

The Fantasy-Adventure Films
as Contemporary Epics, 2000-2007
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*This paper aims to compare the narrative form and themes of the folk epic (as typified by **Labaw Donggon**) and the contemporary fantasy-adventure film (as typified by the four **Enteng Kabisote** films). **Labaw Donggon**, an epic from the Sulod society of Central Panay, possesses all the universally decipherable elements of the epic narrative. On the other hand, the **Enteng Kabisote** films' narrative forms, themes, social contexts, and function may be generalized as applicable to most, if not all, of the other fantasy-adventure films at the turn of the century. The four films are found to be episodic like ethnoepics as they have loosely connected episodes, adventurous detours, and skirmishes forestalling a final battle. The contemporary fantasy-adventure film is also found to be cyclical with its repetitions and recreations, novel retellings, sequels and prequels, and the addition of new episodes and characters. As typified by the **Enteng Kabisote** films, the contemporary fantasy-adventure film perpetuates a narrow, even muddled, sense of nation. It has shrunk its vision into the comfort zone of the family, insecure about and unsure of the individual's and the nation's abilities to aspire for heroism and expansion. Instead of expanding the oft-repeated centrality of the family in the ethnoepic, the fantasy-adventure film has remained fixated on this theme and has neither widened, deepened, nor problematized it.*

Introduction

Written discourses about the national cinema of the Philippines have been delineated in two critical modes – film as art (art cinema) and film as social practice (popular cinema). The terms, as far as actual film artists and film texts are concerned, are not

mutually exclusive. Art cinema, canonized in the annals of cultural institutions and critical writings, is held up as a model. Popular cinema, canonized in movie magazines, press releases, and television promotions, is appraised as a yardstick of popular culture and as continuations of folklore.

It is with the latter that this paper is concerned.¹ The fundamental assumption of this critical mode is that mass audiences patronize popular films because they are configured like folk narratives typifying a people's beliefs and values. Popular films – generally genre films – are assumed to reflect *and* reinforce social trends and norms, through their networks of character relationships and narrative resolutions. It is at this point where the interests of the film critic and the folklorist intersect.

Specifically, the paper aims to make a comparative analysis of the narrative form and themes of the folk epic (as typified by *Labaw Donggon*) and the contemporary fantasy-adventure film (as typified by the *Enteng Kabisote* films), here considered as analogues of each other. Furthermore, the paper also seeks to evaluate the latter in light of the former, in terms of their respective narrative social contexts and social function.

In a relevant study on national fictions, Graeme Turner argues, based on the works of Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss, that “narrative [is] a culture's way of making sense of itself” (18). That is, narratives produced by a native culture serve a reflexive role in understanding this same culture's own signification. Echoing Levi-Strauss, Turner says that narratives probably appear in a more or less limited, universal form in *all* cultures, but that specificity is determined by a given indigenous culture's articulations – and, one may assert by extension, its articulations at a specific juncture in history. In this regard, while it is true that key film genres have been perfected and made widespread by Hollywood hegemony, they are particularized, embellished, and undermined within a particular indigenous culture and actuated by particular indigenous praxes.

In speaking of popular cinema, certain film genres emerge as dominant in a particular nation because of sociocultural and historical circumstances. In the Philippines, the dominant film genres since the 1950s up to the turn of the century have been comedy, melodrama, and action. Relatively, other genres like horror and fantasy may be considered as fluctuating or limited in their popularity.

The Rise of the Fantasy-Adventure Film in Popular Cinema (2000-2007)

Considered in this context, one would notice significant changes in the landscape of the national cinema in recent years. The turn of the century has seen the rise of popularity of the fantasy-adventure (FA) film in the Philippines, marking the genre as dominant in terms of capital investment and increase in production. In the last eight years since 2000, the film industry has produced around 25 big-budgeted fantasy films², many of which have figured on the top five of box-office receipts in the year or at the time of their release and have had a separate, probably bigger, market on video.

In 2002, the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) featured four FA films – *Ang Agimat: Anting-anting ni Lolo* (Augusto Salvador), *Ang Alamat ng Lawin* (Ronwaldo Reyes a.k.a. Fernando Poe, Jr. a.k.a. FPJ), *Spirit Warriors: The Shortcut* (Chito S. Roño), and *Lastikman* (Tony Y. Reyes). The last emerged as the second-highest grossing movie of the year (Flores, 2005: 24). Two other firsts happened in 2003: the MMFF was held nationwide, and three superhero FA films were exhibited – *Captain Barbell* (Mac C. Alejandre), *Gagamboy* (Erik Matti), and *Fantastic Man* (Tony Y. Reyes). The last was the highest-grossing film of the festival (*Fantastic Man*, 2003). Every succeeding year since then, three up to five FA films have been screened in the annual MMFF.

In 2004, *Enteng Kabisote: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend* (Tony Y. Reyes) held the record as the highest-grossing Filipino film of all time (Lauzon, Cuyugan & Batac, 2004: 181). *Enteng Kabisote 2: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend Continues* (Tony Y. Reyes), *Exodus: Tales from the Enchanted Kingdom* (Erik Matti), and *Mulawin: The Movie* (Dominic Zapata & Mark A. Reyes), emerged as the top three highest-grossing films of the 2005 MMFF, collectively earning about P240 million (Lo, 2006).

In 2006, a controversy erupted when *Enteng Kabisote 3: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend Goes On and On and On* (Tony Y. Reyes) won the Best Picture award in the MMFF, being the top grosser of the festival at the time of the awards night, eventually placing second with box-office sales of P128 million. Together with *Super Noypi* (Quark Henares) and *Zsa Zsa Zaturrnab* (Joel Lamangan), the three fantasy films of that year grossed roughly P158 million (Torre, 2007).

In 2007, *Resiklo* (Mark A. Reyes) won the Best Picture award in the MMFF, and together with the second highest-grossing film of the festival, *Enteng Kabisote 4: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Beginning of the Legend* (Tony Y. Reyes), earned more than P126 million (San Diego, 2008).

Though the actual profits in relation to the high production costs of the FA films are uneven and the gross earnings have been on the decline, the figures are significant because these are upturns in relation to the steady and dramatic decline of cinema attendance and mainstream film production as the new century opened – with 103 films produced in 2001; 94 in 2002; 80 in 2003; 55 in 2004; 50 in 2005; and only 48 in 2006³ – further underscored by the circulating belief that “the Philippine film industry is dead.”⁴ The figures are significant also because while there has been a decline in general production, there has inversely been an increase in the production of fantasy films, indicating a seven-year trend of marketable films, on which commercial producers have aimed to cash in.

In this regard, it can be reasonably accepted that trends in Hollywood have influenced this increased production of FA films in an attempt to salvage the dying industry.⁵ However, as Turner asserts of indigenous cultural narratives, it cannot be said that the local FA films are merely copies.⁶

Significantly, the popularity of recent FA films succeeds the “wake” held over the local action film or the *bakbakan*. For several decades, the *bakbakan* has been one of the most popular and productive local genres, even paving the way for its icons to hold high offices in government – most notably Joseph Estrada and son Jinggoy Estrada, Ramon Revilla and son Ramon “Bong” Revilla Jr., and Lito Lapid.

