

A Newspaper's Account of Cinema in Cebu, 1915-1919

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The emergence of cinema in Cebu could be traced back to the establishment of the first exhibition venues at the start of the 20th century. Yet little is known of these early years of cinema in Cebu due to a lack of available records. Newspapers could have been a great source of information but almost nothing of the few that Cebu had during the time have survived. The earliest and still relatively extant local newspaper available in the archives of the Cebuano Studies Center in the University of San Carlos is the Spanish language *Nueva Fuerza*, which was issued starting May 16, 1915 with a flip-side Cebuano section bannered as *Bag-ong Kusog*.

In response to the need for early film history in Cebu using local sources, this paper covers film-related events recorded in *Nueva Fuerza* during its first five years of publication. The periodical review focuses on anuncios or advertisements, news stories, features, columns, and photos that help show how cinema developed in those years of American occupation. It looks into the increasing influence of Hollywood on the local screen in the wake of World War I and the clamor for independence as the Philippines was about to reach its second decade under American colonial rule.

Cinema during latter half of the 1910s belonged to what Tom Gunning calls the period of the “cinema of narration,” when film had already evolved into a full-fledged narrative medium, albeit remaining silent and largely in black and white.¹ In Cebu, the period saw the dramatic rise in the number of American films although the theaters still advertise them mainly in Spanish-language titles.

The Novelty Years

The earliest indication of film's arrival in Cebu comes from the anuncio in the Manila-based newspaper *El Comercio* in 1897, which declares that a certain Mr. Charochi was going to visit Iloilo and Cebu where he “plans to stay for a few weeks before returning to Manila and present screenings using his cinematograph.”² Although it was likely, given the length of his stay, that he could have screened films in Cebu, no records attest that it actually happened. The turn of the century was a period of unrest and revolution in Cebu, starting with an uprising on April 3, 1898 that led to the liberation of Cebu from Spanish rule on December 29, 1898.³ The short stint of self-rule would be followed by the American occupation of Cebu in 1899 and the outbreak of local resistance. The war made it difficult for cinema to thrive in Cebu as a form of public entertainment.

Still, a few itinerant screenings took place in makeshift venues. Cebuano scholar Resil Mojares dates the first recorded screening of cinema in Cebu in April 1902 when Pedro Alario set up the Cinematografo Electrico-Optico Luminoso Walgrah in a camarín (warehouse) owned by then mayor Don Florentino Rallos. Mojares believes that Alario could have been working for the Englishman known only as Walgrah, who owned Manila's second movie house in 1900, the Cinematografo Walgrah located in Intramuros. “We have no information on what movies were shown at the Rallos warehouse, but these must have been ‘novelty’ films of the camera-trick genre,” Mojares notes. “What is clear is that the cinematografo created quite a stir in the local community.”⁴ Film exhibition then simply consisted of a projector and screen setup in any place large enough to hold an audience. Mojares mentions as examples Cinematografo ni Pastor (1904), Cinematografo Mabini (1904), Cinematografo Walgrah (1906), and Cine Royo (1908). The latter, located in Juan Luna, doubled as a cockpit owned by Cebuano businessman Don Pedro Royo.⁵

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As the cine's popularity grew, playhouses also began screening films. Teatro Junquera, Cebu's first theater established in Colon Street in 1895, later featured films in its presentations. After 1910, it became more of a movie house than a place for stage plays.⁶ It first became home to the American-owned It Cinema in 1909 and Cine Empire in 1911.⁷ Ownership and management of Teatro Junquera was passed from Juakin Junquera and Florentino Rallos to Leopold Falek and Pedro Rivera-Mir and, finally, to the Avila family who later renamed it Cine Oriente.

Mojares writes that Cine Empire was renamed Cine Ideal after it moved to Colon Street in 1911.⁸ *Nueva Fuerza*, however, indicates that up to 1915, Cine Empire continued to advertise screenings under its same name. It was not until the year after, on March 6, that the Greek entrepreneur identified only as Mr. M. D. Mabromatis,⁹ who previously screened films in his Cebu Cabaret, inaugurated his movie house, the Cine Ideal, in Colon Street. In the anuncio for this event, the movie house was said to have screened a nightly program of twelve films from Paris, Milan, Turin, and Chicago through its distributors in Manila, namely: Sirena, Empire, and Cine Ideal, which must be an affiliate or franchise of the movie house.¹⁰ As more theaters were established in Colon, it soon became known as *Calle del Teatro* (street of theaters).



First Cine Oriente ad on *Nueva Fuerza*, Bag-ong Kusog, 5 Feb 1915. Images courtesy of Radel Paredes.



Cine Empire Noli Me Tangere, *Nueva Fuerza*, 17 Oct 1915.

