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## **Going Global, Veiling the Poor: Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila**

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BORIS MICHEL

# Going Global, Veiling the Poor

## Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila

This article examines neoliberal modes of urban governance and revanchist urbanism in Metro Manila. Making Manila attractive to foreign capital, international tourism, and the new urban middle classes, as well as presenting it as a symbol of the state's attempt to transform the Philippines into a "newly industrialized country," is a vital part of a neoliberal project that gained power in the mid-1990s. On the one hand, this project seeks the erasure of marginality and poverty, which contradict the image of global modernity. On the other hand, it entails a reconstruction process beyond erasure: the shaping of specific parts of the city as a "globally competitive metropolis" freed from all hints of the "stark realities of a Third World country." To underline the argument two case studies are presented.

**KEYWORDS: NEOLIBERALISM · URBAN STUDIES · URBANIZATION · PRIVATIZATION OF URBAN SPACE**

Urban studies and research on urban governance focused for a long time on cities in the centers of the capitalist world system. Research on cities under the conditions of contemporary globalization followed similar lines. For the most part so-called Third World cities were not on the screen of these scholars in urban studies. They were “off the map,” as Jennifer Robinson (2002) puts it in her critique of the academic separation between mainly Western-focused urban studies and development studies—the latter addressing the “other,” nonmodern, underdeveloped Third World cities using a distinct set of theories and approaches. In contrast, in this article I want to center the discussion on Metro Manila, a city that, in the minds of most social scientists as well as in economic terms, clearly qualifies for what has long been described as a Third World city or a megacity in the global South. I want to ask how current entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance and neoliberal modes of regulation (Harvey 1989; Hubbard and Hall 1998; Jessop 1998) hit the ground in a place that was neither liberal nor fordist previously, but had a dependent or peripheral developmental regime with strong neocolonial ties to the former colonial power, and one that often has been described in terms of cronyism, “booty capitalism” (Hutchcroft 1998), or oligarchic “cacique democracy” (Anderson 1988).

This article shows how a specific type of neoliberal urban governance is put in place, altered, and contested in Metro Manila. It also highlights the new ways by which the local state and private actors form alliances to rework the urban environment and how these are applied and tested in the urban space. Many of these policies and projects in Metro Manila revolve around an imaginary of global cityness and attempts to imagine the metropolis as an emerging global city. The article illustrates this point by examining (a) one of Metro Manila’s state-led beautification programs, Metro Gwapo, which sought to attract foreign investments and demonstrate the state’s capability to regain control over the urban space, and (b) one privately planned and managed high-end inner-city mixed-use community: Rockwell Center. I argue that these initiatives can be understood as a specific example of what has been described recently, with regard to Neil Smith, as a globalization of revanchist urbanism (Swanson 2007; Whitehead and More 2007; Slater 2010).

### **Neoliberal Urbanism(s) and Imaginaries of Global Cities**

How, by whom, and with what effects have strategies, which first emerged in some cities in the North during the crisis of fordism, been implemented

in a city like Metro Manila? While the term neoliberalism is often applied merely as a slogan without much explanatory power, the concept of neoliberal urbanism as it emerged in recent years can help shed light on many developments in cities around the world. Even though there is some degree of convergence between cities in the North and in the South as argued by Dick and Rimmer (2009), cities remain unique and complex assemblages of local and global flows and histories. The globalization of strategies and discourses that are commonly related to neoliberal urban governance—like the global spread of zero-tolerance policies, entrepreneurial strategies, and intensified gentrification; the expansion of gated and exclusive urban landscapes; the privatization of urban space and planning—clearly does not produce a single globalized type of the Neoliberal City. As many scholars have noted, it is necessary to understand neoliberalism not just as a worldwide hegemonic project, but also as a geographically and socially highly uneven project that is embedded within “national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 349). The different emerging “actually existing neoliberalisms” (ibid.) are more diverse than most theories would suggest. For the term to be applicable to a larger set of social and political contexts, a broader understanding is necessary. As Peck and Tickell (2002, 53) have written: “One of the most striking features of the recent history of neoliberalism is its quite remarkable transformative capacity” that allows it to often adapt and interact successfully with local sites. Since the 1970s neoliberalism has undergone considerable mutations that also differ from place to place (Peck and Tickell 2002; Leitner et al. 2007). Even after the recent global economic crisis and the urge to restabilize the global economy, it seems too early to proclaim its irrevocable passing away, especially on the urban scale.

