

# SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

## <Book Review>

**Darlene Machell de Leon Espena**

**Patrick F. Campos. *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016.**

*Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, August 2018, pp. 240-243.

**How to Cite:** Espena, Darlene Machell de Leon. Review of *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* by Patrick F. Campos. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, August 2018, pp. 240-243.

## **Link to this book review:**

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2018/08/vol-7-no-2-book-reviews-darlene-machell-de-leon-espena/>

## **View the table of contents for this issue:**

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2018/08/vol-7-no-2-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

**Subscriptions:** <http://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

## **For permissions, please send an e-mail to:**

english-editorial@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp



Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

of Cambodia. Taking from the Buddhist tradition, Harris suggests, all were expected to live an extreme version of various monastic ideals regarding the renunciation of worldly goods, family ties, and emotions, especially useful in getting ordinary folks to turn in “enemies.” Moreover, the consumption of alcohol was demonized, perfumes and jewelry banned, short hair for both sexes mandated, and severe restrictions on inappropriate interactions with the opposite sex put in place. In accordance with the latter rule, forced marriage was a common practice to authorize reproduction, although overwork, malnutrition, and trauma severely hampered fertility. Monasteries that survived the heavy artillery bombing of the region were no longer places of devotion or monastic quarters and instead were turned into military bases, arms depots, officer training schools, storage and medical facilities, bureaucratic offices, or vehicle repair shops. Monastic grounds were used also to raise crops and animals. Others were simply dismantled for their composite materials. Monasteries served as “good barracks and good prisons,” as Harris writes, their “widespread use as workshops of torture and execution chillingly reinforcing the traditional association of Buddhism and death” (pp. 108–109).

The historical and political complexities involved in the periods covered by the book—pre-1970 through the Cambodian Civil War into the reign of the Khmer Rouge, and then through the eventual fall of the PRK in the late 1980s—may make portions of the book hard to follow for those unfamiliar with the region and time. Moreover, since the book focuses on novices and monks, as the title aptly suggests, the reader is privy only to the opinions on and impact of communism from a male perspective. Nonetheless, *Buddhism in a Dark Age* is a welcome supplement to other studies on the Khmer Rouge and the rise of communism in Southeast Asia, as Harris adds nuance to our historical understanding of the role of Buddhism and Buddhists during these times. He also demonstrates that disentangling the Buddhist worldview from the ruinous ideology that devastated Cambodia is, perhaps, more difficult than many would like to assume.

Kelly Meister Brawn

*History of Religions, The University of Chicago Divinity School*

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

PATRICK F. CAMPOS

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016.

Patrick Campos’s groundbreaking book *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* tries to make sense of the complexities and intricacies of the metamorphosing Philippine cinema on the brink of the twenty-first century, interrogating the positionality of national cinema and the concept of independence within the interlocking global, transnational, and regional

cinemas and trends. Grounded on the premise that

the dynamics of nation formation have been refocused and recast as the conflicted relationship between state and society, government and nongovernment organizations, and classes, races, ethnicities, and genders with forces beyond the nation encroaching at every step on the terms of the conflicts (p. 17)

the book probes into the case of cinema in the Philippines, challenging assumptions about definitive national cinematic boundaries. Campos offers a way to understand the liminality of national cinema in a way that emphasizes the nuances and subjectivities of cultural imaginaries, which are simultaneously challenged and reinforced in cinema. While we see aspects of what appear to be coherent homogeneity, border crossing, transnational circulation, and multilingualism, Campos renders specificities and contradictions embedded in historical memory and narrative vividly intelligible. Throughout the book one gets a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, at times upholding the nationhood and at times resisting it, continually occurring within and beyond the national cinematic narrative. The outcome is a thought-provoking critical evaluation of Philippine cinema and its connections and parallelisms with Southeast Asian cinemas, highlighting how limits and boundaries tend to break down and how the notion of national itself transcends cultural and linguistic borders.

Campos's personal dialogue with the cinematic world began long before the writing of this particular book. He laid the groundwork in the 1990s, when he was still a film student nostalgic about and navigating through the Golden Ages of Philippine cinema while at the same time lamenting on the box-office hit *bomba* films. As a production assistant in the next decade, Campos immersed himself in the world of films through multiple approaches. He engaged in filmmaking himself and was an avid spectator of independent films produced by Filipino filmmakers. He also found himself observing the advent of digital technology in the country and how the film industry tried to make sense of the unprecedented influence of globalization and breaking down of borders in the age of the Internet. As he admits, the developments in those two decades drove him into film criticism without his noticing it.

While the book does not follow any clear-cut divisions, the nine chapters can be read as distinct and coherent stand-alone pieces. The first chapter examines Ishmael Bernal's critically acclaimed film *Manila by Night* as a "third space," a site for imagining the nation and critiquing the modernist aspirations of the Marcos regime. The second chapter considers the role of filmmaker Mike de Leon in the shaping of Philippine cinema, emphasizing the perceptible intertwining of his films and the broader discourse of nationhood. In the next chapter Campos investigates yet another Filipino filmmaker, Kidlat Tahimik, and the emergence of independent cinema, specifically how a native filmmaker struggles to salvage his creativity, agency, and cultural traditions while confronting Western cultural hegemonic propensities. These three chapters probe into the complex role and

positioning of filmmakers in the development of, resistance against, and promotion of the national in both film and politics.

