

# Re-animating Philippine Cinema: For Filipinos, By Filipinos

Maria Paulina P FLORENTINO

University of the Philippines Manila

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## *Abstract*

This study explores the Philippine animation industry in terms of its original local content through the eyes of Filipino animators. It is a brief chronicle of Filipino animated films throughout the years, particularly film entries to the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) and Animahenasyon, from 2007 to 2016. These films were proudly made by Filipino animators and captured the essence of being a Filipino. With the talent and creativity of Filipino animators, they are constantly pursued to create content for foreign animation studios. This has led to a boom in animation subcontracting. However, with the flourishing business side of animation comes the breakdown of the local animation industry. With the preference of working as “in-betweeners,” Filipino animators have devoted their talent to assembly line-type of work instead of bringing to life characters that are uniquely their own.

To trace the “re-animation” of the Philippine animation industry, this study draws attention to how Filipino culture is manifested in the animated films included in the study. Along with this, an analysis of MMFF and the Animahenasyon as main platforms for animated films and their roles in the distribution and exhibition of animated films are presented.

The study is able to affirm the presence of original local content in the selected animated films from MMFF and Animahenasyon. Despite the challenges faced by Filipino animators, the original local content of the animation industry is blooming and defying expectations. Filipino animated films are reflective of the aspirations of its people and the nation's socio-political issues, mythology, and folklore. Indeed, Philippine animation can be distinguished as a distinct and continuously developing cultural art form.

**Keywords:** original local content, Filipino animators, festivals, MMFF, Animahenasyon

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Animation is watching inanimate objects come to life with vibrant scenes, imageries, exaggerated voices, and movements. Animation pushes beyond borders, for it portrays many things that live action cannot. Paul Wells (1998), in his book *Understanding Animation*, noted that animation came from the Latin word *animare* which means “to give life to.” People have always been fascinated by moving images, evident as early as the prehistoric times as illustrated by cave paintings from our ancestors. In the 19th century, developments in science led to experiments and discoveries. *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Animation* by Giannalberto Bendazzi (2009) detailed the start of animation with the invention of the toy with moving stills called *Phenakistoscope* (1832). This toy evolved into different apparatuses that smoothened the transitions between frames. The progress in animation was not only centered on the United States; countries in Europe and Asia also began to explore this industry. From then on, studios like Disney were established and significantly contributed to the development of animated films. Lastly, the invention of 3D animation paved the way for the renaissance of animation and still continues to revolutionize the way films are made.

## **History of Animation in the Philippines**

The Philippines updated itself on the trends and developments in the animation industry and was later able to establish its own. In John Lent’s (2004) work on the “sleeper” status of Asian animation, domestic animation

started with cartoonists who converted their comic strips into animated shorts like *Juan Tamad* (1955). Cartoonists eventually ventured into projects initiated by the government. These animated films gave emphasis to culture and folklore but were infused with political messages as well (Lent, 2004). This commenced the development of the Filipino identity of Philippine animation. The first full-length animated film was entitled *Tadhana* (1978) and was created during the Marcos regime.

In the local scene, Filipino animators made efforts to produce their own content through animated series, like *Captain Barbell* (1980) and *Darna* (1986), in an effort to reach a wider audience and to make Filipino animated series a part of the daily viewing experience. However, animators still struggled to produce their original content because of the costly production and the decline in demand for Filipino animated films. According to the documentary *From Lines to Life: An Introduction to Animation* (Tuldok Animation, 2010), the Philippine animation industry shifted its focus from creating original local content to serving subcontracted labor for foreign studios in the 1980s. Filipinos animators were commissioned to produce animated films from and for abroad. This started the journey of Filipino talent to different animations studios abroad and the reduced interest of Filipino animators to produce their own content.

### **Subcontracted Labor and the Establishment of Animation Studios**

The Philippines has long been known as an animation hub for subcontracted labor. Foreign animation studios prefer to work with Filipino animators because of cheap labor, coupled with their facility with the English language, American-oriented culture, and high-level artistic skills (Lent, 2004). Since then, foreign animation studios had animators from the Philippines at the top of their list in producing their content. Filipino animators are working with entertainment giants such as Walt Disney and Japanese anime producers like Toei Animation Co., Ltd. Filipino animators, as skilled laborers and creative artists, have also endeavored to the fields of advertising and game development. They are known for rendering graphics in gaming platforms such as Nintendo, Sega, Game Gear, Game Boy, and Sony PlayStation (Animation Council of the Philippines, 2004). This led to the establishment of an organization that aims to further develop the Philippine animation industry locally and internationally and to organize Filipino animators, the Animation Council of the Philippines, Inc. (ACPI) (Tuldok Animation, 2010).

### **Issues in the Philippine Animation Industry**

Filipinos are known for being world-class when it comes to their talents and skills. Unfortunately, they are left with no choice but to offer their services abroad due to lack of support and funds. In addition, animated projects are seasonal work; therefore, animators are not guaranteed permanent employment or continuous work. In his lecture at the *Animation and I.T. Fair*, Gamboa (2017) stated that apart from the fact that networks are hesitant to finance animated shows and movies, it seems that these are not widely accepted by Filipinos. Gamboa also mentioned that local networks prefer to fund live-action films compared to animated films; however, when local networks do, they claim all the rights, leaving nothing but a meager sum of money and less recognition for the animators behind the films.

In the same lecture, Caliguia (2017) specified that the Philippines does not have its own local animated cartoons and that there are gap years between productions. Compared with its neighboring country Malaysia, which produces its own content, the Philippines is left with “back office” jobs which are not directly related to producing original content. It is essentially what subcontracting is all about—obtaining goods and/or services from a foreign supplier. Caliguia also noted that there is a preference for entertainment that is greatly influenced by the “masa” culture, which usually involves fanaticism for celebrities. He also mentioned that Filipino movies and

television shows follow the same formula for years now and that the entertainment industry of the Philippines is definitely star-oriented.

