

POPULAR AS POLITICAL CULTURE: THE FATHERLAND, NATIONALIST FILMS, AND MODERNITY IN SOUTH KOREA, TAIWAN, AND THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

The experience of modernity results from the emergent social relations formed in liberalized market economies, which also posit as sites of newer forms of pain and suffering as especially experienced by those in the margins. As national economies undergo liberalization to survive in globalization, so are their political structures reshaped to become conducive to transnational capital. The essay discusses the relationship of the state and civil society in a postcolonial national setting, looking into their operations and parameters in the South Korean film *A Single Spark*. The analysis of the effects of the state and civil society in issues of citizenship and urban being is discussed in the Taiwanese film *Super Citizen Ko*. The transformation of the national into the transnational state and civil society is discussed in the Philippine film *Eskapo*.

Keywords

A Single Spark, Asian films, *Eskapo*, *Super Citizen Ko*

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Popular culture figures in the recent transformation of nations, one that shifts from authoritarian to civil society. The image of the fatherland resonates as this liminal figure that marks the shift—advocating both dictatorial and popular rule. In this essay, I am interested to find out the following: How is the fatherland mobilized as the impetus for nationalism in film, and consequently, modernity in society? How is popular culture used for the political transformation of societies? How is the popular retransformed into the political culture in selected Asian nations?

Distance along Philippine national highways is measured by monuments. Every kilometer stretch of the national highway is indicated by yard-high landmarks, the designs of which are a microcosm of national politics. Former First Lady Imelda Marcos had theirs made resembling coconuts, with a hollow in the center originally conceived to hold coconut oil with which to light them. During President Corazon Aquino's term, these markers were replaced with yellow tombstone-like monuments. President Fidel Ramos, who succeeded her, opted for pebble-wash tombstone markers. The periodic revision of these distance markers is part of the larger project of transforming and reinventing the nation.

Marcos' Filipino design was part of then President Ferdinand Marcos' agenda of coming up with symbols to meet cosmopolitan ideals of the "New Society" (*Bagong Lipunan*), the official utopia of the nation. Aquino used the color yellow from the song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon," an anthem for her assassinated husband, oppositional leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino. This song also became the anthem of the middle-class protest movement that eventually toppled the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. The pervasive use of yellow was also meant to add color to her lackluster presidential performance. Ramos prized global competitiveness, and the design he preferred reflected a rejuvenated and functional subsystem that in turn suggested an equally hardworking presidency.

Why the eagerness to reinvent landmarks and highways? The meagerness, in number and scope, of Philippine highways has not dampened the official energies to transform them from simple paths of transport to imagined superhighways in the mobile exchange of people, goods, and capital. And because of uneven development aggravated by the archipelagic national space, all roads lead to the various centers of national and regional trade and commerce. Highways now mark the envisioned smooth flow and exchange of produce to the centers. The landmarking of highways measures proximity to these centers. The centers become both the emergent and residual sites of global capital as it accumulates and penetrates the national space.

However, the highway landmarks not only point to the centrality of economic and political centers but also to the originary national historical moment of a single monument. The monument of Jose Rizal, the official national hero, in the nation's premier park is point 0 in the highway system. Every other place is measured from this point. Thus, a landmark bearing the number 25, for example, means that it is 25 kilometers away from Rizal's monument in Manila, the country's capital. Just as all highway landmarks bear the spatial relational distance to this privileged national monument, so also do the landmarks and highway system bear the weight of the relations to the significance of the monument.

The significance of Rizal in the construction of the Philippine nation is not to be

understated. Historians and government officials have handcrafted a mythology of Rizal as purveyor of enlightened nationalist ideals—from his nationalist novels up to his martyrdom in death—that eventually pushed elite nationalist leaders to declare Philippine independence in 1898, and having done this, to make the country Asia’s first republic. As the nation became the emblem of modernity, Rizal’s figure has become the national symbol of Philippine modernity. After all, Rizal’s significance has been an American colonial handiwork. Chosen to represent the ideals of enlightened colonialism, Rizal prevailed over other heroes of the revolution against Spain, the colonizer before the United States came in. His significance materialized when he was officially designated as the national hero by colonial administrators, and his meaning and materiality were mythologically disseminated.

