2024



ISSN 000-000-00
VOLUME 1
ISSUE 1

URBAN REVIEW ASIA



AIM & SCOPE

The journal aims to serve as a space for engagement among scholars, experts, practitioners, advocates and the general populace on issues that affect the everyday lives of people that occupy cities and their peripheries. The topics that interest the journal covers relate not just to issues and conflicts brought about by urbanization but also the human response to these challenges and the narratives these engagements generate. The journal welcomes submissions that utilize interdisciplinary approaches towards engagement of urban issues and approach questions on history, economy, politics of space, policy, politics of space, and diaspora of the city.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

- Submissions to the journal should be original works of the author(s) and have neither been previously published nor under review or consideration by another journal or publication. Submissions will undergo a double-blind review. Submissions should always be accompanied with the submission form which can be downloaded here.

- The journal utilizes style and citation format of the seventh edition of the American Psychological Association. A list of works cited must be included at the end of the submitted article or work and should utilize endnotes instead of footnotes. An abstract of around 250 words as well as five keywords should also accompany the article.

- Submitted manuscripts should range from 6000 to 8000 words including endnotes and the list of works cited. Review articles are expected to be around 1500 words. The artist's statement that accompanies the illustrations of the City Vignettes should be around 500-600 words.

- Manuscripts must be double-spaced and utilize 12-point Calibri or Times New Roman font. Images, tables, figures, and other supporting illustrations should be in separate files and accompanied with captions and references. Illustrations that accompany articles should have a dpi of at least 300.

- Submissions to the following sections should be in the respective file formats:

- Articles and reviews – Open office, Microsoft Word, RTF or Word Perfect.
- City Vignettes – images should be high resolution (TIFF) while the artist's statement should be in Open office, Microsoft Word, RTF or Word Perfect. Images or panels for the vignettes should have at least a dpi of 300.

- Contributions to the journal should be accompanied with a brief biodata of the author or contributor, which should include the author's institution, their present position, and their email address.

  Submissions can be via electronic mail to urbanreviewasia@gmail.com. Please refer to the guidelines on the review process on the protocol for submissions

PROCESS & POLICIES

Peer Review Process

The journal follows a blind refereeing system. Information that refers to authors should be removed from the main text as well as file properties of the submission. This is to prevent authors, editors and reviewers from identifying each other and ensure the integrity of the review process. The abstract, author's information, and the five keywords should be placed in a separate file.

Open Access Policy

The journal aspires to provide relevant research to the widest audience possible, both in the interest of expanding readership and citations for the works of authors as well as creating a space for discourse on issues that impact the lives of people in urban centers and their peripheries. Given this aim, the journal provides open access to all its content.

Privacy Policy

The names and email addresses provided by authors will be used exclusively for the stated purposes of this journal and will not be made available for any other purpose or to any other party.

Copyright Notice

Authors retain copyright of their published articles, although the journal requests that they refer requests for access to their work to the journal's site. Clearances and permissions for any and all parts of manuscripts, including images are the responsibility of the author including involved fees and notification to copyright holders.



MAIN ARTICLE

The search for *Nayon ng M*: An exploration of urban and rural spaces in Darna texts

Cherish Aileen A. Brillon
College of Mass Communication
University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

In the country, analysis of what constitutes the local superhero genre still comes in trickles. If there are any discussion, it is typically subsumed under studies on fantasy and action-adventure or from the perspective of gender, but these approaches overlook certain aesthetics, themes, and ideologies that is inherent and relevant to the superhero genre.

This paper is an initial exploration on how setting is represented in the Filipino superhero genre using selected Darna texts as sites of analysis. While setting is simply defined as the physical location and time in which the narrative is set, the superhero genre adds another layer of importance to it as it serves as a platform for the superhero's display of power and, in some cases, becoming an important character in the story. This paper is also interested in looking at Darna's relationship with her rural and urban environments and how these justify her continuous adventures which has economic implications for the superhero genre. In the end, this paper hopes to expand the discussion of superhero texts and its representations of urban and rural environments, but from the perspective of a local superheroine.

Keywords: Darna, genre studies, rural spaces, superheroes, urban spaces

Introduction

The dominance of the superhero genre in the past decade culminated in Marvel Studios' *Avengers: Endgame* grossing around 2.8 billion (Box Office Mojo, 2019) in box-office worldwide, making it the top grossing movie of all time. Accompanying this success is a renewed interest from academic scholars to take a serious look at the genre from various lenses and perspectives. Alex Romagnoli and Gian Pagnucci (2013) have already criticized how the academe continues to marginalize superheroes even in the realm of comics and popular culture studies. For them, superhero texts, like other forms of art and literature are worthy of analysis because of its multimodal and multigenerational nature, its aesthetic value in terms of content and form, its history, and its ideologies (p. 24).

In the same vein, there is hardly a systematic literature on the Filipino superhero genre, outside of studies about Darna. This may be because local superhero stories still come in cycles as opposed to the regularity of melodrama, horror, and comedy. If there are any discussion, it is subsumed under studies on fantasy and action-adventure featuring folk heroes (Sicat, 2014; Campos, 2009; Reyes, 2009; Teodoro, 2007; Lucero, 2001). While genre conventions are fluid and borrowings are common, I have previously argued (2018) that subsuming the study of Filipino superheroes under the fantasy and action-adventure overlooks certain aesthetics, themes, and ideologies that is inherent and relevant to the superhero genre[1].

This paper is an initial exploration on how setting is represented in the Filipino superhero genre using selected Darna texts as sites of analysis. Setting is defined as the physical location and time that a story is set in and this serves as a backdrop or context and helps initiate the mood. In the superhero genre, setting is an important convention because it serves as a backdrop to the heroism of the protagonists. As for example, Superman's Metropolis became the stage where he showcased his power as a superhero. Sometimes, setting is also more than a stage for the showcase of a hero's prowess as it gets a life of its own and becomes an integral part of the story such as Batman's Gotham City.

Relevant to the notion of setting is Scott Bukatman's (2013) study of the superhero's relationship with the city which he categorizes as magisterial, cryptologist, and trespasser. A magisterial superhero, as in the case of Superman, surveys the city from the top in a kind of panoptic gaze. A magisterial superhero is like an all-seeing god and serves as a monument to the notion of city as open, modern, and 'democratic' (pp. 179-180). Meanwhile, a cryptologist deciphers the city – its nooks and crannies and the hidden motivations and machinations of its underbelly. In this regard, Batman is the perfect example of this since his city (Gotham) is always engulfed in a heavy-fog and lacks sunshine and is defined more by its shadows: the bars, the ports, the short cuts (pp. 181-182). Spiderman exemplifies the last category – trespasser – not only because he lives in a real-life city (New York) which, according to Bukatman, is already "a complex organism that defies easy comprehension" (p. 183), but also because a trespasser is neither the city's hero of choice (like Superman) nor one of its most powerful citizens (like Bruce Wayne), but is someone who walks its streets, crawls up its walls, and swings by buildings as if he's perpetually being hunted (p. 184).

However, Bukatman's analysis mostly centers on the male superhero's relationship with the city, but glosses over female superheroes in the process. This is ironic because there are superheroines who are identified with popular (but imagined) places such as Themyscira (for Wonder Woman) and National City (Supergirl: TV Series) while some also live and move within previously male identified cities such as Jessica Jones and Susan Storm aka Invisible Woman (New York). Unsurprisingly, there remains a lack of attention to the relationship that superheroines have with their setting. This is where I situate this paper's significance. As a female superhero, Darna's long history parallels those of other (male) Western superheroes, but she is rarely analyzed from the perspective of superhero studies which has its own approaches and elements. This paper asserts that an analysis of Darna cannot be separated from the conventions of the superhero genre since she is first and foremost imagined by Mars Ravelo as a superhero figure in the vein of mostly male heroes such as Superman, Shazam, and then Wonder Woman (Brillon, 2018, p. 127).

Lastly, this paper is also interested in uncovering how rural and urban spaces justify Darna's continuous adventures which has economic implications for the superhero genre. This level of analysis borrows from Umberto Eco's idea of "oneiric climate" (1972/2004) or how superhero characters are trapped in a never-ending present because superheroes cannot grow old or die since they are treated as commodities that corporations want to continue to exploit for as long as possible. As a superhero, Darna has been the subject of thirteen movies, three television series, and four theater plays. In short, she is not just a popular culture icon, but a profitable one. In looking at this perspective, this paper also expands the scope of what can be studied about Darna that goes beyond her gender as it explores how the perpetuation of the superhero genre is dictated by its political economy.

This paper is a close reading of how Darna texts utilized setting for its stories. In particular, I took note of the spatial (urban and rural) and temporal milieu of these narratives and how Darna moves in them. Available materials that were selected for a close reading includes several komiks (though not all are completed issues) and five movies2. Since I am dealing with a multitude of texts from komiks and movies, the analysis of setting were made on a general textual level, though I endeavored to point out important nuances. Further, this is only just an exploratory study of how rural and urban areas are represented in Darna texts and an initial look into defining her relationship with these places using the generic conventions of the superhero and how it is being used to commodify the genre. While gender is something that was discussed, it is not yet the main focus of this paper.

Lastly, as a long-time superhero fan, it is worth noting how, despite having local superheroes that hark back to the time of American colonization and having a number of Filipino and Filipino-American creators that are widely celebrated in international comic book publishing, there are still a lot of areas in the study of local superheroes that does not get enough attention. More specifically, this paper hopes to expand the discussion of superhero texts and its representations of urban and rural environments, but from the perspective of a local superheroine.

The article starts out with an overview of the function of setting, particularly the importance of cities in the superhero genre followed by how urban and rural spaces have been represented in various Filipino movies that are mostly from the melodrama, social-realist, and fantasy genres. The final two sections focus on how Darna texts represented these spaces and its implications by using Eco's oneiric climate.

Setting in the superhero genre

While setting is a convention across all stories and narratives, there are particularities to specific genres. In the superhero genre, cities as setting is a great source of narrative because this is where the action is (Bukatman, 2013). As Riddler, one of Batman's nemesis once said, "When is a man a city?" (as cited in Wyse, 2014, para. 7). In fact, New York City with its nooks and crannies, its tall buildings, and diverse peoples, and its history as a modern city has become an inevitable signifier for what constitutes a "superhero city" (Reynolds, 2013, pp. 108-109; Klock, 2013, p. 118).

The relationship of superheroes to city and modernity was borne out of their introduction during a "period of rapid industrial growth, a shift from rural to urban, and worldwide war" (Boney, 2013, p. 43). Within these wider social forces, the city became the locus of power and energy, which inspired a variety of reactions from people ranging from awe to trepidation. Alex Boney observes that in early modern novels, the cities were portrayed as intimidating, fast, and overwhelming, so much so that the protagonists were swept away by the fast-paced life and they exhibited no control over their surroundings, sometimes destroying themselves in the process (i.e. *The Great Gatsby*). Meanwhile, comic book writers and artists also portrayed the city in the superhero genre the same way, but instead of being overcome by it, the superheroes were powerful, strong, and as the famous quote from Superman goes, they are also "faster than a speeding locomotive" and "able to leap over tall buildings in a single bound". In short, the superheroes were in command and in control of the city. These superheroes provided relief to the readers as they transcended "the limitations of contemporary existence and stave off the chaos of the modern world" (2013. p. 49). While they are the reflection of people's anxieties with changes, superheroes can control it through extraordinary feats of strength and power.

For Boney (2013) and Nicole Liang (2019), the earliest concerns and motivations of superheroes during their formative years were brought about by the urban setting they were situated in. These superheroes dealt with rising criminality and the chaos brought by America's transition from an agrarian to urban economy. These early superheroes were not concerned with abstract notions of truth, justice, and freedom, but more with helping individuals who got robbed, kidnapped, or hurt by criminals and organized crime syndicates who took advantage of the city's dark corners and hidden passageways. This also fostered a kind of mutual dependence between the hero and the city — where, according to Liang, the hero is often raised by the city, and he reciprocates by supporting the city when it is in need (*Choosing a medium*, para. 3).

As one of the most popular characters that came out of comics, superheroes are inseparable from their mostly urban setting because they "constitute part of the representation of urban imagery in popular culture" (Liang, 2019, para. 1). Superheroes has a connection to the modern city because they reflect "the dreams and realities of twentieth-century urban life" since they act out its utopian and dystopian possibilities (Bukatman as cited in Hatfield, 2013, p. 77). This is seen in:

> Their flamboyance and mobility across the cityscape, in their panoptic vision (from above) and defiance of urban order and rationalization, and yet too in the anonymity of their "secret identities"—an anonymity that confers a type of freedom—superheroes mythologize what the beginning of the story, by flawed abilities and attitudes presumably shared by the audience (Bukatman as cited in Hatfield, 2013, p. 77).

Liang also points out that superheroes are not just modern American myths that serve an escapist function, but also creates an 'other space' or what is called 'spectral cities' which re-represent the:

> internalized images of real-world American metropolises as ghostly images upon a fictional territory, but it may also point to the omnipresence of superheroes lingering like specters in their respective comic book cities (2019, para. 2).

In short, inserted within the pages of comic books are literal images of the city, culled from authors' and creators' own experiences with it, which lends its portrayal a sense of realism. In this regard, there are two types of spectral cities in American superhero comics that was also reflective of their publishers' brand and image (Liang, 2019; Allen, 2014). DC Comics, the home of Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, engage in what Liang calls 'fantasy town-planning' or creating fictionalized cities that borrows elements from the real world (*Fictionalized Cities in DC Comics*, para. 1). Examples of this are Metropolis and Gotham which are reminiscent of New York's (for Metropolis including Delaware and Toronto) urban landscapes, though the illustrators made sure that there are no particularly identifiable landmarks. For Liang, DC cities function as a kind of simulacrum because it borrows elements from various places which are then distilled to create another image of a city that is also made real and complex (*Fictionalized Cities in DC Comics*, para. 4)

On the other hand, Marvel Comics, home of Spiderman, Captain America, the Avengers, are more into 'landmark realism'. Superheroes operate in real-life cities, for example Spiderman and the Avengers in New York and Wolverine in Quebec (Liang, *Fictionalized Cities in DC Comics*, para. 1), and utilize familiar buildings and landmarks in its stories (Allen, 2014, p. 2). For Allen:

> The Marvel universe and the real world were threaded into each other in such a way where contemporary social issues could be explored with the metaphor of the superhero living amongst the general populace. Marvel's early heroes were based in the hometown of their creators, which also happened to be in large part, a cultural touchstone for the rest of America (2014, p. 25).

While both types can be considered spectral cities, the characters that move within the fantasy cities of DC Comics are more akin to fables and mythologies with Superman being the template for the classical Greek hero, while a certain kind of 'realism' pervades Marvel Comics' stories which is representative of their flawed and humanized characters.

What is perhaps also relevant in Liang's discussion of spectral cities is the notion of its timelessness and placelessness, where it is an "image of everywhere but nowhere" (*Fictionalized Cities in DC Comics*, para. 5). William Uricchio (2010) traced the notion of timelessness and placelessness of superhero settings (or cities) to the comics's serial nature which means that stories need to go on for long periods of time because of its economic implications. In his argument, Uricchio locates Gotham City's importance in the never-ending narrative of Batman as it provides the source of the "franchise's endless iteration" (2010, p. 120). Since Batman operates exclusively in Gotham City, he needs a space to showcase his adventures and becomes his rationale for continuing to don his bat costume. Here the narrative does not offer up any explanation on why nothing is ever solved despite Batman's long-running career in crime-fighting. In this sense, Gotham has to remain a corrupt and dirty city because it is the only way Batman can continue to live on and for DC Comics to continue making money for the character. The same is true for Marvel superheroes, especially Daredevil and Spiderman, who are also both closely identified with New York.

What these literature shows are the various preliminary studies on the importance of setting in the superhero genre, though it also exposed the major limitations and gaps in research, particularly the focus on male superheroes and their relationship with cities while simultaneously glossing over female superheroes and the genre's perpetuation of certain narrative tropes because of its economic implications. This is what this paper will try to address.

