



Masses, Power, and Gangsterism in the Films of Joseph “Erap” Estrada

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ABSTRACT. The masses in Estrada’s film are massified, i.e., individuals forced by circumstance to bond together and to search for a liberator. In politics, such a representation remains sublimely real. Estrada coached the masses to posit him as their ally and salvation. And the masses, which comprised the huge voting population, gave him the ultimate chance to serve them. In this essay, I am interested in assessing how Estrada’s films and politics have mobilized the masses. This is a cultural analysis of the discursive construction and use of the masses. How do individuals bond together for a political purpose without having to realize their class interest? How do the masses remain a massified entity inside and outside Erap’s filmic and political machine? How are the masses extolled in entertainment industries and yet marginalized in actual social politics? How are the Filipino masses metropolitanized in recent imperialist globalization?

KEYWORDS. masses · Joseph “Erap” Estrada · film studies · power · gangsterism · Philippine studies

INTRODUCTION

At 2:20 p.m. of 20 January 2001, under armed escort, Joseph Estrada unceremoniously left Malacañang Palace through the Pasig River. Earlier that week, the Philippine elite—Jaime Cardinal Sin, who presided at the EDSA I people’s uprising in 1986; former presidents Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos; resigned officials of the Estrada Cabinet; and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, among others—joined the call for millions of people, most of them belonging to the generation that did not participate in the first People Power, to amass in indignation in EDSA in order to overthrow Estrada. Dubbed EDSA II, this uprising came at the tail of scandals that had haunted Estrada and had disenchanted the elites who had not fully accepted him as head of state. After all, the scandals concerned mansions for his some five mistresses, unprofessional work ethic (not reporting for work because of his drunkenness and a night of mahjong), a secretive midnight

cabinet (where Estrada was most alive), and massive corruption charges. The decision by the Senate impeachment committee not to divulge the contents of a sealed envelop, said to contain direct evidence linking Estrada with *jueteng* (poor man's gambling lottery) paybacks, frustrated his already swelling body of opponents. Amassing at the EDSA Shrine for four days, their numbers swelled, forcing Estrada out of power. He was arrested and photographed in mug shot, turning the hero he was in his films into a criminal figure. Estrada sold dreams attuned to the masses' own, but even the masses realized the thief in the president they elected four years back. He had temporarily lost their confidence, and had yielded to the public's call for his ouster, prosecution, and conviction.

Estrada, an action hero for four decades, was elected thirteenth president of the Philippines in 1998. According to the 1998 Social Weather Station exit poll, he won with the biggest margin in presidential election history, garnering 39.9 percent of the votes cast in a field of eleven candidates. He cornered 38 percent of the 71 percent available votes from class D (Crisostomo 1999, 314). Estrada won big, by using the masses (*masa*) as a cornerstone of his presidential campaign and governance. Despite his affluent background, he succeeded, owing to his star system, to project himself as one of the masses. Estrada came out of the local action film genre, "the *aksyon* (action) film, called *bakbakan* (fighting) in Filipino, [which] focuses mainly on physical conflict" (David and Pareja 1994, 82-3).² His action films depicted characters in solidarity with and providing leadership for the masses. So successful was his filmic career that his double excess, more than the usual excess attributed to aspiring politicians (being a gambler, womanizer, and alcoholic), were pardonable, even as the foibles of other candidates and politicians were not.³ His campaign slogan "*Erap para sa Mahirap*" (Erap for the Poor—Erap being his pet name) was not so much based on genuine pro-masses politics, but was just a mnemonically and rhetorically effective device mobilized in his campaign. That a "defender of the masses" (in film) used a pro-masses slogan through a political party called the Laban ng Makabayang Masang Pilipino (Fight of the Nationalist Filipino Masses) spelled some redundant certainty of victory.⁴

The masses in Estrada's film are massified, i.e., individuals forced by circumstance to bond together and to search for a liberator. In politics, such a representation remains sublimely real. Estrada's films coached the masses to posit him as their ally and savior; the masses,

which comprised the huge voting population, gave him the ultimate chance to serve them. In this essay, I am interested in assessing how Estrada's films and politics have discursively mobilized the representation of the masses. This is a cultural analysis of the discursive construction and use of the masses. How were individuals made to bond together for a political purpose without having to realize their class interest? How do the masses remain an internally massified entity outside Erap's filmic and political machine? How are the masses extolled in entertainment industries and yet marginalized in actual social politics? How are the Filipino masses metropolitanized or led into a cosmopolitan and urban identity formation in recent imperialist globalization?

The first section of the essay deals with the two dominant modes of constructing the Filipino masses—one based on nationalist historiography and alternative nation-building, the other on the cultural capitalist agenda of homogenizing audience. In line with the latter mode, the second part of the essay discusses the trajectory of use of the masses in Estrada's films, as represented in the films herein analyzed. What historical bloc claims are made for the masses? How are the masses massified and demassified using speech, gender, and commodification? The third section discusses the notion of power, as specifically manifested in gangsterism and as culled by Estrada. What historical moment heralded Estrada into power, and how did his kind of gangsterism fragilely cohere the nation? An incipient violence underscores the use of gangsterism and the masses, one that represents alienation, a Third World metropolitanization of the citizen-subject, and masochism.

Popular films foreground truth-claims about historical events and figures, especially as such popular films are generated, knowingly or unknowingly, for political gains. The masses are spoken for in these films, i.e., aesthetically represented ideologically from a middle-class position—a representation generated by producers for capitalist gains. However, an analysis of the films altogether yields historiographic evidence: how were these films coached through the filmic power of representation—in this essay's case, the masses, for political gains? In undertaking an analysis of filmic representation, actual power is foregrounded and critiqued, and the filmic fantasy is undermined.

THE MASSES IN CULTURAL POLITICS

The modern meaning of the "masses" revolves around a binary opposition. As Raymond Williams explains, "[one side] is the modern

word for many-headed multitude or mob: low, ignorant, unstable; and [the other] is a description of the same people but now seen as a positive or potentially positive social force” (1983, 195). The first category connotes a dystopic classist remark on the masses; the second category connotes a class utopia. It is in the second category that the masses serve as a possibility for social transformation, according to how they are generated and mobilized for certain collective ideals.

