

Looking backwards to investigating the future urban development of Metro Manila

The role of public space



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1 Introduction

Disruption is an adequate word when describing the history of the Philippines. The country has had a history characterized by dramatic change of political governance starting with the Spanish colonial era from 1521 to 1898 followed by the American colonial period from 1898 to 1946. The post-colonial period with the Marcos regime was also a turbulent time, ending in dictatorship and the People's Power Revolution 1986. Throughout all of these periods Manila, as the capital of the country was where power was manifested and the development of the country emerged. According to Jenkins the current urban development of Metro Manila is dominated by the globalized private sector, though globalization is not a new phenomenon, but rather has its roots in the colonial periods (Jenkins, et al., 2007).

During a three week field trip to Metro Manila, I found the absence of public spaces troubling. In Europe public spaces are a natural part of a city and it was in their absence, it became striking how much I desired them. It also got me thinking of how this could be and what effects it has on the Philippine society. In times of endless numbers of shopping malls and business districts, it seemed like no one cared about the issue of public spaces. It corresponded with the segregated character of the city, where the wealthy part of the population delimits themselves from the poor, who exist in the margins. In a country where gated communities are the norm and the urbanization is developing in a tremendous speed, who considers the large scale

issues needed for a functional society, like infrastructure, segregation and democracy? In this paper I will investigate the recent history of the city, analyse crucial periods which have been dominant in shaping what Metro Manila is today. Three periods appears to be more relevant regarding the urbanization, the American Imperial period, the modernist period under the rule of the Marcos regime and the period of today, the global era. I will then with this background criticise and discuss potentialities for the urban future of Metro Manila.

2 Literature Review

Like many other Asian cities, Metro Manila developed its current form under colonial rule. Before Spain invaded the Philippines in the 16th century, Manila was merely a barangay, a small community, which was what the whole country contained of, small clans with little common organisation. Spain established their base in Manila, in what now is Intramuros. The colonial expansion required new establishments for military, administrative control, centres for collections of natural resources and its subsequent onward transport. This is where the urban network began to develop which functioned as the hub for controlling the exploitation. Jenkins describes this as the first wave of globalisation (Jenkins, et al., 2007).

Even though this is when Manila was established as a city, there are few traces left of this period on an urban scale. Because of this I will focus on the later periods in Manila's history. However, I do think the Spanish colonial period has made an impact on the Filipinos ability to find a power balance in the country's political system.

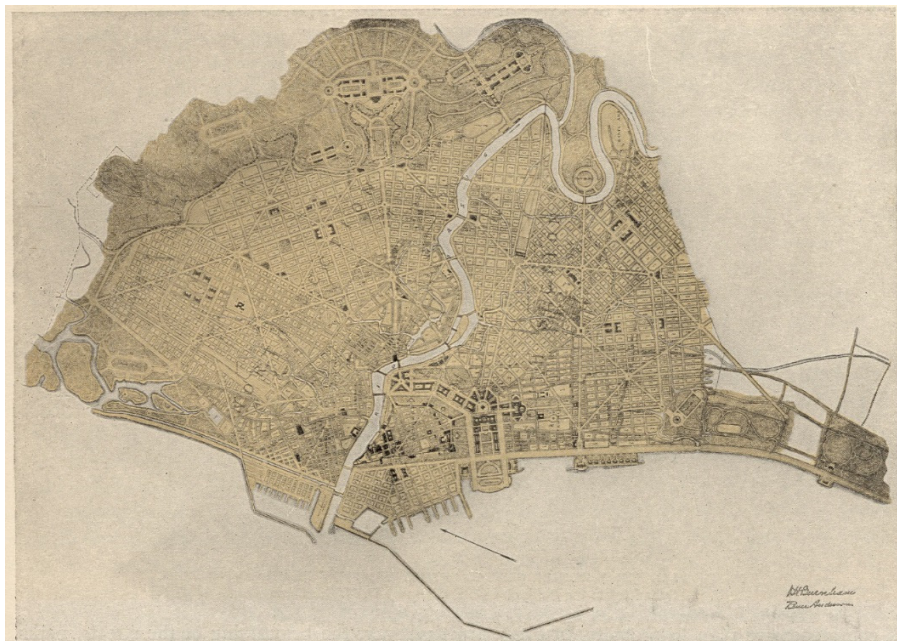
2.1 Metro Manila during the American Imperialism 1902-1946