The rise and implementation of neoliberal policies in the Philippines must be seen in the context of a wide array of conflicting causes and actors since the mid-1980s. Political restructuring, i.e., the toppling of the Marcos regime, the accompanying rise of a broad democratic civil society, the partial reconstruction of pre-Marcos elites and attempts to restabilize the pre-Marcos hegemonic bloc, constituted a prime accelerator of the restructuring process. To such restructuring have been added some socioeconomic shifts, i.e., the growing importance of transnational migration (in economic as well as social terms), the shifts within the global economy and the Philippines’s role therein as well as a politically and financially weak national state (Abinales

and Amoroso 2005, 230–60; Bello 2004; Reid 2001). It is also important to remember that some features conventionally associated with neoliberal urbanism, i.e., the privatization of planning and urban management; the middle-class-oriented aesthetization of urban spaces; the condemnation of state-led approaches in fighting poverty; and a focus on market-led strategies for providing affordable and low-cost housing, were already deployed in Manila long before neoliberalism became the global mantra of growth and development (two terms that again gained in influence). Most of these strategies were first implemented under martial law during the Marcos regime and some of them go back to the years of American colonialism (Caoili 1999; Michel 2010; Shatkin 2005). So it would be misleading to conceive the current transformation of Metro Manila's urban landscape and urban governance as something fundamentally new and alien to older modes of governance and capitalism in the Philippines, or elsewhere.

In the remainder of this article I show how these conditions shape what can be understood as a specific example of what Kate Swanson (2007), with regard to Neil Smith's (1996) work on the "Revanchist City," has called revanchist urbanism heading South. Mindful of the massive differences between urban regimes in the U.S. and the global South,<sup>1</sup> Swanson argues that the southbound revanchist urbanism aims at creating urban landscapes that are free of visible poverty and marginalization (especially in the form of indigenous peoples, who are represented as backward, dirty, and the like). Hints of any local identity and history are replaced with a whitened, commodified, and policed space that quotes an imagined global West as a space of modernity and progress. Thus, a certain idea (rather than economic condition) of the "Global City" becomes a "regulating fiction [that] offers an authorized image of city success (so people can buy into it) that establishes an end point of development for ambitious cities" (Robinson 2006, 111). This particular idea or image of a Global City is not so much concerned with quantifiable global control and command functions in distinguished segments of global finance and service industries as portrayed in the concepts of Saskia Sassen (2001) or Peter Taylor (2004), as it is with centering on a "global identity" and a somewhat vague image of cities that are top-seeded in this economic ranking (e.g., Paul 2005; Douglass and Huan 2007; Yeoh 1999). To planners, politicians, and developers the aim is "to project an image of an economically successful global city, both to persuade its citizens that its strategies of globalization of the economy are correct, as well as to attract investment

and tourism in order to fully realize this strategy" (Shatkin 2005, 581). In Manila's policy discourse, projected images are those of global cities like New York, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which are of considerable influence to urban managers of cities that fall below the standards of global economic performance. Singapore, in particular, is regarded by those actors (*Manila Times* 2006, A4; Yuchengco 2002)—and in some way also by the narratives of Filipino migrants to these cities—as a shining example of a successful, modern, progressive, clean, and orderly global metropolis, which Manila is not.

This whitening and controlling of urban space is realized by a whole series of strategies ranging from a repressive revanchism to a more subtle culture-oriented "pacification by cappuccino" (Zukin 1995, 28) and the production of a spectacularized "cosmopolitan" urban landscape (Söderström 2006). Its constitutive "other" is confined to "slums" and "shanties." More often than not, these latter spaces are represented in the local media discourse in terms of deviance, underdevelopment, and a passive culture of poverty. Consequently a wide range of repressive strategies against informality has been launched by different state agencies. With New York's Rudi Giuliani and Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew as role models of zero-tolerance policies, measures in Metro Manila range from demolishing informal settlements or chasing informal street vendors and destroying their goods by sprinkling kerosene on them, to the ban on drying laundry in public (David 2007; Shatkin 2007). Even though the Philippines is home to the most articulate and diverse civil society and social movements, the country holds by far the largest number of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the region (Silliman and Noble 1998), and the urban poor constitute the most important electorate in Metro Manila, it seems extremely difficult to challenge the government measures that have been implemented (Shatkin 2004; Velasco 2007; Hutchison 2007). Explicit "urban" social movements that are able to address urban issues beyond specific local places, such as questions of public goods and "the right to the city" (Lefebvre 1996), are surprisingly rare in Metro Manila.

Revanchist urbanism and an emerging corporate-driven gentrification are central to the neoliberal transformation of Metro Manila since the early 1990s. After the wave of suburbanization that dominated urban growth until the late 1990s, in recent years investments in the inner city have become attractive. Yet, they have required a different urban setting to be successful, especially a middle-class friendly, clean, and safe urbanity that was perceived

to be absent and consequently needed to be produced. These gentrified urban landscapes can be regarded as a direct and probably most visible outcome of the shift toward a neoliberal regime of governance in Metro Manila. Before substantiating the argument, the next section highlights the central elements of Metro Manila's development and history.

