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Pasyon, Pelikula, at Telenovela:
The Hidden Transcripts of Edsa Masa

Tess del Rosario

This essay discusses the notion of a "hidden transcript" as the underlying discourse among participants of Edsa Masa—an uprising of seven days in April 2001. Conceived as "subterranean discourse" (Scott 1990) among subordinated groups, the central themes that constitute this discourse are those of persecution, execution, and retribution. They are derived from cultural forms, particularly the pasyon, the Filipino film (pelikula), and the telenovela. The essay elaborates on the various themes that have been reworked from the pasyon and how these were readjusted and exported to films and telenovelas. The hidden transcript of Edsa Masa is a direct rebuttal to the openly modernist vision of the first two Edsa uprisings.

KEYWORDS: *Collective action, cultural hegemony, status subordination, dramaturgy, social movements*

The ghost that imports a charged strangeness into a place or sphere it is haunting, thus unsettling the propriety and property lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge . . . the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing . . . It gives notice not only to itself but to what it represents. What it represents usually is a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken . . . we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory out of a concern for justice. Out of a concern for justice would be the only reason one would bother.

—Avery Gordon

In the twilight years of the Spanish colonial occupation of the Philippines, a religious confraternity known as the Cofradia de San Jose rose up in revolt to challenge colonial rule. Headed by a charismatic leader known as Apolinario de la Cruz, the confraternity carried out secret rituals; foremost among these was the recitation of the full Rosary, or the fifteen mysteries. Other rites included the singing of hymns, locally known as *dalit*, and prayer devotions to Saint Joseph, the confraternity's adopted patron saint and divine intermediary. What started as a religious association sanctioned by the Spanish authorities as instruments to facilitate christianization of the natives ended as an outlawed organization that the Spaniards suspected of propagating heretical practices, particularly when the confraternity's members (*cofrades*) declared De la Cruz the Tagalog¹ Christ and, therefore, their King. In October 1841, the Spanish army went to battle for ten days against five hundred or so *cofrades* who, according to the historian Leandro Tormo Sanz (1963, 84, in Ileto 1979, 62), "walked to battle as in a church procession, dressed in white garb" and "dancing, implying controlled and ritualistic movements." Overcome by the superiority of Spanish forces, some two hundred *cofrades* fled to the forests of Mount Banahaw, itself regarded as a holy mountain and site of several religious cults. De la Cruz was executed by the Spaniards and his body brutally cut up in pieces for display. His followers were all decimated.

Over a hundred years have passed since the secret society of Apolinario de la Cruz was discovered and decimated by the Spanish authorities. An uprising in the streets of Manila is taking place. The site is Edsa, the longest highway that runs for twenty-six kilometers across the metropolis. Millions of people have come out to protest the arrest of former president Joseph Estrada on 25 April 2001. The manner of his arrest was more than just personally injurious to an ex-president. A force of about two thousand policemen descended on his home in Greenhills, San Juan, ready to tackle and subdue his supporters who had camped around his house early in the week to prevent and protest his arrest. Estrada (also known as Erap) emerged from his house, head bowed. He and his son quietly rode the van that would take them to Camp Crame, the same site where eighteen years ago Ramos and

Enrile staged their mutiny that signaled the first Edsa uprising. From the van, he waved sadly to his supporters. It was reminiscent of the manner in which Jesus Christ was arrested on the eve of his crucifixion. Millions of Estrada's followers went out into Edsa in a surprising display of solidarity with a leader whom they venerated as, well, a god.

This essay explores the cultural themes that have been mobilized from local religious traditions in support of political protest. The use of these traditions follows an internal logic. It is derived from a meaning system among the lower classes about the nature of social and political change, and the religious sources from which this understanding is drawn. The religious traditions which inspired the earliest uprisings in Philippine history continue to do so today, and there exists an "uninterrupted line of interpretation" which dates back to the earliest secret associations whose conceptualization of social change was shaped by their colonial experience. The richest source of these understandings is derived from the Passion of Jesus Christ, popularly referred to as the "pasyon."

In the postcolonial Spanish era, the cultural form that evolved from the pasyon is the *pelikula* (film) introduced by the American Occupation regime at the turn of the twentieth century. The themes explored in Filipino films are reminiscent of the pasyon, and therefore they continue to provide the cultural armament for shaping local understandings about the nature of society and the possibilities for social change. The net effect is thus a "fusion" of cultural forms in which religious themes from the pasyon find themselves reworked and readjusted to suit the more "secularized mood" of modern political life in the Philippines. Lastly, a third cultural form, the telenovela, supplants the themes of the pasyon and the film. Even with the invasion of television in almost all Filipino households, particularly in the urban areas, people can still access those cultural meanings and messages from the old themes of the pasyon.

As a daily portrayal of the themes of rebuke and redemption, the telenovela is the latest incarnation of a process by which social and political meanings are formed among subjugated groups. These meanings are woven together in what Scott (1990) terms "a hidden

transcript," an underground discourse formed in the backstage regions of power relations between the dominant and subordinated groups. Recourse to these transcripts, both their discursive and nondiscursive elements, provides the key survival skills which are available to the subordinated groups in the daily negotiation of their lives suffused by acts of indignity and loss of autonomy. But these transcripts, more importantly, provide the clues to those "rare moments of political electricity, when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power" (Scott 1990, xiii). The Edsa Masa uprising is one such breakthrough in which a long-standing hidden transcript, crafted over centuries of subordination, was enacted to "storm the stage" (ibid.).

I discuss the circumstances and conditions that made possible the overcoming of the built-in barriers of hidden transcripts to culminate into an urban uprising known as Edsa Masa.² An elaborate theoretical discussion of the content and formation of these transcripts provides the conceptual armament that underlies the dramaturgical performance of subordinated groups. These likewise provide the internal logic for the appropriation of a religious discourse in which to couch the dramaturgical enactment of resistance to oppression.

I further argue that these varied sources of meaning do not veer away from the traditionalist conceptions among the poor about their redemption. That is, these notions of change continue to be rooted in a framework of paternalism provided by populist leaders who personalize their mission of redemption toward the poorer classes. Erap signified the strongest embodiment of their aspirations, thus their belief in his "messianic" abilities to provide them with hope for a redeemed future. There is also the continuous adherence to the central religious themes of "return" and "resurrection," which in modern-day politics translates as a "comeback."

The metascript of Edsa Masa therefore constitutes the antithesis to the modernist project of *Edsa Uno* and *Edsa Dos*, and the resistance to this project that began during the colonization period was generated by a subaltern discourse in which religious themes were reworked and replayed by subordinate groups as the vehicles for expressing their collective discontent.

