

Indie film entitled *Pugon*: Reflecting the experiences of the modern Indio in the current formulation of Philippine society

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Abstract: This study introduces the indie film titled "Pugon: Reflecting the Experiences of the Modern Indio in the Current Formulation of Philippine Society." It investigates the nuanced experiences of contemporary Indios within the evolving landscape of Philippine society, offering a profound exploration of their challenges, endeavors, and triumphs in the quest for identity amid societal transformations. The researchers aim to provide a deep and meaningful examination of the struggles, aspirations, and accomplishments of the Indios as they navigate their personal battles, dreams, and the realities they face as individuals in society. Employing qualitative research methods, the film emphasizes the intricate experiences of the Indios, showcasing personal narratives, dreams, and the societal formulations that pose challenges and limitations to their progress and the pursuit of their aspirations. The findings encapsulate the multifaceted stories and characters representing the modern Indio, fostering a profound understanding of the social, cultural, and personal issues they grapple with in contemporary times. The film serves as a testament to the capability of indie cinema as a powerful instrument for broadening understanding and discourse on the social, cultural, and personal experiences of the Indios. In conclusion, "Pugon" stands as a unique indie film, serving as both a mirror and a spokesperson for the experiences, efforts, and hopes of the modern Indio in present-day Philippine society. It values its identity, aiming to open doors for deeper comprehension and appreciation of films that celebrate the culture, society, and individuals of the Philippines. The study suggests avenues for further exploration in the realm of cultural identity, discrimination, and the challenges faced by the Indios in Philippine society.

Keywords: Histosociological, Indie film, Modern Indio, Neo, Philippines

1. Introduction

The word "*pugon*" originates from the Philippines, specifically from the Filipino language, which is also known as Tagalog. "*Pugon*" refers to a traditional clay or brick oven used for baking bread, pastries, and other food items. These ovens are typically heated using wood or charcoal fire, and they are commonly found in traditional Filipino bakeries and households. The word "*pugon*" may also be used colloquially to refer to any type of oven, especially in areas where traditional baking methods are still prevalent in the Philippines.

The oppressed are striving to break free from the hands of oppressors. This is the reality being advocated by the powerless who struggle against the powerful. "I looked at my hands to see if I was still the same person now that I am free" (Tubman, wt). Before true freedom can be achieved, one must be resilient, persevering continuously, and, if one desires to taste freedom, persisting onward. A harsh reality based on the history of the Philippines is servitude. From ancient times to the colonial era, many Filipinos were enslaved by others. During the Spanish era, Maritima (2015) recounted in her study that Filipinos were forced to work in *encomienda*'s or

lands owned by the Spaniards. In the American era, some Filipinos were compelled to serve as soldiers and workers in coffee and sugar plantations.

The Lumad, comprising various indigenous groups in Mindanao, Philippines, are facing significant challenges due to ongoing conflicts, land dispossession, and human rights violations. **Land Disputes and Forced Displacement:** Lumad communities are often targeted for land grabs by mining companies, agribusiness firms, and even government-backed projects. These encroachments threaten their ancestral lands and disrupt their traditional way of life. The construction of dams, logging activities, and expansion of plantations lead to forced displacement, disrupting Lumad communities' social cohesion and cultural practices. **Violence and Militarization:** Lumad leaders and activists advocating for their rights and defending their ancestral lands face threats, harassment, and violence from paramilitary groups allegedly linked to the military or private interests. Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and attacks on Lumad schools and community leaders are not uncommon. The militarization of Lumad areas exacerbates tensions and perpetuates a climate of fear and insecurity.

Underinvestment in Education and Healthcare: Many Lumad communities lack access to quality education and healthcare services. Schools in Lumad areas are often underfunded, poorly equipped, and sometimes targeted for closure or harassment by authorities. This deprives Lumad children of their right to education and perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization. Similarly, inadequate healthcare facilities and services contribute to poor health outcomes and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. **Cultural Discrimination and Stigmatization:** Lumad communities face discrimination and stigmatization based on their ethnicity and cultural practices. Their indigenous languages, traditions, and beliefs are often marginalized and misunderstood, leading to cultural erosion and loss of identity. Discrimination in mainstream society further marginalizes Lumad people and restricts their access to opportunities for socio-economic advancement. **Lack of Legal Recognition and Protection:** Despite constitutional provisions and international conventions protecting indigenous peoples' rights, legal recognition and protection of Lumad ancestral domains remain inadequate. Existing laws are often poorly implemented, and legal mechanisms for securing land tenure rights are complex and inaccessible to many Lumad communities. This leaves them vulnerable to land grabs and dispossession without proper recourse to justice.

