

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Region in Motion in the Road Movie *Patay na si Hesus* (2016)

Mary Anne D.C. Mallari  
University of Santo Tomas  
anne.mallari608@gmail.com

**Abstract**

Utilizing the theories of Bakhtin's dialogism, Hall's cultural identity, and Giddens's globalization, this article analyzes the Cebuano regional road movie *Patay na si Hesus* (2016). The road film genre reveals that the Philippine regions have a diverse identity, as shown in the image of the regional landscapes and unconventional characters. The use of camera techniques such as the traveling shot and other related styles reveals a dialogue among the diverse cultures of the regions. Furthermore, the image of the automobile in road movies and its mobility also illustrate that the regions combine an image of tradition and modernity as they constantly change because of globalization. Ultimately, this essay affirms that understanding the existence of cultural diversity in the regions is also a means of comprehending their complex identities.

**Keywords:** regional cinema, film studies, mobility, globalization

An offshoot of the travel film, the road movie is described as a genre that highlights "the imagery and activity of the car (or motorcycle) as the foundation of the narrative" (Laderman 13). Initially emerging as a Hollywood genre, this film explores themes of personal freedom and identity and illustrates "an embrace of the journey as a means of a cultural critique" (Laderman 1). These concepts from Laderman's seminal study specifically extract its definition of the genre in the context of its Western (specifically Hollywood and European) examples, but other films from World cinema that were produced later than Laderman's study (such as the Latin American modern classics

*The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Y Tu Mama Tambien*) prove that the road movie is effective in introducing the audience into the discourses specific to the national contexts in which it is written and produced.

There are some notable studies that define the conventions of the road film, but most of them visualize these characteristics in terms of Hollywood cinema. A tradition often mentioned is the image of automobiles primarily providing the mobility of the characters in the film. Laderman states that in a road movie, "the privileged vehicle is the automobile" since it is the most popular mode of transportation in the postwar era, although other popular road movies

employ other vehicles such as buses or even bicycles (13). Cohan and Hark explain this prevalent image of automobiles, saying that this figure “has much to do with representing modernity, its historical achievements as well as its social problems, as it does with reiterating masculinist fantasies of escape and liberation” (3). Cohan and Hark’s ideas show that modernity is correlated with mobility which is made possible by traveling on board the automobile. Furthermore, the mobility of the characters in a road film should not only be a temporary activity but rather an action that “leads the characters outside their daily environment, out of their comfort zone” (Lie 11). These generic conventions, mostly anchored in the Western cinematic examples, concentrate on the relationship between an individual and the changing industrial society, with other pertinent topics to this discourse remaining secondary themes.

Moreover, since the above definitions of the road film all contextualize the genre’s characteristics using its Hollywood counterparts, these descriptions may be quite limiting whenever films beyond the Western studios are analyzed. As seen in the arguments of the scholars mentioned above, the driving force of the road movie underscores the interaction of modernity and identity without noting the cultural nuances that the genre may have once it is adapted into World Cinema. In their study of Latin American road films, Garibotto and Pérez critiqued this tendency to contextualize the road film in relation to Hollywood productions, saying that “the uncritical assumption that Latin American films are variations of US conventions neglects the specific features of the road movie in the region, and thereby reinforces an ethnocentric, subalterning perspective” (6–7). This argument justifies that the analysis of the road film by using Western, especially Hollywood movies gives a limited space for the distinctive qualities and thematic and aesthetic variations that non-Western productions embody in their versions of road films.

In Philippine cinema, there are already several films that incorporate the styles of road films, all of which show convergences and differences from the ascribed characteristics of American road films. In most of these films, the image of the automobile or any other similar mode of transportation such as the motorcycle or a bus, among other vehicles, is not ubiquitous but rather a fleeting, almost spectral metaphor that drives the narrative, which is a slight difference from the

characteristics of the Western road films previously mentioned. For example, the mainstream dramedy film *Trip* (2001), which is an obvious response to the slew of American teen flicks in the early 2000s, uses the image of the automobile to reflect the journey of the protagonists from being adolescents to mature young adults. In *Trip*, a group of friends’ road trip for the college break becomes an initiation to maturity as truths are revealed about their families, friends, and even themselves. *Trip* illustrates the conventional formula as the characters search for freedom and personal identity, strikingly similar to the characteristics of the American road film. On the other hand, Emerson Reyes’s independent film *MNL 143* (2012) takes a different turn with its themes by incorporating a mixture of personal and societal topics through the story of an FX driver named Ramil (Allan Paule), who hopes that his ex-wife will be his passenger before he leaves to work in the Middle East. The film’s plot serves as a snapshot of the city commute as it features some snippets of the passengers’ lives when they board the vehicle, contributing to the overarching narrative of Ramil, his quest for closure, and his aspiration to have a better job abroad. Although the story focuses more on the personal tribulations of the character wishing to meet and settle his issues with his former lover, the film subtly shows the challenging commute Filipinos have to go through to get to work but does not manage to sustain this important theme in a deeper context. Moreover, Antonette Jadaone’s *Love You to the Stars and Back* (2017) uses the road trip formula to tell the story of two young strangers who accidentally meet on their journey with different goals in mind—while Mika (Julia Barretto) aims to find aliens, Caloy (Joshua Garcia) plans to meet his estranged father. The two protagonists’ mobility metaphorically refers to their movement to overcome resentment towards their families, which also ultimately relates to their journey into adulthood. The romantic plot is also used in Neriza Picadizo’s *Requited* (2017) to tell the story of Matt (Jake Cuenca) and Sam (Anna Luna) as they traverse a bike trail from the busy streets of Manila to the rugged terrain of Mount Pinatubo. Although a mixture of independent and mainstream productions, these examples focus on characters in their search for their identities rather than overtly elaborating on cultural aspects that may strengthen and broaden the meaning of the themes to wider and more relevant societal discussions. Furthermore, most of these

films reflect the traits of the Hollywood road films' characters to have "a burning need to withdraw from culture, sometimes from humanity itself" (Laderman 18) because of their protagonists' literal journey from congested cities to pastoral communities. This expedition to an unknown territory also propels them on their passage to self-discovery.

