

Iconic Performance and the Media: The Case of Kris Aquino

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Abstract

Through a document analysis of archive videos and still images of the popular Aquino political family, this study particularly looks into the iconic performances of Kris Aquino, known as the 'queen of all media' in Philippine pop culture, alongside her father, the late Senator Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino Jr. The study inquired into the crystallization and persistence of the 'Aquino Magic' political narrative through different historical periods.

This author argues that Kris's popularity in media is attributed to how she skillfully transgressed kinship and social norms, and asserted herself as a woman in control of herself, in spite of her entanglement in different controversial relationships. The study aims to provide a historical approach on the role of media as an instrument in the construction of a personality cult or icon that obliquely advances a political economic agenda at specific moments in history.

Keywords: *Ninoy Aquino, Kris, iconic performance*

Introduction

In an old video archive posted in Youtube (Pinoy Insider, 2015), seven year old Kristina Bernadette C. Aquino, hitherto referred to as 'Kris,' is seen with her mother greeting a crowd of people in a campaign sortie for his detained father, Senator Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino Jr. As a campaign stand-in for her father, Kris then speaks on the microphone, appealing for the people's support to vote for her father so that she and her family can finally see him and so that Ninoy can serve the Filipino people. Her soft, innocent voice pierced the emotions of the crowd and provided a resounding counterpoint to the dark silence of martial law.

Ninoy was then running for a position in the infamous 1978 Interim Batasang Pambansa (IBP) or parliamentary elections under the Lakas ng Bayan party (LABAN), opposing the administration's Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) party led by Imelda Marcos. In spite of the presence of the other Aquino daughters and only son, Benigno 'Noy' Simeon Aquino III, who would later become President, it was the appearance of the young Kris that was picked up by foreign media, such as The New York Times and Time magazine that year. Being featured in the front page of these newspapers was a big deal for the Aquinos and the LABAN campaign as they were deprived exposure by local media, mostly controlled by the dictator.

Surprisingly, on March 10, 1978, a month before the elections, Ninoy was granted by Marcos one television interview through Channel 9's talk show, *Face the Nation* (Ninoy Aquino TV, 2009). This television interview was supposed to expose Ninoy's possible removal from the Lakas ng Bayan's (LABAN) party because of thwarting a decision to boycott the Batasan elections and foreshadow his defeat. Instead of being grilled by pro-Marcos host Ronnie Nathanielsz and three other panelists, Ninoy seized the media opportunity to pitch for the elections. He explained that in spite of being one of the early proponents of the boycott decision of the party, the dire need to vent out the injustices of the dictator made him change his mind. He recalled telling his mother, "Ina, kating-kati na akong makipag-usap sa masa" (Mother, I'm very excited to talk to the masses) (Reyes, 2014, para. 40 ; Ninoy Aquino TV, 2009). Ninoy, who was already imprisoned for more than six (6) years, thought that running for the elections is the only way to connect with the broader masses rather than sticking with the boycott decision. A good orator and a fiery speaker as he was, Ninoy's eloquence and rousing words proved that the dehumanizing six years of prison life did not stifle his resolve in fighting the dictator. Reyes (2014), recalled that after watching the show on 10 March 1978, those who were with him "looked at each other and agreed that we had just watched a virtuoso performance, one that will be talked about ages and ages hence" (para. 45)

On the night of April 6, 1978, the eve of the Batasan elections, by way of showing their support to LABAN party's defiance against the

dictatorship, the people went out and lined up the streets bringing whatever they can hold to make noise and joined the historic noise barrage that lasted until midnight. For some observers, the 1978 noise barrage, notwithstanding that the country was still under Martial Law, was an early muscle-flexing rehearsal for succeeding massive mobilizations that would happen in 1983 and 1986 (Cojuangco, 2004; Esposito, 2011; Santos, 2016).

I have particularly chosen these historical markers to stress the moments wherein father and daughter, Ninoy and Kris, through their charismatic media appearances, or 'performance' so to speak, became 'icons' in the sense that they transformed into "sensation provoking art objects [images] that ever enfolds the subject into its form" (Ghosh, 2011, p. 8, emphasis mine) and have acquired "material force and symbolic power" (Bartmanski and Alexander, 2012, p.1). Ninoy's and Kris's projections in media became an 'image encounter' and 'iconic ritual' for the Filipino people as they articulate dissent against the Marcos dictatorship (Sonnevend, 2012, p. 220).

Filipinos who cannot explicitly critique the dictatorship found a voice in Ninoy's speeches. Conversely, the wives and children of those who were imprisoned or went missing during martial law, found solace and hope in the innocent voice of the young Kris. In this case, Ninoy and Kris, in these historical moments that I purposely chose, have the potential or tendency of fulfilling the fundamental functions of an icon, which are, "to allow members of societies (1) to experience a sense of participation in something fundamental whose fuller meaning eludes their comprehension and (2) to enjoy the possibility for control despite being unable to access directly the script that lies beneath (Bartmanski and Alexander, 2012, p. 2). It is along these lines that this study argues that the 1978 media appearances and historical circumstances surrounding them were the pivotal moments in the iconic beginnings and tendencies of Ninoy and Kris, the germ of what would later become the "Aquino Magic" phenomenon in the EDSA 1986 uprising.

Research Problem and Objective

This study problematizes how media play a vital role in the formation and circulation of icons, and in how these processes, when approached historically, factor in on the political, economic, and cultural configurations in Philippine society, specifically looking at gender. This study perceives that media and their articulations always exist in the context of mediation, by their producers, audiences, by the changing technologies of the time, and even by their subjects.

It is along this line that this study also questions the ways by which the subject, in this case, Kris Aquino, 'performed' counter-hegemonic acts that are potent enough to become 'iconic encounters' and 'icon rituals'. These events, projected and circulated through different media technologies and platforms, are shared by the mass audience who are not only active encoders but also producers of meanings from media texts.

The objective of the study is to demonstrate how the emergence and 'iconic performances' of the Aquinos in the visual landscape of the anti-dictatorship struggle, triggered an affective and emancipatory dimension among women. This aims to show the dynamic activity of encoding and decoding meanings by different actors that gain access to media icons, without losing sight of their political, economic and cultural positions in society. The Lopezes who run ABS-CBN for example, cinematically covered Cory Aquino's funeral for purposes other than simply subscribing to the legacy of defending democracy. On the other hand, grieving mothers, wives, and children of martial law victims identified with, and were inspired by Kris and Cory's resolve as much as they identified with the martyred Ninoy. The iconicity of Ninoy, Kris and Cory, I initially surmise, tapped a very potent social force—women and the youth—that contributed to the build-up of the anti-dictatorship forces in the late 1970s until 1986. This study, however, will primarily explore Kris Aquino's historical function in either perpetuating or debasing the political currency of the "Aquino Magic."

