THE END OF NATIONAL CINEMA IN THE PHILIPPINES?

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> "(It) is now practically impossible to imagine cinema in strictly national terms and more alluring to imagine it as always already global."
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> (Campos 12)

In September 2016, Filipino director Lav Diaz won the Golden Lion at the 2016 Venice International Film Festival for his film *Ang Babaeng Humayo* (2016). Earlier in the same year, Jaclyn Jose became the first Filipina to win the Best Actress award at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival for her performance in Brillante Mendoza's *Ma'Rosa* (2016). In February, just months before Jose's success in Cannes, Diaz won the Silver Bear Alfred Bauer award for his film *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* (2015). Other Filipino films, such as Bradley Liew's *Singing in the Graveyard* and John Torres's *People Power Bombshell: The Diary of Vietnam Rose* (2016) continue to tour international film festivals. Filipino Cinema is blossoming at the moment, and Patrick F. Campos's monumental work on *The End of National Cinema*, an investigation of national cinema in the context of an increasing presence of Filipino film at international festivals, is published at the right moment.

Throughout his work, Campos, an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines Film Institute, explores the adequacy of the changing, and, indeed malleable and fragile concept of "national cinema." How "national" can national cinema be in the context of globalization, of foreign influences on national cultures, of international festivals which are at times the only platform for national films to be shown? And, what is national cinema after all?

Campos begins with a detailed introduction of Southeast Asian Cinema(s) and the various developments in Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and more. The Philippines, the main focus of the book, plays only a minor role in Campos's introduction. He uses his introduction to create a basis for the reader who can, in Campos's following chapters, situate Philippine (national) cinema in

the wider area of Southeast Asian cinema more generally. The author argues that the divergent colonial histories and the diversity of language, culture, religion, and political systems, as well as the struggles of local film artists with particular industry ills and state censorship, conditioned the evolution of cinemas on the national level, with local industry outputs largely unseen by overseas viewers, even from neighboring countries. (2)

The national remained national for much of the 20th century. Campos identifies the increased competition from popular cinema from abroad, such as the mainstream films from Hong Kong, as a force which has caused a split in national cinema; films to attract the masses, and films acclaimed by critics. Campos goes further and argues that this precise split also changed the way "national" films were marketed. He points specifically to Hollywood remakes by Japanese, Korean or Thai films which were "celebrated as the triumph of 'national cinemas' in an international arena" (6).

In his book, Campos looks at a range of subject matters and themes treated in film, and periods in Philippine film history, such as the Golden Age of Philippine Cinema (1980s-1990s), in order to argue his case. Ranging from an analysis of the works of three iconic Filipino directors—Mike de Leon, Kidlat Tahimik and Ishmael Bernal—to a discussion of the Cinemalaya festival as part of a discourse on independent film to an investigation into New Urban Realism, the role of rural landscapes in the construction of "the national" to the aesthetic of haunting as a case for transnationalism, Campos's book attempts to touch upon as many categories as possible in order to make a case for the end of national cinema in the Philippines. But what promises to be a thorough and wide-ranging investigation into several areas of Philippine film becomes the book's biggest downfall. The number of subjects the author deals with is too overwhelming for a coherent and focused analysis, and the drop of qualitative arguments, especially in the second half of the book, is almost consequential.

There are two specific chapters where this problem becomes apparent. In Chapter 4, Campos explores the role of *Cinemalaya* in the formation and support of independent cinema. The chapter benefits from Campos's own insight into the festival direction as both a panelist in 2010 and a congress rapporteur from 2006 to 2008 (220). It is rich in information about the running of the festival and how it encourages young independent filmmakers, and is therefore highly informative for the reader. On the other hand, Campos falls short in making his arguments clear. After an initial framing of where *Cinemalaya* is situated in the world of film festivals in the Philippines, in particular in the capital Manila, the author turns this chapter instead into a review of past *Cinemalaya* congresses with lengthy successions of exchanges between panellists and a strong focus on the different

viewpoints of Clodualdo del Mundo and Nick Deocampo. Even though the ongoing debates at the festival regarding independent Philippine cinema are intriguing and allow a behind-the-scenes view otherwise not necessarily accessible to the reader, Campos's intention to place *Cinemalaya* in the discourse on independent cinema does not justify the length of the chapter. It also feels as though the voice of the chapter's author is missing, given the almost absolute focus on the words of congress panellists. The chapter is more a summary than an argument about the role of *Cinemalaya* in independent cinema.