A more nuanced adaptation of the road film genre is seen in *Patay na si Jesus* (2016), a regional film directed by Victor Villanueva, with its script written by Patrick Tabada. *Patay na si Jesus*'s narrative revolves around a Cebuano family led by its matriarch Iyay (Jacklyn Jose), and her grown children—the youngest, Jay (Melde Montañez), a lazy bum who skipped his third take of the board exam because he was too afraid to fail again; Iyay's only daughter, Jude (Chai Fonacier), a transgender whom his female lover left for another woman; and the eldest, Hubert (Paul Vincent Viado), Iyay's shrewd son who has Down syndrome. Hudas, their pet shih tzu, whom they treat as a close family member, completes the unconventional family. Their journey starts when Iyay receives news that her estranged husband Jesus died, urging them to travel using their old, red mini-van from Cebu to their former home in Dumaguete. The dark premise is made lighter with comedic antics as the protagonists meet their adventures along the way and try to come to terms with Linda (Olive Nieto) and her children, the other family Jesus has chosen. Compared to the previously-mentioned road movies which underscore the protagonists' search for their own identities to achieve self-actualization, *Patay na si Jesus* transcends that limitation by emphasizing the nuances of regional landscapes and experiences in its narrative and visuals. By using the road film genre and related camera techniques, *Patay na si Jesus* illustrates the heterogeneous nature of the regional landscapes and the lived social realities of their people. Through the extensive use of the traveling shot, the film maps out the junctures of regional space as the camera follows the movement of the vehicle. The aerial shot complements the traveling shot, reinforcing the crossroads of connection through the snapshots of the visual cartographies of regional spaces. The traveling and aerial shots uncover that the cities of Cebu and Dumaguete consist of various types of landscapes that share similarities with each other as well as with the metropolitan centers in the capital. Likewise, the existence of rural communities within these

areas affirms the complex development of regional landscapes because of globalization, which Giddens defines as the "intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (64). Furthermore, since the developments brought about by globalization are uneven, with some areas having more efficient physical and technological networks than others, the development of the regions becomes more complex and multidimensional.

The complexity brought by globalization is also translated into the social experiences of the people, which the film illustrates through its characters. *Patay na si Jesus* shows that the open-minded and progressive way in which the characters confront timely issues such as challenging gender norms and the notion of disability is an indication that the ideology attached to the regions is not necessarily parochial nor conservative, which is a misleading stereotype attached to them.

The images of diversity in regional landscapes and experiences dialogue with each other and produce a more heterogeneous yet harmonious representation of the regions that reinforce the decentralization of culture from the center to the peripheries. The interaction of these images of diversity is essential to understand that the regions are never homogeneous, but rather, dynamic and ever-changing. In the words of Bakhtin, "the dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse" (*Dialogic Imagination* 275), showing that recognizing diversity in all aspects of analysis (in this case, interpreting the regions) leads to viewpoints that accept varied ideologies which are essential especially in today's changing society. The aesthetics of the road genre and the themes of the film illuminate the dialogue of the cultural nuances in the regions, and reveal that regional cultural identity is dynamic as it interacts with the changes brought about by globalization and modernity. As Stuart Hall notes, "we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (232). The dynamic notion of regional identity is an essential argument that interrogates the homogeneous concept of national identity that only acknowledges social and cultural representations from the center and disregards the voices of the peripheries.

With *Patay na si Hesus* as the object of study, this essay explores how the road movie genre and its use of its aesthetic conventions delineate the dialogue of influences in the regional landscapes constantly shaped by globalization. These multifaceted aspects of the regions are reflected in two main points of the film—first, by featuring the different landscapes of Cebu and Dumaguete, and second, by emphasizing the social lives of an unconventional Filipino family (Figure 1). How do the aesthetics of the road film reflect the complexity of regional landscapes and the people's social experiences? What do these visual and thematic representations highlighted in *Patay na si Hesus* contribute to the understanding of the diversity of the regions?

### Regional Films in the Globalized Society

Filmmakers from the regions have produced films since the introduction of the film apparatus in the Philippines, with Iloilo and Cebu as two of the most productive places outside of Manila when it comes to early film production (Deocampo 236). In different localities, from the northern region of Mountain province to the southern locality of Mindanao, filmmaking was used for “novelty entertainment, preaching God’s word, documenting native life, or making profit (Deocampo 236). As seen in these examples, regional filmmakers already considered film a useful and important art form even though the technologies used to create films were quite expensive.

Nowadays, digital technology has made filmmaking in the regions more productive since it is relatively easier and cheaper to access cameras and other forms of film technology. In addition, these gadgets used for film production are not only exclusively available as stand-alone technologies but are already incorporated into common devices such as mobile phones or laptops, making it easier for artists to create and edit their works. The extensive use of the Internet also contributed to the growth of digital films from the regions since movies may be released through *Neflix*, *Vimeo*, *YouTube*, or other related platforms. The number of festivals that exhibit these films is also increasing, and since the pandemic, some of these events and film screenings were made available online because of the changing quarantine classifications.