This study used textual analysis of “image encounters” and “icon rituals” through archival and document analysis as research methods. The units of analysis are the images and words. Images include still photographs and moving images (film and video), while words include utterances that go alongside these visuals. These images and words highlight the icon’s physical attributes, rhetorical skills, and sagacity or the lack of it.

As a media research, this study is primarily concerned with the mediated process of icon formation, focusing on their mode of presentation and re-presentation, and the meanings media produce. These units of analysis were then examined by observing how they contribute to the shifting dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses in politics and gender that the icon subscribes to.

This study is organized into three distinct periods or historical turning points.

First is the late 1970s until the 1986 EDSA uprising that signaled the rise of Cory Aquino to the presidency as well as Kris’s popularity. This period is characterized by the significant shift of media practice in terms of freedom of expression, from a suppressed media landscape to one that was variably free upon the so-called restoration of democracy in 1986. This was the period of the public’s first ‘image encounter’ of the 7-year old Kris as a stand-in for Ninoy Aquino in the Batasan elections until she became a popular teen-age role model who occasionally appears on TV shows and commercials.

Second is the post-EDSA period covering the administrations of Ramos, Estrada and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. In this period, Cory Aquino remains in the background of Philippine politics while Kris is making it in the movie industry and further expanding her popularity in hosting daily TV talk shows and games. However, Kris’s popularity was coupled with several controversial relationships with men that transgressed societal norms expected from a highly respected, religious, and influential political clan such as the Aquinos. A striking event in this period’s transition to the next was Cory Aquino’s death in 2009.

And lastly, the period from 2010 until the present time, characterized by the return of an Aquino in the presidency through Noynoy “Pnoy” Aquino and Kris Aquino further establishing her influence in popular culture and media through her TV shows, film production company, magazine, commercial endorsements and online presence.

Theorizing the Materiality of Icons

Several theoretical frameworks guide this study in teasing out and in drawing its arguments and analysis.

First is Bishnupriya Ghosh’s (2011) theorizing on mass media icons in the formation of the popular and in the possible articulation of “a people” (p. 336). Ghosh opposes the idea that mass media, through its production of icons often understood as luring people to commodity fetishism, simply stupefies its audiences. She argues that the ubiquity of media images in our everyday viewing, in fact, “provide(s) a ready pallet of signifiers for contemporary struggles against global oppression” and as such, icons activate a distinctive semiotic economy that harness social bonds (p. 337). Further on she puts forward a conceptualization of the materiality of media icons as an incorporative “technology” that pulls together a multi-disciplinal dialogue. The materiality of media icons converges on three aspects, namely: a) Technological infrastructure or the raw tangible materials that comprise or construct the icon; b) Physiological materiality or the icon’s appeal to sensorial experience, and c) The icon’s geophysical materiality or the icon’s ability to draw space, distance and movement.

Second is Antonio Gramsci’s theory on hegemony that puts forward the argument that domination is brought about not only by physical threat and coercion, but also a configuration of cultural, political and economic factors. These factors mutually exchange with one another to achieve a degree of social consent so that the dominant status quo can exercise ideological control (Gramsci, 1999). In building up social consent, it is imperative for the ruling class to wield the power of media. This explains why during martial law, Marcos subjected all media networks under his control. However, because hegemony is also a process of negotiation and the media is a battlefield for competing

ideologies, at a certain point, a crisis of hegemony will arise and pave the way for the emergence of a counter-hegemonic mass. This is a stage characterized by the weakening of the state's economic, political and moral ascendancy, exemplified by the Marcos regime's widespread pauperization of the population, human rights violation, corruption and bankruptcy that finally imploded in the EDSA 1986 uprising.

This counter-hegemonic mass that incarnated during this period was not mainly brought about by economic and political forces alone. This study surmises that media, through their idealistic and iconic depictions of the Aquinos, were in a way, progressively instrumental in forging a unifying image of signification against the dictator and for the restoration of democracy, specifically 'elite democracy'. However, after the EDSA 1986 uprising until the present, this iconic image constructed by the media, have been exhaustively used, manipulated, and abused. While there is 'iconomania' over the "Aquino Magic," it also spawned an 'iconocrisis,' a state wherein an icon loses its magical aura and what replaces is an alternative signification of how these icons can be deployed to arrive at a future yet to be worked out by the people (Ghosh, 2011).

Extending the idea of hegemony is Stuart Hall's (1993) notion of encoding and decoding. Hall (1993) argues that messages are entangled and subjected to complex 'structures of discourses in dominance' as they traverse the four stages of communication, which are production, circulation, consumption, and reproduction. These four stages of communication are interrelated but independent from each other, and retains their distinct modalities and modes of existence. The production stage is characterized by the construction of messages "in the form of symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of 'language'", made possible by the means and relations of production within media apparatuses (Hall, 1993, p. 508). As Hall put it succinctly, "the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event" (p. 508).

The messages are discursive in form because these do not only follow certain rules and conventions in communication to become a sensible narrative, but are also framed based on wider socio-

political structures that may even include experiences and feedback drawn from audiences. Thus, Hall (1993) implies in his discussion that the audiences can be both the source and receiver of messages. These messages, which are always already discursively formed, will then be circulated and distributed to audiences, whose role now becomes a decoder of the messages. But this practice of decoding is not automatic, and not always identical or symmetrical to what the intended meaning of the message is. For a message to have an 'effect', Hall (1993) argues that it must first be "appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (p. 509).

The creation and construction of messages in the encoding stage as well as the extraction of meaning in the decoding stage by audiences, operates under conditions of dominance. But this is not to say that there may no longer be cracks or crevices by which oppositional and negotiated decoding can take place. This can be gleaned by how relations of production, ownership of communication infrastructures, and frameworks of knowledge are embedded, and in turn, dictate the form and content of the message in each of the communication stages.

As will be discussed in the next section, the March 10, 1978 broadcast of Face the Nation program, as an example, was a tightly orchestrated event to put forward Marcos's allegations against Ninoy Aquino and boost the dominant narrative that the latter was a losing candidate. A close examination behind the program's structure reveals that Face the Nation program and its hosts were under strict media control and were in fact cronies of Marcos. No wonder that the questions hurled at Aquino during the interview were intended to derogatorily frame him. But because each stage is not in itself a closed system, disruptions to the dominant discourse may be possible, such as Ninoy's overall 'performance' in the Face the Nation interview where he successfully destabilized Marcos's attempt to intimidate him in the Batasan election campaigns.

