

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Urban Religious Change at the Neoliberal Frontier: Notes toward a Spatial Analysis of a Contemporary Filipino Vernacular Catholicism

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Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 62 nos. 3–4 (2014): 529–47

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Urban Religious Change at the Neoliberal Frontier

Notes toward a Spatial Analysis of a Contemporary Filipino Vernacular Catholicism

This article sketches a theoretical point of departure for a spatial analysis of a contemporary Filipino vernacular Catholicism. Based on materials from religious studies, the sociology of religion, and ethnographic and historical materials, it focuses on the new neoliberal spatial dynamics of Manila and the extent to which recent shifts in its spatial constitution might be correlated with shifts in the sites and occasions of contemporary Catholicism, and in particular with the emergence of El Shaddai. It asks: If increasingly the neoliberal city is eviscerated of public and civic spaces, can El Shaddai serve to revitalize and reenchant the city?

KEYWORDS: FILIPINO CATHOLICISM • RELIGIOUS CHANGE • NEOLIBERALISM • SPATIAL ANALYSIS • EL SHADDAI • URBAN REENCHANTMENT

The thesis of the return or resurgence of religion has been a consistent feature of the Western sociology of religion at least since the 1980s. If the secularization thesis predicted the steady if uneven decline of individual religious belief and consequently individual religious participation in Western societies (Bruce 2002; Wilson 1982), the thesis of religious resurgence countered with evidence pertaining to the emergence of new religious movements (Barker 1982), the “turn” to spirituality (Heelas 2008), and, through the conceptualization of the religious actor according to an economic behaviorism of rational choice embedded in an egoistic human nature, a model of cyclical religious growth and decline (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). These arguments were in large measure sustained by comparative studies of quantitative datasets from North American and European societies that broadly assumed that religiosity could be deduced from survey data and interview statements about belief, affiliation, and participation (for an overview, see Warner 2010). If this conversation seems rather narrow, parochial, and even irrelevant to those outside “the West,” it is nevertheless worth recognizing as a background to more recent theoretical and methodological debates about religious change—debates that draw on a much broader evidence base that includes ethnographic and qualitative evidence from African, Latin American, and Asian societies.

Recent calls to reframe the sociology of religion have revolved around questions of lived and vernacular religion, which focus on “how religion and spirituality are practiced, experienced, and expressed by ordinary people (rather than official spokespersons) in the context of their everyday lives” (McGuire 2008, 12) and assume that “religion is not fixed, unitary or coherent” (*ibid.*, 210). These calls to reframe the sociology of religion question the assumptions that lurk behind sociological analyses of secularization and its countercurrents. Too often focused narrowly on questions of belief (doctrinal adherence), affiliation to a specific religious group, and regular attendance at a single place or site of worship, the vernacular or lived approach assumes that religions are complex assemblages of practices, dispositions, and ideas fabricated from various cultural and religious traditions (Orsi 2002, xix–xxiv; Harvey 2013). The understanding of vernacular or lived religion privileges “thick descriptions” of religious lives over survey data. Indeed vernacular and lived approaches to religion constitute a theoretically sophisticated and methodologically sensitive point of departure for scholars seeking

an alternative to the sociology of secularization. The vernacular or lived approach, however, does not necessarily offer a means to address questions about religious change. In the Philippines recent shifts in the topography of contemporary Catholicism suggest that the emergence and rapid growth of movements such as El Shaddai demand explanation. It should be noted that vernacular and lived religion approaches are not necessarily unsuitable for the study of groups such as El Shaddai—only that such approaches, which have been more interested in exploring the deep textures of religious lives, cannot explain the rapid growth of such groups.

