

Book Review

**Review of Patrick F. Campos,
*The End of National Cinema:
Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*
(Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2016)**

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Patrick F. Campos's first book is the first academic book to explore Philippine cinema on such a monumental scale. In its 550 pages, followed by a more than 100-page bibliography and index, this grand work brings to light the major historical, critical, and practical developments and transformations of a century-old national cinema. Curiously, though, the book starts with "The End." This ambitious appearance of Philippine cinema in international film scholarship already declares its own demise. Does this imply that we come to understand this relatively unacknowledged history in world cinema only when it is completed, as the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only at dusk? But as the owl soars into the unknown time of a new night, *The End of National Cinema* aspires to the beginning of a new cinema while manifesting, in the other sense of *end*, "a renewed 'end' or purpose for continuing to conceive of national cinema."¹ This renewed national cinema is, in a nutshell, global cinema as locally and independently produced outside the old paradigm of national cinema.

If national cinema has been characterized in terms of specificity and difference from Hollywood, Campos emphasizes that their intermingling is already a new normal as national borders are ever more broken through and broken down. In the Asian context he deftly maps, Hollywood's remakes of Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Philippine films celebrate the triumph of national cinemas globally, while at the same

time reviving or transforming local industries face-to-face with Global Hollywood. Southeast Asian cinema emerges as a global cinema in this age of globalization. Here included are “art films” by internationally acclaimed auteurs such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Pene-ek Ratanaruang, who openly state that their local films directly appeal to transnational, cosmopolitan audiences without being mediated by Thailand’s national tradition. As local filmmaking is made increasingly easy, thanks to digital production and circulation, we see the paradoxical phenomenon: the more local a film is, the more global it can be. To highlight national distinctions, then, tends to be “a superficial political act or, worse, an advocacy that is party to the maintenance of oppressive cultural representations and repressive social conditions.” The global order has hegemonically “harnessed the contradictions of capital, the tractability of laboring bodies, and the transnationalization of cultural production, and rendered the meaning of ‘nation’ chameleon-like.”²

Of course, there have been many debates on the national vs. the global, but Campos’s real point of attack is, in fact, the “nationalist” tradition of Philippine cinema, against which non-national “glocalism” opens room for some independent, alternative cinema. As Paul Willemen (1994) states, “nationalist cinema” typically performs the right-wing repression of complexity, rendering national identity as essentially natural.³ From the constructivist viewpoint, however, the identity of a nation is culturally produced in the historically specific system of power and knowledge. What is different in the case of the Philippine nationalist cinema is that, as the first half of the book charts, it emerged from the 1970s-80s antifascist film criticism during and after the Martial Law years under Marcos and the People Power Revolution that deposed the dictator. This rather leftist anti-autocratic movement pumped up the nationalist desire to make a better, autonomous, more democratic nation while politicizing national cinema accordingly—not unlike what happened in South Korea in the 1980s. However, the post-revolutionary Philippines has been perfidiously taken over by the oligarchy, with its cinematic “Golden Age” gone and yet its nationalist mindset somewhat persisting—in contrast, Korean cinema began to blossom around the new millennial turn while its core political generation quickly adapted

to cultural globalization, as Campos also notes.⁴ Against the degradation of the revolutionary spirit and the culture of corruption and impunity in the Philippines of the twenty-first century, Campos therefore sheds light on “indie” cinema emerging as the end of national cinema. For him, independence signifies “a refusal of any despotic claim on and to interrogate unproblematized notions of the nation.”⁵ Notable films in this regard include Raya Martin’s bravely titled and Cannes-screened *Independencia* (2009), which fills in some of the gaps in the nation’s historical memory of the colonial period (Chapter 8).

No doubt the colonial and postcolonial issues explored in the second half of the book offer a bigger historical context in which to identify the nationalist and independent film movements. The Philippines was a US colony at the inception of its national cinema, and Hollywood still retains hegemony in the global film market. Meanwhile, anticolonial nationalism has grown and underlies the struggles against dictatorship in the postcolonial era. Now local cinema embodies globality, taking full advantage of capitalist modernity and labor migration in relation to the global US; at the same time its independent camera captures the abject spectral bodies floating or exploited in the global system (Chapter 9), the new and only valid “Empire” without a center in Michael Hardt-Antonio Negri’s sense. Against this broad historical backdrop, Campos locates, illuminates, and reinterprets a number of indie filmmakers including such pioneering masters as Ishmael Bernal (Chapter 1), Mike de Leon (Chapter 2), and Kidlat Tahimik (Chapter 3), through concepts such as the “thirdspace” and “native independence.” It is noteworthy that instead of “Philippine cinema,” the neutral name for the nation’s cinema, Campos uses Nick Deocampo’s more pointed “Filipino Film” for the book title, the term that indicates the colonial/transnational origins of the cinema as first expressed in Spanish (“*pelicula Filipina*”). Evoking this initially mixed transnationality, alternative cinema has questioned the status quo of the commercially dominated national cinema in the forms of new wave indie movements, in the 1980s revolutionary films, and now with global cinema.⁶