Beginning around 2002, however, action film releases have steadily dwindled to as low as four or less in a year. In 2004, only one film outing may be properly labeled “action,” *Mano Mano: Arnis, The Lost Art*. Action stars have begun to venture into romance or romantic comedy (e.g., Robin Padilla in *Till I Met You* [2006]), comedy (e.g., Bong Revilla in *Kapag Tumibok ang Puso...Not Once But Twice* [2006]), or action-comedy (e.g., FPJ in *Pakners* [2003]). Action film entries in the MMFF, like *Terrorist Hunter* (2005) starring action stars Eddie Garcia, Dennis Roldan, and Ronald Gan, and the comeback film of Lito Lapid, *Tatlong Baraha* (2006), grossed lowest in their respective festivals. Significantly, the foremost action icon in the Philippines, FPJ, died in 2004.

Scholars from various disciplines agree that the *bakbakan*-as-genre is indicative of popular cultural consciousness,⁷ connected intimately with other contemporary popular media (e.g., *komiks*, radio, TV), anchored on dramatic traditions (e.g., the *komedya*, most especially), the nineteenth century *awit* and *korido*, and, ultimately, folk literature. While Agustin Sotto begins his historical sketch of the *bakbakan* from the *komedya* (Sotto in Tiongson, 2001: 96), Salazar goes even farther and, concluding his analysis of the narratives of 14 action films, writes,

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Ekspresyon silang lahat ng diwang bayan at, samakaturwid, ang kanilang mga istorya ay naglalaman ng mga pinakamahalagang elemento ng kulturang bayan. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit popular ang pelikulang bakbakan, kasing popular ng mga epikong etniko sa mga pamayanang etnolingwistiko ngayon at lahat ng mga Pilipino noon (Salazar in Salazar, Cover & Sotto, 1989: 11).

(They are all expressions of the people's mindset, and the stories therefore contain the most important elements of the people's culture. This is the reason action films are popular, as popular as the ethnoepics of the ethnolinguistic communities of both present and the past.)

While the one-to-one correspondence that Salazar is asserting cannot be unquestionably determined without qualifications, one will not be off the mark to surmise that there is indeed an affinity between popular culture and folk culture, to say the least. Following Salazar's analogy, one must turn to the current FA films, since the bakbakan has apparently fallen out of popularity, while the epic impulse in film has not disappeared.

In terms of narrative form, the movement from bakbakan-as-epic to FA-as-epic is a returning and a flight, from the worldly to the otherworldly, from the bleak landscape of crime and injustice to the wondrous realms of magic and utopia. What remains of the bakbakan in the FA film is the excitement of combat, the exhilaration of manipulated time (acceleration and protraction), and the visceral evocation of movement. The FA film accommodates these but in a much more spectacular scale.

The FA, as the term suggests, emphasizes the visual spectacle of the fantastic in terms of cinematic spaces, costumes, and magic. Furthermore, it cues the spectator to the conventions of the adventure narrative by following the hero(es), either on a quest into otherworlds, unknown lands, faraway exotic places, or on struggles in a familiar setting transformed into an adventure

space. The spectator presumably recognizes the elements of the journey, the vanquishing of villains, and the overcoming of obstacles with thrilling narrow escapes as indicative of adventure.

If indeed there is a demonstrable continuity between the folk epic and the FA film of the new century, as entertainment and locus of folk values, in spite or because of the intervening rise and decline of the *bakbakan*, then it would be instructive to draw out the salient characteristics and social function of the ethnoepic and the FA film.

Ethnoepics: The Example of *Labaw Donggon*

Returning once again to Turner's arguments along the lines of Propp and Levi-Strauss, one may regard the folk epic (and the epic impulse) found in innumerable tribes across cultures and across history as universal; while in its specificity, each epic narrative can be perceived as a reflection of an indigenous culture.

Philippine ethnoepics, thus regarded, exhibit patterns that may be found in the epics of other non-Filipino cultures, like the strange genesis of the hero; his incredible fighting prowess; his magical weapons; his otherworldly travels, high and low; and his death and resurrection (Meñez, 1996: 15). However, as E. Arsenio Manuel contends, Philippine ethnoepics are native and of pre-Spanish vintage, and its heroes are local and are neither derived nor identifiable from contaminating cultures (62); hence, there is specificity in their narrative themes, contexts, and function.

The example of *Labaw Donggon*, an epic from the Sulod society of Central Panay,⁸ may be taken here as representative of the ethnoepics, for a number of practical and instructive reasons. *Labaw Donggon* possesses all of the universally decipherable elements of the epic narrative but is, at the same time, unmistakably indigenous. It is also both an epic of romance and of valor, and both religious and social in nature. Finally, it is also conventionally

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considered as being part of a larger epic, highlighting the nature of an epic cycle.

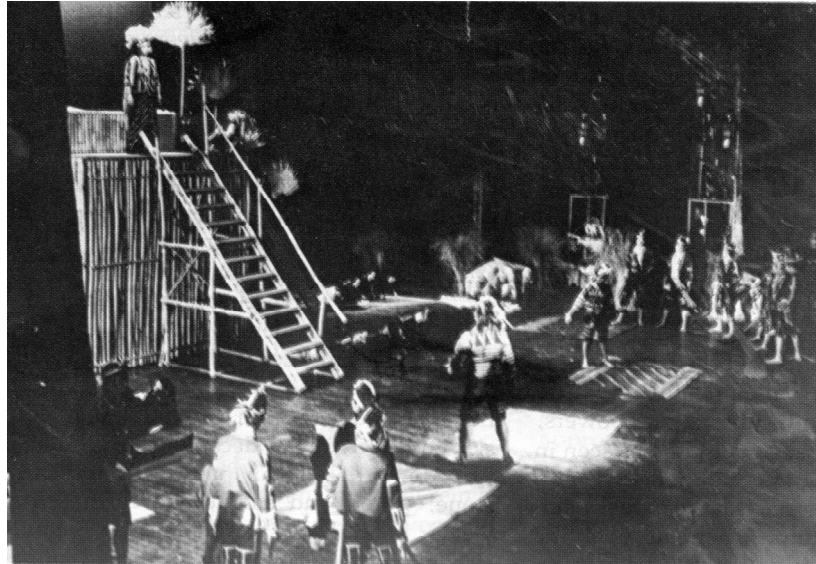
Synopsis

Labaw Donggon is the eldest son of Buyung Paubari and Abyang Alunsina. The epic begins with Labaw Donggon's birth, miraculous growth, and immediate journeying to the mouth of Handog, by the river Halawud, to ask for the hand of the beautiful well-kept maiden (*binukot*), Abyang Ginbitinan. Labaw Donggon wins the hand of Abyang Ginbitinan, by pleasing the maiden's father and killing a great monster, as part of the young man's dowry.⁹

As Labaw Donggon travels home with his new bride, they meet a group of young men who are on their way to Tarambang Burok to win the hand of Abyang Doronoon, whose beauty is legendary; she is the sister of Sumpoy, the lord of the underworld. The moment they arrive home, Labaw Donggon embarks on a quest to win the hand of Abyang Doronoon. Before he reaches his destination, he combats a giant ridge-guardian with a hundred hands. The adversary is no match against Labaw Donggon's fighting prowess, so the giant allows the hero to pass. Labaw Donggon wins the hand of Abyang Doronoon.

