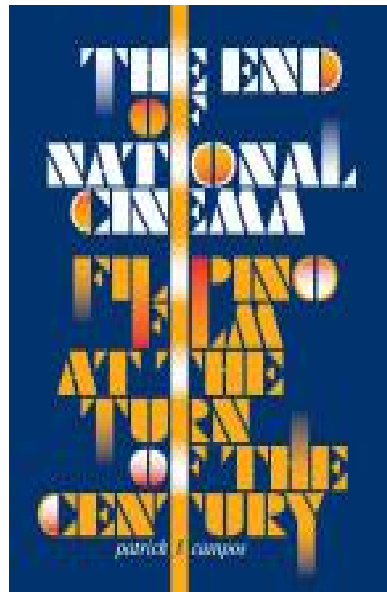


Book Review

Oscar Tantoco Serquiña, Jr.

Campos, Patrick F. 2015. *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press. 665 pp.

Patrick F. Campos's first book-length contribution to film studies, *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (hereafter TEONC), is a significant source of bibliographical data, sensitive commentary, and rigorous scholarship on Philippine cinema. Its strength surely lies on its wide historical coverage, thick archival knowledge, and sensitivity to the entwinements and turns of geopolitical currents, cinematic movements, and aesthetic impulses. With nine comprehensive chapters that examine the lives and filmic labors of directors such as Ishmael Bernal (Chapter 1), Mike de Leon (Chapter 2), and Kidlat Tahimik (Chapter 3); account of the internal and external shifts within the order of men and their machineries within the country's film industry (Chapters 4, 5, and 6); and map out the changing contours of film genres that mediate and are mediated by Filipino markets, film makers, and audiences (Chapters 7, 8, and 9), TEONC is film criticism of an unprecedented scale, trajectory, and ambition.



It is unprecedented because it puts together into one collection essays that analyze particular films from different directors from within the country and elsewhere. These essays tackle various phenomena confronting film business in the country from the 1970s to the 2010s, using theoretical rubrics (i.e., Thirdspace, hauntology, and "filmic folklore," etc.) and methodological mechanisms (i.e., ethnographic, textual, historiographic, and discursive) that lay bare the limits and possibilities of Philippine cinema.

No book in the last decade has offered a cogent assessment of national cinema and exposed the shortcomings of nationalist frameworks in film criticism in the country. Perhaps, no other book has made a bolder claim about “the end of national cinema” and exemplified such argument through case studies of films from the Philippines, the Southeast Asian Region, and the US and their particular entanglements and participations in historico-material junctures. TEONC is a voluminous tome of many propositions about, perspectives on, and approaches to understanding the ecology of Philippine cinema. Campos shows most fascinatingly his scholarly expertise when he contextualizes historical periods; compares films based on their conceptual, aesthetic, and ideological features; and puts in question the voices and subject-positions of dominant figures in Philippine film production, distribution, and reception, including critics, directors, and producers. All these critical practices do not only signify that Campos is attuned to the nerve and verve of the film industry, as well as perceptive of the narrative flow of a movie script and the possible signification of a moving image on the screen; they also gesture at a deep academic investment and a careful discernment of the vagaries that enfold, and are in turn, informed by Philippine cinema over the years.

But how do we make sense of this book’s premise about “the end of national cinema”? This end is marked by the consistent and continuous cross-collaborations across the SEA region; the importation of film technologies from the US and Europe; the commercial competition and cultural appropriation between SEA cinemas and films from Hollywood, Hong Kong, Japan, and India; and the influences of critically acclaimed films and popular entertainment genres from various parts of the world on Philippine cinema. National cinema’s ontological and epistemological grounds shift in the context of globalization. National cinema takes a regional coverage, as well as participates in world cinema in the face of liberalism, democracy, and economic prosperity. Campos writes that “any insistence on clinging to the notion of the national as a way of framing cinema in the new century must necessarily be heuristic, for a narrow view of national cinema would obscure rather than illuminate the dynamics of historical, economic, and sociopolitical forces within and beyond the boundaries that render the very notion of ‘national cinema’ meaningful....[C]inema can be productively analyzed beyond and, in fact, cannot be evaluated simply within the territorial concept of nation.”

These are not totally new claims about the nation and its many lives. While Campos’s assertion about the restrictions of “clinging to the notion of the national as a way of framing cinema,” as well as his encouragement to tease out the “dynamics of historical, economic, and sociopolitical forces within and beyond the boundaries that render the

very notion of ‘national cinema’ meaningful,” are thoughtful and urgent to be sure, they are not at all scintillating in their belated critique of the nation, the national, and the nationalist.

As this announcement is proffered to realize the arrival of the global, it reveals a narrow notion of the local and the national—one that presupposes that they are essentially oppositional to, and thus, separate from the global. How can national cinema be imagined as necessarily global as well? How can the global be conceived not just as a historical juncture to which national cinema heads or of which it becomes part, but also as a constitutive component of it, if not the very condition of its emergence? Perhaps one needs to examine cinema in its *a priori* state to see the “national” in Philippine cinema and the much-vaunted end TEONC anticipates.

Another ordeal concerning Campos’s work stems from a lack of a clear definition of the most significant and polysemic term in its title, which serves as the centerpiece of TEONC’s argument. What “end” is the book referring to in the first place? Does it refer to a spatial limit such as a border, or a temporal juncture such as death? Why does it have to be definitive and singular, as in “the end”? And why does it portentously signal a foreclosure or a termination of national cinema?

TEONC shows in its individual book chapters how Philippine cinema can no longer be purely viewed from a bound local or national context, nor understood through solely nationalist frameworks. Filipino films are not only part of national but also regional and global contexts, as indicated most cogently by the production, dissemination, and circulation of the works of Bernal, De Leon, and Tahimik, and by the participation of our genre films in Southeast Asian and Hollywood markets in the new millennium. Nationalist themes in film production and criticism—prevalent during the tumultuous period of Marcos’ dictatorship—have already become inadequate, and may even “become detrimental to a useful or liberating understanding of Philippine cinema today.” Despite its critical stance toward nationalist impulses and practices, however, in the book’s final chapter which examines “the tactical necessity of the shift of focus in film studies from the national to the transnational” through several Asian horror movies, Campos maintains that “there remains an ironic but pressing need to sustain the phenomenon of nation against the global perils that sustain it.”

So what is really ending in the national cinema? Is it the practice of producing films within a milieu such as the Filipino nation? Or is it the mode of critiquing them from a nationalist paradigm? Film practice in the country—a product of geopolitical relations and colonial or imperial configurations—has always gone beyond the national in terms of material composition, cinematic consciousness, and aesthetic

influence, has it not? Philippine cinema wittingly or unwittingly, partially or wholly, has always been conversing with the cinema of the nation's colonizers and its regional counterparts? If what is considered restricting is a nationalist framework, how does Campos lock horns with those who rehearse such theoretical training to film critics like the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*?

The local and the national remain vital constitutions of the global. The nation stays as a crucial platform on which films are made, a fertile source from which they are taken, and a viable audience for which they are produced. National cinema and nation building should not be immediately antithetical to the global. There has to be a more robust way of imagining them as co-productive and co-extensive of each other. Furthermore, it is not the production, practice, and narratives characterizing a national cinema per se that should end because they do not hold up to the demands of globalization.

What is both constrained and constraining are the people who allow Filipino film to be stunted by tried and tested parochial procedures for large scale profit, or consent to a myopic assessment of their nativist and nationalist dispositions.

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