The next chapters interrogate the state of Philippine cinema at the turn of the twenty-first century with the advent of digital cinema and how it operates as a platform for confronting debates about cinema and independence as well as the country's anxieties harking back to the Marcos era. In the fourth chapter, for example, Campos explores *Cinemalaya* as an assemblage site for a spectrum of filmic discourses ranging from mainstream and commercial to statist and nationalist, among others. The next chapter advances this critical reading in the context of realism in Philippine cinema and looks into the dynamic space where national and transnational intersect. In the following chapter, Campos continues to problematize the construction of national cinema through the depictions of rural landscapes.

In the last three chapters of the book Campos confronts the central question: What constitutes a "Filipino" film? Resisting simplistic and narrow categories, Campos manages to identify the historical continuities in various film genres in the Philippines, often explicating the socioeconomic milieus that produce them. Chapter 7 scrutinizes the medley of factors that catapulted comedic fantasy-adventure films into popularity, such as their obvious commercial agenda and their links to Philippine traditional epic narratives. In the following chapter, Campos brings forth a critical analysis of experimental films that explore the memories of the Philippine-American War and argues that these films embody rigorous attempts to recover certain esoteric memories crucial to understanding the Philippine nation. In the final chapter the author probes into two Asian horror films: Yam Laranas's *The Echo* (2008) and Kelvin Tong's *The Maid* (2005). While he traces the aspects of the nation in both films, he also questions the necessity of perpetuating the notion of nation, no matter how ambiguous, vis-à-vis the global.

What makes this book stand out is its irreverent outlook toward the articulations of national in cinema and its assertion (perhaps illusion) of an "end" of national cinema itself. The book consistently makes readers and scholars aware of the uncertainties, contradictions, and ambivalent manifestations of the nation in films. Campos is able to point out the processes that draw out the connection between cinema and nation, albeit unfinished and uncertain. In every chapter he prompts readers to situate the cinema and nation within the realm of liminality. Campos attempts to unravel the transformations and future of national cinema, boldly anticipating its end. While this end, in terms of both temporal and spatial, may not come anytime soon, this book proves to be an outstanding contribution to our efforts to break down simplistic and rigid connotations on racial and ethnolinguistic lines and hardline conservative nationalisms.

Despite not having a concluding chapter that could have strengthened the connections and transitions among the nine chapters, this book remains a mine of knowledge and cogent assertions. *The End of National Cinema* compels us to take a step back and recognize where the nation lies amidst global forces and the nascent tendency to deconstruct boundaries and spaces. It also encour-

ages us to look at the persistent influence of transnational mobilities that have permeated cinema, rendering complex the manifestations of the national and global and the hybrid images in between. Despite the title of the book, Campos does not seem to advocate for the obsolescence of the nation. In fact, the discussions remain to play around with the perception of the nation, no matter how obscure and malleable the idea is.

Darlene Machell de Leon Espena

*School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University*

***Caged in on the Outside: Moral Subjectivity, Selfhood, and Islam in Minangkabau, Indonesia***

GREGORY M. SIMON

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014.

Entangled in the existing literature between the notions of customary laws (*adat*) and Islam, the moral integrities and religious lives of the Minangkabau community in West Sumatra, Indonesia, have been a point of constant scholarly and polemical debate. The debate emerged partly from the “reformist” movement-turned-civil war of the Padri War since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and escalated through the Kaum Muda movement in the early twentieth century. Ever since, the questions of religious and ethnic identities vis-à-vis collective morality and personal piety have remained in the atmosphere of this mainland community. Often concentrated on questions of matrilineal culture, one peculiar phenomenon in which the Islamic and *adat* elements face each other, existing studies have analyzed questions of religiosity, customs, culture, and ethnicity in varying levels, depending themselves on varying arenas of society, such as government policies, land and property relations, religious discourses, etc. In *Caged in on the Outside: Moral Subjectivity, Selfhood, and Islam in Minangkabau, Indonesia*, Gregory M. Simon moves away from these debates and explores the ways in which the Minangkabau people make sense of their subjectivities in terms of morality, whether or not based on religion, customs, and ethnic characters.

The study is a refreshing read for it presents a number of different voices on the foundational questions of morality and subjectivity from outside the usually sought-out venues such as religious texts, legal codes, mosques, and pesantrens. An equal presence and voices of both female and male interlocutors make it further interesting in comparison with most of the existing studies, which present an imbalanced male voice when it comes to issues such as morality even if the location of the research is a matriarchal or matrilineal one as is this Minangkabau community. Through open-ended and person-centered interviews, the author explores what participants told him about their experiences, and he “treat[s their voices] as legitimate windows into their lives and subjec-