After the Spanish-American War of 1898, which cost over 200.000 lives, the U.S. took command over the Philippines (Shatkin, 2005). Many Filipinos did however not want to surrender to American control which led to a three year war between the Philippines and the U.S. At the time Manila held a population of 200.000 people, 1946 it had expanded to 700,000. According to Shatkin the Americans pictured the Philippine architecture as primitive and oriental, in order for them to entitle their invasion. This is when the American Daniel Burnham was selected as the official colonial architect of the Philippines.

2.1.1 Burnham's plan for Manila

Before he was commanded colonial architect of the Philippines, Burnham had done a great number of prestigious assignments including supervising the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago 1893 and designing the city plans for Chicago and downtown Washington, D.C. The exposition was strongly influenced by the emerging reformist movement called “The City Beautiful”, which Burnham was highly involved in. The movement sought to transform degraded cities through the development of monumental buildings, grand boulevards and parks (Shatkin, 2005). The historian Zeynep Çelik describes the exposition as “*an exercise in racial typology*” (Brody, 2001). It reflected the general approach the U.S. had regarding their colonies, where the orient was a space of fantasy. Letters from Burnham to the head of the Philippine Commission, William Cameron Forbes reveals Burnham's enthusiasm and belief concerning his work in the Philippines. He saw it as a great opportunity for him to realise his somewhat naive and glorified dreams of what the orient could be (Brody, 2001).

The picture below is the plan Burnham made for Manila in 1905. As written on the plan, the road system was radiated symmetrically from the government centre, the railway station and the harbour which formed the center. All in line with “The City Beautiful” movement, parks and monuments were important phenomenon.



XXXI. PLANS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANILA, SUBMITTED TO THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION BY D. H. BURNHAM, 1905.
The essential elements of this plan are the government center and system of proposed arteries radiating from it, the railway station, and the shore road.

According to Brody, Manila developed a lot thanks to Burnham, but he question the intention of these developments. Brody states the American developments was designed to control and survey the colonial land. According to him (Brody, 2001) they aimed to create a system of power, much like Foucault's description of the Panopticon:

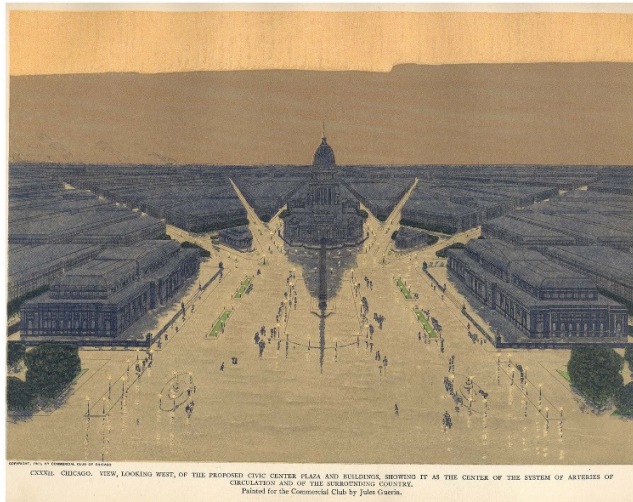
“We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the center a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside of, corresponding to the window of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows



the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each a madame, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy.”

Brody then states that even though a surveillance tower was not placed in the middle of Manila, the act of forcing a grid of Western planning into an urban settlement is similar to Foucault's definition of the Panopticon. This top-down power relation is a recurrent phenomenon in the Philippine history (Brody, 2001). Today parts of the city are entirely owned and controlled by the private sector which on their hand are dependent on global forces. I will return to this matter later on.

Burnham left Manila after the plan was done, though he passed the work forward to the architect William Parsons, who was legally bound to continue working according to Burnham's plans.