The availability of regional films on an international scale shows how globalization breaks down the homogenization of culture from the center and how diverse cultures from the peripheries are recognized. Accentuating the plurality in a nation is a crucial juncture in a society that often only recognizes traditions and practices from the center, translating to the homogenization of cultural influences. Homogenization seeps into the practice of cinematic production and consumption from other broader societal aspects. The proclamation of Filipino as a national language, which is “primarily based in a regional language called Tagalog” is an example (Tan 138). Film scholar Katrina Ross Tan mentions that a similar case is observed in the production and



Fig. 1. The unconventional family in Victor Villanueva’s road film, *Patay na si Hesus*. T-Rex Entertainment, QCinema International Film Festival, Epicmedia and Above the Line, 2016.



consumption of Filipino films since “Tagalog cinema has dominated the film industry” (Tan 141). Tan’s statement explains that regional films dismantle the homogenization of Manila-centric film narratives because they feature the diverse culture of the regions as a fundamental aspect of the narrative and not just merely giving them a token representation in the film. Moreover, in regional cinema, “the directors offer their interpretation of social realities, past and present” (Tan 142), which exhibits that regional films thoroughly engage with specific cultures and experiences. This point further expresses that the history and evolution of the regions and their people’s experiences are different and more complex than the misleading representations about the regions in most Manila-centric films.

Another manner of establishing the regional films’ connection with their heritage is the use of regional languages, which acknowledges the plural identity of the nation. Apart from showcasing the cultures of the regions, the portrayal of the characters from the regions and speaking their native regional languages are ways of understanding the heterogeneity of the nation. Paul Grant establishes a crucial argument about acknowledging the importance of language in cinema, saying that “the national literature can be a more robust one that in turn gives voice to or is expressive of the multiplicity of languages, experiences and cultures in a given country” (57). Taking his cue from National Artist Resil Mojares’s claim regarding vernacular literature, regional cinema also mirrors the diverse socio-political landscape as well as the cultural and economic complexity of the nation. Such portrayal is far from the stereotypical renderings of characters and experiences often found in Manila-centric films, especially those which give the regions a token representation.

On the other hand, while the use of regional languages in cinema links films with cultural heritage, the representation of landscapes highlights globalization’s influences on the region’s present and investigates how these changes can ultimately affect its future. In this regard, the contestable notion of rural landscapes in films set in the regions is studied by Patrick Campos. Citing the theoretical concepts of Yi Fu Tuan and Tim Cresswell, Campos states that “if place is value-laden and constituted by emotional attachment, then it is always contested space” (“Rural” 350). Campos’s argument shows that rural landscapes, contrary to their stereotypical representations in some films, exhibit various power dynamics that constantly

redefine their qualities and the experiences of the people. Campos’s argument also supports Raymond Williams’s idea to see beyond the dichotomous comparisons of the urban and the rural and “go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis” (Williams 297).

The insistence on abiding by binary, rigid, and often stereotypical images of the rural and the urban often results in a myopic notion of the regions, which is discussed in Patrick Campos’s article, “Allegories of Scale,” where he studies three films about *Mindanao* (Brillante Mendoza’s *Mindanao* (2019), Lav Diaz’s *Ang Panahon ng Halimaw*, (2018) and Bagane Fiola’s *Baboy Halas* (2016)) and how these works perceive the region. Using the category of scale to analyze how these filmmakers “construct a metaphor of society, how they bind and unbind time, spaces, and subjects to represent Mindanao and its people” (Campos, “Allegories”), Campos concludes that of all the three films, Mendoza’s work discusses the region with a narrow viewpoint, and applies a “risky project of scaling national cinema from an aerial view that obfuscates the network scalar projects on the ground” (“Allegories”). This narrow portrayal of Mindanao in Mendoza’s film shows that his work has historical inaccuracies and does not focus on depicting cultural nuances in exchange for perpetuating biased viewpoints about the region.

These articles mentioned above, which focus on the need to acknowledge and understand the regions’ heterogeneity and create more nuanced representations, emphasize that different aspects of the regional landscapes dialogue with each other. The nuanced examination of the complex influences of heritage and globalization within a region through constant dialogues with one another is similar to the theoretical underpinning of the Bakhtinian dialogism, in which Bakhtin states that “we must deal with the life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-linguaged world” (*Dialogic Imagination* 275). Bakhtin’s statement already acknowledges the innate diversity within different regions and localities and compels the need to comprehend how these heterogeneous cultural identities and experiences dialogue with one another. As Spivak emphasizes, following the approach of Bakhtinian dialogism, “landscape is loud with dialogues, with storylines that connect a place and its dwellers” (17). Spivak’s idea implies that in order to understand the development

of a regional landscape, one must study not only its physical transformations but also the social experiences of its people. The constant interaction of the people with the changes in their landscapes and the analysis of how factors in the modern world influence both aspects determine the dynamic cultural identity of a region. The dialogue among these different players in a society fosters the heterogeneous notion of cultural identity, which, as Hall mentions, is “a matter of becoming as well as ‘being’” (233). Cultural identities are “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (Hall 234), which exhibits its dynamic and not static nature.

The image of the moving vehicle in a road film is a fitting metaphor that expounds on the heterogeneity of regional identity also connected to the notion of polyphony in Bakhtinian dialogism. As Bakhtin explains, “the essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent” (*Problems* 21). This idea is reflected in *Patay na si Hesus* in such a way that the film explores the various aspects that influences the cultural identities of the regions. Despite differences, the cultural identities still produce a diverse yet harmonious image of the regions, and ultimately, the nation.