Representations of urban and rural setting in Filipino films

Various film genres in the Philippines have always harnessed setting as a way to tell stories. However, it is only in recent years that setting has become an important line of inquiry for the academe.

A fruitful area in this regard is the study of city films. Patrick Campos (2016) traced the beginnings of the city film genre in Europe during the 1920s, roughly around the same time that comics was also starting to become

popular. Earliest city films such as those by Lumiere Brothers presented the city as "a space that needs to be mapped out in order to be known" (p. 45).

The most popular city films that Filipino film scholars focused their analysis on were mostly from the melodrama and social-realist genres or movies that address real-life issues and concerns, with characters grappling with 'realistic' conflicts. In particular, Lino Brocka's *Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila in the Claws of Light, 1975) and Ishmael Bernal's *Manila By Night* (1980) received a lot of attention from the academe. In his analysis of the two films, Rolando Tolentino (2012) explains that these two city films provided an "analog of the literal city" and became a "space for negotiating the film narrative" (p. 116). In these movies, Manila became a representation of Marcos' City of Man and is shown as both vibrant and listless, clean and dirty, controlled and uncontrolled by the State's power, and where light and darkness occupy the same space. Meanwhile, Jose Gutierrez's (2016) review of *Maynila* explained how the setting functioned to show how "human beings are presented as cogs in the machine in order to manufacture an image of a modern city" (p. 7). Here the fate of the characters — Julio Madiaga and Ligaya Paraiso — were juxtaposed with who they were and what happened to them when they both journeyed from rural (site of their innocence and dreams) to the city (site of nightmare, reality, and violence). For Tito Quiling (2017), the city as a setting became a fertile ground for film narratives because of urbanization and the lack of opportunities for those in the rural areas, especially those displaced in the aftermath of World War II (p. 72). The city became a symbol of survival, opportunities, and a chance to start over again, though the characters would typically find themselves living in bleak conditions upon moving to the city (2017, p. 74).

City films as a local subgenre used setting as an important character, not just a place or time where and when a story was situated. In these movies, the city was a site of negotiation and contestation of meanings and actions. All of these works also assume the city as a product of modernity and just like the lead characters in early modern literature, the protagonists in these city films were engulfed and overwhelmed by the city's oppressiveness, though there are certainly gaps for resistance.

There are also studies that focus on the representations of rural spaces. Eulalio Guieb's (2006) article on another Bernal movie, *Nunal sa Tubig* (Speck in the Water, 1976) is an example. The film's setting was a small fishing village located along Laguna de Bay, a provincial town south of Manila. His analysis of the movie exemplifies the collision between the urban and rural and its differing perspective on modernity and tradition. In another article, Campos (2016) highlighted the representations of rural landscapes in cinema though his focus remain on social realist movies done by independent filmmakers in the early 2000s. According to Campos, early representations of Philippine landscapes – associated with provincial spaces – framed it as remote and marginal (p. 349). The rural is seen as a pastoral — an idealized image of country life — and is meant to delineate the rural as an aspirational space where there is peace, simplicity, and purity, while presenting the urban as a place of poverty and where people were seen as cold and heartless (pp. 344, 365). These observations are important because the setting of various Darna texts are also located in both rural and urban areas and they were produced and distributed around the same time that these social realist films came out.

Rosario Cruz Lucero's (2001) and Francis Gealogo's (2006) analysis of film settings veer away from melodrama and social-realist movies into fantasy. Gealogo's analysis of *Nardong Putik* (1972), one of the most popular *agimat* (amulet) movies in the seventies, illustrated the role of the film's setting (Cavite) in the discourse on power, especially during the time of the American colonization. Gealogo noted how the main character and his tribe of outlaws are able to wrest some of the power away from the colonizer by living in the periphery (outside of the city center). Here they are able to live a carefree life, evade capture, and maintain a semblance of control of their surroundings. On the other hand, Lucero collapsed the genre conventions between Darna (in particular *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik*) and a number of other fantasy movies in her analysis. She points out that fantasy stories start when women leave their natural, eden-like habitat and venture into urban wilderness. She generalizes these movies as conflating and reaffirming the relationship between woman and place as the home, landscape, sea, forest nature is portrayed as feminized. Further, she reduces the women in these movies to the notion of topophilia – a woman's affectionate attachment to

places, her urge to "settle down and keep the home fires burning" (p.12). This is something I disagreed with in my analysis below and drives home my previous point that analyzing Darna using the conventions of fantasy may sometimes fall short and fail to illuminate other interesting and important aspects of her character and story.

Studies that focus on the representations of rural and urban spaces in local cinema have always been centered on melodrama, social-realist, and fantasy genres. In my survey of related literature, popular culture movies — typically labeled as *pang-masa* (for general audiences/masses), escapist, and profit-oriented — are rarely the subject of this kind of serious academic inquiry. What is even rarer is using the local superhero genre, as possible source or point of analysis about a culture's imagining of their rural and urban spaces.

Setting in Darna texts

Darna, created by Mars Ravelo and illustrated by Nestor Redondo, was first published in Pilipino Komiks (Ace Publications) in May 1950 (Brillon, 2018). This section now presents the general thematic findings of how setting, both spatial and temporal, is represented in Darna.

Setting in Darna komiks

Rural is the default setting of Darna in several komiks stories included in this analysis such as *Darna* (1950-1951), *Darna at ang Babaing Linta* (Darna and the Woman Leech) (1968), *Darna at ang Babaing Tuod* (Darna and the Wooden Monster) (1964-1965). In Mars Ravelo's origin story3, Narda (Darna's mortal alter-ego), her brother Ding, and grandmother, hails from a small rural town called *Nayon ng M* (Town of M), a town outside of Manila (1950, #1, p. 14). This setting actually signifies a real-life location – that of Malabon, General Trias, Cavite where Mars Ravelo was born (Reyes, 2009 p. 16). This rural town was only mentioned in the first issue of the komiks to situate where Narda and her family lived, but did not figure much in the overall story and even in succeeding komiks issues.

In these stories, rural is a peaceful place where people live simply, and everyone knew each other. It is a place where Narda and Ding can safely roam and play with other children even at night, without their grandmother worrying about them. These places are shown as untouched by modernity with people still living in nipa huts without electricity and other urban amenities. However, this peace and quiet only seems to be in the surface as these places hold unexplained mysteries and terror because of the villains lurking in these areas.



Fig. 1:
The rural environment in *Darna at ang Babaing Linta*
(Taken from *Darna Komiks,* 1968, UP Diliman Library).

Rural is the site where exotic creatures and monsters are found and where supernatural beliefs abound. In earlier stories, the rural was an unforgiving place for the villains and the site of their revenge. Valentina (*Darna*), Garda (*Babaing Linta*), and Luci (*Babaing Tuod*), were out of place in this space because of their deformities (Valentina had snakes for hair and Garda had an elephant-like nose and mouth) and their outlook (Luci was portrayed as a 'liberated', but sinful woman). These villains did not fit into what townspeople consider 'normal' and so they casted them further in isolated islands or in dense, thick forests, and caves where they are forced to live in seclusion. A number of Darna's fight scenes with the villains took place in these places which lend the komiks more of an eerie, gothic feel in terms of aesthetics. Compared to Superman whose earliest villains were just mostly criminals and pickpockets, Darna also fights enchanted creatures from lower Philippine mythology.

There were no identifying features and landmarks of these places that will enable readers to determine where these stories happened since Darna's setting were mostly just given generic names and descriptions such as *Bayan ng L* (Town of L) (1950, #19, p. 36) or "bayan sa labas ng Maynila" (a town outside of Manila). All other stories were also vague in terms of the time frame aside from *Darna at ang Babaing Tuod* which explicitly indicated that the story happened in the year 1944 (Ravelo & Fernandez, 1964, #5, p. 50). It is worth noting that though glimpses of the city in Darna stories have begun to appear in these pages, what can be gleaned is that majority of the action and plot remain in the rural areas.

This changed with the Darna komiks that came out in the seventies such as *Darna vs. Sataniña Dayabolika* (1977), *Darna at ang Black Widow* (1980-1981), *Darna at ang Toxic Monster* (1999), and Mango Comics' reimagining of *Darna* in 2003. Just like Filipinos who migrated to urban areas to try their luck, Darna's heroic adventures also took her to the city, although they (Narda and Ding) continue to have their residence outside of Manila. If they need to solve a crime in the city, they are shown as having relatives who accommodate them without asking any questions.

The city as a setting in these later komiks is always imagined as a place where tall buildings abound, with modern transportation such as cars and trains, places of leisure such as bars, malls, and concert stadiums as seen in *Black Widow* and the 2003 *Darna* Comics. There were also subtle nods to real landmarks such as the Paco train station in *Black Widow* (1980, #189, p. 29), Tagaytay City in *Darna* (2003, #1, p. 10), Araneta Coliseum in Cubao in *Toxic Monster* (1999, p. 2). But while these panels already show familiar places, the temporal setting remains indistinguishable and vague.

The urban as setting is also a stage for Darna's heroism. Here, the villains are not outsiders who live in caves, forests, or far-off islands, but are in plain sight as in the case of Sataniña who has taken on the appearance of a young child and Black Widow who is a wealthy mother of a disfigured child. The villains in these latter stories utilize the nooks and crannies of the city to hide their evil deeds, unlike the villains in the rural places where they utilize the vastness of space and their control of natural surroundings to sow terror (in particular Valentina). An exception to this is the toxic monster, a Godzilla-like creature, who is seen in full view of the people and caused severe damage to the city's infrastructure.

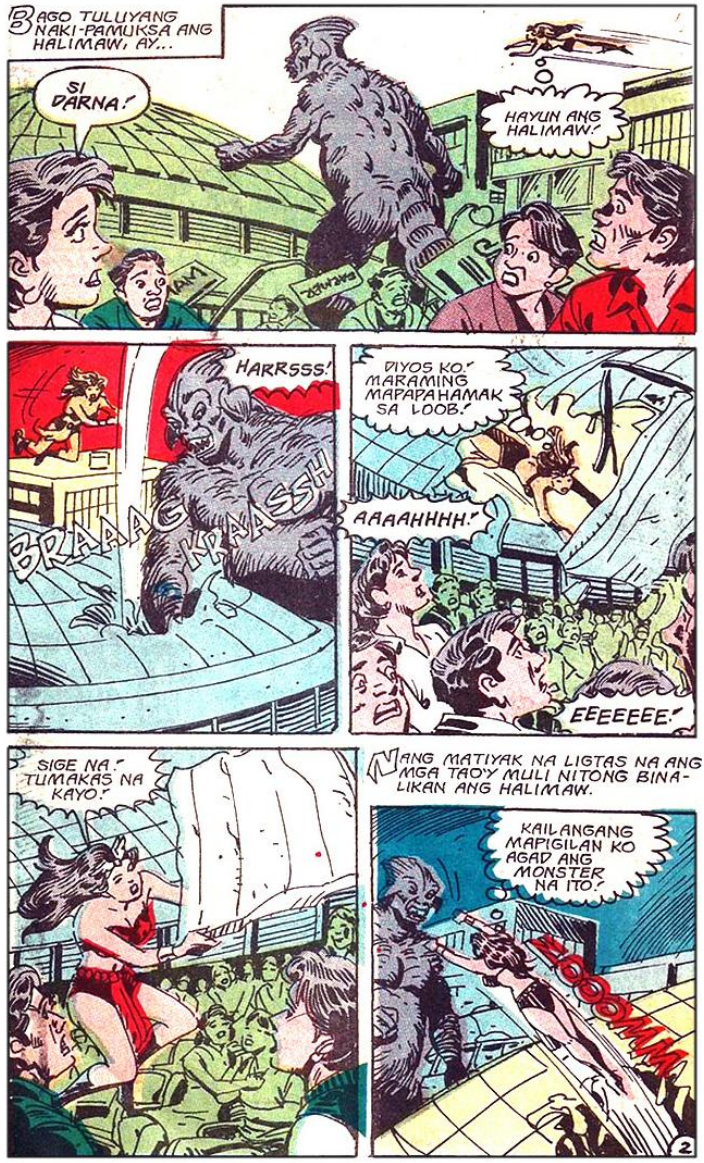


Fig. 2:
Darna fighting the toxic monster in the city
(Taken from *Super Action Komiks*, 1999, with permission from the blog owner. Retrieved from https://pinoysuperheroesuniverse.blogspot.com/2010/07/darna-reborn.html).

Lastly, when Darna fights in the city, her heroism is on full display with many comic panels showing a lot of people who are either scampering for their lives, gawking at the fight, or cheering her on, unlike in the vast spaces of forests and caves where the only witnesses to her heroism are Ding and some characters related to the villains.



Fig. 3:
Panel from the first Darna komiks.
(Taken from *Pilipino Komiks*, 1950, with previous permission from the owner, retrieved from Video 48 website).

Overall, komiks stories utilize the setting to show Darna's mastery of her environment, whether urban or rural.

Setting in Darna movies

As mentioned, Darna is a popular source material for adaptation in both small and big screens. Perhaps because of its audio-visual nature and the fact that stories are shot on location, these texts have more grounding in realistic landmarks and actual places as compared to komiks. For this section, five Darna movies, namely *Darna and the Giants* (1973), *Darna Vs. The Planet Women* (1975), *Bira, Darna, Bira* (Go, Darna, Go) (1979), *Darna at Ding* (1980), and *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik* (1994) are included in the analysis.

At first glance, what all these adapted texts have in common in terms of setting is the narrative trajectory of having Narda and Ding come from the province into the city, either to solve a crime or to stay permanently. The difference is in how these places are represented as sites of Darna's heroism and has similarities with how rural and urban places are presented in melodrama and social-realist genres.

In movies like *Giants, Planet Women*, and *Darna at Ding*, majority of the story took place in rural areas because this is where Narda and Ding lives. Initially, these are also seen as idealized places, seemingly like a pastoral landscape, with notion of purity, tranquility, and an idyllic sense of living, but not as premodern as it was in the komiks. These places have a sense of community and belongingness and where Filipino values are still espoused and practiced such as *pagmamano* (kissing an elder's hand as a sign of respect), *paninilbihan* (serving the family of the person you love), and *harana* (serenade), among others.



Fig. 4:
Screenshot from *Darna and the Giants* showing Narda and Ding's idyllic life in the farm (1973, Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions).

This tranquil rural life is always interrupted by evil such as aliens (*Giants* and *Planet Women*) and zombies (*Darna at Ding*) who terrorize these communities. Following Campos (2016), the arrival of evil in the villages signifies the defilement of the rural community, but with Darna's help, order is restored, and the space's symbolic purity is once again regained.

Notable among the movies who exploited the value of rural as a setting is *Darna and the Giants* because it made use of open spaces and vast lands as the site of the giants' slaughter of townspeople. It also effectively used night as a temporal setting because this is the time when giants would freely roam to scare people and destroy their properties. Further, instead of caves functioning only as a site for battle like in the komiks, the caves in the movie are turned into claustrophobic dungeons and prisons where people are tortured or killed, evoking images of Marcos' martial law (Brillon, 2019, p.223).



Fig. 5:
Screenshot from *Darna and the Giants* showing one of the giants terrorizing a rural community (1973, Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions).

Meanwhile, movies such as *Bira, Darna, Bira* and *Darna at Ding* portray Narda and Ding as traveling from rural to urban to help solve crimes. Like the characters in the city films, they also discovered that the city is dirty, congested, polluted, and crime ridden. In *Bira*, Narda (Rio Locsin) and Ding (Romnick Sarmenta) were initially forced to collect garbage in order to have money to buy food, until Narda was discovered and became a model. In the course of the film, they became entangled with an investigation into a serial killer and a criminal organization. In the second episode of *Darna at Ding*, Narda (Vilma Santos) and Ding (Niño Muhlach) travelled to Binondo where they lived in a cramped space in the poorer part of the city. While here, Ding and a lot of other children were kidnapped and almost offered as a sacrifice to the devil by the sorceress Lei Ming (Celia Rodriguez). In a sense, this characterization of the city is not far from how social realist movies have portrayed it, though Darna movies end on a more triumphant note where she becomes the city's savior and the conflicts are settled clearly unlike the tragic or open-ended endings of Brocka and Bernal's city films.