### **A Brief History of Metro Manila**

Metro Manila, a city of some 11 million people living within the metropolis and probably over 16 million in an extended metropolitan region, is not just one of the largest cities in Southeast Asia. I will argue that Metro Manila can also be regarded as a city with a long history and exceptional intensity of privatization in urban and regional planning, going back to the political and administrative transformations under U.S. colonialism in the early twentieth century (Doeppers 1984; Michel 2010). It is characterized by an extremely uneven distribution of wealth and access to the city. The first corporately planned and managed city and the first private upper-class gated communities were constructed as early as the 1950s under the conditions of a weak and unreliable local and national state. These were built long before they became a global trend closely linked to a globalized neoliberal urbanization.

With the exception of the early phase of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines when the new colonial power tried to transform Manila into a showcase of a modern colonial city and introduced a modern regime of capitalist urban planning (Hines 1972; Sonne 2003; Van den Muijzenberg and Van Naerssen 2005) and the dictatorial Marcos regime, the government's direct involvement in the planning of urban space was relatively insignificant and characterized by highly decentralized and inconsistent regulation. On a previously unprecedented scale the Marcos regime used modernist urban planning and a massive centralization of power to rebuild and reimagine the metropolis as the center stage for its projected "New Society," ranging from the monumental architecture at the Cultural Center of the Philippines to new modes of governing the urban poor (Lico 2003; Magno-Ballesteros 2000; Laquian 2005, 44ff). A few large real estate developers, often linked to wealthy family-owned conglomerates (such as the Ayalas and the Lopezes), dominated the production of middle- and upper-class oriented spaces up to the scale of whole privately managed cities. Since the mid-1980s, when authoritarian rule was replaced by democracy, public urban spaces have been replaced increasingly by privately constructed and controlled urban spaces

that cater to middle- and upper-class consumers. The reforms of the 1990s, when the national government under Pres. Fidel Ramos took up a neoliberal and growth-oriented agenda, made way for an unprecedented growth in scale and scope of privatized urban planning (Van den Muijzenberg and Van Naerssen 2005).

Makati was the first and still one of the most striking examples of privatized urban planning that had eminent consequences for Metro Manila's contemporary urban regime and landscape. In the early years of independence and at the southeastern fringe of the city of Manila, the Roxas-Zobel-Ayala began master-planning on a former hacienda of some fifteen hundred hectares what in the 1960s became the richest city in the country and today comprises the Philippine's premier Central Business District. Since then Makati became home to the vast majority of the country's corporate headquarters, international organizations, and embassies, as well as the country's first and still most prestigious gated communities and shopping centers (*ibid.*, 151–53). Makati turned out to be not just an economically successful project for its owners, the Ayala Land Inc., but also a blueprint for successful real estate development and private urban management in the years to come.

Beginning in the 1980s, Makati's position was challenged by three large-scale projects: the Ortigas Center, a privately planned and managed Central Business District some kilometers further to the north; the also privately planned and managed Filinvest Corporate City, a projected edge city in the suburban south; and more recently the Fort Bonifacio Global City, a project situated on a privatized former inner-city military base. While Ortigas and Filinvest Corporate City, like Makati, have been owned and managed by local enterprises (and direct competitors of Ayala), Fort Bonifacio Global City was acquired by an Indonesian- and Hong Kong-led consortium in the mid-1990s. Following the turmoil of the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998, it was taken over by an Ayala-led consortium. These "shining new cities" are removed from the realities and life-world of most of the people living in the city (Berner 1997, xiv). This isolation may be one reason why they rarely become the object of conflicts over the right to the city.

In 1992, when the economic situation in the Philippines, which had been largely bypassed by the vast amounts of capital that floated into Southeast Asia since the mid-1980s, began to ease and the political and economic situation began to stabilize, the Ramos administration took over and started to implement a political and economic agenda that was highly influenced

by the global discourse of liberalization and privatization. The preceding Aquino administration, whose legitimacy and (partial) coherence was based on the shared experience of the anti-Marcos struggle and People Power, had maintained to some degree a discourse of democratization and empowerment. However Ramos, supported by the hegemony of neoliberalism in major international organizations as well as by the Philippines's weak economic performance throughout the 1980s, shifted toward an imperative of economic growth, globalization, and liberalization. This shift was accompanied by a strengthening of the local state as well as a growing involvement of civil society groups and NGOs. The urban scale played important roles in this project of transforming the "sick man" of Asia into a "new tiger cub" (Kelly 2000, 39–41). The discourses on globalization, the coming age of the Pacific Rim, NIChood, and Emerging Markets—as geographical, political, and economical imaginaries for those countries advancing or escaping from the status of "Third/underdeveloped/backward/developing" world (Sidaway and Pryke 2000, 189)—were key imaginaries in this project that the Arroyo administration sought to continue.

Liberalization and privatization had major impacts on the built environment of Metro Manila. They favored the production of urban spaces to cater to upper-middle classes while in many cases impairing the conditions for the urban poor (Shatkin 2008). It involved lifting the constraints on foreign capital to acquire property and the deregulation of the financial sector; the privatization of existing and planned infrastructures, accompanied by the growing importance of public-private partnerships; the massive expansion of infrastructure projects that led to large-scale evictions; and, more generally, the massive gain in influence for the private sector, especially real estate developers (Bello 2004; Serafica 1998).