Dramaturgical Conceptions of Power

Benford and Hunt (1992, 36) have constructed a processual schema to explain and analyze how social movements "construct and communicate power." They enlist four dramatic techniques in the service of social movement actors who redefine and articulate power. These techniques include: (1) scripting, (2) staging, (3) performing, and (4) interpreting. Each of these processes, the authors argue, implicates the power contests inherent in social movement activity. The differences in conceptions of power are also central to the works of Gamson (1968), Gerlach and Hine (1970), Piven and Cloward (1977), Moore (1978), and Tilly (1978), all of whom undertake considerations of power according to how it is defined, who wields it and who does not, and how it is used. Further, several authors engage the power question in terms of its *interpretive* dimensions. Gamson et al. (1982) elaborate on the notion of "injustice frames," while McAdam (1982) proposes the term "cognitive liberation." Benford and Hunt (1992, 37) seek to contribute to the power question within the dramaturgical tradition through a "conceptual framework illuminating the processes by which movements construct and communicate power." Scripting processes employed as one dramatic technique take off from the concept of "frames," a term originally advanced by Goffman (1974, 21) to signify a "schemata of interpretation" available to social actors with which to "locate, perceive, identify and label" their experiences and provide the latter with meaning. These meaning-derived conceptual frames serve as guides to social action. Within the context of social movements, frames are collectively designed to organize their subjective understandings toward their objective situations (McAdam 1982, 34). Through "injustice frames" (Gamson et al. 1982), social movement actors interpret actions of authority as unjust and therefore legitimize protest and noncompliance. Snow et al. (1986) detail each of the processes involved in frame construction.

While certainly an advance over prior conceptualizations of frame analysis and dramatic processes, there remains an inherent assumption that social actors engage themselves in these activities from a liberalist conception of political pluralism as a social context within which these

processes occur. To elaborate, theorizing about movements and social actors proceeds from the notion of a political space as an open arena equally available and accessible to everyone. Within this arena is the free and unhampered "tangling of frames" and competitive scripting processes, the outcome of which is to be determined by the more resonant frame or the more compelling script. These approaches suffer from an ethnocentric conception of the political arena as an unfettered structure, a celebration of the triumph of western liberal politics where the poor and the disadvantaged can enjoy equal recourse to the institutionalized processes of interest aggregation, articulation and adjudication (Almond 1972) as the rich do. Indeed, within the discourse of modernity, it is precisely the cementing of these processes into the formalized institutions of the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches of government that provide the hallmarks of political modernization against which the "progress" of any country is measured. The institutionalization processes are blind to gender, race, and class considerations.

In highly unequal and severely stratified societies where such processes are sorely lacking, and where institutions are rendered inefficient by their structural "dysfunctionalities," what are the possibilities for the poor and the disadvantaged to articulate their grievances? How do actors maneuver in tight and constricted spaces, as in colonial and authoritarian regimes, and what explains their efficacy? How do dramaturgical conceptions implicate the question of uneven and lopsided power particularly in unequal societies? Simply put, how is protest possible in contexts of power inequality and within political arenas where dominant groups have near absolute control?

A final inadequacy lies in the ahistorical framing and scripting processes. That is, the historical situatedness of power and its construction is missing in the analytical discussions by these authors. The historical backdrop of the construction of power relations in many societies provides valuable clues to the possibilities afforded for protest among the poor, as well as the limitations facing them. Through a historical outlook, we acquire a deeper appreciation of how disadvantaged groups maneuver within time periods, what forms of resistance have evolved through time, how they form social and political meanings against a background of what preceded their efforts, and how they

reckon chances for success in light of what historical memory they have been able to preserve from the prior experiences of their forebears. The continuous popularity of the pasyon readings known as *pabasa*³ provide what Peter Berger (1976, 184) terms a "cognitive map" among subordinate groups whose adherence to the meanings generated by this religious discourse over time enable them to fashion their resistance to authority accordingly.

Utilizing the Gramscian notion of "hegemony," I subscribe to the view that elites engage in the dramaturgical project of ritualizing their displays of power through modes of speech, dress, mannerisms, and the like. This is particularly more evident in societies stratified along caste, class, gender, ethnic, or age lines where ritualized displays of power deepen elite hegemony and result in "consensual domination." The poor and the marginalized foster this hegemony through their own ritualized behavior of deference and humility, a posture of "knowing one's place in society," whether by way of lowering one's eyes and head before one's superiors, or engaging in "stratified talk" that denotes respect but also subordination.⁴ Habits, behavioral and linguistic, are undergirded by a subservient ethic that scripts the relations between the dominant and the subordinated. The perpetual adherence to them by both parties results in an uneasy though long-lasting equilibrium founded on hierarchy and inequality.

In addition, Scott (1990, 21) notes those specific sites where the elite congregate, as in specific clubs—ritual spaces of privilege and exclusivity—where the powerful gather and confirm their hegemonic status. Likewise, the poor construct their own "safe spaces" (Gamson 1996, 27) which are open and outside the realm of social control, where an oppositional culture can take root and mature to construct a shared critique of power. Such public spaces include "semi-autonomous community institutions, movement half-way houses, and cyberspace." Subordinate groups in unequal societies, however, have less access to these public sites. Where available, there is no easy recourse to them due to lack of resources and because their movements are far more under the gaze of power by the dominant groups. In short, their movements are, in Orwellian terms, heavily "patrolled." In the face of physical limitations for openly demonstrating their discontent, these

subordinate groups craft their resistance against authority through subterfuge and through strategies of "negation." These take the form of jokes, rumor, gossip, euphemisms, reversals of speech, fantasies of revenge, and, in some instances, the carnivalesque displays of behavior (e.g., fiestas) with an avalanche of symbolic behavior in which to couch resistance. A counter-ideological "guerrilla warfare" is launched through the formation of dissident subterranean cultures, whether through folk religion, millennial and revivalist movements, myths, class heroes, and the like (Scott 1990, 198). This discourse is both behavioral and linguistic and the rituals of subordinate groups throughout history have enabled them to survive generations of powerlessness. At the same time, there have been occasions when these strategies leave the safety zones of subtlety and subterfuge, when episodes of penetrating the public transcript of power burst onto the open social stage to dramatize their resistance openly.

Thus, rather than the unilateral conception of power as emanating from totalizing wholes such as the state, or even the application of Foucauldian disciplinary technologies of power through surveillance, punishment, and evaluative judgment, power relations construed as "ritualized performances" afford subordinate groups greater leeway to maneuver within tight and constricted political spaces. This maneuverability stems from the character of these performances: they are ongoing negotiations and elaborations depending on the audience. They undergo constant redefinition and reconstruction based on their reading of the safety of the environment and the strength of their numbers. As in most theatrical displays, a cast of thousands projects a more dramatic script than do a few social roles. Occasionally, some scripts culminate in dramatic explosions, and the result is a public collective outpouring of sentiment. The history of hierarchical societies is the history of dramatic encounters among the dominant and subordinate groups, each encounter the result of scripts that are enacted in the front stage and back stage of social life. A dramaturgical view to power relations that is both historical and analytically lodged within settings of local discourses rescues the treatment of power from overdetermined Marxist structuralism and Foucauldian poststructuralism.

The Pasyon: Persecution and Execution

Popular revolts during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines were spearheaded by religiopolitical societies (popularly known as *Colorums*)⁵ and peasant-based organizations whose charismatic leaders preached a life of prayer and austere living. They rose to prominence by the force of extraordinary events—either through dreams, apparitions, or “unexplained” powers. The *pasyon*, an epic tale centering around the life of Jesus Christ, constituted the main texts from which the uprising leaders drew their inspiration. Meant as a tool by the Spanish friars to “brainwash” the *Indios*⁶ into loyalty and passive submission to the Catholic faith, the *pasyon* instead became reinterpreted by these religious associations to “articulat[e the] values, ideals and even hopes of liberation” (Ileto 1979, 15–16).