Hall explains that while communicators and programmers have a preferred meaning for their messages, which are often the dominant and 'naturalized' or normalized, meaning carried on by the status quo,

audiences may decode and reproduce the messages differently, as in the case of how the people reacted and took action after Ninoy's Face the Nation interview in 1978 (discussed in the succeeding section). In this sense, Hall is implying that it is not only the programmers and broadcasters who produce messages, but considers the audience as producers and consumers of content as well. The people therefore are not passive consumers of media but are actively appropriating meanings on media texts and at times even destabilizing long-standing cultural significations constructed by media such as, in our case, political icons.

Media as Battleground (late 1970s-1986)

Diverse forms of wielding power characterized Marcos' martial law. Aside from the obvious use of military force, political disenfranchisement of rival oligarchs, economic embargo, and tight media control were vital. In Marcos's earlier close alliance with the Lopezes, who spent money and media machineries to make him president in 1969, Marcos must have learned the importance of the power of media in molding populist sentiments. However, when the oligarchic characteristic of this clan became a threat to his political survival, he unremorsefully lashed the first whips of martial law on the Lopezes making them the first targets of Marcos's "revolution from above" (McCoy, 1994). Upon the declaration of martial law, Marcos ordered the seizure of Lopez-owned broadcast station ABS-CBN. In the same vein, Ninoy Aquino, who was acclaimed "Man of the Year" in 1971 by the Philippine Free Press and bannered prominently in media because of his fiery criticisms against the dictator especially after the Plaza Miranda bombing, was also detained and spent seven years in prison.

Marcos cronies, close relatives and friends, then took over sequestered broadcast stations and media corporations. These handful individuals were Roberto Benedicto who headed the Philippine Daily Express, Weekend and the three largest broadcasting systems that operated at least 16 television and 26 radio stations (Lent, p. 36); Benjamin "Kokoy" Romualdez, Imelda's brother who controlled Philippine Journalists Inc. that published dailies such as Times Journal, People's Journal, People's

Tonite and Taliba (Lent, p. 36); Presidential aide General Hans Menzi owned Bulletin and Liwayway publishing corporations and other close friends like Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. owned the Philippine Long Distance Telephone (PLDT) and Juan Tuvera and wife Kerima Polotan who owned Oriental Media Inc. (Lent, p.37).

With this setup, there was no way for the political opposition to effectively assert themselves through media because journalists themselves embarrassingly admitted that they censored themselves to avoid libel suits and harassments (Lent, 1987). But Ninoy was media-savvy. Perhaps with his experience as the youngest media correspondent in the Korean War, he knew the value of 'performance' and on how to tease the popular sentiments of the people through media. As Francisco Tatad (1983) wrote, "He knows the meaning of good media coverage. The noise rally he led in Manila in 1978 and the hunger strike he staged...were both media events" (para. 5).

That is why when Marcos unexpectedly allowed Ninoy to be interviewed in national TV through the program, "Face the Nation", Ninoy wasted not a single second in the 90-minute program. This was his first and only television appearance as candidate in the Batasang Pambansa elections under the banner of Lakas ng Bayan or LABAN, a coalition of oppositionists with some candidate closely aligned with the national democrats (ND) and social democrats (SocDem). It must be noted that the Partido Liberal, the party to which Ninoy officially belonged decided to boycott the elections. While maintaining respect to the party's decision, Ninoy later thought that running for the elections would be an opportunity for him to 'speak to the people', even if he would be subject to rigid regulations because he was still in jail. In a statement quoted in Mr. & Ms. Magazine, Ninoy said that he was willing to go through the rigors just so he could personally campaign and immerse with the people to know their real sentiments and figure out what they wanted him to do (Cuartero, 1978).

The television interview was intended by Marcos to be a media blitz to grill Ninoy on his affiliation with the CIA and his role as spy in what was known as the 'Indonesian affair,' a government-funded operation to track CIA-backed mercenaries planning to topple Indonesian president

Sukarno (Drake, 1978). What happened instead was that the television interview became a chance for Ninoy to criticize the government and pitch for the April 7, 1978 elections. In a Newsweek article, Ninoy was quoted as saying, “I decided to run because I wanted to give our people a vehicle for their frustrations” (Drake, 1978, p. 8).

Even these days, a video of the said interview in Face the Nation is still circulating through Youtube (Ninoy Aquino TV, 2009). By watching the video, one can say that the body language and gestures of the grilling panel were at the defensive in the face of a very eloquent and well-prepared Aquino. Ninoy sarcastically made allusions to the administration’s move for “block voting” as “bulok voting” (spoiled voting), a thing that was spewed by the *lumang lipunan* (old society) and insisted by the *bagong lipunan* or New Society. What was prominently laid bare in the oral exchange was how Ninoy exposed the blind obedience of appointed generals and even media people to Marcos. When one of the hosts, Ronnie Nathanielz, tried to corner Ninoy by insinuating that he was trying to question the integrity of the administration and its men, Ninoy quickly retaliated by frankly asking Nathanielz, at his face, if he could defy the dictator given that he was working under the auspices of Marcos himself. Towards the end of the interview and afterwards, it was clear to the vast TV audiences who tuned in for Ninoy’s television appearance, that he was successful in seizing the media opportunity, ironically provided by his enemy, in rallying for the demands of the opposition. Instead of depriving Ninoy the means to campaign, the 90-minute media mileage bolstered his popularity more than if he could have been allowed to campaign freely, and put Marcos in an embarrassing state (Drake, 1978).

To complement this media exposure by Ninoy was the young Kris’s appearances at the campaign rallies of the LABAN party. In the March 1978 issue of Mr. & Ms. Magazine, a close-up picture of the seven-year-old Kris accompanies an article about Ninoy’s declaration to run for the Batasan elections. The caption indicated that it was in the first rally of the LABAN ticket in the University of the Philippines Theater that the young Kris Aquino spoke in behalf of his dad and convincingly got the approval and sympathy of the crowd (Cuartero, 1978).

Ghosh's (2011) study on icons as contested and mediated images, heavily intensified by its multiplicity of meanings and articulating towards a representation of global aspirations, can be helpful in examining the potency of the Aquinos as political icons. Ghosh (2011) took her perspective by examining how the 'popular' or the people understood and constructed meanings out of icons apart from the hegemonic forces that have control over these images through media. The Ninoy and Kris Aquino's cases I have discussed above show that it is not enough that 'the people' conspire in the processes of 'iconic ritual' and meaning construction. First and foremost, the personalities themselves must be willing and effective 'performers'. Ninoy and Kris in the 1978 Batasan election campaigns have overturned the media machineries, the technological machineries of the dictator, to their advantage.

