

Acuña’s role in the Filipino film industry is subsumed by her being part of the prominent Nepomuceno family. Acuña’s range of responsibilities in the studio and during the filmmaking process increased over time. In the 1920s, she worked as a casting director, costume designer, art director, set decorator, and makeup supervisor in the productions of Malayan Movies. The company was the main film producer in the Philippines during the silent era and was largely a family-run business, with the company offices being on the same address, 247 General Solano in Quiapo, as the family residence.²¹ In 1931, the company was dissolved, and in its place, Malayan Pictures Corporation was formed. Isabel de Nepomuceno was listed as the vice president of the new company in the Manila city directory.²² Throughout the 1920s, her name was not mentioned in the city directories’ entries for Malayan Movies. Further research is required to shed light on her enigmatic promotion to the position of vice president and her responsibilities at Malayan Pictures Corporation.

In a 1983 book on José Nepomuceno, Joe Quirino writes about Isabel Acuña’s long workdays, her unfailing presence on set, and how she “did most of the preparatory work before any actual shooting started.”²³ In this book, Quirino repeatedly calls her “the right hand and left hand” of her husband.²⁴ In a rare 1981 interview,²⁵ Acuña describes her role in the film production process as a partner within the Nepomuceno-owned companies and José Nepomuceno’s life-long collaborator: “He had always wanted me to work side by side with him in our film projects. So he taught me the rudiments of casting, scriptwriting, production design and even art direction. That’s why in the States I was considered the first casting director in the Philippines.”²⁶

In this interview, Isabel Acuña challenges an assumption prevalent in Filipino film history that she played a supporting role in Nepomuceno’s ventures. Instead, she speaks

about her work as a valuable contribution to her and José Nepomuceno’s joint projects. Moreover, she asserts that one of her chosen areas of specialization—casting—has secured her an international fame within early film history.

This status as the first Filipino casting director, reportedly attributed to Acuña in the United States, is not part of the history of her contributions to the film industry in her native country. Although it has now become clear that Acuña was an early film pioneer in the Philippines and was highly involved in the production process of Nepomuceno’s films, she continues to be referred to, if at all, as the wife of an important film director. As a result of working in the shadow of her famed husband, much of her work has not been documented, nor has it been properly credited. Further research is required to rectify this lacuna in Filipino film history and to reveal the details of Acuña’s involvement in specific films, as well as her various roles in the history of Filipino film production.

This essay attempts to restore Isabel Acuña’s place as a recognized partner in the Nepomuceno film production companies, the place she rightfully claimed in 1981, when she told the interviewer: “The film projects we undertook were really husband-wife venture, or call it team.”²⁷

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How Ateng Osorio Films In Heres and Elsewheres

Avie Felix

1 This essay is a longer reworked version of a profile I wrote on Isabel Acuña for Columbia University’s *Women Film Pioneers Project*. Available here: <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/isabel-acuna/> (accessed August 17, 2020).
2 *Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory 1932–1933* (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1932).
3 Lena Strait Pareja, *Roles and Images of Woman in the Early Years of Philippine Cinema 1912–1941* (PhD Dissertation, University of the Philippines Diliman, 1998).
4 Nadi Tofghian, “José Nepomuceno and the Creation of a Filipino National Consciousness.” *Film History* 20.1 (2008): 77–94.
5 Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003), 257.
6 Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women’s Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 5.
7 See, for instance, Sofia Bull and Astrid Söderbergh Widding, eds. *Not so Silent: Women in Cinema before Sound* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2010); Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Ingrid Stigsdotter, ed. *Making the Invisible Visible: Reclaiming Women’s Agency in Swedish Film History and Beyond* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2019).
8 George Vail Kabrisante, “Jose Nepomuceno: The Father of R.P. Movies,” *Jingle Extra Hot Movie Entertainment Magazine*, May 4, 1981.
9 The issue of the earliest “Filipino” film is discussed and problematized by Patrick F. Campos in *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016); Charles Musser in “Nationalism, Contradiction, and Identity; or, A Reconsideration of Early Cinema in the Philippines,” *Early Cinema in Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); Nick Deocampo and others.
10 A few years ago, the independent film historian Teddy Co found a film accredited to a certain “Josh Nelson” and filmed around Zamboanga City in Mindanao. This film bears many similarities to José Nepomuceno’s lost *Moro Pirates* (1931).
11 Joe Quirino, *Don José and the Early Philippine Cinema* (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House Inc., 1983), 23.
12 Nicasio Osmeña, “Broadway Theatrical Expert Talks on Filipino Women”, *Graphic*, August 27, 1927, 3.