How then can we explain religious change if neither secularization theory nor vernacular or lived approaches offer a persuasive way forward? The point of departure for this article is the provocation that religious change occurs at times of heightened uncertainty and that neoliberal market expansion across Southeast Asia constitutes a complex of emergent risks and rewards in view of the deregulation and rerouting of culturally and religiously mediated relations of exchange, mutuality, and competition (see Szanton 1998). This provocation returns the sociology of religion to its classical heritage, which assumes a correlation between religious resurgence and intense moments of political, economic, and sociocultural crisis; this correlation in turn converges with sociological interest in religion and capitalism (see Tremlett 2014). This heritage includes Weber’s (1930/2001) brilliant study of the emergent liberal subject and his claim for an elective affinity between Protestantism and capitalism as well as recent empirical–theoretical interrogations of religion, debt, and labor (e.g., Graeber 2012; Aguilar 1998). In this article the problematic of neoliberal capitalism and religious change constitutes a point of departure for a spatial analysis of contemporary Filipino vernacular Catholicism. El Shaddai is notable for its use of media and its appropriations of public space (Francisco 2010; Wiegele 2005, 2006). Neoliberal capitalism is also not just about money or exchange; it has had a profound impact on the urban environments in which religious lives are lived out. As such I advocate a spatial approach to religion.

Spatial approaches to religion (for an overview, see Knott 2005), like the vernacular and lived approach previously discussed, constitute an acute problematization of traditional Western sociological concerns with secularization. Spatial approaches begin with the sites and occasions of religion as deeply implicated in place-making processes, territorial

imaginaries, and the formation of social relationships through time and across space (for the Philippines, see Francisco 2010). Moreover, they bring together a constellation of methodological tools from anthropology, historiography, politics, sociology, and geography (for example, see Bridge and Watson 2013; Featherstone and Painter 2013). My own interest is in the emergence and development of towns and cities in the Philippines (Tremlett 2012a) and, in particular, in contemporary shifts in the spatial logics of Manila and the relatively sudden increase in gated communities, malls, and informal settlements that arguably challenge the public and civic spaces of the city. A spatial approach to religion offers methods for grappling with these and corollary questions of religious change. As such, the question at the center of this article asks, if the neoliberal city is a city increasingly eviscerated of public and civic spaces, does El Shaddai constitute a vehicle for the reenchantment of the city?

The term reenchantment references Max Weber's claim (1948/2009, 139) that modernity brings with it the sense that "there are no mysterious incalculable forces" and that "one can, in principle, master all things by calculation." It also points toward Georg Simmel's (1903/2002, 14) characterization of urban life in terms of the "blasé outlook"—an attitude similarly framed by principles of calculability. In the sociology of religion, scholars such as Christopher Partridge (2004) have deployed the term reenchantment to indicate new sites and occasions of religion that appear to challenge these assumptions.

The discussion that follows offers a definition of neoliberal capitalism and the necessity of situating it, as a logic of practices, historically and culturally. It considers recent attempts to think through the relationships of religion in terms of the new risks, uncertainties, rewards, and inequalities that everywhere seem to have accompanied neoliberal market expansion. It then looks at Manila and its historical development as a city of walls and El Shaddai's uses of media and public space via a tentative juxtaposition with research on urban assembly and urban space in connection with the Occupy protests in London in 2011–2012 (Tremlett 2012b), before offering some concluding remarks. It should be stressed from the start that the question concerning reenchantment is experimental and designed to provoke a particular, spatially informed research agenda and cannot, as such, be conclusively answered here.

Neoliberal Capitalism and Religious Change

What is neoliberalism or neoliberal capitalism? David Harvey (2005, 2) has defined it as "in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."

Neoliberalism, then, can be defined in terms of certain core beliefs—for example, the belief in the equilibrium of unregulated (or deregulated, free) markets—but it can only be studied "through an exploration of . . . complex, contested interactions with inherited national and local regulatory landscapes" (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 368; cf. Springer 2010). In other words, although neoliberalism can be represented in terms of core, common tendencies and characteristics (such as deregulation), it nevertheless needs to be situated within local dynamics of culture and history.

What Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002, 368) refer to as the "exploration of . . . complex, contested interactions with inherited national and local regulatory landscapes," among other things, opens out the question of religion and its relation to this complex form of hypercapitalism, particularly in relation to questions of religious change. The expansion of neoliberal markets is one among a number of causes that have been identified as an explanation for religious change in East Asia. According to Robert Hefner (2010, 1033), religious change may be an expression "of a civil society rising in the face of a long overbearing state," or alternatively it may be "the unintended consequence of the destabilization of once secure secular nationalisms." Either way Hefner (*ibid.*, 1034) maintains that the "new religious currents also show the influence of . . . the desire of ordinary believers for security, self-initiative, and dignity in the face of far-reaching social change." He notes that it is "the more popular, voluntary, and laity based" religious movements that are growing, and their growth is marked by "the heightened participation of women" as well as a general preoccupation "less with otherworldly transcendence than with inner-worldly well-being" (*ibid.*, 1031; cf. Wiegele 2006, 502).