1915: World War I and Worcester

The First World War was raging in Europe as it entered its second year in 1915. And, with the US taking the side of England, France, and the rest of the Allies, the Philippines—being America’s new colony—started military preparations with the prospects of war spreading to the Pacific. *Nueva Fuerza* ran a continuing report on the growing number of casualties from both sides in the battle fronts of Europe. On September 9, along with other news of the war, the paper declared that the death count had reached 21,770,000.¹¹ *Bag-ong Kusog* reported the arrival in Cebu of five American destroyers sent to patrol the sea.¹²

Following American war propaganda, *Nueva Fuerza* helped spread anti-German sentiment among the Cebuano public as its writers caricatured and demonized the Kaiser and the German people in general. As the hate campaign intensified, incidents of discrimination against German nationals in Cebu also increased. Curt Mutschink, identified in a news item as “primer official” of the German boat Wiegand, which was docked at the Fort San Pedro, was fined PHP 500 for allegedly smuggling alcoholic drinks.¹³ But an article in *Bag-ong Kusog* praised the patriotism of Germans living in Spain who tried to sneak through Allied checkpoints by hiding in coffin-like wooden boxes just to be able to return to Germany and join the war.¹⁴

War was in the air and even the anuncios were hawkish. A Botica Cebuana ad ran the headline *declaration de guerra* against its competitors. Amid the anxiety over the war in Europe, cinema provided escapist entertainment. The movie houses also catered to the public’s growing interest in the war, offering revistas or newsreels as well as fiction films about the Great War. In May, for example, Cine Oriente billed *La Guerra de las Guerras* (*War of Wars*)¹⁵ and *Escenas de la Guerra Actual* (*Actual Scenes of the War*).¹⁶

Still, most of the movies advertised were fiction films that did not deal with the war theme. These included serials which were typically “action-oriented, offering thrilling elements like master criminals, lost treasures, exotic locales, and daring rescues.”¹⁷ The first film to be advertised in the maiden issue of *Nueva Fuerza* was *Marlo y Sra* (probably

Marlo y Señora or *Marlo and Wife*, as news items in Cebuano call the film *Ginang Marlo* or *Mrs. Marlo*.), which came out with short news items about the film that was to be screened in Cine Oriente starting in May.¹⁸ Other films that were repeatedly advertised were the Italian film *El Bandido de Port Aven* (*The Bandit of Port Aven*, 1914),¹⁹ *La Casa de Couber Burglary* (*The House of Burghery Couber*),²⁰ *La Daga Japonesa* (*The Japanese Dagger*), *El Cardenal Richelieu* (*The Cardinal Richelieu*), and Francis Ford’s *La Rosa Misteriosa* (*The Mysterious Rose*, 1914). But enjoying the longest run in the anuncios (advertised from November 1915 to the end of January 1916) as well as the most publicized in 1915 was Louis Gasnier’s and Donald MacKenzie’s *Los Peligros de Paulina* (*The Perils of Pauline*, 1914). Produced by the French company Pathe, this serial features the American actress Pearl White.

The “serial queen” type that Pearl White portrays uses “the trope of the imperiled woman” who is able to survive every obstacle through skillfulness and as such “put forward assertive models of femininity.”²¹ Such a character must have shocked or delighted an audience torn between a predominantly Catholic Hispanic conservatism, which assigned subordinate roles to women, and the growing influence of American liberal values reflected in ongoing debates over women’s right to education, suffrage, and even divorce.

Another notable film was *Noli Me Tangere*, advertised by Cine Empire in *Nueva Fuerza* in October 17.²² It appears to be the film adaptation of Jose Rizal’s novel made by Manila-based American filmmakers Edward Meyer Gross and Harry Brown. The film was a big hit in Manila yet no article or news item about it appeared in *Nueva Fuerza*. If it was screened at all, it would be interesting to know how the Cebuano audience reacted to it, especially as it was a film about the Filipino national hero that was made by filmmakers who belonged to the new colonizers.

Meanwhile, the Cebuano sense of patriotism was expressed more boldly in the outrage over the appointment of Dean C. Worcester as head of the Visayas Refining

Company in Mactan. Worcester was an anthropologist who had been the Philippine Secretary of the Interior from 1901 to 1913 during which he made *Native Life in the Philippines*, a documentary which showed the “savagery” of native Filipinos, particularly those in Northern Luzon. Released in 1914, this film was used by Worcester in his lecture tours around the US in an effort to persuade his fellow Americans not to support the granting of independence to the Philippines as the country still needed to be “civilized.”²³

Worcester’s film angered many Filipinos, so when news of his coming to Cebu came, a series of protests led by the local intelligentsia broke out. In July 25, *Nueva Fuerza* reports of a “meeting *de protesta*” that was held in Cine Oriente.²⁴ In his book *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester*, Rodney Sullivan describes the protest, thus: “A large crowd gathered at the Cine Oriente, Cebu’s largest theater, answering a summons from fourteen prominent citizens for a popular protest against Worcester’s arrival. The summons emphasized that the objection was not to the company as such but to the designation of Worcester as manager; among other complaints, it cited the ‘hostile campaigns waged by Worcester against the Filipino people.’”²⁵ Between July and October, the *Nueva Fuerza* ran a continuing coverage of the issue. An article in *Bag-ong Kusog* calls Worcester the “great enemy” and recalls how Worcester used footages of Igorots to portray Filipinos as uncivilized.²⁶ Although Worcester’s film was not released in the Philippines, the protests of Filipinos against it indicate their growing awareness of the power of cinema to distort reality and manipulate public opinion. Against the backdrop of American colonial rule, the protests reflected Filipino desire for self-determination and sense of national identity.