Before long, he journeys again using his magical boat to woo Malitong Yawa Sinagmaling Diwata, the young bride of Buyung Saragnayan, lord of darkness. Buyung Saragnayan challenges Labaw Donggon to a duel. The two have a protracted fight, but Labaw Donggon could not surpass the powers of Buyung Saragnayan's amulet; the hero is imprisoned under his opponent's house.

Meanwhile, Abyang Ginbitinan and Abyang Doronoon give birth to their own sons, Asu Mangga and Baranugun respectively. The two sons undergo a miraculous growth and immediately set out to rescue their father. They meet along the way and join forces.



Centro Escolar University produced in 1973 **Hinilawod** which is based on the epic **Labaw Donggon**. (CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, Volume IX, 1994)

The neighbors of Buyung Saragnayan come to his aid against Labaw Donggon's sons. Abyang Alunsina, mother of Labaw Donggon, reveals to her grandchildren that the strength of Buyung Saragnayan resides in the heart of a wild boar. This knowledge enables the two to triumph. However, Labaw Donggon goes into hiding out of shame.

Meanwhile, hearing of Labaw Donggon's defeat, his brothers, Humadapnon and Dumaladap, search for their lost brother. They find him and bring him back home to his wives. Labaw Donggon's wives weep, because their husband has lost his sense of hearing and his firmness of mind but they believe that their husband deserves his defeat for his covetousness. The wives are jealous of Malitong Yawa Sinagmaling Diwata, but Labaw Donggon assures them that he will treat them equally. The two wives perform a ritual that hastens their husband's convalescence.

Narrative Form and Social Context of Performance

Labaw Donggon combines the narrative and the dramatic in poetry. As an ethnoepic, it is characterized by “a certain seriousness” (Manuel, 1963: 69) and is “less humorous, loftier...than the folk tale” (Lumbera, Chua & Lucero in Tiongson, 1994: 29). This seriousness is partly derived from its use of poetic language and its length.

On the one hand, the poetic language of *Labaw Donggon* and its characteristic chanting are rooted in the religion and rituals of the society in which it is chanted (Jocano, 1965: 20-21, 42; 1968: 88). Its most striking quality is its use of repetition, rhyme, and rhythm (Jocano, 1965: 21). The repetition of words or whole lines typically occurs in the most thrilling scenes, such as in courtship or the climax of the story, underscoring repetition as a technique for keeping listeners excited. *Labaw Donggon* is also visual. There are scenes of elaborate detail like ritual preparations before battles. The battle scenes themselves are prolonged and fantastic. The profuse use of metaphors and similes, along with meaningful pauses, regulate the imagery and movement of the poem (Jocano, 1965: 23).

On the other hand, *Labaw Donggon* is also very long taking several evenings to finish its chanting (Magos, 1996: 127). It is episodic, as can be observed in the synopsis; portions of the epic may be lifted and appropriated for some social or religious ceremony.

Furthermore, not only is *Labaw Donggon* episodic, which is a characteristic of most ethnoepics, but it is also conventionally regarded as only one *cycle* of a longer and more coherent epic called *Hinilawod* (Jocano, 1965: 24).¹⁰ Being oral literature, a set of events or episodes, or details and characters thereof, is added to an epic in some instances of performance (Castro, et al., 1983: 4), eventually forming distinct cycles. The *Hinilawod*, in this sense, is a macroepic, consisting of microepics with differing structures (Manuel, 1964: 60).

Being oral literature also, the poetic enunciation of this lengthy epic is focused more on the context of performance than on any fixed structure; the manner of chanting changes as soon as the context of the narration changes (Jocano, 1965: 20, 22). *Labaw Donggon* is chanted in various occasions, such as wedding rites and feasts, wakes, harvest time, rituals of magic and religion, or even in informal gatherings of family and neighbors after meals or before sleeping (Jocano, 1965: 19-21; Magos, 1996: 127-128). The aesthetic of *Labaw Donggon*, therefore, lies in its mixing of the secular and the sacred, alternating in consideration of the context of individual performance and the reactions of listeners (Jocano, 1965: 22-23).

Jocano recounts that when the *babaylan* chants *Labaw Donggon*, he takes liberties in omitting portions of the narrative when he notices that the listeners are no longer enthralled (Jocano, 1965: 23). Jocano observes that “the audience reacts to portions of the epic which reflect the familiar behavior or patterns or certain observable features of their society” (e.g., philandering; references to the *aswang*) (24).

Social Functions and Themes of the Narrative

The ethnoepics, as illustrated in the foregoing discussion of *Labaw Donggon*'s synopsis, structure, and setting, are 1) always permeated with the presence of the marvelous and the fantastic, and portrays otherworldly deeds, extraordinary display of strength and endurance, and the active presence of supernatural beings; 2) filled with magnified and protracted combat between brave and strong warriors; and 3) generally meant to be performed before a watching audience in a specific social setting (Castro, et al., 1983: 3; Manuel, 1963; 3, 50-51). “[These] characteristics,” Jovita Ventura Castro writes, “confirm a theory that the epics were *used for entertainment* in a society that had neither radio nor television

nor film superheroes like Superman, Wonder Woman, or James Bond” (Castro, et al., 1983: 4; italics added).

However, beyond being mere entertainment, the ethnoepics are reflective of the society from where they originate, and *serve as vehicles for preserving and passing on tribal wisdom and specific customs* (Manuel, 1963: 53-57; Castro, et al., 1983: 4). Jocano explains how the *Hinilawod* embodies the Sulod society’s worldview; tells its origins; contains ceremonial prayers; provides mythical characters for religious, political, and social norms; defines kinship structure; expresses feelings; and vouchsafes empirical judgments (Manuel, 1963: 56). In other words, as Manuel writes, “the epics find their justification in the deep-seated life-ways and values of the people” (53).

The Centrality of the Family

A significant portion of the narrative of *Labaw Donggon* deals with marriage. Finding a mate and marrying is the primary preoccupation of Labaw Donggon and the main animating conflict of the plot. The whole narrative centers on this institution, and the love and affection that is and should be present in it. Labaw Donggon does not take any action without consulting with his wives, and it is his wives’ acceptance of him that restores him to health and the extended family social unit into equilibrium.

Aside from the relationship between husband and wife, the relationship between generations, between parents and children, is also a key theme in *Labaw Donggon*. In the narrative, it is Labaw Donggon who courts his wives, but it is he and his parents who ask for the woman’s hand. Moreover, parents are expected to fulfill their duties toward their children and vice versa, as exhibited in the intervention of Labaw Donggon’s mother, and the attempt of Labaw Donggon’s two children who are half-brothers to save him.