At the institutional level, democratization after 1986 was followed by the significant reorganization of the metropolitan administration and the local state. The Metro Manila Commission, the centralized governing body for the Metro Manila area, that was founded in the mid-1970s and led by Imelda Marcos, was largely deprived of its power. This move reflected a decentralization of urban governance and the wider political landscape. It was a response to the highly centralized urban regime that was put in place by the Marcos regime (Rüland 1982; Caoili 1999), which to many was an outstanding symbol of the regime's authoritarian rule and cronyism (Van Naerssen et al. 1997, 177). It was also a response to a wider shift in the

IMF and World Bank programs toward supporting local and decentralized policies, and to the demands of social movements and NGOs (Karaos 1997, 70; Porio 1997, 11). In 1990 the interim Metro Manila Authority was established, followed by the creation of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) in 1996.

Consequently, Metro Manila today is characterized by a decentralized and fragmented urban regime, where local government units (seventeen cities and municipalities) possess a relatively strong position vis-à-vis the metropolitan and national scale as can be seen in numerous conflicts between the metropolitan and local state. One consequence is that the MMDA on the metropolitan scale possesses very little regulatory and fiscal powers, resulting in the virtual absence of metro-wide governing capacities. This situation to some degree exacerbates the uneven regional development within the metropolis and between local cities and municipalities, between relatively rich cities such as Makati and poor cities such as Caloocan and Navotas.

At the same time private developers have been equipped with significant resources and bargaining power. Until the late 1990s, suburban expansion was the most important trend and strategy for local developers and the entire formal residential real estate market, because cheap suburban land was widely available and could be transformed easily into residential land. So the 1990s saw a massive land-use conversion at Metro Manila's urban fringes and in the neighboring provinces (Kelly 1998; Spreitzhofer 2002). Gated communities became a central modus of upper- and middle-class flight from the threats and fears associated with a decaying, dysfunctional, and crowded megacity.

In addition to the economic reasons, especially the rapidly rising land values in parts of the urban center that made suburban gated residential communities the best choice for private developers, these communities became a major signifier of social mobility, "modernity," and affiliation for the new urban middle class. They offered middle- and upper-class families not just security from crime (or at least "an impressive guard house" as one advertisement promoting "Casa Royale," a middle-class gated subdivision north of Metro Manila, said) and safe power and water supply but also distinction from the decaying city and its inhabitants in a "clean and green" neo-Victorian or Mediterranean surrounding (Connell 1999; Michel 2006).

The only major investments by leading developers in central areas took the form of large, enclosed shopping malls that line the major inner-city



thoroughfares of Metro Manila and a growing number of provincial cities. They not only replaced other forms of consumption and public spaces in the city but, as Hedman and Sidel (2000, 118) point out, have also “emerged as perhaps the most familiar landmarks and spectacular monuments of urban Philippine society and culture today.” This development has immense consequences for Philippine urban life, consumption patterns, and concepts and usages of public spaces.

While the move by the upper and middle classes to the suburbs deprived the older center, once diverse in social classes, of its resources and drained capital from the inner city, recent years have witnessed some degree of “revitalization” and gentrification of some selected inner-city areas. These processes are predominantly corporate-driven projects with some minor involvement of state agencies.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate I now focus on two attempts at reworking the urban landscape in order to produce a middle-class and investor-friendly urbanity. The first example deals with a recent state-led beautification project aimed at symbolically reclaiming the inner city for the state and the middle classes and preparing it for (international) investments. The second example focuses on an upper-class mixed-use community that can be regarded as a spearhead for redevelopment and gentrification in Metro Manila. Both projects gained some publicity in the years they were launched. After a description of these projects I conclude by trying to substantiate that both are key elements of neoliberal urbanism in the Philippines.

### **“Metro Gwapo”: Beautification 2.0**

Evictions of informal settlements and street vendors, especially those living and working near routes visible to the international audience, have a history that goes back at least to the mid-1960s. Under the Marcos regime, “slums” and squatter settlements for the first time were dealt with as a political and increasingly moral problem, rather than just as a juridical and temporary problem that could be policed away or would be solved automatically in the course of modernization and development. As part of the regime’s rhetoric of a “Revolution from the Center” (Marcos 1978), Metro Manila became the central stage for the regime’s project of a “New Society” and was projected as the prospective “City of Man.” This focus on the urban center and its promotion as a modern space was a key element of the regime’s development agenda. Due to the modernist vision of a “progressive” and “international” city, Manila attracted a large share of the state’s investments, the concealment

of social contradictions being part and parcel of this process (Pinches 1994; Lico 2003).