Etienne Balibar explains the dialectics of class and masses as “the continuous transformation of historically heterogeneous masses or populations into a working class, or the successive avatars of the working class, together with a corresponding development in the forms of ‘massification’ specific to class situation” (1991, 162-3). However, while the masses have been generated by the culture industries—mass consumption, mass culture, mass communication—class has been elided in this modernist project. Though claiming to access the widest reach, the masses have not accessed their potential as a socially transformative entity. On the one hand, some films about the masses may signify the utopia of social transformation—of highly politicized masses transformed into politically mediated and sustained proletariats, environmentalists, feminists, gay activists, and so on. On the other hand, real experience suggests a high degree of defiance of the masses to such transformation; the masses have yet to become political entities other than pawns mobilized for electoral politics. Though accounts of the masses successfully transformed into critical entities abound, the masses have yet to be transformed into a massive class entity. By this, I refer to a kind of class overdetermination that can prove antithetical to the prevailing order and chaos of imperialist globalization. The masses are especially significant in class and class-related issues, providing the impetus in the transformation of the masses into a class issue. As Deleuze and Guattari states, “Beneath the self reproduction of classes there is always a variable map of masses” (1987, 221). For Estrada to rise above his political ambition, for example, the masses were politicized in traditional politics and its representation in his films. This essay provides the political mapping of the masses by Estrada. In the films discussed in this essay, the masses are not provided the basis of class mobilization, as class becomes the impetus for the masses’ transformation.

As a consequence of the negation of class in the possibility of the masses, culture industries are looked upon as the dominant mode by which individuals, unknown to each other, bond and redefine themselves

as critical entities or resultant communities. Such acceptance of right-wing hegemony of the culture industries towards the masses implies two further consequences. First, a contrary macropolitical analysis is purged, for the cultural dominance under imperialist globalization is poised as infallible. Second, cultural analysis therefore focuses on locating sites of resistance—usually in the interstices—within the dominant cultural and economic matrix. Class is further negated as inappropriate in analysis specific to culture and culture industries. It is also deemed a given, therefore that there is the need to simply move on with regards to how people make do and make sense of their classless realities.

The economic reductionism of class is triggered by the wide-ranging influence of imperialist globalization in all spheres of daily social experience. Imperialist globalization has successfully and kinetically moved capital that now redefines ways of sensing and experiencing reality. An ideal of imperialist globalization is the middle-classification of the masses, the attainability of democratic standards of living for the majority of the population. The masses' gentrification is looked upon as a way of easing the political in issues that might tend to be political. In so doing, the political eventually is made to echo conservative and liberal politics. Class issues then give way to monitoring and distribution of government funds to projects, public accountability, electoral reforms and so on. What is particularly insidious in this classless schema is the wholesale buy-in of postcolonial nations to middle classification as a national ideal.

The social imaginary of being middle class involves rationalization and substantiation. Culture industries are mobilized to reinforce and centralize themes of individual mobility towards the fantasized ideals of national mobility. In the Philippines, there have been two divergent reactions to the fantasizing of the nation and its masses. The first one is provided by an oppositional nationalist historiography in which the masses are poised as central in history making and nation building. The second one is provided by movies as culture industry, in which stars, specifically action stars are made spectacularized entities of the possible in politics. Because of the nature of the Filipino *aksyon* genre, the lead actor's fetishistic physical contact with the forces of the anti-hero and the masses brings into play a familiar fantasy in the aspiration for politics. A proof of this is that the stars catapulted into local and national politics are male leads from *aksyon* films.⁵

Colonialism brought in a colonial historiography that valorized and justified the influences of colonial rule. It played up the gains of great men and events in nation building both symbolically and materially. On the other hand, nationalist historiography provides a case in point on how the masses were reclaimed as agents of history. Historian Renato Constantino states in his highly influential rewriting of national history that “[the] rich tradition of struggle has become a motive force of Philippine history. Participation in mass actions raises the level of consciousness of the masses. The more conscious they are, the more they become active and the more telling their contribution to the changing of society and the changing of their attitudes, until they come to realize that struggle is their historical right and it alone can make them free” (1975, 10-11). The masses’ participation in the struggle to be free becomes the defining concept in national history. The activation of the masses is the agent of being in Philippine history. The pedagogical function of envisioning nationalism in the masses becomes the imperative of rewriting national history. Constantino continues, “The only way a history of the Philippines can be Filipino is to write on the basis of the struggles of the people, for in these struggles the Filipino emerge” (1975, 11). The masses, who accept a dormant emplacement in colonial historiography, are awakened in nationalist historiography, made active subjects of the nation.

The nationalist moment of class betrayal of the masses is embodied in the Tejeros Convention of 1897. What was intended to consolidate the revolutionary forces of the Katipunan emerged as the occasion for its fragmentation into two camps: the Magdalo and the Magdiwang factions. The former embodied the elite class dominance of the affairs of the revolution; and the latter, its mass interest. Emilio Aguinaldo of the Magdalo faction secured the presidency while the plebeian leader Andres Bonifacio was elected the Director of Interior. A member of the Magdalo faction protested Bonifacio’s election, “saying that the post should be occupied by a person with a lawyer’s diploma” (Constantino 1975, 11). Bonifacio was outmaneuvered, and eventually ordered executed under Aguinaldo’s command. This historical class betrayal is documented and renarrativized in another nationalist historian’s work, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* by Teodoro Agoncillo. The book maps Bonifacio’s life against the backdrop of the revolutionary movement, pedagogically positioning Bonifacio’s consciousness against the larger wellspring of the masses’ own fermenting nationalist consciousness.

Such a betrayal becomes the defining moment of a Philippine mass nationalism, one that seeks to position itself as distinct from the classist variant of local intranationalisms. To a large extent, the *causa* for the continuing nationalist struggle is the assertion of Bonifacio's (and the masses') own disavowal by elite nationalism—that the majority of the people remains under an oppressive national system that only benefits a few. Bonifacio becomes the condensed signifier of the masses' nationalist legacy, the continuing mass struggle, and a future utopia of mass control of the mode of production. He becomes the signifier of the nation's past, present, and future. He embodies the experience and the promise of securing the class interest of the masses. Subsequent interrogation of official and elite nationalisms by mass nationalist movements center on the politicized image of the mass subject. The assertion of a nationalist culture—including arts and literature, media and culture—is predicated on the emancipation and liberation of the masses.⁶ Thus, to mobilize the concept of the masses involves the mobilization of a continuing political mass nationalism.

