

# The Fatherland, Nationalist Films and Modernity

*Rolando Tolentino*

The experience of modernity is interconnected with the experience of the nation. The fatherland figure in nationalist films engages past traumas with the present economic boom of the nation. It opens up a discussion of the state and civil society in the postcolonial nation, citizenship, and the transformation of the national into a transnational society. This essay provides a relational perspective into the experience of modernity in South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines and intends to insert itself into the continuing narrative of modernity's transformation of the postcolonial nation.

**M**Y INTEREST IN THIS ESSAY IS ON THE CONVERGENCE OF issues of nationalism and modernity that bring about first, the resurgent overt preoccupation of the dominant institutions in nation-formation, and second, the counter-hegemonic practices in modernity that the majority of the nation has yet to thoroughly figure out. Such travails of modernity result from emergent social relations formed in a liberalized market economy in which new forms of pain and suffering are generated for and experienced by those historically poised at the margins. I present a cognitive map of the affects brought about by historical processes that attempt to deal with past national traumas amidst present and sustained economic national flight. How does it feel to be a modern postcolonial citizen that is both traumatized by the past and gentrified by the present cultural and economic geography? In the construction of the nation's past, present and future, the colonial and imperial historical moments are at play, together with the nation's own invented nationalism. How

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has the affect that allowed a tasting of the postmodern future provide a dialogue with recent economic woes and beings in some nations in the Asia Pacific?

My hypothesis is that the experience of modernity is interconnected with the experience of the nation. As the nation is never organically whole, so the experience with modernity is never complete. The nation that is imagined to experience growth and stability is at once interrogated by modernity. The further division and feminization of global labor are not only symptomatic of the modern penetration; the division and feminization are crucial in perpetuating the modern as the ideal for national economic, political, and cultural transformations. I use nationalist films to trace the trajectory of nation-formation in the light of more recent economic national developments that have transformed (at least, up to now) Asia Pacific nations. The nationalist films I choose to examine came at a time when the various nations in Asia Pacific (i.e. South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines) have been experiencing sustained economic growth. Using the grid of western liberal democracy and the nation's own invented nationalism, these films were therefore able to engage with certain past national traumas. By nationalist films, I am referring to those films that provide a historical reenactment of an originary moment, usually posed as a national trauma, in the construction of the nation's present being. There is a consensus in the significance of the particular national past as the 'nation thing'—as a hinge that both holds against and provides the impetus to greater national mobility. Like the authority figure in psychical socialization, the fatherland figure in nationalist films provides the libidinal drive that seeks to dominate the narrative of the postcolonial nation—instantaneously mobilizing and immobilizing the national past in order for the nation to move onwards. For if the *langue* for articulating the nation's past is through the present experience with liberal democracy, then the nation's own invented nationalism becomes the *parole* to articulate these historical processes from which a concept of the modern postcolonial nation emerges.

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I begin the essay with a discussion of state and civil society in a postcolonial nation, by looking into their workings and limits in the South Korean film *A Single Spark* (Park Kwang-su, 1996). I proceed with an elaboration of the effects of the state and civil society in issues of citizenship, especially those living in the city, in the Taiwanese film *Super Citizen Ko* (Wan Jen, 1995). I then look into the transformation of the national into a transnational state and civil society in the Philippine film *Eskapo* (Chito Roño, 1995). While providing a relational perspective into the experience of modernity in South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, the essay also intends to present, in a general sense, a continuing narrative of modernity's transformation of the postcolonial nation.

#### STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND FATALITY IN *A SINGLE SPARK*

THE 1980s were marked by the historical shift of political power from dictatorial rule to popular presidencies in the Asia Pacific. Oppositional leaders had taken the rein of government. The move to democratize the nation also came at a time when the nation was reaping the rewards of economic liberalization and was already well placed in the global economic network, whether as an enclave of global capital or as a terrain for the global division of labor. But economic integration is not the only process by which capital survives and flourishes in developing nations. For if capital is allowed to penetrate the national economy, the state—the coercive institution of the nation—has to rely more and more on consensus building, or to 'represent [the state's] own interests as those of society as a whole' (McLellan 1979). As David McLellan (1979) writes of Antonio Gramsci's idea: 'The concept of hegemony was thus the answer to the puzzle of capitalism's ability to survive in the bourgeois democracies of the West.' The state is able to reinvent itself through civil society, which for Gramsci is the domain of the private that allows for a discussion of the everyday practices in which the nation-state is to be perceived.

