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Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema. By Katrina Macapagal. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. 204 pp.

The book explores contemporary urban cinema or city films in the Philippines, but shifts gears from the usual metropolitan centres and its culture of the one per cent to the sprawling urban poor communities primarily hidden from the arteries and heartlands of the metropolis but where a third of Metro Manila residents locate, reterritorialize and home themselves. It is a massive social engineering of invisibility by the state but which is rendered visible, vibrant and prone to violence and individual redemptive action in Philippine cinema.

Katrina Macapagal undertakes a difficult project of ethically mapping the time-space visibility of social injustices in the “slum chronotope” in city films—or “how narratives and characters of selected Philippine films might reveal imaginaries of ‘spatial justice’” (p. 4)—emanating primarily from Philippine independent cinema, a surge of independent film-making by mostly young people that began in 2005 and that was brought about by the democratization of film-making through digital technology. It is the first book that undertakes a study of the films produced in what is widely referred to as the third golden age of Philippine cinema, as it is also the first book on Philippine urban cinema.

The representation of disenfranchised peoples and spaces and of social justice in film is a tricky political project, invoking a filmic

analysis that needs to reference how film characters embody and disembody historical actors, sectors, events and state formation in society. The filmic analysis needs to harness the material culture to flesh out spatial justice and slum imaginaries. The analysis also needs to expound on the time and place of the mostly younger film-makers in the “indie cinema age” of Philippine cinema that authored the slum films and the limited middle-class audiences that watch films outside their comfort zones—films about abject poverty and poor characters.

Macapagal draws her historical grounding of the slum chronotope mainly from the period of the Marcos dictatorship (1972–86) and correctly frames, as bookended in the beginning sections of the introduction and conclusion, the continuation of their state engineering of the slums up to the present: the Duterte administration that emplaced slums and their adult male demographic as primary targets of its war on drugs and its mismanagement of the pandemic. She dissects the components of the slum chronotope through close textual reading of the narrative and characters of the films, and this is where I think lies the stumbling block. For a book purporting to talk about slum imaginaries and spatial justice, there is little referencing to the material culture of the slums in Philippine society. As tackled in the main body of part 2, the thrust of the book is an examination of the “routes of reading Philippine urban cinema”. The examination, however, unravels further variations of the diegetic slum chronotope: chronotope of passage in films that feature young adult characters; affective chronotope in the labour of mother characters; chronotope of (masculine) mobility in characters witnessing or undertaking criminal activities; chronotope of in/visibility in migrant worker characters; and the chronotope of performance in a young rap artist character.

The exceptions to the absence of linkages to the material culture of slums are in chapter 7, which brings to light the history of labour migration, and in chapter 8, which anchors the analysis on the Duterte administration’s war on drugs that substantiated the characters and narrative quests in the films discussed. The chronotope of passage, for example, conjures a coming into being of the young adult characters in chapter 4, but there is no mooring in Philippine society to grapple

with why the characters were coerced into confronting their unjust realities. The concept of lost childhood in children in abject poverty and violent environments, or the case of Kian Loyd Delos Santos, a seventeen-year-old killed on suspicion of drug possession in the war on drugs, and other similar cases involving minors could have been an entry point to anchor the social injustice rendered in the films.

But the chronotopes of the slum, which serve as the main analytical tool and are fleshed out in part 2, are not of equal discursive weight as the characters, plots, affects and effects are not clearly demarcated. Furthermore, the chronotopes cited seem to be present in all of the films. The uniqueness of the routes and their relatedness to the other films are not foregrounded in the book. The particularity of historical and real slums as actual film locations in the analysis are also not mentioned for the most part, with the exceptions of Malabon in chapter 6 and Pandacan in chapter 8. The slums seem to be generic and have not changed over time for most of the discussion, and this feature tends to homogenize their representations in the analysis. Missing too in the chapters are the social relationships of characters as they navigate the slums and metropole within Metro Manila.

The film-makers and the indie cinema movement that produced the films analysed are not fully brought into the discussion. Instead of relying largely on secondary sources, the writer could have provided a better understanding of the sociocultural context of indie cinema and the political agendas underlying it by engaging with the film-makers and the major social activists responsible for the formation of slum representations. While Brillante Mendoza, the director of the greatest number of films analysed in the book, became a workhorse of Duterte's media blitz, Treb Monteras of the film *Respeto*, among other directors, was issued a death threat for being critical of Duterte. Philippine cinema and politics are inextricably linked.

While the political linkages of filmic representations, historic slum imaginaries and social justice could be sharpened, the book remains a pioneering and substantial intervention into the currents of Philippine cinema and society—with its excess of poverty, slums, corruption, and shifting national politics (from dictatorship to populist

presidencies)—allowing for a political and ethical rethinking of global cinema, and of how Philippine indie cinema represents discontent with neoliberalism and greater conservatism and renders political futures.

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Silence and Sacrifice: Family Stories of Care and the Limits of Love in Vietnam. By Merav Shohet. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021. xvii+267 pp.

What does someone mean by not answering a question? How do some forms of verbal exchange generate non-verbal responses? Why would someone respond to talk by not talking? In short, how does a social analyst interpret silence? Sooner or later, anyone who studies society must confront the fact that silence is notoriously difficult to interpret. What analysts call a “non-response” or “ethnographic refusal” is conventionally discarded in favour of verbal data. Yet what does the silence actually mean? It may signify disagreement with the question or, conversely, mute agreement with its pretext. It may simply mean nothing at all. Of course, how one interprets silence depends on cultural context and historical situation, especially in places where violence has cut lives short or coercion punishes unacceptable speech. In these situations, reaching a point of silence might signal a stopping point, effectively ending communication. But explaining why an inquiry ends here can become a kind of guesswork, perhaps even prompting the analyst to fill in the silence with words that have never been spoken.

One of Merav Shohet’s signal achievements in *Silence and Sacrifice* is facing this problem of silent non-response and tackling its interpretation head on. Far from something that signifies nothing, silence, in Shohet’s view, is meaningful, powerful and moral.