

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Patrick F. Campos's

*The End of National Cinema:
Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*

Review Author: Cherish Aileen A. Brillon

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 66 no. 1 (2018): 99–103

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

but is historically valid and logical. Scientific development in the past had a select audience, which was apparent in its major players and beneficiaries. Advancements circulated within a circle of experts, public officials, and elites in the private sector. As José Rizal depicted in *El filibusterismo* using the metaphor of a mysterious and inaccessible physics laboratory, scientific works only benefited the state and the colonial sciences. One could be critical and ask: where are the Filipinos and Cubans in this narrative? Further research will surface them and accord them space in the historical narrative. In my opinion, science was liberated and became more liberating in the nineteenth-century Philippines and Cuba. The science that was usually confined to the laboratories evolved into a “public science,” and this process manifested in the fields of education and commerce, with the support and bureaucratic backing of influential segments of Philippine and Cuban society in the nineteenth century.

Kerby C. Alvarez

Department of History, University of the Philippines-Diliman
<kcalvarez@up.edu.ph>

PATRICK F. CAMPOS

The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016. 665 pages.

If there is one thing to be gleaned from this voluminous book, it is that Patrick Campos is passionate about Philippine cinema. This passion is perhaps what drove him to deconstruct it so that we can appreciate it with newer lenses.

There are a number of reasons why *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* differs from other works in the field of Philippine film criticism. First, unlike other film scholars, Campos does not frame his analysis strictly within a socio-realist tradition, the art versus commercialism debates, or nativist and indigenization perspectives. His work is influenced by various theoretical approaches ranging from political economy to spatial analysis, from geopolitics to postmodern and postcolonial concepts. Weaving these various approaches is no mean feat, but Campos manages to do it effortlessly and, best of all, turn it on its head, thereby

creating a nuanced analysis that is akin to “thirding,” an analytical and practical strategy of creating a counter-space drawn from opposing categories to open up new alternatives or spaces for a critical engagement with texts. It is in this “thirdspace” that Campos positions his analysis.

Second, instead of just doing a reading of selected movies, Campos uses a wide range of available materials to acquire his data. Under this methodology fall his critical and thematic analyses of movies, personal interviews, observations, direct participation, film festival transcripts, and archived materials. One cannot dispute Caroline Hau’s observation, found in the book’s blurb, that this project is “broad-ranging and empirically grounded.”

Third, Campos’s focus moves away from previous conceptualizations of “national cinema” as a canon of films that was produced only within a specific geographical boundary (stories set in the Philippines, financed and directed by local producers and filmmakers) and critical of the state, specifically those that came out during the Marcos regime. In addition, this definition only seemed to describe movies done by mostly male auteurs such as Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Lamberto Avellana, Gerardo de Leon, and Mike de Leon, among others. Campos questions the efficacy of using a limited definition of national cinema by pointing out its colonial origins, in both form and content, and its transnational quality as exemplified by our participation in the global film movement through the network of film festivals, film critics and programmers, and cinephiles.

Fourth, the spatial and temporal analysis that undergirds the whole work is an interesting approach to the study of Philippine cinema. It is not incidental that the book’s title also includes the phrase “at the turn of the century” to signify the body of films included in the analysis. The production of these selected movies in the first decade of the twenty-first century also coincides with the peak of globalization. For Campos, what we know of national cinema may have ended or at least have gone to a different direction precisely at this juncture because cinema has taken on a more global dimension and outlook. While he is very particular about the temporal and spatial coverage of his analyses, he does so not by signaling a break similar to a before-and-after model, but by locating movies and events in a historical continuum stretching as far back as the arrival of film technology in the country during the American period until the first decade of the twenty-first century when the independent film (indie) movement broke new grounds.

For example, chapter 8 starts with a discussion on how Thomas Edison's newsreels were used as a pretext for the continued American colonization of the Philippines. Campos then connects and contrasts these newsreels with contemporary but diverse types of movies that also deal with the Philippine–American War, such as *Amigo* (2010), *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2001), *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), and *Independencia* (2009). Instead of highlighting the need for American intervention, these later movies were more concerned with filling the gaps in our historical memory of what transpired during this period.

As the contents of the book are culled from previous journal publications, Campos provides a general framework in the Introduction to describe the relationship of each chapter. He describes this design as “spatial, with the shape and movement of each chapter guided by the thematic and cinematic objects it considers vis-à-vis a multivalent concept of national cinema” (18). Nonetheless, even when read individually, the chapters can stand on their own.