Not coincidentally, the increase in agrarian unrest occurred during the colonial phase in which the Philippine islands were opened to world commerce. The cultivation of export crops—sugar, hemp, copra, tobacco, and coffee—opened the ports of Manila. In the countryside, provincial elites benefited from this economic transformation, as subsistence farming was replaced by commercial agriculture. New sources of wealth based on landholdings ushered in an era of frenetic activity among prominent rural families to accumulate and consolidate landholdings. With their knowledge of Iberian law, these families could facilitate the legal acquisition of land. For the rural poor, a process of dispossession began (Sturtevant 1976, 37).

During this same phase, controversies in the Catholic Church were brewing over the question of the “Filipinization” of the clergy. At issue was the conflict between the Spanish regular priests and the Filipino seculars over the control of parishes. The campaign of the native clergy to assume responsibility over the parishes was in large measure a demand for securing the social and economic benefits of the “ecclesiastical offices” which, once attained, would easily translate to “enjoying the concomitant political power . . . and it was one they (the Filipino clergy) were ready to take” (Majul in Anderson 1969, 153). That the earliest stirrings of rebellion thus assumed a religious character

was not coincidental. Rather, these were based on the historical and structural peculiarities of the Philippine colonial experience, in which anticolonial sentiment was defined as anticlericalism (De la Costa and Schumacher 1984).

Such native ingenuity in reworking the *pasyon* texts to provide new political meanings served the causes of the anticolonial struggle very well, as charismatic leaders drew their followers around them in the same manner that Jesus Christ chose his twelve apostles. The execution and death of Jesus Christ provided the material for reworking a hidden transcript of resentment and, inevitably, resistance. Its core elements consisted of persecution and abuse to which subordinate groups were exposed on a daily basis. These "expressions of personal exasperation" (Beik 1997, 28) served as constant reminders of how their lives were subjected to the realities of status gradations in which they occupied the lowest rung. Their subjective experience of subordination was one of insults, denial of self-esteem, a lack of autonomy, and, in some cases, even physical beatings and punishment. Sennett and Cobb (1993) would call these the "hidden injuries" of those who suffer the daily ritual of being ordered around. Like Jesus Christ in the *pasyon*,⁷

Pagmuda daing cabarang,
sompá, langhad, caibahan,
itolod dagnan tumbanan,
mapadasmag, mapadongcal
an cruz ay cababaobabao.

The insults were beyond compare,
accompanied by the curses and
invectives.
He was pushed and kicked,
and he stumbled and fell
with the cross on top of him.

(Tiongson 1999, 740–41)

In the postcolonial period, the *pasyon* texts have continued to inspire the formulation of hidden transcripts whose cultural codes still resonate among the urban poor protestors and supporters of deposed president Estrada. The prelude to Edsa Masa began with the impeachment trial—a modern-day *pasyon* in which all the characters, unwittingly, assumed the roles in the *pasyon* itself. It was the most avidly watched program on TV, overtaking the regular programming of news and daily fare of evening soap operas. To Erap's supporters who believed in his innocence despite the revelations about his hidden wealth, the primary

message of the trial was the avalanche of insults heaped upon their leader—someone who was castigated and ridiculed from the beginning of his reign as president, not because he was corrupt, but because he was incompetent, crass, crude, an offense, and an embarrassment to the elite establishment. The opening statement of the prosecution panel set the tone of the trial:

Projected on a screen in a hushed Senate chamber here was a check for 142 million pesos, or \$2.8 million, signed by “Jose Valhalla.” Next to it was the familiar image of a 500-peso bank note, signed by the president of the Philippines, Joseph E. Estrada.

“We want you to study that check very closely,” said Joker Arroyo, a prosecutor in the impeachment trial of Mr. Estrada, which began today. “Examine the signature. You need not be an expert.” From the swooping J to the crabbed last name, the signatures were nearly identical. Curiosity gave way to incredulity, and finally to whoops of laughter. . . .

Mr. Arroyo said the president, using a fictitious name, had deposited the check into an account controlled by a friend. The money went to buy a \$1.7 million estate for one of Mr. Estrada’s mistresses. “We cannot have the country run by a thief like him,” Mr. Arroyo said, summing up the arguments of prosecutors from the House of Representatives. (Landler 2000)

To the middle class modernists watching the same argument on the opening day of the trial, the prosecution’s statement was a testimonial to the workings of institutionalized justice. The fate of the Estrada presidency was to be decided upon by the rational processes of evidence and counter-evidence, on legal arguments that take precedence over unsubstantiated claims. The prosecution had produced the material evidence of a signed check, albeit with a dramatic flourish, on which the guilt of the president, they argued, was going to be established. A defense panel consisting of the best lawyers—one of them a former Supreme Court Chief Justice—would represent the president and cross-examine the witnesses of the prosecution in true modern-day courtroom style. But to the poorer classes who listened and watched the same trial, it was the familiar taunts, the sneering, the accusatory

laughter against their president and savior that they heard. It was a straightforward reenactment of the indignities suffered by Jesus at the hands of his captors:

Totoo na catiponan duman nin camaliuagan nag-iisip sindang anan can ipasasaquit na tunay.	An assembly indeed it was of evildoers, of wicked pharisees who thought of ways to make him suffer.
Ugaleng di catonosan, magna catampalasan, ana sanang magna bintang cadtong magna tampalasan qui Jesus na Cagurangnan.	An unjust act of the scoundrels: the wicked ones fabricated charges against the lord Jesus. (Tiongson 1999, 588–89)

At the hands of his accusers, Erap was, to those who believed in him and supported him, a case of betrayal. Erap was the victim of a “sell-out” from one of his closest buddies who became disgruntled over the allocation of the spoils of office. As Judas would deliver Jesus to the Pharisees, Chavit Singson was the “whistleblower” who delivered Erap to the hands of the prosecutors. This was classic melodrama, staged along the format of the *pasyon*.

Below is the English version of the narrative of Maria, a household helper whose flat refusal of witness accounts during Erap’s trial only strengthened her faith in the man whom she believed was wrongly accused and abandoned by his friends at the hour of his persecution. The ultimate goal, she claims, is his execution.

T: Did you believe what you saw (on television)?

M: No, ma’am.⁸ Because there was just too many . . . it was too confusing. Supposedly there’s this name that was transferred to that name (in bank accounts). The *jueteng* money supposedly transferred to this and that name. It was just too much. Like it was all made up in order to oust him (*pabagsakin siya*).

Those witnesses? They were all paid (*bayaran*).

Because, ma’am, nobody talked before. Why did they not come out before?

Why only now? And besides, they were all also doing the same thing. They all followed him (Erap).

If that was all true (*sana kung lahat yan ay totoo*). . . . Besides, just because Singson squealed (*pumiyok*, like a frightened rooster)⁹ All the others also squealed (*nagpiyukan*, as in a chorus of roosters). It looks like, someone just led the squealing. All the others just followed. Isn't that so, ma'am? It's like Singson just ordered all of them to squeal with him.

If what Singson says is true, then they should both be jailed. He went with Erap (*sumama siya*), isn't it, ma'am? Now that he is the one who accused (*nagsuplong*) and then he won't be jailed? That is so unfair to Erap.

They are all the same, all of them. There is no one among them (leaders) who has not stolen from the money of the Filipinos, of the people, of the country. They are all the same

What we were really hoping for is to wait for the truth. Because all of us (in our community), we're pro-Erap. They all agreed that Erap should be jailed, but first prove all the accusations against him first. Nobody among us is saying that if he is guilty, not to jail him.

