

When asked if she considers her *Lola* a feminist, Tetchie shares, “Wala siyang pinaglalaban (She wasn’t fighting for anything). Feminism was not part of her consciousness, she was just being who she is.”

Part of being who she was, Ateng did not only direct films on the set. She also crocheted bedspreads and garments and did embroidery while thinking about how to approach specific scenes or pondering about the last-minute changes she wants to do on the script. She gave these crocheted works as gifts to her cast and crew as remembrance. She embroidered the clothes of her children and grandchildren and, whenever time permitted, she sewed their clothes for special occasions.

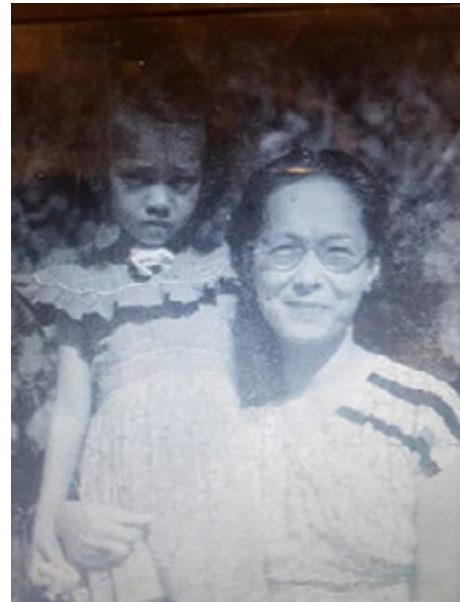
Her multi-tasking of directing, on-the-spot scriptwriting, crocheting, embroidery, and taking care of her children and grandchildren while on production show that Ateng did not compartmentalize her interests or roles and did not put boundaries on what she could and could not do. Filmmaking as an elsewhere for her was a safe space to accomplish and realize her work, her family duties, her interests, and her own creativity within and beyond filmmaking all at the same time.

Ateng was never seen idle. She was always doing something or tinkering with something. Interestingly, Tetchie shares that she does not seem to have a memory of her grandmother eating. “She was so thin and did not gain weight even as she got older. And she hardly slept as her mind was always busy.”

“One thing I fondly remember about Mamang,” Angela says, “is that she never said she was tired or afraid. I even forced her to retire in the late ‘70s because she didn’t want to stop working.” At age 72, Ateng retired from filmmaking. During this time, she was suffering from an eye cataract and could barely see, but unfortunately, she could not get an eye operation because of her low blood pressure. She also eventually lost her hearing. A year or two after her retirement, she had a stroke and was bedridden for a few years. She died at the age of 79 from pernicious anemia in 1986, the year that we now recall as a milestone for women’s leadership.

Ateng’s life and career were intertwined not only in her process but also in how she managed and negotiated the spaces she occupied, allowing for the complete coexistence of creating and living. She orchestrated her actual space to enable an elsewhere without boundaries, undaunted by patriarchal pressures and gender-based constructs. This orchestration gave her the chance to balance compliance and rebellion and the leeway to push boundaries. From wearing pants, bringing her children to work, creating bedspreads while directing or spontaneously revising scripts, and assuring the financial success of her films, it is apparent that Ateng was navigating through the expectations of her work and environment along with her desires and needs as a woman. As these spaces and roles come together in harmony for her practice and life to merge into an elsewhere, we witness an illustration of our own elsewheres.

As is constellated here in this research, my writing and myself in dialogue with readers of this article are constellators traversing elsewheres both in Ateng’s practice as a woman pioneer and my own space as a woman who researches film. Here, we find not only parallel realities but also a familiarity of discourses between the then and the now, blurring differences in time and space. Constellating in this transhistorical conversation, we begin to understand that women’s filmmaking is an elsewhere, much like writing women’s film history is. The progress reached by and for one’s elsewhere is also progress in another time and constellation.



Osorio with Angela.

