

**Framing (and Manufacturing) Filipinoness
Rethinking World Cinema, Orientalism, Exoticism**

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Introduction
Mapping the Field
Reatlasing World Cinema, Rethinking Orientalism and Exoticism

The title of this study, ‘Framing (and Manufacturing) Filipinoness: Rethinking World Cinema, Orientalism, Exoticism’, was inspired by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), a book that deals mainly with the cultural policy and economics of mass media. The most important concepts discussed in the book, among others, are the five filters, namely the (1) size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media, (2) the advertising license to do business, (3) sourcing mass media news, (4) flak and the enforcers, and (5) anticommunism as a control mechanism. For the ‘framing’ part of the title, I owe it heavily to the works of Teresa de Lauretis (1987)¹ and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989)². Fortunately or unfortunately, the similarity ends there, since my intervention has forced me to appropriate only what was useful and applicable, which in this case only the title and the overall spirit of their critique, and to offer something that although may not be unique in the Philippine context, may only be found here in this study, by its very singularity. I thought it apt and fitting to combine the influences of their significant works, particularly since my topic touches upon the intersection of gender, film, and postcolonial theories. While Chomsky and Hermann are concerned with the straightforward deceit and artifice of the media industry on a larger and broader scale, this study deals mainly with film, specifically with world cinema, and how it figures within the domain of international film festivals. While Teresa de Lauretis’s discussion is more discursive and argues that gender as a product of representation and self-representation, the representation in this study refers specifically, in case study-like fashion, to the protagonists and other characters in the film on one level, and to the representation of Philippine cinema on another level. While Trinh T. Minh-ha offers a very compelling part-biographical, part-ethnographical, and on the whole critical analysis of the Othering of female, immigrant or second- or third-generation women with hyphenated identities, mostly Asian, in the United States or at times a shuttling back and forth between the Asian and American experiences, the Othering experience being discussed in this study is limited and specific to the Philippine context, as found in the narratives of the three films under study and as gleaned from my

¹ See page 5 of ‘The Technology of Gender’, where de Lauretis argues that ‘the construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation’ and offers four main propositions to elucidate this point.

² *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) seems to be the classic text where Trinh’s arguments are clearly laid down. But similar discussions may be found in her other works albeit less directly, such as in *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (1991) and more recently in *The Digital Film Event* (2005).

perception of how Filipino films are received at international film festivals, specifically at Cannes, Berlin, and Venice, or the ‘Big Three’, as Chaudhuri (2005) calls them. The three contemporary, independent Filipino films that I am referring to are the following: (a) *Engkwentro* (*Encounter*, 2009) by Pepe Diokno, which won the Orizzonti Prize at Venice Film Festival; (b) *Tirador* (*Slingshot*, 2007) by Brillante Mendoza, which won the Caligari Film Award at Berlin Film Festival; and (c) *Kinatay* (*The Execution of P*, 2009) also by Brillante Mendoza, which earned him the Best Director award at Cannes Film Festival.

Using the abovementioned films as the case studies, I seek to answer this particular research question: How does orientalism, working through the imperial gaze, influence the way Filipino independent filmmakers create films that portray a certain kind of ‘Filipinoness’? How does this notion of ‘Filipinoness’, in turn, reinforce the construction and representation of Filipino films, and Philippine cinema as a whole, as a feminized, exoticized, Far Eastern cinematic Other?³ This research question is explored through a gender postcolonial analysis, where the films are examined not only in terms of textual analysis but also through the specificities that their medium entail, where the conventions, style, singularity are taken into consideration. In a word, it demands a closer look at the medium specificity or a work-immanent approach, as Buikema (2009) prefers to call it. This medium specificity combined with the cultural, social, political, economic overtones or the textual analysis results in a synthesis⁴ necessary in giving rise to an informed study of the films. Or at least that is the intention of this study, without however claiming to an absolute, definitive, infallible conclusion. At most, what I hoped to show was that the study of the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze is closely related to the self-exoticization of Filipino films, which in this case is established through the three films that were exhibited and recognized at the Big Three. This self-exoticization also extends to the filmmakers who consciously and deliberately use their Orientalized, exoticized position to attract attention, secure a spot in the international film festivals, and win awards. But as I argue throughout the study, more specifically in the fourth chapter, this is more complicated than it appears to be. Self-exoticization has a dual function, a dual meaning, and it does not readily lend itself to a one-sided explanation. As most issues and phenomena in critical studies go, the self-exoticization issue by these Filipino films and filmmakers is always

³ This is the first time of the several instances in which the research question appears in the study. The plan is not only to stress the research question’s iterability for purposes of unproductive repetition, but also to allow for each chapter to stand independently in case they should be read individually and not as a whole.

⁴ In her article she focuses on the combination of work-immanent approach and textual analysis in the works of two South African authors J.M. Coetzee (*Disgrace*) and Marlene van Niekerk (*Agaat*).

already more complex and more complicated that it seems. Even as one is more inclined at focusing on the negative side of this issue, as was my initial, stubborn stance and judgment, a gender postcolonial optic reveals that there are allowances that must be given in order to fully understand the situation, issue, and phenomenon.

What on earth is world cinema? Definitions, issues, and polemics

To better situate Philippine cinema, I started with the discussion of world cinema in chapter one. Originally meant as a necessary context, it proved to be an indispensable topic that would otherwise not have made the analysis possible. Philippine cinema as an Orientalized cinematic Other as viewed from the West could not possibly exist in isolation; its locus in the atlas of world cinema had to be pinpointed and firmly established. In the survey that is found in chapter one, early definitions of world cinema were confined to a mere enumeration and simple listing of cinemas from around the world, starting from the country of origin, France hailed as the birthplace of film is undeniably the clear choice, leading up to other established and critically recognized national cinemas in Europe, such as German, Italian, Swedish cinemas (Rotha, 1930; Robinson, 1973). Finding this definition wanting and not exactly giving a proper definition, I looked for more scholarly approaches and found more than what I bargained for – the theoretical issues and debates surrounding what constitutes world cinema, what is included and covered, the binaries involved, and how to overcome them. In *World Cinema. Critical Approaches* by Hill and Gibson (2000), the definition is anchored on Hollywood, and the binary that results is a differentiation between Hollywood and other non-Hollywood cinemas. Even at this point in the temporal context of world cinema, the centrality of Hollywood, or Hollywoodcentrism, has not only been acknowledged but also reinforced; non-Hollywood cinemas have had to define their mode of production, aesthetic style, thematics against Hollywood which acts as the global cinema, with its nationality or country of origin as not an issue that figures since it is already implied and understood, as it stands. Codell (2007), meanwhile, recognizes that the scope of world cinema is far more complex than mere dichotomy between Hollywood and everything and anything that is indiscriminately lumped together as non-Hollywood, and even offers a broader coverage of it, which includes those filmmakers who emigrated to the United States and are now working as part of Hollywood mainstream production. In other words, for Codell it is no longer the country of origin that determines the nationality of a certain cinema but also, and perhaps more importantly, the origin of the filmmaker, hence, a matter of identity politics bringing its influence, presence in the central and mainstream filmmaking system.

Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (2006, p. 6), in their book *Remapping World Cinema. Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, put forward two possible definitions of world cinema, namely, 'as the sum total of all the national cinemas in the world' and 'as against US or Hollywood cinema'. Moreover, they raise the bar higher by bringing to the fore a discursive approach to world cinema, particularly in the chapter aptly titled as 'Situating World Cinema as a Theoretical Problem'. As a theoretical problem given more attention as a serious topic of scholarly study, they problematize world cinema as a 'discipline, methodology, and perspective' (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 6). It is in this meticulous and reflective undertaking where they tackle issues previously overlooked by other scholars, such as raising the question as to how to more productively criticize and counter Hollywoodcentrism, taking into account the presence of alternative, independent, and nonmainstream films in the United States that are working within and struggling against the system, and questioning the branding and repackaging of non-Western films as authentic, arthouse world cinema fare, when they are in actual fact considered mainstream, popular, and dominant in their own national or local cinemas. As most prudent scholars, Dennison and Lim do not impose their own hegemonic, infallible definition or solutions, but their significant contribution would be the serious and thoughtful study that they accorded world cinema as an important topic in film theory and practice, and bringing together more contributions by current scholars of world cinema, thereby upgrading the level of discourse.

As a case in point, it is Andrew's (2006, pp. 20-25) work, which is part of Dennison and Lim's compendium, which exemplifies this much-needed questioning attitude by calling for an atlas of world cinema, not just geographically but also politically, demographically, linguistically, topographically, and in terms of orientation. While all types of maps that Andrew gives are valid and sound enough, and one might even say commonsensical to some extent, it is the orientation map that seems most useful yet also the most challenging. Following Fredric Jameson's influential concept of cognitive mapping, it asks us to reconceptualize our mental mapping of world cinema that is not as easy as it seems, especially where binaries are concerned that have become so naturalized, acting as nearly automatic and self-activating. And where Andrew advocates a rewiring of the mind in conceiving world cinema as a concept and a theoretical discussion, Nagib (2006) in 'Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema' promotes an affirmative and a highly optimistic definition of cinema where centrisms are attenuated by putting forward the notion that world cinema is simply cinemas of the world with no center, with no beginning or end; as a method instead of a discipline; and as a more inclusive and democratic concept where binaries are ignored or not

given undue importance much less dominance. These bold yet admirable propositions by Nagib owe largely to the path already paved by Shohat and Stam (1994) in *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, where they introduce the concept of polycentric multiculturalism that is by its very name a democratic, pluralist, antihegemonic stance on power. 'It is about dispersing power, empowering the disempowered, and transforming subordinating institutions and discourses' (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 48), as they put it, which without question is a strongly political and unapologetically oppositional stance for critical theory (postcolonial studies most especially) in general and for visual culture in particular.

Of great relevance to the concept and discussion of world cinema is Third Cinema, which finds consonance with Shohat and Stam's polycentric multiculturalism. Chaudhuri (2005, p. 11) offers a simplified yet not simplistic definition of the Third Cinema by briefly differentiating First World as that of the dominant, commercial, and mainstream cinema or Hollywood to be exact, the Second Cinema as European art and auteur cinema, and Third Cinema as cinema of militant collectives. Or as the proponents Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino and would say, Third Cinema is the cinema of decolonization (Khanna, 1998). This cinema of collectives became famous in the 1960s, in keeping with the worldwide spread of activist spirit, ideals, and movement during that period. However, despite its lofty political goals, Third Cinema eventually met its demise, in terms of the decline of its popularity, following, and in some instances even applicability. This may be attributed perhaps to the changing politics of the times, or to its own loopholes and weaknesses as a movement or ideal because of its susceptibility to binarisms (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 6). What we can consider as the offshoot or a close political cinematic relative of Third Cinema would be postcolonial cinema, which although not as 'explicitly polemical' is 'strongly political and still concerned with authoritarian oppression' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7), which is also in consonance with the goals of not only Third Cinema but also of polycentric multiculturalism. Yet postcolonial cinema should not be seen as structured, set, and established as the other two, since it is still changing and open to developments. It is still engaging with the expansion, evolution, and growth of marginalized cinemas, and the displaced peoples that such cinemas represent and portray.

Having spoken at length about the issues and debates in world cinema, Third Cinema, postcolonial cinema, the question as to where the Philippine cinema, context, and experience comes in will naturally have to be brought to the fore. Philippine cinema is without question part of world cinema, as it is a relatively obscure national film entity from the less developed

part of the globe. It may fall within the category of Third Cinema in terms of the political messages in the films, less sophisticated production style and film aesthetics, and themes, especially where independent, avant-garde, arthouse films are concerned because of the relative freedom from movie studio restrictions. But more appropriately it is postcolonial cinema because unlike Third Cinema that is concerned primarily with the collective, with the people as a solid and unified entity, postcolonial cinema brings the individual, the marginalized, subordinated, displaced, deterritorialized individual (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, pp. 7-8) back to the discussion without disregarding the struggles and sentiments of the collective to which the individual belongs. In the three Filipino films under study, the protagonists are foregrounded without necessarily neglecting to include the nameless people, acting as supporting characters in the background. The dilemmas of the singled-out individual speaks for the shared problems of his or her people, but the individual's singularity is fleshed out, given a face, a name, and a voice. The question should probably not be what is postcolonial about the three films; rather, the question should be what is not postcolonial about them. All the elements are there, waiting and open to be interpreted and reclaimed as such. This is true for *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, where the personal challenges of the protagonists reflect the overall plight of their fellow slum dwellers.

The two-way ideological traffic: the -isms and self-exoticization

For chapter two I coined the phrase 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' to emphasize that although the three Filipino films are not traditionally considered exotic films for depicting a glossy, poster-perfect settings or getaway-like narratives for Western characters vacationing in a harem or island paradise, the three films still qualify as exotic films by using the backdrop of poverty, filth, stench as their main attraction for audience not accustomed to such way of life. I argue that the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze, which traditionally emanates from a Western⁵ lens, works in a two-way process with the self-exoticization of Orientalized, othered Filipino films. I say two-way process because the response of the Filipino filmmakers to the Western gaze can be seen at the way they create their films to, as Chaudhuri (2005, p. 6) has already stated, cater to Western tastes by packaging them in Orientalist and tourist-friendly ways. Orientalist in the sense that the films respond to the typical notion of what the East ought to look like, that is, as

⁵ By 'Western' in this study I refer specifically to the Big Three, which refers to the organizers, selection committee, the jury members, the audience, the potential distributors present at the Cannes, Berlin, and Venice international film festivals.

typically different, enchanting, seductive, and enigmatic. And tourist-friendly because they are made less complicated and more accessible to the uninitiated, less informed, or perhaps even not easily pleased or thrilled.

But to be able to prove this two-way relation, I started with the theoretical discussion of orientalism as originally laid down by Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978, p. 3), particularly the most oft-quoted line in this highly celebrated yet equally controversial work – ‘Western dominating, structuring, and having authority over the Orient’. While most scholarly works should be evaluated and appreciated in terms of their relevance and applicability according to the context and circumstances surrounding them, the criticisms to, close readings of, and informed responses to ‘Saidian’, orientalism-focused, and postcolonial studies had to be taken into consideration. For this study, the appropriations and reappropriations of feminist scholars of Saidian orientalism and those directly related to visual culture, with special concentration on film were largely useful. Matthew Bernstein’s analysis of the use of ‘blackface’, or white actors standing in for black people in classical Hollywood movies is an early occurrence of othering, orientalism. And early and more straightforward evidence of exoticism was shown in the movies through stories set in distant and faraway deserts portraying an invented Africa, tropical paradise depicting an imagined Asia, cultures that are too different compared with what is commonly found in the West. Reina Lewis’s (1996, p. 17) work, while not limited to the study of orientalism in film raises two important points: first, she asks whether there could be a possibility of the innocent experience of orientalism; and second, by studying the works of two female artists – novelist George Eliot and visual artist Henriette Browne – she questions the non-inclusion and absence of women as cultural producers of Orientalist discourse and as agents of colonial power. Perhaps this is Lewis’s most important contribution, in the sense that she attempted to look at the gender aspect of orientalism from every possible angle.

Homy King (2010, pp. 5-6), meanwhile, focuses on cinematic representations of orientalism by analyzing movies from East Asia. Possibly also because of the surveys she has made of the orientalist discourse and the abundance of already available literature on the subject, her arguments are more nuanced, informed, and thought-provoking. For instance, she laments the presumptions of stable identities when it should be accurate representations of such Asian identities where more attention and energy should be expended on. Furthermore, and also particularly significant, she is skeptical about the use of the tropes of hybridity and miscegenation as sufficient the violence of Orientalist discourse, and by this violence I understand it as not only representational but also epistemic violence. She also casts doubt on

the efficacy of using vernacular or indigenous forms or ideologies of representation to counter such representational violence, but also concedes that the efforts to address it is also necessary.

Next to orientalism, neorientalism, and exoticism, imperial gaze is the concept that is a significant component in the nexus that influences the self-exoticization of Filipino films being examined here and of their filmmakers. It was E. Ann Kaplan (1997, p. xi) who should be credited for this, who building upon the works of feminist film theorists, Laura Mulvey most of them, developed the notion of the imperial gaze, which she calls a one-way subjective vision, where the one with more power and privilege gains the advantage of gazing at the other. Within this concept of the imperial gaze she differentiates the gaze from the look – ‘the gaze’ is more objectifying, ethnographic in approach, and sees without an attempt to know, while ‘the look’ functions more as a process, a relation, where curiosity about the other is present. It is this looking structure that I find particularly useful in connecting to the nexus of orientalism and exoticism, which acts as a primary motivating factor, be it implicit or explicit, conscious or subconscious, in viewing the Filipino films in this study. It is the ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ that attracts both the gaze and the look, and for most instances I argue that it is the gaze that is being used as a viewing structure or lens. It is probably rare where instances of the look are employed. And in cases where this takes place, it is curiosity, a drive to really know the Other that works and sustains. For after all, ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ is never easy and comfortable for the eye, much less for the sensibilities. It takes a genuine interest to forge a relation or undergo a process to go beyond mere objective and objectifying, ethnocentric and ethnographic gaze.

Medium specificity, textual analysis, and the aesthetics of suffering and poverty

After a cartographic presentation of world cinema and a theoretical discussion of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze, it is in chapter three where the study proceeds to ascertaining and pointing out what is exactly filmic about the three films. To enable this, I draw inspiration from the synthesis of work-immanent approach and textual analysis given by Buikema (2009). This combined approach is important mainly because there has been the tendency nowadays for some scholars to neglect or overlook the specificities that define the medium they are investigating in favor of the cultural studies approach, that is, the privileging of the social, political, economic overtones and meanings of the book, poetry, painting, film, and any other piece of art for that matter. This chapter calls for the necessity and importance at returning to the conventions, style, specificities of the

films, and to stress this, I return to the trope of ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ as I make a close reading of the films both in terms of textual analysis and medium specificity.

From Robert Stam (2000, p. 94) I took the notion of ‘aesthetic of poverty’ that is commonly found in Third Cinema, Third World films, and postcolonial cinema, and the three films do not escape this tendency. For *Engkwentro* and *Tirador* most especially, the dirt, filth, and stench of the slums where the protagonists live and where most of the plot takes place set the tone and serve as the backdrop of the films. The aesthetic of poverty is also predominant in *Kinatay*, but the plot takes us to a psychological meaning of poverty from the middle part of the narrative onward, as brutal violence, murder, rape, and mutilation, as though to suggest that the pervading poverty economics-wise leads to graver kind of poverty, in this sense a poverty of the soul, or moral destitution, if you will. This aesthetic of poverty is in keeping with the thematic and stylistic tradition and conventions of cinema verité and social realist films. The main difference perhaps lies in the fact that this aesthetic of poverty in the three Filipino films is exacerbated, magnified, and amplified to serve as the magnetic force that draws orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist interest, viewership, and recognition.

Chouliaraki (2010, p. 107) also offers a discussion on suffering as portrayed in advertisements and public awareness campaigns for nonstock, nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations, which she divides into two categories, the shock effect and positive imagery images that have both been severely criticized by scholars. The shock effect images are criticized for ‘dehumanizing the sufferer’, as they typically contain images that are too gruesome, which may work for potential donors but deprive the victims or sufferers of their dignity. Positive imagery advertisements, on the other hand, are similarly criticized, but this time for ‘glossing over suffering’ because it is common to show people smiling, laughing, as though the natural disasters, wars, or physical abuse that had wreaked havoc on their lives are to be taken lightly. It is a brave front, no doubt, perhaps even a statement about the triumph against adversity, the triumph of the human spirit, and similar rhetoric. And while Chouliaraki’s work focuses on advertisements, in print, television, and online commercials, it is also applicable to the three films. *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay* have the shock effect imagery throughout, as most prominent in the slums they live in, the subsistence-level and the sorry lives they lead, and the predicaments they find themselves in. But as Filipinos are known for being ebullient and easygoing and able to laugh at life’s cruelty and misfortune, it should come as no surprise to find positive imagery even in small quantity and in the most unexpected of scenes and plot points. While this mix of shock effect and positive imagery may not be unique to the three Filipino films, the use of such mix in the films only reinforces

the trope of ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ that pervades all three films.

Commonsense knowledge dictates that there is nothing beautiful about suffering, in the same manner that there is nothing romantic about squalor, but in these films the reverse is true and rather compellingly work to their benefit.

In chapter three, I also touch upon a different kind of suffering of the protagonists that draws on masculinity studies. It is Bordo’s (1999) analysis of fashion advertisements that looks at how particular poses and body language suggest the feminized trend that is noticeably different from traditional representation of masculinity in fashion and visual culture in general. By looking at particular dramatic highlights in *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, I have observed that the male protagonists have been feminized and emasculated. For instance, in cases where they are being cornered and trapped, being coerced into doing something against their will, or being embarrassed and shamed in public, the body language, no matter how subtle for some cases, reveals a diminishing of mannish, rugged demeanor. The head is bowed down, the body bent and limp, the gaze averted, suggesting that a debasing circumstance occurring in one’s already sorry life is now without reservations being portrayed onscreen, emphasizing rather than denying or avoiding a reduced sense of virility. This is not unique, to be sure, for these ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ films, but this calls to mind the effects of colonialism for the native men who had been treated in a feminized manner⁶, and in this modern day of postcolonialism, this context narrowed down to the three films, it is the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism that brings about a feminizing and emasculating effect on the male protagonists. The men are on display, but it is not traditional masculinity that is being shown onscreen, rather, a diminished, reduced sense of it.

Marketing the margins: on Huggan’s postcolonial exotic and staged marginality

In chapter four I return to the concept of staged marginality, or ‘the process by which marginalized individuals or minority groups dramatise their “subordinate” status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience’, by Graham Huggan (2001, p. xii). I have previously discussed in chapter two, but attempt to show that it has a dual function, in the sense that it could work both in negative and positive ways. Negative because one marginalizes oneself more to get recognition, or fabricates one’s marginality since most musicians, writers, visual

⁶ In Toni Morrison’s novels, the feminization and emasculation of black men who work as slaves is common. They are called ‘boy’, juvenilized as well as stripped of decision-making power. But to bring this situation to the context of film, in Claire Denis’s *Chocolat* (1988) the black manservant Protée is treated the same way. In a heartrending scene, for example, Protée cries as he takes cold shower, while naked, outside the house, realizing how pitiful his situation is when his employers get to enjoy warm baths that he prepares for them.

artists, filmmakers from postcolonial nations come from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, have had excellent education, and are not as destitute as they represent or misrepresent themselves, even when the characters they write about or portray come from the poorest sectors of their society. On the other hand, staged marginality may be seen as positive if the artists undertake to ‘uncover and challenge dominant structures of power’ (Huggan, 2001, p. xii). In a word, the artists are able to redeem themselves if they employ staged marginality with the goal of subverting oppressive and authoritarian power, or of subverting the system from within.

Another important concept put forward by Huggan (2001, p. 28) is the postcolonial exotic, which by definition involves the intersection of two regimes of value, that of postcolonialism and postcoloniality. Postcolonialism, according to Huggan, refers to the politics, the anticolonialist regime of values opposing imperialist power; postcoloniality, meanwhile, refers to the economics, the marketing of culturally othered goods and ideas and how they circulate within a system of exchange within a globalized market. The postcolonial exotic then may be said to be a contradiction of values, of ideas, where otherness sells so long as it is cloaked in noble ideological -isms and -logies.