### **Filipino Animated Films Through Time**

According to the documentary *From Lines to Life* (2013), local content in the Philippine animation industry has been present since the 1970s. Nonoy Marcelo, an animator who was educated in New York, collaborated with Imee Marcos and created the first full-length animated film entitled *Tadhana* (1978). Despite the boom of the Philippines as a hub for subcontracted labor in the 1980s, animators continued to create their own work such as *Nguyamyam* (1989) by Josephine Atienza and Jojo Topacio, *Anino* (1984) by Claire Salaveria, and *Panday* (1986), the first Filipino animated series created by Gerry Garcia (Tuldok Animation, 2010).

The Marcos regime gave rise to a plethora of politically fueled, animated and experimental films such as *The Criminal* (1981) by Nonoy Dadvivas and Fruto Corre, *Hari* (1982) by Alcazaren Brothers, *Huling Trip* (1983) by Alcazaren Brothers, *Eye in the Sky* (1984) by Joey and Roby Agbayani, and *The Great Smoke* (1984) by Monlee and Roxlee.

Animators eventually ventured to commercial advertising because of its steady profit (Tuldok Animation, 2010). Other examples of local animated films included in the documentary *From Lines to Life* are: *Adarna: The Mythical Bird* (1997) by Gerry Garcia, *Noli Me Tangere* (1995) by Gerry Garcia and Manny Aldana, *Mokmok* (1995) by Living Room Productions, *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* (1997) by Ellen Ramos, *Anak Maynila* (1993) by Nonoy Dadvivas, *The Ghostwriter* (1997) by Joey Agbayani, *Vexations* (1996) by Alcazaren Brothers, *Alamat ng Ibong Adarna* (1996) by Animasia Studios, and *Isko: Adventures in Animasia* (1995) by Octoarts Films.

Before Filipino animators were trained as subcontracted laborers for foreign animation studios, local folklore and comic characters were the focal point of Filipino animated films that started to establish Philippine cinema as a cultural and cinematic art form. As years passed, Filipino animators used animation as a vehicle to convey political and social issues. Indeed, Filipino animation is present but has been eclipsed by animation work commissioned by foreign animation studios. With that being said, this study aimed to re-animate the Philippine cinema—to revive the vigor of animators to create original local content.

### **Problem and Objectives**

This study primarily evaluated how the Filipino culture is manifested in animated films, and it aimed to investigate how animators incorporated the sense of being a Filipino in their works and how they were able to weave stories that are reflective of who they are and where they belong to. This paper, which specifically included the films that have received awards in the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) and Animahenasyon, discovered the distinct qualities of Filipino animation in terms of stories. These are the two festivals that so far attempted to show animation films in a broader platform and tapped Filipino animators for their original work. In analyzing the films, as well as how the festivals work, the researcher determined the kinds of local content that Filipinos were able to produce and how these festivals affected the animators. The study of original local content synthesized Philippine animation as a cultural art form.

Aside from the evaluation of films, MMFF and Animahenasyon are given focus as these are vital in re-animating the Philippine cinema; particularly, the study discussed their promotion of original Filipino content and how these festivals impact the local animation industry, covering the period 2007—which witnessed the start of Animahenasyon Film Festival—to 2016. Both festivals provide a venue to showcase the talents and skills of animators, pave the way for them to join other competitions and festivals, and prove that Philippine animation is a

cultural and cinematic art form. While MMFF has a wide reach that makes local animated films more accessible to the Filipino audience, Animahenasyon brings together animated films from different regions.

The MMFF films included in this study are the winners of the festival's New Wave Category: *Kaleh and Mbaki* by Dennis Sebastian (won in 2013); *An Maogmang Lugar* by Mary Ann Espedido (won in 2014); and *Buttons* by Marvel Obemio, Francis Ramirez, and Jared Garcia (won in 2015). In 2016, MMFF's New Wave Category was discontinued and short films were partnered with the full-length films. *Passage of Life*, an animated drama by De La Salle-College of St. Benilde students Renz Vincemark Cruz and Hannah Gayapa, won "Best Work for Children."

The Philippine animation industry first introduced an animated film in the 34<sup>th</sup> MMFF entitled *Dayo: Tungo sa Mundo ng Elementalia* (2008) by Cutting Edge Productions and directed by Luis Suarez. This film is the first all-digital, full-length animated feature film to compete with seven other films in 2008. *Dayo* won four awards—Best Sound, Best Visual Effects, Best Musical Score, and Best Original Theme Song. In 2010, *RPG Metanoia*—a Filipino 3D computer-animated, adventure film produced by Ambient Media, Thaumatrope Animation, and Star Cinema—was the first full-length Philippine animated film presented in 3D to join the 36<sup>th</sup> MMFF. It won the title for 3rd Best Picture, Best Sound Recording, and Best Original Theme Song. During the 2016 MMFF, *Saving Sally*, a Filipino animated-cum-live-action film directed by Avid Liongoren and starred Rhian Ramos and Enzo Marcos, won Children's Choice Award and Best Musical Score.

The Animahenasyon films included in this study are the grand prize winners of the festival. In 2008, *Love and Marriage* by Kenny Lynn Taiayapa won the grand prize; *Mutya (Muse)* by Nelson Caliguia, Jr. won in 2009; *When Alma Died* by Richmond Wesley Ruiz Tan won in 2010; *Sanayan lang ang Pagpatay* by Gil Joseph Sanchez won in 2011; *Marianing* by Niko Salazar won in 2012; *Buhay Kubo* by Ellen Ramos won in 2013; *Lakas ng Lahi* by Arnold Arre won in 2014; *GEO* by John Aurthur Mercader won in 2015; and *Strings* by Rafael Daniel Evangelista won in 2016.