Through broadcast television, the admiration to a smart senator which was almost obliterated in the memory of the people because of his imprisonment, was revived in the battleground of media. Ninoy did this by capitalizing on his powerful arguments while, on the other hand, Kris did this by simply activating the emotions of the people, by being herself a young girl and a child of a political detainee speaking against a tyrant. Ninoy's much awaited and limited TV appearance also surmounted geographical barriers and allowed the people from far-flung provinces to witness his 'performance'. It is also important to note the context of the people's 1978 'image encounter' of Ninoy and Kris in print and television. It was a time of strict censorship where nobody could openly and explicitly criticize Marcos; yet, Ninoy and Kris overcame this barrier. The very narrow television appearance provided to him by Marcos, as a token gesture of accommodating opposition views, was magnified and overturned by Ninoy into a very tensed space and time in attacking Marcos in a nationwide television broadcast while appealing emotionally to the people to be one with his aspiration for freedom.

Aside from the literal meanings of their utterances quoted and captured in these media appearances, Ninoy and Kris's images offered the people an interpretation of their collective historical and personal circumstances, opening up the possibility of identification

and connection. Through their media projections, Ninoy and Kris's images allowed the audiences to say and do something that otherwise could not be said and done under the conditions of martial law. For example, at the outset of the election campaign, very few people attended the campaign sorties of LABAN because of fear of harassment by the police and the military (Santos, 2016). Mothers, widows, children and relatives of the victims of martial law and even ordinary Filipinos unscathed by the dictator chose to remain silent in the looming possible retaliation and red-tagging. But the slippage of Ninoy and Kris in a strictly censored media, their appearances on TV and in print media, provided impetus for the LABAN campaign and the anti-dictator protests that would eventually build up in the late 1970s. An important manifestation of awakening, dissent, and loss of confidence to the Marcos dictatorship was the April 6, 1978 noise barrage staged by LABAN supporters.

On Mourning and 'Death Performance' (1983)

By a twist of fate, Ninoy's heart ailment paved the way for his exile in the United States to seek medication and later pursue fellowship grants in U.S. universities. The time when they were in the US away from the noisy politics in the Philippines, was the happiest years of the family, according to Kris Aquino. Not until Ninoy decided to return to the Philippines and was gunned down as he was escorted in the airport tarmac on August 21, 1983.

Contrary to contemporary depictions, especially in biographical films about Ninoy, that his flight back home was top secret, media write-ups and discussions reveal that it was in fact an open secret. Everyone knew about Ninoy's homecoming. Perhaps the only thing that remained confidential was his exact time of arrival and flight number. From Boston, Taipei to Manila, Ninoy was accompanied by a group of international journalists and even entertained interviews in his hotel room. In these interviews, the possibility of an assassination upon his arrival was something far-fetched, and viewed as desperately fatal for the crumbling Marcos regime, at least for the imagination of most media delegates and Aquino's companions during the trip. As Sandra Burton (1989) observed, what was supposed to be

a clandestine interview, became a press conference sans the video cameras. Therefore, the journey back home was a big media event that Ninoy consciously played along or even intentionally utilized to diffuse whatever dangerous plot awaited for him in the Philippines as international media were all eyes on his homecoming. Unfortunately, Ninoy was assassinated on August 21, 1983 at the airport tarmac.

The Aquino family's subsequent decision to retain Ninoy's physical state during the funeral, intentionally to make a statement of Marcos' brutality, did more than that in the Filipino imaginary. In spite of government downplaying the whole situation by blocking newspapers, television and radio stations about Ninoy's death, the originally planned simple funeral became a nationwide mourning.

In Filipino culture, the act of grieving also entails the act of looking at the dead body. Particularly in Ninoy's death, this gazing of the body by the people who came to pay their last respect was crystallized into a level of identification, especially for those who were victims of Martial Law. Proof to this is a passage that states:

Gazing at his blood-soaked chest and his wounded face still bearing its bullet-marks,... a grief stricken people were actually gazing not only at Ninoy Aquino but at themselves, bloodied and wounded by a long history of colonial domination, still suffering from foreign and native oppression (Panaligan as cited by Ileto, 1985, p. 14).

Inserted in political theology, Ninoy and Cory were conveniently elevated as the modern day Christ and Virgin Mary in Philippine politics, ready to redeem the people from the bondage of oppression. Conversely, as the people gazed at Ninoy, the identification was not that they wanted to be like Ninoy, but the other way around—that Ninoy was very much like them. As Ileto (1979) explained, the deeply rooted influence of the *pasyon* in our culture, "in its narration of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and of the Day of Judgment, provides powerful images of transition from one state or era to another, e.g., darkness to light, despair to hope, misery to salvation, death to life, ignorance to knowledge, dishonor to purity, and so forth" (p.14). In this parallel reading, the *pasyon* and the death of Ninoy were events that provoked people to reflect on the injustices of society and

of their own poverty.

Cannell's (1995) findings in her study of Bicolano lowland practices of imitating the dead Christ tangentially asserts that Filipinos, specifically Bicolanos, identify with Christ by performing rituals and practices of intimacy as a way of acquiring and negotiating power with the supernatural. The dead Christ is not only seen as Christ, in the strictly western Catholic sense, but was also seen thru the non-Catholic lens by associating the dead Christ as the best shaman or magical hero, with whom they could derive power to heal the sick or acquire magical objects such as the anting-anting that can shield the person wearing it from bullets.

Ninoy's death and the massive outpouring of people in his burial and funeral march, when viewed in this light, explains the exuberance and an unfathomable energy from the people, rather than simply conveying misery and hopelessness. This powerful force 'acquired' from the association of Ninoy with the supernatural powers of the dead Christ will later be put to use during the 1986 EDSA uprising.

As the 'death performance' or the rituals of identification and intimacy unfolded, not only was Ninoy's image congealed into an icon, but also of his direct family members like his wife, Cory and youngest daughter, Kris. The 'image encounter' of the people with Ninoy's bloodstained body and his grieving family, coupled with an emotionally laden 'iconic ritual', which was the experience of intimacy with Ninoy-as-dead Christ, completed the prerequisites of the construction of an icon. The people's memory of the seven-year old Kris campaigning for his father four years ago and the 12 year-old Kris who wiped her tears behind huge eyeglasses, mourning along with her siblings and mother in 1983, were two vivid images that stirred the people's sympathy and admiration.