The three films, technically speaking, can be considered culturally othered goods in the sense that it is their otherness that makes them marketable, that it is their exoticness, their Filipinoness that is expected to be markedly different from other national cinemas, that ‘buys’ them a slot in the international film festivals, sells tickets during the festival season to curious cinemagoers, and earns them the opportunity to be considered for international film distribution. However, strictly speaking, they are not as explicitly anticolonial in terms of the message the films express, nor are they as widely distributed, marketed, or exchanged in the global market place, or in the postcolonial bazaar, as Ghosh (1998) prefers to call it. *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay* are classifiable as postcolonial exotic because they straddle the curious and contradictory values of postcolonialism and postcoloniality. Brouillette (2008, p. 17) in ‘The Industry of Postcoloniality’ also talks about the commodification of otherness, but introduces the notion of postcolonial touristic conscience and consciousness, wherein she classifies the consumers of culturally othered goods, for this case postcolonial literature, as either tourists or travellers and antitourists in quite an accessible manner. The tourists are those who make the minimum effort in terms of relating to the new, the unfamiliar; on the contrary, the travellers and antitourists are the ones who exert maximum effort to get to know the culture they are dealing with, and for some instances even identify with them. With such level of understanding, empathy, and cosmopolitanism, the travellers and antitourists look

down on tourists and deplore such distant, detached, and at times offensive treatment of the Other. What is particularly important about this article is that Brouillette questions whether Huggan might be accusing readers of postcolonial literature as committing the crimes of exoticizing, aestheticizing, and/or dehistoricizing these works, when a legitimate form of knowledge could actually be produced from such practice.

Where knowledge production is concerned, it is Ghosh's (1998, p. 7) work which could possibly contribute to a more productive discussion on the marketing and exchange of culturally othered goods by addressing the issue at the level of pedagogy. By this Ghosh (1998, p. 16) wishes to educate the publishing industry and all the networks or systems involved in the business of marketing the margins the politics of the academia, that is, critical theory and postcolonial theory. She claims that a 'deep structure' should be laid down in order for the teaching of this politics of the academia to be firmly rooted and eventually change the system of the postcolonial bazaar.

Concluding inconclusively

In this study my main research has been simple, and I started with the preconceived and bold assertion that the Filipino filmmakers exoticize their works and exacerbate their Filipinoness and their own marginality in order to secure a spot at the prestigious Big Three; greater ambition and career goals start there. However, as I looked into the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze works vis-à-vis this phenomenon and practice of self-exoticization, I have been forced to look at the other factors that come into play. My earlier assumptions and even accusations have had to adjust and soften as I started to look at this as a two-way process, a relation. There is more to this self-representation than I assumed. While I maintain that self-exoticization and staged marginality are the key motivating forces driving Filipino filmmakers, there is some form of subversion, no matter how subtle and implicit, which can be found in *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, especially where the postcolonial exotic is taken into consideration.

Chapter One **From Binaries to Polycentrism** **World Cinema, Postcolonial Cinema, and the Philippine Context**

Always already opposed to what? World cinema defined and redefined

World cinema, especially in film studies and postcolonial studies, in recent years has become a fashionable topic of inquiry, criticism, and debate, although ironically enough, there is no well-delineated definition that is universally agreed upon and acknowledged. Why is world cinema important? Or more importantly, what exactly is it? As most scholars would agree, there is no easy way to define this rather complex and complicated concept, but as it is crucial, if not central, to this study, a cartographic survey of world cinema is in order.

An early attempt at tackling world cinema was made by Paul Rotha in his voluminous book *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* (1930/1967). No definition of world cinema, however, is given in the book, as it mostly goes back to the origin of film, which he traces to American, European (Soviet, German, French, British) roots, and where ‘films from other countries’ (Rotha, 1930/1967, pp. 323-325) are concerned, he makes a passing mention of Swedish, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, Japanese, and Indian cinemas. As a film practitioner himself, Rotha’s book is understandably an enumeration, a list of achievements of film throughout the decades, an apologia of his commitment to film even. While recognizing the influence of theater to film, he saw television as a threat, and commercialism as a more serious challenge to be overcome, and as he strongly put it, he had ‘faith that cinema itself will gain its freedom from the aims of its purely commercial and/or political exploiters and reach the adult status of a great art in its own right’ (Rotha, 1930/1967, p. 776). In an undertaking not unlike Rotha’s, David Robinson (1973) in *World Cinema: 1895-1980* makes another attempt at tracing the glorious past of cinema and gives a detailed periodization of film movements and trends, while conceding that it was ‘a fairly reckless undertaking to try to compress the history of more than eight decades of cinema into a book’ (Robinson, 1973, ‘Preface’, xiii). Although it cannot be seriously considered academic or scholarly, Robinson’s work is a step further Rotha’s mere enumeration and periodization of cinema(s), as it makes an effort to discuss issues of cinemas – American, European, and other cinemas – thematically, as can be seen in the chapters devoted to realities, survival, revival, legacy of world cinema. However, no definition of world cinema is given, which makes the discussion acutely wanting.

From mere enumeration, periodization of world cinema came a more intensive discussion of world cinema two decades later in the article aptly titled ‘Issues in World Cinema’ written by Wimal Dissanayake (1998). It is in Dissanayake’s work where the

binaries in world cinema – binaries of Westernization and indigenization, tradition and modernity, the local and the global – emerge as a conceptual, political problem (Dissanayake, 1998, p. 877). Focusing on Indian cinema and other similar cases, he argues that ‘we must avoid treating non-Western cinemas as expressive of some unchanging “essence”’ but ‘instead we must see them as sites of discursive contestations, or representational spaces, in which changing social and cultural meanings are generated and fought over’ (Dissanayake, 1998, p. 878). He discusses at length the inevitable connection of cinema to nation-state and nationhood, but he fails to give a definition of world cinema and instead refers to non-Western cinemas throughout (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 5). But already the Western-versus-non-Western binary has figured prominently, as though oppositions always work in such a clear-cut and neat divide.

A couple of years later, *World Cinema. Critical Approaches* came out, and in the general introduction, John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (2000) define world cinema as the films ‘devoted to non-Hollywood cinemas, both in the sense of films that are geographically made outside Hollywood and films which have adopted a different aesthetic model of filmmaking from Hollywood’ (Hill and Gibson, 2000, p. xiv). This Hollywood-centric definition ‘has meant that other cinemas have had to define themselves by differentiation from, or in opposition to, Hollywood’ (Hill and Gibson, 2000, p. xv), and this very definition, no matter how simplistic, has since become the main entry point for scholars who have followed suit. Fortunately, there are scholars who have chosen to not let this definition rest and decided to question, rethink, reopen it to closer inspection and scrutiny. Chaudhuri (2005, p. 1), for instance, considers the topic of world cinema ‘as far from settled’ and that it is sometimes used as a ‘catch-all term, designating all cinemas around the world, including Hollywood’. Although she does not avoid the relation to and opposition to Hollywood, she points out the importance of not only referring to ‘national cinemas outside Hollywood but also to assert the importance of placing the national within regional and global perspectives’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 1). This emphasis on locating the national within a wider perspective seems to make an effort at pulling apart the simplistic Hollywood-non-Hollywood dichotomy, leaving more room for issues that may be found lingering, lurking within the spectrum. For Codell (2007), world cinema is a ‘complex term that embraces films made by other people living outside Europe and America and those who have emigrated to Europe and America’ (Codell, 2007, p. 359), but has come to include films by American filmmakers, such as Spike Lee and Wayne Wang, ‘whose identities and subjects were outside of and challenging “mainstream” subjects, styles, financing, marketing, and production but still widely popular’

(Codell, 2007, p. 359). This definition complicates the scope of world cinema, since it now takes into consideration Hollywood filmmakers whose identities and topics are not strictly speaking Hollywoodish, that is, dominant, commercial, illusion-peddling, and other similar crimes that have been constantly attributed to Hollywood as a well-oiled, reliable economic machine and culture industry. Codell has brought to the fore, by way of tracing world cinema's roots to Third Cinema (which will be discussed more in the subsequent portion of this chapter), the inclusive nature and telos of world cinema (Codell, 2007, p. 2), making it more palatable and fashionable as a response to challenging the old and tired dichotomy.

Dennison and Lim (2006, p. 6) have further expanded the scope and concept of world cinema by situating it as a 'theoretical problem', by interrogating these films as to 'how they work' and 'where they come from' as crucial to reconceptualizing it, and by analyzing it as a discipline, methodology, and perspective. Building on already existing literature yet problematizing much of it, Dennison and Lim (2006, p. 6) offer two popular ways of understanding world cinema: (1) 'as the sum total of all the national cinemas in the world', and (2) 'as against US or Hollywood cinema, which they concede as both problematic and raise different questions. They see this world-cinema-as-sum-total view/understanding as an act of indiscriminately lumping together diverse films, as presupposing an entity called the nation-state, and as ignoring the possibility of organizing the world 'according to economic power, gender, sexuality, or other identities or formations that cannot be defined by a geopolitical boundary or by race and ethnicity'. And this view/understanding also 'risks overlooking modes of film practices that include, Third Cinema, women's or feminist cinema, queer cinema, and many regional sub-state, transnational, diasporic and nomadic cinema' (Dennison and Lim, 2006, pp. 6-7). As for the always-already-opposed-to-Hollywood view/understanding, Dennison and Lim (2006, p. 7) cite Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's observation in *The Oxford History of World Cinema* that Hollywood does not fall under the category of national cinema by virtue of the central position it occupies. And this is where Dennison and Lim truly dissect this notion of Hollywoodcentrism by raising several issues that cannot be simply be ignored or completely solved. First, they call into question the extent of this prevailing US-centrism and whether it would actually be possible to 'construct a narrative that de-centres US domination, challenges its hegemony, and uncovers examples of cinemas that have developed in total oblivion to Hollywood' (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 7). Second, they claim that this opposition to US elides the presence of independent, underground, avant-garde films within the US film scene/industry itself that are diverse and complex when compared to typical commercial films (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 7). Third,

and overlooked by other scholars and proponents of world cinema-as-art movement, is the privileging of the so-called alternative films which in some cases, if not most, are in actuality dominant in their respective national cinemas (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 7). Given these issues illuminated on by Dennison and Lim, it complicates further the scope, nature, concept of world cinema. If the content would be the basis of films that would qualify as world cinema, are not popular Hollywood films sometimes capable of appropriating such alternative, ticklish, relevant topics while still maintaining their time-tested, crowd-pleaser marketability? Would this all-inclusive scope not also be considered a reverse of mainstreaming the indie in the US, a case of world-cinemazing the mainstream, the popular? And if world cinema is as inclusive as it is purported to be, then why are the world cinema films, so-named and so-categorized as such, glaringly arthouse to the exclusion of popular films (Andrew, 2006, p. 6)? Apparently the inclusive nature of world cinema is also marked by certain standards that must be met. And as Chaudhuri (2005, p. 9) has pointed out, in some cases popular films (not to be confused with the previously mentioned ‘dominant’ films by Dennison and Lim) in local cinemas become repackaged and branded as art. This repackaging/branding practice raises issues that occur in relation to travel, transfer, and translation of films to the very international circuit of world cinema.

As if this already expanded and expanding scope of world cinema is not vast enough, Shohat and Stam (1994, p. 48) in their highly celebrated work and oft-quoted *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media* call for ‘polycentric multiculturalism’ which is probably the most imaginative approach in terms of challenging the power of Hollywoodcentrism, for not unlike Foucauldian conceptualization of power, ‘it is about dispersing power, empowering the disempowered, and transforming subordinating institutions and discourses’, thereby shifting not only images, but also, and more importantly, power relations. By unthinking Eurocentrism, Hollywoodcentrism, or any other centrism for that matter, Shohat and Stam (1994, p. 48), in promethean fashion, advocate granting ‘epistemological privilege’ to those who find themselves faced with negotiating both margins and center through polycentric multiculturalism. This celebratory, empowering, affirmative tone of polycentric multiculturalism goes even further by rejecting a ‘unified, fixed, and essentialist concept of identities (or communities) as consolidated sets of practices, meanings, and experiences’, on the contrary, it ‘sees identities as multiple, unstable, historically situated, the products of ongoing differentiations and polymorphous identifications’ (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 49). Clearly this polycentric multiculturalism not only complicates the scope and

nature of world cinema but also raises its level of abstraction, and asks for a decentring vision and aesthetics and for a rewiring of the brain to allow for non-centric perspectives.

This call for a rewiring of the brain's structure, restructuring one's perspective finds resonance with Dudley Andrew's (2006) atlas of world cinema, which is his way of offering a radical way of remapping the prevailing notion of Hollywoodcentrism and its relation to national cinemas. Andrew's approach refers to several types of maps – political (power, dominance of Hollywood and other emerging players), demographic (not so much the production as the availability of images, that is, audience reach), linguistic (center-periphery, international-vernacular), orientation (echoing Jameson's cognitive map⁷), and topographical (nomadic; pp. 20-25) – which he finds more appropriate for the study of world cinema as compared to 'survey', which 'suggests a distant gaze, panoptically monitoring the foreign for ... convenience and use' (p. 19). Seeing the 'pedagogical promise' of maps, Andrew (2006, p. 19) believes that what matters more in world cinema is not the coverage, but rather, the displacement. But to put this displacement into effect requires the adoption of these types of maps, which although promising can be a bit problematic in terms of feasibility, particularly the orientation map that Andrew argues. Andrew's remapping and atlasing of world cinema is a step forward for the displacement, as he puts it, of world cinema, which makes it rather surprising how he finds Shohat and Stam's approach as 'being moralistic and upholding a set of smart, politically correct films standing against Eurocentric global media forces', for the very reason that the two do not account for 'popular genres and failed heritage films as well as critical successes' (quoted in Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 6). It seems that Andrew's remapping and atlasing takes the inclusive character of world cinema seriously, and not too far from the approach he himself criticizes.

Drawing heavily on Shohat and Stam's polycentric multiculturalism and agreeing with Andrew's atlases, Lucía Nagib (2006) in her very optimistic, and titled as such, article 'Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema' calls for getting rid of the binary system altogether. She proposes to do so by giving three propositions/points:

- (1) World cinema is simply the cinema of the world. It has no centre. It is not the other, but it is us. It has no beginning and no end, but is a global process. World cinema, as the world itself, is circulation.

⁷ Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) is the book where scholars draw cognitive mapping from. It involves a making sense of postmodernism, after the fall or diminished applicability or popularity of modernity and modernism. While I admire Andrew's appropriating of Jameson's famous concept, it would have been more productive had he concentrated on this map, this atlas, instead of offering numerous classifications of atlases/maps. But I suppose this is in keeping with the pluralist spirit of poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonial studies, and in this regard Andrew hit the mark.

- (2) World cinema is not a discipline, but a method, a way of cutting across film history according to waves of relevant films and movements, thus creating flexible geographies.
- (3) As a positive, inclusive, democratic concept, world cinema allows all sorts of theoretical approaches, provided they are not based on the binary perspective. (Nagib, 2006, p. 35)

The question, of course, that comes to mind is whether these propositions would hold water and be seen as theoretically sound enough to be adopted or at least taken into serious consideration by film scholars and critics, filmmakers, film industry practitioners, and even by postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial academics. For one thing, the first proposition goes beyond the binaries and multiplicities by claiming that world cinema is ‘us’, referring to all films, regardless of country of origin or nationality, or historical context. While it may be considered as a way of disrupting the linearity of Western construction of history and time, as a way of thinking differently, as an attempt at finding a way out of the impasse, does this not run the risk of being ahistorical, of losing context, specificity, and singularity? As for the second proposition, which departs from the tripartite approach of Dennison and Lim in establishing world cinema as a theoretical concept, that is, discipline, methodology, and perspective, this has already been raised by Franco Moretti’s comparing of the approaches in the study of national cinemas and world cinema. According to Moretti (quoted in Andrew, 2006, pp. 21-22), the studies of national cinemas are similar to ‘genealogical trees, one tree per country’, while a ‘world systems’ approach may be likened to ‘waves, which roll through adjacent cultures’. What Nagib proposes, however, is to use these waves to cut across film history, which would decenter and unseat the privileged and secure places of some cinemas, for instance, we readily associate the origin and early beginnings of film/cinema to 1895, to the Lumiere brothers and to France, or for the fiercely pro-American, to Thomas Edison. Nagib (2006, p. 34) prefers to agree with ‘Alexander Kluge, for whom “cinema has existed for over ten thousand years in the minds of human beings” in the form of “associative currents, daydreams, sensual experiences and streams of consciousness ... [t]he technical discovery only made it reproducible”’. As for her final proposition, this pluralist, inclusive, democratic approach, brings to mind poststructuralist, postmodern, postcolonial theories and, most fittingly and fashionably, Deleuzian concepts of rhizome, assemblage, machinic, body without organs, plane of consistency, to name but a few. This is also consistent with Nagib’s adherence to Shohat and Stam’s polycentric multiculturalism, which can be seen as making it possible for an ‘inclusive method of a world made of interconnected cinemas’ (Nagib, 2006, p. 34). Interconnected but without hierarchy, no center, and consequently and hopefully no

binaries. Although Nagib does not explicitly reference Deleuze, we may be justified in assuming that there are overtones and resonances that can be gleaned from her positive, affirmative propositions.

The wave of affirmation in critical theory, particularly in world cinema and feminist theory, has not escaped my attention, which is why following Nagib, Andrew, and Shohat and Stam, I also wish to call into question, rethink, redefine, reevaluate world cinema with the hope, if not to do away with binaries and oppositions, to at least make the centrism, in whatever shape and form they may be found, less important or relevant. In this study, the centrism that figure prominently are Eurocentrism, that is, the ‘Big Three’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 6) – Cannes, Berlin, and Venice – in the international film festival circuit, Hollywoodcentrism as the norm, the standard, by which national cinemas measure themselves, and the national cinema, where the nation-state acts as its center. I wish to deconstruct the primacy of these centers in relation to the postcolonial films that this study focuses on, examines, and reevaluates. Like Andrew, I seek to find ways of remapping the waves in Philippine film history, movements, trends that led to the success, visibility, and participation of contemporary Filipino independent films at the big-three film festivals, and to rethink this badge of honor within the ambit of world cinema issues and concerns. Like Shohat and Stam and also Andrew, I will look at the specificities, aesthetics of the three films that make them arthouse by European, and by extension, American, film canon or standard. In a similar vein, the question that comes up would be whether it would be possible to study these films within the context of world cinema, in relation to neorientalism and exoticism without falling into the trap, without hitting the wall of impasse, without getting lost in the labyrinth of structures that binaries and centrism have established. While I cannot put forward a revised and proper definition of world cinema that would be suitable at this pressing time, I wish to adopt a critical and eventually affirmative approach to world cinema – one that is evaluative, critical, yet also inclusive, decentring, empowering, transversal. To see the relation of the three films to world cinema, neorientalism, exoticism while also looking at the spaces and zones of struggles, contestations, and negotiations. An approach to world cinema that utilizes postcolonial theory, feminist theory, film theory is indispensable and inevitable, hence, combining into a gendered postcolonial film analysis. To make this possible, world cinema must be understood in relation to notions of colonialism and neocolonialism, imperialism, orientalism and neorientalism, exoticism approached from postcolonial feminist theory. World cinema must necessarily be related with the strands in postcolonial cinema studies, specifically the specificities of film as a medium, and the larger

view of understanding the text, of what is left unseen, unframed. Third Cinema, for instance, cannot be avoided, since it has provoked issues that are crucial to world cinema.

Third Cinema's influence and the articulation of difference

It seems that a discussion of world cinema cannot be complete without a reference to Third Cinema, the manifesto, movement, method most popularly attributed to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino in the 1960s. Third cinema was radical at the time since it is the kind of cinema that 'calls for the dismantling of Hollywood hegemony, in the name of the political cinema of decolonisation' (Khanna, 1998, p. 13). With its three-tiered cinema model – First Cinema as 'commercial, studio-based patterned after Hollywood, Second Cinema as European art cinema and auteur, and Third Cinema as cinema of militant collectives' (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 11) – it is unapologetically political and ideologically opposed to the filmmaking practices of both First Cinema, with its numbness-inducing entertainment, and Second Cinema, with its elitism and the complete control of the auteurs (Codell, 2007, p. 360). Third Cinema is also regarded as an 'articulation of a new culture and vehicle of social transformation' (Dissanayake, 1998, p. 878) and as a movement that focuses on collective history, shared grievances and experiences, communal circumstances to promote solutions to fight oppression (Codell, 2007, p. 361). Third Cinema ultimately aims to effect a liberation of cultures and 'contribute to the universal decolonizing of the mind' (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 5).

However, despite its noble political goals, Third Cinema has been criticized by recent scholars as problematic on many points/levels. Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (2011, p. 6) have noted its 'susceptibility to succumb to binarism'. Following Paul Willemen, Dissanayake (1998, p. 878) argues that Third Cinema makes the impression that it was created in Latin America for Latin America and that its wider applicability was added as an afterthought. From its seemingly Latin American origins, it has been widely used as an 'umbrella term to embrace geographically diverse films' (Armes 1987, quoted in Codell, 2007, p. 361), or 'as a category for shared ideological purposes across films' cultural differences' (Pines and Willemen, 1989, quoted in Codell, 2007, p. 361). But I suppose that the intended coverage for whom and what Third Cinema is matters less, when the goal of decolonization should be the overriding focus. As Chaudhuri (2005, p. 11) has acknowledged, while recent scholars have found problematic issues with Third Cinema, particularly with its inapplicability for diasporic cinemas – Black British Cinema serves as a good example – it still remains as an influence and inspiration for contemporary filmmaking, and maybe we

might also add to film theory. We can also say without reservations that Third Cinema has laid the critical framework for world cinema (Chauduri, 2005, p. 11). Or as Codell (2007, p. 2) less valorizingly puts it, the changes that have taken place in Asian and African cinemas have brought about the need for a wider categorization, hence, world cinema has stepped up to the plate as the 'more appropriate and inclusive phrase'.

What is most commonly and readily associated with Third Cinema is its militant, oppositional, political character, as the cinematic, and by extension cultural and psychological, weapon of the oppressed, the marginalized, the once-colonized. Ponzanesi and Waller (2011, p. 5), however, caution against collapsing Third Cinema into Third World. It seems that the equation that has been formulated is that Third Cinema is solely and exclusively for, by, of the Third World, while First Cinema is for, by, of the First World. With the transnational movements of films over time came the spread, cross-cultural encounters of themes and aesthetics, to the extent that 'Third Cinema could be anywhere, not just in Latin America or Africa but even in Europe' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 5). And we might add even in the US itself, where filmmakers with indigenous roots have been producing films that may be situated within Third Cinema (Codell, 2007, p. 362).

Even in the binary-defying *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Shohat and Stam (1994, p. 28) recognize the overlaps in terms of production and comes up with four concentric circles of denotation that pertain to both Third Cinema and Third Worldist films: (1) a core circle of 'Third Worldist' films produced by and for Third Worldist peoples (no matter where those people happen to be) and adhering to the principles of 'Third Cinema'; (2) a wider circle of the cinematic productions of Third World peoples (retroactively defined as such), whether or not the films adhere to the principles of Third Cinema and irrespective of the period of their making; (3) another circle consisting of films made by First or Second World people in support of Third World peoples and adhering to the principles of Third Cinema; and (4) a final circle, somewhat anomalous in status, at once 'inside' and 'outside', comprising recent diasporic hybrids ... which both build on and interrogate the conventions of 'Third Cinema'. This line of reasoning and classifying has earned Shohat and Stam the moralist comment from Dudley Andrew, as what this Third Cinema denotes and connotes does not include popular films. But what Andrew may have failed to realize or refused to acknowledge perhaps is that it is the political character of the films that earned them a spot in the Third Cinema/world cinema roster, and not necessarily because they were popular. Perhaps it may not be too far-fetched to say that some popular films may have underlying political message that is often overlooked since they are readily dismissed as the foreign/national cinema version of

Hollywood movies. The political message may not be coming from a blare of horns, but the overtones may be heard if carefully listened to. The political signs may not be conspicuous, but the trace may be perceptible if closely examined.

