

more on the possibility that pan-Malay identity might have developed also as an offshoot of people's day-to-day life. Hardly was it mainly an end product of intellectual enterprise. This point can be glimpsed in the discussion of Ibrahim's early life, but due to the intellectualist preference of the book's analytic scheme, it was unfortunately glossed over as background information.

These misgivings do not invalidate the value of this book. It is well researched, empirically rich, well organised and lucidly written. It is a fine contribution to our understanding of the history of knowledge production, transmission and consumption in Malaysia.

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## The Philippines

*Martial law melodrama: Lino Brocka's cinema politics*

By JOSÉ B. CAPINO

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This book is a critical appraisal of one of the most prominent and internationally acclaimed Filipino filmmakers as much as it is an exploration of the turbulent and repressive political landscape in the Philippines under martial law. Challenging myopic assumptions that specific modes or genres are suited explicitly to cinema politics, *Martial law melodrama* explores the role of mainstream films as a platform for both 'mundane and exceptional practices of sociopolitical representation' (p. xiv). Focusing on the work of Lino Brocka, who made political melodramas and mainstream commercial films, José Capino ventures into examining politics in both the obvious and ubiquitous places, the overt and hidden, the politically charged and the trivial. Citing Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou, Capino proceeds to broaden our understanding of what can be interpreted as politics in films and how to examine the political work of cinema.

The book explores how Brocka's films, set within the context of Philippine mainstream cinema from the 1970s to the early 1990s, mediated (and resisted) the consequences of Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarianism. While the book concentrates on a single filmmaker, the focus is quite apt. On the one hand, Brocka has produced a wide array of films, from commercial imitations of Hollywood, which were box office hits, to socialist realist ones with a clear political agenda and social critique. On the other hand, Brocka was a political activist who participated in demonstrations and rallies protesting against the Marcos regime's excesses. As the central subject, Brocka offers a broad spectrum with which to examine cinema politics in the Philippines.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each focusing on specific subgenres of melodrama: social, maternal, crime, family, male, and political. In the first chapter,

Capino explores Brocka's efforts to forge a 'new Filipino cinema' by examining two films, *Weighed but found wanting* (*Tinimbang ka ngunit kulang*, 1974) and *Manila in the claws of the light* (*Maynila: Sa kuko ng liwanag*, 1975). The films are regarded as social melodramas, employing melodramatic overtones and realism interspersed with sociopolitical representations. Chapter 2 investigates the maternal melodramas in Brocka's films *Insiang* (1976), *Whore of a mother* (*Ina ka ng anak mo*, 1979), and *Cain and Abel* (*Cain at Abel*, 1982). Capino argues that the use of horrible mothers upends the normative image of self-sacrificing mothers and quite strikingly acts as a substitute for the patriarch of an authoritarian state. Playing out the political disputes between the state and dissident youth, these maternal melodramas present the audience a means to articulate the repression and hostility of the Marcos regime and to fantasise about overthrowing tyrannical figures. In chapter 3, Capino turns to Brocka's crime melodramas in *Jaguar* (1979) and *Angela, the marked one* (*Angela markado*, 1980) and reads in them inscriptions of ordinary people's struggles amidst the pervasive state-sponsored violence.

The last three chapters explore the effects of the 1980s financial crisis. In chapter 4, the economic downturn is framed through the experiences of the poor and middle class, particularly evident in Brocka's family melodramas, which present narratives and visual tropes accentuating the social costs of the crisis without overtly rebuking the state. Chapter 5 shifts our attention to male melodramas that showcase the emergence of an overtly militant articulation—*My own country: Gripping the knife's edge* (*Bayan Ko: Kapit sa patalim*, 1984) and *Miguelito: The rebellious child* (*Miguelito: Ang Batang Rebelde*, 1985). Regarded as among the most important contributions to political cinema in the Marcos era, these films portrayed the demise of authoritarianism, young men rising up to challenge the system, and the prevalence of extrajudicial killings. In chapter 6, Capino looks at Brocka's films after the 1986 People Power Revolution which express his disenchantment with the new president, Corazon Aquino. Capino suggests that Brocka's post-Marcos films capture his assessments and interrogating of lingering sociopolitical problems in the country. The chapter also highlights the incorporation of political themes in exploitation cinema.

The final chapter, on queer melodrama, sheds light on the entanglement of Brocka's political and personal proclivities, and while it remains an interesting read, the chapter is not compelling enough. Brocka's portrayals of gay and bisexual lives, while they could be interpreted through the lens of gender politics, do not seem to be firmly embedded in the political discourse of the Marcos regime, per se, or the nascent anti-authoritarian vector in his other films. Indeed, one could argue that the inclusion of scenes of a gay brothel in *Manila in the claws of light* convolutes rather than strengthens the narrative of the main protagonist himself as he navigates the challenges of living in the city under the shadow of authoritarian rule.

Grounded in close readings of Brocka's films and other archival and secondary sources, Capino's book has clear and cogent arguments and compelling evidence. It affords us a means to evaluate both commercial and socially relevant films as fragments of political cinema. The book is a welcome addition to the few systematic works on Brocka, Philippine cinema during the Marcos period, and the intersections between melodrama and politics. With its provocative take on melodrama and political cinema in contesting and subverting authoritarian rule, the book is highly

recommended for anyone interested in film history and sociopolitical criticism in the Philippines.

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## The Philippines

*Philippine modernities: Music, performing arts, and language, 1880 to 1941*

Edited by JOSÉ S. BUENCONSEJO

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Exploring the development of music, performing arts and language in the Philippines from 1880 to 1941, this book contributes significantly to the global discussion of the complexities of modernity and how a study of the arts can enhance research on the cultural history of postcolonial nations. Spanish and American colonialism brought modern ideas as well as new print and media technology that resulted in rapid sociopolitical and economic transformations in the Philippines. New forms of cultural entertainment staged by foreign travelling troupes induced the production of local transcultural arts genres and the rise of modern concerns such as nationhood and national identity. Challenging the Eurocentric interpretation of modernity that is associated with the Enlightenment, the authors show that multiple and alternative modernities evolved in the Philippines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first few chapters examine the consequences of the commodification of music that emerged with the introduction of the market economy during Spanish rule in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. José Buenconsejo analyses the publication of Diego Perez's piano arrangement entitled *Recuerdos de Filipinas* (1886), comprised of 19 folk songs and dances from the various islands of the Philippines. This medley marked the beginning of music consumerism among the middle class and the addition of composers' names to printed scores. Arwin Tan illustrates how music commodification led to social mobility among musicians who became wage earners. It was during this period that musicians were first employed by urban entrepreneurs who invested in musical theatre shows. With their performance skills and ability to read music scores, musicians from the Philippines were exported to cities such as Singapore and Shanghai, a trend that has continued to the present day.

The second part of the book brings to light the strategies of the Americans who attempted to colonise the Filipinos through the English language, theatre and print media in the early twentieth century. By examining the guidebooks for classroom learning, Christi-Anne Castro shows that singing was used to teach English, the language of the new colonisers. Similarly, Raul Navarro argues that compulsory