A strong sibling relationship is also portrayed as ideal. Siblings act as a unit in an endeavor, as evidenced by the setting

out of Humadapnon and Dumaladap to avenge the name of their brother Labaw Donggon when he was defeated. It is Humadapnon who convinces his brother's two wives to accept Labaw Donggon's third wife and to perform the ritual to resuscitate Labaw Donggon.

Separate Tribes and Supernatural Worlds

The ethnoepics depict the world as separate communities, and one sees in them tribal heroes and families, marrying or battling people from other such separate communities. When Buyung Saragnayan is challenged by Labaw Donggon and faced with impending danger, he calls upon the members of the community to help him. At once the young men from all over the Land of the Dawning Sun gather and rally on his behalf. In the face of crisis, the whole community acts as a unit.

Although narrow in the sense of referring to separate and defined communities, the narrative setting of *Labaw Donggon* is enlarged by otherworldly journeys. The hero woos his first wife in Handog, the earthworld; the second wife in the underworld; and the third wife, a diwata, "in a place where the brilliant light of the sun starts," or in the eastern sky. In this sense, the tribe of Labaw Donggon is expanded vastly.

A further enlargement of narrative setting happens, when supernatural forces take interest in the action and intervene in the affairs of the characters. The mother of Labaw Donggon, a diwata, actively takes part in the action of the epic and tells the sons of Labaw Donggon how to defeat the adversary. This intervention determines the outcome of the plot. It is implied that knowledge that comes supernaturally is indispensable in overcoming problems, since this event of intervention occurs at the crucial and climactic portion of the narrative. The wisdom conveyed is that the natural lives of people are impossible to divorce from their supernatural lives; life has two realms and the wise, prosperous, and peaceful life is in the balance of these two realms (Jocano, 1965: 42; Campos, 1990: 232).

The Audacious Hero

The epic heroes – Labaw Donggon, his brothers, his sons, and the heroes of other ethnoepics – are strong and brave, of great fighting prowess, and are possessed of an adventurous spirit, great determination, and endurance (Eugenio, 2001: xvii-xviii). They are endowed with supernatural powers and possess magic objects and spirit friends (xxi). Labaw Donggon is of such striking appearance that his mere presence produces a strong impact on his opponent Buyung Saragnayan. The latter is impressed at the sight of him and says, “He looks like a god; he appears like a deity, a deity from the sky” (xviii).

Such a characterization of the hero is understandable if one remembers the social function of the epic, that the hero is at the center of an embodied worldview, and his quests, downfalls, and victories are projections of the tribal society’s collective desires, fears, and value-system. Understood in this way, the hero’s actions and decisions are underscored by the network of his relationships (i.e., hero as husband, son, brother, enemy) and his community.

For instance, while polygamy is allowed in the tribal society from which *Labaw Donggon* originates, the narrative implies that covetousness and killing are not permitted by this same society. The result of this covetousness is Labaw Donggon’s humiliating defeat in the hands of Buyung Saragnayan. Labaw Donggon’s defeat and misery also result from his refusal to heed not only the advice of his wives, but also of his parents. The turn of events validate parental authority and provide cues for kinship behavior.

**The Fantasy-Adventure as Contemporary Epic:
The Example of *Enteng Kabisote***

In what follows, the salient characteristics of FA films – here regarded as contemporary epics – are discussed in relation to their convergence and divergence with the ethnoepics. Such an analysis,

echoing Turner, attempts to determine a popular narrative form's signification of popular culture *at present*, and at the same time, this signification's rootedness *and* departure in folk narrative form and culture.

The example of *Enteng Kabisote (EK)*, a series of four blockbuster FA films, is here taken as representative of the FA films of recent years. The *EK* series – whose producers, filmmakers, and stars have also made the financially successful *Fantastic Man* and *Lastikman* – have been the most popular FA films of late, exhibiting explicit imitations and profound differences from the Hollywood model. Taken together, the films' narrative form, themes, and social context and function may be generalized as applicable to most, if not all, of the other FA films at the turn of the century, and may thus be most illuminating.

Synopses

Enteng Kabisote: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend (EK 1)

Enteng Kabisote is a *tagalupa* (mere earthling) married to Faye, a fairy and the only daughter of Ina Magenta, Queen of Engkantasya, the kingdom of fairies. They have two kids, Aiza (adopted) and Benok. The family is a picture of harmony.

Amidst the peace, Satana, the Queen of *Kadiliman* (Darkness), covets the power of Ina Magenta and longs to rule the world. She wreaks havoc on earth by bidding her minions to poison the drinking water of humans, but the wards of Engkantasya foil the attempt. Failing at this, she sends the horse Itim (literally, black) to spy on and break the Kabisote family. The family, however, shows goodness to Itim, and, having felt love for the first time, the horse defects from Satana.

Satana then transforms herself into a beautiful girl to seduce Benok. Benok falls for her, and the boy begins to disrespect his sister and father. Just when Satana is about to possess Benok, Enteng thwarts her. Enteng realizes that the disrespect that he

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shows his mother-in-law, Ina Magenta, may have also influenced Benok. Father and son both admit their mistakes.

Meanwhile, Satana kidnaps Faye and demands that Ina Magenta cedes her powers to her. Enteng, the ever-loving husband, begs Ina Magenta to send him to the other realm to save his wife. Ina Magenta agrees and equips the *tagalupa*, together with Benok and Itim (now transformed into a white, talking and flying horse) to battle Satana. After numerous adventures and comic fights, the father-and-son team rescues Faye. The family celebrates in Engkantasya.



Poster of **Enteng Kabisote: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend**. Retrieved February 8, 2009 from <http://www.kabayancentral.com/video/octoarts/octekokfkl.jpg>

Enteng Kabisote 2: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend Continues (EK 2)

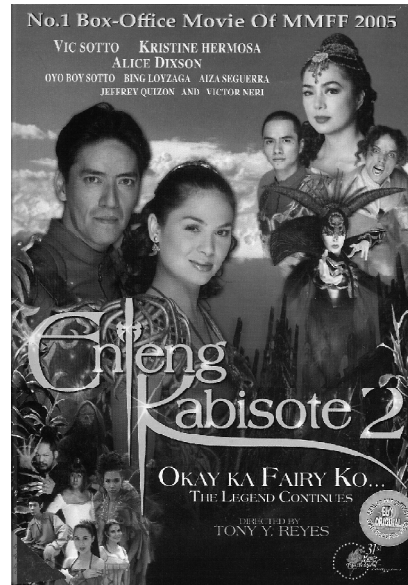
Engkantasya and the Kabisote household welcome Ada, Enteng and Faye's new daughter (hatched from an egg). Amidst the happiness, *Kadiliman* is brooding. Satana is reborn, through the blood of human traitors, and shakes up Engkantasya, the sea world, and the forests.

Ina Magenta is debilitated. Faye is now responsible for finding three missing amulets in order to save Engkantasya.

With the help of Alyssa (Ada's godmother) and her mother Ina Azul, sister of Ina Magenta and Queen of Engkantasya Azul (sea); Verdana/Jose, battered husband and sidekick of Enteng now

turned female ogre; Ina Verde, another sister of Ina Magenta and Queen of Engkantasya Verde (forest); Enteng and his family travel through Satana's kingdom; battle dragons, sea creatures, and the sword-wielding minions of Satana; and recover the amulets.