Environmental Degradation and Climate Vulnerability: Lumad communities rely on their forests, rivers, and agricultural lands for sustenance and livelihoods. Environmental degradation caused by extractive industries, deforestation, and climate change undermines their food security and exacerbates poverty and vulnerability. Lack of sustainable land management practices and inadequate support for alternative livelihoods further compound these challenges. The Lumad people in the Philippines face multifaceted oppression rooted in land dispossession, violence, discrimination, and neglect. Addressing these systemic issues requires concerted efforts to uphold indigenous rights, promote inclusive development, and ensure meaningful participation of Lumad communities in decision-making processes affecting their lives and territories.

Based on actual historical events, this is portrayed on various platforms to convey to the public the atrocities committed by oppressors and the suffering of the oppressed themselves. It utilizes drama, poetry, songs, stories, films, comics, and more. In different eras, there are prevailing mediums that people support and enjoy. Like films, it became popular due to the rise of themes related to societal events. Themes such as love, family, fiction, history, servitude, sex, nature, homosexuality, and many others. It cannot be denied that people prefer to watch the love story of two beings who almost never end up together towards the end of the film. However, when the theme focuses on real events like physical, sexual, mental, and spiritual abuse, Filipinos are not enticed to watch. It is believed that Filipinos temporarily escape the reality of life. Because of this, the cinematic curtain weakened, and realistic films that were not given the right budget by anyone who wanted to make a film became separate.

The "Independent Film" or more commonly known as "Indie Film" emerged, which presented more realistic scenarios or true events experienced within the film. Some Filipino films included in Indie Film have won awards in other countries. In fact, this is more favoured by foreign countries because they see the cultural aspect of a country. From the portrayal of characters, conflicts, climax, and the conclusion of the story, it resonates more with the emotions of the audience. Although Filipinos are not quite ready for Indie Film, its growth cannot be stopped because directors, scriptwriters, and cinematographers have become more enlightened in creating more stories that can be seen only in society. It is like creating a plot for a film is easier because it can be seen around. Directors have become sensitive and observant every year and place that becomes their inspiration for their next project.

According to Rowlands (2022), "people in independent film have passion; they're not in it for the money." Indie Film is easier to produce because it values the content of the story and events more than income or money. Editing cinematography is not as expensive because it shows the reality of events. Adams (2020) adds the definition of an independent film is torture with less money and time. Based on these statements, this research has borne fruit, examining the Indie Film entitled "*Pugon*" by Gabby Ramos. It revolves around Sonia's experience, a fourteen-year-old protagonist who was pawned by her parents to have funds for her father's burial. It also tackles molestation, abuse, and the violation of Sonia's human rights. Afterward, it is linked to the history experienced by Filipinos during various occupations, and the events are presented in the current situation in Filipino society.

Studying servitude in the Philippines is crucial to understanding the importance of independence and the rights of every citizen. Through this study, we can see the events and significance of people in society fighting for the country's freedom. The Researchers also observe the effects of servitude on the society and economy of the Philippines. According to research, there are many reasons why servitude happened in the Philippines, including lack of resources, lack of education, knowledge, and poverty. Because of this, many Filipinos were forced to work as slaves to survive. Currently, many of them still experience abuse and servitude. Through continuous study and collaboration between citizens and the government, the issues of servitude in the Philippines can be addressed. It is essential to fight for the rights of every citizen to achieve true freedom and development for our country.

2. Literature review

2.1. New forms of oppression

Due to changes, new forms of oppression have emerged in the Philippines. One of these is poverty or the oppression experienced by people in dire circumstances, such as those who lack education and opportunities, leading to a hand-to-mouth existence. According to the study by Quirino and Salvanera (2019), poverty results in a broader scope of oppression as it permeates many individuals within and outside society. Additionally, other forms of oppression may include abuses of power, humiliation, and discrimination based on gender, sexuality, and other characteristics.