It now seems remote to think of newly-found wealth only among the cronies and *compradors* of the state. Economic liberalization has democratized the acquisition of wealth, trickling it down to individuals and sectors that generate and consolidate the middle class. It has made real estate prices soar so high that landed farmers can now own

capital. Political liberalization also comes into play in the transformation of the economy. States are only too eager to transform past atrocities into present workable 'win-win' situations in the name of national peace and harmony. Commissions of truth and good government—fact-finding committees to look into the excesses of past dictatorships (especially in cases of human rights violations and corruption) are formed by national governments wanting to deal with their traumatic past, an undoing of the state's doing. The objective is not to try personalities but to present a collective truth about the past, both as national closure and birthing of eras.

But the project is never complete, as it is at once interrogated by the disjuncture of national crises of ending and beginning. As Gramsci (1971) stated: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'<sup>1</sup> Yet the crisis has been naturalized in everyday life. Through civil society, the crisis is normalized as the nation's state of being; hegemony is also manifested in the same morbidity that characterizes its working-project nature, never complete and always in the process of formation. The workings and limits of civil society are thus ambivalent—at once representing a break in the purely coercive state but also limited by the language through which such break can be articulated, and that is, the discourse of the state's own civil society. Homi Bhabha (1994) calls this doubling as 'the nervous state', allowing for a self-reflexive instance of articulating, for our purpose, both the temporal breakdown of the state and resurgence of civil society functions.

This doubling allows us to speak of *A Single Spark*, Park Kwang-su's film biography of the political awakening and self-immolation of labor union martyr Chon Tae-il. Park's directorial focus is to present the fetish of the state for surveillance and discipline, and how activists are able to circumvent the state operations. State power is never made complete by the continuing existence of activists and protest actions in the very same network through which the state interrogates these people and actions. However, the civil society that allows for the existence of emergent protest activism is only articulated through the language of state crisis. So pervasive are state surveillance and discipline in sweat-

shop factories, as the film depicts, that self-immolation becomes an instant reprieve from civil society's indifference to the workers' plight. Chon's self-immolation becomes the 'morbid symptom' in the crisis, a way to temporally break state hegemony in civil society. In doubling a

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crisis within a crisis, Chon provides a punctuation to the workings of the state. This punctuation, however, also points to its very limit, becoming the single last action of political dissent. Park reworks this life in the larger course of directing the formation of the recent civil society in South Korea that allowed for the election of a former political dissident, Kim Dae Jung, into the presidential office in 1998.

The film begins with documentary footage borrowed from the Korean People's Photographers Association on a more recent mass protest involving youths and students. This event is the result of the trajectory of Chon's awakening and martyrdom. The film is poised in the interregnum of a shift from past political oppression to the present-day politics of a civil society that allows for such films to be made and to take a critical stand. The state somehow manages to distance itself from its own history. Thus, while Chon's self-immolation presents the doubling in the filmic text, the film itself represents the doubling of the state, forecasting the interrogation of its nature and the limit of such an interrogation.

While allowing room for discussion of new dimensions of recent civil society, the film is readily available to sanction state hegemony. It is precisely in the very dissidence allowed within the language of the state that the film is able to articulate its protest. Such protest is twice removed. Historically, the film deals with the nation's official past, and depicts state coercion; discursively, the film is made using the 'alien' language of the state in which the past is articulated and which, in turn, has displaced the life of Chon. Moreover, the film becomes part of the continuum of recent civil society that allows for such films to be produced and released in the present time. While interrogating the state,

the trajectory in which the film has poised Chon's story is made within the grid that has resulted in the recent civil society. It must be noted, however, that the availability of Chon's story only in the present is precisely allowed by the marginal existence of a civil society in the 1970s. Recent civil society allows for the retelling of Chon's story because it fits within its own narrative of developmental democracy.