Because however else it may look like, he was followed by the people, he received so many votes, bigger than the others. That should be respected. But no, they want death penalty right away. Convict right away, just like that (*ganun-ganoon lang*). But he isn't even yet proven guilty, he is already convicted.

The underlying parallelisms to the religious narrative in her recounting of the impeachment trial came to the surface. It was a testimonial of a true believer, someone whose faith in the intrinsic innocence of Erap was larger than the evidence provided in court, surpassing even the astounding revelations about his personal life—his mistresses, his enormous bank accounts, his vices. This was a narrative, not about Erap's guilt according to the modernist notions of the law embodied in the public transcripts of the dominant groups, but of a denial of respect and public humiliation established in the familiar offstage transcripts of

the subordinate. As the impeachment trial proceeded on the public stage of TV, the Calvary of Erap continued off-screen through cruel jokes mocking his lack of bourgeois competence, which circulated via the rumor mills, electronic text messages on cell phones, the gossip circuits that reached cyberspace communities—those multiple public spaces where safe, open protest has always been available to the dominant groups.¹⁰

Hers was likewise a narrative of “inclusivity” in which a community of resisters operated below ground, bound together by a code to protect one another’s secrets. Singson belonged to this hidden circle; he was, after all, a close associate of Erap for many years long before the presidency. His sudden appearance on the public stage of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee to divulge the reportedly scandalous and corrupt lifestyle of Erap and his fellow associates was the apex of betrayal, a violation of an unwritten code among subaltern actors that theirs was a shared discourse which flourished in the underground.

Further, Erap’s public persona to the poor were the proverbial loaves of bread that he brought to the poor communities which he visited, the laying of his hands on the foreheads of the weary, unashamedly standing next to them in their ragged clothes, communing with them with his hands with which he ate his food in their presence, as though he was one of them. During those visits, Erap gave them a moment in which he delivered immediate satisfactions: a recognition of their worth, an escape from the daily grind of exasperations. In his presence, they experienced a respite. Their hidden transcripts were on hold, and they did not need to perform. In the presence of the actor, they could stop acting. Much like the savior they revered in the pasyon, Erap was someone who made many things possible, like the Biblical parable of the multiplication of fish. Thus, her indignation at what she perceived as disrespect for Erap’s victory at the polls, a substantial display of the man’s public worth which seemed to have been dismissed “just like that” (*ganun-ganoon lang*), like Jesus was dismissed by his captors, who was, after all, recognized by many as the Son of God. Talk of the death penalty for Erap’s crimes, of which he was yet to be proven guilty, was the final ultimate insult—the very same ones she, as society’s subordinated, have had to endure for years, except that this

was now being hurled at Erap who succeeded in becoming president on the strength of the majority vote of the poor.

The *Pelikula*: New Forms, Enduring Themes

As the Philippines moved toward “secularization,” following a long period of decolonization from the Spaniards and the onset of modernization under the tutelage of the Americans, the cultural form of the film (*pelikula*) supplanted the *pasyon* texts, even while the former would oftentimes retain the themes of persecution and salvation in film productions. Interestingly, it was the Americans who brought cinema to the Philippines. Thomas Alva Edison and Ronald Ackerman captured scenes of the Filipino-American War on film and showed these to American audiences eager to learn about their newly acquired overseas possessions (Sotto 2000, 6). A period of “Hollywood-ization” of the Philippine film industry would see the rise of localized versions of American film actors and actresses. There would be the Elvis Presley and Natalie Wood look-alikes. But one of the most enduring icons in American filmdom that would have a huge impact on Filipino actors and directors alike was James Dean (Lumbera 2000, 12). His films *East of Eden* and *Rebel without a Cause* introduced a new theme: rebellion against convention as upheld by the institutions of Church and family. Nonconformity became a style of protest among the young.

It was during this same period for Joseph Estrada who was a young actor then, a dropout from the Jesuit university, the Ateneo de Manila. He adopted the stance of James Dean: the same bouffant hairdo, the upturned lip when he smiled, the cool distant gaze, and the blasé attitude. Estrada’s film roles were a combination of society’s rebellious youth and a heart for the downtrodden, the underdog. He is strongly remembered for his portrayal of *Asiong Salonga*, a true-to-life social dropout operating in the urban slums of Tondo. Salonga was a Robin Hood-type who distributed the goodies of the rich through his winnings in gambling. Estrada’s personal rebellion against the dictates of his middle-class family found its consummation in acting. In the movies, he was James Dean, but also in real life. In fact, his reel and real lives were no different from each other.

Thus, the rebellion theme afforded by a cleverly reworked interpretation of the *pasyon* was “smuggled” out of, and conveniently transferred from, the religious plays to the big screen. The *pasyon* themes were not abandoned; rather, they were infused into the plots of Filipino movies where a Christlike figure assumes the *bida* (leading) role, opposite a *contrabida* (a villain). The hero invariably undergoes a period of trial and suffering, is betrayed by a friend-turned-foe, as Judas would betray Jesus, and then the final act of glorious redemption. He wins his true love; there is some conversion from badness to goodness as with Magdalene, and the villain is locked away or dies, like Judas. His retinue of supporting actors and actresses—his Greek chorus—assists him in his quest for ultimate goodness. This singular virtue was portrayed by charismatic figures who were frequent box office winners. They were champions of the oppressed as *Asiong Salonga*, *Nardong Putik*, and *Baby Porcuna* were, mostly originally from the lower strata of society, the metaphorical manger in Bethlehem from whence they rose (Lumbera 2000, 26).

What follows is a narrative of Marilou Diaz-Abaya, a well-known Filipina film director whose lengthy excursus into the culture of the movie industry provides her with a strong insight into the deep connections between religion and film, which infuse everyday Filipino life, particularly in the formation of subterranean discourses among moviegoers, fans, followers and, inevitably, voters of presidential elections.

T: What I want to explore is films. All of us have been watching ever since we were small, across all classes. How do we learn to live our life according to scripts?

M: (Let's begin with) the “vaudeville tradition” . . . when Filipinos were encouraged by their Japanese colonizers to express themselves in their own native language. (Then), they (Filipinos) tended to produce comedies and dramas, song and dance numbers with biblical themes.

Meaning, there was always an identification of who is the *bida* (protagonist) and the *contrabida* (antagonist); who is good and who is bad. And who is good is always Christ-like. He is humble, he is poor, he is patient, he is blessed, he is gifted, he is loving. And always male. He will be exploited and persecuted by the

powerful and he will bear all these ordeals and persecutions until the point where he must save either his own life or the life of another,

In which case, not even he alone will be able to redeem himself. He will need divine intervention. So *Deus ex maquina* was a crucial component of those stories.

This carried over to the cinema of the 50s. So you had your central characters inspired by Christ. Judas as your betrayer.

Then you'd have Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene as the converted prostitute. So you'd have these themes of the Pasyon, the crucifixion and the resurrection.

You will always have the 'goodie goodie' Susan Roces and the bad Zeny Zabala who was the bad, *suplada* (snooty) who smokes a cigarette. So that's the Mary Magdalene versus the Virgin Mary. Zeny Zabala, Bella Flores, Rosa Rosal—these are the *contrabidas* eh. In the same way that you would have Fernando Poe Jr., Ramon Revilla (now senator), Joseph Estrada—you know, representing the Filipino, the brown Filipino who was persecuted, or whose family members were persecuted.