However, while these causes (growth of civil society, weakening nationalisms, and neoliberal market expansion) may be analytically distinct, they may equally constitute a single, complex constellation of causes and

effects. Kirsten Endres and Andrea Lauser's (2011) analysis of a Vietnamese shrine to ten young women killed during the war against America and the competing narratives that surround the shrine frames religious change in terms of state-sanctioned commemoration, local religious practices surrounding the dead, and market deregulation. Endres and Lauser (ibid., 123) argue that the "narratives exemplify processes of appropriating and transforming official history, and illustrate how national heroes may become efficacious deities that constitute a living presence rather than a glorified memory." In this context Endres and Lauser (ibid.) pull apart the fissures between the demands of the state for heroic commemoration, the specter of the potentially potent and hungry ghost condemned to wander the earth because of its untimely demise, as well as the shrine's position within emergent networks of spiritual entrepreneurs.

Some anthropologists of Christianity have been quite specific about which religious forms are experiencing change—the charismatic and Pentecostal churches—and have argued that there is a link between the growth of these churches and the emergence of new, neoliberal landscapes. For example, according to Joel Robbins (2010, 55), "looking out at the desiccated social landscape that neoliberal restructuring so often leaves in its wake," he observes that one fact "stands out clearly: the current neoliberal regime has in many places been very good for religious institutions, particularly for Pentecostal and charismatic churches." As such, for anthropologists of Christianity such as Robbins, neoliberal capitalism has been "good" for religion, as he explicitly links together certain specific kinds of religious change with new kinds of economically articulated fracture and inequality (cf. Guyer 2007).

However Pentecostal and charismatic Christianities are not the only ones experiencing change. Across East Asia local, vernacular religious traditions are in revival or are being reinvented, and new spiritual entrepreneurs and religious movements are emerging. Erik Kuhonta's (2009, 139) documentation of struggles surrounding "development" in Thailand includes the erection by activists of "a shrine to the spirit of King Naresuan" to protect the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary from destruction by the Nam Choan Dam project. Similarly local opposition to the Pak Mun Dam project included the performance of "a morning ritual to worship the goddess of the river, *phra mae khongkha*" (ibid., 149–50). In the same vein, Goh Beng Lan's (2011, 145) analysis of *keramat* propitiation by property developers in Penang in Malaysia explores the conjuncture of "capitalist modernity and

ethno-religious nationalism" (*keramat* is a Malay-Muslim spirit). On the one hand, Goh (ibid., 158) claims that the cultural hybridity of these acts of propitiation reflects tensions between the "fluid and plural maritime world upon which Malaysia was built" and discourses concerning proper Islamic practice and Malay nationalism. On the other hand, property developers are said to understand their activities as transgressions of the "sacred spaces guarded by this Malay Muslim supernatural being" (ibid., 150).

Kuhonta's analysis of Thailand is framed, following James Scott (1985), in terms of resistance rather than religious change, but it nevertheless demonstrates that religion remains a vital vernacular and cultural resource for articulating alternative imaginaries of the land and of human relationships with it and as a special kind of attractor for assembling people together to engage in specific tasks. Likewise, Goh's study of Malaysia suggests the continuing importance of a vernacular religion to the imagination of (urban) territorialities and moralities that transcend and disrupt ethnic and religious markers of identification and pose the possibility for other solidarities to emerge. In short it seems safe to conclude that neoliberal market expansion is one significant cause among a cluster of related causes for explaining religious change.

The Neoliberal City

Deregulation and the retreat of the state under the aegis of neoliberal reform have opened up new spaces for religion. But neoliberalism has also altered the very fabric of urban environments across the globe. This section sketches some common morphological characteristics of the neoliberal city and considers their (contested) impacts on public space and civic life, after which it outlines a brief spatial history of the Philippines and Metro Manila in particular.