2.1.2 The American legacy

According to Shatkin the most notable traces from Burnham's plan are the relation between public buildings and the urban fabric and the concern of aesthetic improvements rather than addressing the needs of the working class and the urban poor. Shatkin asserts that the main critique of the American colonialism in the Philippines has been that they failed to address socio economic inequalities and instead implemented a system where the state became reliant on the countries landowning elite which has been the case ever since. (Shatkin, 2005)

2.3 Metro Manila during the Marcos regime 1946-1986

In 1946, after the WWII, The Philippines was declared an independent state and Ferdinand Marcos was elected president. This was also the time of modernism when cities like Brasilia was established. Marcos used modernist urban planning as a tool for manifesting his power



which was centralized in Metro Manila. In the project “New Society”, new monumental and public building like the Cultural Center of the Philippines (the CCC) was created, primarily to impress the growing urban middle class, the upper class and an international audience (Michel, 2010). He continued to reinforce Burnham’s monumental plan by placing the new public buildings according to it, the CCC for example was located in Manila Bay, one of the biggest nodes in Burnham’s plan. On the agenda was also a project where informal settlements were to be eliminated though evictions of the urban poor who (at most) were relocated in poorly conceived housing programmes (Shatkin, 2005). The biggest project was the construction of a new capital in Quezon City called National Government Center, which was to contain important institutions and monuments. Shatkin describes the corruption that increased and the discontentment that came with it, both from the domestic population and the multinational companies. Monumental buildings like the CCC soon came to represent the venality and corruption of the regime and became unpopular and underused,

which still today is the situation. It all ended for Marcos in 1986, when he was overthrown, a protracted process where the U.S was highly involved.

2.4 Metro Manila as a global city 1986-

Shatkin describes the period since the fall of the Marcos regime, as a time where the Philippines have experienced tremendous political and economic change and an integration into the global economy. He points out two main forces for change.

First the power of Metro Manila was decentralized from one strong national regime to the 17 cities forming Metro Manila. He describes the national governments weak influence on the capital of the nation. Instead the Local Government Units of each city became largely autonomous in areas such as housing, land use planning and community services.

Secondly he argues the local government units (LGU) on their hand are highly dependent on the private sector (this is also valid for the national government). They obtain their capital mostly from land owning tax and value-added tax (VAT) which makes them highly dependent on the land owners and the commercial establishments. This results in a country with a national government dependent on cooperating with the wealthy families owning most of the recent developments in the city, like Ayala Land Corporation, who built and owns the Makati central business district (Shatkin, 2005). Michel describes the nature of the urban developments that have emerged in what they call the Global era as neoliberal urbanism.

“[...] features conventionally associated with neoliberal urbanism, i.e., the privatization of planning and urban management; the middle-class-oriented aesthetization of urban space; the condemnation of state-led approaches in fighting poverty; and a focus on a market-led strategies for providing affordable and low-cost housing [...]” (Michel, 2010)

Michel points out that these features were characteristics of Manila's urban development long before neoliberalism became the universal mantra of growth and development. The system was initiated during the American colonialism and further implemented through martial law during the Marcos regime (Michel, 2010).

The liberalization and privatization of the city is embodied in large scale shopping malls, a growing number of private townships (such as Fort Bonifacio Global City) and the large-scale inner-city thoroughfares. These development are created to cater the upper-middle classes while the conditions of the urban poor is

impaired (Michel, 2010). Michel argues that these conditions have major consequences on the urban life, consumption patterns and usage of public space. Michel gives two examples of recent urban development projects that creates a middle-class and investor friendly urbanity, one managed by the private sector and one by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

