

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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

From Paris and Beijing to Washington and Brasilia: The Grand Design of Capital Cities and the Early Plans for Quezon City

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Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 64 no. 1 (2016): 43–71

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From Paris and Beijing to Washington and Brasilia

The Grand Design of Capital Cities and the Early Plans for Quezon City

Political leaders have always sought to build monumental capitals, with earlier designs influencing those of later cities. The Western design that revolved around a central axis of power became evident in some Asian capitals, although cities in the Chinese cultural realm differed in shape but nonetheless had its own axis of power. This article provides a typology of capital cities and from this perspective it explores the design of the newly created capital of Quezon City in the late 1930s. Quezon City's design embraced some design ideas from elsewhere, but it remained unique. However, the design was not realized entirely.

KEYWORDS: CAPITAL CITIES · URBAN PLANNING · QUEZON CITY · MANILA · WASHINGTON, DC

What do Washington, Brasilia, Canberra, Ottawa, and Quezon City have in common? These were planned, designed, and built to house the seat of government of their respective countries. They are all capital cities.

A capital city is a town, big or small, where the top political institutions of a country are located. Most capital cities existed before their selection as capitals, or have had urban functions other than their political role (for example, as port or industrial center). However, some cities are new towns that were created specifically for the purpose of becoming political centers.

Although easily defined, capital cities have been often marginalized in urban research. A few researchers (Cornish 1971; Eldredge 1975; Gottmann 1977, 1983, 1985; Taylor et al. 1993; Clark and Lepetit 1996; Corey 2004) have tried to go beyond case studies in order to present a comparative or general view of capitals (Stephenson 1970; Rapoport 1993; Therborn 2002). They are often viewed as administrative centers with little attraction, even though as seats of power they are in fact symbolic theaters for national ideology (Raffestin 1993; Monnet 1998; Sonne 2005; Cochrane 2006; Minkenberg 2014), idealized models of what a city should look like. In postindustrial economies nowadays they are at the forefront of national economic development, both due to advanced information facilities and the desire to promote the country through its leading city. Capital cities are often the seat of a national museum that presents the official vision of the country's development. Their urbanism and architecture are supposed to embody national identity and showcase the political principles on which the country is based.

Seven types of capital cities have been identified, although with some overlaps (Hall 1993): (1) multifunction capitals, such as London, Paris, Madrid, Stockholm, Moscow, or Tokyo; (2) global capitals that serve world markets, such as London or Tokyo; (3) political capitals created as seats of governments but often lacking corporate power, such as The Hague, Ottawa, Canberra, Brasilia, Washington, DC—even though it can be argued that Washington, due to the presence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Federal Reserve Bank, plays a major role in the world economy (Boquet 2001); (4) former capitals that have retained other historic functions, such as Bonn, Saint Petersburg, Philadelphia, and Rio de Janeiro; (5) former imperial capitals of colonial

empires, some having retained national capital status (London, Madrid, Lisbon, Vienna, Moscow), while others have not (Istanbul); (6) provincial capitals; (7) “supercapitals” that host international organizations, some of which are national capitals (Brussels, Rome, Paris), but others are not (New York City, Geneva, Strasbourg). In the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, capital cities have often emerged from the main colonial ports (Abidjan, Buenos Aires, Dakar, Batavia/Jakarta, Lagos, Manila), sometimes through a transfer of former capital locations inland toward new sites on or near the coastline (Cuzco to Lima in Peru, Fes to Rabat in Morocco); this move has occurred even in the rare case of a country that was not formally colonized (Ayutthaya to Bangkok in Thailand).