According to Marcello Balbo (1993, 24–25), "the city of the third world is a city of fragments. . . . Wealthy neighbourhoods provided with all kinds of services, such as exclusive schools, golf courses, tennis courts and private police . . . intertwine with illegal settlements." These fragments are identifiable visually not only in terms of types of architecture and infrastructure, but also in terms of service provision and the conditions of tenure enjoyed or indeed endured by their inhabitants. Likewise Teresa Caldeira (1996, 308), in a comparative analysis of São Paulo and Los Angeles, outlines certain common characteristics of a specific kind of urban fragment, namely, the "fortified enclave":

All types of fortified enclaves share some basic characteristics. They are private property for collective use; they are physically isolated, either by walls or empty spaces or other design devices; they are turned inwards and not to the street; and they are controlled by armed guards and security systems which enforce rules of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, these enclaves are very flexible arrangements. Due to their size, the new technologies of communication, the new organization of work, and security systems, they possess all that is needed within a private and autonomous space and can be situated almost anywhere, independent of the surroundings.

According to Stuart Hodkinson (2012, 501), the enclave or enclosure is “synonymous with [the] neoliberal restructuring of city space.” But what is its purpose? For Hodkinson (ibid., 506), the enclave or enclosure constitutes a means of purifying urban space and securing it against those inhabitants who might “devalorise its exchange value or disrupt the process of consumption.” Additionally, what are the consequences of the new, fortified enclaves and fragments for the public spaces of the city? Balbo (1993, 32) suggests that urban fragmentation or enclaving may enable the articulation of “formal or informal networks of mutual aid” and the “founding of interest groups around local issues, leading eventually to active participation in the political urban arena.” By contrast Jean Comaroff (2010, 20, 23) has argued that “under the sway of neoliberal policies, many states have relinquished significant responsibility for schooling, health and welfare” and for the “social reproduction of their citizens” and have thus threatened the idea of a “national economy in which local interest groups recognize each other.” Likewise Harvey (2008, 32) has claimed that because “the spatial forms of our cities . . . increasingly consist of fortified fragments, gated communities and privatized, public spaces kept under constant surveillance,” the “ideals of urban identity, citizenship and belonging” have been cut adrift and in consequence have “become much harder to sustain.”¹

If, then, processes of fragmentation and enclosure are the key characteristics of the neoliberal city and if these processes suggest uncertain consequences for public space and participation in a common public life, what are the local factors that shape neoliberal urban transformation in the Philippines?

Urbanization was prevalent in mainland Southeast Asia long before the arrival of Europeans in the region (Keyes 1995). Manila, however, was largely the product of Spanish colonialism, central to which was the process of “reduction.” The *Orders for Discovery and Settlement*, which were compiled in 1573, codified Spanish colonial practices of discovery, settlement, and pacification across their colonial possessions (Lefebvre 1991, 151). According to Robert Reed (2002, 166) these sixteenth-century ordinances were a combination of Spanish experiences of urbanism in the Americas, classical theories of urbanism, and then-contemporary European theories of urban forms.² Indeed, the “programme of reduction” the ordinances standardized involved resettling the scattered and dispersed indigenous populations of the Philippine archipelago into town centers as a means of concentrating Spanish power, including racial zoning (Rafael 1988; Fryer 1953). These centers were concentrated around a church and plaza complex that lay at the heart of a gridded pattern of streets, with the houses of the elite clustering around it (Francisco 2010, 189–90).

During the American colonial period the development of Manila continued with the Burnham Plan: among other things a “modern harbor was constructed on reclaimed land on the seaward side of Intramuros (1903),” while the “main development of the city was shifted south of the Pasig [River], where new administrative and residential districts were created” (Fryer 1953, 480; cf. Doeppers 2010). In the 1960s and 1970s further urban development took place under the aegis of the Marcos regime, which linked modernization with the clearance of informal settlements (Connell 1999, 420). Comparable processes continued, particularly under the Aquino and Macapagal-Arroyo administrations (Tadiar 1995). However, because of the lack of any central, strategic planning particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War and despite the creation of agencies such as the Metropolitan Manila Authority in 1990, Manila’s morphology has been shaped primarily by the interests of powerful families such as the Ayalas’ and the Aranetas’ and by the migration of large numbers of rural Filipinos from across the archipelago to the city in search of work and livelihood.