Teshome Gabriel (1989, pp. 46-47), who is credited for the development and theorization of Third Cinema, compares the ‘tendencies, not absolutes’ of Western dominant conventions and non-Western use of conventions. With the Western filmic conventions, such as high contrast and low key lighting, eye-level perspective, distance according to emotional content, fixed perspective, studio set, actor’s iconicity, conflicting characters/forces, not looking directly at the camera, Gabriel contrasts non-Western filmic conventions that have the tendency to use less-developed lighting, deliberate choice of low/high-angle shots for purposes of political or social comment, minimal use of close-up shots, varying camera movement but not in response to individual psychology, location shooting, nonprofessional actors, cross-cutting, and the look that is directed at the camera. That although aesthetic intentions are supposedly subordinate to Third Cinema’s political and social purposes (Codell, 2007, p. 361), these filmic conventions that are present and distinctly noticeable in the films would prove otherwise. The aesthetic intentions seem to be on equal footing with the political and social purposes, which are extended and manifested visually and aurally. Documentary-like style, as a case in point, is regarded in Third Cinema as having a revolutionary potential, which is aimed at awakening its audience (Codell, 2007, p. 362), which would help explain the presence of documentary-like scenes in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), the exemplar of Third Cinema. Although strictly speaking the filmmaking practice of Third Cinema is said to have met its ‘demise’ (Chauduri, 2005, p. 11), the aesthetics are still noticeable in contemporary films that would qualify as world cinema, particularly the use of long takes, prolonged silences, and grainy appearance that seems to mirror the gritty realism in the films.

Robert Stam’s (2003, p. 32) discussion in ‘Beyond Third Cinema: the Aesthetics of Hybridity’ has provided an updated view on aesthetics that account for the inevitable, unavoidable, much-vilified ‘contamination’ of Third World/world cinema films for the reason that some of them adopt First Cinema techniques. Stam (2003, p. 32) calls it ‘constitutive hybridity’, which ‘replaces binarisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new global regime where First World and Third World are mutually imbricated’. In cinema, as in literature, music, theory, the current trend has been to understand the spaces where in addition to hybridity, in-betweenness, interstitial character may be found.

It is in these contact zones, the points of encounter where subtle differentiations are often overlooked but are too significant to ignore.

Hybridity may be said to be particularly embodied by postcolonial cinema. Drawing on Derrida, Ponzanesi and Waller (2011, p. 12) argue that postcolonial cinema is a “‘dangerous supplement’” to genre and national cinemas mainly because ‘it exposes relationalities, contaminations, and zones of contact’. Postcolonial cinema then may be said to share similar characteristics with world cinema, and to posit differences may be quite a challenging task, but I would hazard that postcolonial cinema is more politically inclined than world cinema, but both may be linked genealogically to Third Cinema. But for purposes of clarity, postcolonial cinema is ‘less explicitly polemical than that of Third Cinema yet strongly political and still concerned with authoritarian oppression’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7). A possible explanation for this would be that ‘polemical’ connotes oppositional, dialectical, which is prone to binarisms that scholars have been assiduously trying to avoid, if not altogether eliminate. But it retains the political aspect, which relates to power – as to how it can be decentralized, devolved, distributed, and productively transformed. Postcolonial cinema departs from Third Cinema in the sense that while maintaining engagement with collectives, postcolonial cinema refocuses on the specificity of individuals (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7). Postcolonial cinema, in a nutshell, brings the individual back to the discussion, back to the foreground, back to the frame, which had been glossed over by Third Cinema, relegated to the background, left out in the space-off, as though the only way by which the collective could be empowered was to entirely divest the individual of his/her importance, specificity, subjectivity. This individual, let us emphasize for clarity’s sake, does not refer to ‘ego ideals or everypersons’ but to ‘multidimensional figures – often marginalized, subordinated, displaced’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7) or ‘deterritorialized’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 8). Postcolonial cinema then recognizes both the empowerment of both the collective and the individual; a choice between the two need not be made, for that in effect would be another form of binarism, which we are at great pains trying to avoid. Postcolonial cinema opens up spaces where ‘porosity’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 9) is allowed, which may not be found in Third Cinema. The acceptance of the porous – be it an idea, a trend, or aesthetics – allows for more inclusion, a higher level of abstraction, and a step closer to productively addressing issue and concerns within the ambit of postcolonial paradigm.

World cinema, postcolonial cinema, and international film festivals

International film festivals have played a key role in the exposure, exhibition, and recognition of world cinema. This tripartite notion of exposure, exhibition, and recognition, however, has taken on a dual meaning as it can be seen positively or negatively. On the positive side, Chaudhuri (2005, pp. 5-6) recognizes that international film festivals ‘perform an indispensable role in enabling a diverse range of films to be seen by audiences around the world’. On a broader level, international film festivals ‘facilitate cultural exchange between different ‘national’ cinemas and provide an alternative global distribution network’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 5), because it would otherwise not have been possible for the films to be exhibited and distributed both on international and national screens because of the constraints set by international distribution and the increasing impenetrability of national cinemas (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 5), which would normally prioritize films that would ensure marketability and profit. For the filmmakers themselves, the participation and exhibition of their entries gives them ‘international visibility and kudos’ and brings possibilities for attracting international distributors, notwithstanding the fact that ‘85 per cent of films shown at festivals never reach commercial screens beyond the festival circuit’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 6). Yet, on the whole the invisibility and kudos accorded the films and the filmmakers redounds to the benefit of their own national cinemas. For national cinemas that have consistently or increasingly been performing well, it further buttresses their role as key player in the festival circuit, gaining them a stronger foothold for festivals to come. As for national cinemas that have either suffered from a long drought or have been hitherto unrecognized, this gives them a tremendous opportunity to be part of the international cinematic map. This also gives national cinemas incentives to support local filmmakers by providing institutional assistance through grants from film boards, a relaxing of censorship for films with sensitive content and mature images, and more promotion and publicity.

However, with regard to the tripartite notion of exposure, exhibition, and recognition, there are views that reflect issues that seem to tip the scale to the other side, the negative one, or rather critical. Andrew (2006, p. 19), for instance, calls the method and practice of world cinema films for festivals as ‘a la Miss Universe, seeking top products to be put in competition each year’. It brings to mind certain impossible standards that the films have to measure up to make the cut, to earn a spot during the cutthroat and unforgiving process of selection. Like contestants, competing films beforehand have to accentuate their assets and hide their flaws or imperfections in order to earn that much-coveted spot in the Miss Universe pageant. Reality and naturalness are not enough; they need to be beautified, cosmeticized, glamorized while maintaining a natural and realistic look and feel.

This brings us to the most caustic and alarming criticisms that filmmakers of non-Western origins have constantly been subjected to: self-exoticization in their bids to ensure a spot in the program, to win an award, attain prestige and international recognition (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 3). This is not a new phenomenon, and as has already been pointed out by Chaudhuri (2005, p. 6), ‘certain film industries and filmmakers, mainly in non-Western countries, have been accused of targeting their films specifically for festivals’. Chaudhuri (2005, p. 6) adds that ‘some critics think that the choices of subject matter, style and visual imagery in these films cater to Western/international film-festival tastes, packaging Third World cultures in Orientalist or ‘tourist-friendly ways’. Indeed, it is not unusual for filmmakers to create films tailor-made for a particular festival, for instance to finish a film that would beat the deadline of a prestigious festival, or for films to take more liberties in their treatment of sexual themes and images for European festivals, or to exaggerate violence for American audience. Stereotyping goes both ways, and expectations play an even greater role. Whether we call it self-exoticization, or self-prostitution⁸ if we are inclined to be more sinister and caustic, I would imagine that orientalism (or neorientalism) and exoticism have profoundly affected world cinema as we know it today.

Dennison and Lim (2006, p. 1) could not have hit the mark more when they put forward world cinema’s ‘situatedness’, that is, ‘the world as viewed from the West’. The films that get exhibited and recognized in film festivals are not necessarily ‘representative of the situation of filmmaking in their originating country, nor the kinds of films that are popular with that country’s audiences (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 6), but rather, these films suit the ideas that Western audience, critics, festival coordinators view as possessing a certain *je ne sais quoi*, a certain appeal that matches their notion, perception, belief of those countries of origin of these world cinema films. Is this not what Edward Said (1978/1995, p. 3) had argued after all, that this is another form of ‘Western dominating, structuring, and having authority over the Orient’? The orient taken to mean not just Asian, but also Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American cinemas, lumped together to form the exotic Other. Exoticism, as Shohat and Stam (1994, p. 21) have argued in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, solipizes its object for the exoticist’s pleasure, using the colonized ‘other’ as an erotic fiction in order to reenchant the

⁸ In a peer review I attended in May, I was advised to either elaborate on this strongly worded remark or refrain from using it altogether. What I had in mind as I was writing it is that we, a general we, sometimes find ourselves in situations where we swallow our pride or bend or suspend our moral judgment and do something we would not otherwise do were it not for a possible gain. I stretched the meaning of prostitution as an exchange, almost businesslike in so many ways, and where self-prostitution is concerned, it is a conscious activity, where victimhood should not be an easy scapegoat, a ready excuse. There is some agency somehow, despite the negative connotations attached to it.

world'. And film is by far the best medium on which this eroticism can be projected, with the film festival coordinators and filmmakers making this projection possible. The 'Big Three' – Cannes, Venice, Berlin – which hand out the highly prestigious and much-coveted Palm d'Or, Golden Lion, Golden Bear awards, respectively, prove 'valuable for catching the attention of international audiences and distributors, although judging decisions can be arbitrary and lack transparency' (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 6). What Chaudhuri should have considered, however, is that exoticism cannot be expected to be not arbitrary much less transparent, because it primarily boils down to a mental construction that an individual or group has of the Other. Or in layman's terms, it is simply a matter of taste, which is rarely rendered quantifiable or precisely qualifiable.

Phyllis Rose said it wittily, and rather sardonically, in *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (1989, quoted in Shohat and Stam, p. 21): 'While racists are threatened by difference, exoticist finds it amusing ... Racism is like a poor kid who grew up needing someone to hurt. Exoticism grew up rich, and a little bored. The racist is hedged around by dangers, the racist by exoticist by used-up toys'. World cinema films in international film festivals are not too different to the exotic film fetishist, whose flair for the exotic demands flavor, authenticity, and even squalor. There has to be a trait in that particular foreign art film that would on one hand excite, titillate, satisfy and on the other hand shock, repel, disgust. And the bar gets higher as one level is attained, and it remains to be seen whether the exoticist will tire of this exotic taste, once the novelty wears out. Like the Miss Universe contestants, there must be a new set of exotic international beauties each year; the foreign supply must constantly be replenished, while adhering to the exoticist's taste, mental picture, and construction of what the Other is or what ought to be.

Exoticism is an important concept that forms part of the nexus of orientalism, orientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze which I argue influences the self-exoticization of the three Filipino films in this study, as well as that of their filmmakers. The relation between the nexus and self-exoticization, however, does not follow a one-way direction but is a bidirectional process. This is elaborated in chapter two, and the three films are briefly introduced in this chapter and analyzed more thoroughly in chapter three. But before I get ahead of my discussion, let me first situate the Philippine experience within world cinema and international film festivals by giving a brief background of Philippine cinema.

Show me something truly Filipino: festivals and the Philippine context

Kidlat Tahimik⁹, based on the reading I have done so far, is arguably the Filipino filmmaker who has become the scholars' favorite (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011) because of his film *Mababangong Bangungot* (*Perfumed Nightmare*, 1977), which had its fair share of participation at the Berlin Film Festival and was distributed to a limited run by Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope in the US. I fear that my knowledge of this film is based mostly on what I heard firsthand from Kidlat Tahimik during an experimental film workshop he coordinated, which I attended, sometime in 2008. It was experimental by official title, as it was organized by the University of the Philippines Film Institute, but it had a twist to it that was unmistakably Kidlat Tahimik – what made it experimental was the creed/mantra that we should always listen to our *sariling dwende*, that naughty, mischievous dwarf inside us that dwells in our mind, consciousness, or more academically speaking, subjectivity, which significantly influences our creativity. He wanted us to create films, and art in general, based on our realm of experience, on what makes us unique, be it our ethnicity or our cultural specificity, which sets us apart and makes us individuals who could tell interesting, fascinating, engaging stories. This *sariling dwende* was to be our manifesto if we wanted our art to have a distinct voice. From this I understood what made him a hit in the international scene, precisely because he channeled his *sariling dwende* to make a film that was a commentary on the Philippines by mixing creativity, ingenuity, and playfulness with a 'serious' theme. But I am afraid that where scholarly study of Kidlat Tahimik's filmography is concerned, there are other scholars who have delved on it more analytically and theoretically than I ever could.

To place Kidlat Tahimik in Philippine cinema will involve a cursory look at its own history/cartography. Like most national cinemas, there is always a constant tension between the mainstream and the independent. Dissanayake (1998, p. 880) gives us three classifications of films in national cinemas: (1) popular, which is 'commercial by nature, for mass appeal, profit'; (2) artistic, which have 'high art' concerns and tend to be shown in international film festivals; and (3) experimental, which is 'much smaller in number and much less visible in the filmic landscape, committed to the creation of oppositional cinema and characterized by the audacious attempt to interrogate the Establishment and its values'. Kidlat Tahimik's work

⁹ Born Eric de Guia, he uses the name Kidlat Tahimik, even as the Supreme Court of the Philippines denied his petition to legally change it. His educational background ranging from theater, speech communication from the University of the Philippines and business management from Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania can be seen in his independent films with a critical, revisionist, postcolonial streak. His other film, *Memories of Overdevelopment*, which to my knowledge has not been released at all, is a reworking of Philippine history during Spanish colonial times. In it he claims that it was a Filipino slave who first circumnavigated the world, since he continued on doing so long after Ferdinand Magellan had died.

would fall under the second classification, and so would the other Filipino films that had been exhibited and recognized in international film festivals. What would count as diasporic Filipino films are those that are sent in DVD format to Filipino migrants workers in the Middle East, major cities in Europe, and any other part in the globe, by their families, or those films that have had rare and limited screenings for Filipinos who have immigrated to the US or Canada or other parts of the Western world. These films rarely have subtitles, which become quite a challenge to younger Filipinos whose first language is English. These diasporic Filipino films, if we could them that exactly, would fall under the popular classification and tend to be of the melodramatic type.

For Filipino filmmakers eager for international accolades and visibility, it has been the practice to make artistic films. This can be traced historically, or cartographically, in terms of ‘Golden Ages of Philippine cinema’. The First Golden Age is believed to have happened in the post-US liberation ’50s, when the works of Filipino filmmakers were screened and recognized at European film festivals for the first time (Tiongson, 1994). These films have nation-building themes meant to inspire and strengthen nationalist fervor among the citizens of the then young democratic republic.

In 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos declared the Martial Law, which is remembered in Philippine history as a period of massive corruption, rampant human rights violations, and curtailment of basic freedoms. The filmmakers then, particularly from the late ’70s to the early ’80s, made a stand against the dictatorship by forming an organization, the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, and created films that were pro-democracy, anti-fascist, and inflammatory, which were meant to object to and challenge the dictatorship. Considered as the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema (David, 1995), the films were also screened and earned accolades at international film festivals, but what is more important to underscore here is that these films were created and intended primarily for its national and local audience and were not made only to compete or to be showcased on the international stage (David, 1995).

Decades later and with the rise of digital filmmaking and other forms of technological innovations, independent filmmaking, or simply called ‘indie’ became the buzzword. Indie may refer to the independent mode of production, or to the aesthetics that digital filmmaking entails, or to the themes that are deemed to be bold and brave. Participation in and recognition from international film festivals have once again become accessible, attainable, and hence, was greatly welcomed by the local film industry. There has been the pervading notion once again that the Third Golden Age of Cinema may have very well arrived, although to my knowledge this has not been officially proclaimed as such in Philippine film studies.

The three contemporary Filipino films this study is concerned with are the following: (a) *Kinatay* (*The Execution of P*, 2009) by Brillante Mendoza, which won the Best Director award at Cannes Film Festival; (b) *Engkwentro* (*Encounter*, 2009) by Pepe Diokno, which won the Orizzonti Prize at Venice Film Festival; and (c) *Tirador* (*Slingshot*, 2007) by Brillante Mendoza, which won the Caligari Film Award at Berlin Film Festival. They depart from Kidlat Tahimik’s work in the sense that they project beautiful suffering, romanticized poverty in the package of social realism and Third Cinema aesthetics, and lacking the political yet playful overtones of *Mababangong Bangungot*. Whether it is a result of the changing times, the politics of the moment, or Western cravings is something that may be too soon or premature to tell and requires a careful analysis not only of the films, but also of the film festival history and world cinema criticism and reception. This part will be elaborated on in the succeeding chapters, but suffice it to say at this point that what these films project is a certain notion of Filipinoness that is appealing and attractive to Western audience.

The Philippine experience, of course, is not unique, as this surely occurs in other national cinemas. Dissanayake (1998, p. 880), for instance, criticizes the ‘Mexicanness or *mexicanidad*’ that has been a ‘privileged topic in Mexican intellectual and aesthetic discussions’ but is currently being deemed and reevaluated as ‘elitist, sexist, class-bound, privileging the criollo over mestizos and Indians’. Dissanayake (1998, p. 880) suggests that ‘through the interrogation of such concepts of “Japaneseness” or “Mexicanness” associated with filmic discourse, scholars are emphasizing the need for the reacquisition of subaltern agency and the repossessing of history’. This reacquisition, I believe, would be possible through the use of gendered postcolonial analysis of the three independent, festival-worthy Filipino films.



Figure 1. The three films in this study and their posters. Note the conspicuous presence of the olive leaf, the now iconic symbol of international film festival success.

Some concluding thoughts

In this chapter I have talked about the problematic definition and redefinition and issues concerning world cinema, Third Cinema, and postcolonial cinema in order to lay the groundwork for the three contemporary Filipino films in focus. I have been trying to relate these issues with orientalism and neorientalism and exoticism, and yet I have still to go in-depth to make the connection, directly or indirectly. This connection will be returned to in the following chapters, but would focus more on the appropriations and redefinitions of orientalism as theory and practice, on exoticism, on imperial gaze, which collectively form a nexus that relates to self-exoticization.

Chapter Two Gazing at Beautiful Suffering, Fetishizing Romantic Squalor Orientalism, Exoticism, Imperial Gaze

Situating the three films within the –isms: an introduction

It seems that I cannot go any further making a claim for the neorientalist, exoticist, exoticist treatment of Filipino films at international film festivals without giving proper credit to Orientalism, in its original conception and its appropriations and reappropriations, even when the original text itself is not the most apt recourse for this study since it does not deal in any way with the Palestine question specifically or the stereotypes of Middle Eastern nationals. For purposes of clarity, then, the research question must be reiterated in this chapter – How does orientalism, working through the imperial gaze, influence the way Filipino

independent filmmakers create films that portray a certain kind of ‘Filipinoness’? I look at how this notion of ‘Filipinoness’, in turn, reinforces the construction and representation of Filipino films, and Philippine cinema as a whole, as a feminized, exoticized, Far Eastern cinematic Other, by focusing on three contemporary independent Filipino films – *Engkwentro* (2009) by Pepe Diokno, *Tirador* (2007) and *Kinatay* (2009) both by Brillante Mendoza – that had been exhibited and recognized at the ‘Big Three’ of European film festivals – Cannes, Berlin, and Venice – using the optic of gender postcolonial analysis. I wish to explore this research question by finding the connections of the films with the salient theories, by foregrounding the tendency and practice of ‘self-exoticization’ (Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 3) by these two Filipino filmmakers.

What is seemingly problematic, however, in this study is how the films under study are not visually pleasurable, not glossy, not enticing or appealing in the traditional notion of an exotic film, rather, they offer exactly the opposite¹⁰. They do not offer vast deserts, harem-like atmosphere, nor do they evoke the senses through aromas and tactile images. *Engkwentro* (2009), *Tirador* (2007), and *Kinatay* (2009) all have urban settings, where poverty, filth, and detritus serve as the unappealing backdrop. The storylines do not involve adventures where we easily identify with the protagonists, unless we count daily harrowing struggles of the poor and the disenfranchised as adventurous. At first glance the films exemplify Judith Butler’s (2009) discussion of precarious, grievable lives that beg to become livable in the first place, precisely because of the daunting challenges that the characters seem unable to escape. The films would qualify more appropriately as social realist, cinema vérité, or films that could fall within the ambit of Third Cinema or postcolonial cinema. Although these films do not fit the traditional definition of exotic films, I argue that it is precisely this oppositeness that serves as the lure, which is what I would like to call, for the purposes of this chapter in particular and of the study as a whole, as ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ that draws orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist gaze to the films on one level, and also to Philippine cinema as belonging to the realm of world cinema on another level.

Orientalism and its many permutations and its relation to film

To address the research question, the pertinent theories must necessarily be mentioned first. In a word, Orientalism according to Edward Said (1978/1995, p. 3) is ‘Western

¹⁰ The Philippines, as an archipelago of 7,100 islands with a tropical climate, has a lot to offer in terms of natural wonders and Lonely Planet-worthy sceneries. We are blessed, and cursed one might say, with natural resources, which makes this focus on poverty quite alarming or in this study, a worthy topic for investigation.

dominating, structuring, and having authority over the Orient'. This line, along with the whole celebrated book, has been quoted, scrutinized, twisted, turned in every manner imaginable, that it is enough to have a separate scholarship specifically and exclusively focused on Saidian Orientalism. Huggan (2005, p. 126), for instance, in his thought-provoking article '(Not) Reading Orientalism' talks about this phenomena of various interpretations, the reading and 'not reading' that have been accorded Saidian Orientalism by focusing on the works of Aijaz Ahmad, Meyda Yeğenoğlu, and David Cannadine, and claims that such various interpretations have been a form of a 're-Orientalization' of the book and the theory itself. While Huggan focuses on re-Orientalization of Orientalism, Reina Lewis (1996) in her book *Gendering Orientalism* asks about the gender aspect of Orientalism. Although the book focuses on the work of artist Henriette Browne and writer George Eliot, an important point that Lewis (1996, p. 17) raises, following critics of *Orientalism*, is the 'troubling status that Said accords to the "real" Orient: the Orient figures both as a construction, "the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced ... any such real thing as "the Orient", and a real thing that can simultaneously be misrepresented by Orientalism and directly conquered by the West'. She asks whether there could be a 'possibility of the discursive inscription of a real "Orient", or innocent experience of it' (Lewis, 1996, p. 17), which continues to be a challenging question for scholars in the field. How, indeed, can Orientalism be productively discussed without orientalizing it? Following the thread of Orientalism as an ideology of conquest, Lewis (1996, p. 18) questions the absence of women as 'producers as Orientalist discourse or as agents within colonial power' and argues instead that 'women did play a part in the textual production that constituted Orientalism ... and, moreover, that gender, as a differentiating term, was integral to the structure of that discourse and individuals' experience of it'.