In some cases, capital functions are split between several cities. A well-known case is the Netherlands, where Amsterdam (the official capital of the Netherlands, with the Royal Palace) and The Hague (where Parliament, the Dutch government, the Supreme Court, and the Council of State are located) have shared political power since the sixteenth century. In Israel the government has relocated to Jerusalem, but most embassies, as well as the Ministry of Defense, are still located in Tel Aviv, a less controversial location. In South Africa, which has no legally defined capital city, the major branches of political powers are split between Pretoria (government), Cape Town (parliament), and Bloemfontein (the high court). After an agreement reached in 1899 between silver mining and tin mining interests, Bolivia's capital functions were divided between La Paz (executive and legislative branches) and Sucre (judiciary branch and official capital of the country according to the constitution, since the Republic of Bolivia was founded there in 1825). There are also split functions in Sri Lanka (Colombo and Sri Jayewardenepura) and Swaziland (Mbabane and Lobamba). In Metro Manila today there is a wide dispersal of capital functions, with embassies in Manila, Pasay City, and Makati; the Senate in Pasay City, while Malacañang, the Supreme Court, and major government offices, plus the National Museum and the Rizal monument, are located in Manila; the House of Representatives, the Ombudsman and the Sandiganbayan, and other major government offices are located in at least two separate main sites in Quezon City.

In a few cases, federal districts that are independent of any other political subdivision and are under special jurisdiction have been created. This situation holds in Abuja (Nigeria), Brasília (Brazil), Buenos Aires (Argentina),

Canberra (Australia), Caracas (Venezuela), Islamabad (Pakistan), Kuala Lumpur-Putrajaya (Malaysia), Mexico City (Mexico), New Delhi (India), and Washington, DC (USA) (van Wynsberghe 2003).

In this review of capital cities, we endeavor to examine the characteristics of the geographical location of new capital cities and the main elements of urban planning found in new capitals around the world. The first part of this paper is devoted to a typology of capital cities, which will serve as the basis for a later discussion of Manila and Quezon City's early plans and urban history. The remainder of the article explores these questions: As a new city specifically created to become the capital of the independent Philippines, what is the place of Quezon City in the historical sequence of world capitals and urban pattern of cities born as political centers? In what regard did Quezon City planning fit the patterns of new capitals in terms of location, symbolism, and urban development? How did foreign influence shape the design of the city? How well were the original and ambitious plans of famous town planners hired to make the Philippine capital another Washington, DC, implemented?

New Capital Cities and their Locations

Many countries in the world have built new capitals, often at the time of independence after colonization or at a period of national unification. In Asia some early examples are found in Xi'an and Beijing ("capital of the North") in China (capital cities under different names since the eleventh century and 1153, respectively), Nara and HeianKyo/Kyôto ("capital city") in Japan. Another example is Madrid in Spain, which was created in 1561 after the merger of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. These early examples were followed in 1682 by Versailles, on the outskirts of Paris. Then came maybe the foremost example of a city entirely designed to be the capital of a new nation, within a special administrative district: Washington, DC, built from scratch between 1790 and 1800. Brasilia, which was also entirely designed as an urban model, replaced the long established capital of Rio de Janeiro in 1960. The 1911 transfer of capital functions out of Calcutta gave birth to New Delhi, located next to Old Delhi (Volwahn 2002). Two years later, a new capital for Australia was established in Canberra.

The twentieth century saw the proliferation of new capital cities, mostly with the split of old empires (Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire at the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union in 1991) and

the end of colonial rule. Worthy of mention are Nouakchott in Mauritania (Pitte 1977), Gaborone in Botswana (Best 1970), Dodoma in Tanzania (Hayuma 1980) and Abuja in Nigeria (Ikejiofor 1997; Abubakar 2014) in Africa. In Asia (Murphey 1957) new capitals were created in Quezon City in the Philippines (1939), Islamabad in Pakistan (1960), and Putrajaya in Malaysia (2002) (Moser 2010; Bouchon 2014). The collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to new capitals in central Asia (Astana in Kazakhstan, Ashgabat in Turkmenistan), in the same way that Ankara (1923) represented the rise of a new Turkey after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, replacing Constantinople (Istanbul) as the political center of the country. Many of these capital cities were new urban sites (Nouakchott in Mauritania), while some consisted mostly of major extensions of a preexisting city (Ashgabat in Turkmenistan).