In the film, prior to Chon's own self-immolation, he first lights up a black book containing the labor code. Chon's symbolic gesture marks the failure of the state to implement its own laws on the safety and just compensation of its workers. His own immolation (depicted in slow motion, repetitive shots of black-and-white and colored intercuts of fire engulfing his body) marks the double failure of the state. The state did not provide for adequate protection of its youth laborer-citizen; neither did the state oppress Chon enough for him to accept the conditions of the sweatshop. However, as Chungmoo Choi (1993) has pointed out regarding the series of self-immolation in South Korea in 1991: 'The symbolic power of the powerless thus cashes in on the vested social faith to seduce the masses into their romantic venture.... [T]he line of criticism is directed at the romantic nature of the *minjung* movement and its failure to embrace a larger populace, a charge of exclusionism.' Such sublime death and its cinematic depiction in *A Single Spark* allow very little room for the examination of the politics in which sublimity is to be contextualized as political action. The analysis is similar to Gayatri Spivak's (1988) own interrogation of *sati* or wife burning after the death of the husband. The sublime death, though it defies some textual codification, does not do justice for the woman subject.

Benedict Anderson (1991), however, puts the idea of fatality in another light, as one that is vital to the project of imagining the nation. He states: 'The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality.' This purity comes with the disinterestedness of individuals toward the nation, a kind of pure primordial love that allows the nation to extol human sacrifice among its citizens. Anderson (1991) also places the 'interplay between fatality, technology and capitalism' as the 'essential thing' in the formation of the nation. Though Anderson uses this notion in relation to the territorialization of the nation, such a notion can also be used to establish the connection be-

tween self-immolation in the nationalist movement as a way of reconceiving a new form of imagined community. Chon's self-immolation marks the fatality of the language of the state. When fire started to engulf his body, cameras begin flashing, capturing this moment of pure self-sacrifice. The body that commanded the attention of workers in the sweatshop district will henceforth attract a larger number of workers in tomorrow's newspapers. This identification with the burned body by unknown, nameless and faceless workers throughout South Korea provides the network to imagine a contrary notion of nation, other than that espoused officially.

The state still hovers as the large entity that prefigures the inscription of the nation and modernity in nationalist films. In the process of seeking redress for ill practices and conditions of the sweatshop where Chon works, labor officials would connect these conditions with the patriotic mission of Korean workers. The state rationalizes the poor conditions and unjust practices in the sweatshop factory as part of the trajectory of the national project for economic development. But with the sustained growth of the Asian economies until the crisis of 1997, standards operative in the 1970s working conditions are either minimized or transported to other less-developed transnational sites. This does not mean that state and capitalist oppressions are eradicated; it means that these are displaced elsewhere or that newer oppressive relations are established with recent movement of capital. However, *A Single Spark*—by focusing on the life of the martyr Chon and connecting such sacrifice to recent protest actions by youth and students—missed out on other pertinent connections especially as these relate to newer social relations arising from the more recent movement of capital and the restructuring of labor. For instance, recent International Monetary Bank prescriptions for the bail-out money of South Korea's saddled economy required the liberalization of policies regarding the hiring and firing of workers. The production of critical texts such as *A Single Spark* should include the production of a range of contexts in which such texts can be read. Rather than maintain allegiance to the official trajectory of the recent civil society, nationalist films should equally elaborate on further broadening the connections between the past national trauma with

present conditions of gentrification and newer exploitative relations with capital.

The margins and social movements have survived in South Korea even with or without the theoretical sophistication of the academe. Though the academe has enriched the various groups' experience, it has done so largely in terms of enriching the articulation of the experience. Choi (1993) states: 'Resistance or struggle has real-life consequences beyond intellectual imagination. How we read what is not written needs to involve these practical considerations.' What then do these practical considerations entail? *A Single Spark's* unique contribution to a model of politicized commercial filmmaking is the creation of a counter public sphere that engages the participation of various sympathetic individuals to the production of the film. As Kyung Hyun Kim (1998) points out: 'Through grassroots fundraising, more than 7,000 individuals helped to finance this project, raising about half the cost of film production.' Such participation calls into mind the political nature of filmmaking in 'Third cinema', a collaborative nature of making do with the given resources to interrogate not only the issues of cinema but also the contextual issues that produce such a cinema.