The next three parts of the essay will now discuss the film *Patay na si Hesus* in terms of how the road movie portrays the dialogue of the heterogenous, polyphonic voices of the regions, specifically through its camera work. Through the analysis of the film’s visual representation of regional landscapes, this paper shows that the road film’s aesthetics visualize Cebu and Dumaguete as a mixture of both rural and urban centers. Moreover, the existence of various architectural structures from different Philippine historical periods also gives a glimpse of the polyphonic cultural identity of the regional landscapes. In addition, the characterization in the film highlights that the changes occurring in the regional landscapes dialogue with the lives led by its characters, producing more nuanced depictions of social experiences deviating from the generic representations of the regions in other film narratives. The female characters in *Patay na si Hesus* exude a powerful image of women as seen through Iyay, who raised her children on her own and separated from her philandering husband, and Lucy, Iyay’s sister who disrupts the conventional image of the religious clergy. On the other hand, gender norms are further interrogated through Jay,

whose qualities challenge the traditional notions of masculinity by being characterized as a cowardly loafer perpetually dependent on his family in terms of financial and emotional needs; and Jude, a transman who asserts his identity despite of the ambivalence of others around him. Meanwhile, Iyay’s eldest son, Hubert, who has Down syndrome, is characterized as an independent young man who can effortlessly communicate with others, an image different from the discriminated or even invisible figure of disability in cinematic representations. These two points of visual representations of landscapes and characters will be further clarified in the article through the analysis of specific scenes that highlight these two aspects in the film by means of the road film’s camera aesthetics.

In its conclusion, this article will interrogate how the dialogue of the images of the regional landscapes and the social experiences of their people through the road film emphasizes the dynamic cultural identity of the regions essential in recognizing the diversity of a nation and understanding the voices of the peripheries.

### **Mobility and Change in the Regional Landscapes**

*Patay na si Hesus* opens with an old, red mini-van parking in an open space. Without revealing her complete profile, Iyay gets out of the van and starts preparing food with her staff, revealing that the vehicle is a mobile canteen. As the people flock to eat, a customer buys another serving of adobo, to which Iyay’s partner Domeng (Publio Briones) tells him that they have run out of Visayan *adobo*, but they do have the Tagalog kind, just like Iyay. The opening scene hints at the concept of mobility by pointing out that Iyay is a local migrant who is originally from Luzon. This detail is essential since it sets up the theme of the entire film to refer to the notion of mobility and change not only in the literal sense as what is illustrated through the genre, but also in the changes that can be seen in the regional landscapes through the different scenes in the film. As Cresswell and Dixon affirm, mobility in film “points out to the transformation and even dissolution of key social institutions such as family and home, flag and country, and even civilization and humanity” (11).

Cresswell and Dixon’s explanation of the metaphorical significance of mobility can also be connected with the features of the road film, as seen in



Fig. 2. The family's red van driving along the business district of Cebu City.

*Patay na si Jesus* which portrays the transformation of the regional landscapes through various camera techniques. In the first few scenes of the film where it pays attention to the portrayal of the characters, a tracking shot is used to feature Jude (Chai Fonacier) walking home. The tracking shot is “more ‘grounded’ and slow, related to running or walking” (Laderman 15), and in this particular scene, it is used to feature a facet of Cebu City as an urban locality. Jude walks with the busy streets of Cebu as his backdrop—a colorful local Cebu jeepney passing by behind him and a construction of a new building just nearby their home—with the camera following him until he gets home. This scene establishes Cebu as no different from Manila, even if it is located in the peripheries. To further emphasize this cosmopolitan vibe of Cebu, Jude is characterized as a call center agent, a career associated with those working in developed cities such as Makati, Pasig, or Taguig. This specific detail shows that cities outside the metropolitan Manila are as developed as those in the center and suggests that the peripheral cities outside Luzon are very similar. Hence, the implication of Cebu City as a bustling metropolis where commercial industries thrive, the inclusion of the image of heavy traffic experienced by the Cebuanos in the region's capital city, and the representation of a transman in a seemingly conservative locality blur the line between the center and the periphery. These images are different from the extremely polar depictions of a regional landscape as either a tourist paradise or a less commercial locality, highlighting the effect of globalization, which is also seen as “a process of uneven development that fragments as it coordinates”

(Giddens 175).

Meanwhile, another technique employed to highlight the evolving landscapes in the regions is the traveling shot. According to Laderman, this technique slightly differs from the tracking shot in such a way that the traveling shot is “usually located with the driver, or the car itself,” and is often accompanied by the aerial shot (15). The effect of the traveling shot, especially when framed in a way that it shows on screen the different routes that the vehicle travels in a road film, is a visual cartography exhibiting the varied landscapes in film's setting. *Patay na si Jesus* exemplifies this effect in several scenes. For instance, in the exposition where the family initially embarks on their journey from Cebu City to Dumaguete, the film features a combination of shots following the characters' red van in different areas in Cebu City. A traveling shot follows the red van traversing the busy streets of Cebu City and occasionally being stuck in a middle of a gridlock, revealing that the city has the same traffic problem as Manila. A wide shot of the vehicle cruising along the same area, with its skyscrapers and commercial establishments in the background, follows the vehicle as it drives through the city's cramped streets and tunnel roads. This scene implies the evolution of the city into a highly-developed metropolis comparable to the central business districts in Manila (Figure 2).