Most towns in the country have at least one Rizal monument and one major street named after the national hero. Rizal was invoked for emulation by the US to prepare the local citizenry for its own national independence. Nationalist historians, however, antedate the modelling of the nation by already imagining the Philippines as a republic even prior to the coming of the US. Through a dialectical opposition and relation with another hero, the unofficial national hero, Andres Bonifacio- mythologized as a plebeian revolutionary— Rizal’s position was already concretized. For lack of available archival materials, Bonifacio is spoken about with a tight relation to Rizal who had premonitions of greatness. Rizal had a propensity to save personal possessions, reflect on all things, and build an artillery of sources of his intellectual prowess.

For even in the post colonial era, Rizal is the locus and impetus for the formation and transformation of the nation. The anniversary of Rizal’s death two years prior to the independence began the 1998 centennial celebrations. Rizal is the condensed originary national signifier of the Philippine nation. To speak of the nation and its experience with modernity, one has to go where the highway landmarks lead—to Rizal.

Indeed, for the celebration of the centennial of Philippine independence, there were at least three big-budgeted films in production. *Rizal in Dapitan* (Tikoy Aguiluz 1997) full ref for this movie – director, main actors, production company provides a model for these nationalist historical films. The film is highly pedagogical and centers on the male figure as originator and purveyor of larger nationalist struggles and ideals. However, to insert an anticlimactic note, the paper is not focused on the genre of nationalist historical films. My interest is rather 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 the travails of modernity that

the majority of the nation has yet to figure out.

Such travails of modernity result from emergent social relations formed in liberalized market economy, in which new forms of pain and suffering are generated for and experienced by those historically poised in the margins. I present a cognitive map of the effects 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 who 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 has the effect that allowed a tasting of the postmodern future provided 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 the uneven penetration of the experience with 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 with newly-acquired wealth. The nationalist films I choose to examine come at a time when the various nations in the Asia Pacific are experiencing sustained economic growth, and can now, therefore, engage with certain past national traumas using the grid of western liberal democracy and the nation's own invented nationalism. The historical distance provides both a safeguard and a means for subversive penetration into the present cultural geography that, with increasing gentrification, erases the trace of the possibilities of political social transformation.

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" (the essence and essential of nation)—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 language 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.

The films analyzed have common characteristics. They were made by directors who lived through their nation's traumatic experience as protesting citizens or in one case, as an offspring of the national administration's bureaucrat. The films add on to these directors' coming into canonical status in their nation's cinemas and industries. The films also were made at a timely moment when historical interrogation of the nation's traumatic past was possible. Public interest in knowing the truth about the past generated box-office and critical success for the films. Thus, the films become part of a retrospection of the nation's past trauma, allowing it to move on a guiltless trip through its gentrified present.

I begin the essay with a discussion of state and civil society in a postcolonial nation, 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. These films also need full referencing—as above.

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 have taken the reins of government. At the same time, the move to democratize the nation also comes at a time when the nation has already been economically liberalized and is reaping the rewards of economic liberalization; when it has already been well placed in the global economic network, whether as an enclave of global capital or as a terrain for the global division of labor; when there is no position to speak from outside the global economy. But the 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 as David McLellan says, to “represent [the state’s] own interests as those of society as a whole” (186). McLellan 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” (186). 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 states 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 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” (276).¹ 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 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*, a 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. By the continuing existence of a network of activists and protest actions within the very network the state interrogates these people and actions, state power is never complete. 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 sweatshop 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 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 example, 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 present-day politics of 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 that, in turn, has displaced the life of Chon. Moreover, the film becomes part of the continuum of recent civil society that allows for such a film 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. The availability of his story only in the present is precisely allowed by the marginal existence of a civil society in the 1970s. His story opened up this civil society to what it is today. This recent civil society allows for the retelling of Chon's story because it fits within its own narrative of

developmental democracy.