Cine Ideal ad for Graft in *Nueva Fuerza*, 21 September 1916.

Film exhibition business was already becoming lucrative in 1915. Three movie theaters regularly advertised in *Nueva Fuerza*: Cine Royo, Cine Oriente, and Cine Empire. Mabromatis’s Cebu Cabaret also screened “world famous movies” at ticket prices ranging from forty centavos for the *preferencia* or privileged seats to ten centavos for *entrada general* or general admission. But in December, as a Christmas treat for the public, Mabromatis screened movies for free outside his cabaret.²⁷ Cinema Empire, on the other hand, claimed in an anuncio that it was “*El Coliseo mas fresco, comodo y elegante de Cebu*” (The coolest and most elegant Coliseum in Cebu). Moviegoers could also choose to pay ten, twenty-five, or forty centavos for a ticket. On October 21, 1915, *Bag-ong Kusog* reported that the theater was closed temporarily because a new projector was being installed that would result into much clearer movies.²⁸

An anuncio for a concert in Cine Oriente mentions entrance fees at ten, fifty, and eighty centavos. The luxurious theater was decorated with paintings by Raymundo Francia, who advertised himself in the newspaper as “*pintor y decorador del Cine-Oriente*.”²⁹ Ten centavos was the lowest one could pay for a ticket to the theater. And for that price in the following year, one could buy a *vaso grande* (big glass) of *cerveza* or beer in a hotel bar.³⁰ The monthly pay of the ordinary Filipino worker in 1916 was only about PHP 20 while the American worker in the Philippines was paid PHP 300 to PHP 400.³¹ Capitalizing on the popularity of the movies, the government required PHP 100 annual tax for theaters.³²

As cinema increasingly became a favorite pastime, some people started to be wary about its negative effects. *Nueva Fuerza* cites findings of a court in Osaka which linked watching movies with juvenile delinquency.³³ An article in *Bag-ong Kusog* reports observations of an eye doctor in the US that watching movies could harm the eyes.³⁴ Watching films was also linked to superstitious beliefs. A news item tells the story of a woman in Manila who gave birth to a baby with only one arm and one leg and whose face closely resembled Bumuy, described as a comic character similar to Max Linder, which she watched in a film the night before.

The year 1915 saw the prevalence of European films although those from America had started to dominate the local screen. Among the films screened that year were war newsreels, which catered to the hunger for the latest information about the war. The movie house also became not just a venue for collective entertainment but for expression of public grievance, as in the case of how Cebuanos trooped to Cine Oriente to protest against Worcester. With the controversy over Worcester’s racist film and the rise of war newsreels and movies, Cebuano spectators were being introduced to the power of cinema as tool for propaganda.

Gran Espectaculo, *Bag-ong Kusog*, 13 Jan 1916.Cine Ideal ad for *Guerra*. 4 May 1916.

Opposite page:
The Man Inside in *Bag-ong Kusog*, 25 Oct 1917.

1916: Cebu's War of Cinemas

Cebu in 1916 saw increasing public anxiety as the US entry in the war in Europe became more and more imminent. As American warships patrolling the Pacific arrived in Cebu, the crackdown on German expatriates in the city intensified, leading to arrests and seizure of property.³⁵ Meanwhile, local theaters were engaged in their own marketing war. In March 6, Mabromatis finally inaugurated his own movie house, the Cine Ideal, located in Colon. The inaugural ad states Cine Ideal's affiliation with another theater of the same name in Manila, along with Sirena and Empire. The mention of Cebu Ideal being connected to Empire in Manila is confusing as another Cine Empire also existed in Cebu. Perhaps, affiliation here only means relationship between theaters in terms of film distribution and exchange and not as local franchise. Cine Ideal also claims that all its films come from Paris, Milan, Turin, and Chicago. Prices of tickets were at ten and twenty centavos.³⁶

Echoing wartime chest beating, Mabromatis declared war on his competitors in May, reducing ticket prices to as low as five centavos and offered to show twenty films every night, which he claimed was something never done by any other theater in the country.³⁷ This was announced in an ad that flashed the headline “*Guerra*.” Being the manager of an ice plant, the Greek entrepreneur could also afford to drop the price of ice cream sold in his theater to as low as five centavos. Stiff competition had driven theater owners and managers to be creative in marketing. Seat arrangement in cinemas retained class segregation of old playhouses, with privileged palcos near the stage, a butaca or balcony, and the *entrada general*, which had the lowest price. People from all walks of life gathered to watch a movie in the same theater albeit in seats demarcated according to class.