It is also important to note that two important factors convinced the reluctant Cory to finally run as president in the 1986 Snap elections. First was after receiving a petition signed by a million signatures in support of her presidency, and second was after Cory conferred her to decision to her children, with Kris instantly signifying her support

while the rest of her siblings registered their vehement reservations. Nevertheless, the Aquino children were convinced and supported their mother in the campaign that later brought her to the presidency.

From Disco-hopping to TV-guesting (1986-1992)

Kris Aquino was in her teens, around 14 to 15 years old and a high school student at the Colegio de San Agustin-Makati, when her mother, Cory Aquino, ran for the presidency. She was a constant companion of her mother during campaign sorties. As early as that time, she was considered a hot media material in television talk shows like Inday Badiday's *See True*. Her first appearance was in a taped interview for *See True* on February 4, 1986 (and aired on February 8, the day after the scheduled Snap elections) that would feature Kris Aquino and also Imee Marcos-Manotoc in the 'spirit of equal time' (Japitana, 2010). We have to bear in mind that at this time, Marcos was still in power and media still operated under great restraint, tolerating showbiz stuff rather than discussions on political issues.

It was in this interview that Kris revealed she was the only one who wanted her mother to run in the election, explaining perhaps because she was too young to see what her father had gone through so she thought she would "like to try it" (politics). "But now with all these intrigues and what people are saying, *ayaw ko na*. No, I don't like to be in politics myself," Kris elaborated (Japitana, 2010). The question whether she ate *galunggong*, a kind of fish commonly consumed by the masses and often used as reference by Cory when critiquing how prices had rapidly gone up under a Marcos-led economic policy, interestingly caught the young Kris admitting that she had never eaten that fish. When asked if she would enter showbiz, her answer was a yes. "Perhaps just one movie. That's all my mom will allow me..." Kris explained (Japitana, 2010). Given the possibility of becoming a presidential daughter, Kris modestly responded media people's speculation of her role in politics if her mother would win the election by simply saying that she will remain Cory's daughter and will not meddle at all with politics.

Events quickly unfolded thereafter. The Snap Elections in 1986 was ridden with fraud that led to the mass walkout of NAMFREL (National

Movement for Free Elections) officials during the counting of ballots. This incident triggered Cory's faction to declare civil disobedience and call to boycott products manufactured by Marcos-crony companies that later snowballed into the massive mobilizations in EDSA in the days of February 22 to 25, 1986. Ironically though, Cory Aquino was not in EDSA during the height of the tension, but was in fact in Cebu with Kris Aquino, kept safely by nuns in a convent to thwart the possibility of an arrest. Accounts on the chronology of the EDSA uprising by the *Inquirer* revealed that Kris Aquino was disco-hopping in Cebu, oblivious of a historic event that would eventually topple the man who caused so much misery to the Filipino people, including her very own family. Her disco-hopping in bars must have been part of her 15th birthday celebration, which fell on February 14, only days between the Snap Election and the EDSA people power uprising.

On 1 March 1986, a week after 'people power' that ousted Marcos, Kris, then a presidential daughter, had her first live TV interview on Channel 7 for Inday Badiday's *See True*. As Japitana (2010) recalled, Kris appeared sophisticated, had her hair done in the latest hairstyle, and conveyed in her statements Cory Aquinos' call for reconciliation after long years of martial law. Consequently she also appeared as a guest in IBC's *The Sharon Cuneta Show* (1986), co-hosted in variety shows like *GMA Supershow* between 1986-1992 and *Eat Bulaga* in 1988-89; and appeared in sitcoms and TV specials. In 1989, ABS-CBN aired *Kris at 18*, a TV special that featured Kris Aquino's 18th birthday celebration. Inday Badiday's show *Eye to Eye*, also made Kris' debut special by inviting the presidential daughter's biggest showbiz crush, the Purefoods star basketball player, Alvin Patrimonio. Aside from Patrimonio's popularity, the thought that the presidential daughter publicly admitted her attraction to the basketball player, was enough for the public to get intrigued, hence they followed Kris' budding and colorful showbiz career.

One of Kris Aquino's earliest talk show stints was when she hosted RPN's *Actually, Yun Na!* in 1992-1995 with actor-comedian Arnel Ignacio. Interestingly, in one of the show's episodes in 1995, the staff invited Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., who was then the congressman of the 2nd District of Ilocos Norte. Whether to show a

gesture of reconciliation or merely pump up the ratings of the show, the appearance of Bongbong and Kris on television was indeed much talked about even until now, with the fact that the said episode was uploaded in Youtube. In the show, the two presidential heirs talked casually about their parents who were staunch political rivals, about their personal take on martial law, and about politics, as if everything else had all been ironed out after a court ruling convicted 16 defendants for the assassination of Ninoy in September 1990. While viewers lauded the civility and politeness of Kris and Bongbong in the midst of an issue, which was far from having a clear closure, this episode also cued the audience on the shallowness and superficiality of Kris' historical grasp. She may have the eloquence of her father, but not the fervor and political acuity of Ninoy. By accommodating Bongbong Marcos a share in the limelight, Kris thought that she had done her mother a favor of exuding the aura of reconciliation and of pacifying the discontent of critics regarding her mother's failure to bring a convincing verdict on the mastermind of Ninoy's assassination.

By lacking depth and context, what Kris had actually done with this episode was to gloss over the crimes, human rights violations, massive economic pauperization, and injustices that the Marcos regime had brought to the Filipino people. She has reduced an issue that had a historical and national implication into something that was otherwise trivial, personal and spectacular showbiz performance. Kris Aquino seemed to be so insensitive or was not astute to miss the point of all these. Cory Aquino, upon knowing about this controversial interview, got angry, especially when her daughter kissed Bongbong Marcos on the cheek after the said interview. As Lourdes Sytangco, Cory's spokesperson, exclaimed in a news article, "How could she do that to her mom?" (Deseret News, 1995). Or to put it in another way, how could Kris do that to the Filipino people?

The Massacre Queen: Kris in the Movies

With her popularity on TV and political vestige as the presidential daughter, Kris Aquino did not find it difficult to enter the film industry in the 1990s. Her first film was a comedy flick with blockbuster comedy actor Rene Requiestas in the film *Pido Dida: Sabay Tayo*

(1990), a spin-off from the 7-up cartoon commercial featuring Fido Dido, produced by Regal films and directed by Tony Cruz. Even if film critics griped about her acting as rigid and stiff, *Pido Dida* quickly became a box-office hit prompting the making of two more sequel films in 1992 and 1993. Cory Aquino did not particularly like her daughter's exposure in the film industry, considering that Kris' image in these comedy films would run inconsistently with the image of the respectable, prim and proper Aquinos in politics, not to mention that Cory was still the president during that time. But then again, nothing could dissuade Kris from realizing her dream of becoming a star.