On the other hand, as the family's journey continues to Carcar City in Cebu and makes a quick stop at a gasoline station and its nearby convenience store, *Patay na si Jesus* includes product placements that are also distinctively Cebuano in nature—Mia (Precious Miel Espinoza) grabs a box of a biscuit brand exclusive

in Liloan, Cebu, and Jay buys bread from a famous Cebuano bakery. In the same manner, the characters' stopover in Carcar City market is also embellished with a subtle promotional detail as they are greeted by locals offering them their famous delicacies *chicharon* (pork rind) and *lechon*. These scenes, although intended to promote the film's sponsors, may be considered as a cultural detail since the products dealt with in the narrative of the film are exclusively Cebuano. These details also exhibit the commercialism present in the locality of Carcar, indicating its rapid development as a city.

This representation of the city as a lucrative site of commercialism transitions into another depiction of the regional landscapes. As the family continues their journey, the busy streets and bustling marketplace are replaced with wide grasslands. Here, a wide shot of a serene green field is shown as Jay and Jude engage in a brief roughhousing since Jay attempts to escape the family trip and return to Cebu City. In these scenes, viewers can see a coexistence of two contradictory aspects—the more cosmopolitan urban area as seen in the busy marketplace of Carcar and the film's promotion of Cebuano commercial industries, contrasting the more serene rural areas existing within the same locality.

Featuring the architectural structures in the regions also emphasizes the heterogeneity of cultural influences. As the family travels to Carcar, the film features a fleeting traveling shot that gives a glimpse of the San Vicente Ferrer Chapel of Pitalo in the San Fernando, Cebu. The colors of vibrant red and gold outlining the windows, entrances and designs of the church against its white façade are exclusively striking although this scene is just brief. The chapel was ordered to be built by a devotee of San Vicente Ferrer in 1925 (Mayol), and withstood the test of time, including World War II. Meanwhile, as the family decides to meet Iyay's sister, a quirky nun named Lucy (Angelina Kanapi), the family stops by the Simala Shrine in Sibonga, Cebu. Through a wide shot, the film reveals the entirety of the shrine while the characters stand in awe. From this angle, Simala appears like a castle in a fairytale, but it is a shrine built before the dawn of the new millennium in 1998 by the Marian Monks from Pampanga ("Simala Parish Church"). The origin of the shrine similarly implies the heterogeneity of culture, since the religious people from the northern part of the Philippines built the majestic shrine in the

Visayas region. In addition, those who do not know the origin of the shrine may think that it is a commercial establishment, as reflected through the comment of the innocent child Mia, who quips, "Is there a roller coaster inside?" Mia's admiration of the magnificence of Simala shows a dissonant perception of what she thinks the structure is and what it is in reality, hinting at the eclectic nature of the shrine's architectural style. Moreover, the pointed arches in the design of Simala are gothic, a popular European architectural design. The overlapping characteristics and conditions in which the monastery was built highlight the dialogue of both Western and local influences, further emphasizing the regions' heterogenous cultural identity.

On the other hand, architectural structures and scenic spots featured in the neighboring Dumaguete landscape are similar to those in Cebu. During the family's travel to Dumaguete, the film shows a brief traveling shot displaying Silliman University which is built during the American era in Philippine history. In another scene, the viewers are given a glance of the Dumaguete Cathedral belfry, a historical landmark built during the Spanish period, through a wide shot of the city. Moreover, Jay, Jude, and Hubert stroll on the famous Rizal Boulevard, a tourist spot named after the Philippine national hero, was built during the American period in 1916 (Yap), while they ruminate about their resentment towards their father, and find closure in their relationship by granting him forgiveness. These architectural forms illustrate that the cities of Cebu and Dumaguete share similar characteristics in terms of historical influences, as seen through the predominantly historical landmarks built during the Spanish and American periods. Moreover, both cities are rapidly developing localities in the Visayas region—Cebu City is a known commercial hub, while Dumaguete City is known as the center of education because of its world-class universities outside the nation's capital. Visually mapping out these spatial structures reflects the diverse cultural interactions in these two neighboring cities while also emphasizing how these landmarks reflect the distinct cultural heritage of the Visayas region in modern times.

*Patay na si Hesus* also uses these architectural structures to subtly describe the protagonists' equally diverse nature. With a mixture of traveling and wide shots, the camera follows the family's red van home as it passes along the Nuestra Señora del Patrocinio de Maria Parish Church, more popularly known by



the locals as Boljoon Church, a national historical landmark that the Augustinian friars recognized as a local parish in 1690 (Baroña). By incorporating a visual effect, the angelic statue on its entrance arch appears to almost falling, illustrating the figure as crooked. Although this detail is meant to initiate a comedic idea, it also reinforces the protagonists deviating from the traditional image of a Filipino family, as seen in the appearance of the statues losing their symmetry.

In this regard, *Patay na si Hesus* also explores the protagonists' eccentric characterization and connects this to the notion of dynamic cultural identities elaborated through the conventions of the road film genre. Apart from the film reflecting the various influences in the regional landscape, it also projects how the people's social experiences dialogue with the changes in modern times. This dialogue lets the characters deviate from the stereotypical notion of parochiality attached to the regions and instead portrays these experiences as nuanced, as seen in the discussion in the next section.