A combination of theories and approaches was used in identifying original local content in Philippine animated films and how the Filipino culture is manifested in these. The analysis was focused on the writing of the animated film in terms of its plot, story, characters, setting, social and/or philosophical significance, and symbolism. The combined approaches that were used in the film analyses further emphasized the nodal issues in the reanimation of Philippine cinema. The first method of analysis is the symptomatic interpretation which "looks at the film as part of the broad context of society, reflecting and illustrating themes prevalent in the culture, in the time and place it was made, and possibly in the creator's personal life experience" (Jacobs, 2014, p.2). This level of interpretation tries to recognize symbolic content and identify characters and situations as metaphors or possibly seeing the entire story as an allegory. The second method is the realist approach which examines how a film represents reality. Filmmakers use techniques that attempt to use cinematic techniques to replicate a certain type of reality the filmmaker wants the audience to experience (Jacobs, 2014). The third method is the contextualist approach, also called a culturalist approach, which considers a film as part of some broader context. This can be the society at large, the culture, or the milieu that created it (Jacobs, 2014).

### **MMFF and Animahenasyon as Festivals that Promote Filipino Content**

The MMFF and Animahenasyon festivals celebrate Filipino animation and were created for the encouragement of Filipino animators and for the awareness of the existence of original local content. The festivals are the main venues for animators to showcase their work, aside from venues like the internet or cable channels. Animahenasyon is the brainchild of the Animation Council of the Philippines Inc. (ACPI). Before, the ACPI was just an association of animation studios focused on subcontracting work abroad. Marasigan, as a part of the ACPI, was able to advocate the importance of creating original content. In 2007, Animahenasyon started; its main purpose is to serve as a venue where artists can showcase their work. It became a staple event that animators look forward

to every year. Animahenasyon has become an institution with hundreds of animators joining every year, with contestants varying from students to teachers and professionals (B. Marasigan, personal communication, March 31, 2017). The MMFF and Animahenasyon are great venues for the new breed of Filipino animators. Animators can gain support for their projects through securing financiers who can kick start their project into something bigger. MMFF and Animahenasyon are testimonies to the talent of the Filipino animators and that the local animation industry is evolving (R. Evangelista, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

### Animahenasyon Film Festival Grand Prize Winners

#### *Doodle of Doom (2007)*

Directed by Nelson Caliguia, *Doodle of Doom* (Figure 1), an animated film which used 2D sketches, portrays the story of a young child watching other Filipino street children play *tumbang preso*. The young boy has a disability and it was through his drawings that he escapes his reality. In his drawings, he is a hero who fights against monsters. While he draws, he builds his imaginary world. It is the fantasy of a child to save a love interest. The child identifies himself with the *kayumanggi* Filipino warrior.



Figure 1. Screen shot of *Doodle of Doom* (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

#### *Love and Marriage (2008)*

Directed by Kenny Tai, *Love and Marriage* (Figure 2) is an animated film, accompanied by the music of Frank Sinatra, about a Filipino-Chinese relationship. The film is a narrative of the story of a couple, from childhood to adulthood. The Chinese girl is against the rule of her parents to end up with a Chinese boy. The film is an accurate depiction of the struggle that a Filipino and Chinese couple undergoes as Chinese families usually want their children to marry a fellow Chinese as well. The film shows classic Filipino elements such as the *kalesa*, *camisa de chino*, *tsinelas*, *pedicab*, *salakot*, and the Binondo church.



Figure 2. Screen shot of *Love and Marriage* (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

### *Mutya (2009)*

Directed by Nelson Caliguia, *Mutya* (Figure 3) is an animated film that was sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Based on the story of Mina Caliguia, *Mutya* has a very native element. It features the transitions that Filipino architecture went through, from the *bahay kubo*, *bahay na bato*, churches, and eventually to buildings. Throughout the film, the attire of the characters is proudly Filipino, especially in the Spanish colonial period which was the peak of the barong and *baro't saya*. It also features fiestas and celebrations such as the Santacruzán. The film also features an instrumental version of Bahay Kubo.



Figure 3. Screen shot of *Mutya* (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

### *When Alma Died (2010)*

Directed by Wesley Tan, *When Alma Died*, an animated film based on a true story, features a man who is sinking into despair in a chaotic room. His computer screen displayed the words “I’ll never forget that night.” Then the flashbacks started with the man amidst chaos in a city in the middle of war. There was a picture of a former Philippine president too. There were fighter jets and bombings, and people were trying to escape. One of them was Alma. Debris fell on her, causing her death in front of the man.

### *Sanayan lang ang Pagpatay (2011)*

Directed by Gil Joseph A. Sanchez, *Sanayan lang ang Pagpatay* (Figure 4) is an animated film about the various ways to kill a *butiki*. The *butiki*, the focal point of the story, was crawling on different areas of the house. Obviously, one of the basic ways to kill a *butiki* is to smack it with flip-flops (*tsinelas*). The story leads to more gruesome ways such as using fireworks. The message is that there are different ways to kill, and it is not any different from the ways that people kill in the Philippines. The ending shows various news articles about massacres and murders. The whole narration is a poem by Fr. Albert E. Alejos, SJ with the same title. Though the killings are rampant, we remain simply observers in the background.



Figure 4. Screenshot of *Sanayan Lang Ang Pagpatay* (Source: [www.deviantart.com](http://www.deviantart.com))

### *Marianing (2012)*

Directed by Nikolo Salazar, *Marianing* (Figure 5) tells the story of a mysterious man named Marianing who avenges the death of his wife killed by *aswangs*. The story drew inspiration from the life of Salazar's grandfather, a supernatural healer and a local legend in a small village in Leyte.



