



Balikbayan #1 Memories of Overdevelopment Redux III

Kidlat Tahimik

Production company Voyage Studios (Mandaluyong, Philippines). **Director** Kidlat Tahimik. **Director of photography** Boy Yniguez, Lee Briones, Abi Lara, Santos Bayucca, Kidlat de Guia, Kawayan de Guia, Kidlat Tahimik. **Production design** Kidlat Tahimik. **Set design** Santiago Bose. **Costume** Katrin de Guia. **Sound** Ed de Guia. **Music** Los Indios de Espana, Shanto. **Editor** Charlie Fugunt, Abi Lara, Chuck Gutierrez, Clang Sison, Malaya Camporedondo.

Cast Kidlat Tahimik, George Steinberg, Kawayan de Guia, Wigs Tysman, Katrin de Guia, Kabunyan de Guia, Danny Orquico, Marlies v. Brevern, Mitos Benitez, Marita Manzanillo, Jeff Cohen, Craig Scharlin.

DCP, colour. 140 min. English, Tagalog, Spanish.

Premiere 10 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

Language is the key to the empire. Enrique is the slave of Ferdinand Magellan, who circumnavigated the globe. Aside from bathing Magellan every evening, Enrique also has to translate Filipino languages into Portuguese and Spanish. The film opens with a cardboard box containing film rolls being dug up from the ground. Shot in 1980 and now showing their age, the images tell the story of the circumnavigation. Magellan died shortly before the journey was completed, but had authorized that Enrique, now by default the first true circumnavigator, was to become a free man. Enrique carved his memories of the journey into wood, with the sculptures adorning his garden. *Balikbayan #1* weaves together the official story with that of Enrique, as well as with the director's cut of what Tahimik started filming 35 years ago in order to find out the truth and continued in a village in the province of Ifugao in 2013.

The actors are no longer the same, and Tahimik, who himself played Enrique in 1980, has grown older, just as children have been born. *Balikbayan #1* is a home movie, a flamboyant epic, a study of colonialism, a historical corrective and an homage to what Tahimik calls 'Indio Genius'.

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus

A cinematic guest worker

'Balikbayan' – the word Kidlat Tahimik chose as the title of his film – is the Tagalog term for guest worker.

Many Filipinos from the huge underclass of their developing country work in affluent Asian countries like Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, but also in Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates. Their employment is usually precarious and based on temporary contracts, some of which are extended for a long time. While women from the Philippines often work as housekeepers, nannies or nurses, many male Filipinos work as builders or drivers on building sites in the Gulf States, as workers on oil platforms or as sailors on ocean-going ships.

In some cases, whole families in the Philippines live from their salaries. Those who manage to land a job abroad enjoy prestige among those left behind. The state energetically supports this labour emigration: it has an agency dedicated to placing guest workers abroad, although this process entails great social costs and critics brand it a form of human trafficking.

Director Kidlat Tahimik, too, was a Philippine guest worker abroad for several years, and sometimes, with irony, he uses the German word for it: 'Gastarbeiter'. But his working conditions were more pleasant than those of most 'balikbayan'. After studying in the United States and spending time as an OECD staff member in Paris, in the early 1970s he lived in Munich, where he developed an interest in filmmaking.

His first three films – *The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), which was feted at the Berlinale in 1977; *Turumba* (1981); and *Who Invented the Yoyo? Who Invented the Moon Buggy?* (1982) – made him one of the most important directors of postcolonial 'Third Cinema'. And all three films related to Germany; parts of two of them were even shot in Bavaria.

These works thus belong to a transnational cinema *avant la lettre*: long before this concept became popular in film-theoretical debate and in a time when the world was much less networked than it is today, Kidlat Tahimik was among the first filmmakers to cinematically document and reflect on political, economic and cultural globalisation.

A slave as the world's first circumnavigator?

The protagonist in Kidlat Tahimik's long unfinished film *Memories of Over-Development*, who appears as simultaneous victim and beneficiary of Europe's colonial expansion, is also a 'balikbayan': Enrique Melaka, a slave of Ferdinand Magellan. The Portuguese seafarer, who undertook several expeditions to Asia on commission from the Spanish crown, thereby not only paved the way for Spanish colonialism; his journeys also finally proved that the earth is round. Magellan almost became the first person to circumnavigate the globe – but shortly before the end of his last journey, warriors of the tribal chief Lapu-Lapu killed him in battle on the island of Mactan, which is part of the Philippine Archipelago.

A few brief passages in the notes of Magellan's ship's chronicler Antonio Pigafetta make it seem possible that Magellan's slave Enrique succeeded where his master failed: in traveling all the way around the world. Magellan had bought him on an earlier expedition in Malacca (today a state in Malaysia) and brought him back to Portugal. Magellan's next voyage was to the 'Spice Islands' of Southeast Asia – but this time in the opposite direction, westward across the Pacific. In his testament, Magellan ordered that Enrique, who had served him as valet and interpreter, should be freed. If

Enrique returned to Malacca after Magellan's death, then he was in fact the first person to sail around the world.

Kidlat Tahimik deduces that Enrique originally came from the Philippines thanks to a detail that chronicler Pigafetta mentions in his log of Magellan's expedition: when the Spanish ships reached Cebu, Enrique was able to make himself understood by the natives. For the filmmaker, that was an indication that Enrique was actually a Filipino who had either been sold as a slave to Malacca or who was a member of the Filipino minority community there. (Another explanation why Enrique could communicate with the rulers on Cebu, of course, could be that Malay, which he spoke fluently, was the lingua franca of the entire region at the time.)