Starting January 30, articles and advertisements announced the screenings in Cine Royo of the “*serie gigante*” (gigantic series) called *Las Hazanas de Elena* (*The Exploits of Elaine*), the 1914 film directed by Louis J. Gasnier and Leopold Wharton, which also starred Pearl White. Cine Royo ran it from February 2 to July 2. Produced by Pathe, both *Los Peligros* and *Las Hazanas* exemplify the new thriller genre which features an adventurous heroine who always tend to outsmart her male antagonists. Such a character reflected the liberated “new woman” that in Cebu would be associated to the controversial “yaya” dress (a loose dress that revealed the shoulders) and the equally risqué tango dance.³⁸

Aside from the two Pathe films, fewer titles were featured in the anuncios that year. They were *La Mano Aferradora* (*The Gripping Hand*), Francis Ford's *La Moneda Roda* (*The Broken Coin*, 1915), Otis Turner's *La Caja Negra* (*The Black Box*, 1915), Howell Hansel's *El Misterio del Million* (*The Million Dollar Mystery*, 1914), and Sherwood Mac Donald's *El Circulo Rojo* (*The Red Circle*, 1915). All these films were produced in the US, mostly from the previous year. Even *Las Hazanas* was a collaboration between a branch in the US of the French company Pathe and the American-owned Wharton Studio with American cast and crew. This suggests the gradual takeover of the global film business by US companies, as the war-stricken French and other European film companies withdrew or closed down. The lack of films, particularly those coming from Europe, was evident in Cebu this year.

Still, demand for movies continued to grow not only in Cebu City but also in the neighboring towns. An anuncio in *Nueva Fuerza* called for investors for a movie house to be built in the town of Carcar, promising sure and fast return for a small capital. It also offered catalogs of equipment and a list of European and American films. But nothing in *Nueva Fuerza* in the next three years would show that this planned movie house in Carcar was actually built.

1917: Cinema in the Time of War and Cholera

Triggered by the sinking of American merchant ships torpedoed by German U-boats in the Atlantic Ocean, the United States finally joined the war in Europe in 1917. In its April 8 issue, *Nueva Fuerza* bannered the headline “*Declaracion de Guerra.*”³⁹ The US entry in the war was much anticipated by the Cebuanos. Propaganda films screened in the local theaters helped ensure local support for the American war effort. News of the fighting filled the pages of *Nueva Fuerza*, which also dealt with the question of whether German submarines would reach the Philippines.⁴⁰ As government feared the spread of war in the Pacific, it began training selected students in the University of the Philippines in the operation of a submarine. A news item reports of plans to manufacture submarines in the Philippines.⁴¹ Defenses around Manila were beefed up, particularly in the island of Corregidor where heavy artillery and fortifications were installed. Mines were laid in the sea surrounding Manila to thwart entry of German warships and submarines.⁴² President Manuel Quezon pledged to send 20,000 Filipino soldiers to Europe⁴³ and ordered the creation of *Militia Nacional* or reserve force. Newspapers also echoed government’s call for wartime austerity.⁴⁴

Reports of Cebuanos killed in the war in Europe helped intensify anti-German sentiment that would later be aimed at the German civilians living in Cebu.⁴⁵ The authorities began a crackdown on German nationals in Manila, raiding their homes and confiscating their belongings. In Cebu, the German Vice-Consul M. C. Andre, who also headed the Behn, Meyer & Co., was arrested while he was sleeping in his house in Mabolo. The American torpedo ship “Bainbridge” guarded German boats docked at the pier in Cebu. The local constabulary also helped watch over these enemy boats.⁴⁶

Besides stories of World War I, *Nueva Fuerza* also reported the outbreak of the Communist Revolution in Russia. On the same day it bannered the American declaration of war, it also ran the news story “*La Revolucion en Rusia.*”⁴⁷ More and more articles on this event would appear suggesting local interest in the ideology behind the revolution, which was referred to as “*collectivismo*” or “*Bolhevismo.*”

Amid all the somber news, the public found refuge in the movie house, which offered escapist entertainment and, in the case of propaganda war movies, a reflection of their militaristic and patriotic zeal. War newsreels continued to be popular. Cine Ideal screened newsreels of recent fighting, particularly at the Somme.⁴⁸ Other films about the war featured in the anuncios were Edward Jose’s *La Perla del Ejercito* (*Pearl of the Army*, 1916), William Bertram’s *Nell el Marino* (*Neal of the Navy*, 1915), and T. Hayes’ and Hunter Hayes’ *El Misterio del Submarino* (*The Secret of the Submarine*, 1915).⁴⁹

This year saw the rare use of publicity photographs as illustrations for the anuncios. This includes the advertisement

for Cine Ideal’s screening of Stewart Paton’s *20,000 Legwas* (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1916), an adaptation of Jules Verne’s novel of the same title.⁵⁰ Another ad illustrated with not just one but six photos is one that featured the screening in Cine Ideal of George Lessey’s and Richard Stanton’s 1915 film *Graft*. Interestingly, the anuncio does not carry the title of this movie but only implies it in the copy using the Cebuano translation of graft as “soborno.”⁵¹ Still another ad illustrated with photograph is one featuring the 1916 American film *The Man Inside*. This ad is entirely written in English and strangely does not mention the theater sponsor and instead banners the name of the actor, Edwin Evans, in hand-executed lettering that is as big as the title.⁵² An article in *Nueva Fuerza* also describes the French silent film actor Max Linder as “*el popular comico en las cintas cinematograficas, el eterno humorist*” (*the popular comic of cinema, the eternal humorist*). These instances suggest the growing fascination among Cebuanos for actors as celebrities or stars. The increasing emphasis on the names of the actors in the anuncios and newspaper publicity coincided with the rise of the Hollywood star system, leading the way for the emergence in the Philippines of the culture of the *artista*.