And so they used their strength to redeem the honor or the property of their family members. That's throughout (the movie). Even Dolphy (the prototypical comedian) is always persecuted, and in the end he manages to thwart his persecutor. That is always the substance of all our films.

It's always a story of redemption. How a person becomes, how a person who starts out badly in the beginning of the film is redeemed in the end.

T: Why Biblical?

M: Most of the story-tellers during the Spanish times were friars and priests. The public entertainment was mostly religious entertainment. In fiestas, this was encouraged, anything that was secular was frowned upon as materialist and mundane.

(Also) because our producers were all *Katoliko sarado* (closed-case Catholics, meaning diehards). There were only four to five big studios. Of course they hit the nerve of the audiences. The ar-

chetypes worked also because our own existing social setup included those archetypes.

We had a patriarch you know, like Abraham, who was somebody in charge. We had somebody who had the power who took charge of those who did not have power.

T: Even 50 years of American public education?

M: The Americans gave us the English language and it liberated us somehow from ignorance. But the language unfortunately did not express the volcanic nature, I think, of the range of our emotions as a people.

With English, we simply reinforced, . . . re-used, recycled our regional dialects in English rather than Filipino.

By so doing, you would still go back to "indigenous" culture as having been presented to us by the Spaniards which is to say pre-Hispanic to the Hispanic.

The impact of religion is in the "irrational" realm of human nature, which I think persists and will always prevail over all other materialist paradigms of which the American paradigm is one. It's very difficult to convert the human nature that resides in the realm of the irrational, of the imagination.

The Americans tried to educate us in the rational realm and so we will adopt to that as a matter of convenience to please our masters and to be able to obtain what we wanted in the comfort zone. But we never surrendered the religious superstitions, the religious biases, the fear of ex-communication and so on and so forth.

T: Is that how it was with the "zarzuelas" and the "moro-moros?"¹¹

M: Oh yes, the moro moros always had the Spaniards and the Christians as the good people, and the heathen, bad murderers were always those who were not Christian. And so it was always the triumph of the good over the evil.

It's always been that way. That was always been a running thread in our films since until at least the 80s. In the 90s we

entered the kind of a postmodern period eh, where our protagonists entered this zone of grey (chuckles). (Except for) a few directors but still they were not popular. The popular ones were still those that showed you clearly who were good and who were bad.

Telenovelas: The Performance of Fantasy and Retribution

Fast forward to 1999. In the household where Maria works as a maid, the TV blares at 6:30 p.m., and the retinue of fellow helpers are glued in front of the TV for the next remaining hour. It is the nightly ritual of soap operas after the prime time six o'clock news has been read and the metropolis is once again excited by further stories of kidnapping, rape, and the occasional sensation of movie stars getting pregnant out of wedlock, then hurriedly engaged.

For the last three years, the longest running soap opera *Mula sa Puso* (From the Heart) has brought many households to a standstill. The hated step-aunt, Selina, has concocted a new plot to eliminate the only rightful heiress, her niece Via, to the wealth of Don Fernando, Selina's brother. She encouraged Via to elope with her boyfriend from the slum areas, and then organized a group of mercenaries to follow the unsuspecting couple to the bus station from where they will proceed to the province and get married.

Via was previously engaged to be married to Michael, the son of her father's business partner, on her return from the United States shortly after her eighteenth birthday. But her heart is not with him. Her interest was sparked instead by Gabriel, a young boy who rescued her from a kidnapping attempt during her birthday party. He comes from the slums whose foster mother, Magda, it turns out, is Via's true biological mother, separated from her at birth by the wicked Selina. Magda was a household helper with whom Don Fernando fell in love and whose love child, Via, was stolen from her in the thick of night. The heroine grew up in the United States and only returned to the Philippines when her adopted mother died of cancer. Don Fernando meanwhile falls for the stories spun by his sister Selina about Magda's illicit love affairs, which causes him to loathe her. The suffering Magda is banished to the slums, loveless and childless. In the intervening years,

Gabriel becomes her adopted son, who, by some curious twist of fate, meets Via as he rescues her from her captors. The two fall in love against the wishes of Via's father, and Selina, smelling an opportunity to finally get rid of her, encourages the unsuspecting debutante to elope with Gabriel.

A bomb is planted in the bus by one of the goons. Selina is several yards away, ready to detonate the bomb from a remote control device. Her despicable, hateful eyes glare in the darkness as she ensures that the lovers are in the bus. Selina's evil triumph over Don Fernando's millions is just an explosion away. She summons her evil genius with all her might and presses the red button. The bomb blows the bus and all its passengers to nothingness. Selina is standing outside with her goons, laughing so hysterically tears stream down her cheeks. It is not known if Via is on the bus. Was she killed with Gabriel, or did they somehow manage to escape? The episode ends, to be continued tomorrow, same time, same channel.

The maids are squatting on the floor, Maria is in tears with her fists ready to knock down the TV. She and her fellow viewers curse with all their breath, wanting to murder Selina for this hideous deed, but they applaud the actress for such exemplary acting. "Ang galing umarte" (She acts so well), they declare between sobs.

When the soap opera finally ends three years from the date it began, the confrontation between Selina and Via (the latter did survive the bus bomb attack after all, and so did her boyfriend) was pure dramatic delight—a long fighting scene, with fists, poles, and Selina's gun, furtively evaded by the lithe Via—much like the animated videogame *Mortal Kombat*. The sweet and once-shy Via confronted her wicked aunt with the venom of a fed-up, enraged, long-suffering martyr now turned warrior woman. But this final episode should not mar her original goodness of heart, so she should win the battle without ever tarnishing her image. The familiar *Deux ex machina* technique came to Via's rescue. Selina was run over by a cargo truck in pursuit of Via on the streets where the fight spilled over. Selina's death was TV victory; so were the double marriages of Magda, the household helper, to Don Fernando, and Via to Gabriel. For the faithful viewers came their own much-needed, long-awaited catharsis. The curtain falls, then a sta-

tion break and a five-full minute commercial interlude. The preview of the next soap opera heralds the arrival of a new production which inaugurates tomorrow. Another beautiful, fair-skinned slum girl is the heroine, her boyfriend the son of a wealthy couple. Its title is apt: *Pangako sa Iyo* (literally, "Promise to You").

The arrival of TV, particularly the soap opera genre, changed the culture of the film industry in the Philippines in the late 1980s. Against a background of rapid urbanization and migration into the cities, a new viewership was reared in the crowded slums and settlements of the metropolis, having been displaced from their villages by the forces of economic stagnation and social inequalities. Further, the arrival of affordable TV in almost every household changed movie-going habits. TV was free and perpetual—one could watch it all day from one's living room or even from the distant gaze of a neighbor's window, whereas movies were built into a household budget, and always ran on schedule. For urban migrants whose employability lay in a bloated service industry, their time was no longer completely their own. One had to wait for the Sunday day off to watch a movie and perhaps even take out an advance from one's employer to afford the rising costs of a cinema ticket. In contrast, TV was simply everywhere—in a restaurant, a bar, a street corner, a mall, a *sari-sari* (neighborhood) store. Also, *Dallas* had invaded Filipino households and so did *Dynasty*. J. R. Ewing was the wealthy patriarch with questionable morals but took good care of all his women through his astounding oil wealth; Alexis from *Dynasty* wore sharp clothes and an equally sharp tongue from which she dished the latest soap opera opprobrium, and Krystal was the ultrafeminine, soft-spoken wife with her huge capacity for patient suffering. The urban migrants took their latest cues from these telenovelas from which they recrafted and readjusted their hidden transcripts. The result is an acquired taste for fantasy and retribution.