Satana is revealed to be Amorillo, the prodigal sister of the queens of Engkantasya. Ina Azul and Ina Verde, who had conflicts rooted in envy, are reconciled. Enteng intervenes and provides the final blow against Satana. In the world of humans, Jose is also reconciled with his wife. The family celebrates in Engkantasya.



Poster of *Enteng Kabisote 2: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend Continues*. Retrieved February 8, 2009 from http://www.filipino-music.com/DVD_Enteng%20Kabisote%202.jpg

*Enteng Kabisote 3:
Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...
The Legend Goes On and On and On (EK 3)*

Enteng's business is thriving because he has begun to swindle others. He has also begun flirting with other women. Aiza drifts away from Enteng because he has become too selfish to listen to her. She runs away. Faye becomes unhappy with the changes in Enteng's character and sends him away.

Enteng becomes remorseful but before he could return home, he (with Jose) is swallowed by the ground and brought into another realm. Enteng escapes incredible dangers, monstrous creatures, and cannibals. In the process, he fulfills a messianic prophecy of heroism by saving a whole tribe from its enemies in this otherworldly realm.

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Meanwhile, Ina Magenta faces a cosmetic disaster (her face becomes masculine) because of her vanity, and this has affected Engkantasya and the powers of all fairies.

Satana sees all these conflicts as the opportunity for revenge and to gain power. She sends a shape-shifting cowardly alien-lizard to the Kabisote household to pose as Enteng. Enteng (with Jose) is able to return home and defeats the lizard. Enteng's family and Ina Magenta finally face Satana and her minions. Good triumphs over evil. The family celebrates in Engkantasya.



Poster of *Enteng Kabisote 3: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Legend Goes On and On and On*.

Retrieved February 8, 2009 from <http://www.kabayancentral.com/video/star/stek3okfktlgo.jpg>

Enteng Kabisote 4: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Beginning of the Legend (EK 4)

A magical Mirror of Time transports Enteng and Ada to the Spanish colonial times. Enteng saves Rizal from supernatural beings who are trying to kill him because these beings hate "Filipino heroes". Enteng and Ada are chased by Spaniards and are forced to flee into the present time through the Mirror. Unknown to them, evil enters the human world through the same Mirror as well.

The Kabisote family – minus Aiza who has run away and Benok who is now an undercover policeman battling syndicates – takes a trip to the beach where an old man visits Faye. The old man happens to be her old fairy lover-turned-evil, Prinsipe Inok.

Afterwards, Inok meets Dark Angel. They make a deal: Dark Angel is to help Inok win back Clorotheam (Faye's fairy name), and Inok is to surrender his power to Dark Angel. *Aswangs* then attack the Kabisotes on the beach. Enteng defeats them with a magical whip given by Faye.

The Kabisotes return to Manila. Enteng is kidnapped by the minions of Dark Angel and Inok, brainwashed, and pawned into crime. Enteng is saved by Benok, but Enteng cannot remember anything. Ina Magenta brings Enteng to the Time Lord, who shows Enteng images of his bachelor days and how he had met, fallen in love with, and married Clorotheam/Faye. Enteng recovers his memory; while Inok, despondent as he realizes the greatness of Clorotheam's love for the tagalupa, disappears.

Enteng, Benok, and the police now face Dark Angel and his horde (crooks-turned-drones). The Kabisotes triumph. At narrative's end, Aiza comes home, and the family celebrates beneath the statue of Rizal at Luneta Park.



Poster of **Enteng Kabisote 4: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko...The Beginning of the Legend**. Retrieved February 8, 2009 from <http://i30.tinypic.com/2hd9kio.jpg>

Narrative Form and Social Context of Production

The *EK* films, as in most contemporary FA films, were exhibited at the annual MMFF, held from Christmas Day to the first week of

January when people are generally on holiday vacation and have 13th month pays or bonuses. In the year *EK 1* was released, the MMFF was already being held simultaneously in all the cinemas of the Philippines. In the duration of the festival, only Filipino films selected for competition/exhibition by the MMFF committee/jurors are shown; no foreign films may be shown across the country. Given the nature of the MMFF, major mainstream film production outfits have tended to capitalize on big-budgeted and/or General Patronage (i.e., wholesome, family-oriented) films, with an eye on return on investment, profit, and prestige.

Produced in such a context, *EK* is decidedly commercial and popular. Like most other recent FA films, *EK* exploits the popularity of generic comedy as denoted by its tone, premise, and featured stars who are also mainstays of the longest-running noontime comedy show *Eat Bulaga!* – Michael V., Jose Manalo, Allan K., Ruby Rodriguez, Joey De Leon, Tito Sotto, and Vic Sotto. This is a significant departure from the aforementioned serious tone of the epic.

The comedic tone of the films is also occasioned by the films' self-consciousness about the fantastic (e.g., magic spells go wrong; ridiculous characters and circumstances encountered in otherworlds), and manifested in the tongue-in-cheek treatment of popular generic conventions and images (e.g., playful titles; wisecracks about elaborate costumes, magical tools, and stock characters, like the princess or the aswang; verbal references to pop culture like *Marimar*), calling attention to the artificiality of the film imagery and premise.

For instance, *EK* draws heavily and self-reflexively on the popular images of Hollywood sci-fi and fantasy films. *EK 1* refers to *Blade*'s sleek vampires; *EK 2* to *Shrek*'s Princess Fiona; *EK 3* to *Star Wars*' light sabers, laser guns, and the Ewoks; and *EK 4* to the flying machine of Green Goblin in *Spiderman*; among others. Generally, the films also refer to *The Matrix* trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and the *Harry Potter* series. Hollywood images

are, however, lifted not for characterization and plot development but only as formally excessive references to the popular.

EK, as in other FA films, also exploits the generic conventions of the *bakbakan*. Apart from the climactic and comedic battles near the end of the films, *EK* presents “serious” action sequences not directly related to the plot and not featuring Vic Sotto.¹¹ These action sequences are reminiscent of the fist- and gun-fights of the *bakbakan* films, laced with Hollywood-styled spectacle.

The *EK* films, like the ethnoepics, are episodic. The ethnoepic narratives are not always coherent in the sense that one set of events (e.g., birth, courtship, combat, death, or resurrection) does not necessarily result from or in another, in a cause-and-effect sequence. The FA films, as illustrated by *EK*, share this form: episodes loosely connected and not always related by cause-and-effect; adventurous detours; and skirmishes forestalling a final battle.

Furthermore, like the ethnoepics, the contemporary FA film is also cyclical. For instance, because of the enormous commercial success of *EK*, each film always ends with the possibility, if not the overt mention, of a sequel. Moreover, even before the *EK* series was made between 2004 and 2007, Enteng Kabisote already existed as a character in the long-running TV sitcom, *Okay Ka, Fairy Ko!*, which began in 1987; the TV sitcom has also had two box office hit movie spin-offs in the early 1990s. In fact, *EK 4* harks back to the beginning of the story, to characters/stars now gone (i.e., Bayani Casimiro, Charito Solis), to actual scenes from the TV series, in order to refresh Enteng’s and, by extension, the viewer’s memories of the origins of the story. Taken together, these repetitions and recreations, novel retellings, sequels and prequels, and the addition of new episodes and characters, constitute cycles.

