

# **Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?**

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## **Introduction**

Cinema has always played an essential role in shaping and reflecting a nation's identity, particularly in a country as historically rich and culturally diverse as the Philippines. One of the most significant Filipino films that encapsulate this dynamic is *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (1976), directed by Eddie Romero and starring Christopher de Leon. Set during the late Spanish colonial period and the early years of American rule, the film follows the journey of a naïve young man, Kulas, as he navigates personal and national identity during a time of sociopolitical change.

This reflection explores the film's themes of identity, nationalism, and transformation by analyzing Kulas' journey, the film's portrayal of Philippine society, and its continued relevance in today's world. By doing so, I will not only discuss the film's historical and cultural significance but also reflect on how it challenges and deepens my understanding of Filipino identity.

## **Historical Context and National Identity**

One of the most striking aspects of *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* is its depiction of Philippine society during a critical period of transition. The late 19th century and early 20th century were marked by the weakening of Spanish colonial rule, the rise of the Philippine Revolution, and the eventual shift to American occupation. The film places its protagonist, Kulas, in the middle of these events, presenting an ordinary man's perspective on the struggle for national identity.

Kulas starts as an innocent and simple-minded individual, unaware of the broader sociopolitical forces at play. As he interacts with

different characters—Filipino revolutionaries, Spanish officials, Chinese merchants, and American soldiers—he begins to understand the complexities of Filipino identity. The film effectively raises the question: *What does it mean to be a Filipino?* At the beginning of his journey, Kulas simply believes that to be Filipino is to be born in the Philippines. However, as he experiences betrayal, loss, and transformation, he starts to grasp that being Filipino entails more than just birthright—it is a responsibility and a commitment to one's nation and people.

### **Kulas' Character Development: A Reflection of the Filipino Experience**

Kulas' journey is symbolic of the Filipino nation's own struggles. His initial innocence represents the pre-colonial Philippines—content, self-sufficient, and unaware of foreign influences. As he embarks on his journey, he is exposed to different ideologies and influences, much like how the Philippines was shaped by colonial rule, revolution, and modernization.

One of the most compelling aspects of Kulas' transformation is his gradual disillusionment. He initially believes that simply acquiring wealth and status will elevate him, much like how many Filipinos today equate success with financial stability. However, he soon realizes that societal recognition does not necessarily equate to true fulfillment or national identity. This mirrors the historical experience of Filipinos who, after centuries of colonial rule, struggled to define their identity beyond imposed foreign structures.

The title of the film itself—*Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?*—poses an important question not only about Kulas' personal growth

but also about the progress (or lack thereof) of Filipino society. It challenges the audience to reflect on whether Filipinos today have retained the values and struggles of their ancestors or if they have lost sight of their national identity in the modern era.

### **Colonial Mentality and Filipino Identity**

One of the strongest themes of the film is colonial mentality—the idea that Filipinos have internalized the superiority of foreign cultures over their own. Throughout the movie, Kulas interacts with various individuals who display this mindset. For instance, many of the elite characters prefer to associate with Spanish and American figures rather than embrace their Filipino heritage. Similarly, even Kulas himself, at times, struggles with his own identity, questioning whether success means becoming more like the colonizers.

This issue remains relevant today. The Philippines continues to grapple with post-colonial influences, from language and education to media and politics. Many Filipinos still prefer foreign brands over local products, and Western beauty standards dominate advertisements and social media. The film serves as a reminder that, while colonial rule may have ended, the psychological effects of colonization persist. It urges viewers to critically assess how much of their identity has been shaped by foreign influence and whether they have truly embraced their Filipino heritage.

## **The Role of Women in the Film and Society**

Another significant aspect of the film is its portrayal of women. While the story primarily follows Kulas, his interactions with female characters reveal the limited roles available to women during that time. Diding, for example, represents the traditional expectations placed on women—to be beautiful, obedient, and submissive. Her character mirrors the struggles of Filipinas who, both in the past and present, have had to navigate a patriarchal society that often dictates their roles and opportunities.

While *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* is a period film, the issues it presents regarding gender remain relevant today. Women continue to fight for equal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership. The film subtly challenges viewers to question whether gender roles have significantly changed or if society still limits women's potential in various ways.

## **Relevance to Modern Society**

Although the film is set in the late 19th century, its themes remain strikingly relevant. Today, the Philippines faces new challenges—political corruption, economic struggles, and the continued search for national identity in a globalized world. Many Filipinos, like Kulas, are still in the process of defining what it means to be truly Filipino.

The question posed by the film's title forces modern audiences to reflect: *Have we learned from our past, or are we still repeating the same mistakes?* While progress has undoubtedly been made, issues such as colonial mentality, social inequality, and political instability continue to plague the country. The film encourages viewers to reexamine their role in shaping the nation's future.

## **Personal Reflections and Lessons Learned**

Watching *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* was both an enlightening and emotional experience. It made me realize that the struggles faced by Filipinos in the past are still present today, albeit in different forms. It also deepened my appreciation for history, showing me that understanding our past is crucial in shaping our present and future.

Kulas' journey reminded me that identity is not something that is given—it is something that must be discovered and embraced. Just as he had to go through trials and tribulations to understand his place in the world, so too must Filipinos continue to search for and assert their national identity.

The film also reinforced the importance of critical thinking. Kulas initially accepted things at face value, but as he grew and learned from experience, he developed his own perspective. This is a valuable lesson for Filipinos today, who must be discerning and reflective in the face of misinformation, political manipulation, and cultural influences.

## **Conclusion**

*Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* is more than just a historical drama—it is a thought-provoking reflection on what it means to be Filipino. Through Kulas' journey, the film explores themes of identity, colonial mentality, nationalism, and personal growth. It serves as a reminder that, while the Philippines has undergone significant changes, the search for true Filipino identity remains an ongoing process.

As Filipinos today continue to face new challenges, the film's question remains relevant: *Paano kayo ngayon?* Have we truly

learned from our past, or are we still struggling with the same issues? Ultimately, the film urges us to reflect on our own roles in shaping our identity and our nation's future.