How have these factors shaped imaginaries of space and place in the Philippines? It is salient to note the location of the Philippines at the neoliberal frontier and its position as a country where arguably elites have long been interested in their own enrichment at the expense of the welfare of the citizenry (see Sidel 1999). As the country’s resources increasingly

have been opened up to various forms of extraction and as those resources are increasingly recognized by Filipinos to be in need of protection, new kinds of territorial imaginary have emerged that register attempts to safeguard communities and resources from predatory forces. Two of these are the “ancestral domain” and the “gated community” (Tremlett 2013). These imaginaries mediate complex class and status divisions in Filipino society, establishing as well as denying rights of access vis-à-vis resources such as land and water. In recent years Manila’s low-rise skyline has been transformed by the emergence of “high-rise central business districts and apartment blocks . . . hotels and convention/cultural centers, shopping malls, superhighways, and enclosed residential communities” (Connell 1999, 418; cf. Tadiar 1995; Hedman and Sidel 2000). A significant element of these new developments is the gated community and, as Connell (1999, 436) notes, this effectively returns Manila to its original colonial form, namely, to a city of walls but with racial zoning replaced by spatially articulated class and status stratification.

A well-educated, urban group of Catholic intellectuals working within the traditions of liberation theology increasingly has been involved in indigenous struggles over land and ancestral domains, particularly in opposition to mining. These struggles have included the promotion of varied forms of “forest citizenship” (Vadjunec et al. 2012, 76; cf. Alejo 2000; Smith and Pangsapá 2008). They have also included the attempt to promote an “ecological spirituality” (Gariguez 2008, 29), which, on the one hand, draws on indigenous vernacular religiosities to revitalize the church and, on the other, offers a sharp critique of disenchanting, urban anomie and alienation. However, just as the gated communities can divide urban populations against one another, so too may the privileging of indigenous rights over those of more recent, migrant communities (Tuong 2009, 184).

Thus, while both the ancestral domains and the gated communities become sites for new kinds of citizenship and public association, they also have the potential to eat away at any sense of shared citizenship or belonging to a common national imaginary. For example, according to Caldeira (1996, 325), a city of walls does “not strengthen citizenship but rather contribute[s] to its corrosion.” To further complicate matters, somewhere between the gated community and the ancestral domain lies the parish, a much older territorial imaginary of the moral community, which is still the site of much of the religious life of ordinary Filipinos. However, the growth of the El

Shaddai movement through the 1990s until today has coincided with both the dramatic redevelopment of Manila’s topography and the rise of the Filipino diaspora and the *balikbayan* (returnees from overseas). El Shaddai’s use of television broadcasting and its holding of weekly mass rallies point to the emergence of new forms of religious mediation and of new sites and occasions of religion. It also points to Manila’s shifting spatial dynamics, with consequences for the centrality of the church–plaza complex as the main or only location of religious practice. Religious performance has moved onto the airwaves, into the malls, and onto the streets. Is El Shaddai simply a passive reflection of wider structural changes in the spatial dynamics of Manila? If the neoliberal city is indeed a fragmented city eviscerated of common public and civic spaces, does El Shaddai constitute a vehicle for the reenchantment of the public spaces of the city?

The Spatial Logics of El Shaddai Catholicism

This section sketches one kind of contemporary, Filipino vernacular Catholicism—that of El Shaddai—with a focus on the spatial dimensions of El Shaddai worship or *gawain* (cf. Francisco 2010, 201–5). This analysis draws from a critical reading of Katharine L. Wiegeler’s (2005, 2006) important research and my own observations on religion and urban change in Manila and San Pablo City, Laguna. Wiegeler’s work has already effectively demonstrated the extent to which El Shaddai draws upon local cultural symbols and practices while simultaneously being a part of a resurgent global Pentecostal phenomenon. This intervention addresses Wiegeler’s (2006, 496) claim that El Shaddai worship transcends the space of the parish and undermines the traditional sites of religious mediation.

El Shaddai is the largest charismatic, Catholic movement in the world with some ten million members. It enjoyed national political influence during the Estrada presidency. In sharp contrast to the liberation theologians, it encourages its members to transform themselves, not society, in the face of economic hardship (Hefner 2010, 1036). Indeed Wiegeler’s ethnography suggests that El Shaddai’s prosperity theology encourages a direct and personal relationship with God “unmediated” by conventional, Catholic intercessors; affirms desire for mobility and success in the here and now; and combines traditional animistic or shamanic vernacular practices of healing with Protestant practices of subject formation that emphasize choice and individual responsibility (Wiegeler 2005, 89, 147; 2006, 499).