Any move to articulate a counterhegemonic language, at the very least, invariably implicates the hegemonic language it seeks to subvert. As Michael Taussig states, “No writing is above the reality it realizes, and this is especially the case with the State, arbiter of reason in an unreasonable world” (65). Any critique of the state happens within a paradox: it has an ability to articulate an inside/outside position whereby to speak of one is to implicate the other; thereby, the workings of the state is exposed, but only to the extent that both the state and critique have come to their limits. In the succeeding section, I elaborate on this failure in terms of Chon’s self-immolation, and in terms of the labor conditions in which such action took place.

In the film, prior to Chon’s own self-immolation, he first lights up a black book containing the labor code. Chon’s symbolical 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 has pointed out with the series of self-immolations 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 ... the 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” (99).² Such sublime death and its cinematic depiction in *A Single Spark* allow for very little room to examine the politics in which the sublimity is to be contextualized as a political action. The analysis is similar to Gayatri Spivak’s own interrogation of the *sati*, or wife burning, after the death of the husband. The sublime death, though it defies some textual codification, does not do justice to the woman subject.

Benedict Anderson, however, puts the idea of fatality in another light, as vital to the project of imagining the nation. He states that “The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality” (144). This purity comes with the disinterestedness of individuals for the nation, a kind of pure primordial love that allows the nation to extol human sacrifice among its citizens. Anderson also places the “interplay between fatality, technology and capitalism” as the “essential thing” in the formation of the nation (42). Though Anderson uses the linguistic notion in relation to the territorialization of the nation, such a notion can also be used to establish the connection between 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 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.

Such a fatality as technologized originally by the burning body and then reproduced by the media only seeks to mark the limits of media dissemination. Chon's earlier initiative to bring his case to the media yielded an initial positive feedback from the state's labor apparatus. It then became a matter of procedure within this state apparatus that such positive response was undertaken only to prolong the energies as well as anxieties over the poor labor conditions. Chon's death provides a knee-jerk response from the state though he is now marked for secular nationalist martyrdom. In a flashforward scene in the film, Chon's biography becomes standard reading for the new generation of workers in the area. The capital operations that instigated Chon's search for reprieve remain ever present.

Ironically, it is through the gentrification of the national economy that labor standards are upgraded by the state and businesses. After all, Nike's working conditions and pay in Indonesia, for example, will not do for South Koreans performing the same workload. It is a matter of keen transnational business sense that South Korean enterprises and state give to workers their due "South Korean" wages in order for greater products to be purchased from the same wages paid to them. With the greater role emphasized by capital in the interplay of the imagination of the nation, Chon's fatality and the technology in which this is disseminated gravely restricts the potential for subversion and liberation. Such a fatality simply punctuates the hegemonic language, unable to move the terms in which grammar and syntax of nation-formation, for example, are to be used for counter-hegemonic purposes.

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 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. With sustained growth of the Asian economies until the crisis of 1997, the 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 newer oppressive relations are established with recent movement of capital. By focusing on the life of the martyr Chon and connecting such sacrifice to recent protest actions by youth and students, *A Single Spark* missed out on other pertinent connections especially as these relate to newer social relations with the more recent movement of capital and the restructuring of labor.

Recent International Monetary Bank prescription for bail-out money to be flushed into South Korea's saddled economy required the liberalization of hiring and firing of workers. The production of critical texts 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 especially as it concerns a collaborative project of consciousness-raising.