Other movies advertised this year were Jacques Jaccard’s *Brillante Celestial* (*The Diamond from the Sky*, 1915); *La Hija del Circo* (*Circus Girl’s Romance*, 1915); T. Hayes’s *El Secreto de la Mancha Roja* (*The Crimson Stain*, 1916); W. A. S Douglas’s and Harry Harvey’s *La Garra del Diablo* (*The Grip of Evil*, 1916); Louis Feuillade’s *Vampiros* (*The Vampires* or *Les Vampires*, 1915); James W. Horne’s 1916 serial drama *Stingaree*; Jacques Jaccard’s and MacRae’s *Libertad* (*Liberty, A Daughter of the USA*, 1916); George B. Seitz’s *La Garra del Hierro* (*The Iron’s Claw*, 1916); T. Hayes’s and Hunter Hayes’s *El Secreto de la Mancha Roja* (*The Crimson Stain*, 1916); *Ha Caída la Humanidad en el Abismo del Mal* (*Humanity has Fallen in the Abyss of Evil*); and Thomas Ince’s pacifist film *Civilizacion* (*Civilization*, 1916). As in 1915, a total of seventeen film titles were featured in the anuncios in 1917. Most of these films come from American film companies like Universal, Wharton Studio, and Metro and about half of the listed films were produced the year before. This shows that importation of films was starting to stabilize as local distributors now relied more on US-based film exchange companies for their supplies.

As more people trooped to the theaters in a time when epidemics like cholera and leprosy were terrifying the public, concerns for hygiene, etiquette, and moral decadence among spectators were raised. A common target of complaints was the women’s practice of chewing betel nut and spitting indiscriminately.⁵³ One writer noted that this has left red stains on the walls and floors of the theaters. He tried to debunk claims that this native practice could clean and strengthen teeth.⁵⁴ The same writer also exposed voyeurism among some men in the *entrada general*, whose heads were trained not on the screen but on the women upstairs hoping

to see “body parts that should not be seen.”⁵⁵ The dark halls of the cinema also induced criminal activities such as when a writer was attacked while he was watching *La Garra del Hierro*. Incidents like this added to the impression that the movie house is not a safe place. Meanwhile, local moralists succeeded in closing down the Cebu Cabaret, formerly owned by M. D. Mabromatis and now identified with Carl Peterson.⁵⁶

Ownership of theaters was also commonly passed on, as owners often resort to buying out the competition. On April 22, for example, *Bag-ong Kusog* announced that the “popular” businessman Don Pedro Royo, who owned Cine Royo, was now the new owner of Cine Oriente. From then on, ads of the same movies would name the two theaters as sponsors, indicating that the same program was being screened in both theaters.

Unlike in the previous year, there had been almost no report in the *Nueva Fuerza* about M. D. Mabromatis, except for one article that tackled complaints against the services of the ice plant that he used to manage. The writer of the article noted that since Mabromatis left the company, service became elitist as it refused to sell ice to the poor who desperately needed it for medicinal purposes.⁵⁷ This contrasted with Mabromatis’s style of enticing lower class customers by offering discounts, treats, and even free outdoor screenings on special occasions.

1918: War Ends

Germany signed an armistice with the allies in November 11, 1918, marking the end of the war. One year of US participation in the war had turned the tide against the Germans. The Philippines supported the US by sending troops to fight in Europe. The country’s military also prepared in case the war spread to the Pacific. As part of this preparation, the government ordered all German nationals in the country to be rounded up and sent to the US as prisoners of war. It was estimated that there were about 200 Germans living in the Philippines.⁵⁸ Money confiscated from them amounted to PHP 3,000,000 and this would be used to help fund the US war efforts.⁵⁹ In Cebu, the year began with dramatic increase in news of anti-German activities and reports of Cebuanos killed while fighting in Europe.⁶⁰ Local authorities continued their crackdown on German nationals. As rumors of the presence of German spies were reported,⁶¹ the constabulary conducted raids, arrests, and seizure of German businesses in the city.⁶²

Cebu’s theaters continued to screen war films, such as Rupert Julian’s *El Kaiser*, *La Bestia del Berlin* (*The Kaiser or The Beast of Berlin*, 1918), Joseph Golden’s *Los Lobos de Kutura* (*The Wolves of Kultur*, 1918), Jacques Jaccard’s 1917 film *Patria*, and *Heroe del Marne* (*Hero of Marne*). In the latter, the appearance of President Woodrow Wilson allegedly drew applause from the audience.⁶³ This reception of the image of the American president suggests that Cebuanos had already embraced US colonial rule. It demonstrates once again the power of cinema as an ideological apparatus. Other newsreels featured in the ads include *Visita de S. M. el Rey Jorge a su Gran Flota* (*Visit of King George to his Great Fleet*), *La Captura de Mesinas y La Batalla de Arras* (*The Capture of Messinas and the Battle of Aras*), and *Los Peligros del Servicio Secreto* (*The Dangers of the Secret Service*).