After her mother's term as president, Kris Aquino was also quick to change her image as comedy box-office queen to more controversial and challenging roles by appearing in massacre films, a particular psycho-thriller film genre trend that became popular in the mid-1990s mainstream film industry. These massacre films were mostly real-life stories that bannered the news, with court investigations that were controversial and dramatic because of known personalities implicated in the gruesome criminal cases. Notable among these massacre films were the following: Visconde Massacre: God Help Us! (1993); Myrna Diones Story: Lord Have Mercy! (1993); Humanda Ka Mayor: *Bahala na ang Diyos* (1993) all directed by Carlo J. Caparas, Elsa Castillo Story: *Ang Katotohanan* (1994) directed by Laurice Guillen, and The Fatima Buen Story (1994) directed by Mario O'hara, which made Kris a nominee for the Gawad Urian Award for Best Actress.

Visconde Massacre was all about the multiple homicide case of members of the Visconde family against the suspect, Hubert Webb, the son of basketball player, actor, former congressman and senator Freddie Webb. Kris Aquino played the role of 18-year-old Carmela Visconde, who was raped before she was killed. Myrna Diones Story was a survival story of a woman who was raped and executed in Benguet, and *Humanda Ka Mayor* was all about the rape and slay case of UPLB student Eileen Sarmenta by Calauan Mayor Antonio Sanchez. Elsa Castillo Story by Guillen, was no different as this film tackled the plight of a "chop-chop lady", a woman who was literally severed by her lover, and The Fatima Buen story was all about a convicted woman whose entanglements with different men impeded her struggle for

redemption. In all these films, Kris played the leading role, earning her the title “massacre queen” of the Philippine movies.

Kris also appeared in films of different genres. In some romantic films, she even paired with popular leading men of the decade, such as, Alvin Patrimonio in *Tasya Pantasya* (1994), Richard Gomez in *Ang Siga at ang Sosyal* (1992) and Aga Muhlach in *Bakit Pa Kita Minahal* (1994). However, these romantic flicks did not register with the audience as prominently as her massacre films.

One might say that, for one with significant cultural and political clout, Kris Aquino could choose more pleasant and less controversial films and actually turn down the gruesome massacre and rape films. But why didn't she? If it were only to get attention, then Kris succeeded admirably by providing the audience the novel entertainment of the then presidential daughter being violently raped by brutal men in true-to-life crime films.

Repeatedly portrayed as a victim in massacre and rape films, Kris' image remains pitied every time she gets into trouble with men. Has she carried on this 'performance as a victim' in media on to her real-life relationships and to her mass following?

The coincidence of branding the younger Aquino as the 'massacre queen' while Cory Aquino's presidency was actually marred by real-life massacres, such as, the Mendiola Massacre and Lupao Massacre in 1987 that claimed the lives of poor peasants, is but unsolicited historical circumstance that may work in favor or against both Kris and Cory Aquino's reputation.

At the turn of the century, Kris finally had her biggest break in the film industry when she won the FAMAS Award for Best Supporting Actress for the film *Mano Po* (2002), wherein she co-starred with Maricel Soriano and Richard Gomez. The film was a big hit not only in the box-office but also among award giving bodies as evidenced by the 12 awards including Best Picture given by MMFF (Metro Manila Film Festival). After this success, Kris was quick to follow the Asian-horror trend and turned into making horror films such as *Feng Shui* (2004)

and *Sukob* (2006). The achievements of these two films both directed by Chito Roño and produced by Star Cinema, which raked millions in the box-office locally and from international screenings, signaled Kris Aquino's shift from being a "Massacre Queen" to "Philippines' Box-office Horror Queen."

At this peak of Kris Aquino's success and after more than two decades in show business, appearing in both film and television, she then ventured into film producing. She started out co-producing films with Star Cinema, Viva Films and MJM to name a few. Then later on she established her own production firm named, Kris Aquino Productions or K Productions in 2013, which produced the films *Instant Mommy* (2013) directed by Leo Abaya for Cinemalaya, *My Little Bossings* (2013), that launched the showbiz career of her son James "Bimby" Aquino Yap, and a sequel film of her blockbuster film *Feng Shui* (2014).

Everyday Kris

Unlike her parents or even her brother, President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, Kris had become an indispensable image, consistently appearing in our popular culture and almost like a staple product in every Filipino household ever since her first appearance on television in 1986. If the other Aquinos were only seen in the news, in biographical documentaries or in press conferences like President Noynoy Aquino, Kris, on the other hand, was everywhere, every day in billboards along the highway of EDSA hawking milk, appliances and clothes. At eight in the morning, she gossiped with friends on her morning show *Kris TV* and entertained housewives in the latest vacation and food trips she had with her sons. In the evening, she capped the night with another dose of gossip and showbiz news with co-host Boy Abunda in *SNN: Showbiz News Ngayon* aired at ABS-CBN, which later became *Aquino and Abunda Tonight*.

At one point in her career, especially from the year 2001 until 2011, she thrilled audiences with her gameshows such as *Game KNB?*, *Kapamilya Deal or No Deal*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Pinoy Bingo Tonight* and the Philippine version of *The Price is Right*. Beyond her exposure in television, Kris also launched her own lifestyle magazine, *K! The*

Kris Aquino Magazine, and in 2009 she launched K Everyday, a lifestyle brand that features an array of kitchen and home products in partnership with ABS-CBN Licensing. Adding up to all these media omnipresence, Kris Aquino made sure she is updated in the world wide web by creating her own video blogs through her website, withlovekrisaquino.com.

Her media reach and influence had widely expanded, elevating her image from “Queen of Massacre and Horror Films” to being the “Queen of All Media” in the 21st century. Kris Aquino practically filled the gap of more than two lull decades, after Cory Aquino finished her term as president in 1992, up until 2010, when another Aquino became president. This gap in the country’s political history, with an Aquino only in the sidelights during the administration of presidents Fidel Ramos, Joseph ‘Erap’ Estrada and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was also the period when Kris was intermittently involved in scandalous relationships with married men such as actors Joey Marquez, Vic Sotto and Philip Salvador, to name a few. These affairs were all feasted upon by media and almost threatened the ascribed patriotic legacy and saintly image of the Aquinos. In spite of all these, Kris remained the number one product endorser in the Philippines (Mananquil, 2011) and among the top taxpayers in the country, registering more than P40 million of income tax paid in 2013 (Rappler, 2015).