The paradox of critique of the state speaks of a politics that engages in Bhabha's notion of doubling. What I want to briefly explore further is the direction in which emergent critiques of the state can be channeled, directions that provide for a quite self-reflexive, dialectical and perspectival approaches and, in turn raise, at the very least, ethical issues of empowerment. Because of the interchangeability of positions, Bhabha's doubling easily sidetracks the ethical issue of "for whom?" What is negated in the process is the very limits of exposing the state, marginalizing the issue of literal violence that comes with the epistemic violence inflicted on already traditionally-marginalized individuals and communities. How then to empower the margins?

The margins and social movements have survived 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 states that "Resistance or struggle has real-life consequences beyond intellectual imagination. How we read what is not written needs to involve these practical considerations" (99). 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 sympathetic various individuals to the production of the film. Kyung Hyun Kim has pointed out that "Through grassroots fundraising, more than 7,000 individuals helped to finance this project, raising about half the cost of film production" (17). 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.

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

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. He is lost in the newness of politics, time and space of Taiwan, after having been imprisoned for sixteen years and choosing to isolate himself for eighteen more. 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 not to succeed other than to resolve symbolically 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 on Taiwan's forgotten history be made to materialize in the 1990s, when such national memory has already been invoked in the everyday politics? How can a repressed memory be dealt with when it has now been surfaced? 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. Modern Taiwanese politics have been set and dominated by mainlanders. Individuals are not as quick to reinvent themselves. 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-fledged 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.

Civil society has now taken root in Taiwan after decades of authoritarian rule that has overseen the national economic growth. Unlike the recent past in *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 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 reskill him or herself with the latest of machine or service sector technology, the latest political fallguy. When an open civil society somehow manages to surface in the state, Ko's

accumulated identities become unaccustomed to 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 led to?

Super Citizen Ko becomes part of the spectacle involved in the resolution of the February 28, 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 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" (287). 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 god-sent; it is also enplaced 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 of the February 28, 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 here's another movie that needs full ref. that won an award at the Venice Film Festival because of its political subject matter (see Sassen 206).

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" (287). 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. The ground level alienation is further intensified by an overview detachment to 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 encouraged it. His body does not bear the marks of a highly cosmopolitan and modernized city. His dated fashion, detachment from his daughter's modern family life, alienation from cityscapes, and displacement in national politics and civil society become symptoms of a loss of subjectivity. He is melancholic not from longing for an originary national identity, but from a sense of family coherence as he imagines the family of his early years in black-and-white footage. The break up of the family was predicted by the state, upon his incarceration for a crime against this state.

Taken by surprise by his decision to divorce her, his wife decides to end her life. His daughter grows up alone, persecuted by teachers for having a traitor of a father. With recent amenities of technologizing family coherence in modern Taiwan, the family readily becomes the symptom of national growth and unity. Having lost his family—Ko's primordial source of identity—to the state, he is unable to fully deal with newer shifts in state and civil society.

The city becomes emblematic of the tensions arising from loss and the inability to deal with this loss. The city is indifferent to multiple identities, even as its civil society advocates a plurality of tolerable politics. Claims towards identity in the highly modernized city become extremely limited. 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 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?” (206) 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 (91-110). 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?

To stake specific claims on the city amidst globalization follows through what Nicholas Garnham proposes, the “universal rationality as a cultural principle” (251). Garnham sees no other option but to take a universalist position³ in the debates of globalization, one that attempts to “democratize the globe and the role of an increasingly globalized media system.” Thus he claims that “while globalization calls for the development of a parallel concept of global citizenship and representative global political structures, at this time the only effective political structures we have are nation-states, and our actual citizenship identities are national” (259). Garnham’s idea seeks to liberalize the modern public sphere, but does very little to question the very tenets in which liberal democracy may obliquely fit in various nation-states.

How can a new discursive strategy that purports to be as global as the most recent economic drive of capital be applied when the very implementation of capital has not been evenly developed and globalized? In *Super Citizen Ko*, the city becomes the organizing geography for Ko’s search. As the city has lost its historicity and the nation has trivialized its past, what the film implies is the transnational movement of national identity formation. Sassen places due consideration on marginal identities, like immigrants, making claims of citizenship on a denationalized city.

