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Rolando B. Tolentino (ed.),
Geopolitics of the Visible

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astute understanding of the human (hence, Negrense) psyche, that leads one to suspect that Groyon may have mined his own life—young but decidedly rich in material—for this prodigiously detailed novel.

The Sky over Dimas ranks among the best Filipino novels in English to appear in years. If one wants to know how it ends, suffice it to say that beneath the author's lyrical prose and the sheen of precocious wisdom beats a heart of pure pulp.

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Rolando B. Tolentino (ed.), **Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures**. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000. xxi + 384 pages.

Geopolitics of the Visible is an anthology of sixteen scholarly essays exploring the ideological uses of film in the Philippines. Rolando Tolentino's introduction sets the tone of the anthology, which apparently takes as its primary objective the critique of fascism and neocolonialism. Tolentino writes that the growth of the film industry in the Philippines coincided with the expansion of American imperialism, portrayed in early documentaries as humane and civilizing. Film reproduces the imperialist ethos on the one hand but it also allows the expression of resistance and anti-imperialist sentiments of the oppressed. It is important, therefore, for film critics to examine how films carry out the objectives of their makers and how their viewers read them.

In "The Filipino OCW in Extremis," Alice Guillermo analyzes three filmic representations of the life of Flor Contemplacion, an overseas contract worker (OCW) accused of murder and sentenced to death. Guillermo says that such films are protests against the government's sending Filipino women to work abroad, especially as domestic help-

ers, with inadequate support and protection. The films show the contrast between the government officials, portrayed as indifferent, arrogant, and elitist, and the nongovernment organizations like Gabriela and Migrante, which are militant in their position. These movies show how the dehumanization of OCWs can force an assessment of the inherent contradictions in labor relations and eventually an articulation of social transformation. Thus, they can serve emancipating purposes.

Two essays, however, show how films, instead of investing popular icons with a liberating significance, do otherwise. Francis Gealogo's essay argues that such is the case of *Nardong Putik*, a popular film on the life of the Cavite bandit leader Leonardo Menecio. Many Filipinos identify with Nardong Putik, because like him they find themselves working outside the framework of the social order. The film, however, fails to capture the essential contradiction in Nardong Putik's social milieu, namely, the uneven development that made class antagonisms more acute and less resolvable, highlighting instead the individual's struggle. Alfred McCoy makes a similar analysis in his essay. McCoy writes that Filipino action films erase the military's violent past and provide a rationale of its existence. For Gealogo and McCoy, such films also obliterate the real-symbolic distinction, a maneuver which takes its toll on passive viewers.

Essays by Jonathan Beller, Eulalio R. Guieb III, Bliss Cua Lim, and Camilla Benolirao Griggers are more positive in their assessment of Philippine film. Beller shows how films like Lino Brocka's *Orapronobis* mediate between the past and present conditions of Philippine society, one that is characterized in recent times by totalitarian rule. Guieb writes that in Ishmael Bernal's film *Nunal sa Tubig* the sociospatial organization of Laguna de Bai is seen. Lim's study of films depicting violence against women shows how fictions can be read as social responses to lived violence. Griggers's essay situates the Filipino woman in the context of outmigration history and military history. All four essays posit a certain agency on the part of viewers.

Jean Vengua Gier sees in Philippine cinema a specter of America's colonial presence in Philippine history. In her reading of films recounting the historic battle at Bataan, she interprets the Filipinos' own "invisibility" and "visibility" in these films as analogues of colonial power relations. Similarly, Sharon Delmendo's essay explores an earlier infliction

of imperialist violence on the colony. The Philippines in the Hollywood movie is projected as the United States' prized trophy, a crucial pawn in the interest of Pax America and a key image in the Pacific World War II theater.

The tension between visibility and invisibility is also a theme in Neferti Xina Tadiar's essay analyzing the foremost icon of Philippine cinema, Nora Aunor, as a mass commodity. The dissemination of Nora Aunor as cultural signifier constitutes an imaginary, aptly rendered as the "Norian imaginary," which becomes a privileged cultural sign-center of the masses. For Tadiar, Aunor is used by the hegemonic order to render the masses both visible and invisible in politics and cultural production.

Three essays talk about the constitution of modernity in the Philippine setting and how film reception becomes the venue for articulating both consent and dissenting opinions. Patrick Flores's study shows how the Noranian cult is a symptom of Philippine modernity, celebrating the carnivalesque and yet maintaining an aesthetic distance for reflection and critique. Fredric Jameson's analysis of the films of Kidlat Tahimik describes them as constituting a counterdiscourse to the articulation of Western modernity while Robert Silberman's study of Filipino films provides a political and social critique of both Philippine society and film-making practices.

The essays in this anthology recast the problem of nationhood in a new light, one that involves a dialectics of the global and the local, a task the book has done well. The philosopher Michel Foucault believes that only by articulating the visible can the invisible gaze of totalitarianism be unmasked. Similarly, the essays reveal the hidden logic of operations of American neoimperialism and the concomitant response of the people. In the midst of America's disturbing encroachment on world affairs via its "war against terror," where countries are caught in realignments and strategic alliances, this book provides us possibilities for ensuring a legitimate space for dialogue to oppose fascism and neocolonialism.

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