Several factors contribute to oppression in contemporary Philippines. One of these is the lack of education and awareness of the rights and dignity of each individual. According to Reyes (2018), ignorance and lack of understanding of concepts such as respect, equality, and unity can lead to oppression. Furthermore, economic, political, and cultural contexts can significantly influence the growth of oppression in society. Oppression in modern times has wide-ranging effects not only on the victims but also on society as a whole. According to Reyes (2018), the effects of oppression can result in the victims experiencing physical, emotional, and mental health issues, leading to more severe consequences.

2.2. Oppression in Ancient times

Foreign oppression can take various forms such as physical, psychological, and economic discrimination. In the studies of Carroll and Japp (2015), it is mentioned that Filipinos in the past experienced abuse, violence, and discrimination in workplaces, schools, and communities. Various factors contribute to or exacerbate oppression in the Philippines. These may include poverty and lack of knowledge about foreign cultures. According to Espiritu (2018), negative beliefs and attitudes associated with power can result in discrimination and oppression. Looking back at the social conditions in the past, people had no rights or means to complain about laws that further entrenched Filipinos in poverty.

According to Quirino (2019), oppression can result in failure to secure employment and education, depression, loneliness, and other mental health issues. Oppression can also lead to the fragmentation of families, failure to integrate into society, and loss of hope for foreigners.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Design of the study

The researchers employed a qualitative design to interpret gathered descriptive data from the Indie Film "Pugon." The researcher believes that this design is appropriate for effectively obtaining and analysing the points necessary to assess and scrutinize the study's objectives.

3.2. Data collection

The researcher utilized various methods to search for the film to be examined. On the other hand, the researcher brainstormed what is not typically studied today. It considered analysing contemporary literature in Indie Films in the Philippines. Many websites were searched to select a film, and "Pugon" was chosen because it exhibited events in the film that continue to occur in Filipino society. The researcher also researched if there were related literature that could be used in the study. The researcher chose award-winning Indie films presented in various international competitions until selecting the film "Pugon," released in 2021, directed by Gabby Ramos, and winning the actress awards as Break Away Stars and Best Actress at the Manhattan International Film Festival in the same year.

After choosing the film, the researcher watched it and documented significant events in the film that could be used in the study. Following this, the researcher formulated research questions that could be answered using the selected film, researched applicable theories and related literature, and finally, developed a title.

3.3. Data analysis

The researcher categorized the recorded data based on the study's objectives. The theoretical framework served as the basis for the researcher to analyse the data. Based on the study's objectives, the researcher aimed to identify the experiences of the modern Indio in the film "Pugon." Therefore, scenarios in the film depicting these experiences were documented for analysis. Additionally, the researcher investigated the possible connection of the film to historical events in the Philippines, which will be used as a lens through sociological and neo-theories to reveal connections between the present and the troubled past of the Philippines.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. The experience of modern Indios

The short film "Pugon" unfolds within a mere 19 minutes and 40 seconds, revealing events that one wouldn't expect to see in a film but are unfortunately part of real life. The entire story revolves around the life of Sonia, a fourteen-year-old filled with dreams, aspiring to rise above poverty. Unlike other children her age who engage in playful activities, Sonia is awakened to a job unsuitable for her. Sonia's family is destitute, leading her to be

pawned off to make ends meet. All of Sonia's dreams vanish at that moment, especially in a heartbreaking scene at 5 minutes and 38 seconds, where Sonia cries uncontrollably against her will due to the circumstances. Sonia's period of servitude concludes, but within a month, her father, whom she relied on, dies, plunging her mother into the need for money to bury him. Sonia's mother approaches the pawnshop, hoping to borrow money for the funeral, but is met with a cold "no." Left with no choice, Sonia's mother pawns her daughter again to secure funds for the burial.

According to the study by Quirino and Salvanera (2019), poverty often leads individuals to make decisions they wouldn't otherwise make. Sonia's mother, trapped in her predicament, resorts to the only option available – putting her daughter back into servitude. Sonia is now owned by the pawnshop, her life controlled by Edmond, who boldly declares, "You are mine because your mother pawned you, so you have no choice." These words bring tears to Sonia's eyes, realizing she has no escape. Sonia works early mornings to earn a living baking bread in a pugon (oven). Edmond, Sonia's employer, is extremely strict and intolerant of complaints, emphasizing the power dynamic in the theory of equality. Edmond holds all the power because he has the money. Sonia is not paid; instead, she is provided food. Edmond tramples on Sonia's rights as a human being. Poverty exacerbates Sonia's experience, subjecting her to situations unfit for her young age. Sonia's femininity is disregarded by Edmond, who forces her into a sexual relationship, taking advantage of her physical vulnerability.