The book is at its best when it deconstructs commonly held notions about national cinema as framed through the country's geopolitics. For example, chapters 1 to 3, which focus on the local auteurs who helped define national cinema, are notable for bridging his discussions on urban realism (ch. 5) and representation of rural landscapes (ch. 6) in independent movies. In particular, he connects Brocka and Bernal's (ch. 1) ways of codifying the image of the city using Marcosian signifiers to how contemporary independent filmmakers, although steep in the filmic practices of these previous directors, create a different image of the city when they focus on the spectacle of violence and poverty.

Another notable essay in his quest to interrogate the idea of national cinema is the chapter on Cinemalaya (ch. 4), a film festival held annually at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. He highlights the role of film critics, scholars, and academics in the creation of a continuing discourse about national cinema as seen in how they connect Cinemalaya's “indie” movies to the critical acclaim and cinematic lineage of Brocka et al. However, Campos points out that the political context (martial law and censorship) that gave birth to the earlier films no longer exists in the present time, and so the connection between these past and present films is tenuous. In fact, what Cinemalaya may have done is to reframe the discussion from what constitutes national cinema in the present time to what it means to have an

independent film movement where the local is also global and where ideas about artistic freedom and creativity are given prominence.

The last two chapters are the strongest as Campos introduces novel ways of problematizing Philippine cinema. His article on the Philippine–American War (ch. 8) not only addresses the gaps in our historical memory by unearthing our colonial past, but also adds to the existing literature on the relatively new area of memory studies in the local academe. There is also a lot to appreciate in the final chapter, “Ghostly Allegories: Haunting as Constitution of (Trans)National Cinema (History).” Here, Campos makes clever use of haunting as a metaphor in looking at two horror movies, *The Echo* (2008) and *The Maid* (2005), which were shown at the height of the Asian horror trend. In these films haunting becomes the symbolic tool for Overseas Filipino Workers to illustrate and counter the epistemic violence that colonization and migrant labor have wrought upon them. This chapter is yet another example of the slippery definition of national cinema because these movies, although produced and financed by foreign capital, prominently articulate the experiences of Filipino migrants. Lastly, the chapter’s empowering message on historical accountability is a fitting way to end Campos’s project of deconstructing national cinema.

However, Campos’s position and location as an academic and film critic with access to a number of these independent movies also put him in a privileged position. The movies that he analyzes are available only to a certain segment of society—film critics, academics, and cinephiles. In this respect, chapter 7 on the *Enteng Kabisote* film franchise (2004–2007) stands out because it is possibly the only one among the myriad of movies he discusses that general Filipino viewers have seen. His overall choice of movies may give the impression that this selection is what Philippine cinema looked like at the turn of the century. Although independent movies certainly characterize the time period, is it reasonable to gloss over the movies released by mainstream studios because of their commercial orientation? Is his selection of movies based on whether these films bring out new definitions or at least interrogate the concept of national cinema? If such is the case, does it automatically mean that commercial movies cannot be called national cinema and hence not fitting enough for study? In a number of ways, Campos’s selection of movies reinforces the ideological chasm between mainstream and independent cinema, between cinema as art and cinema as business.

Despite this minor quibble, the book delivers on its promise stated in the Introduction. Campos asserts that the task of the contemporary film critic is to “clear spaces and reveal nodes of independence within national formations and orient these spaces and nodes across or ‘beneath’ nations to forge supranational solidarities” (17). This book has certainly cleared a space for new interpretations while also laying down the foundation of what is to come.

Cherish Aileen A. Brillon

Department of Communication, Far Eastern University
<cbrillon@feu.edu.ph>

LISANDRO E. CLAUDIO

Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-Century Philippines

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 227 pages.

In his first book, *Taming People's Power: The EDSA Revolutions and their Contradictions* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), Lisandro Claudio examines different interpretations of the People Power Revolution to understand how their competing narratives influence contemporary Philippine politics. He concludes by criticizing both mainstream ideologies, which occlude the role of the left, and the communist movement, which often “instrumentalizes” the people. Disillusioned by both, Claudio seeks solutions to Philippine problems elsewhere. In *Liberalism and the Postcolony*, he proposes one such solution by exploring the political praxis of liberalism in twentieth-century Philippine history. As such, this book has two primary goals. The first is to complexify the understanding of Philippine elite discourse vis-à-vis the liberal practices of four bureaucrats: Camilo Osias, Salvador Araneta, Carlos P. Romulo, and Salvador P. Lopez. (In a highly personal afterword, he includes a fifth liberal, Rita Estrada, the author's grandmother.) Claudio devotes one chapter to each individual to show the existence of an oft-ignored Philippine liberal tradition. Meanwhile, his second goal is to argue for the contemporary value of this tradition—and how it can be a source for future political practice in postcolonial nations.