

Margins – Peripheries – Regions – Place: Histories and Futures of Exo-Manila Cinemas in the Philippines

Towards the end of the 1950s, Cebuano writer DM Estabaya rather poignantly remarked that the reason movie making was unable to flourish in the provinces was simple but difficult to attain in the South, namely capital (Estabaya, 1959). This pronouncement came at the end of a productive period of filmmaking in Cebu, perhaps the first real iteration of what we are today calling regional cinema. In a sense, Estabaya sounded a prescient call to future filmmakers, while reminding them that the difficulties of regional cinemas were not a question of audience, language or aesthetics, those, in fact, were all in place (Estabaya, 1959). What then might rectify the issue of financial support for non-Tagalog filmmaking outside of the capital region? One of the responses would be inexpensive filmmaking practices that weren't obliged to sacrifice quality in the service of budget, and while there were experiments with alternative filmmaking forms and formats throughout the latter half of the 20th century, it was with the introduction of lightweight, mobile, inexpensive digital filmmaking technology that these regional cinemas could begin to flourish in ways which may have excited Estabaya. This flourishing has been attested to with the festivals such as Cinema Rehiyon, Binisaya, Salamindanaw and the many new and existing regional film festivals in the Philippines.

In this volume we find a series of texts that takes into consideration the stakes of this emerging cinema by surveying historical tendencies, as well as contemporary iterations, coming from the provinces and regions

and in the vernacular of their respective places. The dossier opens with a text on cinema from Mindanao. For Mindanao based filmmakers, the practice of reifying Mindanao remains a persistent source of contention. Given both the topographic size and the incredibly diverse populations of Mindanao, relegating it to a discrete and homogenous corpus of work called Mindanawon cinema, dilutes the massive complexity and difference found in the region. In many ways, Mindanao, when imagined as a singular entity, mirrors the same series of arguments as those confronting the idea of a Manila-centric homogenous Philippine cinema. With this in mind, Mary Anne Mallari's "Gendered Cosmopolitanism in Vernacular Cinema: Women's Bodies and the Rhizomatic Rural Space in *The Chanters*" addresses a film from Bukidnon that deals with questions of indigeneity and the ways in which globalization disenfranchises the indigenous communities and their cultures.

Moving north, the texts turn to the Visayas. Within the discussion of Philippine regional cinema, Cebu has been one of the principal actors, largely because it came the closest of all the exo-Manila regions to creating a fully functional, though minor, film industry. In "Screening Place: Regional and Vernacular Cinemas in Cebu" I provide a kind of framing essay, an overview of the wagers of vernacular cinema in Cebu while briefly elaborating some of its historical markers. "Alternative Modes of Distribution and Exhibition: Cebuano Cinema from the Perspective of Filmmakers" by Marie Rose B. Arong and Jeneth B. Borlasa then goes on to address contemporary cinema in Cebu through a series of interviews with Cebuano filmmakers. Their focus is largely on the ways in which alternative modes of distribution and exhibition have been exploited, both historically and currently, offering a convincing argument that such alternatives are an integral part of cinema in Cebu. Their work also offers new insight surrounding the 1977 super-8 Cebuano film *Ang Manok ni San Pedro*.

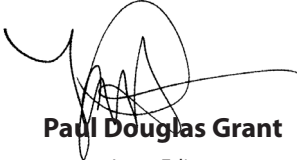
The dossier closes with two essays, one focusing on work based in cultures emerging from Negros and the other turning to indigenous cinemas of the north. Jay Jomar Quintos' "Ang 'Aswang' at 'Tama(w)o' bilang Sinematikong Kaalamang-Bayan at Diyalektika ng Bansa at Rehiyon" uses the figures of the "aswang" and "tama(w)o" as they appear in the horror films of Negrense filmmaker Richard Somes, and examines a series of binaries (nation/region, rural/urban, margin/center, self/other) to locate what Quintos refers to as "articulations of a regional and national history of emotions." Finally, Paolo Jason Telles' "Igorot Cinema in Baguio, Benguet, and Mountain Province: History, Motivations, Constraints" offers a history of Igorot cinema in Baguio as well as the provinces of Benguet and Mountain Province. Telles looks at a broad range of moving image practices, from documentary films

to music videos and makes the case that the strong evangelical influence on the work is able to exist simultaneously with the many indigenous identities, and therefore not betraying self-representation when these films are screened outside of the communities.

Obviously, no collection of texts is able to account for the entirety of this phenomena we are calling regional cinema. It is something that, like all cinemas, in perpetual flux and continually expanding. What this grouping of essays is able to achieve is a rudimentary sketch of what a more heterogenous vision of Philippine cinema might look like, what it can offer the nation and the world. While terminology differs across the various texts, vernacular cinemas or regional cinemas or even minor cinemas, all work in concert to present a more inclusive image of what the Philippine nation is composed of, how it looks, how it sounds, and how it seeks to express itself.

Reference

Estabaya, D. M. (1959, September 16). Dead as a doornail. *Kislap-Graphic*, 62-63.



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