The distinct peculiarity of urban life is that rural migrants in search of better prospects in the city leave their places of origin in pursuit of a series of constructed fantasies—the promise of higher paying jobs hopefully in the urban formal sector; a possible romance with someone, preferably rich; the enjoyment of the city's plural forms and sources of gratification; a stab at social mobility and social status, to

return to their place of origin, more prosperous and affluent than when they first left. For most migrants, the city becomes a site for what Nelson (1979, 51) calls "gambling in an urban lottery."

The reality is that most migrants arrive in the city confronted by the stark realities of urbanization and modernization, processes that entail social and psychological adjustments. In these efforts, the record is uneven: some are more successful than others. Those who are able to transition to urban life with relative success are usually those who can rely on family and kinship networks as well as on "home-place circles" (ibid., 84) that include neighbors and co-villagers. These constitute the social mechanisms by which information is made available to the new arrivals mostly on the possibilities for employment, but also for purposes of recreating communal ties and achieving solidarity.

Still and all, transitions are always uncomfortable, if not severe, and there are those who find urban life a brutish, nasty, and abrupt Hobbesian narrative. With very little employable skills, they end up in low-end jobs in the service sector, or as contractual labor in enterprises which subvert labor laws by declaring seasonal employment. For the younger migrants whose education did not get past elementary schooling, chances for formal sector employment are almost nil, thus they find their way into the homes of the upper and middle classes, to work as domestic helpers, *yayas* (nannies), gardeners, houseboys, drivers. Their hidden transcripts are constructed discourses of disappointment and disillusionment, if not of permanent insecurity and anxiety; their coping strategy, inevitably, one of dependence and escapism.

Politically, migrants are vulnerable to populist appeals. A weak party structure and ineffective urban institutions, plus the "rural inheritance" of patron-client relations and the "thinness" of communal relationships in an urban setting predisposes the urban poor toward a "desire for a patron and protector," one whose "dramatic personal style . . . creates a personal relationship between leader and masses" (ibid., 337). It is a model of "vertically mobilized participation" in which political action by the masses result from instructions, motivated largely or wholly by loyalty, affection, deference, or fear of a leader, or by a desire for benefits they believe that leader may make available to them if they act as he directs (ibid., 168–69).

Populism taps into what Lipset (1963, 115) terms "working-class authoritarianism," which he describes as a

tendency to view politics and personal relationships in black-and-white terms, a desire for immediate action, an impatience with talk and discussion, a lack of interest in organizations which have a long-range perspective, and a readiness to follow leaders who offer a demonological interpretation of the evil forces (either religious or political) which are conspiring against him.

In addition, the populist's rhetoric of delivering concrete goods immediately offers a sharp contrast to political parties that promote, however unsuccessfully, a long-term vision of society, a programmatic approach to social change, and an ideological underpinning of social problems and their preferred solutions. In short, populism among the urban poor is "a patron-client relationship writ large" (Nelson 1979, 329).

Thus, escapist fantasies nurtured through telenovelas offer an almost perfect fit into the urban poor's clientelist orientation. Their depiction of a leader is someone who would grant them the possibilities for their fantasies to come true. A populist leader's rhetoric consists of "attacks on the corrupt and selfish oligarchy" (ibid., 337) which is dramatized everyday on the telenovela through the wealthy contrabida who is most assuredly rich, unscrupulous, scheming, and exploitative. Telenovelas oftentimes offer a redemption of the oligarchy through marriage or through good-heartedness, but it is a redemption that is achieved by retribution (*paghihiganti*). By having married "upwards," an urban migrant has successfully moved "outwards." S/he has avenged him/herself by having entered the previously closed world of the rich. It is the stuff of Cinderella fantasies, but it is, at the same time, a recognition of the power of personal relationships, the role of paternalism (whether from an enlightened rich lover or a good-hearted soul), the vengeance afforded by sheer luck (maybe s/he will become a famous model or singer through sheer talent and be "discovered") and, of course, the possibility of getting even. In an hour-long telenovela, there occur the simultaneous processes of personal identification, social commentary, and political outlook.

The Christ of the pasyon was reformulated to fuse with telenovela heroes who no longer inhabit the world of divinity but interact through the teletubes. Worship was transformed electronically, and a new devotee, the telenovela fan, came into being. These heroes and heroines embody Christlike virtues: patience, goodness of heart, a love for the unfortunate, tenderness, the ability to sacrifice especially for one's family. They tend to suffer for a long time at the hands of the contrabidas, like a long drawn-out Calvary procession. In fact, this dramatic tension is sustained throughout the telenovela for years, as in *Mula sa Puso*, and every new evil scheme hatched by the vicious Selina makes retribution mandatory. Thus, there is always the element of redemption in an everyday context, rather than the resurrection into a spiritual afterlife. Telenovela plots are woven around sagas of individuals and families who rise up into the world but retain their virtues, while there are stories of misfortune that end in marginality—the element of retribution and poetic justice (paghihiganti).

That Erap's electoral base is strongest among the urban poor is therefore not surprising. He exemplified the populist leader par excellence. Urban poor voters in turn responded to him out of a reconfigured notion of what they needed and desired from a leader in their new urbanized settings. He was still the prototypical patron and protector, but he also embodied, in true telenovela fashion, the taste for vengeance and retribution. After all, Erap himself was retribution personified, the "wish-fulfillment component to the hidden transcript" (Scott 1990, 38). His poor English-speaking skills were endearing to the masses who, when he "slides into a familiar grunt, a patented way of talking tough that immediately connects him with the *masa*" (David 2001, 9), exposes bourgeois hypocrisy and middle-class propriety. His accumulated wealth and hedonist ways are behaviors that the poor would emulate and indulge in themselves if they someday became powerful like him. And for as long as he provided for all his families, the urban poor saw nothing wrong with a particular morality which, in their view, the rich was not exempt from, but was too hypocritical to admit to, whereas Erap had never denied the idiosyncrasies of his personal life. Through the telenovela, urban poor migrants negotiate their own hidden transcripts through nightly exposures to televised fantasies

that they can only vicariously experience. But Erap as president was the urban poor's ultimate fantasy come true—a substantiation of the witticism among Filipinos that Erap's electoral victory in 1998 was truly "the revenge of the masses."

The Hidden Transcript Breaks Through

On 25 April 2001, former President Joseph Estrada was arrested at his home on charges of economic plunder. The images of Estrada's arrest on TV portrayed him as a man humbled by the presence of thousands of policemen, some of whom clambered up the roof of his house. They looked very menacing in broad daylight. Estrada emerged from his house from where he was brought to a waiting van, his head bowed, while his van was escorted by a phalanx of uniformed men as it slowly wound its way toward Camp Crame where he was to be detained. Thousands of poor supporters pushed and shoved, wailing and lamenting his arrest. He sheepishly waved at his supporters, looking every bit the victim, abused and ganged upon (*pinagtulung-tulungan*). It was a scene straight out of the *pasyon*:

Ta si Jesus Nazareno
maisog baretang tauo,
pagnandam ninda iniho
na cadaclan nin Soldado
di macadulag na totoo.