According to Wiegele (2005, 58) El Shaddai's mass rallies and their transmission on radio and television extend "sacred and ritual space beyond the immediate locale into the . . . home." Although El Shaddai does not require followers to give up their "traditional attachments" to "family and communal life," nevertheless "mass mediated religious practices" point to a religiosity that contrasts with "Roman Catholic tradition" (ibid.). These practices draw religiosity out of the church-plaza complex and into a variety of new (new in the sense that they are not ordinarily associated with legitimate Catholic practice) spaces including the home, the barangay, and larger urban spaces including Rizal Park and Manila Bay.

El Shaddai's negotiation of Manila's changing morphology is demonstrated at least in part by the weekly mass rallies held on the grounds of the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) by Manila Bay. This land covers some of Manila's prime real estate, the result of Marcos-era urban development; some of it is now owned by private businesses (Wiegele 2005, 74). Periodically occupied by squatters whose settlements are in turn periodically bulldozed, these parts of Manila—with their open boulevards busy with traffic, street vendors, and tourists—offer a potent contrast to the city's informal settlements. Wiegele's (2006, 515–16; see also Wiegele 2005, 76–77) contrasting of this space with that of the insecure dwelling spaces of the vast majority of Manileños and El Shaddai followers is worth repeating in full:

One emerges from cramped, tunnel-like isquinita and streets of semi-squatter neighborhoods, where a typical El Shaddai member might live, to a rare, wide open space with a view of the sunset and, on the horizon, a partial view of the Makati [the business district of Metro Manila] skyline. . . . In this space El Shaddai members . . . are able to express the force of . . . [their] . . . mass to outsiders by disrupting the city and its imposed "order" and by occupying, even reclaiming, public spaces. They create massive traffic jams, and take over the clean, posh segments of the city.

However, as Wiegele (2005, 78) points out, these weekly, temporary "occupations"—language redolent today of the global occupy movement, which convened camps and assemblies in cities all around the world to contest the iniquitous spatial politics of neoliberal austerity—are "full of bitter irony" because the "El Shaddai group . . . must pay rent on this land—land that rightfully should be public—to hold their weekly rallies."

In research I conducted on Occupy London (Tremlett 2012b), I argued that the unplanned siting of the Occupy camp on a thin snake of land between St. Paul's Cathedral and Paternoster Square, home of the London stock exchange—between, on the one hand, a symbol of the parish and the moral, territorially defined community and, on the other hand, a securitized and gated urban space (or fortified enclave) signifying the unregulated flow of capital and unrestrained greed—revealed a critical fracture at the heart of the neoliberal city, whereby the increasing deregulation of capital flows had been accompanied by the increasing securitization of public, urban space. Brenner and Theodore (2002, 352) note that, although neoliberalism "aspires to create a 'utopia' of free markets," in practice it has "entailed a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention to impose market rule on all aspects of social life." With regard to Occupy London the binary opposition of St. Paul's and the Stock Exchange "provided protestors and wider publics with a critical analytic," enabling them to develop a critique of neoliberal austerity as not so much or not only an economic crisis but also a spatial crisis (Tremlett 2012b, 138). In short, whither the territorially located community bound together through relational exchanges based on trust, mutuality, and competition when the globalizing logics of the transaction encouraged only the egoistic pursuit of self-interest, especially when the city has been increasingly defined by gated rather than shared spaces for common life and participation?

El Shaddai's weekly occupations also appear to disclose a fracture between a somewhere and a nowhere: on the one hand, Manila Bay, largely a business and touristic node for the mobile rich, and, on the other, the informal settlements where, as Michael Pinches's work on the Tatalon squatter community in Quezon City demonstrates, the right to land and to a home is (in part) expressed through annual fiesta celebrations. According to Pinches (1992, 74) these celebrations privilege horizontal communal relationships at the expense of vertical relationships largely through the minimizing of patronage or sponsorship by local elites and the church. However, Pinches also details the steady decomposition of solidaristic, mutual networks in Tatalon as some families and individuals gain status and esteem through employment or obtain mortgages, alongside the emergence of political rivalries among different segments of the Tatalon population. The disintegration of these networks points toward broader processes of decomposition related to the neoliberal city and its forms.