From among these movies, it is *Planet Women* which presented a 'positive' representation of the city as it affirmed Marcos's fantasy of progress, mobility, and modernity (see Brillon, 2019, p. 227). While the bulk of the movie was set in the province, majority of the fight scenes happened in the urban areas since the villains were after the scientists and cultural workers residing in the city. From its shot of Araneta Coliseum in the opening credits to one of the most popular Darna fight scenes on top of a rooftop overlooking Metro Manila's horizons, the city was framed as progressive and urbanized with tall buildings and modern transportation. It is also shown as economically prosperous which was on full display in the houses of public officials, but also heavily militarized as seen in the presence of MPs (military police) everywhere (p. 227).

It was *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik* which utilized the setting, both rural and urban, as more than just a backdrop and adhered closer to the notion of the superhero genre's landmark realism and how Filipino social-realist movies made use of cities as characters in stories. The movie was inspired by a real-life event: the Mount Pinatubo eruption on June 15, 1991. The movie's story locates itself in the aftermath of its devastation. Its commitment to talk about a real event that happened in a real environment (the devastation caused by the lahar in Pampanga) was apparent at the start of the movie as it showed actual news clips of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo and the ensuing struggle of the affected villagers. As mentioned by Lucero (2001), this is also where the film's story starts. After losing their land and property to lahar, Narda (Anjanette Abayari), Ding (Lester Llansang) and their Lola (Perla Bautista), traveled to Manila to start a new life with the help of Pol (Rustom Padilla, now BB Gandanghari).



Fig. 6:
Screenshot from *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik* showing the survivors of the Mount Pinatubo eruption evacuating their community (1994, Viva Films).

This film took a different approach as opposed to other Darna movies where moving to Manila and living in poor conditions did not seem to bother Narda and Ding. Upon their arrival in Manila, they were immediately confronted with the poverty, grime, and the hardship of being informal settlers. Ding was forced to take up the responsibility of earning a living by selling rags in the city's dangerous streets; Narda was almost sexually harassed; while their grandmother fell prey to cult-like behavior at the hands of the film's villain, Valentine (Cherie Gil). At the end of the movie, it was only Pol who voluntarily went back to the province, still believing its idealized connotations, while Narda decided to stay in the city in order to find herself. Here I return to Lucero's analysis of women in the fantasy genre and the notion of topophilia and offer a different explanation using Bukatman's assertion that for superheroes, the city is both a place of aspiration and anonymity, failure and rebirth (2013, p. 187). In *Ang Pagbabalik*, it is the city that provided Narda with a renewed sense of purpose (saving people like her which she failed to do after the eruption), a place where she experienced rebirth (she found her powers again after having lost it in her hometown), and where she was able to start over as a 'new' person who can slip on multiple identities as an alter-ego and a superhero because no one from her previous life (rural) knew her.



Fig. 7:
Screenshot from *Darna: Ang Pagbabalik* showing the place where Narda and her family stayed in Manila after evacuating from Mount Pinatubo (1994, Viva Films).

Further, majority of the selected Darna movies did not end with Narda wanting to settle down to keep the home fires burning (in Lucero's words). Rather, her 'job' as a superhero meant that settling down was the least of her priorities. While all these movies have a romantic subplot, it took a backseat to the fight scenes and the battle between good vs. evil. Each movie always ends with Darna and Ding flying to look for more adventures while the men in her life looks up in the sky, waiting for her to come back. While fantasy stories may show female characters as being corrupted by the city or tainting the city with their femininity and sexuality, this is not true for Darna. In fact, her arrival signals hope and celebration for the people. Despite the adversity she faced in the city, she is never cynical nor corrupted.

The physical place/setting in Darna komiks and movies do not fall neatly into the categories defined by Liang in the sense that it cannot be categorized as either fantasy town-planning or landmark realism. In the komiks, even if the story situated Narda and Ding in a place largely inspired by where Mars Ravelo grew up, it did not figure much in succeeding stories. The same is true for the movies (with the exception of *Ang Pagbabalik*), although this medium by its nature has the advantage of being set in recognizable

landmarks as it is shot on location. However, Darna's mobility as a superhero – travelling back and forth from rural to urban and vice versa – can mean two things: that setting in the Filipino superhero genre cannot 'come alive' and become a character in itself as in the case of Batman's Gotham City and that Darna is more of an omnipresent superhero as opposed to her Western counterparts because she is a master of any terrain, any environment. In this case, she is not just a specter that lingers, but a savior that people calls on whenever and wherever they are in need.

This now brings me to another point – that of Liang's observation that there is a mutual dependence between the hero and the city (or setting) This is almost non-existent in Darna. Even her mortal alter-ego, Narda, isn't raised nor nurtured by these places and so the relationship is only one way – with Darna always playing the savior. This is why her arrival is never a portent of bad things to come, but as a cause for celebration.

Darna's relationship with rural and urban spaces may not be as simple and as clear as Bukatman's categories of magisterial, cryptologist, and trespasser. Darna's mobility makes her a master of both urban (*labas* or outside) and rural (*loob* or inside) spaces. She is a master of the city, flying as high as the tallest buildings and capturing criminals hiding in its dark corners and alleyways. She is also a master of her natural environment since she can navigate its dark caves and forests with ease. But aside from mastering the *labas* and *loob*, she also straddles the line between being a magisterial and a cryptologist superheroine because of the nature of her identity: Darna *mula sa itaas* (from above) and Narda *mula sa ibaba* (from below). As the superhero Darna, she gazes over her rural and urban environments from a vantage point, an omniscient god who can see everything. As the mortal alter-ego Narda, a poor girl from the province, she can navigate these spaces and use it to her advantage.

As a final point in the representation of settings, these movies also do not give an inkling of a specific temporal setting (except for *Ang Pagbabalik*) even though it is possible to historicize the production of its texts. While this is not much of a concern per se in other genres, people who are raised in the comic book's unique notion of continuity4 may wonder as to what

timeline these events are happening. In fact, a number of Darna texts give an impression that time has stopped or is stuck to a fixed point in time. To this end, it is Darna's setting that reminds us of the genre's function to induce an "ever continuing present". This is discussed in the succeeding section.

Setting as an ever-continuing present

On a general level, continuity in terms of characters, stories, places, and events are important in the superhero genre because it anchors the superhero to a tangible reality that the readers can follow. While writers from other genres do not have to keep to this set of elements rigidly, continuity is associated with the superhero's trademark, hence the industry needs to consistently ensure that these elements are present because this is what makes them timeless. As for example, while Batman can be reimagined, his backstory (the death of his parents) and his milieu (Gotham) is always part of what fans recognize about him and this will not change no matter how many times his character is rebooted. The same idea of continuity can be applied to Darna – her alter-ego is always named Narda, she has to have a brother named Ding, and the source of her power is always the stone that she has to swallow in order to transform. These things make her recognizable to her fans and to Filipinos in general.

Umberto Eco's (1972/2004) *The Myth of Superman* discussed the difficulty of the continuing storylines of superheroes. Due to its serial aesthetic superhero stories develop in a kind of oneiric climate which means that events happen in an ever continuing present where these heroes neither get old nor die. As archetypes, they are "immobilized in an emblematic and fixed nature which renders him/her easily recognizable" (Eco, 1972 as cited in Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013, p. 62). This aspect has a profound narrative and thematic effect in a sense that while the hero overcomes obstacles, he/she does not affect "real change in his environment because change would ground the superhero in the temporal and move him one step closer to death" (Duncan & Smith, 2009, p. 234). For Eco, if Superman stories were realistic narratives, where events happen in "real time", he would be "consumed" by events until he eventually grows old and die – a fate which cannot befall a mythic figure.

This state of "ever continuing present" is induced in the reader so that he/she is not aware at all of what happened before and what happens after becomes extremely hazy. As one of the most profitable popular culture products, superheroes has to remain timeless because they are products that can be maximized for profit not only in their various incarnations in media platforms, but also as merchandised items (t-shirts, souvenir items, etc.) or as licensed images (in theme parks). Their popularity nowadays has led to stricter controls when it comes to narrating their identities and stories.

In Darna, the story, the characters (Ding remains a child in majority of these stories), and the setting, both space and time, all come together to induce a state of "never ending present". In the komiks and adapted films (with few notable exceptions), this is done by situating the stories in an unidentifiable time and place. The 'rural' is described or portrayed as just outside the 'city' though it possesses very vague characteristics and there isn't any identifying marks on 'when' these things occur. For a character that was created after World War II just as the country was struggling to get back to its feet, there isn't any sign of the destruction of war nor any form of its aftermath in the pages of Darna komiks. In fact, at least in the komiks I have analyzed, the setting harks back to a nostalgic, simpler, and innocent times. While Superman was created as a response to the dizzying forces of modernity and this is seen in how he's a master of Metropolis, it seems like Darna was created to remind Filipinos of a time when there is no war and poverty, hence the time and place was also made deliberately hazy. This parallels komiks' function as the major source of entertainment for the masses who were just rising from the ashes of war (Reyes, 2009, p.14).

The same haziness is induced in the adapted films. The rural setting in much of Darna's films in the seventies and eighties seems like it is lifted from the komiks' pages. When the action is transferred to the city, it is only through context cues such as music, fashion, and recognizable landmarks that give these movies a sense of place. The exceptions to this are the 2003 Darna comics as it firmly positioned Narda as a college student living in Manila and showed her life outside of her superhero duties; *Bira, Darna, Bira* because it reflected Manila's rising criminality and lawlessness in the

eighties, and *Ang Pagbabalik* which defined its milieu as the Mount Pinatubo eruption in Pampanga and the fate of survivors in evacuation centers in Manila. Situating Darna in an unidentifiable time and place is safer for the entertainment industry because Darna has to remain viewer-friendly and so the focus has to be on her adventures and not on the politics of the milieu.

The sense of placelessness and timelessness that Liang describes is more pronounced in Darna texts than in the Western superhero genre, especially the movies produced by Marvel Studios in contemporary times. In the Western superhero genre, setting not only has a clearer function in the narrative, but also illuminates the superhero's place in it. The city needs the superhero and vice-versa. In Darna, there is less emphasis on her relationship with and placement within these rural and urban spaces because, as mentioned above, her mobility prevents her from developing a connection to these places. As Darna, she stands above everyone as a benevolent superhero. As Narda, she is a slippery figure, moving in and out of urban and rural areas.

As a result, both space and time contribute to the genre's tendency to tell stories in a never-ending present. Time and place are deliberately made vague and hazy so as to prevent any major changes in the character since this will have an economic implication for a genre whose success is predicated on its history and longevity.

Conclusion

A character cannot function in a vacuum hence the importance of setting in whatever genre of storytelling. However, the superhero genre's unique dependence on setting has more to do with the close and intimate ties that the superhero has with these places. As Bukatman notes, "superheroes exist to inhabit the city, to patrol, map, dissect, and traverse it. They are surprisingly proper guides to these cities of change: invulnerable yet resilient and metamorphic, they hold their shape" (2013, p. 195). Unfortunately, the focus of these studies are usually the relationship between the city and the male superhero.

This is where this paper try to locate its contribution to the expansion of the discussion of the superhero genre. It explored how setting is represented in Darna texts as well as her connection to urban and rural environments in both komiks and movies. In the selected texts, the rural, in the surface, is seen as pastoral spaces, until the monster is revealed and Darna springs into action to restore its tranquility. The city is shown similar to Filipino melodrama and social realist movies: congested, polluted, and oppressive, though of course, Darna swoops in to give the people hope.

Darna's relationship with setting is mobile, fluid, and dynamic. She can fly in and out of cities and towns, unlike in the Western superhero genre where they are rooted in a specific place. Darna's relationship to these places can be characterized as both *taga-labas* (outsider) and *taga-loob* (insider), but also as magisterial (*mula sa itaas* or from above) and as cryptologist (*sa ibaba* or from the ground). She is a master of all environments. This is possible, narratively speaking, because she remains to be the most recognizable and most popular superhero in the country. In comparison, many Western superheroes jostle for people's attention and the importance of continuity in terms of characters, stories, places, and temporality is a valued asset. In this regard, places have to be carved out and territorialized for superhero narratives to continue to make sense.

When seen from the framework of the superhero genre, setting in Darna texts present an alternative way of interpreting a superhero's relationship with urban and rural spaces. Perhaps a mobile superheroine like Darna needs to transcend geographic boundaries to represent the majority of Filipinos. However, the selected texts also show how setting contributes to Eco's idea of oneiric climate because placelessness and timelessness yields economic benefits for the owners and creators of texts. To this end, the selected texts have not fully utilized the power of setting, choosing instead to highlight Darna's status as savior of these places which prevents her from further engaging with real world events and concerns.

Endnotes

1 The following Darna komiks are used in the analysis: the complete issues of Darna (1950-1951), complete issues of Darna at ang Babaing Tuod (1964-1965), September issues of Darna at ang Babaing Linta (1968), selected issues of Darna at ang Black Widow (1980-1981), selected issues of Darna versus Sataniña Dayabolika (1977), Darna and the Toxic Monster (1999), and Darna (issues 1-3, 2003). Aside from availability, I excluded other Darna komiks where the action mostly happened in space or in other planets. I tried to make sure that the citation of archived materials are complete, however, there were instances when the material condition (brittleness of the paper, loose pages, lack of details online, among others) of some of the printed materials I have found do not provide these details. The following Darna movies are also included in the study: Darna and the Giants (1973), Darna vs. The Planet Women (1975), Bira Darna, Bira (1979), Darna at Ding (1980), and Darna: Ang Pagbabalik (1994). All of these materials are included in the References.

2 Campos (2009) explains that the visual and narrative conventions of our local fantasy and superhero movies owed a great deal to bakbakan movies (action) in its epic quality that comes in the form of the "excitement of combat, the exhilaration of manipulated time (acceleration and protraction), and the visceral evocation of movement in a spectacular scale" (p.6). It also emphasizes the "visual spectacle of the fantastic in terms of cinematic spaces, costumes, and magic while cueing the spectator to the convention 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" (p. 7).

3 Darna's origin story in komiks started when a young orphan girl named Narda, who was playing with her younger brother, Ding, saw a falling star. Investigating where it landed, Narda found a white, glowing stone from the crash site. Due to fear of being questioned by her playmates about her discovery, she swallowed the stone and was immediately overcome by a strange sensation and a flood of images of planets and alien races which caused her to collapse. She was found by her grandmother who took her home and tended to her. Upon waking up, Narda confided to her grandmother and Ding about what she saw, and when she mentioned the word engraved on the stone (Darna) she was transformed into a tall, powerful woman from the planet Marte. As Darna, she revealed that she was sent to Earth to defend it from the forces of darkness and hatred (Brillon, 2018).

4 Bayan ng M may stand for Malabon, General Trias, Cavite where Mars Ravelo was born (Reyes, 2009, p. 16)

5 Continuity is a unique trademark of the superhero genre. It pertains to the interconnectedness of the characters, stories, places, and contextual temporality in comic stories, though adherence to this is not rigidly observed due to the nature of comic book adaptations (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2005, p. 66). This is also a feature that is more associated with Western-based superheroes since majority of Darna stories do not bother with this as long as familiar elements are retained for identification purposes.

References

Allen, J. (2014). Marvel comics and New York stories: Anti-heroes and street level vigilantes Daredevil and The Punisher [MA thesis]. The City University of New York. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=gc_etds

Avellana, L. V. (Director) (1956). Anak Dalita [Child of Sorrow] [Film]. LVN Pictures.

Bernal, I. (Director) (1980). Manila By Night [Film]. Regal Films.

Bernal, I. (Director) (1976). Nunal sa Tubig [Speck in the water] [Film]. Regal Films.

Boney, A. (2013). Superheroes and the modern(ist) age. In R.S. Rosenberg & P. Coogan (Eds.), What is a superhero? (pp. 43-48). New York: Oxford University Press.

Borlaza, E. H. & Diaz, L. (Directors) (1973). Darna and the Giants [Film]. Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions.