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- 1 The other two are Rosa Mia and Susana De Guzman.
- 2 Dall’asta, Monica and Gaines, Jane. “Constellations: Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History,” *Doing Women’s Film History*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 See Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999); Datuin, *Home Body Memory: Filipina Visual Artists, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002); and Hernandez, *Homebound: Filipina Visual Artists in Nineteenth Century Philippines* (University of the Philippines Press, 2004).
- 5 Datuin, 16.
- 6 All photos are courtesy of Angela “Peachy” Osorio and Theresa “Tetchie” Moralde.
- 7 The series of conversations included in this article is a fictive transcript of what I imagine as a virtual exchange (probably a form of late night chat via Messenger or a similar app). This strategy takes off from the epistolary technique utilized in feminist historical texts to pose ideas derived from research materials. The technique acknowledges the researcher as an active entity approaching “what was” in the manner of “what is.” These conversations are drawn from my interviews with Angela and Theresa, archival research, Ateng’s films, taking into account my own hopes and daydreams.
- 8 All quotes from Tetchie and Angela Osorio are based on my personal interview, held on May 19, 2019, in their residence in San Juan, Metro Manila.
- 9 Ma. Carmencita A. Momblanco, *Philippine Motion Pictures, 1908–1958: A Checklist of the First Fifty Years*, PhD diss., University of the Philippines, 1979.
- 10 Ramon Jocsan, Ellen Bomasang, and Lena S. Pareja, “Osorio, Consuelo P.” *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art Volume 6: Film* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2018), 505.
- 11 Datuin, 2.

DocWOMENTARY Filmmakers:

The Power and Language
of Women Documentary Filmmakers in the Philippines

Jayneca Reyes



Cha Escala preparing for a shoot.
Photos courtesy of Jayneca Reyes, unless noted.

Women have occupied a marginal position in documentary filmmaking and its history until the advent of the 21st century in the Philippines. In general, there are very few accounts of women's contribution in documentary, and the contributions of pioneering women directors are poorly documented. Accounts of whether certain women produced or directed a documentary film are nearly non-existent. Take the case of Bibsy Carballo, a documentary filmmaker in the 1960s. Carballo's documentary, *Recuerdo of Two Sundays and Two Roads that Lead to the Sea* (1969), had just been recently found in New York. Due to the dismal state of archiving in the Philippines and the gendered character of filmmaking, contributions of women documentary filmmakers have been omitted or lost in time.

However, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw the growth in the number of visible women in documentary film production. Among the critically acclaimed women documentary filmmakers is Ditsi Carolino. Her film *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* (1996) exposed the practice of child labor in the Philippine countryside. Another example is Ramona Diaz's *Spirit Rising* (1996) which showcased women's role in the 1986 People Power Uprising. Other women documentary filmmakers followed such as Sari and Kiri Dalena, Avic Ilagan, Monster Jimenez, Adjani Arumpac, Jewel Maranan, Baby Ruth Villarama, Cha Escala, Wena Sanchez, Mae Caralde, and Carla Pulido Ocampo, to name a few. Recently, more women filmmakers have emerged in documentary such as Hiyas Baldemor Bagabaldo, Grace Simbulan, Alyx Arumpac and Pabelle Manikan.

While the list above is not exhaustive, it illustrates that women have occupied a prominent position in the documentary filmmaking scene in the Philippines, especially at the turn of the 21st century. How did this come about? Based on a brief examination of the literature, there seems to be two main gaps in answering this question: one is an explanatory gap and the other a representational gap. For instance, scholars have attributed the resurgence of documentary filmmaking to globalization, the proliferation of digital filmmaking technologies and various forms of support provided by different agencies and organizations as facilitating factors.¹ However, these factors only contributed to the widening of spaces for women, rather than creating them. Their impact is not only exclusive to women but to filmmakers in general. The literature that documents and examines the local documentary scene is devoid of women's voices or perspectives as both subjects and/or framers of history. In many ways, women's contribution to documentary filmmaking and their accounts of its history continue to be invisible.