Campos spends a large amount of time on this summary of congresses, time and space which is missing in other chapters. Bold and intriguing arguments such as his suggestion that "modernism . . . invented national cinema" (59) are a staple of the first quarter of the book, but disappear entirely in the course of the nine chapters. For instance, Chapter 8, "Memories of the Philippine-American War and the End of Cinematic Experimentation," is a case in point. This chapter suffers most from the book's gradual loss of qualitative arguments towards the end. Campos attempts to make a case for experimental cinema coming to an end, therefore mirroring the end of national cinema as a whole. Beginning with a discussion of 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively, Campos shifts to a focus on a depiction of the traumas of the Philippine-American War in experimental film. Speaking about films by Marlon Fuentes (*Bontoc Eulogy*, 1995), Raya Martin (*Independencia*, 2007) and John Saylas (*Amigo*, 2009), the author argues that these filmmakers work on forgotten histories and, in so doing, run the risk of being forgotten themselves (471). The focus on memory in four of what he considers "experimental films" allows for an investigation into how filmmakers use specific aesthetics in order to not only tell silenced stories but also to use their aesthetics to set them off from the popular mainstream film culture. Although this chapter offers an intriguing premise, Campos has not given it enough space to expand on the role of experimental cinema in the formation of the national.

I can detect two problems in this context. First of all, experimental and art house cinema is precisely where local filmmakers can attempt to form something of a national cinema without the support of international co-productions. The majority of these films do not play at international festivals, even though this is what Campos suggests in his book. The author points to this vaguely but falls short in making a case for experimental cinema as an opportunity to retain the national. Instead, and this is the second issue I see in this chapter, which applies to the book in general, he clearly goes out to show that experimental cinema as well as national cinema in more general terms has come to an end. He thus forecloses the argument without arguing a case. He uses films by directors who are already well known and are therefore staples in international festival programmes. However, Campos made no attempt at looking beyond the staple and explore non-canonical directors, such

as Jet Leyco or Adjani Arumpac, which would have enhanced his argumennt and would have allowed his study to breathe.

This chapter is emblematic for Campos's book. Although his study is strong in parts, it is evident throughout the book that the author follows a clear line in order to show that national cinema has come to an end, neglecting films and filmmakers which could potentially challenge his argument. Perhaps the point that shows this clearest is his almost complete neglect of the works of filmmakers such as Lav Diaz. It is with this director that an argument of (trans)national cinema could be well balanced. Indeed, the director's films are primarily shown abroad and have become festival films attracting first and foremost a foreign audience. However, it is important to consider his aesthetics as keeping his country's "national" characteristics alive. Across interviews conducted with the director over the years, there is a persistent discourse around reclaiming the nation's past. This concerns both the country's silenced histories, as Campos mentioned in his analyses of films by Fuentes, Martin and Saylas, as well as the people's pre-colonial life. This is not to say that Diaz's films are necessarily "national cinema," but the films' very aesthetics, especially his use of "jam karet" or rubber hour, to use Paolo Bertolin's expression, as a form of duration, challenges the rather simplistic argument that the national is dead. This is, however, not specific to Diaz. Where would the author position films such as *War is a Tender Thing* (2012) by Adjani Arumpac, for instance? A film by a Filipina who explores the consequences of the Mindanao war through the metaphor of her parents' divorce, a film shot in Mindanao treating a subject that is specific to the region with the help of a personal, an individual approach? These films demand an approach to national cinema different from the rather simplistic view proposed in the book, which seems to suggest, for instance, that a country's cinema is no longer national if its films run on foreign screens. The films by Arumpac and Diaz demand an approach that perhaps redefines the national the way it has been known over decades.

The End of National Cinema is a feast of over 500 pages and contains a large number of aspects of Philippine cinema, which will be helpful in future studies on films from the country. With its sections on economical and political backgrounds to specific films and film themes, as is done most evidently in Campos's analysis of Thirdspace in Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980) and his exploration of the Golden Age of Philippine Cinema, it offers the reader an abundance of material to consider. Its strength certainly sits in its applicability to other countries. Even though Campos focuses on the Philippines, several arguments he puts forward can be considered in the context of other national cinemas across the world. However, the book would have clearly benefited from a narrower focus, a smaller choice of themes, and a more balanced argumentation. The concept of "national cinema" is indeed fragile in an age of ever-increasing globalization, yet it demands a more

enhanced interaction through a more objective investigation than is the case in Campos's book. The author uses one-sided arguments which prove his points. Yet, at the same time, he stops short in arguing cases that would challenge his take on national cinema, as is the case in the above-named Chapter 8. It would have been helpful perhaps to look at the increasing success of national cinema in France, or current debates in Iran about the national in film in order to balance the debate more without foreclosing an argument about the end of national cinema in the Philippines. These arguments are almost invisible in the author's comprehensive study.

In addition, the book, so vast in its scale, lacks a concluding argument, which would have helped the reader to get a clear summarizing overview of the various arguments the author proposes. The book ends abruptly with no opportunity for the reader to revisit, in brief, what s/he has read and what the potential future of this research into national Philippine cinema is. The absence of a clear conclusion is an extension of the absence of a definition of what the author considers national cinema. *The End of National Cinema* is about the end of something Campos never thoroughly describes, either through his own arguments or through the use of other scholars' research. There is a tentative attempt at a definition of national cinema visible in the introduction to Chapter 5, "Intersections of Local and Global Film Cultures in New Urban Realism," but the author stops short in clarifying what he himself considers to be "national." In effect, the book's over 600 pages contain a lot of material, but the crucial basis for the author's research is missing: what is "national cinema"?