Although it was important for the Marcos regime to produce an image of a modern and international city and to promote the legitimacy of its modernist development project, the shift to corporate-driven and entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance and the rising importance of foreign direct investments and foreign capital since the mid-1980s made such policies even more significant. The national state withdrew from the actual building and managing of urban space, and large-scale projects were realized increasingly by the private sector. At the same time the local and metropolitan state became involved in policies that were introduced to prepare the ground for investments by propagating an image of a globally competitive and “humane world class metropolis” (as the “vision and mission” of the MMDA reads), governed by a reliable and active local state.

As Loïc Wacquant (2001; 2003; 2008) has argued regarding neoliberal urban governance in the U.S. and Europe and what he calls the emerging penal state, the state under neoliberalism uses repressive policies against crime, disorder, and the urban underclass (or the urban outcasts, as Wacquant calls them) to demonstrate that the state is still there and in control. While the state retreats from many aspects of the social it is, according to Wacquant, especially in the urban where the state can demonstrate and even strengthen its power and its capacities to govern. On the one hand, Wacquant sees this as a strategy to cope with the growing social inequality induced by neoliberal policies, whereby other strategies such as the welfare state are despised. On the other hand, it can demonstrate to urban middle classes and investors that something is going on, that the state undertakes efforts to revitalize urban misery. Thus punitive strategies in urban governance are used as a sign of the state’s power as well as a means to foster investments by freeing urban space from hindrances. Something similar can be observed in Metro Manila, although it takes place under very different circumstances.

The example I want to introduce is “Metro Gwapo” (gwapo is Tagalog for handsome), an extensive project undertaken by the MMDA. It was one of the pet projects of the MMDA’s controversial former chairman, Bayani Fernando.<sup>3</sup> While Metro Gwapo revolved around beautifying and reworking the face of the metropolis, its focus on certain usages of public space made it heavily class-biased toward an exclusion of the urban poor. This project was launched in 2006 and focuses on beautifying those urban landscapes

that are visible to potential tourists and investors. Another name for Metro Gwapo in 2006 was “Investor’s Route,” referring to both the physical routes international investors take in the city as well as the routes to bring investments to the city. At its launch, the project was supported by considerable media hype and a significant number of pink-colored signposts in English and Tagalog, which promulgated behavioral rules and decency intended to capture a favored notion of progress and modernity. These signposts ranged from “Metro Gwapo 2006: Masagana, Malinis, Ganado” (Metro Gwapo 2006: Bountiful, Clean, Enthusiastic) to the somewhat odd “Do it the Metro Way.”

Metro Gwapo’s stated aim 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. Akin to zero-tolerance policies and theories of broken windows in a wide range of cities (Smith 2009), dirt, disorder, and incivilities were perceived as the reason for social problems and the hindrance to prosperity. The underlying idea was that a clean and orderly city would be a good city, good for its inhabitants as well as for investors. Physical improvements were thus said to bring about behavioral progress. It elicited comments such as the following: “Metro Gwapo, BF [Bayani Fernando] elucidates, is the blueprint for the physical transformation of Metro Manila, by cleaning it literally, and ridding it of squatters, sidewalk vendors, grime and crime” (Lopez 2007). “The program seeks to beautify, clean and civilize the metropolis principally for foreign tourists, businessmen and transients” (*Manila Times* 2006, A4). The strategy served to project “an image of a business friendly atmosphere that has eluded the metropolis with the recent rallies and demonstrations” and asked its inhabitants to “maintain . . . the cleanliness of their surroundings to uplift the country’s economy from the doldrums of poverty” (Chavez 2006, 2). “This is to improve the general environment in Metro Manila in terms of aesthetics and order” (Quismundo 2005, A21).

These pronouncements involved a series of programs and strategies. There were programs for the physical improvement of Metro Manila’s built environment, which involved infrastructures such as roads and sewers, the cleaning of air and water, the implementation of traffic management, and the construction of street furniture, most famously the pink urinals along major roads. Some of these projects existed before but were relabeled and recolored after the launch of Metro Gwapo. These projects, which address problems of an overburdened urban infrastructure, were accompanied by

punitive strategies and often by violent approaches against undesirable conduct. First and foremost these were directed against informal street vendors and settlers, as was the case in the so-called “Street Nomads Care” program, one of the key features of Metro Gwapo. This program aimed at the “removal of street nomads, beggars, vagrants and homeless persons, including ‘rugby boys’ from the streets of Metro Manila” (MMDA 2007).<sup>4</sup> Besides the eviction of informal settlers, the slogans on signposts, and the concealment of unsightly spots behind newly erected walls, in the beginning Metro Gwapo involved the call for dress standards for drivers of jeepneys and buses, and sometimes the destruction of the goods of street vendors and thus their basis of existence (David 2007).