A contrast to the conceptualization and mobilization of the masses comes from mainstream cinema, which seeks to propel actors into star images.⁷ Culture industry plays a pivotal role in the breeding and orchestration of actors into stars, whose signification field extends beyond the celluloid texts.⁸ Estrada, for example, mobilized his star system to yield gains in personal politics. His affinity with nationalist historiography is his filmic capacity to mobilize the masses and herald himself as their leader, to project himself as coming from one of their ranks. There is no overt betrayal of the masses; he remains the messianic figure embodying the mass condition and aspiration.⁹ His films allow the mass audience to suture in dreams of mass nationalism actively at work in various local contexts. I analyze three Estrada films to illustrate the trajectory of Erap's mobilization of the representation of the masses. In *Geron Busabos* (Geron the Bum, 1964), the representatives of the underprivileged masses exist in the postwar boom years. In *Diligin Mo ng Hamog ang Uhaw na Lupa* (Sprinkle the Arid Earth with Dew, 1975), issues of land reform and continuing feudal oppression plague the landless peasants. In *Sa Kuko ng Aguila* (In the Eagle's Claws, 1988), the presence of United States military bases in the country allows for a coalition of political masses. What seems to be a political trajectory of the masses—from gangs to political coalitions—was crucial to Estrada's presidential campaign and management.

The analysis of these films substantiate the historical turn of events in Estrada's political life, one that mobilized the masses for his political advantage. Filmic representations lay truth-claims to the fantasy of the historical, or the imagination of the historical that seeks to engender a utopia. In Estrada's films, it is the particular use of the masses for political gains within filmic and historical narratives. These films attest to Estrada's political development, mobilizing his action star image into prominence in the local, national, and nationalist politics. Each of the films analyze would correspond to almost a decade of Estrada's political transformation: from mayor of San Juan, a suburban Manila town, to senator and vice president with nationalist advocacies, to president with a reversal towards corruption and pro-Americanism. What I expound in the analysis of the narratives of the films is the systematic discerning of the masses—from simply an underclass to a politicized and class-based entity—as the trajectory of Estrada's imagination of the underclass that yields to his own political advantage.

ESTRADA'S POWER TO REPRESENT THE POLITICIZED MASSES

Geron Busabos narrates the life of Geron (Estrada), a young intermittent laborer and leader of a homeless group of beggars, sex workers, and other laborers. Geron could have joined a protection racket syndicate, yet he has chosen to earn a living by working as a hand in the market. Even with his measly income, Geron does not succumb to the lures of easy money. A friend who robs a Caucasian to get cash for the treatment of the sick child and who uses Geron's name to extort money from stall owners is twice disavowed by Geron. By conniving with the syndicate, this person frames Geron for killing an underworld character. The film ends in a chase. Geron is wounded but proves his innocence and determination.

Geron becomes the locus of relations just as Quiapo, Manila's old district, becomes the nexus of commercial relations in the film. Quiapo's cityscape provides a matrix of institutions and institutional practices—the Catholic Church whose patron, the Nazarene, extols tolerance against pain and suffering; the market place, where rural produce is retailed in urban space; and the country's first underpass, the marker of modern urban transformation. Geron is the Christian subject who reenacts Christ's pain and liberation, the protolaborer subject of the postwar economy, and the citizen-subject of the nation. He embodies the necessity for economic and modern transformation

of bodies and cities. The surrounding masses provide the contradictions to this transformation. Geron is surrounded by other intermittent workers—sampaguita lei vendors, beggars, syndicate members, street musicians, part-time laborers—each of whom is badly unequipped to manage the economic and political transformation of the postwar economy. It is Geron's brute force, his manual labor, and his puritan value system that sustain him as a model citizen-subject. His common sense, drawn from survival tactics in street living, becomes the substance that determines his being. As Geron himself states, he believes in institutions but not in the corrupt men running the institutions.

Like Geron, Estrada's own coming into national being had been mythologized in two narratives. The first was his defense of a Filipino classmate against an American bully, which caused his expulsion from an elite boys' school, and his disenchantment with formal education as forbearer of human and social knowledge. The second is his petition and subsequent move to demolish the wall partitioning doctors and lowly workers in a cafeteria at a mental institution, which claimed the attention of both his doctor wife-to-be and his fellow workers. Such narratives play on the liminality of domains. Here is a man who could afford exclusive education but gave it up in defense of the abused Filipino. Here is a man who acts to change an unjust structural hierarchy. Estrada's politics afford him the liminality to mediate between two vested-interest realities. Such liminality of Estrada's power lies also in the perpetuation of Erap jokes—classist jokes playing on Estrada's lack of intelligence, education, breeding, and fine being. Spread predominantly through high technology—the internet and text messaging, newer forms of orality—by the disenchanted middle- and upper-class, Erap jokes only reinforce Estrada's position as one of the masses. The attacks on Estrada are assaults on the class interest of the poor. What is especially interesting in the fabrication and dissemination of Erap jokes is the way class issues are brought into the foreground, when Estrada deems it necessary, as to evoke the masses in a real and reactionary disenchantment with the rich.

The battle was drawn along class lines in a class war orchestrated by Estrada. When an anti-Estrada rally led by Cardinal Sin and former president Corazon Aquino was mounted, Estrada was quick to pick up the class issue. Pitting against the anti-government elitist forces was his own participation in the predated birthday party celebration of Brother Mike Velarde, who leads a flock of millions. Cardinal Sin's rally, held in Makati, the country's financial district, represented elite

interests while that of Brother Mike, a fundamentalist preacher with massive following in D and E class, and who played a decisive role in Estrada's election victory, was represented as a mass rally, held in Luneta, known as the "people's park." Estrada spoke of aspiring "to bring the large majority of our people in to the mainstreams of productive economic activities in [the] country because they matter most to [him]" (1999, 6).

The masses in Estrada's films are embodied as lacking both in physical and moral constituency and in commonsense substance. The two other figures who provide Geron with a contrapuntal challenge are the female sex worker and the aging good cop. Because she is a "tarnished" female, the sex worker is not able to fully experience romantic love with Geron, for he chooses to engage in love with the innocent sampaguita vendor. Because he is unaware of the politics surrounding police promotion, the aging good cop is not able to catch up with Geron's kineticism and moral righteousness. In one scene, Geron feels much more privileged than the cop. Geron has graduated from being a street kid to a semiskilled laborer while the cop remains a sergeant after almost two decades of fine service. The twice-disavowed character is morally wanting, but not wholly, as he asks for Geron's forgiveness before dying. So massive is Geron's hold on people, that even the bad guys are influenced to do good. Geron becomes the master signifier of the masses' own movement in the modernization of and maintenance of tradition in the nation.

In *Diligin Mo ng Hamog ang Uhaw na Lupa*, David (Estrada) enjoins the masses to make him serve as their leader when the older leader is killed by the landlord's forces. The landlord plans to transform the land into a subdivision to be able to take up the challenge of the booming nation. The landlord orders the murder of the older leader to punish him for not working enough to convince the tenants to vote for his (landlord's) brother, who is running for governorship. The landlord orders the tenants' houses bulldozed, and the leader killed. Filmed like Moses's exodus, the tenants desert their land with David leading them. Despite persistent harassment from the landlord's forces, they continue to clear the grassland, work on irrigation, and construct new dwellings. Within this period, David consummates his love for the slain elder's daughter. When the dam is destroyed by the landlord's men, they consolidate their forces to fight off new dangers and to rebuild their source of livelihood.