This invisibility is a recurring theme, as the experiences of early women documentary filmmakers illustrate how they remained outsiders or how their contributions were ignored or undocumented—rendering their legacies to documentary redacted from history. How do we then account for and explain this remarkable development in the Philippines? Given the lopsided interpretation of history and discourse about women in the field of documentary filmmaking, I draw inspiration from contemporary feminist



Ditsi Carolino during a post-screening discussion of *Bunso* (2004) at Cinema Centenario

Donna Haraway. Haraway suggests that the interpretation of women's experiences in society and history must not be founded on universal and transcendental visions and its contending critique (i.e. masculine-modern visions versus feminist deconstruction). Instead, she called for a feminist epistemology which she labeled “situated knowledges.”²

Situated knowledges are predicated on the argument that feminism must be based on limited and partial knowledges instead of relying on universal or relativistic claims. This version of feminist objectivity relies on a woman's way of seeing based on her own lived experience. For contemporary feminists, this is important as it serves to reclaim their versions of history that have been subjugated. This article thus employs Haraway's concept of situated knowledges to privilege and highlight women documentary filmmakers' practice and voices. By using Haraway's enabling concept, the article aims to highlight women documentary filmmakers' subjectivity and produce a feminist retelling of contemporary documentary filmmaking practice in the Philippines from women's perspectives.

This article aims to make two main contributions. First, it aims to present a survey of the contemporary documentary landscape in the Philippines and describe how women have championed the genre for much of the 21st century. The purpose of this survey is to render women documentary filmmakers more visible. Second, it aims to explain why women are drawn to documentary filmmaking and how have they become prominent figures of the genre. In providing this explanation, the article will rely on the “situated knowledges” of select women documentary filmmakers. It must be noted that while the article privileges the perspective of women, it does not represent a singular stream of experience or subjectivity.

Rather, their experiences are variegated and inherently contingent on their positionality and intersection of identities. Being inspired by Haraway, the aim of the article is not to provide an authoritative account for the reader. The surfacing of women's “situated knowledges” serves to facilitate critical conversations. In other words, it is an attempt to surface

subjugated voices and perspectives which ultimately serve to initiate critical conversations, re-examine documentary filmmaking practice in the Philippines, and open pathways for change.

Data for this article were drawn from semi-structured interviews with 10 women documentary filmmakers conducted in the course of two years between 2017 and 2019.³ These were complemented by an exhaustive review of the catalogues of local film festivals such as Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video, Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival, QCinema International Film Festival, GMA 7's Cine Totoo, and Cinema One Originals. The festivals were chosen based on their relative prominence and accessibility. The article, however, does not cover television documentaries because the stages of its production, source of funding, and creative treatment are constrained by broadcast standards.

Women and the Documentary Filmmaking Space at the Advent of the 21st Century

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a growth in the number of women in documentary film production. This change coincided with the advancements in technology and consequently, the emergence of independent film festivals. The increasing portability, decreasing prices, and technological improvements democratized the art of filmmaking.⁴ Technology made it relatively accessible for aspiring independent filmmakers to produce films. As a result, independent and amateur films proliferated in the early 2000s; some of which garnered international recognition. In many ways, the digital revolution freed filmmaking from the mainstream and paved the way for alternative cinema. Prior to this, the experience of independent cinema in the Philippines was characterized by “denial, suppression, and ignorance.”⁵ Independently produced films, which often include documentaries, were often hidden from the public eye. Documentary, as a distinct film practice, has likewise enjoyed resurgence because of these developments.⁶ This phenomenon, however, is not exclusive to the Philippines but is also observed in other countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, and Britain to name a few.⁷ Distinct to this resurgence is how women occupied the documentary filmmaking space by producing documentaries that tackle complicated topics but are intimate and relatable.

In the Philippines, women have occupied prominent roles in the documentary filmmaking scene in the 1990s. Notable examples include Ditsi Carolino and Ramona Diaz. Carolino's *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* gained international recognition and influenced contemporary documentary filmmaking in the country. Diaz's *Spirit Rising* (1996) won the Ida Lupino Director's Guild of America Award, a Golden

Gate Award from the San Francisco International Film Festival, and a Certificate of Merit from the International Documentary Association.