Yet, the binary of Manila Bay and the informal settlement seems more unstable than that seen in Occupy London. Firstly, following Pinches's work on Tatalon, while the informal settlements are clearly an instance of a somewhere, the processes of decomposition Pinches describes suggest a deep level of instability and insecurity that ritual events can only struggle against. Secondly, while Manila Bay might at first sight seem to be an instance of a nowhere, El Shaddai's weekly mass rallies by the bay also constitute a temporary filling of that "empty" space with ritual and their own host of debts, obligations, gifts, and promises among one another and beyond. In short Manila Bay is, even if only fleetingly, reenchanting by these assemblies in a manner that poses the possibility for appropriations of urban space that challenge the trajectory of securitizing space and gating access to it.

It should be noted that this analysis applies to assemblies held at other locations, including Rizal Park in Manila, and it is also the case in towns outside Manila. If discourses of healing and self-transformation take on more complex resonances among the nation's *bayani* (hero) in Rizal Park, in San Pablo City El Shaddai events typically take place on the plaza in front of the church in the old town center. Given that the construction of a mall and other commercial developments on the outside of town have effectively turned the old center of San Pablo into little more than a parking area for jeepneys and tricycles, these El Shaddai events also constitute occasions for the reenchanting of the plaza and its environs, which otherwise are mostly devoted to traffic. Additionally, the question as to whether the construction of a large "House of Prayer" in Parañaque leads to any significant changes in El Shaddai's appropriations of public space remains to be seen. However, Justin G. Wilford's (2012, 6) work on Saddleback Valley Community Church of Orange County, California, a so-called mega-church because of its capacity to call thousands of churchgoers together, suggests that "the postsuburban mega-church seems to reconfigure its local environment in ways that infuse the secular geographies of postsuburbia with spiritual significance" such that the "spaces of recreation, consumption and labour become stages for spiritual self-transformation." Thus Saddleback reenchanting suburbia and suburban life by infusing them with meaning through the staging of performances of religious meaning making across different settings.

Conclusion

Does El Shaddai constitute a vehicle for the reenchanting of the public spaces and common public life of Manila? This article cannot answer this question one way or another; the question is experimental and designed only to push a particular spatial line of theoretical enquiry. The issue is whether the connections drawn between the emergence and rise of El Shaddai and their innovative uses of media and public space correlate with wider processes of neoliberal, urban restructuring (cf. Francisco 2010).

At the outset of the article, I began with the secularization thesis and the question of religious change to argue that explanations are unlikely to be forthcoming from the survey methods characteristic of the sociology of secularization or from the vernacular or lived approach to religion with its interest in the thick description of religious lives. If survey methods are too blunt and overly interested in religion as belief, vernacular and lived approaches tend to steer clear of structural explanations that may disavow their ethnographic orientation. However, a spatial approach does have the potential for thinking about the shifting sites and occasions of religion.

Neoliberalism and its "reforms" have been identified as a cause in explaining religious change. Neoliberalism has also significantly changed the character of cities across the world, particularly through the gating and securitization of space with uncertain consequences for the public or common life of the city. The spatial approach to religion brings together interests in the neoliberal city and a movement such as El Shaddai and its deployments of media and urban space. It is an approach that leaves the meaning of religion to others and focuses instead on religion as a site or as a node for linking, connecting, and assembling people together.

Notes

This article is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the Eleventh Conference of the Asia Pacific Sociological Association (APSA), Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, 22–24 Oct. 2012. The author thanks Jayeel Cornelio who invited him to be part of his panel on contemporary Catholicism.

- 1 Significantly theorists of globalization have noted similar processes of securitized fragmentation. For example, Cunningham (2004) and Shamir (2005) argue that globalization does not mean the free flow of goods, services, information, or people but rather the increased gating of access to resources and spaces that were once imagined to be commonly held.
- 2 For example, according to Fryer (1953, 478), Intramuros, the Spanish walled city, "was a replica of the fortified town of sixteenth-century Europe."

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