Sonia is physically abused for any mistakes she makes, denied food as punishment, and used by Edmond as a mere tool. Sonia's dreams are lofty, and she desires to escape the oppression she faces, but she doesn't get the chance. Sonia's mother's lack of education further hampers the family, leaving them powerless due to ignorance of laws and human rights. Sonia faces punishment whenever she makes mistakes, and Edmond's control over her intensifies. Sonia's mother attempts to plead with Edmond, proposing to work herself and be used in Sonia's place, but Edmond's only response at 9 minutes and 3 seconds is, "You're rotting away!" Sonia's mother is helpless, and Sonia remains in captivity, pawned to Edmond. It is said that escaping the clutches of oppressive hands is difficult, especially when faced with physical strength. When an individual is perceived as superior, they can easily exploit others, particularly when money becomes the basis for superiority. Edmond feels ownership over Sonia due to the wealth he possesses, and as Disraeli (2023) stated, "money is power, and rare are the heads that can withstand the possession of great power."

Ramsey (2023) adds that "money is 80% behavior, 20% head knowledge. It's what you do, not what you know." People's actions and attitudes are reflected in their behavior, especially when they possess money. The wealthy believe that money is the solution to all their needs, including those of others. Due to excessive oppression, it is natural for an oppressed individual to seek escape. No one will willingly endure such a situation. Oppression is a form of theft, stolen by the powerful, as Bales (2023) stated, "slavery is theft – theft of a life, theft of work, theft of any property or produce, theft even of the children a slave might have borne." When a person undergoes such oppression, their entire life is plunged into darkness, making it difficult to see the light. Sonia, like many others, almost loses hope due to Edmond's extreme cruelty, feeling the theft of her entire identity. Nevertheless, Sonia does not lose hope and continues to find ways to communicate her situation to her mother. It is a natural human instinct to try again for a second chance, hoping to achieve one's desires. Trials are not a reason to give up; pain is not an excuse to quit—be strong. Sonia perseveres, enduring the pain inflicted by Edmond's hands. She uses her strength to fight against her plight, succeeding in this aspect and prompting her to find more ways to eventually break free from Edmond's ownership.

The few experiences portrayed in the film reflect the modern Indio. Such incidents continue to occur in the Philippines, where cruelty, oppression, degradation, and sexual abuse persist as the actions of monstrous individuals. These actions are further emphasized in situations where escape is difficult due to the powerful advantage. From this, various sectors or groups have emerged as avenues for those oppressed individuals who need assistance. Organizations require strength and determination to address situations that individuals with

weaker spirits cannot handle. This incident sheds light on the need for help that goes beyond money and power, which has resulted in severe trauma for many. It is essential not to lose heart and to continue helping those who have experienced cruelty at the hands of their employers or masters.

4.2. Connection of the film "Pugon" to Philippine history

Indie films are often created to criticize, impart lessons, revisit the past, and give significance to events happening in our society. In Benedict Anderson's study, history is described as the process of forming the consciousness and identity of a nation or group of people. Similar to events in the past, this has been a process before achieving the desired awareness of the Indios. In modern times, and in the context of the contemporary Indio like Sonia, her experiences are not far from the events of the past. Their comparison serves as a reflection that events from the past are still evident in modern times. It's not just an explicit similarity, but it is marked by parallels. The pawning of children by parents to the wealthy still persists today. Because there is no other way, the unique pawn of a child continues to survive, providing for the family. This also happened to the Indios in the past; they were imprisoned by the colonizers and had to do things against their rights. They were tortured, unpaid, and sometimes not fed due to mistakes committed. Some parts of the novels "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo" reflect such incidents.

Even more painful and unforgettable is when the femininity of an individual is exploited to satisfy the lasciviousness of men. Those in the higher echelons of society are often the perpetrators of this brutality. Victims cannot complain to anyone because it comes with threats and intimidation, sometimes even with the threat of death. Similar to the Comfort Women during the Japanese era, sexual slavery was rampant among Filipino women. According to Cayabyab (2023), in an article in PhilStar, victims continue to fight for their rights as women at the hands of the Japanese during World War II. Some women are still alive today, not losing hope from their past experiences. Here are some excerpts from Cayabyab's article:

CEDAW studied a plea filed by the "Malaya Lolas" in 2016 and found that the government violated the rights of comfort women by failing to redress the continued discrimination and suffering they endured.