Social Functions and Themes of the Narrative

While the ethnoepic and the contemporary FA film take for granted the fantastic and the supernatural, they differ in reason and degrees. Both narratives are populated with folkloric creatures, elementals, magic objects, spirit friends, and the like. However, the ethnoepics are founded in an actual, unwavering, and religious belief in them (Jocano, 1965: 18), while the contemporary FA contains them primarily as necessary formal elements of the fantasy genre.¹²

While the ethnoepic and the FA film both function as entertainment in their respective social contexts, the latter is completely devoid of any religious, sacred, or literal ritual function and is thoroughly motivated by commercial reasons. As entertainment, both draw on the thrilling qualities of the fantastic and the spectacle of combat and of otherworlds. The contemporary FA film, however, is not necessarily accepted as valid metaphysical and empirical explanations of the world anymore, even if the narratives of widely popular films, like *EK*, reaffirm established values, about kinship behavior for example, validated by the people's patronage of the films. In other words, while key social values are maintained, the truth-values about the natural and supernatural worlds supposedly contained in epics are no longer maintained.

The Centrality of the Family

A remarkable thematic convergence between the ethnoepic and the FA film is their stress on the centrality of the family, on the conviction that the family is the most important social unit which wields a perfect influence on every aspect of the characters' lives. In *EK*, the character motivations of heroes and villains, the configuration of their heroics and villainy, such as desire for revenge or power, the propensity for quests, or even their selfishness and nobility, are almost always family-related. Saving his spouse's or

child's life is always a motivation for Enteng to embark on a perilous quest or to engage in battle.

In the whole *EK* series, the premise of the narratives hinge on familial responsibility and the necessity of harmony and cooperation between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between siblings. In *EK 1*, the primary motivation for the heroic quest is to save Faye, Enteng's wife, and in the process to save Engkantasya and the world. In *EK 2*, the equality-in-battle between Enteng and Faye is the key to their winning in combat, constantly saving each other from certain peril. And in *EK 4*, the narrative is anchored on the need to remember the undying love that has sprung between a fairy princess and a mere earthling.

In each film, Enteng and his mother-in-law Ina Magenta always come through for each other, for the sake of the family and, consequently, the world; for as long as there is tension between them, the salvation of the Kabisote family and the world are always at risk. Enteng's conflicts with his children Benok (*EK 1*) and Aiza (*EK 3*) also do not only endanger the family, but also make the whole race susceptible to evil.

In *EK 2*, it is revealed that Satana is Amorillo, the sister of the rulers of the three kingdoms of Engkantasya: Ina Magenta, Ina Azul, and Ina Verde. Amorillo defects, because she wants all of the kingdoms for herself. The three sisters cooperate and set aside conflicts between them to try to bring Amorillo back into the fold; and, with her refusal, to combine their powers to destroy her.

The Filipino family, in both the ethnoepic and the FA film, acts reciprocally and cooperatively during crises as well as celebrations. The role of the family in the survival of the race is illustrated in the FA film, where family solidarity triumphs over the threat of outside, almost invincible, forces. And as soon as harmony in the home is regained, the family celebrates the victory together.

*Ambivalent Settings, Incompatible Motivations,
and Flight to Otherworlds*

The narrative setting of the ethnoepic is narrow, precisely because of its provenance. Its listeners, while transported into otherworlds, do not mistake the narrative to be referring to the “nation,” which is absent as a geopolitical concept. In this light, one will notice the ambivalent presentation of narrative setting in the FA film.

In *EK*, the world is divided into *lupa* (earth), Engkantasya with its constituent Magenta Kingdom (heavens), Azul Kingdom (seas), and Verde Kingdom (forests), and other unnamed and geographically undefined realms. The battle between good and evil never literally happens *for* the real world of present time. The spectator is never presented with a worldly, literal space by which to understand the meaning of defeat or victory.

The point, it seems on the surface, is not the preservation and passing on of customs or the expansion of any knowable community, but the depiction of a symbolic order in two-dimensional abstraction. Whereas a “villain” (if one can properly label him thus) like Buyung Saragnayan in *Labaw Donggon* has precise motivations for antagonizing the hero, the villain in *EK*, Satana, does not desire the domination of any territory or the possession of any person *per se*, but is instead prompted by greed for power or a fundamental evil. Satana demands that her rival fairies, especially Ina Magenta, turn over all power and dominion to her; and her reason, simply, is to wreak havoc on the world (“*upang maghasik ng lagim sa mundo*”).

But alongside the ambivalent narrative settings and two-dimensional character motivations, *EK*, like many FA films and unlike the ethnoepics, allude to an idea of “nation.” This repeated allusion to an undefined nation, impressed in the FA films’ premise, dialogue, or theme songs, results in an incompatibility with the mono-mythic posturing of the narratives.

The *EK* films presume that Enteng sacrifices and wages battles for his family and, *therefore* (even without any visual

signification), the nation. In the conclusion of *EK 3*, for instance, after waging the perennial battle between good and evil in a magical world, faraway from earth, the Queen of Engkantasya thanks the tagalupa for his help and praises his fortitude, his overcoming of temptations, and, significantly, *his fighting in the name of justice for and faithfulness, to the nation*. The reference to the nation, of course, is totally baseless.

A notable, but quite problematic, exception is *EK 4*. Here, the idea of the nation is visually signified. Enteng is magically brought to Spanish colonial times. He saves Rizal from supernatural beings, who are forcing Rizal to recant his beliefs, because they hate Filipino heroes (*“ayaw nila ang mga bayaning Pilipino”*). Enteng reveals to Rizal that while the latter’s life was spared from these evil beings, Rizal will still be executed and later become a national hero. Rizal asks if his death for the nation will not be for nothing, but Enteng is chased by the Spaniards before he could respond.

The evil beings, it is revealed, are minions of Dark Angel, the chief hater of Filipino heroes and of noble men. Unlike Satana, whose motivation is an abstraction, Dark Angel’s goal in the beginning seems tangible: strip Rizal, literally, of his heroism – a bold inflection toward the literal and specific. But by the middle of the film, Dark Angel’s pronouncements become mere platitudes, for his goal is as much an abstraction as Satana’s. He terrorizes and brainwashes men into becoming hero-haters, so as to establish himself as a *Bayani ng Kasamaan* (Evil Hero). For what reason, who he is, and where he comes from are also abstractions.

After the Kabisotes defeat Dark Angel, the whole family offers a flower at the Rizal Shrine, and for the first time, the Kabisote family celebrates not in the otherworld of Engkantasya, but in Luneta. The ideas of nation and patriotism are dealt with in the beginning and the end, but they are subordinated in the main plot to the themes of domestic love and sentimental romance. The “nation” that the film introduces in the plot is not taken up in the second act. Rizal, it turns out, is once again – as in the familiar

images lifted from Hollywood – a mere formal reference to the popular.