Cine Royo y Oriente ad for *El Secreto del Submarino*, *Ali Sing o El Peligro Amarillo*, *La Garra del Diablo o El Abismo del Mal*, and *La Perla del Ejercito*, *Bag-ong Kusog*, 13 Sept 1917.

Film exhibition business remained lucrative in 1918 and theaters lured audiences with more variety in programming. Cine Royo reverted to the old practice of staging vaudevilles and acrobatics alongside screenings.⁶⁴ Its sister theater Cine Oriente also staged performances of magic and hypnotism.⁶⁵ For this brief period, screen and stage were once again reunited. Moviegoers also became more and more demanding. A newspaper writer complained about shouting, loud laughter, and cursing in the *entrada general* and compared this behavior of Cebuanos with moviegoers in Manila who, he said, were generally quieter and would only laugh at scenes that were funny. He asked why theater owners in Cebu would not go around the audience to monitor such misbehavior as they did in Manila. He felt embarrassed that this behavior might give the Americans in the audience wrong impressions of Filipinos.⁶⁶ Another writer in *Nueva Fuerza* criticized some women in the audience who would lie down to sleep on their seats to the dismay of those sitting beside them. These comments aimed at people in the *entrada general* suggest class contempt but also racial insecurity prevalent among the more privileged.

Film titles continued to be advertised in Spanish although most already came from the US. Among them were Julian Rupert’s *Cinderella de Kentucky* (*A Kentucky Cinderella*, 1917), *La Casa de Muñecas* (*A Doll’s House*, 1917), Allan Duran’s *El Honor de Una Mujer* (*A Woman’s Honor*, 1917), and Thomas Dixon’s *La Caída de Una Nacion* (*The Fall of the Nation*, 1916), a rejoinder to D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of the Nation* (1912), which is based on Dixon’s novel. The screening of this racist film came at a time when articles in *Bag-ong Kusog* calls African-Americans residing in Cebu as “agta,” which in Cebuano refers to a mythical dark skinned and kinky-haired giant that dwells in large trees.



Cine Ideal ad for Graft.

The anuncios also featured religious films such as *La Pasion y Muerte de Jesus* (*The Passion and Death of Christ*) and *El Novena Dia* (*The Novena Day*). The popularity of religious movies during this time is not surprising given that the Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country. According to film historian Charles Musser, the passion play was one of the three distinct genres of early cinema, next to travel and boxing films.⁶⁷ “Religious subjects in general were an important genre for the early film industry,” he said.⁶⁸

More than 80 titles were featured in the anuncios this year, which was a dramatic increase compared to previous years. They include Jacques Jaccard’s *Alas Rojo* (*The Red Ace*, 1917), *Amor Volcanico* (*Volcanic Love*), *La Mano de Beatriz* (*Beatrix Fairfax*, 1916), *La Flor de Tempestad*, *Los Amores de Ambrosio* (*The Loves of Ambrosio*), *Conflictos Matrimoniales* (*Marital Conflicts*), Jo De Grasse’s *El Auto Escarlata* (*The Scarlet Car*, 1917), George Seitz’s *El Anillo Fatal* (*The Fatal Ring*, 1917), William Steiner’s *El Peligro Amarillo* (*The Yellow Menace*, 1916), *La Dulce Alicia* (*Alice in Wonderland*), Colin Campbell’s *Gloria* (*Gloria’s Romance*, 1916), and Charlie Chaplin’s *El Hombre Trampa* (*The Tramp*, 1915).

A historic event this year was the screening in Cine Ideal of a newsreel about the funeral the first wife of Sergio Osmeña Sr.⁶⁹ This was the first documentary shot by Jose Nepomuceno, according to Joe Quirino in his biography about this Filipino filmmaker who also shot the country’s first feature film, *Dalagang Bukid* in 1919.⁷⁰ The screening of Nepomuceno’s film was the first ever documented screening of a film by a Filipino filmmaker in Cebu. As it was a film about an event close to Cebu and one that featured a lot of prominent Cebuanos attending the funeral, Nepomuceno’s newsreel thus had an intimate reception.