### Oddball characters

The dark comedic premise of *Patay na si Hesus* is an important factor that propels the characters to come to terms with their emotions concerning their family relationships. However, the complex characterization of protagonists whose qualities make subtle commentaries on issues of gender norms and disability in modern society contributes to creating the thematic substance of the film. *Patay na si Hesus* uses traditional comedic devices, ranging from slapstick to puns, but its characters are far from stereotypical. The characters in the movie are contrary to Andrew Stott's assertion that "comic characterization is usually subordinate to the demands of plot, and therefore more effectively realized with stereotypes and one-dimensional characters than anything approaching the realistic portrayal of human emotions" (40). *Patay na si Hesus* effectively incorporated a mixture of unconventional characters whose conflicts closely resemble the realities in modern-day society, which largely contributes to the comedy of the film.

The film visually establishes characterization through close-up and medium shots focusing on the protagonists' facial expressions and actions, revealing how they navigate their conflicts as an unconventional

family. Since most of the film takes place inside the vehicle while the family is traveling, some of these close-ups are complemented by the traveling shot, showing how the images of the protagonists are in dialogue with one another. In addition, the film's engagement of the characters in their own personal issues and the conflict they have with the family patriarch shows how they challenge existing notions about social issues such as gender norms and disability. Discussing the relevant problems concerning these topics in *Patay na si Hesus* is essential since doing so reveals the heterogeneity and complexity of regional experiences.

The protagonists' characterization mainly critiques two focal issues in the film—gender norms and disability. Iyay and Lucy interrogate the notion of the traditional woman through their eccentric personalities. Iyay serves as the head of the family when her unfaithful husband leaves them for another woman, while Lucy's comedic characterization as a nun challenges the repressive conventions of society. Meanwhile, Jay's characterization as a cowardly loafer dependent on the auspices of his mother challenges the traditional image of machismo. Moreover, Jude asserting himself as a transman and his relationship with his lesbian lover depicts the nuances by which these gendered identifications see themselves in their romantic relationships. Lastly, the portrayal of disability through the character of Hubert, who has Down syndrome, challenges the way persons with disabilities are depicted in films. The normalized manner in which the other characters treat Hubert reinforces the visibility of the disabled body, an issue that should be addressed in these changing times. The dialogue of these diverse situations that these characters experience asserts the multidimensionality of the regions, which reinforces the notion of the constantly changing nature of regional identity.

### Unconventional women

First, the film critiques the traditional concept of a family, which is often defined in terms of patriarchy, primarily through the character of Iyay. While the usual type of family is expected to be led by a father who works to provide financial support and a mother who takes care of the children, the family in *Patay na si Hesus* disregards these conventions. Iyay takes the role of being both the mother and the father in the family

by managing her own business to sustain the needs of the household and providing emotional support to her children. Through Iyay, we can see that women are given a more egalitarian role in society—while working to provide for the family financially, she also manages the household. These two roles are not exclusive of one another. However, the film does not deny the restrictions imposed by patriarchy, as seen in the pervading grudge Iyay and her children hold against Jesus. It is also hinted in the film that Jesus is the sole provider of his new family with Linda, who expresses worry about his sudden death.

Iyay's characterization shows how she challenges and defies patriarchal conventions. In the film's opening, much emphasis was given to featuring the facial expression of Iyay while at work on her mobile canteen. Her anger is exhibited in her preparation of the food, but her poker-faced expression emphasized through a close-up indicates that she is brooding over a thought. She carries on with her neutral countenance when Domeng asks her what was wrong. Iyay answers in the same deadpan look that Jesus is already dead. A similar reaction is observed in a later scene where she tells her children that their father is dead. As Iyay tells her children the news, a medium close-up of her calm, almost expressionless face accompanies the scene, and Jay dismisses the information with more ironic triviality. The characters' dismissive reaction to the patriarch's death and the absence of his figure in most of the film show that the characters barely cared about him anymore. This fact reinforces the image of Iyay as a strong woman who assumes the role of the head of the family. Iyay's powerful stance is further reflected in the fact that almost all throughout their journey to Jesus's wake, Iyay drives their mini-van, signifying that she is in charge of her own life and her family.

Another image that challenges the stereotypical notion of women is done through the parody of the clergy through the image of Iyay's sister, the repressed nun Lucy. Parody is a comedy that "includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice" (Dentith 9). In a parodic imitation, irony is an important factor that creates comedy, and its irony may be "playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive" (Hutcheon 32). The ironic characterization of Lucy is parodic because of its criticism of the repressive norms in society, one of which is seen in the context of religion. The actions

and jokes of Lucy, such as emulating stigmata using a ketchup packet, getting naked in the middle of the field, abandoning her calling as a nun, and eloping with a stranger riding a motorcycle, emphasize her need to break free from a repressive system. The irreverence and irony of her actions are not attacking the ways of the church but instead tackle the repressiveness and coercion of abiding with the conventional.

The characterization of both Iyay and Lucy illustrates what Kathleen Karlyn describes as 'unruly' women who "use laughter to transform suffering into an active response to circumstances they find unjust, painful, or simply ridiculous. For them, laughter is a political weapon that can be wielded to protect themselves and those they care about" (20). In the film, the stern yet humorous way that Iyay deals with her children is a defense against Jesus abandoning her and her family. Meanwhile, Lucy's humor becomes a response to protect her freedom and desire for individuality, which were deprived of her as a clergy expected to act and follow in accordance with set rules. Both women deviate from the conventions expected of them and refuse to be undermined by patriarchal ideologies (Iyay is free from her marriage with Jesus, and Lucy liberated herself from Catholic ways), making them progressive constructions of female identities that disrupt the notion of a strict patriarchal ideology attached to the peripheries.