Another notable similarity between the epic and the contemporary FA films' constitution of narrative setting is the recurring motif of travel and flight, conquests and explorations, and encounters with magical creatures abroad, suggesting a love for enterprise and novelty.

Travel and flight in the ethnoepics bespeak the peoples' experience of mobility and migration. For example, strangely enough, a people who live in the mountains chant the *Hinilawod* epic (literally sound ["hini"] of the sea ["lawod"]), a story of a people who live by the sea. Jocano believes that these mountain folks "own" *Hinilawod*, because they used to live by the sea, but were forced, through a series of migrations, upward (Jocano, 1968: 27; Magos, 1996: 121, 129).

The viewers of contemporary FA films have also experienced or are affected by a more widespread migration farther. The trajectory from the bakbakan's down-to-earth spaces to the FA films' faraway, exotic spaces also parallels the nation's situation in a globalizing, modernizing world. The FA film embodies – contrary to the ethnoepics' confident portrayal of expansion – the people's anxiety in coming to terms with a world that is virtually becoming smaller and smaller, but whose horizon is getting too wide for comfort. The trajectory connotes that battles can no longer be fought convincingly in some narrow and localized landscape, but must be waged in some otherworld, far enough to be unreal but near enough to be Filipino, difficult but bridgeable. Witnessing the spectacle of battles fought in unfamiliar worlds gives the illusion of fighting and triumphing over foes in great frontiers, which Filipinos, through the films, have already conquered.

The Unlikely Clown as Hero

The epic heroes are striking figures, always seeking adventures or insurmountable obstacles. In their exploits, they prove themselves

skillful and strong warriors, persevering, brave, and marked by a deep sense of affection for family and a keen sense of duty to the clan. In this aspect is the *bakbakan* most undeniably like a modern epic, for its heroes always possess some or all of these desirable qualities.

On the other hand, the contemporary FA film has shifted significantly away from the model of the ethnoepic and the *bakbakan* in its portrayal of heroes. While the FA heroes are also family-centered, dutiful, and persevering, many are reluctant, unworthy, weak, and/or stupid.¹³

The unlikely clown as hero, in a comedic narrative of epic proportions, is a very important characteristic of many contemporary FA films. Enteng Kabisote, as his name suggests, is a prime example of this hero-type: “Enteng” sounds like *tingting* (a thin stick) and is suggestive of the hero’s skinny frame; “Kabisote” means mentally dull. He is gangly and blundering; impulsive; at times cowardly, selfish, and guilty of hubris; unworthy and flawed (*EK 3*); susceptible to others’ control (*EK 4*); always weaker than his opponents and even his wife, possessing no special powers; and a mere earthling. His weaknesses and faults, not to mention his sharp tongue, are the narrative’s source of laughs.

These qualities of the underdog, the clown, feed the spectators’ hunger for entertainment, while alerting them simultaneously of the improbabilities of ordinary folks’ heroic potentials and their desire to realize this improbability.

Conclusion

Tribal fealties often persist regardless of extending national borders, and ethnoepics provide graphic characterizations of cultural distinctions that continue to exist in the archipelago. Folklorists such as Manuel and Jocano champion the studying of folklore and its specific ethnolinguistic communities in order to strengthen and enrich the idea of the nation (Santos, 1993: 57). The growth of

research interest and rediscovery of the ethnoepics have served both to highlight the precolonial pride, sense of identity, and local histories of specific communities; and to discursively unite these communities in the forging of a Filipino nation.

The range of social functions of the ethnoepic is from tribal preservation and perpetuation to expansion and permanence. The trajectory of the study of the ethnoepics is from the recognition of ethnolinguistic communities to the forging of the Filipino nation. In this context, the contemporary FA film, as typified here by the *EK* series, has *not* therefore developed much, if at all, from the ethnoepic. Regarded as analogues of each other, the FA appears to be a digression in certain respects.

On the one hand, surveying the points of convergence between the ethnoepic and the FA film (i.e., the epic as folk/popular entertainment; the folk/popular narrative as episodic and cyclical; the centrality of the family as theme) proves illuminating in delineating *both* the culture's signification of itself and what it values, in the form of popular narratives, *and* its process of signification. On the other hand, surveying the points of divergence between the ethnoepic and the FA film (i.e., the epic as entertainment *and* religion vs. as commercial entertainment *only*; serious vs. comedic; allusions to the tribe vs. allusions to the nation; concrete plot and character motivations vs. abstract/incompatible plot and character motivations; otherworlds as expansion vs. otherworlds as escape; heroics of virtues vs. heroics of faults) emphasizes the "underdevelopment" of contemporary FA film narrative.

Instead of delving deeper into narratives that highlight the compatibilities between the epic impulse and realism, as some well-made action or bakbakan films have already tried to do, or instead of traversing the complex narrative possibilities of the fantastic, the sacred, or the mono-mythic, which are at the root of the epic, the contemporary popular epic film has played safe. In order precisely to remain popular and commercially viable, it has capitalized on the popular narrative for its accessibility and not

for its profound universality or its artistic possibilities. Contrived thus, the popular epic narrative, at this juncture in Philippine film history, is revealed to be not only escapist in the context of a globalizing world, but inane, being devoid of clear motivations.

Ironically, the contemporary FA film, now simultaneously presented nationwide instead of performed in only one family's home at a time, still perpetuates a narrow, even muddled, sense of nation (notwithstanding – or especially because of – its insistence on using the nation as trope). No real nation is seen for the families. From the lofty vision of heroic and expanding tribes in the ethnoepic narrative, the FA film has shrunk its vision into the comfort zone of the home, insecure about and unsure of the Filipino's and the nation's possibilities of heroism and expansion. Instead of a natural outgrowth from the already established centrality of the family in the ethnoepic, the FA film has closed in on the theme and has neither widened, deepened, nor problematized it.

The spectator watches and laughs at the unlikely FA hero engaging in impossible battles, ultimately, against the extinction of one family. On the one hand, the narrative is wishful thinking, an escape, an impossibility entertained. On the other hand, it is an expression of a wish for better times for the family, if only for two hours once a year, but never a wish for an epic golden age for the nation. Mainstream cinema, with popular genre films, has the most real potential to literally reach the people of the nation. The epic, as an exalted narrative form, has the potential to spark a collective response to such a lofty idea as sacrifice for the nation. However, the FA film and its spectators have settled for turning the epic impulse into bite-size narratives, soft, sugar-coated, easy to chew, and easy to swallow.