Brillon, C.A.A. (2019). Darna movies in the time of martial law: National trauma and historical memory. Philippine Studies Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints, (67)2, 213–238.

Brillon, C.A.A. (2018). Darna and the intermediality of the superhero genre [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. UP Asian Center Tri-College.

Brocka, L. (Director) (1975). Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag [Manila in the Claws of Light] [Film]. Cinema Artists Philippines.

Bukatman, S. (2013). A song of the urban superhero. In C. Hatfield, J. Heer, & K. Worcester (Eds.), The superhero reader (pp. 170-198). USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Campos, P. (2016). The end of national cinema: Filipino film at the turn of the century. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

Campos, P. (2009). The fantasy-adventure films as contemporary epics, 2000-2007. UP Plaridel: A Journal of Philippine Communication, Media and Society, 6(1), pp. 1-36.

Cayado, T. (Director) (1972). Nardong Putik [Film]. Cavite Pictures.

Duncan, R. & Smith, M. J. (2009). The power of comics: History, form and culture. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Eco, U. (1972). The myth of Superman. In J. Heer & K. Worcester (Eds.), Arguing comics: Literary masters on popular medium, 2004 (146-164). USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Gallaga, P. & Reyes, L. (Directors) (1994). Darna: Ang Pagbabalik [Darna: The Return] [Film]. Viva Films.

Garces, A. (Director) (1975). Darna Vs. The Planet Women [Film]. Tagalog-Ilang-Ilang Productions.

Gealogo, F. A. (2006). Nardong Putik in the genealogy of Tagalog folk heroes. In R.B. Tolentino (Ed.), Geopolitics of the visible: Essays on Philippine film cultures (96-105). Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Guieb, E. III. (2006). Historico-geographical imaginations in Ishmael Bernal's Nunal sa Tubig. In R.B. Tolentino (Ed.), Geopolitics of the visible: Essays on Philippine film cultures (125-161). Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Gutierrez, J. III (2016, August). Lukács, Kracauer, and Lino Brocka's Manila in the Claws of Light (1975). UP Plaridel: A Journal of Philippine Communication, Media and Society, 13(2),1-16.

Hatfield, C., Heer J. & Worcester, K. (2013). Theory and genre. In C. Hatfield, J. Heer, & K. Worcester (Eds.), The superhero reader (pp. 73-77). USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Klock, G. (2013). The revisionary superhero narrative. In C. Hatfield, J. Heer, & K. Worcester (Eds.), The superhero reader (pp. 116-135). USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Liang, N. (2019, August 4). Finding Gotham City — Spectral cities in American superhero comics. Medium. https://blog.usejournal.com/finding-gotham-city-spectral-cities-in-american-superhero-comics-5215edbdce58

Marquez, D. & Magpali, S. (1999). Darna and the Toxic Monster. Super Action Komiks. Atlas Publishing.

Navoa, E.J. & Robinson, C. (Directors) (1980). Darna at Ding [Film]. D' Wonder Films.

Pontee, E. (2005). Superheroes: The never ending story. Retrieved from http://comicbooks.about.com/od/collecting/a/superherolimits_5.htm

Quiling, T. R. Jr. (2017, June). Between the walls: The shanty in "Hellow, Soldier" from Lino Brocka's Tatlo, Dalawa, Isa (1974). UP Plaridel: A Journal of Philippine Communication, Media and Society, 14(1),71-94.

Ravelo, M., Mendoza, R. & Barras, D. (1980-1981). Darna at ang Black Widow. Ravelo Komiks. RAR Publishing House.

Ravelo, M. & Santos, R. E. (1977). Darna versus Sataniña Dayabolika. Kampeon Komiks. RAR Publishing House.

Ravelo, M. & Gonzales, P. (1968). Darna at ang Babaing Linta (Darna and the Woman Leech). Darna Komiks. Atlas Publishing.

Ravelo, M. & Fernandez, J. (1964-1965). Darna at ang Babaing Tuod (Darna and the wooden monster). Liwayway Magazine. Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation.

Ravelo, M. & Redondo, N. (1950-1951). Darna. Pilipino Komiks. Ace Publications.

Reyes, S. S. (2009). From Darna to Zsazsa Zaturnnah: Desire and fantasy: Essays on Literature and popular culture. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Incorporated.

Reynolds, R. (2013). Masked heroes. In C. Hatfield, J. Heer, & K. Worcester (Eds.), The superhero reader (pp. 99-115). USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Romagnoli, A. S. & Pagnucci, G.S. (2013). Enter the superheroes: American values, culture, and the canon of superhero literature. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Romero, E. (Director) (1968). Manila, Open City [Film]. Nepomuceno Productions.

Sanchez, T. (Director) (1979). Bira, Darna, Bira [Go, Darna, Go] [Film]. MBM Productions.

Tolentino, R. B. (2012). Marcos, Brocka, Bernal, city films, and the contestation for imagery of the nation. Kritika Kultura, 19, 115–138.

Uricchio, W. (2010). The Batman's Gotham City: Story, ideology, performance. In J. Ahren & A. Meteling (Eds.), Comics and the city: Urban space in print, picture and sequence (119-132). New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Wyse, P. (2014, September 9). Gotham state of mind: what do comics tell us about cities?. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/09/gotham-new-york-what-do-comics-tell-us-about-cities

Yonzon, H. & Monsanto, G. (2003). Darna. Mango Comics. Yonzon Entertainment Syndicate.

Cherish Aileen Aguilar Brillon is currently an Associate Professor at the University of the Philippines Diliman, College of Mass Communication. She was the previous Program Head of the FEU Department of Communication. Her main research interests are political economy of media, gender, and popular culture.

Glimpsing Manila's Political Spaces and Events in the Autobiography of Arturo M. Tolentino

Ruben Jeffrey A. Asuncion
Department of Social Sciences
University of the Philippines Los Baños

ABSTRACT

For more than six decades, Arturo M. Tolentino was known for his brilliance of legal mind, acumen in argument, and productivity in output. Most importantly, he was known for his oppositionist stand starting with his stint as a leader of the Young Philippines Party. For some decades, as a lawmaker in both chambers of Congress, he had enjoyed a perception of credibility rare for politicians in the acrimony and corruption of the postwar years. However, this was put to the test during the martial law years and afterwards, when he first served under the Batasang Pambansa and then was compelled to follow the martial law era 1973 constitution in the abortive July 1986 "swearing-in" incident at the Manila Hotel. This paper will shift from the national to the local in taking a peek of how Manila had been remembered by Arturo Tolentino in his memoirs *Voice of Dissent*. I will attempt to answer to resolve a.) to what extent Manila's urbanization and development had influenced Arturo Tolentino's significant political actions and b.) how did Arturo Tolentino as a person was developed by Manila and c.) what were the political spaces in Manila that have played a major role in Tolentino's actions.

Keywords: Arturo Tolentino, Young Philippines, Sampaloc, Manila, political biographies.

Introduction

On July 6, 1986, at the Manila Hotel, Arturo Tolentino "swore" as the acting president of the government of Ferdinand Marcos, almost five months after the latter exited the presidency in the EDSA People Power uprising and then subsequently exiled to the U.S. state of Hawai'i. Failing in this attempt to set up a government separate from that of Corazon Aquino's, Tolentino and the supporters of Marcos then faced charges related to subversion and damage to property. Three decades after his controversial move, we can now examine the life, times, and actions of Arturo Tolentino, even his mistakes, despite his claims of being a political maverick. Thirty four years (2020) have already passed since the end of the Marcos regime, therefore surpassing the time frame that Teodoro Agoncillo which gave for a history of the Martial Law period to be written about. He once said there is a need for a temporal distance in order for such politically contentious period to be written (Agoncillo, 2016). Tolentino's role in Philippine history has been recognized by brief entries in the Senate website and even the Wikipedia site, although it was claimed that the entry on him needs verification. I would like also to know more how Manila was remembered by Arturo Tolentino. Although, he was more known as a national politician, Tolentino was born and educated in the capital city. In this light, I would be examining details of Tolentino as a student and politician, as he remembered these, in his memoirs Voice of Dissent. For this paper, I will be interchanging memoirs with autobiographies.

In threshing out the urban in Arturo Tolentino's biography, I will be borrowing the definition of urban biography from Dr. Michael Pante, who also expresses being influenced by urban studies researcher Charles Abrams. In his comprehensive urban history of Quezon City, Pante describes urban biography as the summing up "of a person's lived experience in a city / cities," and its effects on that individual's perceptions of urbanism and urbanity (Pante, 2019). Pante also posits that a person's "knowledge of and immersion in a city or set of cities" allows for a unique appreciation of the way of life in a city that can be influenced by "residence, travel, investments, and access to information" (Pante, 2019). In these regard, I shall set out to answer the following: a.) to what extent Manila's urbanization and

development had influenced Arturo Tolentino's significant political actions, b.) how did Arturo Tolentino as a person-apart from being a student and politician-was developed by Manila, and c.) what were the political spaces in Manila that have played a major role in Tolentino's actions?

Writing on lives

Derwin (2012) emphasizes that memoirs and autobiographies are conventional and narrative stories that unravel "life expressions." Now, these narratives open up "problematic presuppositions:" a.) the recognition of the existence of other people; b.) the influence of class and gender on the subject; c.) the family where s/he came from; d.) starting points; e.) recognition of authors and observers; f.) objective life marker; g.) "real" people possessing "real" lives; h.) turning point experiences; i.) the threshing out of true and false claims (Derwin, 2012).

In the Philippines, Resil Mojares (2002-a) had already critically analyzed the autobiographies from 1870 to 1920, of the likes of Felipe Calderon, Pedro Paterno, Emilio Aguinaldo, Camilo Osias, and Carlos P. Romulo. This study was interesting because it covered three time frames in the present conventional periodization: last two decades of Spanish colonial rule, a brief interregnum of Philippine independence, and the start of American rule.[1] Mojares emphasizes the selectivity of the memoirs, especially in the strategy of the narrator to foreground his presence and experiences in the narrative (2020-a). Furthermore, texts, like biographies, can give us a glimpse on the interaction of large events and the private domains of a person, how a person's life is shaped by events, and the strategies by which a person processes such events (Mojares, 2002-a). Biographies may also be hagiographic, as in the case of the Boholano youth Miguel Ayamuno or of the Visayan youthful martyr Pedro Calungsod (Mojares, 2002-b) and Mojares, 2002-c). Teodoro Agoncillo also wrote the biographies of such eminent Filipino men of letters and history: Teodoro M. Kalaw, Epifanio delos Santos, and Rafael Palma. Even on the leadership of the national-democratic left, a researcher had already evaluated the autobiographies of two opposing individuals (Abinales, 2001). In the case of Jose Ma. Sison, the subject had shown the ability to control the flow of questioning (Abinales,

2001). In the aforementioned examples, one can see that biographies and memoirs are still the province of the rich and an elite. Furthermore, they may be categorized as possessing a "pansilang pananaw" because they mainly written for/by the elite and also used colonial-era official languages of state (Spanish and English). Missing from the otherwise excellent discussions by Derwin and Mojares are the influence of geographical locations, such as cities, on a subject's life and career. They also failed to discuss in detail on how that individual projects the evolution of the place of origin where he came from. It is because of this gap that this paper will attempt to contribute some inputs.

Given the context stated above, it is but important to weigh on the historiographical importance of the *Voice of Dissent*, by former senator Arturo Tolentino. Apart from discussing the actions he had made, starting as a student leader and ending as a controversial running-mate and "acting president" in lieu of Marcos in 1986, I will also intend to place him within the context of 20th century Manila politics. I will emphasize that starting and turning points in his career were in Manila (student leader, incarceration at Fort Santiago, rising political career as Manila lawmaker and legal expert) and his controversial 1986 "swearing-in" was also done in Manila. Hence a need to put into the forefront the role of the city in shaping his career, according to his accounts. Meanwhile, in terms of periodization, Arturo Tolentino's life is within the subphases *Paghahabol ng Kalayaan* (around 1935) and *Kudeta at Pag-aalsang Bayan* (until 1986)."[2] This is an alternative periodization that emphasizes attempts during that period to "gain" independence from America. It was an aim that was nominally achieved, but had ended up in a dictatorship that also exploited the rhetoric of nationalism. Meanwhile, the last point of periodization highlights the historicity and historical importance of the 1986 aborted coup by the Reform the Armed Forces Movement and the subsequent People Power revolution.

A dissenter's voice

The *Voice of Dissent* is a thick book, composed of 891 pages, and was printed by Phoenix Publishing in 1990. This student had consulted a hardbound copy from the College of Law Library at UP Diliman. *Voice of Dissent* follows the usual form of autobiographies with its chronological narrative. Within 36 chapters, Tolentino also frames his life within the overall history of the Philippines until the 20th century. With regard to the memoirs' accessibility, the researcher had initially searched various OPACs or online public access catalogs (National Library, UP Diliman, UP Los Baños, Ateneo de Manila, Far Eastern University or FEU). A handful of copies were found in most of these institutions, indicating that the autobiography had a somewhat wide initial publication. Some of the details mentioned in the autobiography were in the arturotolentino.com website, but upon checking last April 15, 2020, this site has been inoperational.

Arturo "Turing" Tolentino

Arturo Modesto Tolentino was born in Tondo, Manila. Growing up, he studied in the city's public schools. Interestingly, Tolentino did not devote extensive details of his personal life in *Voice of Dissent*. Official entries say he had studied secondary education at the Manila East High School (now called Victoriano Mapa), one of the four public high schools in American-era Manila. The other three were Manila West (Florentino Torres), Manila North (Arellano), and Manila South (Araullo). He then proceeded to University of the Philippines (UP) to study for a law degree. Similar to many young men of his generation, Tolentino then wrote for the *Philippine Collegian*, until he became the editor-in-chief of the publication. It was during his stint as editor-in-chief that he had brushes with the university authorities (Tolentino, 1990). In 1933, Tolentino protested the halting of the publication of an article in the *Collegian* regarding a law student's remarks against Quezon's alleged corrupt and dangerous leadership as Senate President. In January 1934, he was warned by the College of Law dean, Jorge Bocobo, to modify parts of an oration piece that were deemed derogatory to the person of Sen. Pres. Manuel Quezon. In response, Tolentino crafted a new piece that instead attacked Quezon's hostility against the H-H-C

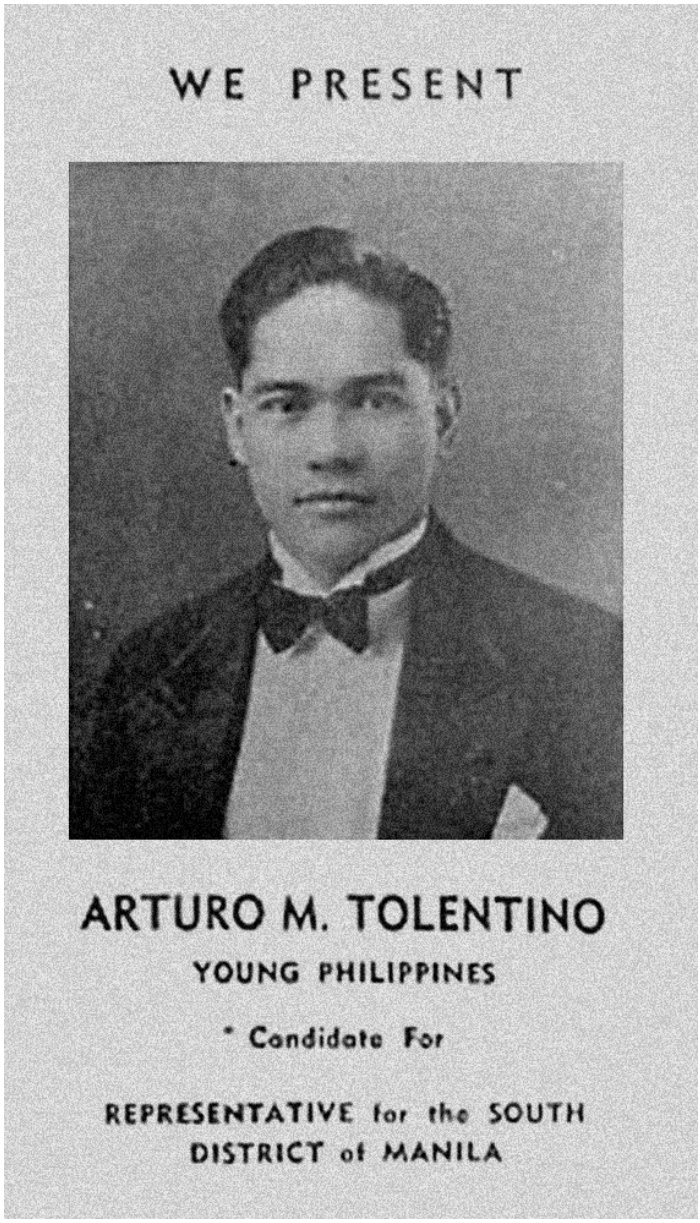
Law (Tolentino, 1990). Nineteen thirty four was also a tumultuous one for UP; its independent-minded President, Rafael Palma, had resigned when it seemed the university's budget was being compromised by his critical attitude toward Quezon. Incidentally, Rafael Palma was also a Manileño, having been born in Tondo in the last years of the Spanish rule.