The momentum of women directing or producing documentary films continued to the 2000s. Carolino released *Riles* (2003) and *Bunso* (2005) together with esteemed colleague and cinematographer, Nana Buxani. *Bunso* was instrumental in the crafting and passage of the Juvenile Justice Bill. Avic Ilagan's *Sowing Seeds* (2002) was featured in the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. Diaz also shocked the world with the release of her controversial documentary *Imelda* (2003), a film about the ostentatious Imelda Marcos, the wife of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Other women documentary filmmakers also came to the spotlight with poetic visual aesthetics—combining elements of experimental with documentary filmmaking in tackling highly provocative themes. Sari Dalena made *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2001) with Filipina-American Camilla Benolirao Griggers. This experimental documentary is a historical narration that made use of archival photos and videos about the Philippine-American war. Dalena's most recent films include *Dabbling Nick* (2015), a documentary-drama featuring the life and work of National Artist Nick Joaquin; *Women of Malolos* (2014), a musical documentary-drama on the struggle of the women in Malolos for the liberation of the country during the Spanish colonial period; *History of the Underground* (2017), a documentary about the Communist Party of the Philippines; and *Guerilla is a Poet* (2013), a documentary she co-directed with her sister, Kiri Dalena, and is based on the life of revolutionary Jose Ma.



Coreen Jimenez, screenwriter Cenon Palomares, Wena Sanchez, Nawruz Paguidopon, Ramona Diaz, Sari Dalena, and Ditsi Carolino at the Masterclass on Documentary Filmmaking organized by Dokyuppees with UP Film Institute, Active Vista, and DAKILA.



Documentary filmmakers Mae Caralde, Pabelle Manikan, Kiri Dalena, Jed Medrano, Jewel Maranan, Anna Isabel Matutina, Mae Calapardo, Baby Ruth Villarama and other participants and organizers of Goethe Documentary Workshop 2012. Courtesy of Goethe Institut Philippines.



Documentary filmmakers Jewel Maranan, Coreen Jimenez, Nawruz Paguidopon, Sheron Dayoc, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. and other participants at the Goethe Documentary Workshop in 2010. Courtesy of Goethe Institut Philippines.

Sison. Among the contemporary documentary filmmakers in the country, Dalena is quite unique in terms of her film language, which is characterized by a fusion of different genres. Dalena came from a family of visual artists which explains her openness to play and experiment with her films.

Meanwhile, many documentary films made by women came out of the revived Goethe Institute workshops in the 2000s. Among these was Jewel Maranan's *Tondo, Beloved* (2011), a slow direct cinema on life in Tondo—a densely populated and poor district in Manila. The film won a Gawad Urian Award in 2012 for Best Documentary. It also earned the Jury Special Mention in the Chopshots Documentary Festival, Southeast Asia. The third and last of her three-part documentary about Tondo is *Sa Palad ng Dantaong Kulang* (2017) which bagged the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2019.

Adjani Arumpac came out strong with her personal documentaries *Walai* (2006), which centered on the stories of Muslim women in Mindanao, and *War is a Tender Thing* (2013), an autobiographical tale of the Mindanao conflict told through the memories of the filmmaker's family. Arumpac also made "Nanay Mameng" (2012), a short documentary about the life of activist and urban poor leader Carmen Duenida produced by Kodao Productions. The film won the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2014.

Other alumnae of the Goethe Institute workshop are Lauren Sevilla Faustino who made *Ang Babae sa Likod ng Mambabatok* (2012), an exploration of the life of a legendary tattoo artist named Whang Od; Mae Urtal Caralde with her *Yanan* (2013), an account of the life of a revolutionary woman who died in an encounter with the military; Baby Ruth Villarama who made *Jazz in Love* (2013), a love story between a young Filipino and an aging German; and Kiri Dalena with her "Tungkong Langit" (2013), an experimental documentary about the path to healing of children whose family was killed in a natural disaster.