While Orientalism has been criticized for its validity as a theory and as gender-blind, it is important to emphasize that what I am particularly interested to look at in this research is the appropriation or reappropriation of feminist and/or gender-sensitive scholars in relation to film. And this is where *Visions of the East. Orientalism in Film* by Bernstein and Studlar (1997) becomes particularly relevant. It is one of the early works that focuses on the relationship of Orientalism to film, by taking as case studies the films of classical Hollywood cinema that have exotic themes, settings, and in the most inappropriate manner possible, white characters passing for African-Americans, North Africans, or any dark-skinned non-Western for that matter, or what has been notoriously come to be known as 'blackface'. In the introductory chapter of the said book, Bernstein (1997, p. 1) calls this the 'transformative

moment' in Hollywood, where African-American characters started to 'stand in for themselves'. Calling Orientalism as a regime of knowledge, Bernstein claims that Orientalism is 'a distinctive means of representing race, nationality, and Otherness' (Bernstein, 1997, p. 2). By explicitly emphasizing race and nationality, Bernstein further narrows its application to film, where the skin color, the clothes, anything physical falls within the ambit of visual imagery, in effect delimiting Said's discursive, politico-economic, literary application of Orientalism. When applied to the films under study, however, there is no blackface to speak of since the characters in the films are played by Filipino actors, both professional and nonprofessional. Perhaps we may call the interest in Filipino characters as giving them the stage, the space to stand in for themselves, although as fitting the perceived notion of what Filipinos ought to look like – brown-skinned, short and small, or at the very least shorter and smaller, with facial features not too similar to the norm, that is, not having too-straight nose, not well-defined chin and bone structure. We may not be justified to call it a transformative moment in world cinema, but rather as a more inclusive move in terms of coverage and representativeness of other national cinemas. It is an important moment, it cannot be denied, for Philippine cinema, but to call it transformative may be too grand, as participation and recognition do not necessarily connote a transformation in Philippine independent filmmaking. According to Bernstein (1997, p. 3), 'cinemas inherited the narrative and visual traditions and cultural assumptions'. It is the cultural assumptions that are at the root of the problem of Orientalism in film, because these very same assumptions underlie the narrative and visual traditions that continue to be upheld in filmmaking and film studies. The Orient conceived 'as a European invention' has been projected 'since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, memorable experiences' (Bernstein, 1997, p. 2). In this respect 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' fits squarely, although, once again, not within the traditional sense of what is usually perceived as a traditional place of romance or memorable experiences. Although the elements of exotic beings and haunting memories and landscapes are definitely found. The 'landscapes' in *Engkwentro* (2009), *Tirador* (2007), and *Kinatay* (2009) are the urban slums in the Philippines, where the houses are made of 'found' objects, such as thin plywood and cardboard boxes, thin and most often holed corrugated roofs, and other materials salvaged from dumping sites. The memories are haunting because the sorry state of lives shown and the narratives that unfold are not for the squeamish, the fainthearted, although probably understandable for the humanitarian, the fellow-minded; one wonders how people could live the way the characters do, and by extension the people from that country. That this state of affairs truly exists is not in question

here, but that this corresponds to the Western imaginary as a European invention is well worth pondering and pursuing. While this is clearly not Bernstein had intended in his discussion of the Orient as a European invention in his article, I argue that the changing times, and also visual tastes, have given way to the expansion of what is meant by exotic. From the visually satisfying and mesmerizing, the exotic Orient has now extended to the visually repulsive, psychologically haunting, and morally revolting, yet one cannot look away. This calls to mind Julia Kristeva's abject on so many levels, because the horrific can sometimes be strangely attractive.

As Dudley Andrew (1997, p. 232) would say, 'there remains a need for the genuinely foreign', and that it is 'the promise of the exotic' that has become part of the attractions of cinema itself, which theater cannot sufficiently fulfill. For surely no matter how exotic the play may be with its story, make-up, costume, et cetera, it is still cinema that possesses the technology of suturing the viewer into an exoticist adventure, fantasy, and illusion. Cinema transports the audience into a faraway land in such a way that the theater cannot do. Not one to pause from giving incisive yet noteworthy comments, Andrew (1997, p. 249) further argues that Orientalism, no matter what the intention or motivation, 'amounts to an essentializing of a people or gender, no matter what the intention'. To come back to the Filipino films under study, one wonders whether the attention accorded them in the Big Three amounts to mere essentializing of the filmmakers as novel and up-and-coming on one level, and an essentializing of Philippine¹¹ cinema as a feminized exotic Other on another, or whether there is a more complex and more complicated dynamic at work. Is attention to foreign, exotic cinema necessarily an essentializing undertaking devoid of innocence, as the critics, according to Reina Lewis (1996, p. 17), have already raised? Will there, indeed, never be an innocent experience of viewing, appreciating, and recognizing exotic world cinema films?

Bernstein (1997, p. 11), in this regard, has a more careful though tentative interpretation of Orientalism in film by saying that

'the closer one looks at Orientalism in film, the more likely one is to find that such oppositions are blurred, complicated, and undone – perhaps momentarily, perhaps more substantially – by the operation of the texts themselves (for example, by the visual style as against the logic of film's narrative)'.

He traces this ambivalence to the tendency of 'Orientalist films to sustain a measure of ideological contradiction and incoherence', to which most representational texts are prone

¹¹ 'Filipino' as an adjective/modifier may also be used, but in this case 'Philippine' is more appropriate; Philippine people, however, will never be acceptable.

(Bernstein, 1997, p. 11). Does this imply that even when Orientalism is so predominant, be it intentional or unintentional, as an ideology in the representational texts there is still a possibility for spaces to open up for this prevalent ideology to be resisted? Does this in effect suggest that there is no pure Orientalism in film to begin with since in itself it does not stand as consistent and coherent? Does this mean that the much-criticized and much-vilified Orientalism in film as it is perceived is not, after all, as pernicious as it believed to be?

Hoday King (2010, p. 5) in *Lost in Translation. Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier* also holds a more nuanced perspective on Orientalism. King (2010, p. 5) uses Saidian Orientalism as the starting point with which to argue that ‘the issue of representation of subordinated otherness’ Said claims is not sufficient ‘without following up with any practicable notion of how such representation could go beyond the parameters of Orientalism’. King (2010, p. 5) not only advocates moving beyond mere issue of Orientalist representation, but also cautions against ‘straightforward anti-orientalist critiques and toward an analysis of the fantasy structures that motivate these representations’. Writing mostly about the cinematic representations of the Orient, particularly East Asia, King (2010, p. 5) proposes problematizing of ‘the presumption of stable identities rather than simply aim for more accurate representations of Asian identities already presumed stable’. King (2010, pp. 5-6) takes an even more pessimistic view by claiming that ‘figures of hybridity and miscegenation’ are ‘not enough to expose the violence of Western Orientalist modes of representations, or even to propose indigenous, vernacular, or other local forms of representation on their counterpoint’ although she concedes that these efforts are necessary as well.

This realistic and pessimistic view on addressing or arresting ‘the violence of Western Orientalist modes of representations’ only proves that the issue of Orientalism, and Orientalist representation to be more precise, is more complex and more complicated than it is commonly believed to be. In postcolonial theory, a vernacular or indigenous turn (or perhaps we may even say a return to the precolonial) as a response to cultural representation is usually seen as inadequate, and even considered as a purist position or a parochial perspective that does not take into account the remnants and inevitable influences of colonialism and globalization. A more cosmopolitan position relates to hybridity, so much so that one gets the impression that hybridity has become a plausible response or a catch-all term serving as an explanation when dealing with issues involving the cultures, identities, and subjectivities of individuals from once-colonized countries. King’s exploration, to her credit, tries to avoid pernicious and tired binaries, but it leaves us asking for more complicated and more complex answers concerning ‘the violence of Western Orientalist modes of representations’. Is there a

possibility of addressing it at all without running the risk of succumbing to the purist and parochial response (that is, indigenous and vernacular as a counterpoint) or taking the cosmopolitan and fashionable view (hybridity)? Taking this line of reasoning a bit further, would claiming the attention and accolade given to these three Filipino films a straightforward form of Orientalist representation/structuring of world cinema still be a valid claim, or does it merely amount to a parochial, reactionary view? If we take the cosmopolitan view of turning to hybridity for an explanation, does this not mean hiding behind Occidentalist influence that is too powerful, too pervasive to resist? It is particularly tricky for world cinema, or for cinema in general for that matter since it is an art form and technology meant for mass consumption, since films are created mostly with national and/or international in mind. If we refuse to call it Orientalism in the classical sense of the term, would calling it neorientalism suffice? Would the effects, influence be less nefarious? Or would it be equally, if not much more so, a violent form of Western Orientalist modes of representations? Or could it be that any name, label, or form that Orientalism takes is still just a Western dominating and structuring of the Orient, the Far East, the enigmatic Other, the Asian mystique? I argue that Orientalism goes hand in hand with exoticism. We could say that orientalism is the ideology and exoticism is the practice, but to strictly adhere to it might not account for the interchange and overlap. Perhaps it is more prudent to claim that the orientalism and exoticism inform each other, and that the Oriental Other is Orientalized for being exotic, therefore exciting, enticing, very foreign, or that the exotica comes from the Other's being from the Orient, a place of unknown pleasures, newness, adventures. The oriental Other is exoticized, and the exotic Other is Orientalized in films, not only in terms of representation but also in terms of epistemology and ontology. Orientalism and exoticism are so deep-seated in our minds (Western and even in non-Western), so much so that they have become so naturalized, and that sometimes it should be a cause for concern as to why the best means of approaching and addressing orientalism (and also exoticism) is too fraught with difficulty and complexity.

The lure of the foreign and the new: exoticism and film

Exoticism has been mentioned several times in this chapter but has not been properly defined. The exotic is the foreign, the new, the authentic, the unknown, the pleasurable. Or as Phyllis Rose (1989, quoted in Shohat and Stam, p. 21) puts it rather sarcastically: 'While racists are threatened by difference, exoticist finds it amusing ... Racism is like a poor kid who grew up needing someone to hurt. Exoticism grew up rich, and a little bored. The racist

is hedged around by dangers, the exoticist by used-up toys'. This passage is found in *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time*, and although it is a biography, the claim may well be worth considering within the academic discussion of exoticism as an ideology and practice. It is interesting how exoticism is juxtaposed with racism, which is very telling of how significant race comes into play. Compared to a racist's intolerance of and despise for difference, an exoticist seems to be a bigger person, whose response to difference is that of interest, pleasure, entertainment, and amusement. The exotic's purpose is to amuse and entertain the exoticist, and if we are to follow Rose's line of argument, then class both on the personal and national levels figures as an important factor, since more often than not it takes a person coming from a more privileged social and economic position to exoticize.

But to discuss exoticism in more academic or scholarly terms, we need to turn to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, p. 21) in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. According to them, exoticism¹² 'solipcizes its object for the exoticist's pleasure, using the colonized 'other' as an erotic fiction in order to reenchant the world'. This is not too far from Rose's argument of the exotic as existing for the exoticist's pleasure; the added element, however, is the colonized other, bringing into the discussion the historical facts of colonialism and imperialism and how these have been instrumental for the othering of the world. Another important point is the erotic fiction – how the Other has been conquered, subjugated, emasculated and feminized, and narrativized. It is a strategy of containment to be sure, because the enigmatic, the mysterious, the dangerous, the unknown cannot be allowed to control the conqueror by way of its charm, mystique, and beauty. Solipcism is another central keyword here, since all this need for containment started and was constructed in the mind in the first place. What was translated to material form – literature, film, and whatnot – was a manifestation of what first existed in the mind. Psychoanalysis certainly will provide an explanation for this, but restricting my scope to gender postcolonial analysis, it is Norindr's (1996, p. 133) excellent and pioneering discussion of 'colonial blues' present in revisionist French films about Indochina, aptly described as phantasmatic, which has laid the groundwork in analyzing colonial feminizing and exoticizing of the once-colonized Other in film. And although in the three Filipino films under study the theme of colonial blues owing to factual, historical French occupation of Indochina does not explicitly figure, this study aims to follow this same exoticist Othering logic present in Norindr's analysis although it is in the form of 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor'. Let me emphasize, however, that unlike *Indochine* (1992),

¹² In chapter four I also discuss exoticism in relation to the postcolonial exotic as discussed by Huggan (2001). Also significant to this topic is Huggan's discussion of the two exoticist discourses.

L'Amant (1992), and *Dien Bien Phu* (1992) where the essence of a phantasmatic Indochina lies greatly in the beautiful landscapes, stately French architecture, and war memorials, the opposite can be found in *Engkwentro* (2009), *Tirador* (2007), and *Kinatay* (2009), where filthy surroundings, urban slums, and chaotic environments comprise the essentialized milieu. The colonial blues films rely on the projected and imagined trope of French and Indochina as 'an old love story' (Norindr, 1996, p. 132), which is in stark contrast with the Filipino films in question where there is hardly a past romantic relationship to speak of; rather, what we have is a sort of soiree, where the West is getting to know Filipino cinema better through them, whether they fit the construction they have always held of what the Philippines is like, what the people (apart from the ones who work in their countries, either as professionals or as help) are like, how they live, and similar details that they may be interested in discovering or knowing more about. If the colonial blues relies on drawing heavily from memory and in aestheticizing the visual construction and revisionist retelling, 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' depends on gazing at the currently available visual images on display to see if these images fit what they have learned about it in the past, a fleeting memory perhaps, based on global television news (which is usually about natural disasters, poverty, or weird-looking customs), second- or third-hand notion of the Philippines based on its international reputation, but not enough to leave a blueprint in one's mind. Let us consider the fact that the Big Three countries – France, Germany, and Italy – do not have a colonial relationship (economic and diplomatic ties will be set aside for a moment, since the three accord the same to most states) with the Philippines. (Filipino films have rarely succeeded in American film festivals, and Spanish film festivals not being major in stature, they are hardly the priority festivals of Filipino filmmakers.) The gazing structure that takes place does not involve one that is drawn from a colonial love affair, but one that is informed by orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist mental perception or construction, begging to be affirmed.

Gazing at the cinematic Other: imperial gaze considered

While I was first apprehensive in including imperial gaze with the discussion of orientalism, neorientalism, and exoticism because 'imperialism' usually connotes a very broad politico-economic colonial power structure, I felt it incumbent upon me to turn to E. Ann Kaplan's (1997, p. xi) concept of the imperial gaze in *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* which for her is a straightforward critique of the gaze as both

male and imperial. Building on Laura Mulvey's pioneering theory of the male gaze¹³, Kaplan (1997, p. xix) aims 'to show parallels between the structures of the male gaze as feminist film theorists, following Mulvey, have thoroughly examined it, and the structures of the imperial gaze, as formulated by scholars building on the concept of male gaze'. Kaplan (1997, p. xvii) sees the imperial gaze as a one-way subjective vision, where in an unequal gazing structure the one vested with more power has the advantage of gazing at the other. The gaze involves extreme anxiety, an attempt in a sense not to know, to deny, as opposed to the look, which is a process, a relation, one involving a certain curiosity about the other (Kaplan, 1997, p. xvii). The gaze, as it follows from the foregoing discussion, is what is present in the orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist treatment of Filipino films as belonging to world cinema. The look, of course, is preferred, but this is more appropriate when parties see eye to eye, so to speak, when both parties are on an equal 'looking' structure. The fact that self-exoticization is being practiced by the filmmakers points to the craving for a chance to be seen, to be looked at, albeit when in practice their films are being gazed at. It is their foregrounding of their difference through the trope of 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' that merits them the much-longed-for look, or rather, the gaze, as it actually happens. Most importantly, it corresponds to what Kaplan calls as the gaze that contributes to 'the subject's interpellation' (Kaplan, 1997, p. xix).

Kaplan softens her approach on the gaze/look structure when it comes to recognizing the role and position of white, female Western travelers/artists. Unlike Reina Lewis who highlights the contribution of white, female artists in the Orientalist representation of the Other, Kaplan, while not dismissing it, sees the productive side of this move by female artists who tended, and still tend, to look at the Other. These women treat difference with more care, more respect, where people from other cultures are not treated as mere ethnographic subjects, or objects, where ethnographic visual study is concerned. What Kaplan finds crucial and in fact proposes is the need for 'envisioning a new process for dealing with difference – using Jessica Benjamin's working through the negativity of difference, which, if survived, prepares the way for recognition of the Other' (Kaplan, 1997, p. 23). This positive approach toward the negativity of difference requires not just openness and broadmindedness but also respect,

¹³ Laura Mulvey's (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is credited as a seminal work on the male gaze. And like Said, her work has been subjected to several criticisms, spawning numerous scholarly research as a result. Kaplan's dependence on her work is understandable because of the gaze and looking structure that is central to her work. It should be noted, however, that Kaplan's book also owes much to Mary Louise Pratt's research on contact zones, since Kaplan's *Looking for the Other* has an ethnographic (in this case not used in a detached, scientific sense of the word) aspect to it.

from which recognition of the Other as a looking and speaking subject, that is, one invested with subjectivity, may be possible. In a formulaic approach, Kaplan (1997, p. 23) argues that positively dealing with difference advocated by Jessica Benjamin could work by combining with Jane Flax's engaging of 'a discussion across the gap marked by the differend'. By way of intervention, I understand this to mean that it is at the gap where the focus and efforts should be directed; where there is missing, be it theoretical or epistemological, that is where the theories of rethinking, reformulating, reworking difference should be undertaken. This is where efforts of treating the Other as different in the negative sense should be treated as the Other with recognition, and not patronization, of their difference. I might also add that although an 'innocent experience' of looking at the Other may not be the too readily and strictly feasible, what is most important is for the male, imperial gaze to be mitigated and diminished by the look, if not totally eliminated. And where the goal of positive treatment of difference is concerned, it is Trinh T. Minh-ha¹⁴ whose work should be referred to by pro-difference female artists and theorists. Kaplan herself recognizes this, and that aptly enough, she argues, still in a formulaic mode, that in addition to Jessica Benjamin's 'working through the negativity of difference' by recognition and Jane Flax's 'discussion across the gap marked by differend', Kaplan (1997, p. 23) adds, most importantly I argue, 'Trinh's theories of the subject and her concept of "speaking nearby"'. This notion of speaking nearby refers to the 'idea of a closeness but with a necessary distance because of difference a concept of "approaching" rather than "knowing" each other' (Kaplan, 1997, p. 201). This method/manner is by far the most difference-sensitive – 'to know' is to assume that one can be completely contained, grasped, interpellated, while 'to approach' is to attempt at having the Other, the-one-who-is-not-yourself understood, acknowledged, recognized. 'Speaking nearby' not only recognizes that the Other is a speaking subject who does not wish to be merely spoken for, but also, and more importantly, the Other, the-one-who-is-not-yourself, has agency, and exercises it through looking, speaking. 'Speaking nearby' is horizontal, non-colonizing, and collaborative. When applied to film theory and practice, speaking nearby finds its applicability in giving due importance to the aural aspect of the medium, which privileges the visual over other faculties. The triadic formula for positive difference (that is, working through the negativity of difference plus engaging a discussion across the gap

¹⁴ Trinh's most notable work is *Woman, Native, Other. Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989), and since then her work has influenced research on difference, Otherness, and issues on how to properly and noncolonizingly represent the Other. This is not surprising since all the axes of intersectionality are present, and where Kaplan's work is concerned, the gaze and the Other are particularly important in patterning her work after Trinh's.

marked by the differend plus speaking nearby) given by Kaplan comes full circle because of the nexus of looking, thinking, and speaking/hearing.

‘Beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ and staged marginality

So far I have discussed at length the pertinent theories – orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze. What I wanted to show was how problematic, complex, complicated these theories are, and not doing so would make it more difficult to create the connection of these theories to the three films. What I would like to emphasize, however, is how these films act more as examples, acting more as ‘a case in point’, of the orientalist, exoticist construction and representation of non-Western films, and that these films may surely be read in various ways and analyzed from different vantage points with different perspectives, and that they may not be the best examples of what orientalist, exoticist films. However, what I have been at pains trying to establish here is that the non-glossy, non-mainstream, non-suturing themes and aesthetics of the three films have been the means by which the filmmakers have caught the orientalist, exoticist attention and the imperial gaze.

Huggan (2001, p. xii), in his caustic yet significant work *Post-colonial Exotic*, draws our attention to ‘staged marginality’, which ‘denotes the process by which marginalized individuals or minority groups dramatise their “subordinate” status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience’. When it comes to the Filipino filmmakers in this study, their choice of themes, aesthetics and their conscious portrayal of ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ in the films is a sign of their complicitous relationship with an orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist treatment and the imperial gaze. For one thing, Pepe Diokno (*Engkwentro*) and Brillante Mendoza (*Tirador* and *Kinatay*) are two male, middle-class, sophisticated filmmakers who could opt to choose topics and aesthetics that do not deal with poverty and the lives of the people of the underbelly of the city. They could deal with films that deal with issues, for example, of the confused middle class, epic sagas, or more ‘humanist’ topics that one would assume they are more, let us say, more familiar with. Both attended respectable learning institutions (film school for Diokno and art school for Mendoza¹⁵) in the Philippines, yet from the films that they make, a person with no knowledge of their background may not get the impression that they in fact had classical training in the arts. It leads theorists, observers, skeptics of Philippine cinema, such as myself, to question this move, this tendency as part of a

¹⁵ Pepe Diokno was at the time still a student at the University of the Philippines Film Institute, while Brillante Mendoza graduated from the Fine Arts college of University of Santo Tomas, the oldest Catholic university in Asia, which has a strong emphasis on mastery of art techniques.

well-planned strategy to put themselves on the national map. In the words of a friend who works in the independent filmmaking scene, they are ‘bumo-Brocka’, or following in the footsteps of the national artist for cinema Lino Brocka¹⁶, who in the ’70s and ’80s became famous for his antiestablishment, antifascist films meant to question Martial Law then imposed by the democratically elected turned dictator President Marcos. Lino Brocka’s films are about the struggles of the masses, their duping by an oppressive system, their failures, hardships, and deaths. As Joel David perceptively observed in his books *Fields of Vision. Recent Applications in Recent Philippine Cinema* (1995) and *Wages of Cinema: Film in Philippine Perspective* (1998), what was remarkable about Lino Brocka was that he made those films with the goal of raising awareness about the inhumanity of Martial Law and he showed his films not just in film theaters but also to schools, to public venues, because his goal was to awaken the public, to arouse the masses and it was never just about claiming accolades or raking in revenues. When his films were banned by the dictatorship, he sought ways to still have them screened, hence, the participation in international film festivals (Cannes mainly) to call attention to what was happening at the home front. David gave another perceptive and incisive comment, which is not covered in the two books, in our Cinema and Nation class that I took under him in the first semester of 2009 in my graduate film program back at the University of the Philippines Film Institute which I have not forgotten and probably will never forget. He said that the new generation of filmmakers make films primarily intended for international film festivals, and not for their own cinemagoers, their own people. Some of the films even make their debut or premiere abroad, as though assuming that their own people would not appreciate the films, as though Filipino viewers are not able of appreciating or, even worse, not comprehending the theme and aesthetics of their art films. He did not call it self-exoticization, but what was clear from his comment was that these young, up-and-coming filmmakers only have their own careers in mind, their eye intently targeted on international stardom. This for him is anathema to everything that Lino Brocka stood for – strong nationalism, fierce antioppressive stance, and concern for, commiseration with, and advocacy of the masses, for he himself, Brocka, was from the masses because of his humble beginnings. That the new generation of new independent filmmakers are doing the cinema about and for the masses a disservice is implied and an understatement; what is missing now is the commitment, conviction in the themes, characters that the filmmakers foreground in their films.