In this wise, Tolentino rubbed elbows with the likes of Wenceslao Vinzons, Carmen Planas, Diosdado Macapagal, Domocao Alonto, Macarambon Abbas, Magno Gatmaitan, Octavio Maloles, etc. A Manileña on the roster was Planas, who became the first female city councilor of the capital city and was among the stalwarts of the party (Tolentino,1990).[3] These students, because of idealism, had established the Young Philippines, or had later on joined the group. The Young Philippines, or YP, was originally established to organize the youth and to cause moral and social reform (Young Philippines, 1934). The YP was created in the middle of heated debates over the H-H-C, which had aimed at "granting" independence to the Philippines after a 10-year-transition period. Before the creation of the YP, many students were involved in the campaign by the Students League for the Acceptance of the H-H-C Law in favor of the said legislation. Students like Tolentino (UP), Aurelio Alvero (University of Santo Tomas), Maximo Calalang (Philippine Law School), Elizeo Tenzo (National University), Julio Garcia (University of Manila), and Leonides Virata (on behalf of students from Cavite) joined veteran "Pro" (supporters of the H-H-C) in a rally at the Luneta in August 1933 (*Sunday Tribune* quoted in Tolentino, 1990).

The YP movement itself was established in Manila, in the Plaza Hotel, while meetings prior to its birth were also held in a house in Quiapo. The YP was the most prominent and most active of the many youth movements that sprung in the Philippines in the 1930s. Many were ephemeral, such as the New Youth Party, or even limited to certain regions, such as Anak Sug (Asuncion 2015).

Manila played an important role in Tolentino's student life. One reason is that the University of the Philippines then was located at its campus along Taft and Padre Faura. In relation to that, Manila was (and still) the center of educational "pilgrimage," wherein Filipinos from various regions congregated to study in its old and new schools, colleges, and universities. Benedict Anderson had initially used the phrase to refer to the interaction of young students in colonial educational centers in such places as French West Africa, French Indochina, and the Netherlands East Indies (2002, 132-132). As such, Tolentino was exposed early on to the challenges and opportunities of a life in politics especially at the political center that is Manila.

Furthermore, Tolentino also established ties with fellow students, some of whom he would become comrades. Finally, the 1930s was an exciting time to be a student in UP because of the then beckoning promise of (re)gaining independence for the Philippine Islands. In 1941, after the National Assembly had reverted to the two-chambered Congress, Tolentino ran for congressman of Manila's south district. He failed to claim it, partly because electoral authorities had refused to recognize 600 votes that were supposedly in his favor (Tolentino, 1990). However, while Tolentino was defeated by Alfonso Mendoza in the elections, he had bested veteran candidates such as Dr. Pedro Gil and Joaquin Yuseco (Evening Herald cited in Tolentino, 1990). Tolentino was not the first YP member to run for an elective position; members of the party had been attempting to win public office since 1937, but only Carmen Planas and Wenceslao Vinzons succeeded in their efforts. Planas won as the first lady councilor of Manila (some say in 1937) while Vinzons won as governor of Camarines Norte.



Arturo Tolentino's poster for the 1941 congressional elections.
Taken from www.arturotolentino.com.

Tolentino was described to have also taught in UP, UST (University of Santo Tomas), UE (University of the East), UM (University of Manila), Arellano University, FEU (Far Eastern University), Manila Law College, Philippine Law School, San Beda College, and the Quezon College. Practically all of these institutions are part of a zone popularly called the University Belt. The U-Belt, as commonly referred today, refers to the conglomeration of universities, colleges, and schools in Manila, particularly in the districts of Sampaloc, Quiapo, and San Miguel. It was, and until now, a center of education in the still burgeoning Manila city and its subsequent megalopolis. However, after the destruction of World War II and in consonance with prior plans, UP has since moved its main site to Diliman, FEU has established campuses in Makati, Alabang, and Cavite (even as it did not reestablish its prewar Pangasinan campus), while Arellano University has also established another campus along Taft Avenue in Pasay City. Tolentino lived at a time when tertiary education in the country in general, and Manila in particular, expanded in curricular scope and geographical location. Whereas *universidades* and *colegios* (except for those in Vigan in Ilocos Sur, Naga in Camarines, Cebu, and briefly, Guinobatan in Albay) were established in Intramuros, universities and colleges during the early 20th century expanded to the former *arrabales* of Manila. Furthermore, new tertiary institutions were also established in other parts of the then American colony of Philippine Islands. But despite this, Manila still remained the center of education and politics for the nation. This accounts for the presence of students in the city of many students from the provinces. Later on, in good ways and bad, these former students will become politicians and leaders in their own right.

Manila in Tolentino's time

The city in Tolentino's time was already in the middle of political, economic, and cultural changes. Though the Americans were firmly in the saddle of the overall governance of their decades-old colony, their Filipino allies have controlled subordinate, but still important, positions in the insular and local governments. The English language and American culture have been permeating the social fabric of many Filipinos, especially those residing in the cities. Hence, Tolentino was among those students who felt more at home in English when it came to writing. They very fact that he was in UP and was also writing in the *Collegian*, was proof of his being a product of his times.

Nick Joaquin calls the 1920s and 1930s in Manila as the "Empire Days" and the time of "Peacetime." During the first two decades of American rule, the transition from what used to be predominantly Hispanic culture was underway, in terms of a shift from *moro-moro* to *zarzuela*. Enterprises and stores in the city's late-Spanish era business heart of Binondo gradually moved to Santa Cruz , streets were merged that resulted in the creation of Calle Azcarraga and Avenida Rizal, and the gradual expansion of the populace and urban areas outside of Intramuros (Joaquin, 1989). This expansion came amid attempts, most notably by the architect Daniel Burnham, for the expansion to be done in a planned manner (Joaquin, 1989). Burnham's "City Beautiful" plan had called for the establishment of a national government center in Luneta, and the construction of an educational center in Sta. Mesa (which actually shifted to Taft Avenue and then had another counterpart in Sampaloc). Filipino politicians, meanwhile, were jockeying for key positions especially in the Legislature especially after the enactment and implementation of the Jones Law, which provided for more Filipino participation in the colonial government, except for the highest sensitive positions such as the governor-general and the heads of "strategic" bureaus. Manila itself regained power as a city that have been lost with the American occupation; proof of it is having an all elective municipal board (Joaquin, 1989). Meanwhile, American products and fads continued to make their way into the new colonial center in American period. By the time Tolentino was studying at the old U.P. campus, the Americanization of a new batch of young Filipinos was still in evidence (Joaquin, 1989). The English language was the medium of communication especially in schools and was manifested with the establishment of campus newspapers printed in that language. Furthermore, Filipinos enjoyed the latest trends during that period that had been also called the "jazz era." But there were continued reactions against perceived American slights of Filipinos. Agoncillo recounts of a weeks-long strike that he and fellow students had organized at the Manila North High School in Sta. Cruz district (1976). This was in response to an American teacher's remarks that a brother-and-sister tandem in the school was not taking a bath (1976). The action had its desired effect and showed the potentialities of mobilization even during a still present colonial rule. Independence was still in the minds of many, and in fact was still an aim of the independence mission of Manuel Roxas and Sergio Osmena. They

got a law that seemed promising for Philippine independence, but Manuel Quezon saw something else and maneuvered for that bill (Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act) to be opposed. Eventually, he will launch his own campaign to get a "new version" of the law, which turned out to be a rehash of the previous H-H-C. Manila's 1930s society and life will be disrupted with the arrival of the Japanese and the declaration of the capital as an Open City in 1942. Furthermore, political changes will be seen with the creation of a Greater Manila Area to facilitate governance in a wartime situation. Late in 1942, all existing political parties "declared" themselves out of existence, to be replaced by the Japanese-sponsored Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod para sa Bagong Pilipinas. Fort Santiago, which used to be a Spanish-era prison for suspected Katipunan rebels, would become a dungeon for individuals picked up by the Kempeitai for "interrogation."

Tolentino started his career as a fiscalizer when he was still with the Young Philippines, which was practically a Manila-based organization. By "fiscalizer," he used a "Philippinism" that referred to a critical stand made by an opposition figure on an administration measure or statement (Tolentino, 1990). Interestingly, this term may have been in usage for several decades already since it was already used in an article on Tolentino in the 1950s. Among his actions as "fiscalizer" were writing a letter, in May 1930, to President Quezon criticizing the latter's plans to extend the term of a president (Tolentino, 1990). Furthermore:

> "A president barred by the Constitution from a second term can act quickly, independently, wisely, and fairly on such demands. But a president with the possibility of reelection cannot lightly ignore those who control thousands of votes, even if their demands run counter to his better judgement" (Tolentino, 1990).

He will write again the following month to Quezon, expressing his opposition to the President's plan for reelection (Tolentino, 1990).

Tolentino and Manila intertwined even in World War II. He was arrested in his home in Sampaloc one rainy night in July 1942:

> It had been raining for several days. The whole district of Sampaloc was flooded and the water was knee high on España street when we went to bed on the night of July 18, 1942. It still rained the whole night.
>
> Between three and four o'clock in the morning there was loud knocking at our door and my brother Donato, who had just gotten married, got up in order to open the door. Once the door was opened Japanese soldiers barged in and one of them collared Donato and dragged him to one of the waiting military cars on the street. Then they asked for me and began interrogating me. From their questions they apparently thought that I was an officer in the United States Armed Forces in the Far East. It was possible that my commission was already in the records of the USAFFE when they left Manila, and the Japanese found this in the Far Eastern University. That could be the explanation why they thought me to be a USAFFE officer. They asked for my gun (Tolentino 1990).

For months until December that year, he was detained at Fort Santiago on the basis of confiscated paraphernalia that allegedly exposed the anti-Japanese stance of the YP (Tolentino, 1990). The Japanese also tortured Tolentino to force him to give more information about his colleagues in the YP. Released from prison, he later on treaded the dangerous path common during the Second World War, that is pretending to collaborate with the occupiers but actually doing the reverse of the latter's wishes. In 1944, he was appointed to a court that had been created to hear cases of abuses, profiteering, and petty crimes in Manila. Tolentino claimed he had helped guerrillas avoid trial by making it appear that evidence against them were insufficient (1990). However, in 1945, after the Americans and Filipinos had liberated Manila, Tolentino was one of the many Filipino politicians detained by the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps. They were detained at Muntinlupa on charges of collaborating with the enemy. Tolentino

eventually defended himself at the People's Court, which had been set up to hear the 5,600 charges of various forms of collaboration by many Filipinos with the Japanese invaders.

Three years after the end of the Second World War. Tolentino and his erstwhile colleagues at the YP tried to revive the group. Eventually, in 1949, they decided to merge with the Nacionalistas to form a more united opposition against the then dominant Liberal Party. This action marked the formal end of existence of the Young Philippines as a political movement; furthermore it can be said that the political mood at the time was strongly with the incumbent Liberals (despite the death of Manuel Roxas and his succession as president by Elpidio Quirino). Tolentino ran and won in 1949 as congressman of Manila despite having received some offers by Quirino himself. There is a story on how Tolentino decided to run for a political office in Manila and won: According to Tolentino, he had been asked by Senator Eulogio Rodriguez, Sr. to run in Sampaloc, which was then part of the third district. Tolentino initially asked for time time to think this over, saying he was contented with his involvement in the Code Commission (Tolentino, 1990). He eventually agreed to run, if no other Nacionalista candidate would be willing to do so. Tolentino was confident that there were enough men who may be willing to run in the third district: Arsenio Lacson, Antonio Barredo, and Teofilo Mendoza. To Tolentino's surprise, Rodriguez had asked Lacson and Barredo to run in other districts in Manila and requested Mendoza to abstain from running (Tolentino 1990). Tolentino was practically forced to fulfill his promise and subsequently proclaimed as the Nacionalista's bet in the third district. Interestingly, Tolentino's record as student debater and Young Philippines leader were considered as his assets as a winnable congressional candidate (Tolentino 1990).

But, Tolentino stayed a safe political distance from Pres. Quirino. This distancing from the incumbent president allowed him to "objectively" act as a "fiscalizer" in a time when the chief executive's name was already smeared by scandals not necessarily involving Quirino personally. Tolentino critically evaluated the Quirino administration's appropriations bills and even its proposed price control measure (1990).

Tolentino also remembers a Manila still ridden by armed factional politics. For his reelection in 1950, Arturo Tolentino had to deal with the use of armed goons and release of funds by his opponent, a former police chief of Manila (Tolentino 1990). He cites a *Manila Chronicle* article, dated September 18, 1950, that reported the destruction of Tolentino's improvised platform which had been located at the corner of Honradez and P. Leoncio streets in Sampaloc (Tolentino 1990). Tolentino also was honored by the Far Eastern University in 1950, when he was teaching law at the time, as most outstanding faculty member" (Tolentino 1990).

Tolentino himself proposed some bills. The most notable among them is the planned authorization of local governments for them to acquire private lands in order to locate their the resettlement sites for the people displaced by the Second World War (1990). Tolentino then claimed he was still a "fiscalizer" even after Quirino was succeeded to the presidency by Ramon Magsaysay. Noticeably, Tolentino did not comment nor criticize the Consultative Council of Students. The council, being an advisory body, was operationalized under Magsaysay's term and held office at the Malacañang. This was remarkable given that Tolentino was, two decades earlier, a student leader in his own right. Furthermore, Tolentino did not mention his stance in 1956 about the then heated debates over the Rizal Bill (1990). Tolentino then related his criticisms of corruption in the governments of Carlos P. Garcia and Diosdado Macapagal, a former fellow member of the Young Philippines (1990). But while he mainly sniped at the anomalous use of reparations funds in the purchase of the presidential yacht *RPS Lapulapu* and even filed an anti-graft bill, Tolentino himself would not be spared with the revelations made during the Harry Stonehill case (1990).

Manila in the wake of the Second World War

By the time Tolentino became congressman, Manila was still reeling from the terrible damage wrought on it by the Second World War. A biographer of Arsenio Lacson, the first elected mayor of Manila, gives us an image in the aftermath of World War II, "a city in decay" which had "deplorable aspects that hampered its recovery." To wit:

> Easily noticeable were the piled trash strewn along major thoroughfares, side streets, alleys, and sidewalks. Though there were street sweepers that roamed daily, they proved inadequate to handle the tasks that faced them.
>
> The same ugly sight could also be seen in the city's *esteros*. Clogged with all kinds of filth, they stanked and served as breeding grounds for disease. During typhoons, they overflowed and contributed in no small measure to the floods that inundated the city (Brioso, 2015)

Furthermore, squalor attended Manila's growth even as gangsters the likes of "Asiong" Salonga lorded it over in slums. Sampaloc alone saw a ballooning population; in 1948, there more than 233,000 people in the district and comprising around 1/5th of Manila's entire population (Census of the Philippines, 1948). Amid all of the postwar problems, Manila still served as the political center of the fledging Third Republic. This was despite the formal transfer of the capital to Quezon City in 1948. From 1948 until 1976, the executive branch largely remained in Manila. The same also went to the legislative and judicial branches. Interestingly, Tolentino gave little impressions on 1940s-1950s era Manila itself. Instead, the details of his memoirs for those years were mostly focused on his political involvements in Congress, the Nacionalista Party and other political activities.