1919: The Rise of Hollywood

Enjoying peacetime boom, theater owners in Cebu continued to upgrade their equipment and facilities. On January 17, Cine Ideal acquired its own generator in order to address the problem of power interruption during screenings.⁷¹ Then in October, it announced that it now had 12 *ventiladors* or electric fans and an orchestra.⁷² Stores outside theaters offered refreshments. Across Cine Royo in Calle Juan Luna, a *salon de refrescos* (refreshment parlor) named Five in Four served ice cream, sodas, *zarzaparilla* (root beer), lemonades, candies, as well as tobaccos and cigarettes.⁷³ A *sorbitihan* (ice cream parlor) called Ang Bitoon, located across Cine Oriente, offered local flavors including fresh coconuts and mango.⁷⁴

As more and more people patronized the newly improved cinemas, controlling the crowd became a problem. An item in *Bag-ong Kusog* tells about a scuffle between moviegoers in Cine Ideal.⁷⁵ Earlier in March, Cine Oriente’s manager Sr. Eduardo Lopez clashed with the local police after two of its members tried to force their way into the theater without paying.⁷⁶ Cine Royo offered free screenings on Victory Day (whatever it celebrated on August 4, it did not indicate).⁷⁷ In an advertisement for the screening of a film starring Eddie Polo (the film could be *Bull’s Eye* starring Polo and released in 1918; again, the name of the actor is

highlighted but the title of the film is not mentioned.), Cine Ideal announced that children were now required to pay full price.⁷⁸

Close to 40 new titles were featured in the anuncios or mentioned in the articles in *Nueva Fuerza* this year. Among them were *El Blanco Tragico* (*The White Tragedy*), *El Amor y Oro* (*Love and Gold*), *Los Bandidos del Ferrocarril* (*The Railroad Bandit*, 1916), J. P. Mac Gowan’s *The Red Glove* (1919), Chester and Sidney Franklin’s *Al Dino y la Lampara Maravillosa* (*Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*), Ben Wilson’s *La Bala de Bronce* (*The Brass Bullet*, 1918), Theo Frenkel’s *Los Dos Rivaless* (*The Two Rivals*, 1912), Harry Harvey and Jacques Jaccard’s *Las Garras del Leon* (*The Lion’s Claws*, 1918), and *Theda Bara in Carmen* (*Carmen*, 1915). The latter, interestingly, was advertised with the name of the artist attached to the title, suggesting the importance of the celebrity as lure for the audience.

One of the biggest news that year was the coming of the Hollywood actress Marie Walcamp, who came to the Philippines to shoot a film entitled *Los Petales de Lao Tze* (*The Petals of Lao Tze*, retitled *The Dragon’s Net* and released in 1920). Like Pearl White, Walcamp was a serial queen who starred in films screened previously in Cebu like *La Hija del Circo*, *Libertad*, *Los Bandidos del Ferrocarril*, *Patria*, *Alas Rojo*,

and *Las Garras*. In its January 31 issue, *Bag-ong Kusog* reports the arrival of Walcamp and her crew in Cebu. Yet news of her coming in 1919 raised suspicions that, as in Worcester’s film, Walcamp’s movie might yet again put the Philippines in a bad light. But when Walcamp arrived at the pier in Cebu, she immediately impressed her fans by doing a publicity stunt of climbing the wall of Fort San Pedro. She then paid a visit to the Governor of Cebu to ask permission to shoot in the province. The Governor agreed on condition that the crew would not film people who were naked so as not to portray Cebuanos as savages. The public was also urged to help watch over the crew during filming.⁷⁹

Although war was over, films about it continued to be screened in the local theaters. These include *Los Lobos de Kultura* (*The Wolves of Culture*), George Lessey’s and Playter Wellington’s *El Ojo del Aguilar* (*The Eagle’s Eye*, 1918), and *La Marina de Guerra de los E.U. No.3* (*The United States Navy, No. 3*). A news item in *Nueva Fuerza* also announced the screening of a film featuring Theodore Roosevelt, indicating continued interest among Cebuanos in the lives of American presidents.⁸⁰

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- Resil Mojares, “The Cine Comes to Cebu.” *Weekend Magazine*, August 11, 1991, 27.
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- Resil Mojares, *Casa Gorordo in Cebu: Urban Residence in a Philippine Province 1860-1920*, new ed. (Cebu City: Ramon Abotiz Foundation, Inc., 2017). In his citation notes, Mojares identifies Mabromatis as the manager of the Cebu Ice and Cold Storage when it was owned by Don Mariano Veloso who bought it from the original American owners.
- Nueva Fuerza* (hereon referred to as *NF*), March 5, 1916, 2.
- “Datos Macabros de la Gran Tragedia,” *NF*, September 9, 1915, 1.
- Bag-ong Kusog* (hereon referred to as *BK*), September 30, 1915, 5.
- “Aleman nga Gimultahan,” *BK*, May 20, 1915, 3.
- “Gugma sa Yutang Natawhan,” *BK*, May 6, 1915, 4.
- Cine Oriente ad. *BK*, May 27, 1915, 4.
- Cine Oriente ad. *NF*, May 30, 1915, 2.
- Kristine Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2003), 61.
- Cine Oriente ad. *BK*, May 16, 1915, 3.
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- Cine Empire ad. *NF*, October 17, 1915, 2.
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- “Meeting de Protesta Contra Worcester,” *NF*, July 25, 1915, 2.
- Rodney J. Sullivan, *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992), 195.
- “Worcester,” *BK*, August 8, 1915, 3.
- “Sine sa Cabaret Walay Bayad,” *BK*, December 5, 1915, 3.
- BK*, October 21, 1915, 3.
- Raymundo Francia ad. *BK*, August 1, 1915, 3.
- Cervesa Oriental ad. *NF*, March 9, 1916, 1.
- BK*, January 23, 1916, 3.
- “Hinungdanon Kaayo,” *BK*, November 4, 1915, 1.
- “Los Peligros del Cinematografo,” *NF*, August 22, 1915, 1.
- BK*, September 5, 1915, 3.
- BK*, September 30, 1916, 5.
- Cine Ideal ad. *NF*, March 5, 1916, 2.
- “Mabromatis Declara la Guerra,” *NF*, May 11, 1916. An article entitled “Gubat sa mga Sine?” also appeared also appeared in *BK*, May 11, 1916, 3.