Figure 5. Screenshot of *Marianing* (Source: [www.nikolosalazar.tumblr.com](http://www.nikolosalazar.tumblr.com))

### *Bahay Kubo (2013)*

Directed by Ellen Ramos, *Bahay Kubo* is an animated film about the *bahay kubo* and the statistics related to a Filipino family. Seemingly an infomercial with a cogent narrative, numerous Filipino elements are included in the film, such as the use of *salakot*, the *bahay kubo* and relating it to the population, fertility rate, and other statistics on agriculture. The statistics also include the job aspirations of children. There is only one setting in the story, but it is implied that the family, as well as their concerns, was growing.

The animated film focuses on the life of a simple farmer and how politics exploits the likes of him. The *bahay kubo* stands out as the symbol of the Filipino family; it also symbolizes their dreams. In time, it becomes dilapidated because of wrong governance.

### *Lakas ng Lahi (2014)*

Directed by Arnold Arre, *Laro ng Lahi* (Figure 6) an animated film that deals with oppression and war. It begins during the Spanish colonial period in 1894, where a Filipino witnesses the abuse from a Spaniard. The same Filipino witnesses the horrors brought by the American and the Japanese wars. It fast-forwards to the present, where several people are being tortured by a gang. Over time, their fighting tactics improved, but they are still facing the same problem—same oppression, different abuser. A woman fighter was also highlighted, freeing her from the chains of a traditional Filipina.



Figure 6. Screenshot of *Lakas ng Lahi* (Source: [www.flipgeeks.com](http://www.flipgeeks.com))

*GEO (2015)*

Directed by Arthur Merceder, *GEO* (Figure 7) is a futuristic animated film that revolves around the imagination of a young boy who sees himself as a hero. In his room, he gets to fight robots and has the most advanced fighting gear. It is an elevated form of kids’ playtime. It also shows the relationship of a mother and a son. In his simulated reality, he can fly. It also shows the typical dos and don’ts at home. Whenever he is in his room, he always has to face an antagonist. In the end, the young boy relates to his mom as the real hero.

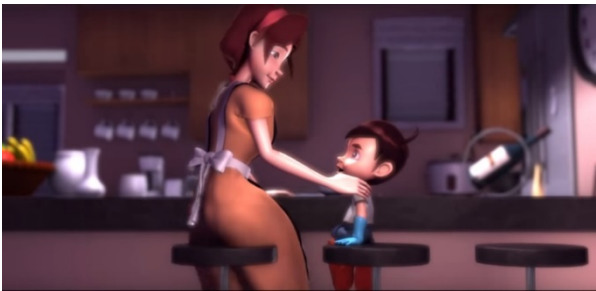


Figure 7. Screenshot of GEO (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

*Strings (2016)*

Directed by Rafael Evangelista, *Strings* (Figure 8) is an animated film about a puppet and his everyday life. Puppets are controlled from the time they wake up to the time they end their day. There are also signs stating “OBEY” everywhere, with everything running according to a schedule. The main puppet then wonders why everything has to be so. He tries to pull away from the strings that control him. Eventually the strings break, and he frees himself. He sees a huge wall and wonders what on the other side of it is. He gets caught and is shot dead. On the other side of the wall are those who disobeyed.

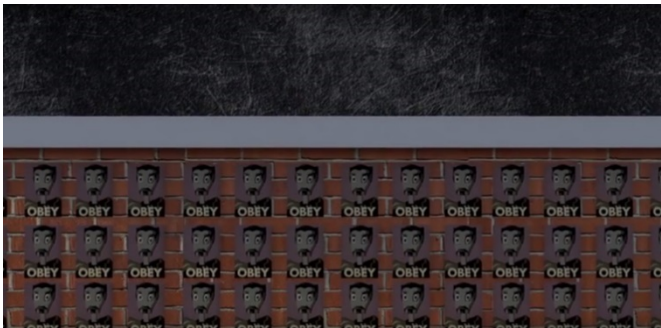


Figure 8. Screenshot of Strings (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

**Analysis of Animahenasyon Films**

The following tables (Tables 1 and 2) present the analysis through combined approaches (contextualist approach, symptomatic interpretation, and realist approach) and the observed manifestation of Philippine culture in Animahenasyon films.

<b>Animahenasyon Film</b>	<b>Contextualist Approach</b>	<b>Symptomatic Interpretation</b>	<b>Realist Approach</b>
<i>Doodle of Doom (2007)</i>	Children with disability coping with isolation through hobbies	Drawings symbolize the strength the disabled child wants to have	People with disabilities can exceed expectations
<i>Love and Marriage (2008)</i>	The struggle of a Filipino-Chinese relationship	Racism, traditions that build a “Great Wall” that divides Filipinos and Chinese	Parents controlling the lives of their children
<i>Mutya (2009)</i>	Preserving heritage and the environment, pre-colonial belief that nature dwells among us	The woman symbolized as a flower as the only hope of the environment	Deforestation and urbanization
<i>When Alma Died (2010)</i>	Consequences of war and violence	All the color washes out from the man’s life due to Alma’s death	Explores the feeling of loss and regret
<i>Sanayan Lang Ang Pagpatay (2011)</i>	Killing is seen as an end-all, be-all solution to wipe away problems	An allegory of having the power to kill someone	Prevalence of killing and violation of human rights
<i>Marianing (2012)</i>	Folklore and beliefs of the provinces, how stories evolve into tales of heroism, courage, and monsters	A tale of a hero and the monster he defeated, it is representative of the struggle of a Filipino to become a hero	Heroes become legends and contribute to the identity of a certain locality.
<i>Bahay Kubo (2013)</i>	The dreams and aspirations of the Filipino family, as well as the factors that tear it down	The <i>bahay kubo</i> represents the ideal of the family. The dreams are represented by the balloons	Filipinos hope for change, but it always comes with a cost
<i>Lakas ng Lahi (2014)</i>	<i>Katipunero</i> warriors brought to the present to fight crime using age-old fighting techniques and weapons	The <i>kampilan</i> symbolizes the leader, Spanish daggers symbolizes forsaking the privileged status, the rope dart symbolizes an immigrant that identifies himself as a Filipino	The Filipino race will never be a subordinate again. They stand proud amidst the challenges
<i>GEO (2015)</i>	Emphasizes the power of imagination of a child	The real hero is his mother who nurtures him and protects him	The film also highlights the loving relationship between a mother and her son
<i>Strings (2016)</i>	A commentary on how society is dictated by its rules and regulations.	We are merely puppets being directed on what to do and what not to do	Even achieving freedom has its costs