Notes

- ¹ For a discursive study of the former mode of criticism, see Campos, P. (2006, July-December). Looming over the nation, uneasy with the folks. *Humanities Diliman* 3(2), 35-73.
- ² The *pure FA*, which includes *Enteng Kabisote 4* (Tony Y. Reyes) and *Resiklo* (Mark A. Reyes) from 2007; *Enteng Kabisote 3* (Tony Y. Reyes) from 2006; *Enteng Kabisote 2* (Tony Y. Reyes), *Mulawin* (Dominic Zapata & Mark A. Reyes), *Exodus* (Erik Matti), and *Pekto: Okay Ka, Pare Ko!* from 2005; *Enteng Kabisote* (Tony Y. Reyes), *Ang Agimat* (Augusto Salvador), and *Alamat ng Lawin* (Ronwaldo Reyes) from 2002; and *Pedro Penduko, Episode II: The Return of the Comeback* (Erik Matti) from 2000. The *superhero FA*, which includes *Zsa Zsa Zaturrnah* (Joel Lamangan) and *Super Noypi* (Quark Henares) from 2006; *Lastikman: Unang Banat* (Mac C. Alejandre), *Volta* (Wenn V. Deramas), and *Gagamboy* (Erik Matti) from 2004; *Captain Barbell* (Mac C. Alejandre), *Fantastic Man* (Tony Y. Reyes), and *Lastikman* (Tony Y. Reyes) from 2003; and *Super B* (Joyce Bernal) from 2002. The *horror FA*, represented by Chito S. Roño's *Spirit Warriors: The Shortcut* (2003) and *Spirit Warriors* (2000). The *action FA*, represented by Augusto Salvador's *Bertud ng Putik* (2003). And the non-adventure, *Halik ng Sirena* (Joven Tan, 2001), fantasy-melodrama, *D'Anothers* (Joyce Bernal, 2005), fantasy-horror-comedy, and *Xtreme Warriors* (Philip Ko, 2001), action-sci-fi.
- ³ Plus 12 more titles in 2006, if one would count the limited-theater digital film runs. Acknowledgment must go to Lucenio Martin Lauzon for providing this researcher with yet unpublished filmographies of Filipino films from the 1990s and 2001-2002. To compare the film releases from 2003 to 2005, see the published filmographies compiled by Lauzon, et al.
- ⁴ Note for example the titles of Clodualdo del Mundo Jr.'s article, "The Film Industry is Dead. Long Live Philippine Cinema!" from *Sanghaya 2002* and the TV documentary *Pinoy Movies, Bukay Ka Pa...Ba?* (2005) produced by Bayan Productions.
- ⁵ For instance, our own superhero FA films have been made around the time of release of the *Spiderman* series (2002 & 2004), the *X-Men* series (2000, 2003, & 2006), *Daredevil* (2003), *The Hulk* (2003), *Hellboy* (2004), *The Punisher* (2004), *Elektra* (2005), *Fantastic Four* (2005), *Batman*

Begins (2005), and *Superman Returns* (2006); and our pure FA films have been made around the release of the *Harry Potter* series (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, & 2007) and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003).

- ⁶ Apart from the surge in FA film production, new graphic novels have been created, superhero narratives have been theatrically staged, and new creations and adaptations of old fantasy narratives have been abundantly produced for TV since 2004 (around 27 FA series, or “fantaseryes” and “telefantasyas”, on ABS CBN 2 and GMA 7), gathering impetus from the viewers’ continued patronage and from each other.
- ⁷ See for example Zeus Salazar’s “Ang Kulturang Pilipino sa Harap ng Mga Institusyong Panlipunan sa Pelikulang Bakbakan,” Agustin Sotto’s “Christ Figures in Troubled Land,” and Prospero Covar’s “Paniniwala, Pananampalataya, at Paninindigan sa Pelikulang Bakbakan” in *Unang Pagtingin sa Pelikulang Bakbakan*; Nicanor Tiongson’s “From Stage to Screen” and Rafael Ma. Guerrero’s introduction to *Readings in Philippine Cinema*; Isagani Cruz’s “Si Lamang, Si Fernando Poe Jr., at Si Aquino”; and Soledad Reyes, “Film and Literature,” to cite a few.
- ⁸ *Labaw Donggon* was first popularized as an epic (*sugidanon*) of a mountain people by F. Landa Jocano in the early 1960s. He was the first one to publish a comparative study of the epic’s archaic sociocultural context and its contemporary sociocultural context. See *The Epic of Labaw Donggon*. The Sulod is a group of people inhabiting the interior mountains of Central Panay. See Jocano’s *Sulod Society* (1968).
- ⁹ Another version of *Labaw Donggon*, in particular, the one in Damiana Eugenio’s anthology, does not have this fight between Labaw Donggon and Manalintad; he wins the hand of the maiden only through the intervention of his parents, and the dowry that they offered to the parents of Abyang Ginbitinan. Since epics are transmitted orally, and by different chanters, the extant documentations of epic narratives are understandably varied. There is no “original” story, and there is no singular “author.” For instance, Jocano, Magos, Gina V. Barte and Alejo Zata, have each recorded different “versions” of the *Hinilawod*. For a general discussion of this, see Villareal’s *Siday* (1997).

- ¹⁰ E. Arsenio Manuel considers the *Hinilawod* of Panay the longest and most coherent epic recorded (18). *Humadapnon*, which Jocano was able to document in 1957, is the other cycle, which he believes comprises the *Hinilawod*. In each of the two cycles, one finds the same heroes, but the character in focus, the plot and conflict, and some supporting characters differ. Anthropologist Alicia P. Magos, however, believes that while the same character names are present in the 10 epics, which she was able to document in 1993, these epics are not necessarily cycles of one long epic only; in fact, she claims, these epics can be and are told independently (Magos, 1996: 118-120, 130; personal communication, July 13, 2004). If one heeds Magos' corrective, one may still consider the ten to twelve epics as microepics, but as one macroepic when taken together, forming cycles revolving around the same central heroes.
- ¹¹ The openings of *EK 1* and *3* feature Jeffrey Quizon and Antonio Aquitaña, respectively; and the middle portions of *EK 2* and *4* feature Victor Neri and Carlos Agassi, respectively
- ¹² Notable exceptions, by degrees, are *Spirit Warriors* and *Spirit Warriors: The Shortcut*.
- ¹³ The heroes of *Pedro Penduko II*, *Volta*, *Fantastic Man*, *Agimat*, and the *Spirit Warriors* series are all reluctant heroes, always on the brink of giving up their powers or responsibilities, for one selfish reason or another. *Bertud ng Putik* and *Exodus* have unworthy heroes, whose quests include the catharsis of character. In *Mulawin*, Aguiluz is killed by a stronger Ravenum, only to be resurrected again, because he is pure-hearted. Lawin, in *Alamat ng Lawin*, would have been surely killed if not for the help of four ordinary children, responding extraordinarily to the call of duty. Pedro Penduko and the clique in the *Spirit Warriors* films are the most vulnerable, being only mortals and possessing no special powers. The alter egos of Zsa Zsa Zaturannah and Captain Barbell are unlikely heroes, weak and helpless as mortals.

In a number of films, like *Lastikman: Unang Banat*, *Gagamboy*, and *Captain Barbell*, references to the *komiks* as source of the fictional superheroes are made, as if to suggest that the superhero and its incarnation in a current film actor may be differentiated; the former will exist mythically and outlive the latter. This underscores the unlikelihood – and hence the backhanded joke – of the possibility

of an ordinary, scrawny guy, like Mark Bautista or Vhong Navarro, becoming a superhero.

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