David's religious figure is uncanny. He is David, battler of giants or the young wise leader; Moses, leader of the exodus and postwar reconstruction; and Jesus, sufferer and liberator. The masses are thrown to him to be led. When they pack their things to escape further harassment from the landlord, the woman brings in David to lead them. Being a woman, she is unable to fully carry the weight of the masses' leadership. David rescues her from this anxious position. The masses also provide the backdrop for his epiphanies. When David and the woman make love, the masses sing the theme song, thereby fusing the issue of land reform and sexual consummation. The interior scene of lovemaking is intercut with the exterior scene of the masses singing around the bonfire.

Yet the film also shows another mass, contrapuntal to the dominance of the feudal lords. The armed mass movement provided swift justice when a farmer's daughter is gang raped and murdered by the landlord's peasant. However, so incongruous is the political in the mass movement that David's brother, a member of the armed movement, unilaterally decides and orders the burning of David's hut because of David's disavowal of revolutionary principles and his questioning of the movement's moral righteousness. David shoots down the possibility of revolutionary mass change. Calling its leaders cowards, he challenges them to engage with the government in a dialogue. When he becomes the tenants' chosen leader, he involves the masses not in an armed struggle but in a contrary agrarian practice, one characterized by collectivity and land ownership. What is being poised in the film is the need for land reform.

The film was made at the height of Marcos's martial rule, whose cornerstone was land reform. Marcos's own iconography for the land reform involved him heartily smiling while planting rice seedlings in muddy fields. Marcos knew that land was the cause of massive discontent with the various national governments. Though his program was limited to rice and corn farms, he sought to liberate the millions of farmers from agrarian bondage. What resulted, however, was dismal—a privileging of landed oligarchs and new cronies in agricultural businesses. Marcos's grand national vision was transformed for the interest of his few favored close subjects.

Estrada's own venture into politics was heralded through a close liaison with the Marcoses. Becoming mayor of a suburban town, he dwelled on greater benefits for the police while extolling them to greater professionalism, and built a public market and a public high

school. Such architectonics recall Geron's Quiapo and the aspiration for the modern and traditional. The two leaders were involved in parallel modernization of the nation.

The masses in Marcos's realm became politicized only when they were massified for public spectacles, e.g., lining the streets, awaiting the arrival of international figures, paid to be mobilized for Marcos's rallies, or to participate in historical parades instantly climaxing in the Marcos's regime. Estrada's masses in *Diligin Mo ng Hamog* are no less different, becoming the units that form the spectacle in the mass exodus and the agents of transformation of the barren into productive lands. It is the pronounced self-effacement of David that eventually lingers in the film. The silent type that produces results, David relies little on public speeches, but more on working side-by-side with the masses. He takes on much of the burden of the newer feudal harassment. In so doing, the self-effacement becomes self-valorization, the righteous member becomes finally recognized and signified as mass leader.

In *Sa Kuko ng Aguila*, Tonio is a jeepney driver who witnesses the daily atrocities engineered by the presence of a United States military base in Olongapo, the biggest outside the mainland—a fisher folk friend is killed when fishing in sea territory marked by the bases as restricted, a sex worker friend is jailed for killing a serviceman during a rape attempt, Tonio's ward is raped by an American, and so on. Without intending to, he shoots two hatchet men in self-defense. He flees and hides, only to resurface to clear his name. He falls for the journalist (played by congresswoman—later senator—Nikki Coseteng) who exposes the rape of his ward. The ganglord-aspirant mayor is exonerated by the courts from the crime. In the end, Tonio is cheered by the people, chanting his name while marching on the streets with the various enlightened sectors of the anti-bases coalition.

Olongapo is an allegory of the Philippines besieged by literal and epistemic dominance of U.S. imperialism. As an allegory, the conditions of oppression and liberation in the film's location become the mediated experience in which Estrada is heralded as a national figure, a defender of the national masses. His filmic experience in politicizing the various sectors (except the women and female sex workers, a task taken up by the journalist) became a mode in which he propagandized his national aspiration for Filipinos. Sure enough, such strong nationalist sentiments produced alliances between Estrada and the mass movement in Aquino's and Ramos's administrations, and produced his now realized presidential ambition. In *Sa Kuko ng Aguila*, the masses are represented by communities of the fisher folks, the already enlightened

student activists (lead by the character portrayed by his son, Jinggoy Estrada), and the informal sector of female sex workers. The swelling of sympathizers and concerned people enlarges the mass. In the final scene, the slow-motion action of Tonio leading the mass action, with red flags and streamers waving call into force the affinity with the nationalist mass movement.

Estrada was able to reinvent himself from a close Marcos ally to a staunch nationalist politician in the subsequent presidential administrations. Estrada's own temporal isolation from local politics during the Marcoses's exile led to an ingenious maneuver—that is, his resurrection as a nationalist, understanding of yet still disenchanted with the transformations of the Aquino and Ramos's administrations. From a *comprador* of special administrative favors from Marcos that ensured efficient delivery of civic dole-outs, Estrada became a nationalist citizen-subject in the subsequent administrations, a move that opened up the possibility of staging the national through a nationalist rhetoric and performance. The masses in *Sa Kuko ng Aguila* provided for him the paradigmatic shift to nationalist politics, a strategy for political longevity and viability. The politicized masses, however, remain enmeshed in personality politics, chanting Tonio's name instead of militant slogans. The significance of sound in the last slow-motion scene becomes uncanny, providing the impetus of the personality of the traditional politician in the coming wave of a new and more militant politics.

The masses are central to Estrada's filmic and political star systems. However, there remains a conscious representation of Estrada as iconographic of the "defender of the masses." His ordinary fashion (dirtied and even tattered shirts, denim jackets and pants, converse rubber shoes), pomaded hair, lean moustache, angry-young-man look, hefty weight, and black wristband are markers of his working class yet masculine affinity. His characters are usually outsiders either in terms of origin or in terms of class relations, yet maintaining great virtue and patience.¹⁰ He is the protector of the marginal. Thus, violence is never gratuitous, and opposite sex relations favor the virtuous woman. The hero is to be differentiated from the antagonist, represented as fashion savvy, mestizo, Spanish-speaking, weightier, wearing a necktie or scarf, with a cohesive family, and inhumane. And similar to Estrada's own weighty signification, the film's location in actual places of squalor or the *mise-en-scène* in general further confuses relations between the real, symbolic, and ideal. Estrada of the real and filmic politics is enmeshed

in liminality to draw linkages between the ideals of both spheres that amounted, in Estrada's experience, to a maximized political and filmic mileage.