13 Kabrisante; Quirino, 5, 22.
14 Elisabeth Cooper, “Meeting the Stars in Hollywood,” *Graphic*, October 22, 1927, 4.
15 Lolita Sollee, “Movieland As Is,” *Graphic*, March 17, 1928.
16 M. San Martin, “Stars that Shine in Philippine Filmdom,” *Graphic*, October 20, 1928, 3.
17 “Who is Who in the Philippines: A Biographical Sketch of Jose Nepomuceno, Pioneer Filipino Film Producer,” *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, 16. The couple later had an eighth child. All their children appeared in their films, and their son Angelito became a popular child actor. Another son, Luis, became a famous film director and producer, and made *Dabil Sa Isang Bulaklak* (*Because of a Flower*, 1967), *Igorota* (1968), and *The Pacific Connection* (1974), among others.
18 Amparo M. Neri, “Women Suffrage Synonym of Divorce and Flapperism,” *Graphic*, December 31, 1927, 12.
19 Ildefonsa C. Osias, “The Changing Status of the Filipino Woman: ‘Weaker Sex’ Doing its Bit in the Advancement of People and Country,” *Graphic*, December 17, 1927, 10–11.
20 “Is Woman Man’s Inferior?” *Graphic*, January 7, 1928, 9; Nieves Baens, “Is the Modern Filipino Girl as Bad as All That?” *Graphic*, January 28, 1928, 3; Virginia Pradas, “What Women Talk About,” *Graphic*, March 3, 1928, 7. Also see Tofghian, 88–89.
21 “Who is Who in the Philippines: A Biographical Sketch of Jose Nepomuceno, Pioneer Filipino Film Producer,” *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, 16.
22 *Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory 1932–1933* (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1932).
23 Quirino, 23.
24 Quirino, 22, 71.
25 Kabrisante writes, “To meet Doña Isabel Zaldarriaga y Acuña for an interview is indeed a rare opportunity. For the past years, Doña Isabel Nepomuceno kept herself in low profile for some sentimental reasons. ‘So far you are the first to interview me about Mr. Nepomuceno’ (she calls her late husband Mr.), she told us.”
26 Kabrisante.
27 Kabrisante.

Consuelo “Ateng” Padilla Osorio was born in 1907 and died in 1986. This fact alone presents her as a subject that cuts across multiple historical periods, both in terms of time and paradigm. To learn about one of only three women directors¹ in the immediate post-World War II period whose prolific career started before the war and lasted until just before the EDSA Uprising is to learn about women and filmmaking in differing historical landscapes. The subject matter, therefore, is as expansive in terms of pedagogic and theoretical potential as it is in terms of research and writing women’s history.

Taking on the task of feminist film historiography is one of complex patchwork of conjecture. It is a massive excavation of archival materials and a *pas de deux* with canons. But in all honesty, for a woman researcher of this contemporary moment, it is primarily grounded on connecting the women of the past to the women of the present and everyone else in between. I consider it a gathering and an attendance to a place of knowing of not only the women of the past but also ‘everywomenelse.’ We connect with Ateng Osorio in such knowledge that as we do so, we gather.

This article is part of a long-term project of recovering women’s film history in the Philippines, beginning with the advent of cinema in the country onwards. The interest of this article is to present an exploratory stage of contemporary feminist film history from the perspective of time and connection in order to invite a woman filmmaker in our present consciousness. This article, so much as it is invested in uncovering and presenting data tapestried from interviews, library research, and viewing Osorio’s extant films, also suggests to students and scholars of film to further engage to women’s histories with the fervor of contemporary theorization.