Likewise, Campos deftly summons whatever relevant parts of film history, whether it concerns national, regional, or world cinema, and

refers to film theory from classical to postcolonial as well as to big thinkers, from Karl Marx to Jacques Derrida. He also navigates around a variety of film trends such as new urban realism spectacularizing violence (Chapter 5), rural landscape films with a national dimension (Chapter 6), and the Filipino action genre called *bakbakan* (Chapter 7). In doing so, he not only offers textual analyses of films but explores the full panoply of film culture, from production to distribution to reception. As a film critic, he also draws special attention to the Philippine indie film festival, “Cinemalaya” (Chapter 4) and to cinephilia as a critical stance. It is indeed “a handful of cinephiles” who “carry the memory of certain obscure films and make viable the task of transposing crucial but arduous modes of remembering back into cultural consciousness.”⁷ Not to mention that the book testifies to the author’s untiring cinephilia solidly supported by the vast range of information and knowledge he has archived. Like Walter Benjamin he often quotes, Campos fulfills this labor of loving cinema to remember “dialectic images” lost in history and redeem them in “the now of recognizability,” thereby opening a critical “third space” in the global age: liminal, inconclusive, complex, dynamic space and counterspace for critical activity.⁸

One may sometimes feel slightly uncomfortable while following Campos’s long and winding road to Philippine cinema. The range of subjects is undoubtedly overwhelming as the whole book could be divided up and developed into a few monographs. Also, many pages are filled up with ‘too much information’ while missing qualitative arguments. It is not necessarily productive for the simple expression “Lino Brocka’s realist effect” to lead to a 2-page-long footnote on the notions of the “realist effect” in André Bazin, Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière.⁹ Meanwhile, one of the most visible Filipino auteurs in today’s world cinema scene, Lav Diaz, is only tangentially mentioned, though his so-called “rubber time,” a sort of “time-image” in extreme duration, embodies both a national and global aesthetics to discuss.¹⁰ This is also the case with Khavn De La Cruz whose “non-cinematic” indie films provocatively evoke what William Brown calls “abject cosmopolitanism” in a “glocal” fashion.¹¹

More crucially, Campos uses the term “global” in the popular

yet vague sense that is not differentiated from “transnational” or “international.” Global cinema is just deemed to extend and destroy national cinema. As the transition from national to global is historically evident to him, what is at stake is above all periodization, or instead, the desire to draw a clear line between *before* and *after*; the desire to “end” national cinema and bring to the fore alternative indie cinema in the global context. It would, however, be possible to formulate the national, the transnational, and the global as based on the core principles of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization each, but also to see them as frames rather than periods—the same film could then be seen differently in each frame. Instead of investigating the terms in such a way, Campos focuses on criticizing the “constructedness of the nationalist discourse” underlying the core history of Philippine cinema.¹² He sharply deconstructs conventional notions about national cinema formed through the nation’s geopolitics by revealing its heterogeneous components in a redemptive gesture. This deconstruction is the well-established methodology typical of leftist cultural studies driven by transnational and postcolonial politics of difference. Its radicality is emancipatory in theory, yet often limited to a small number of elite film consumers who tend to isolate themselves from mainstream commercial cinema and dismiss the latter’s complexities and multilayered potentialities. Discussing a myriad of films almost inaccessible to general audiences, Campos rigidifies the stereotypes of mainstream cinema as business he condemns and indie cinema as art he cherishes.

The point might be that the global system reterritorializes border-crossing forces onto the immanent plane of globalization where the Philippines is also integrated. There is no outside of this system, no independence from it, no emancipatory alternative utopia. In this sense, “any and all cinema is the localized expression of a globalized integration” as Campos also notes, quoting Jyotsna Kapur and Keith Wagner.¹³ Art and business are fused here, auteurs are brand names, the system co-opts any resistance, and it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. And yet this world produces inner cracks with its abject excluded but lingering around it. Globalism involves its own inconsistency and antinomies, pressing challenges

to human subjectivity and community. Some of the global cinema tackles these universal issues that the abject undergo here and there, often reappropriating the system's productivity to attack it or forming unexpected solidarity between themselves in the face of a catastrophe. This potential agency of the global abject opens room for an ethical breakthrough if not a political revolution. Actress Mercedes Cabral, starring in Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay* (2009), appears as a Filipina married to a Korean man in Park Chan-wook's vampire film *Thirst* (2009). Campos incisively comments on the vampires' guilt for abuse of power and "the redemptive dispensation of atoning mercy extended toward the weak and feminized [Filipina]," though she later falls into "unexplainable hysteria."¹⁴ Certain global ethics could be further discussed at this point. The question would be no longer to end national cinema but to struggle for new humanity yet to come in global cinema.

Notes

¹ Patrick F. Campos, *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2016), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

³ Paul Willemsen, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 206-19.

⁴ Campos, *The End of National Cinema*, 306-07.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 253-57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 329-30.

¹⁰ Marco Grosoli, "Space and Time in the Land of the End of History," in *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema*, eds. Seung-hoon Jeong and Jeremi Szaniawski (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 303-21.

¹¹ William Brown, "Conscientious Abjection and Chaosmopolitanism in Khavn de La Cruz's Ruined Heart," *Studies in the Humanities* 45 (2019): 56-73.

¹² Campos, *The End of National Cinema*, 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 307-08.