Performing an Icon

While Cory Aquino continued Ninoy’s projections in politics, Kris made her own name as a showbiz icon, bringing with her the frankness, rhetorical vestige, and bloodline of her father. One can easily conclude that Kris Aquino only borrowed the cultural capital of her parents to boost her showbiz career. However, this could only be true in the early 1990s but did not hold strong towards the turn of the century. Kris, in the year 2000 onwards, had already gained not only popularity, but had evolved into an icon of her own right with powerful economic disposition. She might be an extension of the Ninoy and Cory Aquino iconicity, but definitely a decisive and powerful one that could stir the country’s political and economic narrative.

Alexander (2012), in his discussion of the performativity of icons, states that “icons can perform without the aid of other powers because, once launched, they have power independent of the processes that performatively produced them” (p. 34). But iconicity, he further argues, is a process, that is therefore always dynamic and evolving, “and subject to powerful social mediations” (p.34). This characteristic flexibility of icons somehow explains the constant engagement of different actors in using the ‘Aquino magic’ for their political and economic ends.

One example is the US government who, after the 1986 EDSA uprising, immediately wanted access to the Aquino administration because of its strategic military and economic interests in the region (Aquino, 1990). By taming ‘people power’ and tacitly supporting an Aquino in the late 1980s and in the recent 2010 elections, the US was able to ensure that neoliberal policies are pursued. The Lopezes, who, right after 1986 EDSA Revolution, explicitly pronounced that they fully support Cory’s administration, have easily recuperated losses and recovered sequestered companies, like ABS-CBN and Meralco, to name a few.

During the administration of Benigno Simeon “Noy” Aquino, Kris was provided by ABS-CBN with generous and favorable media mileage and positioning as explicitly demonstrated by the network’s rendition of the national anthem and Christmas station IDs. This only goes to show that the making, as well as the persistence, of a political icon is invested with an overriding calculation of strategic cost-benefit analysis on the part of other actors benefiting from the ascribed iconic power of images. These actors find it necessary to become not merely decoders or consumers of iconic images, but also actively played the part of producers or encoders, who made possible the icon’s discursive reproduction.

Unlike Ninoy and Cory, Kris’ iconic performance became even more interesting because of the tension and dilemma in keeping the balance between politics and the commercially-motivated, privacy-intrusive environment of show business. In politics, she is expected to live up with the legacy of her parents who were perceived as restorers

and fighters of democracy, demonstrating herself as the female counterpart of the articulate Ninoy Aquino. In show business, she is expected to behave according to the religious and saintly conventions painted by media of the Aquinos, specifically her mother, Cory Aquino.

But Kris has performed the iconic role in a rather inconsistent, rebellious and candid manner. She demonstrated this when she had Bongbong Marcos as guest in her TV show a year after the historic 1986 EDSA uprising, when she partnered with comedian, Rene Requiestas, in comedy films and repeatedly portrayed a woman-victim in several true-to-life massacre films in the 1990s, which bravely deglamorized herself as a presidential daughter, and when she surprised a conservative audience in the 1990s in candidly admitting her admiration to basketball hotshot, Alvin Patrimonio. She had drawn the flak of critics because of her scandalous love affairs that were all hot media items, such as her having a lovechild with Philip Salvador in 1994, her revelation that she once became the 'other woman' of Alvin Patrimonio in 2000, her admission that she acquired a sexually transmitted disease from lover Joey Marquez, whom she lived with briefly in 2002, her tumultuous married life with James Yap in 2005 that ended in an annulment in 2012 (www.spot.ph, 2013), and her flirtations with Quezon City Mayor Herbert Bautista.

Every time she committed an act that tarnished the iconic image of the Aquinos, Kris consistently 'performed' emotional interviews with matching wiping of tears in front of the camera. She did this when she publicly apologized to her mother because of her interview with Bongbong Marcos, and in all of her sorrowful moments in her love life (www.spot.ph, 2013). Kris has mastered the art of knowing when to make the people cry and how to win their sympathy, no matter how sensible the reasons of Kris' former lovers in breaking up with her.

In these narratives, Kris was always painted as the victim of men who were described as abusive, unfaithful, and violent, and therefore unworthy in living up with a strong-willed woman like her. These heavily affective events in Kris' life, circulated and magnified in media, facilitated another 'image encounter' and 'iconic ritual' that further enhanced her iconic characteristics. Perhaps, in spite of all these, one

may wonder how Kris has maintained her popularity and approval of her fans. Her manager, Deo Edrinal, described this unwavering appeal of Kris to the masses by saying, "Kris has never been afraid to share her interior life. She has always been transparent... there is no deliberate re-engineering of her image. But there is always an attempt at authenticity" (Mananquil, 2011, para. 7-8). By her frankness and openness in revealing her sexual life, she had disrupted and bravely challenged religious and social norms imposed on women. In this sense, Kris successfully fulfilled an iconic function of saying something that otherwise could not be said by anyone given the same circumstances. In doing so, her iconic image became instrumental in opening up discourses on gender roles, marriage, women's role in politics, and women empowerment.

Another factor is the intertextual link of Kris in the massacre movies and Kris in real life. The sorrowful moments of her life may not be as graphically morbid as the chop-chop lady she portrayed in the Elsa Castillo Story: *Ang Katotohanan* (1994), or the rape victim in Visconde Massacre: God Help Us! (1993) and *Humanda Ka Mayor: Bahala na ang Diyos* (1993). But it can be said that they were equally tragic and traumatic for any woman to experience, much so by an Aquino heir. These interwoven narrative threads of her massacre movies and her tragically forbidden and traumatic relationships with men combined into a representation of Kris as a credible victim. As opposed to debasing her image, these massacre films may have actually contributed in saving her face and in helping her recuperate from an otherwise shameful and irresponsible conduct of private life.

Aside from being literally a performer and producer for TV, film, print, and new media, Kris has gained so much cultural capital that enabled her to orchestrate and encode embedded messages and circulate these significations to the population. This is very far from how she started out in show business. Her more than two decades in show business provided her the opportunity to lay down a network of media connections closely interwoven with political and business entities. Proof of this was her pivotal role in the drama of Cory Aquino's death in 2009.

Her emotional speech during the funeral tribute of Cory and excessively prolonged media mileage of her interview as she recounted her grief over her mother's death, was an event highly feasted by the media. A whole technology of media network was mobilized to cinematically project this event. ABS-CBN alone boasted that it harnessed some two hundred people: 21 cameraman, 13 desk editors, 30 reporters, 13 photojournalists and dozens of engineers. In less than 24 hours after the formal announcement of Cory's death, ABS-CBN managed to setup 70 moving lights and 17 cameras in the Manila Cathedral, and deployed hundreds more doing home-based operations for traditional broadcasting and online streaming (ABS-CBN, 2009). Because the Aquino family authorized only ABS-CBN as the official communication network to cover the whole funeral tribute, there was no denying that the giant network dominated the ratings and raked advertising profit from this funeral event.