The emergence of film festivals in the early 2000s, partly due to growing financial support from international

grant giving bodies, facilitated the production of documentaries in the country. The Cinemania International Film Festival showcased *Kano: An American and his Harem* (2010) by Monster Jimenez. The film is about an American Vietnam war hero charged with 80 counts of rape. It won international awards and the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2011. Malaya Camporedondo's *The Day My Grandmothers Met* (2010) was awarded with the Ishmael Bernal Best Documentary in 2010 in the Cinemania International Film Festival and nominated in the Gawad Urian in 2011.

The Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival established in 2005 also highlights documentaries. Despite its initial struggles, Cinemalaya sustained itself as the nexus for independent films and has gained both international and national attention. It decentralized the monopoly of several studios in terms of film production. Documentary is one of the film genres that Cinemalaya supports but unlike its narrative counterparts, documentaries do not receive any funding from the festival. Nonetheless, the exhibition of documentaries serves as an important venue to showcase the genre.

The most celebrated year for documentaries in Cinemalaya history was in 2013. Films included in its program were Pabelle Manikan's "Bukang Liwayway" (2013), an exploration of a community in El Nido, Palawan, and Rica Arevalo's *The Privileged Migrants* (2013), a film about the exodus of the filmmaker's high school batch mates to different parts of the world to become immigrants or migrant workers. In the same year, Villarama's *Jazz in Love* became the first documentary in its history to open the festival. Villarama continues to break the glass ceiling in both independent film festivals and the mainstream film industry. In 2016, her documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen* became the first and sole documentary entry to the Metro Manila Film Festival in its 42 years. It won the Best Picture award at the MMFF and premiered at the 21st Busan International Film Festival in 2016.

Drawing inspiration from Cinemalaya's success, other film festivals were launched. In 2014, GMA 7

launched Cine Totoo—a film festival dedicated solely to showcasing documentaries. Cine Totoo is the first Philippine International Documentary Film Festival presented by GMA 7. In 2014, the festival announced 11 documentaries as finalists for the festival including entries from two women filmmakers: Ivy Rose Universe Baldoza's *Marciano* (2014), a film about a gay overseas Filipino worker who lived and died in Paris; and Carla Pulido Ocampo's *Walang Rape sa Bontok* (2014), a film about a place where women can live without being sexually violated. In 2016, ABS-CBN soon followed by including documentaries in their Cinema One Originals film festival.

Some local governments like the Quezon City government have also established their own film festivals featuring documentaries. In 2014, Cha Escala and Wena Sanchez's documentary *Nick and Chai* (2014) bagged the Best Picture award in QCinema. The film is about parents who lost their children during Typhoon Haiyan. In 2015, the Quezon City Film Development Council (QCFDC) officially included documentaries as a category in the competition called the DoQC International Documentary Competition. The inaugural film line-up included Baldoza's *Audio Perpetua* (2015), a film which presents a series of audio recordings of an unseen America. Women also took center stage in the documentary section of QCinema in the recent years. In 2018, Sanchez launched her personal documentary *All Grown Up* (2018) following her brother as he starts a new life in college. The film won Best Documentary in the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences Awards (FAMAS) in 2019. Bagabaldo also debuted with *Pag-Ukit sa Paniniwala* (2018) about neocolonial Philippines' interpretation of

saints and gods. Grace Simbulan's *A is for Agustin* featuring a tribesman who loves to sing but never had the opportunity to go to school premiered in QCinema in 2019 and in DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in South Korea.