¹⁶ His film *Insiang* (1978) was the first Filipino film to be shown at Cannes, while *Bayan Ko (This Is My Country)*, 1984) was nominated for the Palme d’Or but was banned by President Marcos during the Martial Law.

Engkwentro (2009) by Pepe Diokno, for instance, is a comment about the local government-sponsored vigilante groups in Southern Philippines who kill petty criminals. The protagonists are two young brothers who belong to two rival youth gangs. Joining these gangs for them seems the only option available to them. The plot takes place over a span of a single day, and the camera follows them, through the narrow alleys, as the elder brother attempts to raise money so that he and his girlfriend could go to Manila to escape the vigilante groups.

Tirador (2007) by Brillante Mendoza, meanwhile, is a multiplot, multicharacter film that shows the lives of thieves, schemers, and hustlers in Quiapo, the most notorious district in downtown Manila where those who fear for their safety dare not tread. Like *Engkwentro*, the political comment goes to the government officials who only remember these constituents during election season. The plots are open-ended, unresolved, as though stating that this will go on and on; there is no resolution seen in the far or near horizon.

Kinatay (2009), another film by Brillante Mendoza, follows a day in the life of the young criminology student from his civil wedding during the day, to his class in the afternoon, to his evening of running errands (collecting bribe or ‘protection’ money from street vendors for the police syndicate), to his getting unwittingly involved in the abduction, torture, murder, and mutilation of a middle-aged woman, a prostitute-turned-drug dealer, by the police officers who moonlight as an organized drug syndicate to reckon with. The political commentary here is that the police and the criminals are the same, and that one could either choose to run and fear for the safety and lives of one’s loved ones, or get dragged in, even against one’s better judgment, because there is simply no escaping the system.

These films have the ‘indie’ themes and the indie aesthetics to match, and perhaps the staged marginality that can be read from the films (and the filmmakers) may either be conscious and deliberate, or that they have become so ingrained that it has become naturalized, to the extent that indie films are no longer expected to tackle mainstream, relatively light themes, or to have glossy visuals because indie themes and aesthetics have already become the rule rather than the exception. But let us focus for a moment on the themes or tropes that these international film festival-oriented works tackle for a moment and ponder how it is glaringly apparent that they ignore the gender aspect of the human condition. The tropes in these three ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ films foreground issues of humanism (necessarily man-centric), nationalism, politics, power and authority, failure of the justice system, citizenship, and other topics that are usually considered as high politics, therefore, masculine. Women are hardly foregrounded here, and when they do appear, they are relegated to the margins, silenced, or heard and seen almost inconsequentially. It is

questionable whether giving more space, screen time, importance to the women in the films would weaken the trope of struggles of the downtrodden and challenges to the human spirit, and as a result ruin their chances of presenting very Filipino (read: exotic and authentic) yet very universal themes. Feminism in films, after all, lends to subcategorizations, such as women's films. The aspiration to universality, cosmopolitanism, and international renown, albeit under the banner of world cinema might be rendered difficult and challenging, so the gender aspect may be ignored, forgotten, dismissed. What these filmmakers fail to realize, however, is that in the orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist scheme of things, their films, no matter how masculine and universal they may be purported to be, they are always already feminized.

Whether the filmmakers are aware of this remains to be seen, but assuming they were so, this awareness puts them in a dual position of either pandering to Western taste and gaze or playing by the rules while injecting subversion and resistance in their work, no matter how subtly, is akin to holding up a mirror to someone to let him or her see his or her own reflection staring back at him or her. As Huggan (2001, p. xii) himself acknowledges, 'staged marginality, far from being a form of necessary self-subordination, may function in certain contexts to uncover and challenge dominant structures of power', as he claims it to be the case with Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990).

But to have faith in the filmmakers' capacity and conscious practice of resistance and subversion in their works would not be enough; these forms and instances of resistance and subversion must be thoroughly examined to see if they are inching toward ways of uncovering and challenging dominant structures of power, as Huggan so eloquently puts it. Where might those efforts be seen? Would they be in the themes and aesthetics of the films? Would they be in the independent means of production and distribution? Would they be, no matter how small, in which humor is surprisingly unnervingly injected in the dialogue, themes, visuals of the films, as though saying that they may be conscious of their staged marginality but they are at least turning their misfortunes into something creative and productive? Would this mean that their awareness of their staged marginality in itself is a sign or form of their resistance and subversion? Or whether or not they are aware of this staged marginality always already mars their resistance and subversion because of their complicitous relationship with the orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist scheme? These are difficult questions that will prove to be more complex and complicated to answer with a simple and ready yes or no.

Some concluding thoughts and preliminary notes

This chapter was written to serve as the transition from a theoretical discussion of world cinema to another theoretical discussion of the concepts of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze, and staged marginality. This explains why the films have been introduced briefly but have not been delved into, analyzed frame by frame, line by line, or as a whole a filmic analysis informed by gender postcolonial analysis. The intention was not to avoid giving a space that would allow for the films to theoretically speak, nor to elide the specificities of the films, much less their gender aspect. On the contrary, the idea was to allot a separate discussion for the pertinent theories that can be connected to, as I have argued throughout, the trope of ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’, which I still contend is the opposite of the usual visual and psychological pleasure offered by most exotic, (post)colonial films, most notable and exemplary of which is *Indochine*. The medium specificity of the films will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, using the combined method of work-immanent approach and textual analysis. By work-immanent approach I intend to not only read the three films but also to look at them, that is, coming from the tradition of film studies. And by textual analysis I mean reading the overtones, undertones, the socio-political aspects that surround and are embedded in the films. The separation will never be neat, as most combined methods go, and I suppose they are never expected to be. But there will be an effort surely to make such approaches interact, intract, and resonate with each other.

Chapter Three Cinematizing Suffering, Aestheticizing Squalor Medium Specificity, Gender Postcolonial Lens, and the Films

Bringing medium specificity back into the discussion: an introduction

In the previous chapter I talked about the concepts of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze in relation to the self-exoticization of Filipino filmmakers and Filipino films. I tried to establish this relation as a two-way process, in which one side responds and corresponds to the other, and that it is never merely a pure, classic, textbook case of orientalism, nor a strictly opportunistic case of staged marginality. Like most situations in the postcolonial setting, the case with the Filipino films (and their respective

filmmakers) are always more complicated and complex than what they appear to be on the surface. A deeper analysis and a more careful examination would always reveal a more blurred and blurry, unsettled and unsettling reading, particularly when one reads and uses analyses coming from the perspectives of history of colonialism, globalization, cultural studies, among others. One could even argue that overreliance on such perspectives sometimes leads to the overemphasis on the cultural side of things, in a manner of speaking, that the specificities of the films themselves are either overlooked or downplayed. In such types of analyses, one is tempted to ask, 'But what is filmic about these films?' In the same manner that Jonathan Culler (2000) laments that emerging theories (feminism included) have overshadowed the literary in literary studies, and that whatever is left of it must be reclaimed. In gender studies, this resonates with the issues concerning the body, about bringing it back into the discussion, ever since the linguistic (in the forms of postmodernism, poststructuralism, as few examples of the social constructivist school) buried the body¹⁷, or left it lying down in the couch of psychoanalytic tradition¹⁸. The fact of the matter is that we can claim that the literary, the body had never left the discussion at all; rather, they had been overshadowed by paying more attention to more fashionable competing theories. And the same could be said about the filmic tradition in relation to other theories/perspectives – the filmic analysis had never left the frame, but the focus was decentered or pulled away. What usually happens is that analysis of films tends to take a film as the text, and the textual analysis that proceeds ignores the medium specificities of the films, as though to do so would be too formalist, too passé, or not theoretical enough to be taken seriously or be considered a legitimate topic of study.

Rosemarie Buikema (2009, p. 5) in 'Crossing the Border of Identity Politics: *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee and *Agaat* by Marlene van Niekerk' addresses this situation by calling for a synthesis of work-immanent approach and textual analysis. By work-immanent approach, she refers to the specificities of a medium that make it as such. And although this approach has been 'so deservedly criticized in the past', she argues that 'form is what defines a work of art; form constitutes its singularity par excellence, which is why it will always withdraw from being appropriated by sheer identity politics' (Buikema, 2009, p. 5). Like Culler, Buikema calls for a return to what is what is literary when analyzing literary works, or in more general

¹⁷ It is a common criticism hurled against Butler especially for *Bodies That Matter*, as scholars say that it starts with the discussion of the body only to forget about it as the discursive and the linguistic take over. I owe this observation to Dr. Marek Wojtaszek, my teacher in the course The Body in Feminist Theory at the University of Łódź.

¹⁸ This can be said not only for Lacan but also for feminist scholars who follow his school of thought.

terms, to what distinguishes an art form from others and defines itself, its very singularity as Buikema puts it. But what is important to emphasize here is that for Buikema it is only through the combination of work-immanent approach and textual analysis can a literary work be more adequately and productively read.

To narrow it down to the film tradition, Robert Stam (2000, pp. 190-191) in *Film Theory: An Introduction* also talks about the tensions between medium specificity and textual analysis within film theory and film criticism. Traditional film criticism may be said to be leaning toward the formal elements or aspects of films, especially when dealing with Classical Hollywood Cinema, or as Stam (2000, p. 190) puts it, these analyses focused more on the 'synecdochic fragments of films'. Textual analysis took a departure from this practice by rejecting the 'traditional evaluative terms of film criticism in favor of a new vocabulary drawn from structural linguistics, narratology, psychoanalysis, Prague School of Aesthetics, and literary deconstruction' (Stam, 2000, pp. 190-191). Taking the departure from traditional film criticism, 'textual analysts often completely ignored issues traditionally central to film analysis: elements like character, acting, performance' (Stam, 2000, p. 191), and focused instead on signification systems (which came to be known as film semiotics, drawing heavily from Saussure, Peirce, and other semiotics luminaries) that can be gleaned from the films as texts, not just as art form or medium.

The predominance of semiotics in film criticism, however, did not last long, as competing theories, such as poststructuralism and cultural studies, emerged and came to be accepted as more suitable as tools for textual analysis (Stam, 2000, pp. 192-193). Critiques of textual analysis were given by Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie (1989, quoted in Stam, 2000, p. 193):

1. Its relevance is limited to narrative cinema.
2. It 'murders to dissect', ignoring the organic unity of the text.
3. It reductively 'mummifies' film by reducing it to its systemic skeleton.
4. It elides film's context, its conditions for production and reception.

To these critiques, Stam (2000, p. 193) dismisses the first as inconsequential 'since textual analysis is applicable to any object', while the second he sees as being 'rooted in hostility to analysis per se'. As for the third and fourth critiques, Stam (2000, p. 193) finds them valid and interrelated, but then goes to explain that 'when textual analyses are reductive, it is precisely because they are ahistorical and therefore fail to take production and reception into account'. He traces this very ahistoricism of textual analysis to its influences: (1) Saussurean linguistics with its 'tendency to cut off language from history', and (2) Russian

formalism, ‘with its preference for a purely intrinsic analysis; these influences led to the so-called decontextualization of film analysis (Stam, 2000, p. 193).

Unlike Buikema’s synthesis of work-immanent approach and textual analysis, Stam does not explicitly propose a solution on how to read or analyze films. Instead, he broadens his discussion:

Film analysis is a method rather than an ideology; it is a genre of film writing open to diverse influences (from Barthes to Jameson to Deleuze), to diverse grids (psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism), to diverse ‘schemata’ (reflexivity, excess, carnival), and to diverse principles of pertinence, both cinematic (camera movement, editing) and extra-cinematic (representation of women, blacks, gays and lesbians) (Stam, 2000, p. 194).

This statement only proves that there are various ways to analyze a film, and that adhering to strictly one approach – be it intrinsic or extrinsic, cinematic or extracinematic, formalist or textual – is futile and impractical, if not impossible. A film, after all, as an art form and a social artifact is always already medium specific and textual, always already timeless yet contextual.

As for film analysis being a method instead of being an ideology, it leaves open the possibility of seeing and reading films from a nonprescriptive, nonreductive angle, and renders it receptive to new, emergent, inchoate theories or perspectives. As Stam (2000, p. 194) so commonsensically puts it, ‘[a]nalysis tends to find what it is looking for’, which allows for even the seemingly strange theoretical bedfellows to work as an approach. In this study, as a case in point, the overarching framework is gender postcolonial analysis, which narrows down to finding the relation between orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze and self-exoticization of Filipino filmmakers and their respective films in order to gain attention and recognition at the Big Three. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does orientalism, working through the imperial gaze, influence the way Filipino independent filmmakers create films that portray a certain kind of ‘Filipinoness’? How does this notion of ‘Filipinoness’, in turn, reinforce the construction and representation of Filipino films, and Philippine cinema as a whole, as a feminized, exoticized, Far Eastern cinematic Other? In this study, I look at three contemporary independent Filipino films – *Engkwentro* (2009) by Pepe Diokno, *Tirador* (2007) and *Kinatay* (2009) both by Brillante Mendoza which had won awards at Venice, Berlin, and Cannes, respectively.

This chapter aims to analyze the aesthetics and conventions of the three films, which would lead to a textual or theoretical reading of the text. Whether it is the aesthetics or the conventions in the films that give way to the textual reading, or the theories that influence the

aesthetics or the conventions is not the main question to ask; rather, it is possible that both are possible and acceptable, and that there is a constant shifting and oscillating move between the two. The goal here is to employ a synthesis of work-immanent approach and textual analysis, or to look at the specificities of the films and their, shall we say, theoretical, social, political overtones.

Through a gender postcolonial lens darkly

The trope that I wish to return to, which I have discussed at length in chapter two, is what I call ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’, and I also wish to reiterate this as the focal point on which I will establish the connection between orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze and self-exoticization of Filipino filmmakers and films – *Engkwentro* (2009), *Tirador* (2007), *Kinatay* (2009). The three films, like what I have already stated briefly in the previous chapter, all deal with nontraditional notions of exoticism, since there is nothing pleasurable in the images, settings, narratives portrayed in them. The settings are dirty, filthy, reeking of poverty; the dangerous, life-and-death situations not particularly appealing to the holiday getaway-yearning viewer. *Engkwentro* (2009) is about two adolescent brothers living in a slum in Southern Philippines, who have become entangled in youth gangs, and for the older brother’s petty crimes, he is being hunted by the local government-sponsored vigilante group. *Tirador* (2007), meanwhile, is a multiplot, multicharacter film that follows the day-to-day struggles of the characters living in Quiapo – a district in downtown Manila infamous for its crime rate – who steal and hustle to make a living. And *Kinatay* (2009) centers on the day in the life of a young man studying to become a policeman but moonlighting as an errand guy for a drug/crime syndicate, who gets unwittingly involved in the abduction, rape, murder, and mutilation of a former prostitute-turned-drug dealer. It does not take a genius to know that these are not the most enticing plots that readily pique and sustain an orientalist’s or exoticist’s interest. Yet it is this very ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ that constitutes these three films’ appeal to persons of the orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist persuasion. On some level, watching the three films is similar to watching reality-TV shows such as *Survivor* or *Fear Factor* – one is disgusted, yet one cannot look away. It is the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze at its finest (or perhaps we should say the worst) at work, when it has become so naturalized that one does not see the point in questioning it, much less considering it as odd; self-exoticization on the part of the orientalized cinematic Other working hard to meet this demand. In the three films, we see this naturalized phenomenon in the following visual forms:

(1) in the opening sequences, (2) in key dramatic highlights, and (3) the characterization of the lead male protagonists and the supporting female characters.

The opening sequences of the three films should be the first clue to this, establishing early on what we are about to expect throughout. These opening sequences are part-cinema vérité, part-social realist, but more fittingly classifiable as possessing and/or exhibiting an ‘aesthetic of poverty’ (Stam, 2000, p. 94), literally or figuratively.



Figure 2. This is in the latter part of *Tirador* before the gang riot, but what is important to focus on here is the locale, which is near the sea, where people get their livelihood from, gather. Note the pile of garbage on the right side of the frame, which ruins the seemingly idyllic atmosphere.

In *Engkwentro*¹⁹ (2009), after we are shown a close up of a young man running toward us, and the title card announces the phenomenon of vigilante groups violating human rights and performing summary killings, we are shown the locale, a fishing town seemingly idyllic at first, only to pan leftward to the alley filled with makeshift-looking houses that people actually inhabit.

¹⁹ For the trailer of the film, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX-Uk4tFbLY>.



Figure 3. The young man with arms outstretched is Tomas, the leader of the protagonist Richard's rival gang *Batang Dilim* and Raymond, the younger brother at the hangout/turf of the gang. The use of makeshift roof serving as walls is common in this neighborhood, with some even being used as walls of houses.

Five minutes into the film and already we see the community that offers no hope, with the extradiegetic sound of the speech of the local town mayor playing in the background, justifying his iron-fist rule for the sake of so-called peace and order. We are introduced in passing, since the camera pans and tracks and aims to gather everything in one long take, to a young couple (the protagonist Richard and his girlfriend Jenny-Jane) worrying and bickering about not having raised enough money to elope, to escape. Then very quickly we enter the house, a single room more appropriately, of the two young brothers, Richard and Raymond, with their invalid father, the three of them having a meager meal, wanting to get more but their credit with the neighborhood store has reached its limit, all this scene framed in medium shot, as though showing us just how narrow and cramped the world they live in is. It is an aesthetic of poverty, indeed, for the visuals it shows, and also for the fact that the film was made on such a limited budget, with the filmmaker and the production team opting to use high-definition digital camera instead of 35mm film. It might also be significant to point out that unlike the cinema verité tradition of the use of documentary aesthetic and lightweight equipment (Stam, 2000, p. 94) for a more convenient and effective shooting at actual and found settings, the slum in *Engkwentro* is not only staged in the sense that great artistic planning and care went to the production design, but also that it was actually created, every single cardboard and plastic of it to make it appear as such. The slum set of the film was built on a horse racetrack in Manila, not Southern Philippines that is purported to be, which makes this notion of aesthetic of poverty in the film seem more staged, more artificial, more invented than ever, even for a narrative film where reality should not be main issue, or it begs the question: Is it not really?



Figure 4. This is the *estero* or open sewer in the neighborhood that serves as the setting in *Tirador*.

In *Tirador*, the aesthetic of poverty takes on a whole new meaning, as this poverty is a way of life, as something that all the characters in the film have learned to deal with and do not bother to escape from. The film opens with the light source coming from two flashlights, directed directly at the camera, as though acting as an indexical, or more specifically as deixis, the ‘this’ (Doane, 2009, p. 136) of language, announcing and tagging the audience as watching, as being there, as now already part of the cinematic dialogue, as though telling the viewer, ‘You are there looking here’ or ‘You are here looking there’. Then the voice is heard from the person holding the flashlight, the district head who warns the others in the community of an impending raid or what they call *sona*, for it is in effect a kind of zoning of the criminals, the usual suspects wanted by law. The flashlight shows people in fast tracking shot – bumming around late in the night, having sex, doing something illicit; all these while the audience is being toured or carried along the dark and narrow alleys, the fast tracking shot showing houses made of cheap and defective materials and open sewer. The characters are corralled from their houses to the basketball area, where they are thrown together hands up and face down, being identified by the police one by one. For the unfamiliar viewer, it will take a while before the main characters emerge one by one and become fleshed out, since in this milieu, they are all treated alike. This aesthetic of poverty in the opening sequence sets the tone for the whole film – the goal is not to moralize stealing, hustling, scheming or any manner of crime, but to cleverly evade getting caught and getting punished. This opening sequence may perhaps call to mind Fernando Meirelles’s *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, 2002), the same crime-infested neighborhood where survivalism is the driving force, except that the color is washed-out and gray rather than vibrant and vivid, the music foreboding and ominous rather than festive and merry, the narrative treatment grim and pessimistic rather

than playful and youthful. Judging by the look of *Tirador*²⁰ alone, one does not easily get the impression that it was shot on color 35 mm film, because of the intentional shakes, long takes following quick actions, and the digital look evoking aesthetic of poverty, or ‘hungry cinema of “sad, ugly” films, films which would not only treat hunger as a theme but also be hungry in their own impoverished means of productions’ (Stam, 2000, p. 95).



Figure 5. The protagonist Peping and his young wife on the morning of their wedding day as they walk from their house to catch a jeepney going to the town hall. This neighborhood is relatively better compared to that of *Engkwentro* and *Tirador*. Note also the more vibrant colors compared to the washed-out look of the other two films. To the right of the frame are two tricycles painted in conspicuous green and yellow commonly used for short-distance public transport.

And this is where *Kinatay* differs from the other two, in the sense that the treatment and the tone of opening sequence are lighter, literally and otherwise. The aesthetic of poverty is alive and well, no doubt, but we see morning scenes in a busy Third World city wherein the urban poor are starting their day early – street vendors getting ready to sell, children in uniform going to school; nothing too ominous or too dark. The camera is also shaky and unsteady, as though mimicking the hustle and bustle in the area, with the diegetic sound of motorcycles whirring or of a cock crowing. The frames are replete with cultural signifiers present that are not found in Western settings, for instance tricycles used for public transport. One scene cuts to another seemingly unrelated scene, establishing the locality where the protagonist Peping and his family live. It is aesthetic of poverty certainly, but there seems to be a lighter tone and overall atmosphere. Compare this opening sequence to the brutality and violence that takes place later and the contrast becomes stronger²¹. Compare this opening

²⁰ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdAONFdDGB8&feature=related> for the trailer. It has no dialogue but is perfectly understandable. Note the overall documentary-like look of *Tirador*.

²¹ For a clearer notion of the plot, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzYSXmkbOpI>. It has German subtitles but the title card and visuals make the story accessible.

sequence of *Kinatay* to that of *Engkwentro* and *Tirador* and the contrast appears more pronounced, unsettling, and effective.

A for effort: the aesthetics of suffering in the films

In the preceding discussion of the three films' opening sequences, what we have established so far is the revolting, disgusting milieu where the downtrodden, the abject live and struggle to survive – the romantic squalor part of the 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' trope of this study. But let us now move to the 'beautiful suffering' part of this trope, which is quite apparent from the harrowing existence and life-and-death situations that the protagonists find themselves in. Suffering usually evokes pity, empathy, commiseration on the one hand, and numbness, fatigue, lack of concern on another hand. Although the article 'Post-humanitarianism. Humanitarian Communication Beyond a Politics of Pity' by Lilie Chouliaraki (2010) deals mainly with images for advertising or awareness campaigns by agencies and nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups like the UNICEF or Save the Children, the discussion of different types of images of suffering might be useful and relevant here. In this article Chouliaraki (2010, p. 107) talks about two types of images in humanitarian communication: (a) 'shock effect' images, which are 'denounced for dehumanizing the sufferer', and (b) 'positive imagery' images, which are similarly criticized for 'glossing over the misery of suffering'. Both images are criticized for issues concerning the 'commodifying solidarity' and the representation of suffering of distant others (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 107). In the three films under study, it is interesting that although advertising and film are strictly speaking two different social media, the shock effect and positive imagery images seem to be applicable and rather fitting. Shock effect and positive imagery images are used in ads for humanitarian campaigns to elicit pity, to provoke potential donors guilt for being privileged, to move them to action, such as reaching into their deep pockets or clicking their mouse to sign online petitions; while in films, shock effect images act as the hook, positive imagery campaigns as the means of sustaining interest.