***A Single Spark's* unique contribution to politicized commercial filmmaking is the creation of a counter public sphere.**

This counter public sphere moves forward earlier attempts of directors from the Third World to produce political films. What comes to my mind is Filipino director Lino Brocka whose political films provide a counter-register of images and issues to those disseminated by the Marcoses and Aquino. Though he did not engage in direct grassroots organizing in filmmaking, his films were directly poised against official hegemony. What can be learned from Brocka is a more timely response in the form of quite historically-poised films that undermine the very contexts in which the films are produced, including entanglement with censorship, judiciary and the military. From Park's film, what can be productively added is a kind of grassroots organizing that broadens the participation to include political filmmaking. The more than 7,000 names acknowledged in the final titles provide both



material and symbolic meaning to *A Single Spark*. Such filmic tactics from Brocka and Park produce a model for engaging in a political kind of filmmaking at a time when the overtly political is being interrogated to give way to the micropolitics of cultural identities and everyday life.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE CITY IN *SUPER CITIZEN KO*

*SUPER Citizen Ko* tells the story of an aging Ko's investigation of a colleague's fate. Ko was forced to tell on the colleague to escape further torture by the police during the Kuomintang's 'White Terror' campaign in the 1950s. The film shows the shifts in Ko's *national* identity—as a soldier of the imperial army when Taiwan was colonized by Japan, as an intellectual imprisoned for allegations of working for Taiwanese independence during Chang Kai Shek's era, to being an aging citizen in present Taiwan. Ko's quest is undertaken at a time when Taiwan is undergoing a national election between pro-unification and pro-independence political parties where issues are openly raised, issues which could have cost someone's life 50 years ago.

Ko's search for a colleague's fate is an analog of his own search for national identity; it is a search that marks the pain and limits of national identity formation. But after having been imprisoned for 16 years and choosing to isolate himself further for 18 years, Ko is lost in the politics, time and space of modern Taiwan. When he can no longer bear the haunting of an imagined memory of his friend's execution, Ko begins his search. This search is predicated to succeed only as a symbolic resolution of individual national identity, as when Ko lights up candles in the isolated graves of victims of Taiwan's forgotten period in the film's ending. For how can the search—anchored as it is on Taiwan's forgotten history—be made to materialize in the 1990s, a time when such national memory has already been invoked in the everyday politics? How can a repressed memory be dealt with when it has now come up to the surface? How can one begin to talk about a traumatic past in an age when the past has been symbolically and materially obliterated, when the signifiers of the past trauma have already been transformed into nodes of the post Fordist service sector? In the film, the building of the Bureau of Public Security that supervised surveillance, torture and summary execution in the 1950s now houses the Lion Forest

Department Store; the military Tribunal office is now a five-star hotel; the execution site is now called Youth Park. Like Ko's citizenship, the city is a signifier without a signified.

Citizenship is posed as an arbitrary construction of hegemony and individual agency. Because of various historical shifts in Taiwan, institutions are continuously being introduced and new social practices continuously being redefined and enforced. How individuals invoke their relationship to the shifting identities of the state is foregrounded in the issue of citizenship. Individuals who immediately grapple with their relational identities—becoming full-pledged citizens, like Ko—are the first to be troubled by succeeding impositions of new orders and identity requirements. When he is determined to make his own claim to identity, to become a Taiwanese citizen, it is already too late because the rigidity of past identity claims has now become liberal electoral issues. The nation now votes on the kind of national identity it wants to perform every four years.

Unlike the recent past in Korea's *A Single Spark* that fits in the continuum of the maturity of civil society, recent civil society in *Super Citizen Ko* comes as a blast of the present, devoid of any historical blocks.

The existence of civil society in Taiwan comes to Ko as an alienation, forging distance to any material subject formation. All his accumulated signifieds cease to have any signification in the modern period. He is a floating absent signifier. He becomes the latest fashion victim, the retrenched worker who has failed to learn skills with the latest of machine or service sector technology, the latest political fall guy.