The extant historical sources cannot conclusively prove the claim that Enrique was a Filipino and also the world's first circumnavigator, but they don't conclusively refute it, either. Kidlat Tahimik uses the resulting narrative possibilities to stage a fascinating thought experiment: what if a paradigmatic victim of early colonisation accomplished a historic, pioneering achievement? Did a man purchased as a servant by a Spanish conquistador on the slave market in Malacca, who interpreted for him and had to serve him at table, play a role in history comparable to that of Marco Polo or of Columbus? In the film, Enrique (played by the director himself) does not appear as the object of European exploitation, but rather as a kind of shrewd cosmopolitan from the Global South. Kidlat Tahimik began working on his film about Enrique Melaka in 1979, but for personal reasons never completed it. Not until more than three decades later has he now been able to finish it, almost without a budget – partly thanks to new developments in media technology (some of the new footage was shot with an iPhone).

Tilman Baumgärtel

Home is in the heart

When the thought of the First Circumnavigator strikes home (i.e., that the voyager might have come from our islands...) it becomes a storytelling energy that is not bound by time. It becomes a personal voyage – however long the timeline takes. The story evolving on film might span several generations... might risk extending over several lifetimes.

When I started churning my 16mm Bolex Camera in 1979, I expected completion within four or five years. Since I had gotten used to filming sans script, I knew it would take time for the story to evolve. We know very little about Enrique the slave aside from seven sentences (in the journal of the voyage) depicting him as an interpreter speaking the language of the islanders. This was in contrast to volumes about Master Magellan in academic write-ups and biographical novels... and perhaps in some obscure forgotten film.

A personal road map

But the slave's story was in no way 'a story to be filmed' – in the classical sense of a character to be embellished from historical accounts. The filming itself was a story to be lived out – for the next three-and-a-half decades. The living road had to be trekked (a karmic path?) to know what elements would become essential in the roadmap.

There's nothing heroic about that. It happens to be my path in doing projects: 'Bathala Na!' (Go for it!... but let the Cosmic Forces put wind in your sails.) In the late 1980s, my three sons were just growing into cool beings whose groupie I wanted to become. So

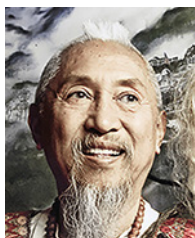
I decided in 1988 to shelve the 16mm shooting of Magellan's trip, expecting to resume playing the slave in five or seven years. Little did I know it would take twenty-five years – of lifestyle changes and political upheavals, of climate-revolts and techno-quakes – to weave the tapestry this tale has become.

Never could I envision that my being adopted by a tribal village would re-crystallise my POV. Nor would I guess that to reach the finish line, my tiny tots in the film would have to play larger roles (in a physical and literal sense.) So, the story rolled along... wherever thirty-five years of serendipitous storytelling-on-film has charted out its own world map. We detoured, sighting a lot of barren atolls, hidden bays, surprise reefs and skirting unromantic isles – not found on efficient maps.

Magellan, the logistics master, was obsessed with discovering an efficient route to the Spice Islands' profit peaks. Enrique the slave, tacitly in touch with nature's currents and winds, 'knew' the way. Because... home is in the heart.

However long the voyage, we reach our home island. Yes, we did stray on track.

Kidlat Tahimik



Kidlat Tahimik was born as Eric Oteyza de Guia in Baguio City in the Philippines in 1942. Between 1958 and 1963, he first studied Mechanical Engineering, then Speech Communication and Theatre Arts at the University of the Philippines. In the 1960s, he lived for a while in the United States, earning an MBA from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

Between 1968 and 1972, Tahimik worked in Paris for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In the early 1970s, he began writing. After a stay in Germany, where he collaborated with Werner Herzog, among other people, he returned to the Philippines in 1975 and began work on his first film, *Mababangong Bangungot/The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977). He later made many films and videos. He lives in Baguio as a filmmaker, installation artist, performer, lecturer and author.

Films

1977: *Mababangong Bangungot/Perfumed Nightmare* (Berlinale Forum 1977, 93 min.). 1979: *Sinong Lumikha ng Yoyo? Sinong Lumikha ng Moon Buggy?/Who Invented the Yoyo? Who Invented the Moon Buggy?*. 1981: *Olympic Gold*. 1982: *Yanki: Made in Hongkong*. 1983: *Turumba*. 1984: *Memories of Overdevelopment*. 1987: *I Am Furious Yellow*. 1989: *Takadera Mon Amour*. 1992: *Orbit 50 (Letters to my Three Sons)*. 1994: *Bakit Yellow ang Gitna ng Bahaghari?/Why Is Yellow Middle of Rainbow?*. 1995: *Our Bomb Mission To Hiroshima*. 1996: *Bahag ko, Mahal ko/Japanese Summers of a Filipino Fundoshi*. 2000: *Banal-Kahoy/Holy Wood*. 2003: *Aqua Planet*. 2005: *Some More Rice*. 2005: *Tatlong Atang at Isang Pagnakaw*. 2007: *Bubong/Roofs of the World! Unite!*. 2015: *Balikbayan #1 Memories of Overdevelopment Redux III*.