Let us consider the fact that the protagonists in all the films are what are commonly treated as the abject of society, which in this context should be understood in the McClintockian²² (McClintock, 1995, pp. 71-74) sense, not just in the Kristevan²³ sense, the

²² By McClintockian I am referring to a colonial setting where the natives are treated with aversion and contempt on the basis of racism, for their color, physique, and supposedly lack of civilization and culture. In a postcolonial setting the same remains true, only this time it is class that becomes the chief basis for discrimination.

ones whom those in power, the dominant, the better situated wish to expunge but cannot do so. Or to take Shohini Chaudhuri's (2010) line of reasoning, they are the unpeople²⁴, because the protagonists live on subsistence level, leading a bare life; or living a precarious and grievable life, as Butler²⁵ would say. Let us consider this plot/narrative as the shock effect image, the hook that draws the orientalist/exoticist viewer in. But the conditions the protagonists find themselves in would not be enough to sustain interest if we do not see them fighting back, trying to beat the odds, so we can expect them to be making an effort to surpass their tribulations and emerge triumphant, or making do with what they have, refusing to feel victimized, exercising some semblance of moral agency, hence, the positive imagery campaigns. In *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, however, the protagonists fight but do not exactly beat the odds; what we are left with is the imagery of beautiful suffering – admirable in terms of effort yet so distant, so far away, that identification of the viewer is not to be expected, much less being sutured into the perspective of the social abject, the unpeople, the precarious.

For instance, in *Engkwentro* we follow Richard, the elder brother, as he unsuccessfully peddles his father's crystal meth, with the camera tracking all his movements, with the intentional shakes as usual. As Richard snakes his way through the narrow alleys, with his back on us, the camera stops to show him positioned on the far left side of the frame, cursing at something he finds. The camera quickly pans to the direction of the 'absent-one', the one who is not in the frame, or according to Jean-Pierre Oudart, it is 'the second shot, the reverse shot of the first, represents the fictional owner of the glance corresponding to the first shot' (Dayan, 1974, p. 115, quoted in Braudy and Cohen, 1999), and finds no one there since the absent-one is too quick to be seen or to linger in the second shot, the reverse shot of the first, since he is escaping. As Richard runs after his little brother, we see for the most part the shaky and unsteady camera tracking corrugated roofs passing for walls, and when Richard catches little Raymond, it is still Richard we mostly see, his upper body in close up, him occupying most of the frame and situated on the left side, with the camera tracking up and

²³ Kristeva's notion of the subject originally refers to a close reading of biblical passages pertaining to taboo, such as food, blood, which she carried over to what we now commonly understand as the abject about femininity – still on blood and other fluids, but also motherhood, and the like.

²⁴ Drawing from Michael Curtis's *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuse* (2004, quoted in Chaudhuri, 2010, p. 192), Chaudhuri cites Curtis's definition of unpeople as 'those whose lives are deemed worthless, in the pursuit of power and commercial gain' and are also 'the modern-day equivalent of savages during colonial days'. I have stretched the applicability of this definition to the protagonists of *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, who are treated as the unpeople in the eyes of their own government.

²⁵ In this more recent article, Butler has been appropriated mostly for feminist studies focusing on the lives of women in wars. Although not set in war time, the sorry lives of the characters in the films are no less grievable and precarious.

down, never staying in one place as he confronts him about carrying a gun, which gang he is joining, takes it, and starts to leave the frame. His little brother while the speech is being delivered is situated on the far right of the frame, looking down but defiant, and shouts, ‘That’s mine!’ when Richard leaves and he is no longer in the frame. As Richard moves, going to the right, he is shot in close-up and from a low angle, as though his mission to settle something makes him magnanimous for once. And rightly so, we follow Richard as he confronts the gun seller who lives nearby, points the gun at him, but buys it instead and takes it away. He may have taken the gun away for now, but it does not solve anything, because later in the film the little brother still hangs out with a neighborhood gang, the rival gang on top of that.



Figure 6. After a long chase in the narrow, snaky alley, elder brother Richard catches and confronts Raymond about missing school, carrying a gun, and joining a youth gang. Richard does not want Raymond to follow in his footsteps – to become a petty criminal with no future and with one foot already in the grave.

In *Tirador*, this film about small-time criminals in downtown Manila, it would not be an exaggeration to say that nearly all the scenes scream ‘beautiful suffering’. But while various scenes deserve attention, I focus instead on one particular scene involving one of the main characters, Tess, who stages schemes with her partner to steal electronics, mostly DVD players. In one crucial scene where Tess and her partner have just finished having lunch, judging by the daytime light, Tess stands up and goes to the sink to brush her teeth and her new dentures she wears for her two missing front teeth. All this is framed in medium close up, showing us the sink with no faucet, the water she is using coming from a water pitcher. As she brushes her teeth her partner, who is not part of the frame and whose voice is only heard in the background, jealously asks about where she went to earlier, that she should always ask for his permission before going anywhere, or that maybe she is now flirting with other men now that she has dentures. Tess cleverly replies to every accusation and controlling remarks,

about how she does not need to ask permission, whether he is jealous, and that he has other women anyway. This verbal sparring seems particularly normal, and that if one does not pay attention to the close-up shot of Tess's hand brushing the dentures, we could not have foreseen the incident of the dentures slipping off her hands, down into the drain that leads directly to the open sewer downstairs, four stories down. Or so we would like to assume that that is where the dentures went, because with the way the house is built, with the gaps and cracks, the dentures could have fallen anywhere. To this Tess screams, cries out for help to her partner, to the people loitering by the open sewer, and the two of them hurry downstairs, the heavy film camera tracking along with them. The scene that ensues is heartrending and moving and/or disgusting and pitiful, depending on one's threshold or sensibilities. Tess and her partner search for the dentures in the sewer, through the filth, garbage, and whatnot, with their bare hands but never find it. The camera pans, tracks, moves back and forth from the close-up shot of hands sifting the dirt, to close-up shot of a stooped-down Tess, crying and hysterical, to the reaction shot of her partner, followed by the low-angle shot of their house, tracking down from the highest story down to the ground floor, back to hands searching in the sewer. Following Laura Marks (2002, p. 2), there is something haptic about this particular scene, one that 'draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics'. The hands touching the open sewer, the fingers sifting through the dirt evokes not only the sense of touch but also the sense of smell. It is as though one could smell the stench just by looking at those hands thoroughly touching dirt. For viewers unaccustomed to such sorry environment and even sorrier situation, this would be immediately disgusting, revolting, and stomach-churning. Beautiful suffering indeed, and a romantic squalor the uninitiated yet adventurous would not mind gazing at. And if we recall the gaze structure discussed by E. Ann Kaplan, this is gazing at the Other, not looking; for one who has never seen, smelled, touched, much less experienced poverty will never know what it is truly like. Or perhaps one might argue, one would never want to know to begin with.

Of the three films, it is the character in *Kinatay* – Peping – who is relatively better situated compared to the other characters in *Engkwentro* and *Tirador*. Although young but already married and with an infant son, Peping is in college, studying criminology to become a policeman; his living condition is relatively better and more livable, and there is the hope of a future somehow. In *Kinatay*, the shock effect, or perhaps more appropriately the shock value, comes from the violence and brutality in the beating, rape, and murder of the former prostitute-turned-drug dealer Madonna. But let me highlight one particular scene, where beautiful suffering is more psychological than physical. In the basement room where

Madonna is held, Peping takes his turn in keeping watch over the abducted Madonna while the other members of the drug syndicate drink and gossip in the garden. Compared to *Engkwentro* and *Tirador*, *Kinatay* has a more mainstream look in terms of lighting, sound design, and the shot-reverse-shot convention. But also like the other two films, *Kinatay* is prone to shaky camera movements, even when it was shot on color 35 mm film, as though to mimic the tension, confusion in the mind of Peping. And it is easy to understand why, since it is Peping's first time. The moment he enters the room, he is seen looking around, unsure in this unfamiliar territory. He looks at the room, then at Madonna, then looks at the room some more, then back to Madonna. It is arguably a point-of-view shot, with the camera focus shifting from soft to well-focused, dollying in and out with tricky camera shakes; Madonna is on the bed, half-naked, hands tied at the back, gagged, with blood and bruises and cuts all over her body, asking for Peping's help with her scared and pleading eyes. To this Peping responds by walking to the table near the wall where the contents of Madonna's shoulder bag are scattered, sees pictures of her young son, and asks about him, in an attempt at making an awkward conversation in a very awkward situation. The next frame is a long shot of Madonna on the bed and Peping still standing near the table, showing us the power relationship in terms of levels and positions. Peping then moves around the room again, the camera tracking, doing an over-the-shoulder shot, as Peping looks around the room, at Madonna, out the window where the others are busy talking and drinking. Shifting from soft to well-focused every now and then tells us how blurry the situation must be for Peping, made more apparent to us by the ominous sound fit for thriller/suspense movies. One would think that with the others busy, his anxious looking around the room the whole time, and with his 'bonding' with Madonna somehow, Peping might help her escape. But this is not the case here – what we have is beautiful suffering without the filth and stench, but replaced with blood and gore, fear and resignation.



Figure 7. Peping goes over Madonna's things on the table, looks at her, engages her in small talk with Madonna's hands tied and mouth gagged. Note that although it is Madonna who is in the foreground, she is cast in silhouette, while Peping may be in the background but the image is clear.

Orientalized and feminized, exoticized and emasculated

There is no arguing the fact that the protagonists in *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay* are predominantly male. Women in the three films are either given minor roles and less importance; their representation is hardly flattering and is not immune from stereotypes. This is common for narrative films, and even for independent films such as these three, that common practice of relegating and framing women in the space-off (de Lauretis, 1987) is hardly challenged, unless we want to be very optimistic and charitable in insisting that there have been several instances of resistance and subversion. But I argue that not much has been done in the three films where the representation of women is concerned. This does not bode well for a study that claims to be using a gender postcolonial analysis, but what I see here as a gender issue worth foregrounding is the orientalization, exoticization, feminization, and emasculation of the main characters who obviously happen to be male. Although this study does not wish to delve into masculinity studies, the challenge to masculinity that I am referring to deals mainly with the feminizing, emasculating tendencies and effects of an orientalist and exoticist gazing at the cinematic Other – both on the individual level (the characters in the film, and Filipinos in general) and on the collective, national level (Philippine cinema seen at, received from, gazed at from a Western perspective as it performs on world cinema stage).

That masculinity of the Filipino men in terms of cinematic representation in these international film festival-worthy independent art films is being challenged or at least portrayed nontraditionally is not readily apparent, and perhaps much less acceptable as an

analysis, may be a point well worth pursuing. How are they feminized when they are still very manly or at least very heterosexual? How are they emasculated when they are still very masculine in terms of roles, identities, demeanor, and whatnot? Before proceeding to the, let us say, the textual analysis part or the cultural studies side of things, it might be useful to refer to Susan Bordo's (1999) work on the male body. In 'Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body', Bordo analyzes advertisements of men in designer underwear and argues that the way they pose – some not looking straight at the camera, stooped, reclining, lying down, body weight resting on one leg with the hips pointing forward, among others – brings about a new trend in the representation of men in advertising. They look more passive, more effeminate, less masculine, less burly, which may be catering to both women and men. Although this observation was made based on advertisements for high-fashion underwear like Calvin Klein and Gucci, I cannot help but find some parallelisms with the three independent films under study that deal with 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor'. Despite the difference in terms of economics, medium, and purpose, I argue that in the three films the positions of the body, the conditions the characters find themselves in have a feminizing and an emasculating effect.

In *Engkwentro* this can be seen in what I call the samurai scene toward the end of the film, where the leader of the rival gang commands the younger brother Raymond to kill his elder brother Richard with a *bolo*, a long and big knife the gangsters call samurai, in order to become a member of the gang *Batang Dilim*²⁶. This takes place after Tomas, the leader of the rival gang, corners the elder brother Richard quite literally at a dead end of a dark and narrow alley, and orders him at gunpoint to kneel. As a convention in most action films, if we are inclined to classify *Engkwentro* as an indie action film that is, much trash talking takes place before the killer pulls the trigger, and here Raymond enters the frame with a *bolo* in hand, being egged on by Tomas to do it already to prove he is not *bayot* or gay. The *mise en scène* here is particularly telling – Tomas on the right pointing a gun at Richard's chest with his right hand, Richard kneeling and looking up at his little brother to the left side of the frame, with his old, tattered white shirt torn and open down to his stomach, and the little brother in his school uniform and raising the *bolo* with his right hand, aiming but hesitating. The scared yet soft look on the kneeling Richard and the light source coming from above, by way of fill light, creates a passive-looking and almost angelic, helpless victim. Like in most action movies again, the hero is able to defeat the villain with several blows and by firing the gun at him. What follows is a berating, with Richard scolding at his little brother, looking down at

²⁶ Literally translated, it means Child of the Dark.

him, giving the ‘So you want to be like me?’ speech. Like words falling on deaf ears, the little brother does not answer, and Richard dramatically kneels down, telling his brother to strike him with the *bolo*, the levelling could not be more dramatic, the backlight on the kneeling Richard could not be more self-sacrificing and saint-like.



Figure 8. Reminiscent of the biblical scene with Abraham and Isaac because of the knife and the lighting from above, Raymond is being pressured by Tomas who is also holding a gun (right) to strike his brother with the bolo. Richard looks on, scared but putting on a brave face, with the neckline of his shirt open down to his belly.

For *Tirador*, let me focus on one of the main characters in this multiplot, multicharacter film – Caloy. Caloy is a young man who lives with his mother, stepfather, brother in the same house, with his father also living in the same area with a family of his own. In one scene where he is eating street food on a stick with his friends, a young woman comes by and Caloy offers to take her there with his pedicab, a public transportation with bike and a sidecar. The young woman declines, calling him *kuya* or a courteous call to an older male friend. Caloy starts bragging to his friends, talks in masculine dirty talk that had she not been his friend’s girlfriend he would have done sexual things²⁷ to her, all this while his stepfather is walking in the background. His stepfather walks up to him, taps his shoulder, and borrows money, and to this Caloy says he has none to lend because he had given it to his father, his tone dismissive, eyes swinging back and forth from staring back and averting, head bowed. The stepfather is naturally angered, tells him he always gives money to his father, hits him on the head, with Caloy not only embarrassed but also infantilized in a way. Gone is the swagger, the dirty talk that he so expressed earlier.

²⁷ In the scene Caloy makes a back-and-forth motion, demonstrating his hypothetical virility to his friends.

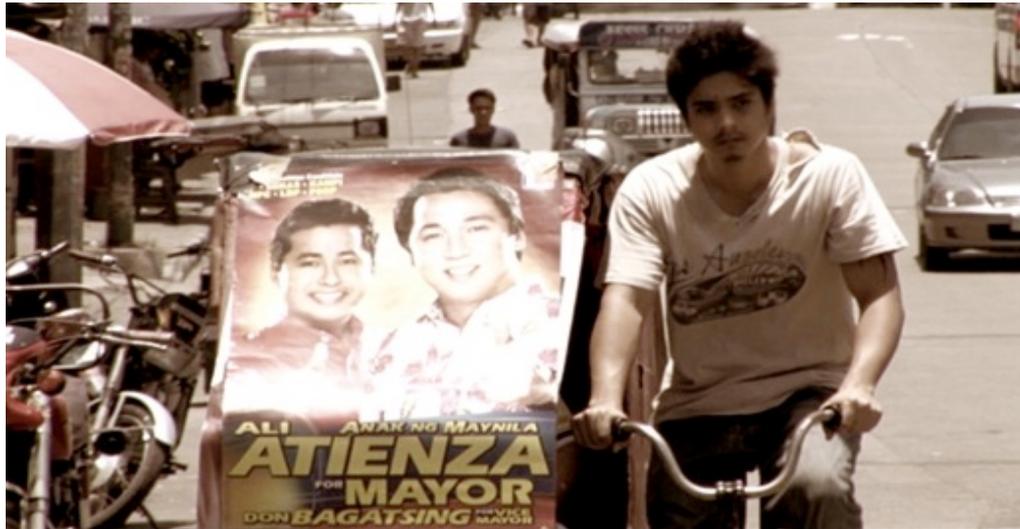


Figure 9. While this is not the photo of the scene described above, this may be useful in understanding Caloy's job as a pedicab driver before he loses it for nonpayment and returns to the old ways, snatching cellphones for instance. His body language is usually stooped, except when he is bragging to friends.

In *Kinatay* the feminized and emasculated position of Peping happens in scenes where he contemplates his lines of flight but never succeeds. His head is always bowed down, and his body is bent as though literally and figuratively spineless, showing him as more helpless and indecisive. In one scene in particular where the van carrying the abducted woman stops at a remote roadside so the men could urinate. The other men go ahead, step out of the van quickly, and all four of them assume their peeing position, while Caloy takes a while coming out because he is seated at the back and also because he warily observes the woman lying down on the van carpeted floor. The peeing scene is framed rather artistically – a long shot with the roadside forming a v-shaped or leading lines position against the van, with the roadside in the foreground and the van in the background but it serves as the key light source of the scene. When Peping finally joins the other four men, he is seen in the foreground. Visually it serves the purpose of drawing attention to the protagonist, so that we can see his facial reaction, his body language and position. Symbolically it points to his being the newcomer in the syndicate, the one whose masculinity is least cultivated, least virile. It is interesting when the other four have finished early and they call out to him to join them. In close-up shot we see Peping having second thoughts, as though thinking of running away. The peeing scene could not have been a more appropriate example of the emasculated and feminized representation of manhood/masculinity in *Kinatay*.



Figure 10. The drug/crime syndicate members stop for a quick break, and all come out to relieve themselves. Peping is seen here on the foreground, contemplating, wondering if he should make a break for it.

The men in the three films, I argue, are traditional heterosexual men whose lesser social position have led them to assume feminized and emasculated positions and roles. Following Bordo, I looked at the way their body language amplifies this feminization and emasculation. The main male characters of the films, incidentally, are also good-looking in a nontraditional masculine and are not very ‘Filipino-looking’, mainly because of their boyish good looks and mestizo features. This may be a minor observation within the larger scheme of things – that is, the correlation between the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze and the Othering and self-exoticization of Filipino films and filmmakers and Philippine cinema as a whole, but it may prove to be a contributing factor nonetheless. The Filipino male character/actor is not only Orientalized and exoticized, but also feminized and emasculated as the one possessing the to-be-looked-at-ness trait, the one being gazed at in world cinema.

Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to emphasize the importance of combining medium specificity with textual analysis, a synthesis that I owe a great deal to Buikema’s synthesis of work-immanent approach and textual analysis. Film as a medium is different, and there is a growing tendency for analysis of films to either take the formalist approach alone or more often read beyond the films and delve too much on them as text. I wanted to look at the films and not just read them, while also hoping that the overarching framework – the gender postcolonial analysis – is not overlooked, downplayed, or not referred back to. I tried to do this by going

back to the trope of ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ that I have discussed in the previous chapter. I discussed the connection of this trope as the hook that serves to entice a gaze driven and motivated by orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, and imperial gaze. This trope ‘beautiful suffering, romantic squalor’ can be productively read and understood when we focus on the opening sequences, the dramatic highlights that reinforce the trope, and the representation of masculinity in the films, or rather the feminized, emasculated roles and positions that the men in the films, and by extension, Philippine cinema on world cinema, have taken.

In the following chapter, I will examine self-exoticization more closely and analyze it in relation to culture industry.

Chapter Four
Catering and Pandering and Then Some?
The Postcolonial Exotic and Staged Marginality

The movie is over. I should add that the movie is based on current events, that some of the vivisectionists are policemen, and that it cannot be shown in the Philippines. This is an Idea. An *idée fixe*, as the French so usefully put it. As Pierre Henri Castel observes, *Au sens banal, idée fixe est l'équivalent d'obsession*. Poor Mendoza knows that his strategy is alienating, his scenes unpleasant and painful, his audience recoiling. That is the Idea. You tell me why. Oh, someone will. You mark my words. There will be critics who fancy themselves theoreticians, who will defend this unbearable experience, and lecture those plebeians like me who missed the whole Idea. I will remain serene while my ignorance is excoriated. I am a human being with relatively reasonable tastes. And in that role, not in the role of film critic, I declare that there may not be ten people in the world who will buy a ticket to this movie and feel the money was well spent.

—Film Critic Roger Ebert on *Kinatay*

When sometimes it's just a matter of (dis)taste: an introduction

The tirade or, if we are feeling more charitable, criticism quoted above has earned *Kinatay* the label, the reputation of being called the ‘worst film in the history of the Cannes Film Festival’ (Vera, 2011), and if this were the only criticism or reputation of the film to go by, its earning the coveted Best Director award for Brillante Mendoza must have also come under attack or called into question, especially since in that year more internationally known and critically acclaimed directors were considered for the award. But I suspect that despite this critique, or perhaps because of it, a lot of attention has come the film’s way and must have aroused the interest of international critics, festival followers, or average cinemagoers to see it when they had the opportunity to do so. If the saying, ‘Bad publicity is still good publicity’, is true everywhere, then this must have redounded to the benefit of *Kinatay* in terms of drawing attention to itself within the international festival circuit, just as it did within its very own local cinema. I would not go so far as agree with Roger Ebert that it was not allowed to be seen in the Philippines, but there was the presumption on the part of the director, producers, and the whole production team that it would not be appreciated, or worse understood, hence, the limited release. However, as soon as the accolades came in, particularly the prestigious Cannes award, it was screened several times in local cinemas as an art film, as an important art event, albeit still not in mainstream theaters. Perhaps that was the idea – to stir enough controversy to attract attention, be it international or local. Or not, and this idea is what I would like to delve into in this chapter, among other things.

In the previous chapters I have tried to establish the connection between the nexus of orientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze and the self-exoticization of Filipino films and filmmakers by looking at the ever-changing definition and scope of world cinema, the nexus of orientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze, medium specificity and textual analysis of the films. In this final chapter, I wish to talk about the role of reception as it relates to the popularity, fashionability, and acceptability of the three films, and the phenomenon of the postcolonial exotic as it relates the three films to the wider phenomenon and notion of culture industry. This chapter will largely owe its theoretical discussion to Huggan's *Post-colonial Exotic* (2001), with the hope of offering an intervention coming from a gender postcolonial framework. In this proposed intervention, I wish to look into the possibility of determining whether there have been spaces in which some form of subversion might have been introduced by these three Filipino films and their respective filmmakers as new players in the competitive arena of world cinema.

But exactly 'when was the postcolonial'?²⁸ A quick detour into the post(s)

Before we go to the culture industry discussion proper via Huggan's notion of the postcolonial exotic, it might be useful to ask briefly as to how we came into the age of the postcolonial in the first place, since this study uses a gender postcolonial framework, and since the concepts I have been touching upon from the very beginning – Eurocentrism, self-exoticization, orientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze, postcolonial cinema, Third Cinema – are necessarily and always already postcolonial. To go back to Stuart Hall's question, when indeed has it taken place when the structures of imperialism, neocolonialism, and neorientalism are very much still very much in place, still throwing their weight around? Hall (1996, p. 242) poses another crucial question that seems nearly rhetorical, unless one is inclined to provide a more exploratory answer: 'If post-colonial time is the time after colonialism, and colonialism is defined in terms of the binary division between colonisers and colonised, why is post-colonial time also a time of "difference"?' Arif Dirlik (1997, p. 501), meanwhile, prefers to ask about the time/moment when postcolonial happened and offers a seemingly contentious answer yet not entirely devoid of truth: 'When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe'. This arrival has been widely attributed to the seminal and much-celebrated works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri

²⁸ This question has been commonly attributed to Stuart Hall's similarly titled 1996 article – 'When was the "post-colonial"? Thinking at the limit'. (Note that in the original it is hyphenated, but I prefer to adopt the now-commonly used term without a hyphen.) But it is possible that other postcolonial thinkers had put forward this question before he did, whether in a rhetorical manner or otherwise.