As with theories of a culture of poverty, the foundation for a successful city is seen in educating and civilizing the urban masses that are regarded as deviating from hegemonic values and behaviors and thus blamed for their poverty. The problem to be solved and regulated, therefore, is not poverty as a deprivation and denial of basic rights but poverty as unseemly conduct. The conditions that produce poverty are not under consideration, but the attempts to cope with poverty, which are expressed by using sidewalks and public land for living and social reproduction. As has been tested in numerous cities all over the world under the aegis of neoliberalism, one of the most effective strategies of cleaning and clearing urban spaces from obstacles to middle-class consumerism and reinvestments is the privatization of public urban space. This point is illustrated in my second example.

### **Rockwell Center: “Where Stylish Manila Stays on Top”**

It is particularly the construction of cut-off inner-city mixed-use, and so-called self-contained communities, which produces urban spaces of “global imaginaries” and “cosmopolitan landscapes” that mirror an imagined global urbanity. A growing number of these urban citadels, which usually consist of a handful of high-rise condominiums, a medium-sized mall, and some office blocks, have risen since the late 1990s. In contrast to an urbanity of subdivisions and suburban living, these encompass places of work, residence, leisure, and consumption within one complex. Projects like Rockwell Center, Eastwood Cyber City, or Manhattan Garden, and on a much bigger scale urban megaprojects like Fort Bonifacio Global City, produce urban landscapes that are solely directed at upper-middle and upper classes, young urban professionals, and the relatively small group of expatriates. Most of



these “micro-experiments on ‘beautiful, wholesome and sustainable living’ experiments designed for the happy few with buying power” (Van den Muijzenberg and Van Naerssen 2005, 142) project images of globality and lifestyles of a gentrified urbanism that blends discourses of sustainability, a global and cosmopolitan culture, and exclusivity. Any visibility of informality and Third World-ness is prevented by combining elements like integrated security and traffic management with the prestige of international architects (international meaning anything but “Philippine” or “local”), extensive landscaping, and maintenance to keep out all signs of decay and disorder. The separation of different social classes guarantee social distinction and secure property values as well as a clean, orderly, and safe surrounding.

One of those privately planned and controlled “micro-experiments in ‘beautiful, wholesome and sustainable living’” is Rockwell Center (fig. 1). Although one of the smallest of these projects, Rockwell Center was the first to become a reality and thus had an immense influence on its successors as well as on the discourses of architects, developers, planners, and the middle-class-oriented mass media on what a good and livable Metro Manila should look like. North of the Central Business District of Makati and adjacent to the Pasig River, the redevelopment of the former Rockwell Power Plant was

regarded by its architects as Metro Manila’s first high-end waterfront redevelopment project—surely a must-have for any competitive and “progressive” Global City, yet too long neglected in Metro Manila (Palafox 2006). In the mid-1990s, the owner of the former power plant, the Lopez Family, established the Rockwell Land Corporation and started to transform this 15-hectare property into an exclusive upper-class mixed-use neighborhood. Rockwell Land Corporation has been responsible for planning, managing, and sustaining the Rockwell Center, which opened in 1998.

The underlying master plan by HOK (the largest U.S.-based architectural firm) and Palafox Associates, a leading Philippine architect, followed concepts of U.S.-style New Urbanism and discourses of sustainability, urbanity, and social inclusion (*Archikonst* 2004; on New Urbanism in general, see Falconer Al-Hindi and Till 2001)—while addressing a middle-class notion of social mixture. The late 1990s concepts projected an extension on the opposite riverside to transform this heavily polluted and bleak waterway into a waterfront that suits luxury communities. Although the latter plans had been delayed due to conflicts over landownership and the revitalization of Pasig River was realized to a small degree only, making the notion of Rockwell as a waterfront redevelopment somewhat ill-founded, Rockwell became a success story for its owners. The middle-class-oriented media demonstrated enthusiasm about this place, which appeared to them as an exemplary public space. The neighborhood is presented as a green and clean, pedestrian friendly, and open urban oasis, freed from all the nuisances of large cities (e.g., *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2000, B10).

Fenced off from the surrounding poorer neighborhoods as well as one of the oldest gated communities in Makati and connected to the main thoroughfare of Metro Manila by its own flyover, access to Rockwell Center by public and lower-class transportation is strictly limited. Signs at the entrances indicate you are entering a private space. The complex consists of nine high-rise condominiums, which are among the most expensive in the country, several office towers, one of the most exclusive malls in Metro Manila, and a subsidiary of one of the country’s most expensive private universities in one of the former administrative brick buildings. The exclusive and tranquil 50,000-square-meter mall is housed in the former power plant and was one of the first departures from the grey-box design in mall architecture in the Philippines.