The counsels for the Lolas - under the Center for International Law Manila and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights - said the reparations agreement was made decades before the Lolas came out in the 1990s and before the public knew about the system of sexual slavery.

The Malaya Lolas are women who were raped by Japanese soldiers in the "Bahay na Pula" in San Ildefonso, Bulacan during World War II. Fewer than 30 members are still alive.

Besides ensuring that the lolas get help and an apology, the UN committee urged the Philippine government to use the "Red House" as a memorial "to honor (the lolas') struggle for justice." Lawyer Romel Bagares, who represents the Malaya Lolas, said the UN ruling "is the first pronouncement by an international body that they are entitled to state protection and espousal of their claims over war crimes they suffered during the Japanese occupation." "The CEDAW ruling... is distinct from Japan's responsibility over the same war crimes - such as rape and torture," he added. - Elizabeth Marcelo

The Comfort Women, victims of our government, continue their quest for justice. They seek support against the Japanese for the suffering they endured, even though much time has passed. Because of this cruelty, their suffering persists, and it is not easy to forget the experiences they went through during that time. Similar to Sonia in the film "Pugon," this became the image of her imprisonment in her own identity. She seeks help from her mother herself. The bakery, the furnace (pugon), the only part of her work, consumes all her strength, tears, fatigue, heat, dirt, and cramped muscles from kneading the dough to make bread. The furnace takes on a modern image of the place that became a trap for Sonia's entire being. The consumers enjoy the bread molded by a woman who worked hard due to her mother's pawn. Oblivious consumers fill their stomachs, nourished by the

daily struggles each person faces in their lives. Like Rizal, who used pen and paper as weapons to finally free the Filipinos, the statement of a scholar of the nation (XxlegendaryxX, 2021) will be seen on the next page:

Many trials were endured by Rizal before he completed this novel (*El Filibusterismo*). Aside from his longing for his family, he also longed for his homeland. He knew that his novel could contribute significantly to the suppression of oppression in the Philippines. When he returned to the Philippines after several years, he was immediately accused by the Governor-General that his novel was subversive. Even though there was a semblance of peace in their conversation, the gentleman left a warning that he could do nothing if the church held Rizal accountable for the contents of his work.

In his letter to Lotomerice, his feelings about the persecution against him are revealed. He stated that despite his quiet writing of this novel, it created a lot of noise. In fact, many suggested that he be excommunicated. He was accused of being a German spy, an agent of Bismarck, a Protestant, a magician, and a pitiful soul. Some even claimed that he devised a plan against the Spanish rulers of the country, and he had a foreign passport that he used whenever he wanted to roam around different countries in the darkness.

Based on the excerpts above, it is evident that Rizal fought against the rulers. Despite the difference in his approach, he chose a silent and writing-intensive method of resistance. Like Sonia, despite the physical and mental blows she endured, she fought at a young age to break free from the oppressor's grasp. She endured facing the oven all day, but sexual abuse intensified Sonia's suffering. Nevertheless, it empowered her to leave the place where she was pawned by her mother. In E.P. Thompson's study, the social relationship of individuals in society is seen as incongruent. Similar to the indios and colonists in the Philippines during Rizal's time, and Sonia, who is impoverished, and Edmond, who is wealthy, a gap can be observed. Applying the theory of social movement, it reveals the events experienced by people whose rights are trampled upon. This theory becomes the voice of the indios and modern indios, allowing their cries to be heard behind the oppression they endured at the hands of powerful individuals in society. Indeed, an individual lacking in resources in life can do little. As stated in Thompson's quote from his study, there is an awareness that a person can experience, and this becomes their identity in life.

The Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) is a network of almost 11,000 social organizations formed by over 58 National Coalitions and groups of women, youth, and socially excluded individuals willing to help those experiencing poverty. They address various aspects of poverty to guide people on how to fight any injustice experienced. According to McCarthy and Maes (2020), people living in poverty often lack adequate access to health, education, and sanitation standards. The United Nations urges countries to eradicate poverty by 2030. Like Sonia and her family, they fall victim to such violence due to a lack of education, making them easy targets for cruel masters or those in power. Therefore, even the wealthy today fight for the rights of those who become victims of such violence. Despite their socio-economic status, they feel the unfortunate fate of those who have been neglected. Many well-known personalities fully support the fight against this violence in their respective countries. Personalities like Bill and Melinda Gates, Ban Ki-moon, Oprah Winfrey, Malala Yousafzai, Majora Carter, Abisoye Ajayi-Akinfolarin, Sonita Alizadeh, Bryan Stevenson, and Reverend Willian Barber II are just a few who continue to battle against poverty in all its forms. They are recognized as "from entertainers to tech moguls to grassroots activists" because of their inspirational advocacy. They have established foundations that act for human rights. Here are their respective advocacies, which McCarthy and Maes (2020) emphasized:

