation of the arrested moment, the non-modern, is to return to Datu Tahil’s rule and the notion of morality. The trajectory of the inevitable progression of the state (implicitly presented in the film as the rejection of the decaying moral order) may not be the way that many Tausug conceptualize the idea of a moral order and indeed the actions of those who live within it. This raises important epistemological questions regarding the conceptualization of the moral act and the moral order of the state.

And what of those Badjao who seek ‘freedom at sea’ and ride the waves of a racialized history to arrive in the modern metropolis of Manila in search of livelihood, only to be told by government officials that as nomadic peoples from pre-history they ‘belong’ back in their place of origin? This spatializing of the origin as existing in pre-history and as a (distant) place to which the Badjao are returned by the State against their will, recognizes difference and affirms the rightfulness of (discriminatory) practices through the erasure of their presence from Manila’s streets. Bhabha argues for the negation of the negative of the stereotype, not through the inversion/subversion of the dialectic, but through a different reading.⁶⁴ Such a way of thinking requires other presentations of cinematic and media representations, although the Filipino media’s tendency to lend itself towards

63 Dissanayake, ‘Introduction’, p. xxiii.

64 Bhabha, ‘Other question’, p. 80.

the exposé style of investigative journalism has its own problematic, as it addresses the evidence of – rather than the underlying forms of – discrimination and inequality. The challenge lies in thinking alternative ways of presenting the representation of difference cinematically; otherwise, through the continuing production, replication and circulation of stereotypes, we will see what we have always known, the recognition and affirmation of (in)difference.