Urban spaces such as Rockwell, which claim to mirror successful global metropolises, can only be realized and sustained by strategies against informal



Fig. 1. Rockwell Center, Makati City. The signage reads: “Bet you think it’s great out here. How right you are.”

economies and informal settlements, as well as against the presence of the urban poor. The proximity of these urban landscapes to “the stark realities of a Third World country,” as Architect Felino Palafox (2006) put it in an article on revitalizing Metro Manila’s waterfront to the Pasig River—the visibility of poverty and marginalization that is almost inevitable in a city where informal settlements can be found at almost any vacant lot and unused space—calls for the minds and eyes of developers, architects, and urban planners to develop strategies that limit the contact zones and visible presence of these “eyesores.” Or, as the architect describes it, “By creating lush and inviting promenades and parks, esplanades and areas for socializing like ‘al fresco dining,’ cafes and riverside restaurants, informal settlements may be eliminated” (ibid.). Not by unsightly gates however, but by landscaped parks and other signs of private control, such as signposts advising to observe traffic rules—or a large inner-city golf course, as in the case of Fort Bonifacio Global City—is exclusion enforced. If necessary, a physical gate is easily closed and security guards will immediately rebuke any misbehavior.

A 2005 advertisement by Rockwell Land Corporation picturing a woman standing on the rooftop of one of Rockwell’s high-rises above the metropolis under the headline “Where Stylish Manila Stays on Top” reads: “If you want to chill out while keeping the unstylish out, come to Rockwell” (fig. 2). Conforming with the neo-urban disinclination to the social and cultural dreariness of suburbia, a cosmopolitan lifestyle is invoked, which supplants “traditional” familism and anti-urban sentiments with consumerism and a display of social advance, represented in the possession of those goods and symbols prestigious in an imagined global culture as well as “a healthy and very interesting mix of people from all over the world” (Salazar 2000, B4). This imaginary of a globalized and cosmopolitan urbanity is represented by a gentrified, commodified, and highly policed neo-urban space. The exclusion of those people and action that contradict this imaginary, rather than appearing as a political and economic exclusion, becomes a question of culture and thus a question of individual conduct.

### Metro Manila’s Urban Regime

Since the 1990s, it has been quite common to portray Metro Manila in terms of its fragmentation. Neferti Tadiar (2004, 84), in an often quoted paper on Metro Manila, wrote that “after 1986, with the new administration’s renewed vows to democracy and its decentralization of metropolitan

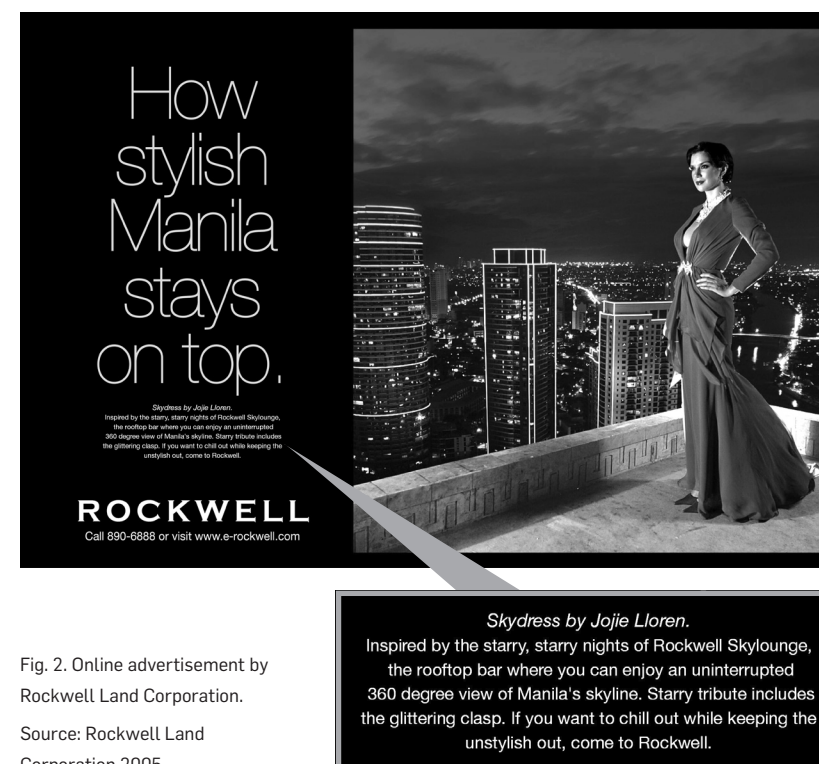


Fig. 2. Online advertisement by Rockwell Land Corporation.

Source: Rockwell Land Corporation 2005.

government, stratification strategies became more a matter of channeling flows,” circumventing spaces where the encounter of social classes was visible. Gavin Shatkin (2008, 384) uses the term “bypass implant urbanism” to characterize Metro Manila’s private-sector-driven form of urban development, which resembles the decentered and postmodern urban condition in the U.S. and elsewhere famously described by authors like Edward Soja (2000) and Michael Dear (2000). At least in the discourse of the middle-class-oriented media, Manila appears as an archipelago of privately planned and managed urban spaces that serve the needs of urban upper- and upper-middle classes, surrounded by a seemingly endless but simultaneously fragmented sea of poverty, marginalization, and despair. These two realities of Manila—as a “would be center of global capitalism” that serves to integrate the Philippines to the global economy, on the one hand, and a “dying city of poverty and disenfranchisement” (Tolentino 2001, 159), on the other—are economically linked to each other by flows of labor and capital. Despite this

connection, the separation of both worlds symbolically and materially is a key element of most of those spaces that try to mirror global affluence and “global cityness.”