When an open civil society somehow manages to surface after decades of authoritarian rule that has overseen national economic growth, Ko's accumulated identities become unaccustomed to the present-day dispensation of power. Since Ko's generation represents pre-boom Taiwan, this open civil society becomes a by-product of sustained economic growth. This realization further isolates Ko and the history he represents—where have all his generation's pain and suffering gone?

**Recent civil society in the Taiwanese film, *Super Citizen Ko*, comes as a blast of the present, devoid of any historical blocks.**

*Super Citizen Ko* becomes part of the spectacle involved in the resolution of the 28 February 1947 incident that marked native Taiwanese resentment of Kuomintang rule. It also unleashed a backlash on the Taiwanese as an estimated 8,000 people were killed in the rectification campaign. As Ping-hui Liao (1993) states: 'While the 8,000 certainly included not only members of the Taiwanese elite, large numbers of local intellectuals were killed or imprisoned, which put an end to civil society that was beginning to take shape.' What was at stake then—civil society—becomes more and more a natural aspect of the postwar and, now, the postindustrial state. The recent civil society is not a godsend; it is caught in national and transnational survival. How can the modern state mobilize its people and the global community for continued economic growth at a time when its nationality is continuously being besieged by mainland China's desire for a return of the prodigal son, a la Hong Kong? So highly maintained is the overseeing of the national economy that Taiwan is one of the few countries in the Asia Pacific that has escaped the crisis affecting the region. Its sustained economic boom becomes its primary political weapon to thwart any move to reunify with China. Thus, the originary island and Japanese coloniality are invoked in national identity formation to expunge a purely mainland China identity.

The unraveling of the national trauma on the 28 February 1947 incident becomes a national spectacle, with a zealous production of incident information artefacts:

The Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province (1991) then started work on an official history of the Incident, which was published in November 1991. Even earlier, however, especially after 1986, many articles and books about the uprising had begun to appear. Drawing on oral history and historiography similar to the subaltern studies in India, writers used interviews to compile biographies of the victims and to describe and analyze the Incident within its historical context. And a major event in this process was the summer 1989 production of *The City of Sadness*, a film directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien that won an award at the Venice Film Festival because of its political subject matter. (Ping-hui 1993)

*Super Citizen Ko* also produces an effect which, as Liao mentions, is part of 'a tendency...to see "martyrs" as precursors of the Taiwan Independent Movement or as victims of political persecution.' This martyrdom is interestingly poised in the *depiction* of Ko's alienation from the urban space. In one scene, Ko blankly stares at people marching for various political parties in an upcoming national election. This ground level alienation is further intensified by an overview of his detachment from the new transformations of the city. In the scene where Ko goes to a Taipei tower, the breathtaking view of modern city buildings and open greenery is given a warped perspective by his dystopic voice-over narration of how the city, as analog of national politics, has been gentrified. Ko's own trauma of the past—intercut of black-and-white footage of his colleague's execution—further isolates the modern city. What the city does to Ko is to present the new signifying field in which transformations of identity are to be filtered. In the process, Ko realizes his loss, he becomes a signifier unable to adapt to newer hegemonic signifying practices.

Ko is not citified, as more recent national governments would have wanted it. His body does not bear the marks of a highly cosmopolitan and modernized city. The city becomes emblematic of the tensions arising from loss and the inability to deal with this loss; it is indifferent to multiple identities, even as its civil society advocates a plurality of tolerable politics. From Ko's own quest for claims of national identity, the problem, as posed by the city, is that the national has given way to the transnational claims of Taiwanese and Taiwanese-ness. The city becomes unsympathetic to national claims, as its present politics only seeks to reaffirm the intransitivity of national claims. Taiwanese identity is to be sorted transnationally, as Ko's ocular view of the city suggests. For the city becomes the quicksand of history; new structures that arise become devoid of historicity and historical block claims. As Saskia Sassen (1996) stated: 'The denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims centered in transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question—whose city is it?'