However, 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 as his being is so 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—whether to become independent or to return to mainland China—to negotiate such terms.

Taiwan, like Ko, becomes a signifier without a signified. But unlike Ko, Taiwan's in-between identity is poised as a postmodern postindustrial dominant organizer of Taiwanese reality. Ko has already lost touch both with the organicity of the past and simulacrum of the present. *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 a transnation externally. Ko's own obsession with what really happened only presents the futility of unearthing historical truths. Like Ko's own quest and discovery, such truths have long been buried in isolated grave sites, and all one can do is to memorialize the memory.

Citizens, as Ko embodies, 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 supercitizen, 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 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 to keep. Such a utopic view, however, is imbricated by the trauma one individual or nation, even if it attempts to deal fully with it, will never wholly resolve. 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*, another wonderful film to check full ref! 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—Genny Lopez, scion to a political dynasty and business empire that include the monopolistic franchise of an electric company, the nation's largest television and media conglomerate, and a former owner of a leading newspaper; and Sergio Osmeña, III, also scion to a political and business dynasty but in the southern Philippine city of Cebu. Upon 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 hostage to quell political and economic opposition. When all else fail after five years in prison, they decide to escape from the military camp and fly out of the country by 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. Disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship but re-enfranchised 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, having already earned profit and mileage. The film tackles a trauma shared by the nation—the Marcos dictatorship—that provides the impetus for greater endeavor in business and politics among the traditional rich.

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 sequestered businesses to them, and the further enlargement of business and political interests. So unabashed is the film in acclaiming the two personalities that it even utilized the country's two leading dramatic actors to portray the characters. The film legitimizes big business and traditional politics, especially as to how these were repressed, liberated, and transformed.

What I find interesting in the film 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 the continuation of the benevolent link between the US and the Philippines that discusses notions of civil society and citizenship. US coloniality is invoked through a massive continuation of the hegemonic narrative that binds the US and the Philippines. Articulated in the highly disseminated

language of William McKinley's benevolent assimilation, US domination of Philippine politics has continued to evoke conflicting and dialoging nationalist responses.⁴ 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.

What McKinley stated in the halls of the White House on the night he decided on the colonization of the Philippines reverberates in the way the film depicts the US. In the film, the US is the safe haven for families disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship. The fathers of both Lopez and Osmeña have chosen to become political refugees in the US to flee from Marcos. What is implied is that the US is an embodiment of the ideals of the liberal state and a working civil society. It is a model for the clans' own vision of a workable political system, one that tolerates dissent and acknowledges populism.

For the film itself, like the fact that *A Single Spark* was allowed public exhibition, is a testament to truth-claims about the medium, freedom of speech, rationality, and other libertarian ideals. The showing of the film marks the opening of a civil society that not only tolerates past dissent, but more importantly represents current maneuvers to sustain this civil society. What is also being invoked is the authorship of recent civil society by the traditional rich who thus have legitimate moral and judicial truth-claims.

What is not said about the two prominent people's escape to the US is the unavailability of such an option for most of the people repressed under the Marcos dictatorship. Their escape involved the hiring of a private plane. Most oppositionists that sought refuge in the US were already part of the elite politics in the Philippines that were disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship. In addition, the 1960 immigration pattern has allowed only for the migration of highly-skilled professionals. As the greater number of people who comprised the oppositional mass movement met neither criteria, the site of struggle was mostly undertaken within the national space. The national space became the privileged domain of nationalist struggle. Consequently, in order for exiled oppositionists to maintain their political and economic clout, there ensued a reverse migration when international pressure on Marcos' human rights violations was beginning to swell.