The *aksyon* hero has been paralleled to the hero of the epic poems.¹¹ The epic is bearer of the social narrative of origin and conditions of specific communities in the Philippines. Proof of the mnemonic prowess of the epic is its sustainability even in the present day, and the absence of an epic in the Tagalog region, the most heavily colonized ethnic group in the country. While diverging from the notion of the epic as bearer of pure indigenous knowledge, I am proposing an analysis of the cultural politics of origin in the epic hero and nationalism. Land signifies the location of action in the epic and nation. It is the issue of transcendence and coming back. To talk of the land issue is to see the letter arriving at its destination, of the angst or absent signifier that coheres Philippine nationalism. The quest for sovereign territory, after all, is the motivation for the continuing nationalist struggle and movement. In *Geron Busabos*, the absence of land allows the contained movement of Geron and his pack. They experience the absence of land in the kind of work and speech entrusted to them. Geron works only on days and hours when jobs are available. He engages in double-talk of love and hate with women. He is able to do so because of his landlessness, his ability to move from one destination to another, and his inability to move in permanently. In *Diligin Mo ng Hamog*, the issue of land is mythologized in biblical terms, depicting land reform as central to any community and human development. On the one hand, the tenants are already landless in the enforced feudal relations of working in the fields of absentee landlords. They do not own the land they till, and the owners are not there to personally enforce feudal agreements. On the other hand, the masses' seeking of paradise devoid of economic determination becomes an unrealized utopia. The state owns the land of their utopia. What happens is a material and symbolic landlessness. The film's insistence on Marcosian land reform further aggravates the issue as history has shown its dismal performance, and the shifting to landlord sanctioned cooperatives and stock corporations during Aquino's era, which remained in place even during the Estrada administration. In *Sa Kuko ng Aguilá*, the quest for sovereignty is overtly positioned. Who really owns Philippine land? What becomes of the land issue in the trajectory of the three films is a greater transparency at pedagogy in which the films tackle the land issue. From an absent signifier in *Geron Busabos*, the land becomes mythologized for the

purpose of propagandizing land reform in *Diligin Mo ng Hamog* and allegorized, through overt discussions of issues in the film *Sa Kuko ng Aguilá*. The land then becomes the signifier of the primal scene of national terror that organizes modern-day mobilization of national imaginaries. The masses become the landscape in which the land issue is narrativized.

In Estrada's films, however, the masses do not speak or they speak only in unison. The masses never articulate the land issue. Given what Lacan has said, "that concepts take on their full meaning only when orientated in a field of language, only when ordered in relation to the function of speech," the masses are devoid of speech and organization of the real (1977, 39). Therefore, the articulation is possible only in the unconscious, where the discourse of the other is possibly settled. What I think is being preserved in the unconscious of the masses in Estrada's films is the continuity of the mass nationalist project, a desire to free the mass subject. If Estrada's "desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other" (masses), on how crucial the masses become to Estrada's subjectivity, then "the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (Lacan 1977, 58).¹² Thus, the prominence of Estrada's character in films embodies a desire for ultimate and undeniable recognition—Estrada's character is Estrada as defender of the poor. What Estrada has done in film is to create, as what Lacan has suggested, "a function of language"—not to inform, but to evoke (1977, 86). His evocation is garnered through a consequential response, a desired action to be specific, from the masses that constitutes Estrada as the chosen leader. Prior to this evocation was Estrada's own disappearance in the masses, that his narrative was no different from the metanarrative of mass oppression and salvation. This evocative function found affinity in the muted masses—how do they evoke their collective desire? By being silenced, they resist Estrada's language system, the machination of the ideal citizen-subject that massifies their existence and nullifies their speech. For in the end, Estrada did not survive in his own domination of the language system and needed to be able to evoke another sphere of seduction with the masses.

Estrada's filmic epiphany rests on the masses hailing him as their interpellated signifier of being. But Estrada's epiphany also rests in the domain of control of seductive women. In *Geron Busabos*, the drunk Caucasian woman in the exclusive club seduces and abjects Geron, repeatedly telling him that the club is not a place for him. The Caucasian woman brings Geron to his proper site of contest, into the

city side streets where he could affect some social change. In *Diligin Mo ng Hamog*, the slain elder daughter's Perla recaps for David the choice he has to make. Perla gazes at the people in the caravan, using the masses as collateral to David's choice and destiny. Before the first sex scene in the film, Perla and David engage in sexual and national double-talk:

Perla: Ako ay lupa, matagal na naghintay sa patak ng ulan. [I am the earth who've waited a long time for rain.]

David: Pagyayamanin ko ang lupa. At sa bawat halaman na itatanim ko ay didiligin ng hamog upang manatiling sariwa. [I will enrich the earth. And every plant I sow will be watered by dew to keep it fresh.] (*Diligin Mo ng Hamog ang Uhaw na Lupa*)

Through Perla's seduction, David realizes his proper and improper places. The land becomes the site of oppression, love, and struggle. He becomes the tiller and defender of lands and the masses' lives.

Diligin Mo ng Hamog shows another sex scene in which David's roles as defender and nurturer are solidified. The sex scene involves an attempted gang rape of Perla by the river. David comes into the defense of Perla, and realizes the need to protect and nurture Perla, who signifies, according to the film's dialogue, the land. Such a scene, as in the gang rape of a farmer's daughter in the rice paddies, calls into attention the tolerated sexuality during the early part Marcos's martial rule. Marcos played up the proliferation of the *bomba* film, the soft porn genre, during the pre-martial law years to justify his declaration of martial rule. When it was declared, the *bomba* that featured mestiza bodies permutated into the wet-look film, which used idealized petite Filipina brown bodies, oval face, and long hair—nationalized in Marcos's New Society, his utopia of "authoritarian democracy."¹³ Perla was portrayed by Gloria Diaz, a Miss Universe titleholder. The films were called "wet-look" because the display of the private parts of women was through the veneer of white wet clothes.