1. Bill and Melinda Gates (influential figures in the fight against poverty for years. They launched the Gates Foundation, which focuses on global health and development, in 2000 and have since given away \$50 billion in support of initiatives to improve health care, education, and the environment.)
2. Ban Ki-moon (spearheaded efforts to create the SDGs, of which the first goal is to end poverty, in 2015. Throughout his tenure and beyond, Ban has been a key figure in the fight against poverty.)

3. Oprah Winfrey (championed access to quality education both in the United States and across the globe for more than a decade. In 2007, she founded The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa – a school that offers girls from underprivileged backgrounds access to the education and support they need to thrive. And she has funded Charter Schools and college scholarships in Chicago, and Philadelphia among other cities.)
4. Malala Yousafzai (a Nobel Peace Prize winner from Pakistan with fierce champion for gender equality and education, both of which are key to helping people break out of the cycle of poverty.)
5. Majora Carter (Raised in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City, Majora Carter experienced firsthand the struggles that low-income and minority communities face in the US as a result of discriminatory urban policy.)
6. Abisoye Ajayi-Akinfolarin (recognized CNN Hero from Lagos, Nigeria and a founder of Pearls Africa Foundation, a social enterprise that empowers girls living in poverty by teaching them to code.)
7. Sonita Alizadeh (a rapper and activist who uses her voice to raise public awareness about child marriage – a harmful practice that impacts 12 million girls globally, depriving them of their fundamental rights to health, education, and safety.)
8. Bryan Stevenson (lawyer and educator who has led the effort to reform the US law enforcement system for decades. Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative, which has helped to free more than 140 people on death row who had been wrongfully convicted.)
9. Reverend William Barber II (Following in the footsteps of Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend William Barber II has dedicated his life to fighting inequality and injustice through non-violent means. Barber is a leader of the Poor People's Campaign, a movement that seeks to end poverty in the richest nation in the world.)

From the mentioned personalities above, there are currently well-known individuals who are not blind or deaf to the people victimized by various forms of violence because they see such widespread occurrences. It is not far-fetched that they may have also been victims of different kinds of hardships in the past. They fought and struggled because they found a way, which led to their success in life. Even though they have become wealthy, they have not forgotten their experiences because they feel the pain, anger, and injustice of those who were superior to them during that time. They give back using the foundations they established to uplift other victims struggling to escape their current circumstances.

4.3. Objective opinion on the experience of the modern Indio

The experiences of the modern Indio are a crucial aspect of Philippine culture and society. They depict the efforts, challenges, and changes faced by the Indio in the present era. The experiences of the modern Indio may vary depending on individual circumstances and life contexts. Some Indios may have had positive experiences and succeeded in their fields, such as education, work, and pursuing their dreams. These can serve as inspiration and models for other struggling Indios aspiring to achieve their goals. On the other hand, there may also be modern Indios facing challenges and limitations. They might encounter discrimination, poverty, or unfair opportunities that hinder their progress and realization of their dreams. These are issues that need attention and solutions to ensure equal opportunities and improve life for everyone. Looking at another perspective, the modern Indio is influenced by what is shallow, entertaining, and trendy – what is supported at the box office or bought in sidewalk stalls. What is affordable and within the budget is what the Modern Filipino buys. Like the bread Sonia bakes, this is what most people buy within their means. Who would buy expensive bread just because it went through vigorous television advertising? The modern Indio has indeed changed. Influences from social media and popular culture clash, and upon closer inspection, there is a hidden story of victimization from physical, economic, and social molestation or discrimination. Here is a statement from the blogger of Rocellism.weebly.com (2022):

Like the T-shirt with the inscription 'Malaki ang titik O' (Big letter O), isn't it a big hit with the masses, and both men and women proudly wear it? Include the other T-shirt with the text 'Patikim ng Pokemon.' When I asked Ms. Vendor about the best-selling T-shirts in her stall, she pointed to those displayed in front of her shop; there, Spongebob's face was printed on white shirts, followed by the cute Justin Bieber. Of course, the one with 'Ms. TINA MORAN' written on it is also popular, and Hannah Montana is not left behind. Next to the Mickey Mouse shirt, there's the face of Rizal, printed on a white shirt.