In this article, we will get acquainted with Ateng Osorio. The premise is that she is our past and we are her future. It is of equal importance to emphasize that she is our past’s present and we are her future’s present rendering this acquaintance as trans-historical and its narrative as a trans-narrative. We take in the metaphor film historians Monica Dall’Asta and Jane Gaines propose in the signifier “constellative,” saying that “forming a constellation with them [historical subjects],” we locate ourselves historically just at the moment that we “find” them by borrowing their signs. So what we “find” when we locate one of these figures is that, actually, we are discovering and locating ourselves in our own historical moment. Who else would we find?”² As Dall’Asta and Gaines reiterate, “They need us as much as we need them. They need us in order to exist historically, exist, that is, as provocative images in and for the present.”³ This article, therefore, is an engagement of constellative nature, highlighting that what we learn from her life and her career is an addition to our learning of our history and ourselves with her and us as bookends.

The challenge is both in the material and in the ideation as we are faced with a highly political and cultural system of archiving and equally selective canon. The nature



Consuelo Osorio. Photos courtesy of Tetchie Moralde and Angela Osorio.

of this challenge isn’t unique though, as we have learned in the articulations of feminist art historians like Griselda Pollock whose work on cracking the canon is insurmountable, as well as Filipinas Flaudette May Datuin and Eloisa May Hernandez who followed a courageous engagement with art history with critical awareness of an existing canon and its nuances.⁴ Our point of inquiry in this article is informed by this challenge and what has so far been done about it by these feminist scholars. We take cue with not only going beyond the collected archives but also indulging in other non-canonical forms of presenting a narrative such as the epistolary technique, or in my case, the fictive dialogue transcript. These unconventional ways of writing about women narrate not only the fact but also thoughts on the fact.

Altogether, these intentions point to an articulation of women’s practices as an elsewhere which Datuin, in a dialogue with the initiations of Pollock and Teresa de Lauretis, appropriates as both resistance and containment. It is inside and outside the margins, not only of dominant discourse, but also of feminism, itself located in the elsewhere of mainstream institutions and practices. Within the elsewhere, the re/presentation of women’s histories and artistic practices becomes a negotiated and oppositional process.⁵

The position of filmmaking as a feminist elsewhere is decisively taken at the onset of this research. Ateng Osorio is an empirical and theoretical entity in that she lived and exercised a practice before the now of feminism. At the current moment, this is where we meet her, in her elsewhere and ours—all as constellates, through accounts of her daughter Angela “Peachy” Osorio and granddaughter Theresa “Tetchie” Moralde, when I interviewed them on March 2019. This also includes my encounter with Ateng through their stories, articles written about her and her context/s, and my experience of watching her films vis-à-vis a lifetime of watching films.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.1. WRITING AND SMOKING.⁷

Avie Felix: They say you’re called Ateng because you are like an older sister to all. And some call you Mama Ateng because you are also very motherly to people you work with.

Consuelo P. Osorio: You may also call me Mama Ateng, if you want.

AF: How many packs of cigarettes do you consume when you are writing your scripts?

CPO: I don’t count. When I’m writing, my only companions are coffee and cigarettes. I won’t even eat unless the script is finished. Do you smoke?

AF: Oh, I’ve been on and off cigarettes. Mostly when I am undergoing stress, like right now, I get hooked again. I’m hoping I can quit for good, soon.

CPO: Why do you need to quit?

AF: I don’t want to die of cancer.

CPO: I didn’t know that smoking causes cancer.

AF: Back in your time, nobody knew it then. The same way that back in your time, smoking was a sign of “kahinhinan.”

CPO: Why? What does it signify now for women?

AF: Oh, let me just put it this way. When you present a woman as a stereotypical whore, you can’t leave out the smoking part.

CPO: Oh, my aching bones!

