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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

City Beautiful, the movement that held sway in urban design and planning in the United States in the 1890s and 1900s, was not just about aesthetics but also about the grand display of power. The movement's principles were eminently showcased in the design of Washington, DC. In addition, proponents of City Beautiful believed that the reconfiguration of physical space would inculcate civic virtues and promote social order in the population, transforming social relations and social space. The US acquisition of the Philippines in 1898–1899 hastened the advent of City Beautiful in the Philippines, a process that Ian Morley documents in terms of the redesign of Manila and the creation of Baguio. By 1916 plans had also been made for Cebu and Zamboanga as regional centers, and for the construction of capitols in a number of provincial centers. Daniel Burnham served as the key City Beautiful advocate who linked the metropole and the colony.

As in the US, the planning of cities in the Philippines was meant to monumentalize power as well as promote social cohesion (“nationalism” as the Americans put it, says Morley). In this sense City Beautiful constituted an integral aspect of US social engineering. However, practical considerations were mixed with the stately design of Manila. As Michael Pante explains for the early twentieth century, transportation and public health were interlinked policy areas, with the development of suburbia, motorized transport, and public works pursued as solutions to the congestion of unhealthful Manila. But, as Pante argues, technical solutions gave rise to unforeseen problems, rendering the ideal state elusive and confounding the colonizers’ civilizing mission.

The American colonial administrators justified on public health grounds the filling in of the “malarious” moat of Intramuros. However, as Morley points out, the move was part of the systematic diminution of the physical vestiges of Spanish colonialism. City Beautiful was thus also a tool in advancing the Black Legend, which concomitantly denigrated Spain and boosted the United States. From a different angle, in the late 1920s the Dutch poet Jan Jacob Slauerhoff wrote three poems that portrayed Manila as the decaying remnant of a defunct empire. As Hidde van der Wall shows, Slauerhoff’s poetry, while evoking nostalgia, also resonated with the European

discourse of Western decline, which seemed to coincide with City Beautiful's effacement of the old in favor of the new.

In the 1930s a new capital city was identified to bear the proud status that would come with the country's impending formal independence. Its physical template would be symbolic of "moving forward to modernity" (57). To give it ample space, this new entity was carved out of existing towns. Eventually called Quezon City, the new capital that was formally declared in 1948 was located inland but adjacent to Manila. Yves Boquet situates Quezon City in the third category in a global typology that consists of central capitals, intermediate capitals, and suburban capitals. The 1941 plan for this new capital blended Garden City concepts with City Beautiful.

The urban design plans for both Manila and Quezon City were partially executed. Only a handful of the imposing government buildings had been erected in Manila before the onset of the Second World War. However, the basic design for the Mall, now the Rizal Park, and the large boulevard that stretched from downtown Manila to the ellipse in Quezon City, now the Quezon Memorial Circle, had been laid, together with the quadrangle formed by East, West, North, and South (now Timog) Avenues. In Quezon City's case the war was a major disruption, but as Boquet (82) notes so were "private interests, greed, and family clan rivalries." Evidently Filipino political elites did not care much to display power through planned geographies and aesthetics of modernity. Evidently, too, they did not care much about putting the national capital—whichever it was—visually at par with the great capital cities around the world.

In 1976 Ferdinand Marcos restored Manila as the country's capital, but under his watch the Batasang Pambansa was built on Constitution Hill, an element in the 1949 plan for a new civic center in this section of Quezon City. Over the years, key state functions, structures, and facilities have undergone spatial dispersal across Metropolitan Manila. Given these conditions, to identify a single "national capital city" has become superfluous. Only a "national capital region" makes sense—a peculiar agglomeration that, unlike other "regions" in the Philippines, is devoid of provinces.

A symposium that would serve as tribute to Benedict Anderson, a valued member of this journal's editorial advisory board, had been planned for a later issue this year. Because Anderson passed away in December 2015, the symposium has been advanced. It is featured in this issue of the journal.

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