Ibago Corderong tunay,
mahoyo daing cabarang.
na saindaing iniual
day man sia matumang
sainda, ni sa quिसay man.

As Jesus the Nazarene
was known for his braveness
the big numbers of soldiers assigned
was to insure
that he would not escape.

But he was a true lamb
gentle without equal.
Even if they taunted him,
he would not fight back
against them or anyone.

(Tiongson 1999, 570–71)

And finally, the "mug shots" and the finger printing of the deposed president and his son, as though they were ordinary convicts, slapped on the front pages for the entire country to witness, a parade of continuing insults that did not stop with the trial nor end with the arrest. It was a grievous dramaturgical error for the government forces that implemented the arrest order on the strength of what they regarded as

the workings of a modernist application of “due process.” It was meant to portray the triumph of modernist justice; instead, it became a “transforming moment of political anger” (Lyman 1981, 71) when the silence was finally breached and the hidden transcript that laid in the shadows of public discourse came rushing headlong into the open arena of Nietzschean *ressentiment*.

That moment when silence breaks, Scott (1990, 207) argues, signals the end of the “silence of defiance in the public transcript.” He calls it pure “political electricity, the high drama . . . when the dissent of the hidden transcript crosses the threshold to open resistance.” For the Edsa Masa protestors, the breach occurred at midday when several thousands of them gathered at the Edsa Shrine, the very same site of the first two Edsa uprisings. It was a symbolic gesture of their own liberation, the act of “trespassing” the site where their president was deposed only three months ago. But it was also a *symbolic* trespassing, a penetration and occupation of an exclusive zone, regarded as the enclave of the middle and upper classes, in which twice in history the latter collectively decided the fate of their nation’s leaders. The Estrada loyalists gathered there in a rare act of violating “hegemonic appearances,” to take the first bold step in expressing their long-suppressed voice and, in so doing, to experience what must have been an act of “personal authentication” (ibid., 208). It is the same thrill experienced by watching Via on the last night of *Mula sa Puso*, when she gathered her courage and challenged Selina to a fight, just the two of them, in a hidden warehouse to settle, physically, all the wrongs, the hurts, the rancor, and the acrimony of the last three years. It was worth the wait, for when Selina was finally crushed under the cargo truck her long-drawn out death allowed Maria and her companions to expunge their demons and “break through the all-englobing web of lies” (Vaclav Havel, in Scott 1990, 206). At the Edsa Shrine, on a most unsuspecting hour, the protestors slowly started to gather, each step a significant leap toward the recovery of their personal worth, to find their voice with which to speak their own personal truth, to experience, at long last, a “strong sense of recaptured human dignity” (ibid.).

Breach, in the terms of Victor Turner (1986, 34), inaugurates the social drama and constitutes the very first phase of the “processually

structured" events in which public action proceeds. It is the moment when social relations held together by norms, rules, and expectations are ruptured, when the "cultural envelope of solidary sentiments" is torn apart and its contents spilled into the public domain. Breaches signal the advent of the second phase, the crisis. They are usually swift and sudden, but they are also irreversible. In the case of marginal groups, moments of breach are not only more dramatic but also fraught with danger, because their open refusal to maintain the charade of subordination signifies that "a major normative knot is cut" (*ibid.*), and there is no turning back. A crisis must necessarily ensue. Having taken the first steps at leaving the zone of prolonged subterfuge and self-denial, what needs to follow is to run the fullest course of public revenge, to demonstrate their staunch refusal to continue the drama of hegemonic appearances. The curtain has risen; the play must begin.

For seven days and nights, Edsa Masa was played out to a packed audience that thickened each passing night. The hidden transcript came out to fully acknowledge their shared sentiments with those other subordinates who were all hidden from public view, hiding in the backstage of the theater of discourse. Public action happened with a surprising speed that caught many by surprise. Mostly, it was the occupation of the Edsa Shrine, an act Scott (*ibid.*) refers to as a "sequestration" of a protest site, claiming it as their space, appropriating the same language, the same symbols, the same techniques of the previous two uprisings, except that this time it was directed against their very authors and sponsors. Edsa Masa peaked at approximately two million according to some observers, far more than the two previous uprisings.

Akin to the Brazilian carnival, Edsa Masa was a "ritual of reversal" (Turner 1974, 137), or, in Scott's terms, "subversive inversion" in which long-held repressions became public hyperboles. "Bold stars"—aspiring actresses who break into showbiz careers via sexually suggestive roles—paraded across the Edsa stage in a fashion show of mockery. Dancers went into exhibitionist dancing to the tune of "Horny." The roof of the chapel was nearly destroyed with the weight of protestors pressing it down. The giant statue of the Virgin Mary was painted with red graffiti and the shrine was converted into a garbage dump-cum-public

toilet. When the uprising finally ended seven days later, the first sentinels were members of the Catholic Church, civil society organizations and concerned individuals who cleaned the shrine of all forms and manner of human waste. It is said that, at carnival time in Brazil, the streets of Rio de Janeiro are "choked with the cars of the middle class, fleeing the revelries of the streets, dreading the carnivalesque reversal of their hard-won bourgeois values" (Scott 1990, 138).

Hidden transcripts, however, are as creative as they are dangerous. In the hands of opportunists, the energy unleashed onto the public stage becomes subject to manipulation. Crafted in the alleyways and side roads of public discourse, the authors of these transcripts are unable to institutionalize their protest, to channel their demands into organizations and movements, and to create "critical communities" (Rochon 1998, 22) within which they can reflect, decipher, diagnose, plan, prescribe, and execute. The discursive difference among the three uprisings is that the third uprising is a portrayal of "raw" anger, while the first two is that of "cooked" indignation (Scott 1990). The sentiment of Edsa Masa can dissipate or, worse, be held captive by unscrupulous elements; the sentiment of the first two uprisings was sustained by disciplined reflection of one's anger because it had been filtered and scrutinized within these communities of dialogue and inquiry.

The hidden character of the Edsa Masa transcripts, once out into the public domain, became vulnerable to "hijacking" by those who would take the rawness and purity of this mass sentiment, and stir it in a direction that suited their narrow interests and purposes. An enlarged crowd at Edsa became the perfect site for an electoral campaign, and so the shrine was filled with aspiring politicians of every conceivable stripe and color, from municipal councilors to senatorial candidates. It was an instant *miting de avance* (or "advanced meeting," in which a large rally is held among the candidates' supporters on the eve of the elections) which provided sudden public exposure—every politician's delight.

But the worst feature of Edsa Masa was the conversion of this rage into a human battering ram, with which to storm the Malacañang Palace and overthrow the government by the gathering force of the crowd. There have been reports of crowds brought in buses and boats as well as drugs, booze, cash, and food to entice the marchers

toward the palace (Mariano 2001; Bondoc 2001). The government forces dispersed the protestors and pushed them back from the palace, but not until almost seven hours later.