Much like the “New Society” project during the Marcos regime, a project called “Metro Gwapo” (gwapo is Tagalog for handsome) was launched in 2006 by the MMDA under the former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Michel describes that



the project was to beautify the face city, with a focus on the usage of public space which made the urban poor target group. The urban landscape were to be reworked in those areas visible to tourists and foreign investors. Michel asserts that “[...] *the Metro Gwapo stated aims was to erase what might contradict the image of a promising site for investment and, like street vendors, what do not fit the image of a modern and successful global city.*” (Michel, 2010). Michel sites MMDA for demonstrating one of the key features of the project was the “Street Nomad Care” program, which focused on the “[...] *removal of street nomads, beggars, vagrants and homeless persons [...]*” (Michel, 2010). Michel argues that this exemplifies that for the MMDA the problem is not poverty with denial of basic human rights but poverty as indecorum, something that smirches the image of the city. The conditions that cause poverty are not under consideration. The sign in the picture translates “*In a handsome/good-looking Metropolitan Manila, People are Inspired.*”.

As an example of a privately developed urban project, Michel writes about Rockwell Center. This kind of private townships, usually consisting of high-rise condominiums, a medium-sized mall, and office blocks, have occurred since the late



1990's. The idea of these citadels is to offer places for work, residence, leisure and consumption, all in one complex, addressed to the urban upper-middle and upper classes. They strive for offering a global and exclusive lifestyle to its inhabitants. Michel asserts they constantly turn against all that is informal or even local by elements like integrated security, traffic management, the prestige of international architects. In 2005 an advertisement made by the Rockwell Land Corporation, pictured a dressed up woman standing on top of one of the high-rise condominiums in Rockwell Center with a text saying "*Where Stylish Manila Stays on Top [...] If you want to chill out while keeping the unstylish out, come to Rockwell*" (Michel, 2010). Michel condemns this kind of lifestyle as imagined globalism, which strives to have "*[...] a healthy and very interesting mix of people from all over the world.*" (Michel, 2010) and that is maintained by a culture of gentrification and consumerism.

These two cases exemplify the neoliberal urbanization in Metro Manila, meaning urban development driven by economic growth, which does not have to be conducted by the private sector. However according to Michel, in this case the MMDA is acting as a company. He argues that one cannot expect a company to take social responsibility in their work, but the same does not go for a public institution (Michel, 2010).

3 Critique

3.1 Public space and power in Metro Manila

Shatkin argues that the middle and the upper classes of Metro Manila have turned against the public spaces in their city. These spaces are regarded as informal margins, occupied by the urban poor, places no one wants to be associated with. This confirms my own experience from the streets of Metro Manila, where I found myself feeling as I did not belong. They were clearly not addressed for tourists, who are supposed to remain in the highly developed parts of the city. If it had not been for that fact that we were studying condition in various parts of the city, we probably would not have ended up in these “margins of the city”.

This approach towards public space has grown as the power have moved from that state to the private sector and the urban development has taken a global character. Nowadays it is the new urban spaces in places like Makati, Bonifacio Global City and Rockwell Center that symbolize the success and power of the country (Shatkin, 2005) and are therefore the places displayed to foreigners. I see this as a symptom of the government’s capitulation or their heavily reduced influence on the urban development. Michel adds to this by stating that *“It is commonly claimed that this trend indicates the retreat of the state as one of the key features of globalization or neoliberalism.”* (Michel, 2010).

Yet the MMDA seems to acknowledge the lack of true public space in Metro Manila. Recently (March 2, 2015) UN habitat together with the MMDA, held a conference on the matter of “Public Space and the New Urban Agenda”. They then declared the importance of public space in shaping a functional society.

“UN-Habitat research has shown that attractive, active, well-functioning public space can jump-start economic development while public spaces help build a sense of community and civic identity as well as promote economic development and culture. By recognizing and developing the positive potential of public spaces, cities can enhance safety, create economic opportunity, improve public health, and promote public democracy or “the right to the city”.”

(UN habitat, 2015)

It is of course crucial that the MMDA recognizes the issue of public space, but they are no longer the ones who control the development, they have become too dependent

on the private sector who profit from urban spaces like Rockwell Center, that are reliant on the separation from the informal and poor part of the population.