For urban planners, the city is a model of economic efficiency and modern living. For those who 'walk the city' to use Michel de Certeau's contrary image, the city is experienced in its rawness and how people

make do with urban reality (de Certeau 1984). But Ko's own experience with the city negates both models, for the city has moved beyond being purveyor of everyday existence. Even the perception of the everyday is mediated through popular ideal images, from ghetto basketball to liberal democracy. Ko looks at the city as highly urbanized and liberalized. It is precisely these characteristics of the city that alienate Ko. The modes of surveillance and discipline such as the blackout city or curfew siren that used to haunt the city have been transformed by highly segregated lines of economic and political transformation. Pain is not just a mental state; it is the material state of the city. Where then to stake Ko's claim on the city?

In the film, while civil society has allowed for, at least, two political positions, Ko's own historical background leaves little room for accommodation. Ko not only shows the limits of recent civil society but also the very politics that have institutionalized this civil society. In this new city and civil society, Ko cannot make claims to citizenship since these are anchored on Taiwan's past, a history nominalized in modern politics. Modern politics have allowed such views to proliferate yet do not really invest power on the state. Taiwan, like Ko, becomes a signifier without a signified. But unlike Ko, Taiwan's in-between identity (whether to become independent or to return to mainland China) is poised as a postmodern postindustrial dominant organizer of Taiwanese reality. *Super Citizen Ko* is a pessimistic look at citizenship within

the national space. Such a national identity, as the film suggests, can only be genuinely generated transnationally.

The point that the film makes is a critique of recent Taiwanese civil society, one that has failed to substantiate Ko's being. This point, I think, posits the continued strength of the state to organize and define Taiwanese modernity and nation. The state may have liberalized, but

only in relation to absorbing alternative politics and history that support its own survival as a quasi-nation internally and as a transnation externally. Ko's own obsession with what really happened only presents

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the futility of unearthing historical truths. But such truths have long been buried in isolated grave sites, and all one can do is to memorialize the memory.

Citizens, as embodied by Ko, are signifiers looking for a signified. Even when the signifying field has been set up by the state and civil society, bodies would always be looking for alternative claims. Thus, Ko's citizenship is one of becoming a super citizen, as the film's title suggests—searching for a non-existent yet basic signified in identity formation. His citizenship, like most Taiwanese's, is neither poised nationally or transnationally. Citizenship then becomes a floating essential signifier, transforming as divergent needs and claims call upon it. However, citizenship does not bear the promise of delivery, nor the possibility of return should one be unsatisfied with it: citizenship is relational. Like Ko's nostalgic view of family organicity, citizenship depends on the company one imagines he/she keeps. Such a view, however, is imbricated by the trauma that one individual or nation, even if it attempts to deal with it fully, will never be resolved. Yet for Ko, the meaning or the lack of meaning of citizenship can only be resolved in the quest, in the struggle to come up with a workable truth of being and nation. Unlike *A Single Spark's* overtly political mode of filmmaking, *Super Citizen Ko* presents a new wave return to the political. The visuality presented in the film, especially as to how Ko relates to the city, mimics the camera. The film foregrounds and critiques the media for the institutionalization of dominant claims that alienate historical block claims such as Ko's.

PRIVATIZED AND TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY IN *ESKAPO*

IN *Super Citizen Ko*, the transnational link was suggested to be the purveyor of present-day civil society and identity formation. In *Eskapo*, however, the connection is more embarrassingly overt, using nationalism in the service of big business and traditional oligarchs. The film narrates the heroic escape from Marcos' maximum security prison by two members of affluent Filipino families—Eugenio Lopez, scion to a political dynasty and business empire that includes the monopolistic franchise of an electric company, the nation's largest television and media conglomerate, and former owner of a leading newspaper; and Sergio

Osmeña, III, also a scion to a political and business dynasty in Cebu. Upon the declaration of martial law in 1972, they are imprisoned for allegedly plotting to overthrow Marcos. The film explains that they were used by Marcos as hostages to quell political and economic opposition. After five years in prison, Lopez and Osmeña decide to escape from the military camp and fly out of the country in a private plane.

