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Author(s)	Hy Hollinger
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Bayan Ko

(My Country)

(FILIPINO-FRENCH-COLOR)

Cannes, May 17.

A coproduction of Malaya Films, the Philippines, and Stephan Films, Paris. Produced by Toni Gonzalez and Vera Belmont. Executive producer, Jeric Soriano. Features Phillip Salvador and Gina Alajar. Directed by Lino Brocka. Screenplay, Jose F. Lacaba, based on true incidents; camera (color), Conrado Baltazar; sets, Joey Luna; editor, George Jarlego, Robert Yugeco, Hero Reyes. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Competition), May 17, '84. Running time: 108 MINS.

Turing	Phillip Salvador
Luz	Gina Alajar
Dhalee	Claudia Zobel
Carla	Raoul Aragonn
Boy Echaz	Rez Cortez
Ka Ador	Venchito Galvez
Willie	Aristo Reyes, Jr.
Mrs. Lim	Lorli Villeneuve
Mr. Lim	Normer Son
Mother of Turing	Gloria Guinto
Sister of Turing	Lucita Soriano

Also with: Joe Taruc and the PETA Kalinangan Ensemble.

One of the most impressive films shown at Cannes and a feature that reportedly had to be smuggled out of the Philippines to be screened for the first time at the fest, Lino Brocka's "My Country" (the title "Bayan Ko" was a popular protest song of the 1930s against U.S. domination of the Philippines, now converted to an anthem against the Marcos regime) is a heavy favorite at this writing for one of the top kudos on the Riviera. Certainly, as in the prior case of Yilmaz Guney's "Yol" (Grand Prix, 1982), the adventure behind the making of "Bayan Ko" will ensure wide theatrical release.

The film narrative is based loosely on two true, separate incidents rather widely known to Filipino audiences: a general strike, and a hostage case resulting in a shootout between police and gangsters in Manila. To these were added the extras of sexy nightclub scenes and a social melodrama to get the project past the censors unnoticed until the final editing stage. Since Brocka is a prolific commercial director with several sexpo/action pics to his credit, the ruse worked without a hitch, and the copy could be aired to Paris to the French coproducer in time for the world preem at Cannes.

For the record, Brocka churned out five other features last year — titles like "Hot Property," "Adultery" and "Your Body Is Mine" — but his international reputation rests securely on earlier socially engaged docu-dramas, films titled succinctly "Jaguar," "Insiang" and "Manila." "Bayan Ko" ranks with the best productions made in the Philippines, although it's not his strongest and has some noticeable weaknesses in the story line.

This is a thriller with social punch, much in the fashion of Warner Brothers fare of the 1930s. The protagonist, Turing, works in a printing shop and has a way of losing his temper when things don't go right — which is quite often, as he is in debt and his wife is pregnant and needs special medicine to prevent a third miscarriage. In order to meet his obligations, he makes a deal with his employer not to join a budding labor union at the shop. That decision, of course, leads to misunderstandings as a general strike is about to be called.

Then there are his connections to a band of smalltime gangsters, who usually hang around a nightclub with striptease dancers. In the end, his wife is in the hospital due to a premature birth — meaning more debts and a financial dead end — and he's in a pack of trouble for agreeing to rob the printing company at the instigation of the thugs.

There's the expected shootout,

but not before the media exploit the occasion of hostage-taking with a live broadcast featuring the trapped Turing to the outside world on tv (à la Warner Brothers via radio and newspapers in the early sound period). It's here that the social message comes across the strongest.

References to the assassination of Benigno Aquino can be read into the context of the plot, although this is on the periphery of the story. So, too, a parody of an official government celebration (like the Manila Arts Festivals under Imelda Marcos), using the occasion of an anniversary party thrown by the owner of the Jefferson Printing Co.

Brocka's pace in telling the story is a major plus, as are a good performance by Phillip Salvador as Turing and an exceptional one by Gina Alajar as his long-suffering but supportive wife Luz. Crowd scenes also are handled masterfully. Look for "Bayan Ko" to make the rounds of the season's festivals. —*Holl*.