In *Sa Kuko ng Aguilá*, though Tonio is already personally critical of American atrocities, he becomes publicly critical of it through a female lawyer-turned-journalist. This female character is typical of the strong women representation in Estrada's films—they humble him only to the extent he realizes his godly mission. These women then become accessories in the male struggle. When Tonio is unable to fully articulate his feelings for the female character, the journalist asks, "Nagdadalawang-isip ka ba dahil mas mataas ako sa iyo o dahil mas mababa ang tingin mo sa sarili mo?" (Are you doubting because I am

more privileged than you or because you think so lowly of yourself?) (*Sa Kuko ng Aguila*). Once affirmed, Tonio is able to grapple with his ego-ideal, made synonymous with that of the masses.

By alienating class in the masses, the films doom individuals into a single commodity. Marx stated in his definition of commodity as a “mysterious thing [. . .] because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor” (Marx 1978b, 320). When individuals are constructed as a mass, the social relations between individuals are established only in relation to their production of the mass entity. The individual labor is negated in favor of a collective input that is never attributable to a single individual. Paradoxically, individuals will never have the chance to see the mass commodity, therefore can never attribute their individual participation as something substantial in the mass. Individuals are always already alienated in the mass, never fully integrated and substantiated into the mass. Individuals, however, can only evoke the mass. This means that the individual can feel a certain nostalgia for the mass, for being part and parcel of the mass, but can never define with certainty what the mass is or was all about. Individuals can only speak of the mass in retrospect. The individuals bonding to form the mass become receptacle and symptoms of the mass—they embody the mass, they are the mass themselves but they are also infinite units of the mass, therefore, negligible and manageable.

As a commodity, the mass is subject to fetishism. Politics and culture industries are the primary arena in the fetishism of the mass. The mass is made inseparable to the very production of Philippine politics. The massive vote buying in elections, for example, is predicated on the mass being circulated, being demanded and sold. Culture industries also buy and sell the mass in the kinds of representation of the masses in popular products, being made reflective of mass conditions and experiences on the one hand, and being targeted for consumption in mass capitalist culture, on the other hand. What becomes of the mass therefore is a double fetishism of both consumption and production, becoming the very producer and consumer of products of the culture industries—what you produce you consume, what you consume you also produce. The mass becomes a kind of public-private property of politicians and culture industries, who claim it as their own.

Marx has stated that alienation is based on private property. The mass when proletarianized, as Marx stated, is “compelled to abolish [private property]” (1978a, 133). In so doing, the proletariat mass becomes substantiated. For when the proletariats do not pursue their historical claim, they “feel destroyed in this alienation, seeing in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence” (Marx 1978a, 133). Like the possibility of finding class in mass, the proletariat becomes one only through the private property, specifically its negation. Estrada unleashes his own alienation in film—his characters are always outsiders—to connote power. The masses, however, are alienated to thwart the possibility of an exit against the helplessness of their condition. What the task, therefore, presents is to raise the masses into a proletariat consciousness, one in which “this poverty conscious of its own spiritual and physical poverty, this dehumanization which is conscious of itself as a dehumanization and hence abolish itself.” (Marx 1978a, 134). A critical perspective allows not for the production of self-reflexivity of the masses in texts—for how can one take over culture industries—but a kind of ways of engineering the political in the understanding of possibilities in the transformation of the masses into some other entity, the entity called proletariat. This choice or as reported in Estrada’s biography immediately after his inaugural address:

Just after the President had driven off to his new official residence, Malacañang Palace, long queues of humanity with appetites whetted like Batangas knives stormed the various food stations [housing the donated 5,000 roasted pigs and 20,000 roasted chickens]. When food began to be given out, pandemonium broke loose as hordes of the masses rushed like swarms of starving locusts toward the stations, jostling one another and running off with whatever food pieces they could grab as their prize. (Crisostomo 1999, 314)

POWER AND GANGSTERISM IN ESTRADA

At another amassment of people, this time commandeered by employment prospects, a stampede occurred. People had been queuing outside the presidential palace gate for application forms for possible jobs. The stampede killed two person and injured dozens (Coronel Ferrer 1999). The positivizing intercourse of people’s hopes and government promises causes the damage inflicted on the whole social order of massification. On the one hand, the stampede disrupted such a given order; on the other hand, it also caused injuries and loss of life

to members of the masses. As Balibar reminds us, “no one can be liberated or emancipated by others, although no one can liberate himself without others” (1994, 12). Estrada’s power presents an insidious violence inflicted among the ranks of the historically disempowered mass.

In his films, this kind of covert violence is perpetrated through his inner circle, a gang-like culture where he is central as the ganglord.¹⁴ Though the literal violence is inflicted on the anti-hero and his gang, giving the *aksyon* film its fetishistic physicalization of violence, the covert violence is inflicted on the members of the inner circle. By sucking the subjectivity of its members, the ganglord positions himself as the central dispenser of meaning and practices. Individuals become dispensable, their subjectivity not integral to their being. Their existence as individuals is predicated on their being at the beck and call of the ganglord. As such, they do not need subjectivity; the ganglord forecloses any possibility for the individual to gain subjectivity.

Gangsterism in Estrada’s films takes on a parallel dimension in his politics. Gangsterism refers to a clique illicitly running the affairs of the nation. Presented suggestively as an underworld, the gangster’s realm is ruled by the ganglord, the utmost representation of totalitarian control. What Estrada has done in politics is to wed the above and underworlds, by using underworld tactics to manage the affairs of the above world or the nation-state. Such gangster tactics readily opens up the possibility of Estrada being labeled as a totalitarian figure. His political ambition, after all, was realized and nurtured at the height of the Marcos dictatorship. He embodies the Marcosian trace, reinstalling the Marcoses and their cronies to a mass degree of public acceptance.¹⁵ By “Marcosian trace,” I play on the idea of Freud on repression and rupture: “[the] common character of the mildest as well as the severest cases, to which the faulty and chance actions contribute, lies in the ability to refer the phenomena to unwelcome, repressed, psychic material, which, though pushed away from consciousness, is nevertheless not robbed of all capacity to express itself” (Freud 1964, 159). The post-Marcos era left a vacuum of supremacy in the gang that some two decades later Estrada would fill up. Though invisible in public coverage of Imelda Marcos’s affairs—e.g., her acceptance of an exemplary mother award at Malacañang Palace or her lavish birthday celebration in 2009—Estrada remains complicit with any Marcos affair as with any Marcos-related political discourse. It is precisely in his invisibility that the

ganglord sustains control over gang members and their spheres of influence.