A transcript that was the creative process of many years in which the private language of protest was fashioned in accordance with the sentiments of the subordinated groups now became ingredients to feed into a sinister plot to launch a power grab. From a legitimate mass uprising of which the subordinate groups were its truest authors and creators, at the hands of a factionalized, disenfranchised elite, it deteriorated into a botched plot. The elite plotters disagreed and quarreled among themselves on what course of action to take. Meanwhile, many of the protestors had gone home at the behest of their sponsors, the Iglesia ni Kristo and the El Shaddai—two religious sects whose participants at EDSA Masa contributed the warm-bodies with which to swell the uprisings—after quiet negotiations with the government. The remaining protestors numbering twenty thousand proceeded with the march to the palace in a last-ditch attempt to carry out an upheaval which, if successful, would result in the creation of a junta. Erap would return as titular head of government. The formula guaranteed the return to power of the three senatorial hopefuls whose showing at the polls was less than encouraging. By supporting a violent takeover of power, they would have achieved a short-cut to power, and eliminated all the risks of possibly losing in the forthcoming elections (Bondoc 2001). EDSA Masa began as a breach against the power of the dominant; it ended tragically, through a betrayal of those very sentiments that occasioned the breach in the first place, and then appropriated by an elite in their pursuit of immediate aims. The plot was put down in time, a press conference was called, and “the agitators washed their hands of responsibility” (Doronila 2001). Even among the elite, the Bible has proven useful for mimicking ritualized denials of culpability.

Epilogue

Maria's favorite telenovela hour is again upon the household and she squats on the floor facing the TV with her other three companions. Tonight's episode of *Pangako sa Iyo* is the launching of Ina's career as a

model. Ina is the fair-skinned heroine whose life in the slums is about to end because of the discovery of her beautiful face that will become the image for young women to emulate. The contrabida Bea Bianca, a dark-skinned beauty, is about to be dislodged as the reigning model and is threatened by this turn of events. She hurls dagger looks and insults at Ina, who patiently and quietly goes about her work.

Her earnings as a model brought them riches, and she moved her entire family out of the slums into a big and fashionable house where they all have separate bedrooms in which to sleep. Her love affair with Angelo, the son of a wealthy couple, is troublesome. Having worked there as a maid, she was perpetually looked down upon as a *hampaslupa* (literally, “beat/hit earth”; figuratively, “as low as the earth”) by the boy’s mother. But secretly, her own true mother is a wealthy businesswoman herself who invested in Ina’s education to become a fashion model, and the business rival of the mother of her boyfriend.

I probed the reasons why Maria likes to watch this particular telenovela. She said it was because of the love between Ina and Angelo, one that has to be fought for (*pag-ibig na pinaglaban*) because of the obstacles of their respective backgrounds. The discovery of her own secret status—that she was after all the daughter of a wealthy businesswoman—would be her redemption, and she need not be ashamed of her love. It has the familiar ring of fantasy and retribution.

Maria joined Edsa Masa, and then became disillusioned by its outcome. I detected the slow evolution of this latest readaptation in Maria’s hidden transcript. Edsa Masa failed to reinstall Erap to the presidency. On the fourth day of the uprising, she received word from her fellow members from the Iglesia ni Kristo to quietly go home because their head, Bishop Eraño Manalo, and President Gloria Arroyo had come to an agreement. Maria disowned all participation in the storming of the presidential palace. Since then, her life was back to the daily grind of housework and evening breaks for watching her favorite telenovela. She will suffer her defeat in front of the TV set out of which she can continue to embroider her fantasies.

Her own version of trying her luck in the “urban lottery” consists of a sudden discovery that perhaps her true mother is a wealthy

woman who will claim her and lift her out of poverty. Or perhaps that the son of a wealthy employer with a kind heart will fall in love with her and marry her. But the odds of this happening, she figures, are about equal to winning in the actual lottery, and so she constructed her final escape: a job as a domestic helper in Hong Kong or Singapore, where wages are higher and life more convenient. She will save enough money to support her parents and perhaps finish her high school education. But she is still saving enough money to buy a passport, a significant amount of P600.00 (about US\$12), while going through the cumbersome process of gathering all her necessary documents to present to an equally repressive bureaucracy. While waiting, she will spend her weekends at a nearby mall during her day off and splurge on herself. It was her own version of her "pangako to herself." Erap was gone and it did not seem to her that he would return to the presidency anytime soon. Under hospital arrest and facing a string of legal cases, Erap's pangako to people like her could no longer be fulfilled. To quote a Filipino witticism, "ang kanyang pangako ay napako" (his promise was not kept).¹²

Notes

1. Tagalog refers to the major ethnolinguistic group in Luzon, the Philippines. The national language, Filipino, is based on the Tagalog dialect.

2. The choice of this term is deliberate. Protagonists of *Edsa Uno* (February 1986) and *Edsa Dos* (January 2001) categorically refuse to label the third uprising as *Edsa Tres*. Doing so, according to them, will only serve to legitimize the "mob attack" on the presidential palace on the evening of 1 May 2001.

3. *Pabasa* which comes from the root word *basa*, meaning "read," are usually held during the Lenten season.

4. "Po" or "ho," a syllable in the Filipino language, has no literal translation in English. Its use underlines courtesy toward elders and persons worthy of respect. Household help, drivers, peons, construction workers, office employees, and even students use it when addressing authority. Using it at midsentence, sometimes twice or thrice, maintains social distance and formalizes the relationship among the conversants; the same effects are achieved by using the French terms *tu* and *vous*. When a person of authority is summoning or reprimanding a subordinate, the latter simply answers "Opo" or "Oho," translated as "Yes, master"/"Yes, mistress."

5. Probably from the Latin phrase *per omnia saecula saeculorum* which always ended the prayers of the brotherhood (cf. Iletto 1979, 75).

6. *Indio*, meant to refer to the population of India, was used mistakenly and pejoratively by the Spaniards to refer to their colonial subjects in the Philippines.

7. The pasyon version quoted in this and later extracts is from the *Pasion Bicol*. Its English translation by Teresita Erestain is a prose rendition (Tiongson 1999, 79).

8. The manner of address, in which the formality of Ma'am (short for "Madam") is used in this interview, already alerted me to the ritualized speech of those who perceive themselves in a subordinate position. I have no doubt that there was a lot in this interview that was purposely omitted, and that the relative safety which Maria experienced with me was because I told her I was writing this account in the United States, not in the Philippines. I consider her revelations as portions of her hidden transcript which she was willing to divulge, because I was outside the framework of her everyday world. I do not doubt that this transcript is edited, self-censored, and incomplete.

9. I note the deliberate choice of words in her narrative. That she chose *pumiyok* (to squeal) is illustrative of the purposeful recourse to a religious metaphor in which the chorus of frightened roosters that led to Erap's betrayal at the impeachment trial is reminiscent of the denial of Jesus by his own fearful apostles against a background of crowing roosters.

10. Here's a sample of a joke sent via texting during the impeachment trial (in PCIJ 2001):

STEWARDESS: sir r u DONE?

ERAP: no I m ERAP

STEWARDESS: no I mean r u FINISHED?

ERAP: no I m PILIPINO.

STEWARDESS: I mean r u THRU?

ERAP: wat do u tink of me FALSE?

11. Local adaptations of theater in which the term "moros" (Muslims, from the Spanish word "Moor") entered the lexicon to mean "a play."

12. *Napako* comes from its root word *pako*, meaning "nail." This play on words between *pangako* (promise) and *napako* (nailed) is not accidental. Rather, it underlies the fluid character of the Tagalog language; this playfulness once again comes from a religious subtext. The terms "pangako" and "napako" are reminiscent of the nailing of Jesus Christ on the cross as a prelude to His promise of deliverance.

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