Table 1. Combined approaches in analyzing Animahenasyon films to draw out recurring themes in Philippine animation

<b>Animahenayon Films</b>	Socio-political Issues	Values	Mythology	Activity	Architecture	Attire/props
<i>Doodle of Doom</i>	Poverty, Physical Disability	Love, resilience	-	<i>Tumbang preso</i>	Filipino shanty	<i>Bahag</i>
<i>Love and Marriage</i>	Filipino-Chinese relationships	Love	-	-	Binondo church	<i>Camisa de chino, tsinelas</i>
<i>Mutya</i>	Deforestation	Friendship	Forest sprite	Santacruz-an	<i>Bahay kubo, bahay na bato</i>	<i>Barong, baro't saya, terno</i>
<i>When Alma Died</i>	War, violence	Loss and regret	-	-	-	-
<i>Sanayan Lang Ang Pagpatay</i>	War, violence, human rights	Vigilance, sympathy	-	-	-	<i>Tsinelas, lampin, bentelador</i>
<i>Marianing</i>	Identity	Heroism, hope	<i>Engkanto</i>	-	-	-
<i>Bahay Kubo</i>	Land grabbing, abuse of power, poverty	Family, hope	-	-	<i>Bahay kubo</i>	<i>Salakot</i>
<i>Lakas ng Lahi</i>	Oppression	Bravery, camaraderie, patriotism	-	-	-	<i>Kampilan, daggers, darts, Maria Clara, baro't saya</i>
<i>GEO</i>	-	Mother-son relationship	-	-	-	-
<i>Strings</i>	Control of the government and society	Obedience	-	-	-	-

Table 2. Manifestation of Philippine Culture in the Animahenasyon Films

## Metro Manila Film Festivals

### *Kaleh & Mbaki* (2013)

Directed by Dennis E. Sebastian, *Kaleh & Mbaki* (Figure 9) is about a hungry hornbill who tries to ask for food from a shaman. The shaman has striking symbolic tattoos on his body and wears a G-string. He was carving images unto rocks. Beside him, a woven basket with fruits can be seen. The indigenous music that is used contributed to the ambiance of the film. Though it was a rough start for the shaman and the hornbill, they became friends in the end.



Figure 9. Movie poster of *Kaleh & Mbaki* (Source: [www.gumroad.com](http://www.gumroad.com))

### *An Maogmang Lugar* (2014)

Directed by Mary Ann Espedido, *An Maogmang Lugar* (Figure 10) is a love story of a woman and her husband who died in a car crash. The husband is now a roaming ghost trying to make his wife laugh by making funny faces. A rooster of San Pedro is present the entire time, as it regulates the visiting hours of the deceased husband. Filipino elements are shown such as the coconut trees in the surroundings, the capiz windows of the house, the calendar which had pictures of saints, and the *harana*.



Figure 10. Movie poster of *An Maogmang Lugar* (Source: [www.ateneoanimation.com](http://www.ateneoanimation.com))

### *Buttons (2015)*

Directed by Marvel Obemio, Francis Ramirez, and Jared Garcia, *Buttons* (Figure 11) is an animated film about two dolls with buttons for their eyes. The dolls inhabit a small street near the garbage. One day, they see a marble (*holen*) and start to play catch. Then a handsome doll appears and sweeps the girl off her feet. A skateboard starts speeding towards the alley and runs the girl over. This leads her to lose her button eyes. The handsome boy drives the girl away, and only her male best friend stays. The best friend removes the needle from his body and sews one of his button eyes onto the girl's face.



Figure 11. Movie poster of Buttons (Source: [www.cinemabravo.com](http://www.cinemabravo.com))

### *Passage of Life (2016)*

Directed by Renz Vincemark Cruz and Hanna Gayapa, *Passage of Life* (Figure 12) is about the journey of a mother and her daughter through the different stages in the child's life. It shows the struggle of raising a baby and a child in her school-age. It then shifts to the daughter pushing her mother away as she reaches her adolescent years and starts to build her own life. As the daughter grows into adulthood, her mother is still there, but the daughter is taking her mother for granted. Eventually, the daughter realizes her mistakes but was too late as it was time for her mother to go.

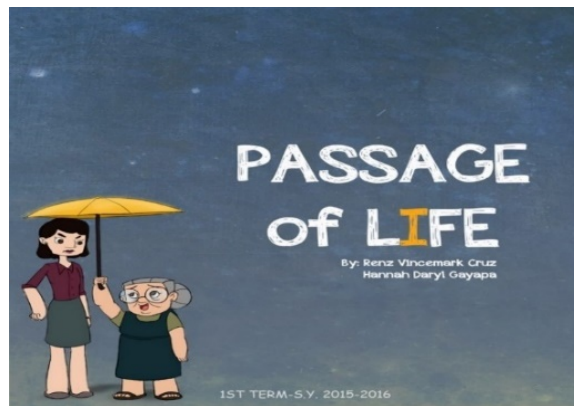


Figure 12. Movie poster of Passage of Life (Source: [www.letterboxd.com](http://www.letterboxd.com))

### *Dayo (2008)*

Directed by Robert Quilao, *Dayo* (Figure 13) is an animated film that dwells on fantasy and Philippine mythology. It is about a boy named Buboy and his adventure in Elementalia to save his grandparents. The film switches between Filipino and English and features iconic Filipino objects like the jeepney, sari-sari store, Philippine money, the Philippine flag, and famous brands. It also shows Filipino customs like *pag-mamamano*, believing in the existence of *nuno sa punso*, *balete* tree and Philippine history jokes.