Marcos cronyism and its permutation in the Estrada administration had a “big-time comeback” in recent years. Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. resumed control of the beer-and-food conglomerate San Miguel Corporation. Another presidential friend, Mark Jimenez, mediated the country’s biggest business deals. What was especially exacerbating about the cronyism of the Estrada administration was the built-in informality of decision-making; “There’s too much reliance on informal processes. That creates unpredictability” (Alexander R. Magno, quoted in Crowell and Lopez 1999, 19). There was also an accommodating attitude towards every member worth maintaining. As *Asiaweek* cites as an example, “He split the agriculture department to provide jobs for two presidential advisers—agriculture secretary Angara [Estrada’s losing vice-president running mate] and food security czar William Dar” (Crowell and Lopez 1999, 19)

Gangsterism also rests on the proliferation of gambling and other get-rich-quick plans. Though scorned by the characters Estrada portray in his films, these practices proliferated in his administration. There was no other time in Philippine history when legalized gambling was so spread out; jai-alai betting and online bingo has joined the lotto and casino. The contending noontime shows of the country’s major television networks underwent quick reformatting, giving away huge sums of money and prizes to winners of game segments. These prizes were usually higher than the average annual income of Filipinos. As a consequence of this televisual psychosis, people fell in line for months, just to be able to have a chance to participate in such contests. Behind this cultural phenomenon, based on the popularization of gambling as a vehicle for social mobility, was a social helplessness, masses of individuals waiting for a material redemption of their plights. It also underscores the fact that the symbolic imagery of Estrada was no longer enough to bolster the masses; the masses were already awaiting real remuneration for their participation in the Estrada machine.

However, the process whereby the masses actively take on the material issue is slow to grind. A newspaper article reported of Estrada’s inaugural address: “[He sounded] just like the champion of the masses in the movies he used to make—he threatened the crooks and criminals, revered the elderly and heroes of the past, promised deliverance for the poor and oppressed” (quoted in Crisostomo 1999, 314). What such a report underscores is the brevity of power of

Estrada's signifier, that every text and act becomes reverberations of his star system ideal. Such a report perpetuates Estrada's myth and negates the violence, both epistemic and literal, it inflicts on the masses.

Anthropologist Jean-Paul Dumont, referring to the violence of Japanese atrocities in Siquijor, states, "The experience of violence had structured the ideology of the experience in such a way that the ideology, in turn, structured the experience" (Dumont 1995, 266). This statement can be used to refer to Estrada's own kind of infliction of violence on the masses. Violence circulated through Estrada's masses relying on the ideology of Estrada—as signifier of defender of the poor—as much as this ideology relied on the experience of an Estrada violence. A way to deal with such violence was through dereliction, primarily signified by the elite class interest in Erap jokes. For the masses, the acceptance of their powerlessness perpetuates violence—i.e., internalizing, projecting, and materializing violence in the high incidents of crimes among the already marginalized, including members of family. The masses' stance of ridiculing the icon—as when a protesting teacher demanded full release of back pay at the presidential palace, mimicking Estrada's macho stance—connotes a sacrilegious or profane act, punishable for being disrespectful to authority.

Such profane acts, however, are individualized and localized reactions, almost improbable to imagine to cohere into a mass action.

[The]lack of complementarity between the ideological structures within the jurisdiction of the state but outside its control, and the material-economic resources outside its jurisdiction but within its control, needed for its reproduction, points to the absence of a direct reflection of class relations in the Philippine polity. As a result, the practical consciousness of many Filipinos is embedded in routines derived from notions of kinship, locality, and association that generally lie outside the formal structures of the state, even if substantially coterminous with it. (Pertierra 1995, 16)

If what Raul Pertierra states of the cause and effect of Philippine violence is true, then class again becomes an elided category in which social relations are experienced. The perceived lack of complementarity might indicate the specificity in which class relations in the Philippines are developed and perpetuated by national and local politics. For how can practical consciousness be without the regimentation of the state's national consciousness? Where then to claim the social signification of the masses?

In the next section, I am interested in fleshing out the extent of Estrada's "supreme violence," the paradox of which being that it "is no longer experienced as violence" (Zizek 1994, 204). That Estrada is seen as productive or neutral only seeks to perpetuate the invisibility of the material violence. In laying bare the implications of Estrada's violence, I intend to "render visible the violence that maintains the very neutral, 'non-violent' framework that is subsequently perturbed by the eruptions of (empirical) violence."

Jose Lacaba writes of the category known as the *bakya* (wooden clogs) crowd, referring to the lowly crowd or the *masa*, as another class-related issue, reflecting the elite's alienation from the Filipino masses (1983, 177). His suggestion furthers the violence, the alienation of class in mass and mass in class. What this implies is that intensification and nullification of class in mass and mass in class. Estrada's own pretension at mass—mass background, mass work, mass aspiration—invokes a desire to be in at least two positions, locations, and subject positions. His identification with Bonifacio as hero falls contradictory as his inauguration was designed after Aguinaldo's own. This is consistent with the laying bare of his own class interest—on the one hand, he presided over Southeast Asia's fastest-growing gross development product; on the other hand, according to Roberto Romulo, "Estrada is the first president not to succumb to worker's pressures to raise wages" (quoted in Crowell and Lopez 1999, 18). In wanting to become the master signifier, Estrada mobilized the contradictions of class interest generated between his overwhelming popularity with the people, and the business-as-usual attitude of the elite. In a poll taken in June 1999, 28 percent of business executives said Estrada failed to deliver his promises; also during that period, Estrada received a 74 percent approval rating from the people (Cabacungan and Torrijos 1999; Marfil 1999, 1). In playing up class, Estrada alienated the mass of Filipinos from each other. In playing up mass, he alienated real class issues in the discussion of mass. As Balibar points out, "Social relations are not established between hermetically closed classes or alternatively that class struggle takes place within classes themselves" (1991, 171).

Another manifestation of violence is the metropolitanization, instead of proletarianization, of the mass especially in the era of imperialist globalization. Metropolitanization involves the transformation of bodies, geographies, and economies in the name of attracting greater capital, mostly from international sources. It seeks

compliance to global standards of, at least, middle-class living, even when actual material resources remain limited. Such metropolitanization involves the nation and its masses' minuscule role in the global and sexual division of labor. Subcontractualization, i.e., six-month contracting of labor, has become the norm of employment. Masses of Filipino perform overseas contract work. Millions of overseas Filipino workers remit billions of US dollars annually. In Estrada's films, Quiapo, rural areas, and the hub of American militarism, for example, become the organizing geography in which other sites, such as bodies and sexualities, are made to conform. The masses are made to redevelop based on their substrata role in the global penetration of capital in the national. With perceived gentrification, the metropolitanized masses are caught up in a sadomasochistic libidinal economy, experiencing pain and suffering for the promise of middle-class redemption. It is in the emplacement of the masses into the economic sphere, devoid of class, that they remain politically inchoate, an ideal of Third World subject-citizen formation. They are connected to the illusory markers of being middle-class; they are conjugated from their class interests.¹⁶ These continuities and stoppages mark the uneven embodiment of capital penetration among the masses.