Funded by Lopez's own film company, *Eskapo* presents a nationalist project that is tied up with business and traditional political interests. Disenfranchized during the Marcos dictatorship but re-enfranchized during Aquino's takeover of the presidency twenty-five years later, the rich have never seen better times. Most families saw the return of their properties and businesses, including political power. The film tackles a trauma shared by nation—the Marcos dictatorship—that provides the impetus for greater endeavor in business and politics amongst the traditional rich. And yet the film also legitimizes big business and traditional politics, especially as to how these were repressed, liberated and transformed. In the film's ending intertitles, updates on the careers and pursuits of Lopez and Osmeña are presented—the political activities they engaged in during their exile in the US, the return of their sequestered business, and the further enlargement of their business and political interests. So unabashed is the film in acclaiming these business personalities that the film even utilized the country's two leading dramatic actors to portray them. What I find interesting in *Eskapo* is the transnational links being posed, especially as to how the US is figured in the whole project of bringing in recent civil society. For if in *Super Citizen Ko*, the transnational link is nameless, in *Eskapo*, it is in the continuation of the benevolent link between the US and the Philippines that notions of civil society and citizenship are discussed.<sup>2</sup>

What is not said about Lopez and Osmeña's escape to the US (which involved the hiring of a private plane) is the unavailability of such an option for most of the people repressed under the Marcos dictatorship. Many of the oppositionists who sought refuge in the US were part of the elite politics in the Philippines disenfranchized during the Marcos dictatorship. In addition, immigration patterns in the 1960s allowed only for the migration of highly-skilled professionals. As the greater number of people who comprised the oppositional mass move-

ment met neither criteria, the site of struggle was mostly undertaken within the national space which became the privileged domain of nationalist struggle.

Furthermore, what is squeamishly uncomfortable about *Eskapo* is the way nationalist films have been invoked in the service of big business and traditional politics. In the refashioning of nationalism for the maintenance of hegemony, big business and traditional politics have set the agenda. Traditional politics helped usher laws banning child labor, the inclusion of marital rape as a crime, stringent protection of the environment, and other politically-correct state measures. In the same light, traditional politics has also aggressively rubberstamped laws maintaining ongoing capitalist principles of liberalization, privatization and globalization.

On the one hand, forest parks are declared national monuments free from illegal logging. On the other hand, the Omnibus Investment Code guarantees preferential treatment to big transnational capitalists and the Mining Act allows the speculative exploitation of all land resources. Whereas in the past, the propaganda films of the state disseminated official viewpoints and representational images, today, this task, like most governmental functions, has been taken up by big businesses. More than any other time in the history of Philippine business, now is the era when corporations maintain a keen interest on social issues and alternative practices as part of good business sense. For instance, Atlas Consolidated Mining Corporation is involved in a shoemaking project for Abaca, a *sitio* within the mine's parameters. Central Azucarera Don Pedro has given loans to housewives and dependents of employees to start up an industrial rags project. Negros Navigation has set up *Bangko Sang Barangay* (The Poor Man's Bank). San Miguel Agribusiness Division and Pilipinas Kao have opened cooperative projects, while Phelps Dodge and Ramcar are involved in various livelihood projects. (Luz & Montelibano 1993)

The state function is being privatized in tension-filled ways. State power is being delegated to businesses but political power is filtered

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through the active participation of business. In the 1998 Philippine national elections, for example, business loyalty to presidential candidates had been made clear earlier on by contending business interests. And yet while the nation-state is being continuously interrogated and redefined by multinational corporations, it has also moved into directions that befit an enlightened liberal community. The military is modernized and the police professionalized. More infrastructure is being built by business participation through build-own-transfer contracts (deals that allow business to establish and to own priority infrastructures for at least 25 years before these are turned over to the government). In addition, water and power distribution have been privatized. Specialized hospitals and the prison system are also on their way toward privatization. What is perceived to be a better, more efficient delivery of basic services is now placed in the hands of business by a government perennially riddled with a bloated and corrupt bureaucracy. In short, business is setting a major bulk of the agenda of nation-building and consequently, of national identity formation.