Tolentino also featured several pages of his memoirs about his political relationship with Ferdinand Marcos, starting when the two were colleagues in the Senate until when the Ilocano politician ascended into the presidency. (By 1964, Marcos had jumped into the Nacionalista Party from the Liberal Party). Remarkably, Tolentino was silent in the earlier parts of his memoirs on whether Marcos was a member of the Young Philippines. In 1966, Tolentino became Senate President-under a gentleman's agreement with another Marcos ally, Senator Gil Puyat. Despite being partymates with Marcos, Tolentino claimed that as Senate President, he still scrutinized the plans and measures whose passage the Marcos administration had sought. Tolentino also criticized the controversial passage of the PHILCAG (Philippine Civic Action Group) bill, which allowed the deployment of Filipino

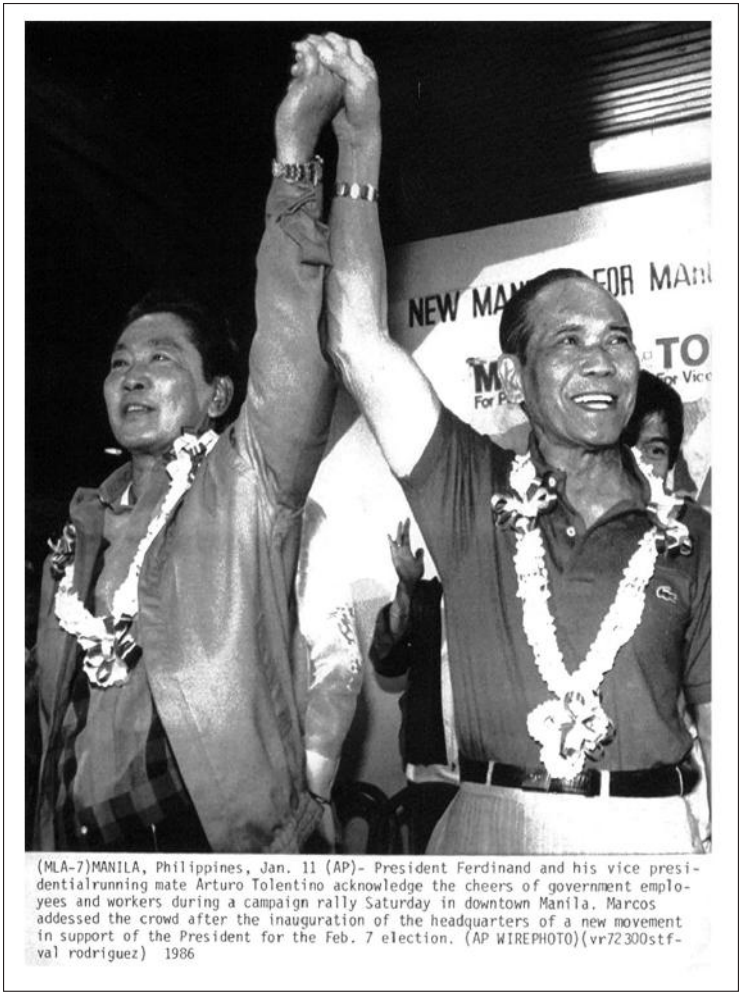
military engineers to South Vietnam. This was a turnaround from Marcos' campaign promise not to commit Filipino troops to the war in Vietnam. When the government of Ferdinand Marcos, under his second term, sought to amend the 1935 constitution, Tolentino even made known his insights harking back to the experiences in drafting the Commonwealth-era charter (Tolentino in Joaquin, 1970).

Meanwhile, Tolentino even claimed that the declaration of Martial Law was a "*coup d'etat*" (Tolentino, 1990) given the speed Proclamation 1081 was imposed. According to Tolentino, Martial Law was proclaimed by Marcos in his position as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces (Tolentino, 1990). With Congress shuttered, Tolentino briefly engaged in a fishpen business at the Laguna de Ba'i. However, Tolentino would make himself heard not for long. But, Tolentino was not consistent with his stances on the regime; he himself said he served as a lawyer for the respondents in the petitions against the referendum for the speedy approval of the 1973 referendum. Throughout the 1970s until 1978, Tolentino spoke to different organizations and took these as opportunities to comment on many actions by the martial law regime (1990). Metro Manila will be mentioned by Tolentino once he wrote about his stint as Assemblyman for the Interim Batasang Pambansa, especially his campaigning during the 1978 elections (1990) under the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan or KBL. Unlike his previous stints in the postwar Congress, Tolentino served the constituency of Metro Manila, which, since 1975, has encompassed Manila and 16 other towns and cities. Furthermore, Tolentino served as an Assemblyman for a legislative body that was situated outside Manila, in Constitution Hill, Quezon City. He recounted another instance of politicking in Manila, which may had affected his win as Assemblyman in 1984. This time, he was running for a seat for the Regular Batasang Pambansa, and the constituencies were reverted to specific local government units. Tolentino had separated himself from the campaign sorties of the KBL because he had disliked the party's penchant for holding fanfare-filled events to woo voters. He also hated the way the Palace press office distorted statements of politician-candidates like him. Finally, to quote Tolentino himself:

> The KBL had used the barangay (local unit wards) chairman (sic) as its campaign network in Manila. They were well financed. Periodically, they were summoned to Malacañan where enveloped containing money for expenses were given to them. My fellow candidates took such "happy" gatherings as occasions to shake the hands of the beneficiaries. I never attended such distributions.
>
> "How come, Senator, that I have never seen you in Malacañan when we are being envelopes?" a barangay chairman asked me after one of my street-corner meetings.
>
> "I am asked to go there, but I don't like to see what is being done-- it looks as if you are being brought." (Tolentino, 1990)

Though he won in the May, 1984 elections for the Batasan, Tolentino only took the fourth place in Manila, trailing behind opposition candidates Eva Estrada-Kalaw, Gonzalo "Lito" Puyat, and Gemiliano "Mel" Lopez, Jr. Tolentino attributed this to the loss of the strategic Iglesia ni Cristo vote and his being dropped from the KBL lineup in favor of Felicisimo Cabigao.

Tolentino will then briefly serve on as an acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, despite objections from within it, in the wake of the retirement of the long-serving Carlos P. Romulo in 1984. This Ministry was then still located along Padre Faura in Ermita, Manila. Later on, to his surprise, Tolentino would then be selected as the running-mate of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1986 snap elections, considering the many times he had criticized some of the dictator's policies.



A photograph by the Associated Press of KBL running mates
Pres. Ferdinand Marcos and Arturo Tolentino during a campaign sortie, 1986

A very politically controversial incident which Tolentino had related in *Voice of Dissent* was the Manila Hotel standoff. For months until the July 6, 1986 "oath-taking," Marcos loyalists have been flocking to the Asian Institute of Tourism and the Quezon City Circle in Quezon City, Plaza Fergusson in Manila and other areas for events showing support for the ousted leader. Tolentino himself had

been questioning, after February 1986, the legality of the assumption into office of Pres. Corazon Aquino. More than four months after the EDSA revolt, Tolentino was later on involved in the July 6, 1986 Luneta rally, especially as the ousted dictator had sent him a letter authorizing Tolentino to "act" as president in his "absence." He did "swear in," but this time in Manila Hotel- where he had previously came to meet with another Marcos loyalist- after failing to find many supporters at the Quirino Grandstand. Tolentino claims the so-called oath-taking was unannounced even to Marcos loyalists for security reasons (1990). He formed a "Cabinet" composed of former Cabinet members and assemblymen of the dictator, like Juan Ponce Enrile, Manuel Alba, Manuel Collantes, Isidro Rodriguez, and Rafael Recto (Tolentino, 1990). A journalist of the *Philippines Free Press* gave a detailed account of the "swearing-in:"

> In a ceremony at the driveway of the luxurious Manila Hotel, covered by both local and foreign media, the former running-mate of Dictator Marcos, flanked and backdropped by former members of the discredited defunct Batasan, was sworn into office by former Supreme Court Justice Serafin Cuevas. After naming his new "cabinet members", the 75-year old "acting President" promptly directed former Speaker Nicanor Yñiguez to convene the Batasan, whose first order of business was to pass a law that would call for national elections at the earliest opportunity.
>
> Members of the "Tolentino cabinet" included Rafael Recto as Justice Minister, Manuel Collantes as Foreign Affairs Minister, Isidro Rodriguez as Local Governments Minister and M a n u e l Alba as Budget Minister. Tolentino also appointed Juan Ponce Enrile Jr.(sic) Defense Minister, for whom the position of Prime Minister was reserved in concurrent capacity. Without the benefit of appointment, former assemblyman Gerardo Espina of Manila served as Acting Information Minister. Except for Enrile, who was "in the suburbs attending to private business", all members of the "Tolentino cabinet" were present (Kiunisala, 1986).

But, Tolentino failed to convince then Minister of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile to join him. In fact, Enrile was quoted to have said in turning down the offer:"I do not need a new job (right now)." With military forces and supporters of the Aquino government reported to be surrounding the hotel, and routes leading to it sealed or barricaded, Tolentino and other Marcos loyalists accepted the invitation to a conference by Deputy Defense Minister Rafael Ileto at the American-era Army Navy Club. The two sides did secretly meet on the afternoon of July 7, 1986, after which an understanding was reached for Tolentino and the Marcos supporters to depart from Manila Hotel in exchange for not being harassed by supporters or forces of the Aquino government. The incident ended on July 8, 1986; Manila Hotel then sought damages from the Marcos loyalists and Tolentino's followers who had occupied it (Kiunisala, 1986). Tolentino also faced criticism and mockery for what seemed to some as a coup, and later on had to deal with being compelled to swear an oath of allegiance to the then prevailing administration (Tolentino, 1990).



Arturo Tolentino speaking to a crowd during the 1986 Manila Hotel "oath-taking." Taken from https://philhistorypicts.blogspot.com/2015/07/july-6-1986-acting-president-tolentino.html

Some observations and summary

I had initially attempted to resolve on a.) the extent Manila's urbanization and development had influenced Arturo Tolentino's significant political actions, b.) how did Arturo Tolentino as a person-apart from being a student and politician-was developed by Manila and c.) what were the political spaces in Manila that have played a major role in Tolentino's actions?

Unfortunately, we can only get glimpses for the initial two questions. For now, we cannot really say that Manila's urbanization and development had impacted on Tolentino's major political decisions. There is yet a definitive urban biography of Tolentino, since we cannot fully sum up for now his lived experiences in Manila. Furthermore, based on the few important details he had given, Tolentino was developed IN Manila only as a student and politician. Despite these limitations, we must recognize that his movements and utterances were made in the crucial political spaces in Manila: the UP campus, Luneta, Fort Santiago, the Congress building along Burgos Drive, and Manila Hotel. In the UP campus, Luneta, and even Congress, he had expressed his sentiments on the burning issues of the times. In Fort Santiago, he denied information to the Japanese that could have incriminated-with his unwilling help- colleagues in the YP. The UP and the Congress were edifices established during the American period and which symbolized, at that time, educational and political advancement. Meanwhile, Fort Santiago was a Spanish-era structure which connoted power and punishment. On the other hand, Manila Hotel stands out from the rest of the spaces mentioned in that it was not normally used for political activities. However, given its location, it had been affected by its proximity to Luneta, which was a site of state-sanctioned and political movement activities.

Furthermore, he did campaign in the streets of Manila, based on his accounts of the 1953 and 1984 elections, Hence, the glimpses we had of Manila in his time reveal the retention of old political practices- such as use of violence and vote buying-and the development of social and demographic changes, mainly in Sampaloc district. But from these glimpses, we can trace the evolution of Manila from a pre-Second World War center of politics and

education towards becoming a part of a Metropolitan Manila, but still a political and educational center. We can also get a glimpse of Sampaloc, his eventual place of residence, becoming a University Belt with Tolentino's references to teaching law courses at the FEU, and another source's mentioning of the other institutions in "U-Belt" where he had also taught in. We can also get a glimpse of the FEU as an educational center that became a vital facility for USAFFE at the outbreak of the Second World War and as an institution recovering from the destruction of the said conflict. In a sense, Arturo Tolentino was exposed to Manila's expanding urbanization when he was studying at the old UP campus along Taft Avenue and Padre Faura. Furthermore, Sampaloc was his abode prior to being arrested and detained at the Fort Santiago in 1942 and in succeeding decades.

The case of Tolentino's *Voice of Dissent* as an autobiography shows that an individual selects details of memories. S/he can also be selective in remembering the events and changes in a particular birthplace or locale. The irony here is while Manila was the political center during Tolentino's long career, he did not mention much the changes happening in his city, even though it experienced a boom in population and dynamics in local electoral politics. He failed to elaborate, for instance, how and why Manila's legislative districts had expanded from two (pre-World War II) to four in the late 1940s. What he deemed more important in authoring Voice of Dissent were his positionings as a "fiscalizer" and as a politician at the national level. In a sense, Manila was "marginalized" geographically in the rememberings of Arturo M. Tolentino. The autobiography was mainly Tolentino's "life expression" of his experiences with people and events for around five decades. Manila was his home city, but his interest lay in the corridors of power which shifted from Manila to the halls of Batasang Pambansa in Quezon City and back again to Manila. Noticeably, his aborted "oath-taking" also happened in Manila, inside an American-era hotel, but abiding with a constitution that was being set aside with the ascendancy of a new government. An explanation can be extended for this: his memoirs was aimed at narrating his success in moving up the political ladder, of going into the political center, of being a vocal dissenter of illegal actions and decisions, and also at explaining his political stances especially during the Martial Law period. It also be argued that even though he tried to be a

maverick in politics, there were stages in his career not to openly oppose political behavior which he may not like, but could not stop. Furthermore, he did not mention any enactment that could have drastically improved for the better the social and economic situation of Manila, especially in the decade after the Second World War.

Given various limitations to research due to the pandemic, we can initially get details of his life mainly from his biography. It would be interesting to compare Arturo Tolentino's memoirs with how Arsenio Lacson remembered the city he served as its first elected mayor. We may see here the dynamics in geographically remembering the place. Tolentino was at the national level while Lacson, though known nationally, remained at the local.

Postscript

UST's *The Varsitarian* student newspaper remembered Arturo Tolentino in an article in 2008. The article mentioned Tolentino's Master of Laws degree which he got in 1937 (Requinta, 2008). Furthermore, Tolentino also taught law subjects at UST's Facultad de Derecho Civil for a year in 1950-1951. But few people in UST had remembered any memory of Tolentino. Furthermore, there was a proposal pending at the time of the article's writing, to rename Espana Boulevard in honor of Arturo Tolentino (Requinta, 2008). However, nothing positive has since resulted from this proposal made by then Councilor Amelia Tolentino.

Endnotes

1 If one follows the Pantayong Pananaw's periodization, those narratives will be placed in "Bayan" and in the early stages of "Bansa."

2 One can look at Zeus Salazar, "Bagong Balangkas ng Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas (1991/1999/2000)," an attachment in Zeus Salazar (translator), Manifesto ng Partido Komunista (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 2000).

3 Tolentino, Voice of Dissent, 17-19. Contrary to Tolentino, Carmen Planas said that YP first participated in elections in 1937. One can also look at the details of her selection by Vinzons in Carmen Planas, "Vinzons and Youth Leadership," appendix in Efren Yambao, Wenceslao Vinzons:The Hero The Nation Forgot (Philippines: Upsilon Sigma Phi Alumni Association), 174-179.

Primary Sources

Tolentino, A. (1970). Interview by Nick Joaquin, "Tolentino: The Charter as Filipino." Philippines Free Press.