Finally, masochism is another manifestation of violence, especially in the cliques of male gangsterism, the experience of "corporeal pleasure in pain" (Silverman 1993, 36). Moral masochism, as Kaja Silverman explains, involves a stronger psychic entity for the ego to be pushed to the last extremity (1993, 39). This psychic entity refers to the thoroughness in which "the subject has been subordinated to prohibition and denial" (Silverman 1993, 39). Estrada can be read as this psychic entity that has caused a moral masochism in the masses. In his films, he becomes part and parcel of the available cluster of images from which the masses see themselves as they want others to see them (Silverman's imaginary introjection), and in his state function, he was the Law in which subjectivities of the subject-citizen were to be generated (Silverman's symbolic introjection) (Silverman 1993, 40). While the imaginary introjection allows for a certain room for individual agency, Estrada's four-decade posturing as master signifier of "defender of the masses" presented him as a veritable image of subjectivity in which subject-audiences and subject-citizens were heralded. Taking off from Zizek's formulation of democracy and totalitarianism, the Estrada subject *knows very well* that Estrada is unreal, not really the defender of the masses, *but just the same* they act

as if Estrada's mystic was possible (Zizek 1993, 168). The subjects, in order to sustain an everyday politics of hope, reified the master signifier in Estrada, emplacing him as their utopia as projection for the veritable lack of actual historical hope. Estrada's fetishism with the masses, however, belies total control. For he too introjects the masses as the other's master signifier from which his own subjectivity is to be generated. Estrada and the masses love each other as much as they want to annihilate each other.

The erosion of class category in Estrada's masses gives way to an economic development model of identity and nation-formation. The middle-classification of the masses has already reorganized major aspects of our social experience. Laws, for example, have been legislated to favor privatization, liberalization, and commercialization. Such acts of the state and commerce eventually reorganize spheres of experiencing emotions, education, culture, media, religion, political parties, and so on. Where then to claim the politicized signification of the masses?¹⁷ The etymology of the word "bakkakan" connotes a slow erosion or decay, as in how termites might be able to interiorize wooden structures. On the one hand, Estrada could very well embody the masses, staging for them in films and politics how one of them can succeed. There is an ongoing reversal of moral accountability, with Estrada putting pressure on the masses to strive even harder. As he said in *Geron Busabos*, "It is men, not the system, that is the problem." Thus, Estrada has used the masses for politicking, not for politicization. On the other hand, the masses could be that entity that has already interiorized the master signifier. Many criminals have and will enjoy immortality via the film biographies produced out of the *aksyon* films. The analysis of masses has shown that their general silencing negates forms of intersubjectivity whereby communication and solidarity can be rendered possible. How might the model of master signification, one that serves only Estrada and preempts the subjectivity of individuals comprising the mass, be interrogated to allow for individuals to look into each other for models of bonding and active subject-formation?

After Estrada's conviction of plunder on September 12, 2007, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in a gesture of reconciliation—or simply to amass a larger support for her own scandal-ridden administration—granted him presidential pardon. President Aquino received flak for apologizing to Estrada for calling for his ouster in 2001, especially in the light of a more scandal-ridden Arroyo administration. Today, he continues to be the leading figure in

national politics. Meanwhile, the lives of the masses have continuously deteriorated, co-opted by the Arroyo administration's propensity for cash gifting, media hype of questionable accomplishments, and subsidized prices for low-quality rice and medicines. All politicians, after all, use the masses to realize their political goals, but not the other way around.

The notion of the political needs to be made integral in attempts at newer modeling of subject-formation. What was presented thus far in this essay are the modes in which subjection of the masses have been fantasized and materialized in Estrada's films and politics. What needs to be further theorized and materialized is how might the subjectivation of marginally emplaced individuals grappling with subjectivity be partially and fully realized in the process that maintains rather than destabilizes the hegemony of the Philippine status quo. The masses have to be made substantial in the reproduction and critique of the Philippine state. ❀

NOTES

1. Tordesillas and Hutchinson (2001) provides a history of the events leading to Estrada's ouster. This article was written before Estrada began his campaign for reelection to the presidency via the 2010 Philippine national elections.
2. The genre developed as a reaction to big-budgeted Hollywood films.
3. Estrada's film background is not discussed without a feature of his political career. See Velarde, (1981, 30-9); De Manila (1977, 1-43); and Lo (1995, 68-73).
4. The literal use of *masa* is perpetuated up to Estrada's first year of office with "Ulat sa Masa" (Report to the Masses) and "Parada ng Masa Laban sa Kahirapan" (Parade of the Masses Against Poverty). Tujan Jr. (1999, 4-9) succinctly elaborates the socioeconomic implications of Estrada's first year. For a historical development of *masa*, see Santos (1999).
5. Among the more prominent *aksyon* stars who became politicians are: Senator Ramon Revilla; his son, Senator Bong Revilla; Senator Lito Lapid; Rey Malonzo, mayor of Kalookan City; and Estrada's own son, Senator Jinggoy Estrada.
6. For a problematization of literature and national consciousness, see Hau (1998).
7. The notion of masses has an affinity with crowds in film, as discussed in Rubin (1996).
8. For a discussion of culture industries, see Marcuse (1993, 138-62). Also, for the use of mass technology, see Lefort (1986, 181-236). Both essays deal with totalitarian regimes.
9. The notion of sacrifice and messianic mission can also find parallelism in the notion of abjection. See Kristeva (1982).
10. For a list of characteristics of the action hero, see Sotto (1989).
11. See for example Salazar (1989) and Covar (1989). Also see Cruz (1992).
12. I am adapting Lacan's statement on self and other.
13. I discuss the various permutations of the *bomba* genre in my dissertation (1996).

14. For an elaboration of violence in other *bakbakan* films, see the essays of David (1995a, 80-2; 82-4).
15. The high profile birthday celebration of Imelda Marcos was featured in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (AFP, AP 1999, 1). Photos of the event by Dennis Sabangan include the Marcos children dancing, or greetings by American actor George Hamilton.
16. Deleuze and Guattari define connection as “[indicating] the way in which decoded and deterritorialized flows boost one another, accelerate their shared escape, and augment or stroke their quanta” while conjugation as “[indicating] their relative stoppage, like a point of accumulation that plugs or seals the lines of flight, performs a general reterritorialization, and brings the flows under the dominance of a single flow capable of overcoding them” (1987, 220).
17. In film, this has been explored by Daroy (1983) and Flores (1999, 10-3).

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