Another point generated in *Eskapo* is the working subject who is able to reclaim and enlarge the meager resources which are nonetheless his/hers. The final intertitles show the professional work ethics of these scions. In claiming what is rightfully theirs, the working subject is poised as the model for preserving civil society. By continuously working to generate surplus, the individual achieves power of a liberal kind. By generating economic surplus, political power is also generated to liberate other less privileged working bodies. Thus, power is democratized through political gentrification. Civil society gradually becomes a pursuit of big business for it yields a power mimicking state power.

In *Eskapo*, business undertakes the financing of the dissemination of *laissez-faire* economics and human rights concerns as prevailing social interests. Being a media mogul, Lopez doubles as both break and continuity in the democratic tradition of media to provide a public sphere for articulating dissent and consent. The appearance on film of his story of victimization and rescue seemingly poses medias' possibility for constituting and transforming the public sphere. However, his authorship of the film biography—both as film subject and producer—not only represents a narcissistic relation to oneself but also to one's

claims. *Eskapo's* public service thus becomes self-service. Lopez, who should know the trauma of losing the media to the dictatorship, indirectly stresses class interest as purveyor of public interest. Nothing is neutral, not even those that seem to provide sympathy to trauma management. What the film becomes is a pedagogical tool for management of the public sphere, clearly demarcating the models and interests of civil society that produces this sphere.

#### NATION AND MODERNITY IN THE FATHERLAND

NATIONALIST films in Asia Pacific cinema embody both the ideal way of dealing with a past national trauma (i.e. what contexts are to be used to generate meaning over the trauma) and the operations of hegemonic and counterhegemonic realities (i.e. how the past is made usable for present contending interests). More importantly, nationalist films, precisely because these deal with social trauma, interrogate the absence and rise of recent civil society. The figure of the fatherland, the masculine allegorical authority of the narrativization of the nation, provides the map to read the past trauma and present predicament. The fatherland, however, is to be distinguished from the motherland: the motherland provides the spiritual inspiration in the formation of the nation and national identity whereas the fatherland provides the material mapping of the formation and elaboration of the nation.<sup>3</sup> The social mapping of the nation is invoked through the discourse of civil society and the state. The fatherland embodies the organization of civil society, marking its absence, birth, and recent maturity through the enlistment of effects, both on the male individual figure, some micro-collectivity, and the nation.

The elaboration of the national experience in South Korean, Taiwanese and Philippine cinemas also expounds on the nation's experience with modernity. On the one hand, the nation is continuously being interrogated and defined by contending and dialoging forces, nationally and transnationally, that produce oblique relations of power and national formation. This disjuncture in being and power almost always materializes through the experience of pain and suffering. On the other hand, since the formation of nation, national identity, and modernity prevail under the most trying circumstances, the nation is already spo-

ken for in the experience of modernity, and vice-versa. One can therefore speculate that the nation is an enlightenment construct that interfaces with the more universal experience of modernity. The local experience of nation-formation is the *parole* in the *langue* of modernity.

Thus there exists a relational mode in which nation-formation and modernity implicate each other in Asia Pacific cinema. Such self-reflexivity can also be seen in the metafilmic quality of nationalist films. Because they document a nation's past and present, nationalist films elaborate on the film's own relationship with filmmaking and media, and society. Each film analyzed presents contending views about film and the media: on how one uses and is used by film and the media to visualize the nation's past and present.

#### NOTES

I am grateful to Jonathan Chua and Esther Yau for the suggestions on improving the essay.

1. Gramsci clarifies the notion of hegemony in a footnote, 'The "normal" exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balanced each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of opinion (newspapers and associations) which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied.'

2. US domination of Philippine politics has continued to evoke conflicting and dialoging nationalist responses. For the mass movements, it was no less than a quest for a genuinely independent Philippines. For the traditional politicians, such a nation can evolve through links with nations more experienced in the task of self-governance and economic prosperity. Because of the enlightened colonial project, the US to this day remains as the single most important purveyor of economic, political and popular culture in the country.

3. See Partha Chatterjee's (1993) gendered distinction of nation-formation. I have also talked about the mother-nation in my article, '*Inangbayan, mother-nation, in Lino Brocka's Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim and Orapronobis*'.

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