_____. (1990). Voice of Dissent. Phoenix Publishing House.

Young Philippines. (1934). "Young Philippines (A National non-partisan civic organization of Filipino youth, and of Men and Women of Liberal Tendencies). No publisher.

References

Agoncillo, T. (1976). Student Activism of the 1930s. Solidarity. X (4), 22-28.

_____. (2016) Talking History: Conversations with Teodoro Agoncillo. UST Publishing House.

Abinales, P. (2001). Fellow Traveler: Essays on Filipino Communism, compilation by P. Abinales. University of the Philippines Press.

Anderson, B. (2002). Imagined Communities, Anvil Publishing.

Asuncion, R.J. (2015). Kasaysayan ng mga Samahang Kabataan, 1934-1978. Unpublished masteral thesis, University of the Philippines-Diliman.

Brioso, Jr., A. (2015). Arsenio H. Lacson of Manila. Anvil Publishing.

Census of the Philippines, October 1, 1948.

Denzin, N. (2012). Assumptions of the Method. In J. Goodwin (Ed.) SAGE Biographical Research vol 1: Biographical Research, Starting Points, Debates and Approaches, (pp. 63-76). SAGE.

Joaquin, N. (1989). Manila, My Manila: A History of the Young. No publisher.

Kiunisala, E. (1986). "Tolentino's Last Hurrah." Philippines Free Press. Accessed online April 14, 2020. https://philippinesfreepress.wordpress.com/1986/07/26/tolentinos-last-hurrah-july-26-1986/#more-41

Mojares, R. (2002-a). 'Time, Memory, and the Birth of the Nation." In Waiting for Maria Makiling, collection of R. Mojares. Ateneo de ManilaUniversity Press.

_____. (2002-b). 'The Brief and Blessed Life of Miguel Ayatumo." In Waiting for Maria Makiling, collection of R. Mojares. Ateneo de ManilaUniversity Press.

_____. (2002-c). 'The Epiphany of Pedro Calungsod." In Waiting for Maria Makiling, collection of R. Mojares. Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Pante, M. (2019). A Capital City at the Margins: Quezon City and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century. Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Planas, C.(1963[2016]). "Vinzons and Youth Leadership," appendix in E. Yambao, Wenceslao Vinzons: The Hero The Nation Forgot. Upsilon Sigma Phi Alumni Association, 174-179.

Requinta, E. "Pag-ala(a)ala kay Arturo Tolentino." The Varsitarian. Accessed onlineApril15,2020/ https://varsitarian.net/news/20081117/pag_alala_kay_arturo_tolentino

Salazar, Z. (2000). Bagong Balangkas ng Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas (A New Framework for the History of the Philippines (1991/1999/2000). Attachment in Z. Salazar (translator), Manifesto ng Partido Komunista (The Communist Manifesto). Palimbagan ng Lahi, 2000.

Asst. Professor Ruben Jeffrey A. Asuncion is currently affiliated with the University of the Philippines Los Baños' Department of Social Sciences, Division of History. From August 2016 up to July 2018, he had taught at Far Eastern University (FEU)-Morayta's Institute of Arts and Sciences, specifically as GE faculty handling Philippine History and Rizal courses. While he was at FEU-Morayta, he had also advised some theses groups for the Department of Political Science. His current research interests are regional histories of Bikol and Central Visayas, urban histories, and the role of the youth in Philippine history.

Well Every Day
My Confusion Grows

Miel Kristian B. Ondevilla
Far Eastern University Manila

Several years ago I took an unplanned trip to Pangasinan with a college buddy. From Manila, the bus ride took about six hours, including two pit stops. Once we arrived at the poblacion of the town, I realized I didn't have any cash on me.

"We need to pull cash from an ATM," I said.

Completely unfamiliar with the town, we roamed aimlessly around the bus station, hoping a sign of any bank ATM would appear. We did this for a good 30 minutes. Finally, a uniformed policeman emerged from the side of a church.

We asked him where the nearest cash machine was. The man was courteous. He gave specific directions which were accompanied with swift hand gestures. Dogs barked from invisible corners.

"I can take you to the ATM, if you like," the cop finally said.

"Okay. Sige po. Thanks." I smiled nervously, as if showing a section of my skull.

My friend and I proceeded to follow this policeman.

Suddenly, this sleepy town became supercharged with the euphoria and nausea that we were excusing ourselves from in Manila.

From my peripheral vision, I saw a balisong—a fan knife—emerge from my friend's pocket. I noted the look of rabid desperation in my buddy's eyes. This happened as we walked in a silence disturbed only by crickets and the grunt of motorcycle engines.

Anything can happen here, I thought.

The procession ended when we reached the cash machine. I completed the transaction. The man who happened to be a policeman left us thereafter. I remember thanking him.

Nothing happened. I sighed.

This was a tedious and structurally unsound story—I decided a few years later—one that followed Chekhov's tone of ennui, but failed to make proper use of a weapon. That friend became extremely successful a few years later.

The reason I mentioned that anecdote is because it is evocative of our experience of Manila before and after the lockdown.

It used to be that we couldn't stand spending long periods in this city. This was why a constant disruption was an important ploy for spiritual and physical regrouping. We went on with this program for many years. Tension, then release. Infiltration, then exfiltration. The country and the city.

And then the lockdown: an actual break happened. The plague arrived and intruded into our rituals. It is no coincidence that "intrusion" is the collective noun for cockroaches.

These days, a weekend has become an absurd notion. We miss the old life when we used to wear jeans. We haven't ironed our clothes since March.

We loiter in our labyrinths hoping Orpheus wanders into our darkened corners. Or even the Minotaur. Or even a Mormon. Hardly anything happens these days. Nothing ever gets done. As flowers might teach us, pollination requires contact. That, however is something quite fatal now. Hell is other people, was it?

We pray for wonders. For the little that's is thrown our way, say a cat video, or a delivery of ube cheese pan de sal or an additional potted cactus or an ostrich, we praise glory holy hallelujah. We fail to realize that we have become the Holy Spirit. We are here but not here, a mere apparition of our older selves, or an amputee with a phantom limb.

These days we have the time to sit down and read a poem. Or even listen to the full eight minutes of "Stairway to Heaven." On vinyl.

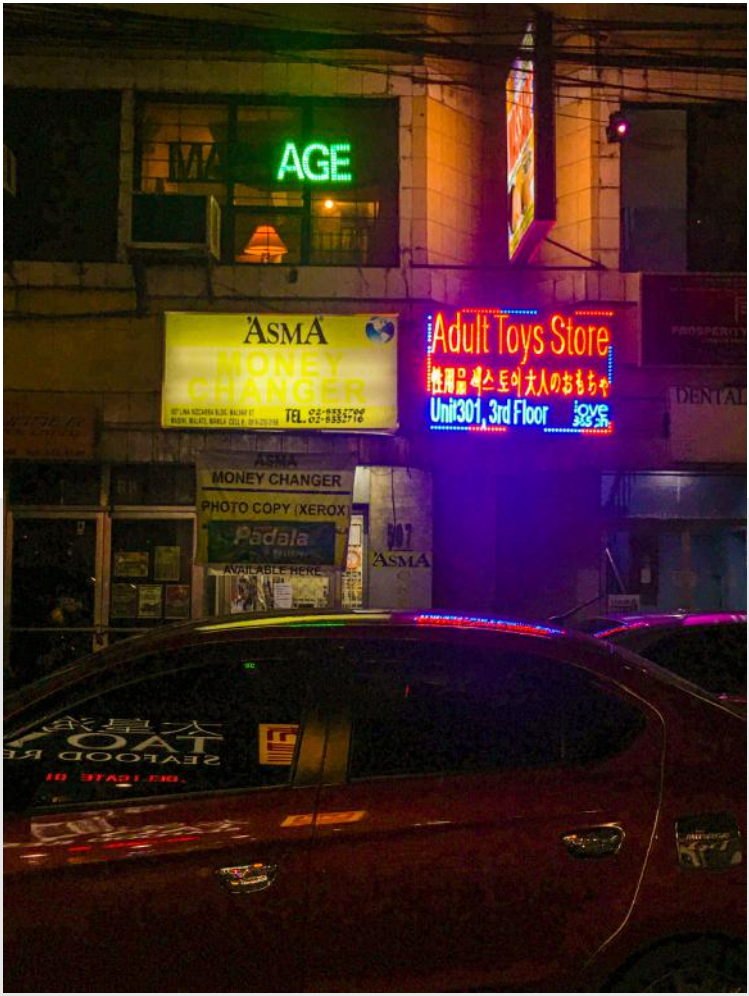
This is time without time.

We are very close to realizing the silent awareness of architecture. Some of us have listened to the gurgling of the plumbing before sunrise. Our pets are probably worried about us.

We are made hyper-aware of being neither oneself and not oneself. We spend hours looking past windows. Whether through actual windows or through the window screens of our computers. We peer past these barriers and look at the world from our suspended space modules. Have we become cosmonauts marooned in space waiting to be rescued? While waiting for something like rescue or respite—as this is the most human of comforts—we also make use of this time to look around.

David Mamet said this about Hollywood: "It is not a monastery for aesthetic truth, instead it is sinkhole for human venality." He might have meant that to describe Manila, too. Most of the time this is true. There are instances, rare as they come in this commotion, when it can be false. Why then can't it be both?

Before Lockdown



Adult toy store

Before Lockdown



Balloon

Before Lockdown



Cat in search of mouse

Before Lockdown



FEU window graffiti

Before Lockdown



I'm tired

Before Lockdown



Manila Bay guitar man

Before Lockdown



Rainbow labor

Before Lockdown



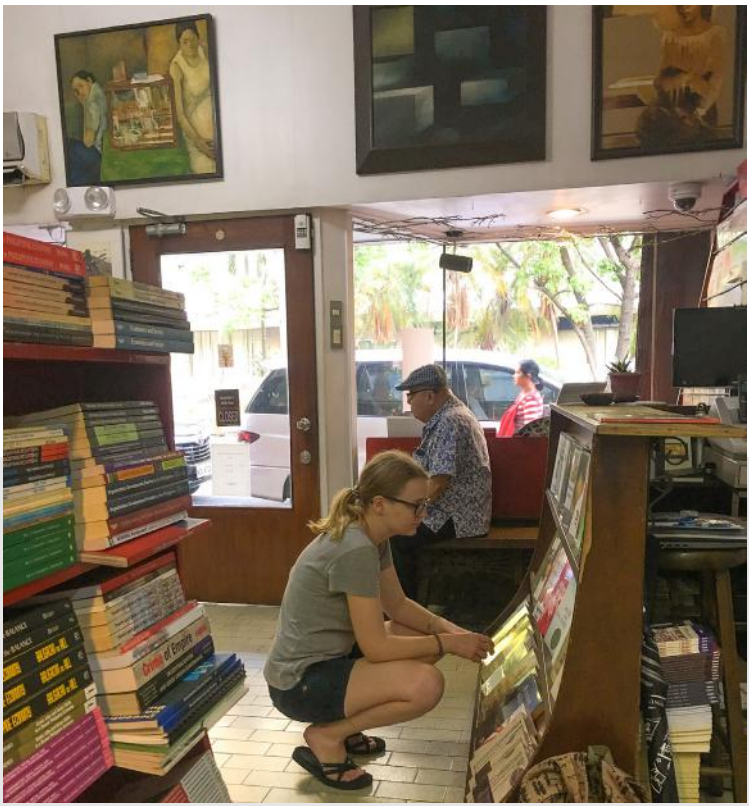
Red Cross legs

Before Lockdown



Smoker

Before Lockdown



Solidaridad

Before Lockdown



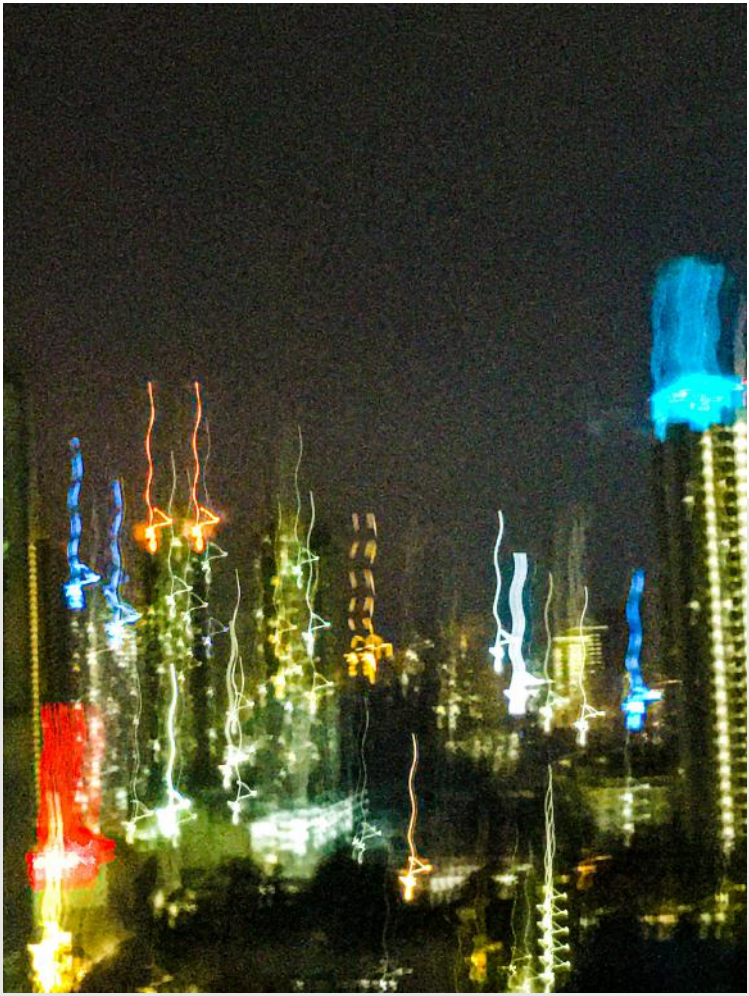
Train cops

Lockdown



Chess game

Before Lockdown



Dark city

Lockdown



Dog Jet ski

Lockdown





Mango kids 1 and 2

Lockdown





Mango kids 3 and 4

Lockdown



Manila resident

Lockdown



Social distancing cats

It is said that photography is an attempt to capture a moment of stillness from the commotion. That is difficult. What might be more challenging is finding silliness in that stillness.

We now have time to look for the eros in the ennui and the joke amidst the jejune.

All these pictures are from my looking around, during the lockdown and the period before it.

In the meantime, even as we wait, we know anything can happen. Any moment now, even as you read this sentence: it begins with anticipation.

The Heritage of the Cathedral City of Vigan

Romeo B. Galang, Jr.
Far Eastern University Manila

A multi-layered history unravels through the tangible and intangible heritage of cities. This is more palpable in cities that survive relatively unscathed by both natural and man-made calamities, providing unique attractions that draw people from all over the world. In the Philippines, only Vigan, among the five cathedral cities during the Spanish era, weathered the 20th century with a considerably intact urban fabric (Algué, 1903-1909).

European and Asian aesthetics and building technology created a distinctively Philippine urban landscape in Vigan. In the cathedral, European-inspired Doric columns support the projecting cornices that serve as pedestals for four diminutive stone foo dogs of Asian origin. Although the present structure dates only to the turn of the 18th century, this institution's history dates considerably earlier (Plano de la iglesia, 1800). The old Augustinian parochial church was elevated into a cathedral in the 1750s, after Bishop Juan dela Fuente Yepes transferred the seat of the Bishopric of Nueva Segovia to Vigan (Galang, 2014, p. 39). As early as 1756, the bishop already commissioned the silver altar ornaments, consisting of altar steps, frontals and cross, for use during the celebration

of the Holy Mass, and which was remitted to the diocese using the sea route (Yepes, 1756). Additional pieces were commissioned in 1790, and some, like the silver *Monumento* of Holy Thursday, continue to be used to this day (Jose, 2014, p. 50). The elevation of Vigan as the seat of the diocese further spurred the growth of the provincial capital.