Figure 13. Screenshot of Dayo (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

The main component of Philippine culture in *Dayo* is the Philippine mythological creatures such as the *manananggal*, *aswang*, *tiyanak*, *kaore*, *tikbalang*, *sirena*, and *nuno sa punso*. Veering away from the horrifying stereotype of mythological creatures, the film portrays the creatures as helpful ones that aid Buboy in Elementalia. Filipino values of friendship and love for family, especially for grandparents, are also portrayed in the film.

The film was also able to portray how a Filipino neighborhood is always on call when someone is distressed; the neighbors in the film always respond and try their best to help. It also emphasizes the power of prayer and how Filipinos turn to their faith whenever they need help, answers, or guidance. The film also emphasizes the importance of family and how we will do everything for them. Throughout the film, Buboy is not only able to confront his fear of these mythological creatures, but he is also able to reassure himself that there is no reason to be afraid of bullies.

### *RPG Metanoia (2010)*

Directed by Luis C. Suarez, *RPG Metanoia* (Figure 14) is about a boy named Nico who is obsessed with playing an MMORPG game called Metanoia. Throughout the film, the game shows its influence on Nico's relationship with his parents, friends, and his weakness when it comes to playing outdoor games. It is a very timely film since Filipino children today can usually be seen huddled inside computer shops and not playing in the streets anymore. Though it centers on a computer game, the film is still able to showcase games that children typically play such as *patintero*, basketball, *holen*, *sipa*, *tayaan*, *tumbang preso*, *agawang base*, and the yo-yo. The film also features tricycles and jeepneys, as well as the sari-sari store as a meeting place for the children.



Figure 14. Screenshot of RPG Metanoia (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

### *Saving Sally (2016)*

Directed by Avid Liongoren, *Saving Sally* (Figure 15) is a live-action and animated film combined. It is about a gadget inventor named Sally and her comic-book-loving best friend Marty. Marty is in love with his best friend Sally and wants to save her from the “monsters” around her.

The film switches between using Filipino and English during conversations. The scenes in *Saving Sally* include the ever-present sari-sari store in every corner of the streets in the Philippines. Bus stops inscribed with politicians’ names and typical modes of Filipino transportation, like the jeepney and the MRT, are also seen in the movie. In the façade of Marty’s house, a *baybayin* inscription is posted. Marty and Sally’s activities also include eating fish balls on a hill and studying in the library with a Sharon Cuneta and Gabby Concepcion book peeking in the background.



Figure 15. Screenshot of *Saving Sally* (Source: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))

### **Analysis of MMFF Animated Films**

The succeeding tables (Tables 3 and 4) present the analysis through combined approaches (contextualist approach, symptomatic interpretation, and realist approach) and the observed manifestation of Philippine culture in MMFF Animated films.

<b>MMFF Films</b>	<b>Contextualist Approach</b>	<b>Symptomatic Interpretation</b>	<b>Realist Approach</b>
<i>Kaleh &amp; Mbaki (2013)</i>	The hornbill represents people who have a motive and will do everything in their power to achieve that. The shaman represents people who choose to focus on their own lives and not meddle with other people.	Unlikely friendships that form in our lives	Kindness and sympathy is essential in living
<i>An Maogmang Lugar (2014)</i>	Husband that was taken away by death will still be the woman's "happy place"	The process of moving on, of learning to find that "happy place" again when all hope is gone	All it takes is one song to bring back a happy memory, or an embrace to fill the void
<i>Buttons (2015)</i>	Trials exist to test not only a person's character, but also to test how strong a person's relationships are with the people around him/her	The skateboard represents the biggest threat to the friendship of the two dolls	Being able to experience such horrible living conditions, they were able to enjoy the simple things in life
<i>Passage of Life (2016)</i>	Children inflict the deepest wounds and at the same time bring out the happiest moments in a mother's life	Mothers are our guiding light as we carry on in the passage of life	A reminder to value our mothers for all the hard work and sacrifices that they have done
<i>Dayo (2008)</i>	Mythology and folklore is deeply embedded in our culture	Confronting the mythological creatures built his strength to face challenges such as the bullies	Family should still be the topmost priority
<i>RPG Metanoia (2010)</i>	The ill effects of computer games, how it destroys friendships and drives us to neglect our relationships with our family	Technology divided the family and the main character's friendships, but was instrumental in their reunion	Bullying, computer game addiction, OFW families
<i>Saving Sally (2016)</i>	Unrequited love, domestic abuse	Marty seeing the people he dislikes as "monsters", Sally inventing gadgets and finding solace in them	Highs and lows of teenage life, breaking free from domestic abuse