In this article I have portrayed actualizations of neoliberal urbanization in a city that, as Shatkin (2008, 399) states in a paper on urban megaprojects in Metro Manila, “represents a rather extreme version of the privatization of planning.” This article has drawn on one example of state-led policies and one example of private urban development. While it has been argued that both fit into the same framework of neoliberal urbanism and entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance, one must also explain why this is the case and what it says about urban governance in the Philippines. While we expect private companies to behave “entrepreneurially,” this expectation does not usually apply to the state.

Entrepreneurial strategies are said to have become influential in urban governance in the U.S. in the mid-1980s (Harvey 1989) but gained in importance in many countries in the 1990s (e.g., Jessop and Sum 2000). They were a response to both the changing fiscal situation and material conditions in these cities, and to a shift in hegemonic discourses on urban governance and the state in general. Harvey (1989) argues that entrepreneurial strategies supplanted urban managerialism as the dominant mode of governing cities. In consequence, urban governance has become oriented increasingly toward growth-oriented strategies, public-private partnerships, and the production of conditions suitable for investments, rather than the provision of infrastructures and public goods to the wider urban population.

The growing worldwide competition between cities, which has led to the global spread of entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance, has made it necessary for states to produce comparability not just in terms of labor costs and modes of urban governance but also at the level of urban landscapes and the visible built environment—thus creating an image of the city as a global city aspirant. Such urban landscapes of global competitiveness bear no signs of poverty and disenfranchisement, making repressive and punitive measures against informality and poverty alluring strategies in this striving for competitive cities. Much of the politics of the global city thus becomes symbolic politics in which rhetoric plays an important role. This leads to the adoption of policies and images of globally successful cities and strategies of governance. Gentrification, the adoption of zero-tolerance policing strategies, and the privatization of urban space are currently among the most common approaches in many cities around the world (Smith 2001b; Smith

2002; Glasze et al. 2006; Atkinson and Bridge 2005). What these strategies and developments have in common is that they are antipoor instead of anti-poverty and that they reorganize the relationship between state and private actors in the city. It is commonly claimed that this trend indicates a retreat of the state as one of the key features of globalization or neoliberalism. While this observation may be true in some respects, it is questionable in others.

Makati, Fort Bonifacio Global City, and Rockwell are examples where the private sector and a very limited number of private developers and private entities, such as the Makati Commercial Estate Association, have gained control over the production and regulation of urban space. In these urban spaces the state has been relieved of some of its duties, like the provision of urban infrastructures and security. Consequently, these urban landscapes have been remade in order to attract international capital and the urban middle classes. At least at the level of representations of space, this leaves no room for the “great unwashed,” those who are not able to act as consumers in and of these spaces, but whose cheap labor power at the same time is needed to maintain, secure, and clean these spaces. In contrast, the example of Metro Gwapo hints at an intervening local state that is anything but retreating from the urban setting and where, instead, policing the urban crowds increasingly takes central stage—even though the effectiveness of such programs can be doubted. Hence urban landscapes such as Fort Bonifacio Global City or Rockwell Center, as well as programs such as Metro Gwapo, function as markers of a deep commitment to a neoliberal globalism. The addressees targeted by policies such as Metro Gwapo are therefore not just international investors and donors, but also the local middle classes and the urban underclasses. To some of them this is connected to the promise of inclusion, to most it puts more pressure and makes it more difficult to cope with the challenges of everyday life in a city that to most does not appear as a shining global city.

## Notes

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- 1 In the same way, Neil Smith (1996; 2001a) is clear about the differences between his notion of revanchism in the U.S. and the French *revanche* of the late nineteenth century, which nonetheless forms the basis of his considerations.

- 2 A notable exception was the administration of former mayor of the City of Manila Lito Atienza. Atienza launched several laudable programs to revitalize older inner-city districts, such as transforming Avenida Rizal into a pedestrian zone or refurbishing the promenade alongside Manila Bay, which did not focus exclusively on middle-class consumers but remained relatively open to a wider public. These projects did not outlive the succeeding administration of Alfredo Lim, who became mayor in 2007 (after he was mayor for most of the 1990s).
- 3 Randy David (2007) called Bayani Fernando “possibly the Filipino poor’s most hated figure.” Fernando was appointed chairman of the MMDA in 2002. He resigned in 2009 to pursue his candidacy for vice-president in the 2010 elections. Since then, Fernando’s favorite pink color for fences and public male urinals has been repainted green.
- 4 The term “rugby boys” refers to youths that engage in solvent abuse, particularly rugby-glue sniffing.

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