Today, monuments stand side by side within the historic Cathedral City of Vigan. The pylon honoring Fr. Jose P. Burgos, the Filipino priest executed in Bagumbayan, together with Fr. Zamora and Fr. Mariano Gomez in 1872, dominates the plaza that flank the lateral side of the cathedral. Behind it looms the three-storey bell tower, whose cupola is capped by a rooster-surmounted sphere, and further adorned by crossed keys and crossier – the attributes of Saint Peter.

Freed from the confines of defensive walls that thwart off the dangers of coastal depredations, Vigan's urban landscape incorporated expansive squares. The cathedral and its bell tower dominate the eastern part of the central square. Over the opposite side once stood the Casa Real or the Casa de Gobierno that housed the provincial governor's offices during the Spanish era (Galang, 2014, p. 32). Demolished in 1931, the present Ilocos Sur Capitol building was built on its site (*Ilocos Sur Capitol*, 1931). The burgeoning demands of office work entailed additional space in the state edifices brought about additional renovations, and finally leading to the construction of the municipal, and subsequently, the city hall on the former site of the Tribunal de Naturales. This also fronts the central square, now known as Plaza Salcedo. The religious edifices that flank Plaza Salcedo, have survived the changing times. The former Colegio de Niñas still stands, but has been adaptively reused as a commercial center. The Palacio del Arzobispado de Nueva Segovia still functions for the purpose it was constructed. However, the Seminario Conciliar of Vigan, that used to stand over the opposite side was totally destroyed when a fire engulfed it (Jose, 2014, p. 54). In its place, a cluster of commercial structures were recently built.

Plaza Burgos, the square at the lateral side of the cathedral, is the focal point of the city's principal street – Calle Crisologo (Galang, 2014, p. 31). It is one of those streets with rows upon rows of two-storey brick houses. Some managed to retain their original clay-tile roof, forming the streetscapes that were long cherished by visitors to Vigan. The row houses of the street are notable for their prominent cornices that abut their otherwise plain façade. Elsewhere in the city, these cornices still prop the overhanging wooden *voladas*, forming an outer corridor that opens out to the streets through the sometimes uninterrupted span of sliding *capiz*-shell windows. These funnel the air through the houses' interior while the masonry walls provide the much needed privacy to the domestic scene.

Most of Vigan's former state edifices are simply over-sized *bahay-na-bato*, as the Philippine ancestral houses are called. Only the Palacio del Arzobispado de Nueva Segovia remains today. The main façade, with grillwork for the *ventanillas* – the window beneath the window sill – only dates from the renovations undertaken in 1882 (Galang, 2014, p. 41). However, the rear facade that faces Govantes River, still preserves the older, wooden, turned balusters of the *ventanillas*, charting through these intact architectural elements, the older phases of the structure's building history. The holdings of the Palacio, now housed in a museum of ecclesiastical artifacts, is a testament to the history of faith and religiosity of the Ilocanos. During the religious festivities, some of these religious artifacts, together with those under the custody of some parishioners, are brought out to take part in these celebrations.

The cycle of human life and religious festivities still throbs with life as they continue to be celebrated in Vigan. The Simbaan a Bassit, the historic cemetery chapel, still opens for mass, although it has been decades since the last metal-sheet votive offerings were last pinned to the Apo's skirt. Although a few pieces of these surviving relics are still left at the chapel, most are now kept in a glass-encased frame in the museum of the Palacio. The chapel is still the center of festivities during the Tres de Mayo that honors the Apo – as the Crucified Christ is known to the Ilocanos – who delivered Vigan from the onslaught of past epidemics.

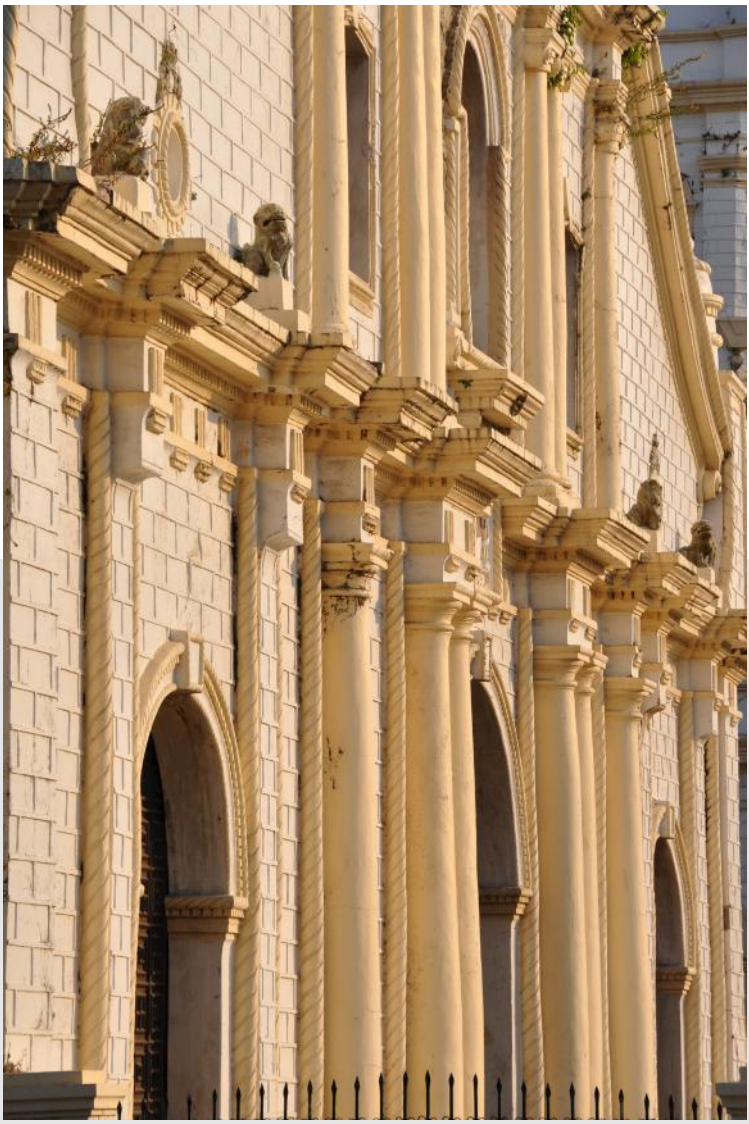
Baptisms, weddings and last rites, however, are still performed in the cathedral. Its bells still toll, as processions leave its portal, marching through the city streets as they did for the last hundreds of years. These celebrate the yearly cycle of religious traditions of the people of Vigan: the feast of Saint Paul the Apostle, Holy Week, Tres de Mayo, La Naval, and the Immaculate Concepcion. Most of the religious images that take part in these festivities are kept by prominent families of Vigan but are brought out during the occasion, decorated with flowers, and fitted with electric wirings to provide lighting by nightfall. On the way to the cathedral, the processional float – the *carroza* – slows down or halts, every now and then, to maneuver through the low-strung, overhead electric wires criss-crossing the steets, lifted by bearers of bamboo poles.

Since the families shoulder the upkeep of the religious images, the changes in the social and economic conditions, brought significant changes on the performative aspects of these rituals. Agrarian reform programs dealt a heavy blow upon the agricultural lands that once partially sustained the celebrations, leading to more austere decorations and less people to carry the shoulder-borne *andas*, leading the families to resort to the *carrozas* that could be pulled by far less people. Other families shifted homes and either left the images under the supervision of caretakers or brought them to their homes in Manila, ending the images' participation in these annual traditions. In some cases, changes in liturgy and belief systems led to the discontinuance of certain celebrations.

Even the inscription of Vigan into the UNESCO World Heritage List (1999) is not a guarantee for the continued preservation of the city's heritage. In one forlorn stretch of a street, the showy flowers of the bougainvillea fail to cover-up the deteriorating wooden elements of a house's second storey level. Dating back to the early 20th-century, the renovations made use of extensive wooden parts, that are among the most endangered elements of the urban fabric of the city today. The intricately carved, decorative wooden corbels, the *persiana* – the horizontal, wooden slats, angled to allow air to pass through but prevent rain from drenching the interiors – or glass transom windows, the sliding glass-windows that alternate with the sliding *persianas* are all falling into decay. Slowly, these architectural elements

would disappear from the urban landscape. In fact, the inscription failed to prevent the demolition of a house with wooden 2nd-storey elements just a few years back. Wood, less durable compared to brick, is more susceptible to decay. In time, these architectural features, a common sight elsewhere in the Philippines, but otherwise rare within the predominantly brick structures in Vigan's historic center, would completely disappear without any intervention. Moreover, a fad that swept across the country scraped off the protective *paletada* – the lime-based mortar. In Vigan, this practice exposed the fragile brick beneath, causing it to erode, undermining the structure in the long run.

The problems confronting Vigan are commonplace in any evolving city. As a lived and dynamic city, its citizens adapt to the changing needs of the times. Traditional materials, like wood and lime for example, for the repair of the ancestral houses are already scarce, and prices have reached an all-time high. Alternative materials, while cheaper, are incompatible with old technology implemented in these historic structures. Nonetheless, the promise brought about the influx of tourists who value the heritage of Vigan, makes the continuance of its traditions and the protection of its built environment more than ever.



Cathedral



Monumento



Burgos Monument



Ilocos Sur Capitol



Palacio Foo Dogs



Calle Crisologo



Streetscape



Volada



Volada



Palacio Facade



Palacio Rear



Simbahan a Bassit



Procession



Procession



Deteriorating Wood



Paletada

References

Algué, J. (1903-1909). Present condition of the Catholic religion in Filipinas. In E. H. Blair & J. A. Robertson (Eds.), The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898 (Vol. 28, 349-368). Gale Research.

Galang, R. B. (2014). Re-visioning Ilocos. In I. Manalo (Ed.), Conscripción: Imagining nd inscribing the Ilocano world (3-47). National Archives of the Philippines in partnership with The Provincial Government of Ilocos Sur.

Ilocos Sur Capitol. (1931). Historical Marker. Vigan: Governor, District Engineer.

Jose, R. T. (201 4). Is there folk knowledge that is neither folk nor knowledge? Jottings on the ecclesiastical Museums in Vigan. In I. Manalo (Ed.), Conscripción: Imagining and inscribing the Ilocano world (49-57). National Archives of the Philippines in partnership with The Provincial Government of Ilocos Sur.

Plano de la iglesia catedral de la diócesis de Nueva Segovia, en Vigán. (1800). Archivo General de Indias. ES.41091.AGI//MP-FILIPINAS,132, 1800

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (1999). Report of the 23rd session of the committee. http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom99.htm#502

Yepes, Juan de la Fuente. (756). Carta de Juan de la Fuente Yepes sobre ornamentos de plata para su iglesia. Archivo General de Indias. ES.41091.AGI/24//FILIPINAS,293,N.66.

Romeo B. Galang, Jr. teaches Arts Appreciation course at the Far Eastern University, with a Rank of Assistant Professor IV. He is currently writing his dissertation for his doctoral degree in Philippine Studies at the University of the Philippines – Diliman. His fields of research include Ecclesiastical Arts, Heritage, Culture, Philippine Arts and History. All communications through the following email address: rgalang@feu.edu.ph.

Void Deck

Ming-De Yuen
Nanyang Technological University

The term "Void Deck" is unique to Singapore and familiar to every local. Post-independence urbanisation transformed the cityscape from low-density village-like "kampongs" into high rise flats. These small flats stack on top of each other to form a vertical community of households. Roughly 80% of the population from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds lives in these public housings. Void decks are the common open areas located on the ground floor of these flats.

Void decks are familiar points of arrival and departure for residents separated from the street and each other. With each silent nod and brief gesture of acknowledgement, they become a community of, what Stanley Migram calls, “familiar strangers”. These transient spaces of letterboxes, bicycle racks, and lift lobbies are also spaces of contested duality. Devised as places of gathering and bonding, they are also spaces that residents want vacant. They are common and public, but they can also become private and personal during certain events. They are places of communal activities, but also places of tranquillity and stillness.

Under the urban development strategies, void decks are devised as common public "hang out" spaces which can foster a sense of community. Amenities are built to encourage the recreational use of the space. One can find ping-pong tables, checker tables, vending machines, stools, and benches. All bolted down or otherwise secured in place.

Ideally, this is where children play, and residents become neighbours. A place where elderly people mingle at the recreational tables, housewives wait for their children school bus, and youngsters kick a ball around. Yet, this space is a source of ambiguity and concern for residents who are concern that the open area brings unwelcomed people who "don't belong here". Children and teenagers playing boisterous games at void decks draw the pique of residents. Schools discourage students from spending time at void decks. Lest they pick up antisocial behaviour such as smoking, or gambling. Wall-mounted signs serve as public reminders of prohibited activities. These include football, skating, skateboarding, cycling, smoking, and littering. CCTVs monitor the area and residents are cautioned to look out for loiterers and report any "suspicious characters".

Some void decks have employed hostile architecture to discourage these undesirables. Benches fitted with metal dividers make it impossible for someone to recline in full and sleep there overnight. Long metal rails obstruct neighbourhood kids from playing ball games. Spikes on the concrete walls puncture the rubber ball of those who tried anyway.

Void Decks straddle between the public and the private. Residents often appropriate the void deck for activities they cannot carry out at home, either due to space constraint or other reasons. Many find the void deck as a good escape from the tropical heat and humidity in their flats and have made the spacious void deck their own with an assortment of old deckchairs, tables, Chinese calendars, and festive decorations. The abundant space is used to keep pot plants, hang washing, and dry cooking ingredients. Ah peks and ah mahs from nearby blocks monopolise the seats, chatting over tea, papers, and biscuits. Even the community cats, which are not allowed within flats by law, are fed and taken care of by the resident cat ladies.

The void deck is also useful when residents need large flexible space to hold social functions that could not be carried out in their private homes. The spatial ambiguity becomes more apparent when this space is repurposed for functions such as wedding celebrations and funeral rites.

Traditionally, the Malay wedding reception is held at the courtyard of the family home. Friends and relatives are invited from different kampongs to give their blessings and partake in a feast. Nowadays, the wedding reception usually takes place at the void deck as it represents the "home" of the couple and their families. During such days, the void deck is lavishly decorated and reverberated by a kompang or hadrah (Malay drum) band, and other loud music.

Another example is Chinese funerals, which are also a common sight at void decks. The coffin is often blocked from view with the use of a tentage. Chinese believes that funeral wakes should be held near one's home so that one's soul could find its way home. The vigil can be a clamorous affair with chanting of prayers by priests over several days. Funeral bands or drum-and-gongs troupes may provide "live" music to give the deceased a final send-off on the last day.

Unsurprisingly, the noise and crowds at these events sometimes lead to tensions between residents. But the usual regulations are loosened for these occasions, and unhappiness is seldom openly expressed.

Once those events are over, the void deck reverts to its usual sparseness of colour and texture in a matter of hours. For the void deck to be repurposed at a moment's notice, it must be structurally minimal. Bright tiles, murals, and colours can affect the solemnity of funerals. Therefore, void decks are characterised by straight, interspersed columns, white-washed walls, and smooth concrete floors.

True to its name, the void deck remains mostly unoccupied for most of the day. Except for the occasional domestic helper out to entertain children and exercise the elderly in their care, or council workers emptying bins and sweeping the floor. The vacant void decks create a sense of space and emptiness in the neighbourhood. The unobstructed design lent breathing space and escape from the box in apartments above. Passers-by are invited to elude the everyday minutia by partaking in aimless non-activity. The killing of time or shooting the breeze. Perhaps because it is a slack space, which bids a vagueness of purpose, both onto itself and on its occupants. It has become something as unique to Singapore as it is hotos



Unattended



Drying shrimps



Laundry



Sunning



Afternoon nap



Afternoon nap 2



Resting



Pot plants



Christmas tree



Pigeons



Reading the paper



Funeral tentage



Fish tank overlooked by her people.

Yuen Ming De lives and grew up in Singapore. Now and again, he encounters pieces of loneliness and disregardance in the city.

Ming De works at the Nanyang Technological University. He is concerned with using technology to create collaborative and interdisciplinary spaces. A lot of his projects involve developing physical and virtual learning environments.

His work can be found in educational publications and his photos can be found on Instagram @void_deck.