Table 3. Combined approaches in analyzing MMFF Films

MMFF Films	Socio-political issues	Values	Mythology	Folklore	Objects
<i>Kaleh &amp; Mbaki</i>	Cultural differences	Friendship, acceptance, kindness, sympathy	-	Shaman	G-string, tattoos, woven basket, indigenous music
<i>An Maomang Lugar</i>	Grief and loss	Love, hope	-	San Pedro, <i>harana</i>	Coconut trees, capiz windows, calendar with saints
<i>Buttons</i>	Discrimination	Friendship, acceptance, resilience, love, simplicity	-	-	<i>Holen</i>
<i>Passage of Life</i>	Taking mothers for granted	Love for mothers	-	-	-
<i>Dayo</i>	Bullying	Friendship, love for family, respect for grandparents, <i>bayanihan</i> , power of prayer	<i>Nuno sa punso, manananggal, aswang, tiyanak, kapre, tikbalang, sirena</i>	<i>Pag-mamano, balete tree</i>	<i>Jeepney</i> , Philippine money, Philippine flag, <i>sari-sari</i> store, Last Supper painting, giant spoon and fork
<i>RPG Metanoia</i>	Ill-effects of computer games, OFW families, bullying	Strong female lead, acceptance, family, friendship	-	<i>Patintero, basketball, holen, sipa, tayaan, tumbang preso, agawan-base</i>	Tricycle, <i>jeepneys</i> , yo-yo, <i>longsilog, daing</i>
<i>Saving Sally</i>	Domestic abuse, suicidal ideation, bullying	Friendship, acceptance, love, family	-	-	<i>Jeepney</i> , MRT, <i>walis</i> , fish ball, baybayin, Sharon Cuneta and Gabbie Concepcion, <i>pedicab</i> , <i>Mamang Sorbetero</i>

Table 4. Manifestation of Philippine Culture in MMFF films based on Recurring Themes

## Summary of Combined Approaches in Analyzing MMFF and Animahenasyon Films

The combined approaches applied in the film analyses were successful in drawing out themes unique to Filipinos that established the manifestations of the Philippine culture in the animated films. The symptomatic interpretation used in interpreting the MMFF and Animahenasyon films focused on how the films were reflective of the society and the themes prevalent in one's culture. The films were clearly representations of society in terms of the issues and beliefs they presented. For the themes, Filipino values were intact throughout the films. On the other hand, using the realist approach, the researcher was able to analyze and compare the elements of the film and how these were able to mirror the ordinary experiences of a Filipino. The films were relatable in a sense that what we see in the film is also a part of our everyday lives. The MMFF and Animahenasyon films were clear manifestations of what it is like to be a Filipino in different periods and situations.

Lastly, the contextualist approach in the MMFF and Animahenasyon films was evident by how the films were able to center the themes on the Philippine setting. The stories were told in a way that the audience was part of the experience and the characters resembled the people in our lives. Most importantly, the films were able to impart that original local content are uniquely our own—these are our stories, our experiences.

### Filipino Culture in Original Animation

Filipino culture is clearly evident in the MMFF and Animahenasyon films. It manifests through the settings, characters, and overall mood of the films. Filipino animated films are usually different from what we usually see in Disney or Pixar films. The MMFF and Animahenasyon films present the country's socio-political issues, values, mythology, and even folklore. Filipino culture manifests through its narration and portrayal of the day-to-day experiences of the Filipino people and objects that we usually see around us. The films also feature different elements of Filipino mythology and folklore. Though some films are not able to overtly show the sense of being a Filipino in their stories, the films were successful in showing Filipino values that we all uphold. The films stress the importance of family, friendship, love, and faith.

For the films in the Animahenasyon film festival, *Doodle of Doom* presents issues that are often overlooked in the Philippines, such as the aspirations of a disabled child. In the eyes of the disabled child in the film, he is a warrior as brave as Lapu-Lapu. Shedding light on relationships, *Love and Marriage* features a Filipino-Chinese relationship that defies the odds. The intermarriage of culture was evident in the film as well. This is another issue that is relatable to many Filipinos and the struggle of the couple resonates with them, given that the Filipino-Chinese community has been around for centuries and has greatly contributed in the development of the country. In a film that incorporates history and the environment, *Mutya* shows the evolution of the country from the Spanish colonial period to the present time. It even delves into the issue of deforestation that comes hand in hand with the development of urban cities. The Filipino pre-colonial belief of the relationship of humans with nature is exquisitely narrated in the film.

Opposite to the light-hearted theme of *Mutya* is *When Alma Died*, which highlights the horrors of war and violence and how it reverberates in a person's life. With the issues of political unrest, civil wars, and violence in the country, the film implores the audience to reflect on what is happening around them. Similar to *When Alma Died* is *Sanayan Lang Ang Pagpatay*. It is another socio-political commentary about the prevailing violence in the Philippines and how we, Filipinos, remain spectators as horrendous acts of violence continue to happen. It is another timely film which acts as a reminder that even human rights violations are predominant in the Philippines, no one bats an eyelash.

A blast from the past, *Marianing* features the time when *aswangs* haunted small towns and *barrios*. It details the adventures of a local hero who avenges the death of his wife. It is based on the story of the director's grandfather who was a supernatural healer and a local legend in Leyte. *Marianing* is reflective of the beliefs in the provinces and how stories of monsters and heroes dominate our folklore. This folklore is deeply embedded in our culture.

*Bahay Kubo* is an infographic animated film that symbolizes and portrays a typical Filipino family. The narrative revolves around the life of a family inside the *bahay kubo* and how external factors, such as politics and economics affect their family. The *bahay kubo* is important because it symbolizes the family as an institution—the family's life revolves around it and it is where their dreams and ideals are formed. The film is another socio-political commentary on how the government is gradually sully the Filipino family.

*Lakas ng Lahi* is a testament to the struggle of the Filipino people to fight against oppression, dating back to the Spanish colonial period up to the present. It is a reminder that Filipinos continue to stand proud amidst the challenges that they face. The story revolves around *Katipunero* warriors, the Hispanic and Chinese influence in the Philippines, and even Philippine weapons.

A light-hearted film that tackles family and child's play, *GEO* is also a futuristic animated film about heroes and high-tech warfare, the product of a boy's imagination. The film emphasizes the character's realization that the true hero is not the one who fights monsters, but the one who gears him up for his daily battles—his mother. The film is a thoughtful representation of our relationship with our mothers and an homage to their efforts and sacrifices.