Conclusion

The Filipino love for Hollywood movies could be traced to the latter half of the 1910s, which saw the rise of the narrative film and American star system. The anxieties during the First World War only reinforced dependency of Filipinos on Americans whose military might had provided them with a sense of security against perceived common enemy. Employed by the Americans as ideological apparatus, cinema facilitated the pacification and subjection of the colonized native who looked to this technological wonder as symbol of sophistication and modernity. In this era of war, epidemics, and austerity, the movie house, which attracted people from all classes, became the new pleasure palace offering escapist entertainment for a few centavos. In Cebu, during these years, while some expressed concerns over the dangers of cinema, most embraced its delightful world of magic and fantasy.

- “Ang Yaya,” *BK*, June 27, 1919, 5.
- “Declaracion de Guerra,” *NF*, April 8, 1917, 1.
- “Austria y Bulgaria y la Paz: Submarions Alemanes en el Pacifico,” *NF*, April 15, 1917, 1. See also: “Amerikano Batok Alemany: Moabot ang Submarinong Aleman sa Pilipinas?” *BK*, April 15, 1917, 3; “Porbida king mga Submarino,” *BK*, April 15, 1917, 3; “Submarino nga Natundag sa Cavite,” *BK*, April 19, 1917, 4.
- “Walay Submarino,” *BK*, July 15, 1917, 4.
- “Amerika batok Alemany,” *BK*, April 12, 1917, 5.
- “Nangahadlok nga Ipadala sa Oropa,” *BK*, June 21, 1917, 4.
- “Ang Pagdaginot,” *BK*, April 22, 1917, 5.
- “Mga Pilipinhong Naangin sa Submarinong Aleman: Duha ka Sugbuanon Namatay,” *BK*, July 1, 1917.
- “Amerika batok Alemany,” *BK*, April 12, 1917, 5.
- “La Revolucion en Rusia,” *NF*, April 8, 1917, 3.
- “Mga Sintas sa Gubat,” *BK*, July 29, 1917, 4.
- BK*, July 15, 1917, 5.
- Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, May 3, 1917, 4.
- Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, September 4, 1916, 4.
- BK*, October 25, 1917, 6.
- “Ang Pagmama,” *BK*, May 24, 1917, 5.
- “Mga Paniid,” *BK*, May 24, 1917, 4.
- BK*, February 18, 1917, 3.
- “No More Cebu Cabaret,” *NF*, August 2, 1917, 1.
- “Nauansa ang Buhatan sa Yelo?” *BK*, May 17, 1917, 4.
- “Tanang Aleman Ipadala sa E.U.,” *BK*, July 18, 1918, 7.
- BK*, March 7, 1918, 7.
- “Sugbuanon nga Atua sa Francia,” *BK*, November 10, 1918, 5.
- “Espias en Cebu?” *NF*, September 18, 1918, 2.
- “Ang Gubat sa Sugbu,” *BK*, February 17, 1918, 7.
- NF*, July 7, 1918, 1.
- “En El Cine Royo,” *NF*, July 28, 1918, 1.
- BK*, November 17, 1918, 5.
- “Nganong Dili Badlongon,” *BK*, August 4, 1918, 7.
- Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 193.
- Ibid., 219.
- “El Entierro de la Sra. De Osmena en Pelicula,” *NF*, January 31, 1918, 1.
- Joe Quirino, *Don Jose and the Early Philippine Cinema* (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1983), 16.
- BK*, January 17, 1919, 5.
- Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, October 2, 1919, 7.
- Five in Four ad. *NF*, September 19, 1919, 1.
- BK*, June 13, 1918, 9.
- BK*, December 6, 1919, 8.
- “Lopez Contra Policia,” *NF*, March 3, 1919.
- “Ang 4 sa Augusto sa Sugbu,” *BK*, August 6, 1919, 5.
- NF*, September 25, 1919, 4.
- “Si Marie Walcamp Ania Na,” *BK*, January 31, 1920.
- NF*, September 27, 1919, 1.

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