### *Varied Masculinities*

Meanwhile, the traditional image of masculinity is also challenged in the film through the characterization of Iyay's youngest son, Jay. By utilizing close-up and medium close-ups of his facial expressions and the framing of his body on the screen, the film reveals that he does not exude the conventional qualities of machismo, whether physically or emotionally. This is an important juncture in the discussion of masculinities since, as Connell emphasizes, "masculinities come into existence at particular times and places, and are always subject to change" (185). Discussing the different forms of masculinity creates a space for varied definitions and not simply opting for a rigid representation of men imposed by patriarchal control. For example, in an initial scene where Jay was working out in a gym, several close-up shots of macho male bodies are framed on the screen while exercising, then cutting to an image of Jay's potbelly while he uses a small dumbbell. Because of his appearance, some

friends insult him that he is pregnant. Later on, the film reveals that Jay is a coward since he is ambivalent about taking responsibility for his pregnant girlfriend, and he skipped taking the board exam again, which he has already taken twice. Jay's characterization, while emphasizing that he is a weakling, contrary to the traditional image of masculinity imposed by the patriarchal society, also highlights the strength of Iyay's mother as a woman because he is dependent on her. Furthermore, the film interrogates the gender norms imposed on men in a small detail in the movie. In the same scene in the gym, Jay's friends, whose chiseled physiques and tattooed arms exude machismo, hold hands as they exit the scene, implying that they are lovers. This crucial detail leads to the depiction of nuances of gender identities in the film.

### ***Transgender and lesbian identities***

A crucial turn that the film takes regarding the discussion of gender identities is made through the characterization of Jude, a transman who has a relationship with Mary (Sheenly Gener), a lesbian. In the film, Jude makes it a point to correct others whenever he is referred to as a woman or a lesbian and says that he is a man, indicating that he is a transgendered subject, which Prosser defines as a "subject who crosses gender boundaries" (5). The transgender is different from a transsexual subject, who undergoes "a lengthy, formalized, and normally substantive transition: a correlated set of corporeal, psychic, and social changes" (Prosser 4). As a transman, Jude cross-identifies with the opposite sex but does not feel the need to undergo a corporeal transition (which he also mentions later in the film), illustrating Halberstam's definition of transgenderism as "a term of relationality; it describes not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds" (49).

Jude's characterization in the film is featured through several close-ups and medium shots focusing on his facial and bodily features. In its first few minutes, the film shows an image of Iyay's family photos, including a college graduation photo of Jude before being a transman. This scene cuts again to the present-day Jude spending time with Hubert and watching the film *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* by Aureus Solito, which functions as an intertextual material in the movie. *Ang Pagdadalaga* narrates the story of a young gay boy whose family readily accepts him and

his sexuality, which is similar to Jude's relationship with his own family in Villanueva's film.

Specific details which explain the ambivalent reaction of society regarding Jude's transgenderism are included in the film. In an initial scene that establishes Jude's close relationship with his lover's daughter Mia, Jude receives a disapproving stare from other parents as he fetches the child, who was dressed as Antonio Luna during a school program. In a scene where the family meets Lucy, Lucy initially refuses to acknowledge Jude's presence and repeatedly asks, "Nasaan na si Judith Marie?" (Where is Judith Marie?), which was Jude's name before he became a transman. Lucy's refusal to acknowledge Jude's presence and gender identity as a man hints at the conservatism of the clergy regarding issues of homosexuality.

Another nuance depicted in the film is seen when Jude discovers that his partner is cheating on him and meets the lover himself. In a serendipitous meeting, Jude sees Mary with another woman, Sarah (Therese Villarante), a femme lesbian, "the woman whose body in no way presents itself to the straight world as different or deviant" (Creed 113). In a tension-filled conversation, Sarah taunts Jude when he declares that he is Mary's boyfriend, insinuating that Mary is not into transgenders. Mary then talks to Jude after this encounter, and in his utter desperation, Jude grabs Mary's lipstick and puts it on, saying that he can be a femme too. However, Mary stops him from doing so and tells him that being a femme is not who he is.

This sequence depicting the relationship of Jude, Mary, and Sarah elaborates the complexity of gender identification, which is not commonly explored with enough sensitivity in some Philippine cinematic works. Moreover, contrary to the trope employed in road movies that usually feature characters who are still in the process of discovering their identities, Jude's characterization shows that he is sure of himself and his sexuality. In addition, the liberal way in which the film deals with the discourse of sexuality veers from the strictly patriarchal values often attached to regional experiences, especially the rural areas. This shows that regional experiences and ideologies are dynamic according to the changes in the landscape.

### ***Agency and Disability***

Along with challenging gender norms, *Patay na si Hesus* also dismantles the stereotype of disability through the character of Hubert, Iyay's eldest son,

who has Down syndrome. Realistically depicting physical or mental disabilities that do not border on insulting and discriminating representations is still scarce in Philippine cinema. Recent films, such as *Water Lemon* (2015) by Lemuel Lorca, which narrates the story of a protagonist with Asperger's syndrome, and Randolph Longjas' *Star na si Van Damme Stallone* (2016), which focuses on how a young boy with Down syndrome tries to reach his dreams are indications that Philippine cinema has been more open to inclusive representations, but there is still a need to have more films such as these.

*Patay na si Hesus* questions the binary notions of normality and abnormality by affirming the agency of persons with disabilities and refusing to marginalize their capabilities, supporting Wilde's point that comedy is "in a favorable position of questioning notions of normality, abnormality, ideas of difference, and so on" (29). The film does not belittle disability but shows the irony of marginalizing disabled persons. Hubert is the most logical in the family even though he is disabled, as seen from his actions and decisions.