Projects like Metro Gwapo feeds the segregation of the city. Michel states that the urban landscape is constantly remade in order to attract international capital and the urban middle classes which leaves no room for *“those who are not able to act as consumers in and of these spaces, but whose cheap labour power at the same time is needed to maintain, secure and clean these spaces”* (Michel, 2010). Michel claims that projects like these does not only address international investors, but also the urban middle and underclasses. For them making it across the threshold is connected with the promise of inclusion in a city that to most does not appear as a “shining global city” (Michel, 2010). The current state of segregation creates a vicious spiral. In a segregated society, people from separate socioeconomic groups rarely meet and exchange experiences. The lack of transparency and trust between classes will in itself make it less probable for people to mix. This results in a situation where no part of the population is likely to oppose the segregation but rather individually will strive for an economic upgrade. I think this mechanism is a huge problem for the democratic system in The Philippines.

3.2 History

The periods described in this paper has been an attempt to understand changes in strategies for building Manila. I have found the capitol building to symbolize and serve the political situation of each period, in which power structures have occurred. I find that Manila has never really been shaped by its inhabitants in a democratic way due to foreign powers that have constantly dominated or interfered. The population of Manila have mainly been objects to these foreign powers in various ways, starting with two colonial empires who shaped the city to serve their needs and reflect their values, followed by numerous governmental powers who more or less have ignored a large part of the population. Today this foreign power consists of neoliberal forces conducted by both the private sector and governmental institutions. This applies not only for Metro Manila, but for the country as a whole.

Through all of these periods the Filipinos have adapted to new circumstances. My theory is that this would impose a feeling of powerlessness in the Philippine society, because they have had no choice but to reconcile with their destiny. Perhaps it has embedded a tradition of an uncritical approach towards foreign powers? It

might also make it less likely that they are to dig into the past, because it is confusing.

This top down power relation which Brody compared with Foucault's Panopticon also applies to recent urban projects in Metro Manila, such as the Metro Gwapo. The inhabitants are still treated as objects rather than subjects in their own city. Michel also states this by claiming that strategies and developments in Manila today are "*antipoor instead of antipoverty*" (Michel, 2010).

To me this raises questions about the Filipinos national identity and when reading more about it, I realise it is an extremely complex field, that I will not have the time to investigate further in this paper.

4 The Role of Architects

When researching this paper, I found that long term perspectives seem rare which has major effects on infrastructure and in the long run, democracy. Regarding this urban planners and architects could play a big role. They should be able to see a more comprehensive picture of the urban context. In doing so, both a retro and a prospective is needed, meaning the context and its history need to be analysed, while future utopias should to be rethought.

Today Metro Manila appears to be a patchwork of gated communities, shopping malls and informal settlements, all detached from one another. There seems to be a problem regarding the large scale. Better connections both for pedestrians and cars would help decrease segregation. When visiting Metro Manila it is very obvious that the infrastructure is heavily neglected, and this is of course something urban planners are aware of. But it is not only a matter of solving the alarming traffic situation, it is about building connections between various parts of the society. To do this I think public spaces need to play a big role.

According to Jenkins, there will be limited political will to create urbanization in favour of others than the upper and middle classes. But there will also be limited political demand for doing this. This means the urban majority, mainly poor, will continue to provide for themselves in margins of the formal system. However, he also states that it is in these situations when inclusive developments are very much needed that they have the possibility to have the most effect.

In a time where globalism dominates the horizon, a critical mass is needed. Architects and urban planners need to take a bigger part in the political discussion and create opinion about the urbanization. Knowledge needs to be spread about urbanization and people need to learn that there are alternatives. It is clear that Filipinos do not have a strong relation to public space in their culture. As stated before I do however think they are of the highest importance in creating a democratic society. As constituted above by the UN habitat, public spaces can be used as an effective tool doing so. Though I think both politicians and Filipinos need to experience good examples of this in order to understand and value these spaces. In this process architects have to take responsibility and lead the way.

According to Shatkin it is a trend in many capitals in East Asia, that the national governments are less involved in shaping utopias for their cities, meaning creating idealized visions which set a direction for future developments. He states that the utopias of today's Metro Manila are being shaped by the private sector, and they are being shaped to profit. Filipinos need to take action and demand to be a part of shaping their own future.

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