Currently, women's roles in documentary filmmaking practice have reached a degree of criticality that they have begun to occupy leadership roles and organize initiatives promoting documentaries, and consolidating the documentary filmmaking community in the Philippines. Arumpac, for instance, initiated efforts to promote "under the radar documentaries" in 2018 by providing them with an alternative space for screening and discussion through the group, DoQ. The group emphasizes the importance of post-screening discussions. Similar to Arumpac's initiative, Maranan founded Cinema Is Incomplete earlier, in 2011, to screen independent films in an alternative space. In 2019, Maranan led the organization of the Alternative Cinema Initiatives Conference, which brought together regional filmmakers from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao to discuss the history and current landscape of alternative cinema spaces and distribution networks in the Philippines. Dokyupeeps, a loose network of documentary film practitioners in the Philippines with Carolino as the initial driving force, has organized documentary film workshops. Recently, on the occasion of the Philippine cinema centennial, the network led by Maranan, Monster Jimenez, Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, and Villarama organized DaangDokyu, a film festival that programmed a retrospective of Philippine documentary films from different decades.



Grace Simbulan filming her first full-length documentary *A is for Agustin* (2019) in Zambales.

Women Empowerment through Documentaries

The increasing prominence of women in documentary filmmaking in the Philippines did not happen overnight. The choice to pursue documentary filmmaking was motivated by different factors that include personal histories and connections, exposure to the filmmaking industry, inspiration from predecessors, and opportunities provided by the rise of digital technologies. Despite seemingly different starting points and interests, I have inferred, based on the interviews I have conducted, that their choice to do documentaries was born out of a critical reaction to the masculinist film industry and the entrenched bigotry in the workplace. In a sense, documentary filmmaking provided a safe space where women could pursue and gravitate toward stories that do not necessarily appeal to the capitalistic and masculinist imperatives of the mainstream filmmaking industry but toward subjects that interest them. This is quite evident in the subjects and topics the featured filmmakers pursued. Consciously or unconsciously, the filmmakers pursued subjects related to issues about women, children, or family. This observation, however, is not absolute and does not imply that these subject matters are the exclusive domain of women documentary filmmakers. Rather, it serves to demonstrate the seeming convergence of interests of women in documentary.

The motivation for making documentaries is rarely monetary, as I learned in the interviews. Instead, women are more concerned with issues that they deem important. The motivation to share relevant issues may be associated with their own form of activism. This activism does not necessarily see its liberating potentials in the production of documentaries but in the process by which these documentaries are made. By delving into the lives of people and having their lives intertwined with others, women documentary filmmakers in many ways legitimize the existence of those who have been marginalized and oppressed, just as they were, albeit in different forms.

Nonetheless, Maranan, in our interview, emphasized that being a documentary filmmaker puts a person in a privileged position; the filmmaker can mediate between the subjects she is filming and her audience. Moreover, she insisted that a documentary filmmaker be aware of such power so that she can practice caution when making documentaries. Maranan claimed, “We exercise power toward audiences because we have the screen to show them what we want to show. More than that, we’re exercising power toward the people that we film.”

In our interview, Sari Dalena highlighted how the immersive method requires a high level of commitment and is fraught with dilemmas. The demands of producing a documentary film for Dalena was immense that she even compared it to pregnancy and childbirth. She said, and I quote at length, “Documentary is a good genre for women because we want to tell a story of another person in a very authentic way and in a very respectful way because I think we are very nurturing. We are very respectful of our film, right? We treat them like babies. The same way we carry our child for nine months during pregnancy until childbirth. Documentary in a way demands that kind of commitment.”

The immense challenges embedded in documentary filmmaking as described by Dalena may be seen in the methods by which women filmmakers produce documentaries. Most of the documentary films made by these women took years to complete. For instance, Jimenez finished her film *Kano* in a span of five years; Arumpac’s *Walai* was seven years in the making; and Diaz’s film on Imelda Marcos was produced in two years. While pursuing their stories, women filmmakers also had to navigate personal, social, and political issues. In addition, women were not keen on using methods that were conventional. Instead, they focused on methods that would allow them to be part of an open, creative, and critical process of shaping a story.