What is squirmishly uncomfortable about the set-up 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 in redefining the terrain of engagement. Traditional politics have 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 have also aggressively rubberstamped laws maintaining on-going 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 and in the same vein, the Omnibus Investment Code that guarantees preferential treatment to big transnational capitalists is ratified and the Mining Act allows the speculative exploitation of all land resources. Whereas in the past, propaganda films of the state disseminated official viewpoints and representational images, the task, like most governmental functions, has been taken upon by big businesses. More than any other time in the history of Philippine business, corporations now keeping a keen interest on social issues and alternative practices as part of good business sense. Atlas Consolidated Mining Corporation is involved with a shoemaking project for Abaca, a sitio within the mine's parameters; Central Azucarera Don Pedro has given loans to housewives and dependants 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; Phelps Dodge and Ramcar are involved in various livelihood projects (see Luz and Montelibano).

The state function is being privatized in tension-field ways. Like Michel Foucault's notion of power, state power—i.e., political power—is made prolific rather than amassed by institutions. State power is being delegated to businesses. On the one hand, political power is filtered through the active participation of business. In the 1998 Philippine national elections, for example, business loyalty to presidential candidates had already been made clear early on by contending business interests. On the other hand, 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; the police professionalized; more infrastructures are being built through business participation through build-own-transfer contract deals that allow business to establish and to own priority infrastructures for at least twenty-five years before these are turned over to the government. In addition, water and power distribution has already been privatized. Specialized hospitals and the prison system are also on their way towards privatization. What is perceived to be a better, more efficient delivery of basic services is now placed in the hands of business by 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, on national identity formation.

Civil society is being privatized in ways that is circuited towards transnational objectives. Transnational objectives of good government have been set by traditional politicians and big businesses to mimic the US model. This is where the US shows its tenacity in maintaining its colonial and imperial legacy. While Japanese popular culture has started to infiltrate the national cultural domain, the model of political and economic governance has always been the US. The link is subtly generated in the film *Eskapo*. For once, as the film shows, human rights is a democratic issue.

Even, or because, Lopez and Osmeña have also suffered human rights violations under an authoritarian regime, their claim to political power is as legitimate as that of the marginal figures who were tortured or who have died under the dictatorship. Marcos' legacy becomes a democratic leveling mechanism to perpetuate claims of victimization and political power. This power is being vigorously redefined in two ways. Osmeña continues to pursue traditional politics while the Lopez clan strives for greater political reach through good business sense. Osmeña's political power, like that of traditional politics, has already been made to serve business interests.

Another point generated is the working subject that is able to reclaim and enlarge the meager resources which are nonetheless his/hers. The final intertitles show the professional work ethics of the scions to claim 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. Political power as imbibed in the working subject is generated as an economic by-product. By generating economic surplus, political power is also generated to liberate other less-privileged working bodies. Power is democratized through political gentrification. Civil society gradually becomes a pursuit of big business for it yields a power mimicking state power.

Business undertakes the financing of the dissemination of laissez faire and human rights as prevailing social interests in *Eskapo*. 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. His story of victimization and rescue appearing on film seemingly poses the possibility of media constituting and transforming the public sphere. However, his authoring 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 becomes self-service. Lopez, who knows the trauma of losing the media to the hands of 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 the management

of the public sphere, clearly demarcating the models and interests of civil society that produces this sphere.

NATION AND MODERNITY IN THE PRESENCE OF FATHERLAND

Nationalist films in Asia Pacific cinema embody both the ideal way of dealing with a past national trauma—what contexts are to be used to generate meaning over the trauma—and the operations of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic realities—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; the fatherland provides the material mapping of the formation and elaboration of the nation (see Partha Chatterjee's gendered distinction of nation-formation; see also my discussion about the mother-nation, Tolentino). 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 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, producing therefore 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 and national identity and modernity prevail under the most trying circumstances, the nation is already spoken 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 language 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 meta-filmic quality of nationalist films. Because it documents a nation's past and present,

nationalist films elaborate on the film's own relationship both with filmmaking and media, and society. Each film analyzed presents contending views about film and the media, both how one uses and is used by film and the media to visualize and audiolize the nation's past and present. While the film narrative provides certain trajectories of nation-formation and the experience with modernity, the self-reflexive meta-film provides commentaries on the very relationship of the film to its media.