Spivak – the holy trinity of postcolonial theory – and has been believed to be the catalyst as to the Western academe’s paying closer attention and discursive and epistemological space for the articulation of the issues of ‘once-colonized’ (Loomba et al., 2005, p. 2) or postcolonial societies in relation to colonialism and imperialism as a significant theoretical issue and academic undertaking. And before long, even First World academics were also dabbling in postcolonial criticism, or what may be considered as the release from the ‘fixity of Third World location’ since the ‘identity of the postcolonial is no longer structural but discursive’ (Dirlik, 1997, p. 504). If Dirlik’s bold and assertive statement that it was the arrival of the Third World intellectuals in First World academia that propelled the institutionalization of postcolonial studies as we know it today, would this be related to notions of authenticity, as though it is only ‘real’ Third World intellectuals where legitimate knowledge production can come from? Would this mean that it is necessarily a question of positionality traceable to one’s origin or nationality? What about the fact that most Third World intellectuals are usually Western educated and in some cases Western based? What about the usual accusation of Third World intellectuals as acting as native informants, as though deconstructing their own culture only to cannibalize it? As native informants, is this the only topic/theme they are most suited to work their research on, or is this due to their desire somehow to assert their difference? Is this a kind of research trajectory that puts them in a better position to produce significant knowledge, or is this not a mere strategy to be noticed? Would we be justified in saying that this is also a conscious and deliberate form of self-exoticization in Western academia? Surely there are no easy and cut-and-dried answers to these questions, but they might be important to consider as we talk about the postcolonial industry and the three films, if only to show that this practice of self-exoticization is not unique to world cinema, and also occurs for other fields such as the academia, literature, and other forms of cultural products.

Postcolonialism vis-à-vis postcoloniality and the postcolonial exotic

As Appiah²⁹ (1992, quoted in Huggan, 2001, p. 9) argues, there is such a group that he calls ‘comprador intelligentsia’ or a ‘small Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery’. The very mention of the term ‘comprador’ immediately calls to mind a very colonial, parochial condition, which renders this group of intelligentsia as participating in complicitous relations, as though serving the colonizer, the oppressor, the dominant force to

²⁹ This is elaborated in his work *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press.

reckon with, when by virtue of their education and experience, there is a certain expectation from them to be the ones advocating postcolonialism vis-à-vis the workings of postcoloniality. By postcolonialism I am referring to Huggan's (2001, p. 6) definition of it – 'an anti-colonial intellectualism that reads and valorises the signs of social struggle in the faultlines of literary and cultural texts'. And although postcolonialism is normally lumped together with postcoloniality, Huggan carefully gives us the differentiation between the two by defining it as a 'value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of capitalist exchange' (Huggan, 2001, p. 6). He goes further by saying the following: 'Postcoloniality's regime of value is implicitly assimilative and market-driven: it regulates the value-equivalence of putatively marginal products in the global marketplace. Postcolonialism, by contrast, implies a politics of value that stands in obvious opposition to global processes of commodification' (Huggan, 2001, p. 6). The irony is that Huggan (2001, p. 6) gives the impression that he is nearly equating postcolonialism with the politics, the ideology and postcoloniality with the economics, commodification, the global market only to concede that the 'two are mutually entangled' because 'postcolonialism is bound up with postcoloniality – that in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products'. In a word, Huggan is in effect suggesting that the politics of postcolonialism has been coopted by the globalizing forces of capitalism masquerading as postcoloniality. But then again, Huggan (2001, p. 6) cautions that 'we shouldn't collapse postcolonial work to the logic of the market', in a move to provide a more complex and nuanced explanation of the these two interrelated and intertwined concepts or systems but in reality further complicating and blurring our understanding of it.

As I have stated earlier in this chapter, I will largely base the current discussion on Huggan's (2001, p. 28) brilliant notion of the postcolonial exotic, which 'marks the intersection between contending regimes of value: one regime – postcolonialism – that posits itself as anti-colonial, and that works toward the dissolution of imperial epistemologies and institutional structures; and another – postcoloniality – that is more closely tied to the global market, and that capitalises both on the widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness and on the worldwide trafficking of culturally "othered" artifacts and goods'³⁰. This definition is closely connected, once again, to his discussion on postcolonialism and

³⁰ This is the more specific definition. More generally he defines it as occupying 'a site of discursive conflict between a local assemblage of more or less oppositional practices and a global apparatus of assimilative institutional/commercial codes (p. 28)'. For more of this, see page 28 onward of the book.

postcoloniality, hence, implicit in this definition is the value-laden characteristic of the postcolonial exotic, this value either a politics of value or economic value. But what is introduced here which I find central is the mention of cultural otherness and the trafficking of culturally othered artifacts and goods, as he puts it.

When applied to *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, I argue that both postcolonialism and postcoloniality come into play, for both politics of value and economic/commodity value prominently figure as an important consideration for the filmmakers, producers of the films. As I have mentioned in chapter two, both filmmakers – Pepe Diokno and Brillante Mendoza – are from upper middle class to upper class background, highly educated, and artistically trained. On some level, we may classify them as comprador intelligentsia, or perhaps more appropriately comprador artists, who mediate between the world capitalism (the international film festival circuit) and the periphery (Philippine cinema) through the international exposure, exhibition, limited distribution of their films. The term comprador, howsoever we try to redeem this term, connotes malice, wiliness, opportunism, which is not the ready and simple trajectory that this study wishes to take, since there is a more complex dynamic at work in this covertly neoimperialist, neocolonialist, and undeniably globalized and globalizing setting. But in this context we need to once again bring in Chaudhuri's (2005) argument that I have mentioned in chapter one, which I prefer to call as the dual function of the tripartite practice of exposure, exhibition, and recognition as having a dual function - both negative and positive, or *potestas* and *potentia*³¹, if we try to be discursive about it. We may recall that on the negative side, Chaudhuri (2005, p. 6) notes that 'certain film industries and filmmakers, mainly in non-Western countries, have been accused of targeting their films specifically for festivals' and that 'some critics think that the choices of subject matter, style and visual imagery in these films cater to Western/international film-festival tastes, packaging Third World cultures in Orientalist or 'tourist-friendly ways'. When postcolonialism is applied to this, it is possible that the filmmakers' anticolonialist, anti-imperialist sentiments, if any, get buried underneath the festival-driven effort to be noticed, to be recognized; a certain type of strategic essentialism³², if we prefer to go along this line of reasoning. The politics of value gives way to economic value or commodity culture; hard-hitting politics, again if any, tend to

³¹ This dual function of power as both repressive and productive has been commonly attributed to Foucault's works, especially *Discipline and Punish*. In recent feminist theory this has been reclaimed and reappropriated and has come to relate to other notions as well.

³² Commonly associated with non-Western feminists, particularly Gayatri Spivak, especially with regard to her against-the-grain reading of the works of the Subaltern Studies Group. Specifically, the article was written in 1995 – 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography'.

be downplayed, mitigated, universalized, or humanized to be more ‘tourist friendly’ and viewer magnet. On the other hand, the positive side that gets overlooked by critical stance on the matter is that international film festivals ‘perform an indispensable role in enabling a diverse range of films to be seen by audiences around the world’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, pp. 5-6). But more than the diverse and greater number of films seen by a more diverse and greater number of viewers, international film festivals play an important role because they ‘facilitate cultural exchange between different ‘national’ cinemas and provide an alternative global distribution network’ (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 5). In this case, perhaps we may argue that the nexus or a Möbius strip, if you will, of postcolonialism and postcoloniality leads to a productive result, as it allows for an opportunity for unknown, unseen, often marginalized national cinemas to have a greater and wider value, both in terms of politics of value, even when this supposedly anticolonialist sentiment is rendered nonthreatening, and economic and commodity value. Since Chaudhuri’s (2005, p. 6) research claims that ‘85 per cent of films shown at festivals never reach commercial screens beyond the festival circuit’, perhaps in this system of uneven distribution of cultural goods one might take the position of being optimistic for the other 15 per cent of films that achieve commercial success. The *potentia* part may be that some spaces are opening up, in effect paving the way for more hitherto unseen, unknown, unrecognized national cinemas to have exposure and recognition.

Exoticism, the postcolonial touristic consciousness, and the films

In chapters two and three, it may be remembered that I relied heavily on Shohat and Stam’s and Phyllis Rose’s works for the definition of exoticism. Interestingly, Huggan (2001, p. ix) also offers ‘two interrelated exoticist discourses’ to explain the postcolonial exotic. The first exoticist discourse refers to ‘those that traverse postcolonial texts and are implicated in them – exoticism in its anthropological, touristic and multicultural forms’, while the second exoticist discourse refers to ‘those that pertain to the academic field of postcolonial studies – the exoticisms implicit in postcolonialism as an oppositional discursive field’ (Huggan, 2001, p. ix). If we apply these to Huggan’s postcolonialism/postcoloniality discussion, then we can say that the second exoticist discourse with its politics of value, anticolonialist sentiments, and –isms may correspond to postcolonialism. The first exoticist discourse may find resonance with postcoloniality, particularly because of the mention of the term ‘touristic’ that gives the connotation of economic value or commodification. However, similar to the postcolonialism/postcoloniality discussion, the two exoticist discourses are not only interrelated but also complementary – the reflections, studies, research being done by scholars

of postcolonial studies depend largely on the observations based on anthropological, touristic, multicultural events, and it is also possible that these anthropological, touristic, multicultural events are influenced by theories being developed, promoted, and/or advocated by scholars.

Taking the parallelisms and analogies aside for a moment, what I find particularly significant in Huggan's (2001, p.13) discussion of exoticism is being exotic is 'not an inherent quality'; rather, it is 'a particular mode of aesthetic perception which renders people strange as it domesticates them, which manufactures otherness'. Not unlike most colonialist enterprise, racism for instance, exoticism is ascribed to and inscribed in the object, place, or person, rather than innate or natural; exoticism is constructed and produced, and then eventually naturalized, reinforced, and perpetuated. As Stephen Foster (1982/3, quoted in Huggan, 2001, pp. 13-14) has said, exoticism is 'a symbolic system domesticating the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary so that the phenomena to which they ... apply to begin to be structured in a way to make them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity'. Foster (1982/3, quoted in Huggan, 2001, p. 14) adds that 'as a system it functions along predictable lines but with unpredictable content'. This symbolic system works as long as the signifiers and signifieds, the denotations and connotations are conceivable by and understandable from a Eurocentric, Western frame of mind; it works as long as the unfamiliar becomes vaguely familiar yet retaining its difference. This difference is always already a 'difference from', coming from an advantageous vantage point, not a 'difference in itself'³³. This 'difference from' is acceptable provided that it is nonthreatening and nondominating, contained and controlled from a distance. This notion of exoticism, I would like to stress, is closely related to the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, imperial gaze that is a central argument in this study. Specifically for imperial gaze, what is significant in Huggan's (2001, p. 14) discussion of the postcolonial exotic is that 'as a technology of representation, self-empowering, self-referential insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back'. No matter how well intentioned, be it for ethnographic or anthropological purposes of study, exoticism as a technology of representation functions within the looking structure as a gaze, not as a look. The looking structure is never equal; the postcolonial exotic is gazed at, looked at, observed from a safe distance.

³³ A Deleuzian concept, Adrian Parr discusses this with regard to singularity under the topic 'Creative Transformation' in *A Deleuze Dictionary*. Although this study does not largely depend on Deleuze, it is one concept that is particularly useful and relevant in the discussion of difference in relation to exoticism.

To return to the two exoticist discourses rather briefly, particularly to the second exoticist discourse, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, p. 159, quoted in Huggan, 2001, p. 14) gives another critical statement by saying that ‘exoticism replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity’. If we recall the Saidian definition of orientalism, then we may be justified in saying that this is a less hard-hitting, less strongly worded claim. Orientalism is about dominating, structuring, and having authority about the Oriental Other, while exoticism’s exercise of power is less severe, mitigated by flattery and pleasantness but still motivated by curiosity.

Taking our cue from Said’s mention of curiosity, the first exoticist discourse is very much related to Sarah Brouillette’s (2008) discussion of the postcolonial exotic in the chapter ‘The Industry of Postcoloniality’ of the book *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, which deals with tourism and market value and anthropological and/or ethnographic gaze. Drawing on the differentiation of tourists and travellers/anti-tourists, Brouillette cites Huggan (quoted in Brouillette, 2008, p. 17) who writes that travellers and anti-tourists ‘look down on “superficial” tourists whom they see as having little or no interest in the countries they visit; as contributing irresponsibly to the despoliation of their environment; and as seeking maximum enjoyment with a minimum of effort’. Going further into this line of differentiating and classifying of postcolonial exotic consumers, Brouillette quotes Dean MacCannell (quoted in Brouillette, 2008, p. 18) who introduces the important concept of ‘touristic consciousness in which the traveller or anti-tourist claims access to knowledge of the “truth” of what she “beholds”, while the basic tourist, like the market reader, glories in her own ignorance of the reality behind the exotic image’.³⁴ Most ‘objective’ scholars would find this claim as moralistic and as too well-delineated, as though a touristic and a traveller frame of mind or disposition are mutually exclusive. Brouillette (2008, p. 17) herself has this same line of critique of Huggan’s postcolonial exotic argument, calling it ‘as a kind of accusation, identifying readers as guilty of exoticizing, aestheticizing, and/or dehistoricizing what might otherwise be subject to more legitimate forms of knowledge production’. And this is where Brouillette presents a challenge to an otherwise quite

³⁴ The discussions by Huggan and MacCannell both call to mind a passage from *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles – ‘Another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking’. The tourist is after the temporary, fleeting novelty of experiencing novelty, while the traveler seeks the intriguingly new and is open to influences. This book is not unlike *The English Patient* in terms of being a useful text for postcolonial literature, particularly with regard to the notion of what passes for exotic.

compelling line of argument presented by Huggan. Her intervention to Huggan's work, in my view, could have been more powerful had she elaborated more on the touristic conscience that she introduced early on in her chapter. For instance, how different is touristic consciousness from touristic conscience? Is having a touristic consciousness a prerequisite to having a touristic conscience? Which one precedes or necessitates the other? Does having a touristic conscience make the postcolonial exotic reader/consumer more advanced, more evolved, more sophisticated in terms of their understanding and treatment of the cultural Other? Or does this understanding stop at the knowledge level but not in practice? Given Brouillette's critical survey and full awareness of the negative connotation attached to the term 'tourist', why does she insist on the deliberate use of this term? Would it not be more productive to coin the phrases 'traveller consciousness', 'traveller conscience', 'anti-tourist consciousness', and/or 'anti-tourist conscience', or anything that avoids the term 'tourist' instead? But I suppose her contribution to this topic lies more in her calling into question what she considers the overly critical materialist approach of Huggan that seems to border on glossing over the possibilities for potential knowledge that could contribute in elucidating the relations of exoticism, cultural othering, tourism, globalizing forces, among others.

The three films in this study – *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay* – when analyzed within the concepts of exoticism in relation to the postcolonial exotic may then be considered as perceived, received, and consumed as culturally othered products. As culturally othered products the films would fall within the bounds of postcoloniality, where their economic value is hinged upon their ability to draw crowds and sell tickets, their marketability for international distribution. The films could also fit within the ambit of postcolonialism's politics of value – either for being explicitly oppositional, anticolonialist, antiestablishment, or for being nonthreatening, universal, and easily likeable and possibly able to allow for identification, hence passing for cosmopolitan or more wordly. According to Huggan (2001, p. ix), 'exoticism may be understood conventionally as an aestheticizing process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar'. And this aestheticizing process is particularly pronounced in film, especially in world cinema. As I have discussed and put forward in chapters two and three, the trope of 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' is a common tendency for *Engkwentro*, *Tirador*, and *Kinatay*, and this trope, one might argue, can also be found in other films from other national cinemas competing for the opportunity for exposure, exhibition, and recognition.

The two exoticist discourses, staged marginality, and the three films

Analyzing the three films in the light of the two exoticist discourses given by Huggan will be more fruitful for the purposes of this study if the concept of staged marginality will also be brought to the discussion. Adapting the term from MacCannell, staged marginality, says Huggan (2001, p. xii), ‘denotes the process by which marginalized individuals or minority groups dramatise their “subordinate” status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience’. In the latter part of his book Huggan devotes an entire lengthy chapter aptly titled ‘Staged Marginalities’, which can be read and gleaned from Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988), V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988), and Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). What is remarkable to note in his discussion is that while staged marginality connotes conscious complicity, Huggan (2001, p. xii) offers another side to the concept that may be seen as productive and even subversive, for some cases and instances. He does so by stating that ‘far from being a form of necessary self-subordination’, staged marginality ‘may function in certain contexts to uncover and challenge dominant structures of power’. Uncovering and challenging dominant structures of power has always been the underlying principle and principal goal of postcolonial cinema, postcolonial studies, and in the critical disciplines as a whole, and it is particularly important to look into how the very specific concept of staged marginality can be used to address a foundational issue. How indeed can staged marginality reveal a much more complex dynamics of power at work? Is staged marginality capable of opening up spaces for subversion through the works of non-Western/postcolonial writers and/or filmmakers? If so, how prominent or how subtle is this subversive act? Where does the issue of compromises figure, or should we perceive such compromises as necessary and inevitable? If marginality is staged, does it make light of real, more pressing issues? And from this practice of staged marginality, where and how does truthful knowledge production emerge, as Brouillette has so perceptively raised?

Now it may also be crucial to relate staged marginality of the three Filipino films to the two exoticist discourses in order to see how the films fit within this context and structure. The first exoticist discourse, as we have already established via Huggan, is about the culture industry of postcoloniality, the marketing, exchange, flows of culturally othered goods. The three films in this study, as I have been arguing throughout, have made their way to the circuit of the international culture industry by way of their exposure, exhibition, and recognition at international film festivals.

Engkwentro was first shown at the Cinemalaya Film Festival, a local film festival where most independent films get their funds and compete during a week-long festival at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the center for high art in the country (which is of course

highly debatable and fiercely contested by independent artists). The selection process for the full-length feature is very competitive, where several scripts are screened before the grant money will be given. One of the conditions is that the movie should have at least one mainstream actor/star, enough to draw in crowds and attention. The rights to the film are usually owned by the Cinemalaya festival, unless otherwise negotiated before or much later. After *Engkwentro* won, much attention was given to it since the director, Pepe Diokno, was still an undergraduate film student at the University of the Philippines Film Institute at the time. This precociousness was harped on not only when the film participated at the 2009 Venice Film Festival, but also won the Orizzonti Prize. It is said that the award was given primarily for the film's technical achievement, which I would say has much to do with the long takes, seemingly difficult shots taken given the location, the technical limitations even. After the triumph at Venice, there have been attempts on the part of the director at targeting mainstream international market. In an interview I saw him in on television before, I remember hearing Pepe Diokno say that they are veering away from only independent circuit so as not to limit its circulation there and to go more mainstream in terms of audience reach. And of course we might add as well that the plan to go mainstream has to do with the goal of attaining commercial success and potential revenue. It would not come as a surprise if the *Engkwentro* team would seek distribution in the United States, just as Kidlat Tahimik had attempted to do with American Zoetrope for *Mababangong Bangungot (Perfumed Nightmare)* decades before him, albeit on a limited release and achieved little to moderate success commercially. The idea to penetrate the international, global market is clearly there, and efforts are being taken to make it happen. It is the Orizzonti Prize that has been the undeniable golden ticket, the gateway to this proverbial road to mainstreamdom.

Tirador won the Caligari Award at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival. While it was critically acclaimed, both internationally and nationally, it did not enjoy as much publicity and popularity as *Engkwentro*. The director of this film is Brillante Mendoza, who is more recognized for his controversial Cannes entry *Kinatay*. *Tirador* could have been more fitting as a quintessential example of an exoticist film, of the 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' variety, for thematics and aesthetics, not unlike *Engkwentro* in this respect. But whichever may be the reason as to why this slingshot of a film did not hit the target squarely, directly leaves much for critical reflection. Could it be for its multiplot, multicharacter format? Could it be for its documentary-like, cinema verite aesthetics? Could it be for insufficient publicity, ineffective marketing, and lack of proactiveness in terms of courting international distributors? Whichever the case may be, we may say that as a culturally othered

product, *Tirador* has not achieved sufficient success enough to make readily available for a wide consumption.

Kinatay, the most controversial among the three films in this study, earned director Brillante Mendoza the Best Director Award at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival, beating more internationally renown and more established directors, such as Ang Lee, Pedro Almodovar, among others. This prestigious award has redounded to the benefit of *Kinatay*, so much so that it has piqued curiosity from Filipino audience and critics, who either loved the film ardently or hated it passionately; there seemed to be not much middle ground, for *Kinatay* is one of those films that refuse to elicit indifference. Roger Ebert has expressed his indignation for it, and so have other critics³⁵. Calling *Kinatay* the worst film ever screened at Cannes, no doubt has made the film controversial, enough to arouse curiosity; one would be interested to see for himself or herself what makes it so. Two French acquaintances, by way of a personal anecdote, have told me that they had seen the *Kinatay* at a film theater in Paris that shows foreign films long after it was screened at Cannes. One liked it, calling Brillante Mendoza brilliant, pun intended to be sure. The negative reviews in one way or another have helped create noise for the film, leading to its further cultural othering.

What I would like to emphasize is that by comparison, these three Filipino films are not as popular, as internationally known, nor as in demand compared to the works of, let us say, Rushdie, Naipaul, or Kureishi, or those of Abbas Kiarostami of Iran or Wong Kar-wai of Hong Kong, if we must insist on looking at the readily marketable Asian contemporary films. In this sense the three Filipino films have not achieved the status of being prominent culturally othered goods. Their exposure, exhibition, and recognition at international film festivals, and in some cases the negative reviews have helped them to draw attention to themselves as interesting postcolonial exotic goods, worthy of examination.

The second exoticist discourse, when narrowed down to the context of the three Filipino films under study may prompt the question, ‘But what’s postcolonial about it?’ This is a valid question considering that the films are not explicitly postcolonial – there are no traces of extremely anti-Spanish, anti-American, or anti-Japanese grievances or sentiments. One will have to look closely, unless one tends to read and see the films as texts working as

³⁵ Another critic from *Miami Herald*, Rene Rodriguez, has written about *Kinatay*. See <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/reeling/2010/03/review-kinatay.html> for his blog post. Noel Vera, meanwhile, a US-based Filipino film critic has responded to Ebert’s scathing review in defense of the film. For this reply, see <http://criticafterdark.blogspot.nl/2011/05/kinatay-brillante-mendoza-2009.html>.

allegory in the Jamesonian sense³⁶, a claim that I do not intend to make here. What I would like to stress here, rather, is that the three films bear the traits of postcolonial cinema in the sense that they would qualify as ‘less explicitly polemical than that of Third Cinema yet strongly political and still concerned with authoritarian oppression’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7).