As they indicate in the interviews, women documentary filmmakers see the form’s unique and intimate method as a means to become more involved in the process of filmmaking and, in effect, to learn and grow along the way. In this sense, women were both objects and subjects of the documentary filmmaking process. This reflects a mutually constitutive and enriching process for both filmmaker and subject, a process that is arguably absent in extractive and formulaic attempts of producing films.

“We exercise power toward audiences because we have the screen to show them what we want to show. More than that, we’re exercising power toward the people that we film.”

The mutually constitutive and enriching potential of documentary is arguably the reason why women are drawn to it. As Maranan claimed, “I think it’s because documentary as a medium [...] it’s designed not merely to tell or express a story [...]. [Making a] documentary is process heavy and what probably attracts me about it [is that it is] a way of learning about my society, that process of making it [...]. And later on, of releasing it and having conversation[s] with people about this research and [the] discovery that I’ve done and compiled and condensed in the form of a documentary.”

Documentary filmmaking serves not just as a means to deliver an artistic product. It is also a space where women can simultaneously explore their creativity, touch people’s lives, be touched by others, and engage with a wider audience. Documentaries, therefore, are not mere products but tools which can serve as a starting point to create spaces for critical conversations at various levels. This legitimizes the agency of filmmakers as framers of the film and of society. As Jimenez shared, “When you constantly attend film festivals, you will notice how different the motivation of fiction filmmakers

[is] compared to documentary filmmakers. [D]ocumentary filmmakers are concerned with the world [...]. Fiction filmmakers seem like rock stars [...]. There’s a bit of showbiz in that. I like the idea that [documentaries are] a reflection of the times. Your eyes are always open to the next thing that people have to find out more about. The impact is different. It’s like a vegetable for the soul. It’s hard to watch it but it’s good for you.”

And perhaps, this is why women are drawn to making documentaries—it is an expression of empathy given one’s own experience of marginalization.

Women and documentaries: Opportunities and challenges

While documentary filmmaking has provided a space for women to develop and pursue their voice and creativity, structural impediments continue to persist. The interviews revealed some of the existing problems. Access to subjects is constrained simply because the filmmakers are women. Harassment and abuse in commercial filmmaking contexts continue to occur with impunity, prompting women to explore other spaces without, or with lesser, threats from the male-dominated film industry and its established structures. Documentary has provided a relatively safer space for women to make films, but this space is now also being encroached upon or limited by the imperatives of international and local filmmaking institutions which impose formulas or templates for documentaries to be considered good or interesting.

Nonetheless, there seems to be some resistance on the level of the filmmakers as there appears to be a tacit recognition that in the camera lies an inherent power to critically view, expose, and question how society and gender relationships work. While this power has the potential to effect change (as seen in the example of Carolino’s *Bunso*, which contributed to the authoring and passing of a piece

of legislation), it also poses ethical dilemmas about what a documentary filmmaker should do in the face of harsh societal realities.

Women documentary filmmakers occupy a unique position. While they possess immense power through their cameras, the entrenchment of patriarchy in society contributes to their marginalization. Despite this marginalization, their power through filmmaking arguably has the potential to give voice to the voiceless. It is this ability to provide voices to the marginalized despite their own marginalization that makes the woman documentary filmmaker unique. And perhaps, this is why women are drawn to making documentaries—it is an expression of empathy given one’s own experience of marginalization. This empathy seems to be present regardless of the filmmakers’ diverging views on their womanhood or feminism. And it is the mixture of creativity and empathy that arguably makes documentaries made by women filmmakers so compelling. In many ways, the appeal of their films is an appeal to their viewers’ humanity. This is a different exercise of power not based on conflict and contradiction, but one that connects and empowers people.

Currently, there is a strong sense of solidarity among the community of women documentary filmmakers alongside enlightened men to push for the boundaries of documentary filmmaking practice in the country and recognize the contribution of women. However, these efforts are also dependent on funding support from various organizations. The community of documentary filmmakers must establish a network that can sustain initiatives that empower women. Meanwhile, as well, there is also much to be done in order to surface the narratives of women filmmakers who were erased from history and recognize their contributions.

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