“Oh, my aching bones!” is the expression that Ateng Osorio was most known for by her colleagues and family. Tetchie, who was Ateng’s granddaughter and one of her constant tag-alongs in film shoots from the 1960s onward, shares that they never heard their *Mamang* complain about anything, but they knew she was either tired or stressed when “Oh, my aching bones!” echoed at the studio.

Another recollection of Tetchie of her Lola Ateng is that “she loved her actors and actresses as her own children.”⁸ Not that she needed more children, having given birth to 12. It was probably because Ateng was the eldest of ten children that she became accustomed to dealing with a lot of responsibilities and taking charge of everyone’s needs. This experience allowed her to juggle filmmaking and being a single parent, aside from being a mother on the film set to the rest of her cast and crew as well. Angela, Ateng’s daughter (and only living child at present), describes her mother’s upbringing as “unusual.” Aside from being born on September 1, 1907 of her father, governor Jose Padilla, Sr., and an equally well-off mother, Clarita Ruiz, and being the *ate* of nine brothers, Ateng was brought up to be aggressive, opinionated, and strong. Her father was grooming her to be a lawyer. “She was always unconventional. She’s the kind who advises any girl who gets impregnated not to marry the impregnator. She was probably one of the first women who wore pantsuits. Pantsuits became her uniform,” expounds Angela.

Ateng was sent to Manila to study from her grade school to high school years at St. Theresa’s College (STC), a Catholic school ran by Belgian nuns. Her independent spirit was probably strengthened by living away from her family at such an early age.

Ateng learned to speak French fluently and became a wide-reader while at STC. During her senior year, Ateng was courted by a young lawyer named Salvador Osorio with whom she eloped as soon as she graduated. While starting a family at 18 years old, Ateng also began her writing career and contributed short stories to *Lirwayway* magazine and a textbook, Angela recalls, titled *Pampanitikan*. “We studied her story in school. Her piece in that textbook was entitled “Logis” which is about a *sabungero*.” Ateng practically built her family life and writing life side by side.



Osorio (second from right) at the birthday party of Mrs. Castelo (to Osorio’s left), her classmate at STC.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.2. DEPRESSION.

AF: I heard you had depression when you lost your twins.
CPO: Yes. I blamed myself for losing my twins. It was an incomprehensible pain. During that time my husband even had to leave his career as [a] lawyer just to be by my side while I went through that lonely phase.
AF: I know how that feels. Especially nowadays that generations after yours, including mine, seem to be more prone to depression, I can't consider myself exempt from that.
CPO: Have you experienced loss recently?
AF: Yes, as I write this research about you, I just lost a loved one. Which also makes me wonder how you went through grieving and what made you overcome depression.
CPO: Writing did that for me. My brother Carlos saw how devastated I was and asked if I would be willing to write a movie script for him, hoping it can take my mind off my worries. Luckily, I can say that scriptwriting somehow worked.
AF: So, your entry to cinema was through scriptwriting?
CPO: Yes, and the occasions that my brothers got drunk in the middle of directing films. On many of those occasions, I took over and finished directing what they left unfinished. Just like when we were younger, I finished what they started every time they messed up.
AF: Your brothers would get drunk and then have you take over their directorial work?!
CPO: That's right!
AF: Then you probably have directed earlier than recorded!?
CPO: *laughs* And I also acted in my brothers' films earlier than recorded.
AF: Ah, way before people remember you as the teacher in the series *Bagets* back in the '80s.
CPO: The teacher who wore swimsuits! Yes, I had my acting debut way, way back.
AF: And by the way, I also learned that you signed your earlier scripts as Consuelo Ruiz. Why did you choose to drop Padilla?
CPO: So that I will be known without the privilege of my father's nor my brothers' name.
AF: 👍