Featuring a world full of puppets, *Strings* is another socio-political animated film which illustrates the power and control that society has over us. It is a reminder that we are all puppets to more powerful beings who are watching our every move. It repeatedly shows "OBEY," a reminder that not following the rules in our society has a cost. *Strings* encourages Filipinos to be more critical, especially during these times of seeming unrest.

For the MMFF short films, *Kaleh & Mbaki* is about unlikely friendships that we form in our lives. The film also proudly features Filipino elements like the shaman wearing a G-string, the practice of carving images unto rocks, and the artful weaved baskets that are known all over the country. The film also uses indigenous music as its background. It also reflects the Filipino values of being generous and amiable.

A touching story of love that is timeless is *An Maogmang Lugar*, a story that revolves around love, kundiman, and death. A rooster of San Pedro can be seen interfering with the dead husband who visits his wife, singing kundiman songs as a reminder of his love. It is a reflection of how strong love is that it transcends even death. Another film about love is *Buttons*. The film shows how two imperfect people can learn to love perfectly. It is a reminder for us to continue to love amidst the challenges and differences that we encounter. *Buttons* is a testament that people in relationships that undergo trials learn to appreciate each other more and become stronger.

*Passage of Life* is similar to *GEO* as it highlights the value of mothers. It illustrates the challenges of raising a child and how we sometimes forget to be grateful for our mothers. *Passage of Life* is a reminder that we should make each moment count and always show our love and appreciation for our mothers.

For the full-length films in the MMFF, *Dayo* illustrates the day-to-day experiences of a Filipino in relation to his/her surroundings. In this film, the power of faith and reverence to our grandparents is emphasized. *RPG Metanoia*, on the other hand, exemplifies the importance of play in a Filipino child's life and the contemporary life of families with OFW members. It stresses the value of family and friendship. Lastly, *Saving Sally* tackles social

issues that are relatable to Filipinos, such as bullying and domestic abuse. It also emphasizes the importance of developing close relationships with the family and how friendship helps us get through the most difficult times.

Filipino culture is evident in terms of the scope and the text of these animated films. The MMFF and Animahenasyon films captured the essence of being a Filipino. This was done through showing elements that are relatable to us. The films also embody values that are important to us. Moreover, the films are a reflection of our unique culture through mythology and folklore.

## Conclusion

Though, currently, the Philippine animation industry primarily serves as a source of subcontracted labor for foreign companies, the creation of original local content will definitely be the saving grace of the industry. Now that growth in the outsourcing field appears to be stagnating, it is high time that Filipino animators focus on creating their own content in order to re-animate the Philippine cinema. The government should provide more funding to these animators for their projects. The private sector should see the benefit of helping the animation industry and give chance to able and talented Filipino animators in order to fully develop animation as a Philippine cultural and cinematic art form, for these resemble the aspects of our everyday lives and remind us of the values that are important to us as a people.

The quality of local animated content in the Philippines is undoubtedly remarkable. These local animated films with original content represent different areas in the Philippines, as told by different perspectives of the Filipinos. Though diverse, their themes are universal, and we could proudly call these our own. These can be witnessed in the portrayal of Philippine civilizations in *Mutya* and *Lakas ng Lahi*, the extensive Philippine mythology as exemplified in *Dayo*, and *Marianing*, and even the socio-political issues faced by Filipinos as seen in *Sanayan lang ang Pagpatay* and *Strings*. Philippine animation has so much more to offer and it probably will take just one movie to convince the audience that yes, this is Filipino animation and yes, this is our own.

Since the Philippine animation industry already produces work for foreign studios that have worldwide audiences, the quality of current and potential local content is already at par with international standards. Along with the quality are the thousands of stories waiting to be told. Animated films usually feature different styles and stories that are unique to Filipinos. It has successfully incorporated Filipino elements such as attires, customs, art, music, and even values. However, the local animation industry needs support from the audience as well as the local producers. Again, the researcher cannot emphasize enough that original local content cannot prevail if commercial cinema owners and big commercial networks continue to dictate the content of the films.

The MMFF not only showcases the talent of Filipino filmmakers, but it also serves as an avenue for the Filipino audiences to evaluate the quality of our films. Film festivals keep the film industry alive and encourage filmmakers and audiences to develop a taste for quality films. On the other hand, organized by ACPI, Animahenasyon is a festival that hopes to generate original Filipino content. It aims for the Philippines to not only be known as a pool of subcontracted talents for foreign outsourcing. It has been the venue for exceptional talents of professional animators and aspiring animators and enthusiasts. This festival was created to boost original local content to re-animate the animation industry and encourage Filipino animators to create their own work.

The films exhibited in MMFF and Animahenasyon were nothing short of wonderful—they impart a sense of pride in being a Filipino. First, because these films are a strong reminder that Filipino animators have excellent skills, have extraordinary stories to tell, and that it takes a herculean feat to create an animated film, especially while facing problems such as financing and limited audience reach. Second, because these films were able to breathe life

into typical objects that we see every day. These possess elements that only our culture has and most importantly, they reflect values that are very important to us.

MMFF and Animahenasyon are commendable venues for Filipino animated films. Currently, these are the two of the more stable and bigger avenues for Filipino animators to showcase their work. The principles of these festivals are in line with every Filipino animator's dream—to be able to produce original local content that will be appreciated by every Filipino. With the inclusion of the animated shorts in the MMFF and the continuing existence of Animahenasyon, these can further promote Philippine culture through original local content. To re-animate the Philippine cinema, mainstream producers, cinema owners, and distributors must cultivate local talent and realize how viable Philippine animation is as a vehicle for Philippine culture. The Filipino audience must also be educated with the existence of these animated films and take part in the development of animation as a unique way to tell stories and portray values.

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