This anti-authoritarian oppression tone is very apparent in *Engkwentro*, where the overriding theme points to the draconian, extralegal measures of the local government by ordering summary execution, or ‘salvaging’ as it is euphemistically called there, of petty criminals to maintain the so-called peace and order in an unnamed town in southern Philippines. The dramatization of this phenomenon or practice is exacerbated by choosing two underage brothers who join youth gangs where committing is not just a way to survive but also as a rite of passage, a need to belong. The local despot barely figures onscreen, except for campaign election posters that decorate the walls of the slum. But more powerful still is the disembodied presence of the local despot through the extradiegetic voiceover, as though suggesting that he may be unseen but his presence pervades the area, part-Orwellian, part-omnipresent, and wholly and totally oppressive.

In *Tirador* it is the national government that is being opposed as the central source of oppressive yet neglectful power. It is no coincidence that the timeframe of the movie covers the lent season in April, preceding the national election in early May. It is an amplification of the Catholic observance of the passion at the Cross that translates to modern-day suffering of the poor, the wretched at the hands of those in authority. The use of actual footage of election campaigns of senatoriables delivering rhetoric toward the end of the narrative gives a more realistic feel and magnifies the film’s social and political commentary against the state.

The authoritarian oppression in *Kinatay* is embodied and perpetrated by the police, which in this film also is the mafia-like drug and crime syndicate. However, unlike *Engkwentro* and *Tirador* where there are several characters in focus, much more so for *Tirador*, in *Kinatay* we have only Peping, the protagonist, whose moral dilemma we are invited to experience as we follow his thoughts and apprehensions, his actions and compromises along the way. In postcolonial cinema, this is where we see the divergence from Third Cinema where before the focus was solely on the struggles of the collective, here in postcolonial cinema the individual is being brought to the foreground, while not disregarding

³⁶ Fredric Jameson has been often quoted for his bold statement saying that ‘[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as national allegories’. But he has been severely criticized for this by most postcolonial writers who argue that this is a monolithic view of most once-colonized societies and does not account for the differences among such societies.

the collective (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7). Peeping is the definitive example not of the 'everyperson' whose 'ego ideals' we isolate, but of the multinational figure who is 'marginalized, subordinated, displaced' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 7) and 'deterritorialized' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 8).

Based on the two exoticist discourses that I have attempted to relate to the three films under study, it may seem on the outset that subversion may be buried in the unflattering cover of self-exoticization and staged marginality. Where is subversion, if any, and where does it figure? Perhaps it may be crucial to refer to Huggan's (2001, p. 7) own concession: 'To admit is not to sell out to pernicious capitalist cause but to interrogate and strategise one's own position within the institutional parameters of the postcolonial field'. This self-exoticization is perhaps catering to 'Western/international film-festival tastes, packaging Third World cultures in Orientalist or "tourist-friendly ways"' (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 6), but it is in this case a strategic move to play the game of the industry of the postcolonial exotic, where consumption depends largely on marketability and fickle tastes and we may even say the politics of the moment. Subversion may be in the form of the 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' from the most literal to the most symbolic, from the explicit to the implicit. Subversion may also be in the form of attempting to get noticed visually through the aesthetics so that the thematics will be conceptually and ideologically understood, if not accepted, on the films' own terms and not simply open to multiple interpretations. If the medium is indeed the message, then this must be the vehicle by which a postcolonial cinema message may come across. Subversion may also be in the denial of viewer expectations of a purely Filipino, authentically Asian, undeniably exotic movie, since the films may have a Philippine setting, Filipino characters, and a Filipino 'way of life', but the film is laced with film conventions ranging from cinema verité to Dogme 95 to Third Cinema aesthetics. The films are contaminated, and in this case necessarily so, and display what Robert Stam (2003, p. 32) calls 'constitutive hybridity' that 'replaces binarisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new global regime where First World and Third World are mutually imbricated'.

To return to the dual function of self-exoticization and staged marginality, they both work as *potestas* and *potentia*. Working as *potestas*, the three films can be easily and readily accused of catering and pandering because of the need to draw attention and compete and thrive within the structure of the postcolonial exotic. At the same time also working as *potentia*, the three films' messages are being conveyed no matter how subtly, no matter how implied. This is where the concept or notion of 'porosity' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011, p. 9)

is being cultivated and developed, in order for nuances to be seen, heard, and felt. It is through this porosity where spaces can be opened up, oppressive structures can be torn down or pulled apart, and differences can possibly be celebrated.

Bishnupriya Ghosh (1998, p. 7) offers a way of dealing with she calls the postcolonial bazaar, where culturally othered products, in this case mostly literary works from the margins, can be addressed by beginning 'at the level of pedagogy'. She advocates teaching the market 'the politics of the academy, pedagogy, and the publishing industry, the relationship of academia to international public spheres, and the intersections of all kinds of cultural work with critical theory, along with our choice of postcolonial texts, offers ways to recuperate the postcolonial as cultural and political resistance' (Ghosh, 1998, p. 16). This pedagogy should be taught by creating a 'deep structure' onto which to anchor its objectives and politics. This proposed deep structure for the critical pedagogy also extends to world cinema in general and to the three Filipino films in particular. Teaching the market may be a very ambitious goal, but this level of education does not have to happen overnight. Inculcating anti-orientalist, anti-neorientalist, anti-exoticist awareness and anti-imperial gaze consciousness may be a small step, but it may very well be a worthy undertaking. As to how it may be done remains for me personally as the greatest challenge yet, because this is no different from what Murray (2002) has explored in her analysis of French nostalgia films, specifically on the daunting task of decolonizing the mind.

Conclusion

In this chapter I finally devoted a more lengthy discussion of the accusation that is commonly hurled against the self-exoticization of the filmmakers vying for the opportunity to be selected, screened, and recognized at the prestigious Big Three. As I have stated time and again, I depended largely on Huggan's critical work on the postcolonial exotic, staged marginality, and his two classifications of exoticist discourse, and attempted to create a link to the three films. As in critical theory, I also included Brouillette's response to Huggan's work, which she in turn developed into a separate discussion of the related concepts of touristic consciousness and touristic conscience. It is the knowledge production that comes from the postcolonial exotic that she discusses which I find particularly relevant. This questioning leaves room for delving into this phenomenon and practice of postcolonial exotic and reveal not only the negative, incriminating side but also the more productive, positive side. I argue that even for films that are guilty of consciously employing staged marginality, this move should be seen not only as a form of catering and pandering, but also a strategic move to get

their postcolonial message across, no matter how subtly, or even possibly in some cases unconsciously. The othering of cultural goods is a prevalent practice, but if this othering can be challenged by anti-oppressive sentiments and expressions, then some form of subversion may also be introduced and injected. This is not an isolated case, as Huggan reveals that even celebrated authors such as Rushdie, Naipaul, and Kureishi would teach us. This practice is perhaps, if we may be so generous and understanding about it, much more needed by filmmakers who are still fighting for their place at the international table, attempting to find a place for themselves in the world cinematic sun. The accusation of self-exoticization is a cruel and tired one, but once one gets past drawing attention, the question is always on how to sustain this hard-won attention.

I also made a brief and passing inclusion of Ghosh's suggestion of dealing with the postcolonial bazaar by teaching the market, the culture industry of artistic works from the margins the pedagogy of postcolonialism. A lofty goal perhaps, but when we look at the intertwined relationship of postcolonialism and postcoloniality that constantly inform each other, then it is possible that Ghosh's proposition will not simply stop at the level of theory. Practice, in this case the postcolonial exotic market, draws on theory from time to time, and one can only hope that critical theory influences the way practice works. In the field of cinema, the separation between filmmaking and film theory may be bridged by the constant check-and-balance approach that critical theory provides, in the hope that progressive filmmakers would put into practice what it offers. What is important is to look for spaces where forms of subversion can emerge, no matter how gradual or minute, as long as the spaces are allowed to widen and for porosity to take place. Self-exoticization in this case will serve as a springboard for the needed impetus, but this strategic move does not have to end there, if subversion will be used as the driving force of filmmakers from the margins.

Conclusion
Tying Up Loose Ends
A Return to the Research Question and More

In this final part what I wish to do is to weave together the concepts as I have already discussed them and refer back to the research question – How does orientalism, working through the imperial gaze, influence the way Filipino independent filmmakers create films that portray a certain kind of ‘Filipinoness’? How does this notion of ‘Filipinoness’, in turn, reinforce the construction and representation of Filipino films, and Philippine cinema as a whole, as a feminized, exoticized, Far Eastern cinematic Other? At this point in the study, the most important question with regard to the research question is whether there is a definitive or conclusive answer that the study has arrived at. What I have discovered, fortunately or unfortunately, is that there while I may have started with quite assertive and bold statements, arguments, and claims, there are no definite and straightforward answers that this study can without hesitation offer. What it does offer, however, is an exploration of the research question, a problematization of the issues that are central not only to this study but also to gender studies, film theory and criticism, and postcolonial theory.

The study and its relevance to gender studies

From the outset the main problem that I myself had to contend with was to deal the most basic question: Where is the gender aspect in this study? It was clearly not enough to bring in names of celebrated feminist theorists to be able to say that this is relevant to gender studies, or to focus on the female characters of the films and analyze their representation, marginalization, silencing, and/or unframing in the narratives and in the frames, scenes, and sequences; one had to bring it a level higher to substantiate one’s claims.

The gender aspect of this study, as I have attempted to establish, lies mainly in the nexus of orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism, imperial gaze on the one hand, and the self-exoticization of the three Filipino films and their respective filmmakers on the other hand. I have tried to argue that this relation is not only Western-originating and Orient-directed but also goes the other way around. The arrow points back, the bullet recoils, and the tape is Möbius – it is clearly a two-way relation, where a one-sided perspective is limited and limiting, closed and enclosing. I started with the appropriation and reappropriation of Edward Said’s (1978) oft-quoted, famous, and groundbreaking but now classic definition of Orientalism to lay down the theoretical foundation. But it could not stand alone without

looking into the responses and critiques of more recent scholars working on the same topic. I had to rely on the interventions made by scholars, such as Matthew Bernstein (1997) whose study, one of the earliest in this regard, focuses on orientalism in film through the analysis of classical Hollywood cinema; Reina Lewis (1996), whose work looks at the gender aspect of Orientalism that Said's classic text does not cover; Homay King (2010, p. 5), whose recent book provides an updated and more nuanced view on Orientalism, which cautions against a straightforward critique of and moving beyond 'the issue of representation of subordinated otherness.' I felt it incumbent upon me to show a survey of Saidian scholarship to show *Orientalism's* gender-blind spots, even when what I originally wanted to argue was that Said's work is not much different from that of Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled' (1965), which has been severely criticized by several feminist scholars³⁷ for not according Algerian women with agency, for not treating women as comrades or equal fellows in the liberation struggle, among other accusations and criticisms. What I am trying to point out is that Fanon's work then was considered a forerunner in giving close attention to the situation of Algerian women in that particular period and in that particular context. Said's work, like Fanon's, may have been highly scrutinized and criticized, since the context was overlooked. But is it not the case that in orientalism, the issue of othering entails the imbrication of race, class, and gender? This may not have been spelled out in Said's work, but if one is inclined to read more closely, traces of this imbrication may be found. But I had difficulty proving such claim, I depended largely on the appropriation and reappropriation of Said via Bernstein, Lewis, King, and even from quite a seemingly unrelated and distant point in the theoretical horizon, that of E. Ann Kaplan's (1997, p. xi) notion of the imperial gaze. Kaplan's work draws heavily on Laura Mulvey's seminal work of the male gaze and on Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone, which as we know are gendered analyses that deal immensely with women's to-be-at-looked-at-ness, objectification, and ethnographication, if you will, or being gazed at with an ethnographic treatment. Kaplan's work is similar to King's in the sense that both call for moving beyond mere criticism and offering a more productive alternative as to how to approach a rather circular problem or issue. Kaplan relies on the pioneering work of feminists working in the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and visual culture (female documentary filmmakers, especially Trinh T. Minh-ha) to formulate her proposition of the look as an alternative to the gaze, and speaking nearby as a better alternative to speaking for. What I find in Kaplan's

³⁷ Most notable of which are Anne McClintock's (1997) 'No Longer in a Future Heaven: Gender, Race, and Nationalism' in *Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*; Marnia Lazreg's (1994) 'Nationalism, Decolonization and Gender' in *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*; and Winifred Woodhull's (2003) 'Unveiling Algeria' in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: a Reader*.

work significant for gender studies is that by adopting and proposing a position of ‘speaking nearby’, she avoids a colonizing, imperializing tendency that is common and prevalent in normative, universalizing phallogocentric works. By not assuming the position of an omniscient, omnipotent figure for another, this proposed position accords respect and assigns agency to the Other, who by such treatment is in effect elevated to subjecthood. Although it might be a stretch, I have attempted to create a link between Saidian orientalism and the appropriations and reappropriations of his works and the Kaplan’s critique of imperial gaze and the counter-looking structure she proposes as an important nexus of looking relations particularly relevant to the study of the three films on one level and for feminist take on visual culture on another level.

Another important topic that I have tried to discuss about the three films is the feminizing and emasculating tendencies of orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist gaze structure for non-Western cinemas. These two tendencies or tropes – feminization and emasculation – are more common topics of analysis for masculinity studies, and it was never my intention to delve into them, as they are broad topics worthy of a separate discussion altogether. But at the outset it has been my dilemma to foreground the gender aspect in the films, when the protagonists are mainly and mostly Filipino men. In most Latinized cultures, men have internalized a macho culture where primacy is placed in being masculine, aggressive, rough and tough, domineering, and in control, and Filipino culture has not escaped such cultural stereotype. And this is where Susan Bordo’s (1999) work in representation of male bodies in advertising proved to be especially helpful. By looking into how men are represented in the films – the traditionally masculine who have been feminized by lack of social power, financial capability, and political personality – it became easier to establish that these men have lost their claim to conventional notion of masculinity, in effect feminized and emasculated. I have attempted to show that the visual imagery corresponds to the narrative, to the plot, and that it is no coincidence that the protagonists in the most dire and dehumanizing sequences are in reclining, kneeling positions, or their heads are stooped, bowed down, gaze averted, bodies looking rather frail and unstable. The actors playing the main protagonists, incidentally, also have more ‘feminine’ features, and a relatively gentle look and demeanor, a cleaner and softer style.

One could always argue that this is not unique to the three films, that it is common even in mainstream Hollywood films, especially the current ones where metrosexuality and androgyny is the main idea, or for other non-Western cinemas, but what I am suggesting here is that this new take on masculinity, that is, feminized and emasculated, is very telling of

the gender-, class-, race-Othering that the orientalist, neorientalist, exoticist gaze structure exerts upon international film festival hopefuls. If we extend this tendency or trope of feminizing and emasculating to the filmmakers themselves, then it may also be revealing. Pepe Diokno was barely out of college at the time he made *Engkwentro*. His age at the time was not too far from the main character Richard's age, and that although born of privilege, it was the knowledge or wisdom from life that comes from one's realm of experiences based on age that Diokno drew inspiration from. Pepe Diokno was a neophyte at the time, whose talent, skills, and acumen were waiting to be proved and validated by something major by film industry and art scene standards. Brillante Mendoza, on the other hand, was at the time already making a name for himself as an indie/art filmmaker who started his career as a production designer. His films have a 'beautiful suffering, romantic squalor' theme as the common denominator, with the protagonists' jobs ranging from working as masseuse, foster child carer (women hired to care for orphans that orphanages can no longer attend to due to lack of space, lack of sufficient budget, or insufficient nun-to-orphan ratio), and other blue-collar workers. Brillante Mendoza is also openly gay, and this figures in his other films where some characters are gay or lesbian, and are being discriminated against, ridiculed, marginalized for being such. We may say that both Pepe Diokno and Brillante Mendoza because of youth and lack of sufficient experience (Diokno) and sexual preference/orientation, that is, homosexuality (Mendoza) are not exactly masculine by traditional notion of masculinity. But through their sheer artistic filmmaking talents, they are able to propel themselves forward career-wise, and where power rests on one's bankability and drive for success, they are more masculine than most average and conventional masculine, heterosexual men. Whether it was intentional on the part of the directors that some aspects of their personality wound up getting reflected in their films or not, one can glean that these aspects have influenced their view, perspective, lens that they use in their storytelling. But since there is the possibility that this awareness of their position vis-à-vis other male filmmakers, local or international, have influenced their approach in the films that they make, could we be justified in saying that they also exoticize these aspects of their sexuality, personality to make their works more alternative? What I am trying to suggest is that when identity politics becomes a motivating force in one's artistic works, is there not a tendency to amplify, magnify, and to some degree cannibalize it even to serve one's purposes? This is staged marginality (Huggan, 2001, p. xii) indeed, one that is more complicated than mere opportunism, cunning, and/or guile, when intersectionality as a pervading issue affecting or influencing the act of creating films and the persons creating them figure as crucial and

integral. This is where the dual function of staged marginality – both positive and negative, *potestas* and *potentia* – demands a more careful analysis and even understanding.

The study and its relevance to film studies

Gender studies being an interdisciplinary field, it leaves room for practically any discipline or field to become a valid topic for study. As a former film student, it did not take long for me to decide to link film with gender. I wanted to approach film from a gender perspective, and to conduct a gender study with a specific focus on film. It has never occurred to me to choose which framework to foreground, for I did not find that an important issue, since it was always clear to me that both should be given equal consideration in the analysis for it to be productive.

To be able to situate Philippine cinema as a feminized, exoticized Far Eastern cinematic Other, I had to start with the discussion of world cinema, which I have shown in chapter one is problematic in terms of definition, scope, and issues and concerns. The survey did not prove sufficient, and more theoretical discussions (Hill, 2000; Dennison and Lim, 2006; Andrew, 2006; Codell, 2007; Chaudhuri, 2005) led me to the belief for the necessity of using a cartography instead. The issues that world cinema scholars have led me to the foundational, which in this sense is not meant in a derogatory sense, work of Shohat and Stam: *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994). Their interrogation of Western knowledge, philosophy, culture, and art as emanating from Europe remains paramount in critical theory. Polycentric multiculturalism, indeed, is the best way as to how to properly, fairly, evenhandedly study visual cultures, in the plural sense pertaining to different national cinemas. In chapter one I have also commended this optimistic, pluralistic, multicultural, dispersed approach, and have even followed their line of theoretical argument in my attempt at formulating a definition of world cinema. My main reservation, however, is whether a return to a postmodern, poststructuralist line would be workable and feasible in practice, when the binaries (that is, Western as embodied by Hollywood and European arthouse and non-Western cinemas) that scholars have been avoiding and criticizing are being reinforced in international film festivals. How is it that even at the Big Three, at Cannes Film Festival for instance, the presence of Hollywood is increasingly dominating in the form of famous directors and actors and actresses sitting in the jury, films traditionally considered mainstream are serving as opening films, and international celebrities' presence at the red carpet are expected to draw more publicity and attention to an already time-honored and prestigious event? Either the Big Three are realizing the need to ally themselves more with

global cinema, that is, Hollywood, for their much-needed survival, continuity, and perpetuation, or that in this globalized and globalizing times, Hollywood is now in its move to blur the distinction between arthouse and mainstream by colonizing the supposedly center of art filmmaking? Another concern is that even with the continuous and sustained criticism of Hollywoodcentrism and Eurocentrism, why is it that the exposure to, exhibition at, and recognition from the Big Three still remain the yardstick by which the success and artistry of non-Western films are measured, their legitimacy validated, their national cinema finally acknowledged? For polycentric multiculturalism to be applicable in practice, we need a cognitive re-atlasing and remapping as suggested by Andrew (2006). But the challenge, as always and as in any field, is how to counter the privileged position of Hollywood (in this case, manifesting itself in the international film festival circuit and/or scene) and Big Three without perennially marginalizing the people advocating such alternative. The tricky part here, as one might argue, is that once the marginalized has already become mainstream, accepted and acceptable, would this mainstreaming also render the erstwhile alternative as having lost its politics, its oppositionist stance by coopting?

The study from a gender postcolonial perspective

From the very beginning this study readily falls within the ambit of gender postcolonial analysis because of its very topic – an Othering that necessitated self-exoticization in order to claim a place in the sun, to counter a condition of marginality by using this very marginality in an attempt to have a place at the table located in the center. But to speak less metaphorically, gender postcolonial analysis is the most appropriate and suitable framework for this study because gender studies and postcolonial theory in so many ways share similar goals: to end discrimination/marginalization, to develop feminist/postcolonial subjectivity, and to contribute or develop to feminist/postcolonial knowledge production³⁸. I originally wanted to use semiotics because I saw the politics of representation before as the central issue, but even with Peircian semiotics via Kaja Silverman or Teresa de Lauretis as I earlier intended, it did not seem sufficient to cover the issues that seemed more pressing in this study. For instance, orientalism, neorientalism, exoticism could not have been adequately covered by semiotics, when the issues call for analysis beyond signifiers, signifieds,

³⁸ These three goals of feminism were mentioned by my teacher Dr. Edyta Just in our Feminist Philosophy and Literature course at the University of Łódź. Originally as mentioned are the following: The three goals of feminism are (1) to end discrimination, (2) to develop feminist subjectivity, and (3) to contribute to feminist knowledge production. In feminist theory these goals have been couched in a different manner, but the way Dr. Just phrased it was rather accessible yet fitting.

connotations, denotations, icon, index, and the like. The analysis, in fact, demanded a synthesis of medium specificity or work-immanent approach, as Buikema (2009) puts it, and textual analysis to be able to look at the conventions of the three films that correspond to the theoretical framework, assertions, and the main thesis of the study. Gender, film, and postcolonial studies are imbricated in this study, and that is encapsulated in the research question that has been put forward from the very beginning.

The three fields are also intertwined particularly in relation to postcolonial cinema, which remains in a state of flux, is porous and constantly changing (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2011). The study in this field may not have offered new theoretical breakthroughs, and one may even argue that it is a mere case study that fits the issue that is even unique or novel. But what this study has to offer still fits within the claim of world cinema to a more inclusive coverage and a greater degree of representativeness. If polycentric multiculturalism promotes a decentring, devolving of centrisms, should not an obscure and far less interesting national cinema compared to, say, Hong Kong or Japanese cinemas be also studied? Should not the self-exoticization of Filipino films and filmmakers also be considered a valid topic of scholarly study?

A footnote of sorts to the title: concluding the conclusion

In all the past four chapters I kept returning to this overarching issue and tried to relate them on other specific yet pertinent issues while veering away from using a synecdochic approach. What I attempted to do was to examine the same problem by peeling one skin, so to speak, or to scrutinize each layer until the whole becomes clearer. Or so was my intention. As most analyses go, the exploration led to more questions, each mature question giving birth to another nascent question. I started with a bold, assertive, accusing title, only to realize that this claim is more complicated than it appears to be. ‘Framing’ is a common film jargon, but its humanistic, social scientific, or even commonsensical use has taken on a negative connotation filled with malice and spite. ‘Manufacturing’ much more so – it brings to mind fabrication, creation of a lie, an elision of authenticity. The other concepts in the title – world cinema, orientalism, exoticism – are no less loaded as terms and concepts, but never lend themselves as simplistic, rather, as more complex and discursive.

This title now seems to be not as straightforward as I earlier thought and claimed it would be. The study, coming from a gender postcolonial perspective, leaves more room for looking at both sides, in terms of dual meaning, dual function, and even a multiplicity of meanings when approached from several different angles. But I have come to the decision

that the title should stand, if only to serve as a provocation, a hook, a lure if you will, on which a more careful analysis incorporating concepts from film theory, gender studies, and postcolonial studies.

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