There is another counter that was being disseminated to mark the countdown towards the actual centennial day of the proclamation of independence. The originary counter that marked the declining number of days towards the centennial of Philippine independence is located in Freedom Park fronting Malacañang Palace, home to the presidency. There was so much media hype during its "100-day" launch that traffic in Metro Manila's highways, because of the massive infrastructure build-up, was further rerouted to accommodate the expected, largely required attendance, of school children.

Such a counter is technologically less calibrated than the digital clock displayed in Tiananmen Square that counted up to the seconds the remaining time left before Hong Kong was turned over to China. The official centennial counter, however, was being disseminated to various national and local offices. It was basically a day calendar whose pages one could pull off, one could work back from one hundred to one. The original and mass-disseminated counters represent the maneuvering of time and hence, history to meet present hegemonic needs for the most intense project of nation-formation. Time is made into a trajectory of itself, devoid of other factors in the ascendancy of hegemonic truth-claims to national history.

It becomes a signifier with a sole signified, and thus constricts the parameters of allowable play of meanings. Time is reversed instead of projected forward. The centennial of Philippine independence now owes authorship to the power behind this reversal of history. Though it may be considered trivial, the reversal of history remains vital to the authoring of the most recent and intense project of nation-formation. It sets up the authority in the management of history, the centennial celebration, nation, national identity and citizenship, and more importantly, the succeeding hundred years of national transformation. In other words, the national future is already marked by a reversal to the originary past. It is precisely because the gesture is symbolic that it yields to contending signifying practices — good and bad nationalisms, hegemony and counter-hegemony, nationhood and colonialism, nationalism and imperialism, localism and globalism.

This discussion of nationalist films in the experience of nation-formation and modernity allows the critique of such emplacement of the public sphere in civil society.

If the terms for engagement are already being set forth by the state and its hegemony, then one of two things can be undertaken by those in which such hegemony is being emplaced—a critique of the state becomes necessary to illuminate both the workings and limits of civil society, and the new ways of both challenging this civil society and moving towards the institutionalization of a counter-public sphere within the state-owned civil society.

NOTES

- 1 Gramsci also clarifies the notion of hegemony in a footnote, “The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance 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” (80).
- 2 The Minjung movement, according to Choi, “began in the wake of the popular April 19 Revolution in 1960 and developed into an anticolonial national unification movement by the end of the 1980s. Its proponents considered it an extension of Korea’s long tradition of popular nationalist movements, from the 1894 Tonghak Peasant War and the 1919 March First Independence Movement to the April 19 Revolution, which toppled the US-sponsored Syngman Rhee regime (1948-1960)” (90).
- 3 Garnham cites three reasons for making a universalist claim on the debate on globalization: “First one can conceive of the problem of a national or local culture being threatened by a globalising process only from a universalist position.... Second, the very phenomenon under discussion, globalization, is a universal phenomenon based on a universal symbol of value, the system of money. Third, a debate is only possible if the participants share some common set of values within which they can say meaningfully that they understand each other’s positions and either agree or disagree and why. And finally, and perhaps most important, because the participants in the global cultural market itself show every sign of happily accepting at least that minimum universals on which any shared cultural space depends” (258-9).
- 4 In President William McKinley’s remarks to a Methodist delegation, he narrates how he decided on the US colonization of the Philippines: “I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed [to] Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way—I don’t know how it was, but it came: 1) That we would not give them (Filipinos) back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; 2) that we would not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; 3) that we would not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was; and 4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we would by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died” (qtd. in Schirmer and Roskamm Shalom 22-3).

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