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Using the nom de cinéma Consuelo Ruiz, Ateng co-directed three films with her husband under Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Films before World War II. None of these films are extant but documents show that all of them were conceptualized and written by her.⁹
When the war broke out, the couple moved back to Plaridel, Bulacan, but had to live in the middle of their family's rice fields since Japanese soldiers took over the town. During this time, Salvador got very sick. He died when he was only 38 years old, a year before the liberation. The young widow took on a teaching job in the province to support her 10 children. In 1946, when the war ended, Ateng went back to Manila to work for Premiere Productions, then a newly established film studio in Grace Park, Caloocan City.¹⁰ Ateng had to leave her children in a convent while she re-established a career in the film industry. "Dinala kami ng mama ko sa kumbento. Meron kaming kamag -anak na Mother Superior sa St. Paul sa Bocaue (Bulacan). Seven years old ako nun. Doon muna kami nagstay habang si Mamang nagpunta na sa Maynila para magdirect ulit. Hanggang sa nakabili na siya ng bahay sa Manila saka niya na lang kami kinuha. Mga isang taon rin yun," shares Angela.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.3. SPACE.

AF: I've been thinking about how strong you are. I can imagine how it felt like to lose a husband, the pressure to take care and provide for all your children, and brave an industry that surely had a fair amount of pressure on you, too.
CPO: I had to press on, I have children to support.
AF: It was a good thing you were able to recover and be financially stable in just a year.
CPO: Fortunately, the film industry was booming. I was able to get a contract at Premiere and buy a house just a block away from the studio.
AF: Yes, I learned that the house you bought is at 10th Avenue, while Premiere was at the corner of 10th and 11th streets.
CPO: I made sure our house was very near the studio so that I could bring my children back and forth or they could visit me whenever they wanted.
AF: Very practical. I myself make sure I can bring my daughter anywhere I work.
CPO: Well, we can't fulfill just one role at one time.



Osorio, Angela, and Bepong flanked by visitors in their home.



Osorio (in dark-colored blouse) with Angela on the way to a location shoot in Antipolo. Later on, her granddaughter Tetchie became her constant tag-along.

Ateng's children regard the studio as the "extension of our home." As Angela recounts, "Doon na din kami kumakain. Nililista lang nung tindera sa canteen ng Premier yung mga kinakain namin 'pag pupunta kami doon. Kinakaltas na lang iyon sa suweldo ni Mamang. On summer breaks, we even spend more time there than at home." She also shares that location shoots were always treated like family outings.
Understanding the concept of space and how women like Ateng Osorio managed and negotiated space is integral to our inquiry on the creative practices of women like her. The demands of motherhood combined with the demands of directing a film necessitate a malleability of spaces to allow the creative process to flow. Motherhood is not something you leave and pick up at your doorstep. You bring it anywhere you go.
As her grandchild Techie puts it, "In order for her to flourish as a mother and as a director, her two worlds should merge." In Ateng's life and career, there was no clear demarcation between home and work, between members of the family or the cast and crew, and between what is personal or professional. In fact, Ateng's children and grandchildren are used to acting as extras. One of her children, Bepong, even turned out to be a famous child star. He said that growing up on the set made acting as normal as playing games for him. At the same time, Ateng's cast and crew were regular guests in her house and joined them in family celebrations.
Datuin, in her discussion of the concept of *maybahay* or homemaker, explains that the home is a problematic space charged with aspirations, concepts of the self, and individual experiences of women who are not necessarily congruent with the largely Western/Eurocentric demarcation of work and home, economic or non-economic.¹¹ Serving as an explanation of the experiences of home-based women creators, Datuin's analogy may also be extended to cover those who are working outside the home. While working outside the home, the woman's space expands, and the conceptualization of the self vis-à-vis her role at home extends as her space expands in the same way that her wealth of experiences expands.
Homemaking and raising children were part of Ateng's filmmaking process and filmmaking was a family activity. Even out-of-town or location shoots served as family activities for Ateng's children and later on, her grandchildren as well. The production crew was part of her family's "vacations," and their role easily transitioned to being extended family. In essence, everything was a family affair.



