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*Empire's Mistress, Starring Isabel Rosario Cooper.* By Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021. 232 pp.

*Empire's Mistress* is a work of art—figuratively and literally—that unearths the engrossing life of Isabel Rosario Cooper, highlighting the importance and complexity of archival investigation. Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez's *Empire's Mistress* is not a biography nor a slice of an obscure historical event; instead, it is Gonzalez's attempt to outline the minor existence of Cooper within the contours of imperialism and the metropole's demand for its colony. Historically, prior scholarship has condensed the life of Cooper as the young naïve lover of General Douglas MacArthur to a “scandalous footnote” (p. 8). But through her discoveries in the archives, Gonzalez interprets in her book that Cooper's love story with the general is minor compared to the entirety of her distressing life dictated by the unique relationship between the United States and the Philippines.

Interestingly, Gonzalez's book is both a chronicle and a collection. The book, composed of twenty-four chapters, gives the reader a dive into the depths of the archives and the author's creative imagination. Chapter 4 contains snapshots of telegrams. Chapter 9 is a transcription of a traveller's account based on “early variety programs and similar articles about the Manila vaudeville stage” (p. 67). Chapter 10 is what-could-have-been scandalous correspondence between Cooper and General MacArthur. Fascinatingly, Chapter 13 is Gonzalez's rendition of Cooper and General MacArthur's first meeting—which she based on doubtful accounts and interviews of the former's relative—written in a silent film format.

The book can be divided into three segments weaved into one overarching theme about the promise of empire. The first segment deals with the intricacies of imperialism. Gonzalez cites the eccentricities of Cooper's life as both the daughter of the imperial metropole and the colonial outpost, born to a white American father and a brown Filipina mother. These eccentricities reveal, for instance, the weight of interracial marriages as either a bane or blessing of colonialism. The second segment discusses the forbidden yet unfruitful love affair that is placed on the pedestal of power. For instance, MacArthur's love letters to Cooper uncover the general's hidden and illicit softness under his façade of masculinity. Still, Gonzalez quickly dismisses its romantic element and instead asserts that Cooper, like any other colonial women, bore the "labors of 'love' crucial for the maintenance of U.S. colonial power in the Philippines" (p. 17). The third and last segment pertains to the 'to and fro' of Cooper's entertainment career—from a young vaudeville dancer in Manila to a trivial actress in Hollywood—which is the strongest segment of *Empire's Mistress*. Gonzalez notes that despite the conclusion of Cooper's relationship with MacArthur and the guarantee of freedom, the yoke of imperialism never left her. Even the guarantee of the American dream in Hollywood subdued and exploited Cooper, relegating her to minor oriental roles because women of colour were treated as "silent accessories, preferably moribund" (p. 159).

As Gonzalez scrutinizes in *Empire's Mistress*, what is interesting about Cooper is the kind of roles she played in her films. Her acting career was a setback, not because she lacked the talent or the face of charm, but because she existed in the limbo of the white and brown races that succumbed to Hollywood's "exotic palette of racial fantasy" (p. 128). This issue sufficiently reveals the imperialistic treatment of people of colour in a land with a false promise of equal opportunities.

Overall, Gonzalez is successful in producing an inventive retelling centred on Cooper both as a colonial subject and participant, crossing the bridge between the evolving Filipino nation and emerging American empire—or, in her words, "how empire operates from the

perspective of those not in power” and the consequence of “emotions, rumor, and fantasy ... embedded in and crucial to imperial success” (p. 12).

The limitations of *Empire's Mistress* are tied to the limitations of the archives. After all, the colonial archives are political and hence “function as an apparatus of power” (p. 9). But these limitations made Gonzalez treat the archival holdings differently compared to some historians’ old belief of ‘no document, no record, no history’. I suspect that the scarce materials about Cooper had paradoxically revealed more information and raised more inquiries beyond Gonzalez’s initial expectations in her quest. Gonzalez is a master narrator and a careful spectator. Still, I could not avow that *Empire's Mistress* is exclusively a work of history as it is also portraiture of “imperial love” and life (p. 11) and of coming to terms with the historical past’s “hauntings and ... provocations” (p. 159).

Most studies about the Philippines produced in the last five decades are too insular. But *Empire's Mistress* is outside that framework. It is an archetype of how archival research should be repurposed. Importantly, it is a great addition to the recent body of work that is gaining ground in treating the Philippines and its subjects within the framework of empire and global history.

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*Celluloid Colony: Locating History and Ethnography in Early Dutch Colonial Films of Indonesia*. By Sandeep Ray. Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. 218 pp.

To drive through the streets of Yogyakarta in Indonesia and see people going about their daily life is a wonderful way to spend some leisure time. It becomes a marvel when what you see are