Hubert's agency is portrayed through various close-ups and medium shots, emphasizing his facial expressions and actions. In the film's establishing scenes, Hubert walks toward some neighborhood friends who ask him if he could teach them how to dance. Here, the film highlights Hubert's facial expressions and actions and shows his significant disability. However, this disability contrasts with how Hubert communicates eloquently with others as he shares some tips on dancing. In another scene where the film continues to establish the characterization of the protagonists, Hubert dances with an upbeat tune, and his graceful movements erase the boundaries between the disabled and the abled body, and suggest that the disabled body can perform just as much, and even better. These initial scenes reiterate that disability primarily manifests in a person's physical attributes, but it does not mean that the disabled body is incapable of agency.

Moreover, the comedy surrounding the disabled body in *Patay na si Hesus* lies not on its inability to do so but, more importantly, on its innate capability to accomplish more and to act more rationally than the abled body. While Jude and Jay are adamant in refusing not to go to Dumaguete, Hubert readily agrees and supports his mother to go. Throughout the film, while Jude and Jay are bickering and infuriating Iyay, Hubert calms his mother down. While his family worries about

him and says he cannot commute alone, Hubert, along with the family pet Hudas, sneaks out of the red van and goes to the pier, proving that he is independent. In the wake, he captures a girl's attention through a lively conversation. Hubert's actions contrast the depiction of disability in most films, especially mainstream ones, as a "metaphor for emotional and spiritual deficiency. Unlike normative filmic bodies that literally advance the plot, the disabled body often exists primarily as a body that is unable to do so" (Chivers and Markotić 2). *Patay na si Hesus* challenges the capability of the disabled and the abled bodies by turning the tables around—the disabled body can do as much, if not more, than the abled ones.

### A Dialogue of Voices

The road film is a fitting genre to explore regional diversity and how these differences dialogue harmoniously with one another, creating a more dynamic sense of cultural identity. The tracking, traveling, and aerial shots, which all give a bird's eye view of the different types of landscapes and spatial structures in the film's setting, reveal that the region undergoes a complex development because it is constantly shaped by its history and the various changes brought by globalization and modernity. As seen in the film, the co-existence of the rural and the urban in different localities and the other structures built during the various historical periods show that the regions are always in a state of becoming, and their identity is never static or fixed.

On the other hand, the film's visuals move from the wider traveling shots to the more specific camera angles, such as the medium and close-up shots that highlight the protagonists' characterizations through their facial expressions and actions and reveal the nuances of regional experiences. *Patay na si Hesus* emphasizes that along with the changes occurring in the regional landscapes, the social affairs of the people also evolve. The family, which is traditionally viewed as the basic unit of society, becomes the image that disproves existing misconceptions about the regions because of its unorthodox portrayal. Specific issues such as challenging gender norms and disability become a crucial trajectory to emphasize that regional identity is far from the flat or superficial depictions in some films, especially those which provide token representations of regional settings and cultures. A climactic point of



the discussion on challenging norms is found in the last scene, where the family pet, Hudas, was run over during Jesus's funeral. Instead of expressing anguish for the departed patriarch, the family rushes over to their pet's dead body and grieves while Jesus's hearse and mourners pass solemnly behind them. This scene signifies not only the literal death of the patriarch but the freedom and detachment of the family from patriarchal restrictions, as shown by the death of their beloved pet being a source of a graver concern rather than the death of Jesus.

The dialogue between the images of space and character in the film culminates in the last scene, when the family is about to return home. In the previous scenes, Iyay and her family are always arguing because of their irreconcilable differences. Jay and Jude are always fighting and Iyay is always in a fit of rage while stopping them; Hubert is the pacifier of the group, and his abilities are often underestimated. However, the last scene portrays them in an ironically lighter mood. All dressed in black since they just came home from Jesus's funeral, they exchange a short banter, but they barely disagreed with each other unlike before. As the folk-like happy melody of a Cebuano song plays, the traveling scene showing the family laughing together cuts into an aerial shot following their red van in a coastal town. Later on, the film reveals them in a wide shot making a quick stop on the beach before continuing their journey. As the Cebuano song continues, the camera follows the van again as it travels along the coastal roads, to a road surrounded by a grove, before passing by the Boljoon church. The alternating focus of the film, from the narrative of the characters to the spaces in which they travel implies the dialogic relationship of these two aspects in the film. As what has been established in *Patay na si Jesus*, Iyay and her family are unique. They are a mixture of characters who accept their differences despite arguing with each other most of the time. In the same manner, the family's diversity jibes with the representation of cultural differences in the regions. The spatial structures of Cebu and Dumaguete boast the dialogue of influences from various historical time eras. These sites around the region may be different, but once taken collectively, they paint a harmonious portrait of the regions exhibiting the indispensable value of cultural diversity in a rapidly-changing society. The road film, which builds on the continuity of images especially through the traveling shot, fully shows this dialogue

between spaces and the people living in these spaces, including the changes that shape them both.

With the combination of traveling and aerial shots featuring the landscapes of Cebu and Dumaguete and close-up angles featuring the protagonists' lives and revealing their characterizations, the film implies the need to acknowledge heterogeneity and dynamic cultural identity. Through the aesthetics of the road film and the movie's incorporation of region-specific details, *Patay na si Jesus* proves the blurring boundaries of the center and the periphery, intensifying the nation's heterogeneous cultures.

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