Osorio (with eyeglasses) in an out-of-town shoot/family excursion. The boy looking down is Bepong who would become an actor and director. The girl in front is Angela and to her left is Andrea, the oldest daughter.



Osorio (with eyeglasses) and Angela, who acted in the film, with the cast of *Kandilang Bakal* (1957): (L-R) Justina David, Gil de Leon, Leo Laforteza, Lily Laforteza, Joseph Estrada, Carlos Padilla Sr., Carlos Padilla III, and Lilia Dizon.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.4. RELATIONSHIPS.

- AF: I heard that when you direct films, you always change the dialogues and scenes. It is so much like an improvisational method. What's the reason behind that?
- CPO: Oh, I like to incorporate lines that I hear from real conversations that I find interesting. Plus, I don't give my actors exact lines, I allow them to put their own flavor in the lines they deliver for as long as they convey the point of the scene. I adjust to the cast, whoever is there at the moment of shooting a specific scene.
- AF: Is that also why you usually write the stories for the films you direct?
- CPO: Yes. And even if I am not directing, I am usually present on the set so that I can easily adjust lines, add and edit depending on what's feasible and what's going to improve the film, as we shoot.
- AF: I find it amusing that you accommodate everyone who wants to be a part of the film. I see you are all for giving exposure to more actors and actresses.
- CPO: Yes. I like to give people the break that they want, especially if they deserve it and they perform well.
- AF: What if they don't deliver?
- CPO: Well, I always tell them that if they don't show up, I'll bump them out of the scene or the other actors will know and tell about their tardiness and unprofessionalism. When you are not on time, I'm gonna tell on you.
- AF: I see that you value time.
- CPO: Definitely! Because I am responsible for the entire production, and there are costs to maximize. The cast and crew are responsible for the success of the film. We are a team.
- AF: How can you say that a film is successful?
- CPO: When it delivers in the box office, because that's a clear sign that we are able to connect to moviegoers and that they like what we are giving them. At the end of the day, it's all about the moviegoers enjoying the product of our work.

Ateng's films were hits in the box office, and as Techie puts it, "She always had good relationships with producers because she made money for them." Her filmography reveals that Ateng did not just stick to one or two genres or even the so-called women's genres. She did action, horror, romance, drama, comedy, and mostly a mix of all genres in one film. And because she was addressing popular culture, her themes were derived from observing daily life and the current interest of moviegoers. It was typical of Ateng to catch an interesting bit of conversation from people on the set and include that conversation in the scene she's shooting. The production team and her family often exchange inside jokes about her picking up their actions and words and would say, "Baka mamaya nasa pelikula na ni Mamang iyan!"

Ateng's two extant films exemplify her connection to popular culture. The song-and-dance film *Bang-Shang-A-Lang* (1968), starring Helen Gamboa, Ronaldo Valdez, Tirso Cruz III, and other teen stars, featured the song with the same title popularized in real life that same year by the American fictional band, The Archies. "Bang-Shang-A-Lang" was a dance craze too, being played in The Archie's Show with accompanying visuals of the popular animation characters demonstrating the dance steps. Ateng knew that her audience would love to see their movie idols sing and dance the most popular song of that time.

In the movie, the character of Helen Gamboa who just came home from the United States is caught between her passion for singing popular music and her parents' wish for her to be a professor. When she starts teaching, she finds that her students are very uninterested in going to school because they are more focused on rehearsing for performances. She ends up performing with her students and becomes very popular for her exceptional talent. The film is infused with romance as she and the character of Ronaldo Valdez have a love-and-hate relationship which turns out to be a happily-ever-after toward the end.

Drakulita (1969), another Osorio film, is set in barrio where there is a vampire scare. The news of a vampire killing people at night makes the barrio people wary of going out at night and interacting with those who are new in town. Each scene uses slapstick humor to elicit laughter, but the film is aware of gender politics and social issues albeit very much a product of its time. The star of the show with the funny lines is a transwoman character played by German Moreno. Though everyone loves her, her stepfather is a typical homophobe who disciplines her in the hopes of making her straight. Throughout the film, we hear lines about women demanding respect from men and having dreams of their own.