This wholesale mobilization of the network's TV, radio, print and online publication teams was not only the Lopezes' way of showing reciprocity or *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) to the person who enabled their economic comeback after martial law, nor was it just about commemorating and immortalizing Cory's legacy. Beneath all these was an underlying political strategy necessary for the neo-liberalist vision to survive, or more precisely, to fortify economic interests of the Lopez clan in the light of an upcoming elections in 2010. It should also be noted that at this point in Kris Aquino's career, she was already a co-producer of many Star Cinema productions and her talk shows had remained top raters among several programs that sustained ABS-CBN. No wonder that the entourage of stars who performed during Cory's tribute were also the talents that Star Cinema and ABS-CBN groomed.

In terms of political insinuations and implications, perhaps the most significant part of Kris' eulogy speech for Cory was when she said,

Kagaya ng pangako na iniwan ng dad at mom sa ating bayan...Noy, ikaw at ako ang nasa pusisyon para ipagpatuloy ang lahat ng kanilang nasimulan... You know that during our last conversation with mom, nangako ako sa kanya... whatever support you needed, we would be there for you (Tahimika2, Aug. 7, 2009).

[Just like dad and mom's promise to our people...Noy, you and me are in the position of carrying on their legacy...You know that during our last conversation with mom, I promised her...whatever support you needed, we would be there for you].

This part of her speech was then followed by applause from the audience. With this utterance in a densely emotional atmosphere, almost a perfect 'icon ritual' event, Kris effectively put forward a claim of bearing the continuity of their parent's iconic status, along with Noynoy Aquino. But if one would think of it, should there really be a monopoly of who will take on Cory and Ninoy's supposed roles in reforming this country? Does this burden of continuity solely belong to an Aquino, thereby discounting the important role of "the people" in the whole political discourse? As the turn of events unfolded, we saw thereafter that this statement by Kris was a prelude to Noynoy's presidential candidacy, forcing Mar Roxas, the official presidential candidate of Liberal Party for 2010 to give way in favor of an Aquino.

These were only some of the myriad ways of performing the icon, by re-articulating, re-molding and reconfiguring the Aquino Magic according to the vested interest of those who wielded power over politics, economy, and culture.

Conclusion

The case of Kris Aquino discussed in this paper provided us a brief survey of the role of media in the construction of the "Aquino Magic" through a historical perspective. While this study initially assumes that the media have a deliberate role in the formation of icons, we saw that the emergence of the "Aquino Magic" phenomenon was ironically an upshot of a suppressed media. Coupled with state coercion, this fueled the people's clamor to look up for images or models to which they can signify their aspirations. Thus, the supposed grilling of Ninoy in national TV and the subtle insertion of the photo of Kris Aquino in the magazines, instead of alienating them from the masses, actually resulted to the opposite.

However, it must be pointed out that this peculiar formation of an icon in the midst of totalitarian rule would not have been effective without

the willful cooperation and exemplary skills of the iconic subject. If Ninoy and Kris were not that articulate, keen, and convincing in their rhetoric, then they would not figure out as icons that can cement a broad anti-dictatorship alliance during martial law. At this point, we can even consider that Ninoy, Cory, and Kris, before and during the EDSA 1986, served a significant counter-hegemonic function compounded by the growing support of an alternative media (Lent, 1987).

But when power relations shifted after EDSA 1986 and Cory Aquino came to power, this also changed the media situation considerably because of government-instigated reforms, such as, the restoration of the writ of habeas corpus, the release of political detainees, some of which were media practitioners, and sequestration of media companies previously controlled by Marcos cronies (Lent, 1987). As a way of reciprocating the Aquino administration, some media practitioners and owners of broadcast stations have also openly signified their support to the transition government.

While the image of a patriotic Ninoy sits comfortably in history, media opened up a new trajectory for Kris Aquino in show business. During the period after Cory's term in 1992 until another Aquino made a comeback in Malacanang in 2010, Kris' showbiz career, served as filler and a link of the Aquino icons to the masses. Despite her successive scandals and involvement in controversies, Kris Aquino's flaws and defects were turned into 'effects,' characteristic of the entertainment industry, therefore tolerated, absolved and forgiven by the public.

Events in history have shown how powerful social entities wielded the iconic images of the Aquinos to advance their economic and political interests. Simultaneously, there was also a prevalent emergence of distortions and manipulations especially in social media. The consequence of this was the possible decimation of the premise of the Aquino Magic's emergence and in the obliteration of the role of a unified "people" imbued with "power" in the processes of imagining and realizing the Filipino nation. Kris Aquino, by her growing influence and control on media and politics, became instrumental in fueling and sometimes tempering the progressive potentials of the Aquino Magic.

As a celebrity icon, she became instrumental in opening up discourses on women empowerment. However, Kris' over-utility and reliance on the iconic magic of the Aquino legacy, have also contributed to the reduction of these icons into token symbols. Kris' iconic performance can reinforce, and at the same time, endanger the credibility and efficacy of the 'Aquino magic', and its corollary association with the idea of 'people power' and anti-dictatorship struggles.

Therefore, there is a dire need, not only to demystify the Aquino Magic and the Kris Aquino personality cult, but also for the people to encode and decode alternative significations. A higher level of media literacy, historical appreciation, and political engagement is needed from the broad mass of media consumers to activate a progressive semiotic economy that will forge new social bonds that can deploy or put pressure on political icons to serve a more empowering and emancipatory function rather than remaining narrow, petty and exploitative in their disposition. With the rise of another authoritarian regime in the image of President Duterte, the pressure is even greater, not only to the Aquinos but to the people as well.

End Notes

¹ These biographical films are *Salamat*, President Corazon Aquino (2009) produced by ABS-CBN and the Benigno Aquino Foundation, *The Last Journey of Ninoy* (2009) produced by Unitel and ABS-CBN, and *Ninoy Aquino & the Rise of People Power* (2010) produced by Tom Coffman.

² For examples see ABS-CBN's 2011 *Lupang Hinirang* video (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2011), ABS-CBN Christmas station IDs from 2009 until 2015 available in Youtube, published by ABS-CBN Entertainment.

³ See Kris Aquino on Mom Cory Aquino (OPM MTV Video, 2016), a Youtube video covering Kris' apology to her mom on his interview with Bongbong Marcos and affair with actor Phillip Salvador. Included in this video was Cory's benevolent and motherly reply to her beloved Kris.

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