

Voices of the Shadow: Malaysian Independent Film Goes Noir

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Film noir has always been known for its interest in venturing into the dark side of human psyche. The noir protagonist in the classical noir, for instance, is an anti-hero figure with world-weary awareness of the world that contributes to a noir sense of (moral) ambivalence. This kind of affinity with human's dark side, needless to say, is traceable within noir's progenitor, that is, the documentary genre - especially the one documenting the absurdity of the World Wars. By the same token, the Hollywood studio system that consigns film noir into the B-movie status due to its limited budget has directly helped in creating a unique series of films that stylises the voices of the shadow – the angst-ridden noir protagonists and transgressively voluptuous femmes fatales. These “routes” to film noir, I would argue, are shared by independent films in Malaysia – the affinity with human's dark side and the B-status that allow them to have independent voices. At the level of ideological symbolism, both noir and independent films are ineluctable critics of their contemporary societies. By juxtaposing the two film genres, this paper looks at three independently produced Malaysian films by Da Huang Pictures – *Before We Fall in Love*, *Flower in the Pocket* and *Love Conquers All* – arguing that they have provided an avenue for the voices of the shadow to be heard, hence, sharing the noir genre's socio-cultural critics of its contemporary society.

From Kidlat Tahimik to Kimmy Dora: Shifting Perceptions of Independence and Continuing Tradition of Resistance

Renei Dimla

In cinema, “independent” films assume the role of the Other. Going against the surfeit of mainstream productions or more aptly (considering the diminishing number of films over the last few years) mainstream sensibilities, the Pinoy “indie” presents an alternative viewing option for mass audiences saturated with Hollywood imports and locally made films with rehashed themes. However, soon enough, the mainstream catches up and penetrates the independent film industry, not long after producers, directors, actors and other creatives begin to jump on the independent bandwagon. What was once the Other turns into a new wonder.

It is not altogether a bad thing but it poses a disjuncture on the use of the term “independent” and leads to further questions about the validity of the term in the film industry. After all, cinema is, and will always be a collaborative effort, hence “independent film” may be deemed oxymoronic and purist to the point of impossibility.

This paper aims to trace back in film history the shifts in the perception of “independent” cinema from Kidlat Tahimik’s pioneering *Mababangong Bangungot* (1977), an independent work by all standards (produced, directed and marketed by Tahimik himself) but remains largely unfamiliar to the audience outside the academe to recent productions like *Kimmy Dora* (2009) that is backed up by the machinations of the mainstream system and has enjoyed considerable box-office take-ins.

Despite these shifts, this paper also intends to put forward the notion that despite the pervading influence of the mainstream through its financial support and wide distribution channels, and the varying success of numerous “indies”, Philippine “independent” cinema manages to continue the tradition of resistance that characterized Tahimik’s oeuvre if not through aesthetics, through profound sociological insight, or even both at the same time.

Fifth generation Malaysian filmmakers; are they revolutionists?

Raja Rodziah Bt Raja Zainal Hassan

Amir Muhammad and Fahmi Reza are familiar names in the Malaysian independent film scene. They are known as the fifth generation of Malaysian filmmakers; films that have been made from the beginning of the new millennium mainly are in digital format and filmmakers who are self-taught or graduated from art or film school. The nature of independent films in Malaysia, while is not strictly defined or confined, usually refers to cultural diversity, showcasing new works by filmmakers whose voices have been unheard or ignored in dominant culture. What is interesting about the two filmmakers are both belong to the major ethnic group in Malaysia, the *Malays* or *Bumiputra*, also known as the *son of the soil*. Being the *son of the soil*, the *Bumiputra* is ensured special rights and privileges in the country. However, despite their background, Amir Muhammad and Fahmi Reza have been showcasing the importance of equal rights for all Malaysians in their documentary films. Their films have attracted viewers from all races and background and have transcended racial boundaries. After 52 years of independence, Malaysia is still at infant stage in defining what it means to be *Malaysian*. This paper probes into the mind of these two filmmakers in order to understand their views on what it means to be *Malaysian* and how important their works in defining the national identity. Personal interviews with both filmmakers and reading of the films

will be conducted to discuss the essence of their films and to understand their views on nation building. The research hopes to grasp the importance of documentary film in defining *Malaysian* identity.

Exploring Notions of Independence in Digital Cinema in the Philippines

Eloisa May P. Hernandez

This paper investigates the various notions of independence brought about by the rise of digital cinema in the Philippines, as well as traces the history of the word “independence” in the context of Philippine cinema. The emergence of digital cinema in the Philippines and its concomitant modes of production, distribution, and exhibition resulted in the shifting of definitions of “independence” in Philippine cinema. Once reserved for a small group of filmmakers working outside of the mainstream film industry, the introduction of digital cinema in the Philippines in 1999 saw several sectors appropriating the term “independent.”

Undeniably, the digital filmmaking technology was taken up by independent filmmakers as a tool for resistance against the mainstream film companies that dominate the production, distribution, and exhibition in Philippine cinema. Meanwhile, mainstream film companies, network based multi-media conglomerates, and government agencies have also resorted to the use of digital filmmaking technology to produce digital full-length films and organize digital film festivals using the label “independent.” Small film production companies utilize the digital filmmaking technology to make low-budget sex films and label them as “independent.” The term “independent” have become a marketing label.

There remain, however, few filmmakers who struggle to maintain their independence from state-sponsored festivals and media conglomerate funding, filmmakers who offer “resistance of resistance” – filmmakers who remain independent from the “independent.” In its various contexts in Philippine cinema, the term “independent” has become a contentious, debatable, and fraught nomenclature.

This paper aims to show the various geographies of independence in Philippine and how filmmakers navigate the blurred spaces of independence in Philippine cinema.