Rizal is not only popular on T-shirts but can be seen everywhere. In stores, glasses, piggy banks, even the logos of businesses bear his face. So, I asked the youth in the mall wearing a 'kultura' shirt with Rizal's face if they knew Rizal, to which they confidently answered yes. I asked who Laon-Laan was, but they ignored me. Who would have thought that Pepe, Dimas-alang, Laon Laan, a doctor, writer, propagandist, and hero of the Filipino nation, would one day be lined up with Spongebob and Justin Bieber? Who could say that the person who introduced the implication 'The Filipino is ready to die for principle, duty, and country' would become a commonplace pop art that, although the name is famous, doesn't really know the person? Like other trends, it is gradually losing its significance.

The ideals fought for by our heroes have become meaningless to the modern Indio. Just like a jeepney driver and food vendors with a hanging cross, its meaning has also changed for them. According to them, it's a "charm" before they start their daily struggles. Thousands of years ago, the symbol of the Catholic cross, which now serves as a charm, is affixed to the wall resembling the bagua in the movie Feng Shui. The concept of the cross, where Christ wears a crown of thorns and has nails in his hands and feet, has become confusing. Even in terms of address, he is called Papa Jesus or sometimes Bro. Since then, the perspective of the modern Indio has become more complicated. Enslaved by various conflicting concepts, influenced by the different explanations of various experts in their respective fields. I would like to present the image below from Amer Abdullatif Mira (2022) regarding Rizal, Jesus Christ, and wearing a T-shirt with mirrored glasses.



Figure 1: Juan Banal by Amer Abdullatif Mira

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The image above from Amer Abdullatif Mira (2022) regarding Rizal, Jesus Christ, and wearing a T-shirt with mirrored glasses. Mira (2022) described it as a colorful yet intricate daily life of the emerging generation of Filipinos. According to him, its head is Rizal, and its body is Christ. It cannot be denied that it does not know itself, just like not recognizing its own head or body. It's a sign that commercialized thinking quickly prevails.

Without scrutiny, content with what can be seen on television, even if it doesn't know the truth or if it's just a street story. Rarely questioning and just following the image without understanding its significance. Not seeking other ways to examine it because for him, the prevailing interpretation of parents and the church is enough.

But even so, Juan Banal said he is patriotic because of the three stars on his T-shirt. Wearing a T-shirt with three stars and a yellow sun imprint is now considered a representation of the entire country. Juan Banal reflects the totality of the identity of the current Filipino. The experiences of the modern Indio continue to evolve in the present time. These are part of the process of progress and change in society, culture, and beliefs. It is important to value and respect these experiences, encouraging equal opportunities and recognition for all modern Indios in society. Lastly, this allows for the recognition of the various experiences of modern Indios and the need to address and respond to the issues they face in the present time.

5. Conclusion

In inference, the indie film "Pugon: Reflecting the Experiences of the Modern Indio in the Current Formulation of Philippine Society" stands as a poignant testimony to the power of cinema in capturing and portraying the intricate narratives of the modern Indio amidst the evolving landscape of Philippine society. Through its portrayal of personal struggles, aspirations, and societal challenges, the film not only sheds light on the complexities of contemporary Indio identity but also serves as a catalyst for broader discussions on cultural heritage, societal reform, and the quest for social justice.

As highlighted by Aor and Iorember (2021), language serves as a powerful conduit for expressing culture and advocating for change. Just as language is instrumental in voicing the cultural practices of the Tiv people, the narratives depicted in "Pugon" similarly underscore the importance of cultural expression in addressing oppression and advocating for reform in modern times. By amplifying the voices and experiences of the Indios through the medium of film, "Pugon" contributes to a greater understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized communities and prompts audiences to reflect on the need for societal transformation.

In essence, "Pugon" not only celebrates the resilience and spirit of the modern Indio but also underscores the critical role of cinema as a tool for social commentary and cultural preservation. As we navigate the complexities of contemporary Philippine society, films like "Pugon" serve as invaluable reminders of the power of storytelling in effecting positive change and fostering empathy and understanding across diverse cultural landscapes.

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