The plot revolves around three main narratives—the discovery of the *drakulita*, the acceptance of the transgender character, and the love affair between a barrio lass and the rich heir of a late *haciendero* who returns from Manila. The love affair is hindered by two factors. There is another suitor who is a member of the village gang, and then there is the guy's

godmother arranging for him to marry her own daughter for financial gain. Twists and turns lead to the vampire scare, which turns out to be a prank, the transgender being forced to "go straight," and the love affair leading to a happy ending.

In both films, we see a cast of not less than 30 actors and actresses, including famous and rising stars like Nora Aunor, Tirso Cruz III, Efren Reyes, Matimtiman Cruz, German Moreno, and Ike Lozada, among others. Ateng took it as her responsibility as a mother figure to nurture budding artists and help them become popular. As Techie recalls, "She took care of everybody. She cared for everyone. Tinuturuan at tinutulungan niya lahat. Pinaaral niya kung sinu-sino. Pinatira sa bahay kung sinu-sino rin."

Ateng's everybody-is-family mentality continued as she transitioned from filmmaking to creating shows and series for television in tandem with a younger woman director named Mitos Villareal. Ateng and Mitos became so close that the latter was considered as a close family member even by her grandchildren.

The possibility of claiming space such that the entirety of the spaces she navigated with worked in coexistence with her family and career must not have occurred without support from the workforce. Her Padilla name must have given her leverage whether she admitted it or not. In any case, her producers respected and trusted her. The respect and trust that she commanded from coworkers and producers allowed her the luxury of combining her work and with her home which undoubtedly led to the success of her films. Although her success meant that she would be boxed as a commercial director. As Techie claims,

"Ang stigma sa cinema eh, si Ateng commercial 'yan. So 'yong mga art films, 'yon ang may prestige. But her films actually provide a slice of what the society was like during that time. She really presented a slice of life. Pero hindi siya masyadong nabigyan ng credit just because kumita 'yong films niya."

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.4. RELATIONSHIPS.

- AF: Did you ever face any difficulty in your career because you are a woman?
- CPO: I can't say that. I worked with strong women. My producers were women. There was Aling Miling and Aling Toreng of Leah Productions, Mrs. Chong of JBC Productions, Mrs. Lim at Premiere. With them around, I never felt that being a woman is challenging.
- AF: Could it also be because you started it with your brothers?
- CPO: Probably. But I've always felt competent.
- AF: But why did you leave Premiere and go into freelance directing?
- CPO: My brother Roy who used to live with me at that time led the worker's union against Premiere. My contract was not renewed because of that.
- AF: How about Leah Productions? Why did you stop making films for them?
- CPO: I only stopped with Leah when they started producing sexy films during the '70s.

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.

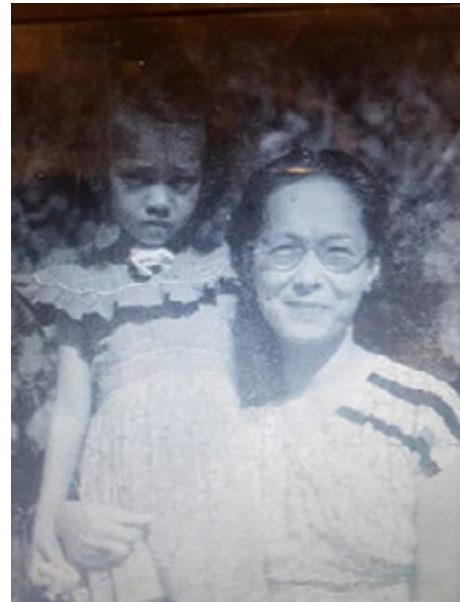
Her multi-tasking of directing, on-the-spot scriptwriting, crocheting, embroidery, and taking care of her children and grandchildren while on production show that Ateng did not compartmentalize her interests or roles and did not put boundaries on what she could and could not do. Filmmaking as an elsewhere 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.