The large number of new capital cities allows for a tentative typology of capital cities. Three main categories of locations can be considered: central capitals, intermediate capitals, and suburban capitals.

Central Capitals

Inland or central locations, as exemplified by Madrid or Brasilia, are sought after as a symbolic location to assert control over a given territory and make travel easier from the capital to different parts of the territory. In the 1920s Weimar, the regional capital of Thuringia, was selected as the national capital due to its central location within Germany. Brasilia represented the progress of a continent-wide Brazil away from its coastal and colonial origins (Madaleno 1996; Batista et al. 2006). Although not exactly located at the geometric center of the country, Brasilia lies at the junction of its major watersheds, the Parana basin to the south, the São Francisco headwaters to the northeast, and the Tocantins flowing toward Amazonia to the north. Brasilia was indeed part of the grand plan of developing Amazonia and Mato Grosso, a steppingstone to these frontier areas reached by buses on roads radiating out of the new capital.

In the postcolonial era many newly independent African states inherited a capital that was central in respect to international trade but eccentric in relation to the country's administrative and cultural hinterlands. Nigeria's Abuja, which gained capital status in 1991, was selected partly because it was at the intersection of three major ethnic areas of the country: the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa realms. It was to symbolize the unity within diversity among

the Nigerian populations. It was also located in a less dense area, more central, and less crowded than chaotic Lagos, and the hope was that the new site in the country's center would transform a long dormant region into an effective settlement by spurring a migration to open new agricultural frontiers and create a more equitable distribution of population (Nwafor 1980).

A rationale for developing inland capitals has often been the desire to reduce demographic pressure on the existing capital. As many colonial countries developed around a portbased outpost of colonization (Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, Lagos in Nigeria, Karachi in Pakistan), relocating the capital city to a more central position was seen both as a way to better balance the nation's development (Ankara, Brasilia, Dodoma, Islamabad) and assert independence (Malik 1998) by redefining the location of the seat of power, sometimes back to central areas that used to be centers of power in precolonial times (ancient capitals in the central plains of Siam/Thailand or Burma, before colonization or openness to the West allowed the development of Bangkok and Rangoon). For this reason Vladimir Lenin quickly transferred the capital of Soviet Russia back to Moscow, even as (or because?) Moscow represented autocratic isolated Russia in contrast to Western-oriented Saint Petersburg (Lang 2006). In some cases the inland transfer of the capital appears to have been motivated by the whims of a strong ruler (Ivory Coast's Yamoussoukro was the native village of the founder of the country, Félix Houphouët-Boigny) or by paranoid policies of an autocratic regime as in Nay Pyi Taw, Burma, inaugurated in 2005 by the military junta, away from Rangoon/Yangon (Lubeigt 2012). In the case of Belmopan (a site within the British Honduras created in 1971), the rationale was the destruction of Belize City by a powerful storm in 1963. Placing the new capital away from the coastline was seen as protection against destruction by future fierce storms. It was also part of a national project to create a new multicultural, multiethnic national identity, replacing the British heritage in this small Central American country (Everitt 1984; Cunin 2012).

However, not all relocation plans succeeded, as demonstrated by the huge failure of Viedma, Argentina, to replace Buenos Aires (Gilbert 1989). Viedma was in a more central location for the whole nation than Buenos Aires, but its position in coldweather Patagonia and the collapse of the military regime that had proposed it allowed Buenos Aires to remain as the capital.

Historically a few sites on the coast and away from central locations have been selected as capitals. Two prominent examples are Lima, Peru, replacing

mountain-surrounded Cuzco at the time of the Spanish conquest (1535), and Saint Petersburg, Russia, chosen by Czar Peter the Great in 1712 to symbolize the opening of his country to the West, a move reversed by the Soviet regime in 1918 as mentioned earlier. In Japan the 1869 transfer of the capital from Kyoto to Edo/Tokyo ("capital of the east") marked both the assertion of the emperor's power and a recentering of the capital within Honshu Island and Japan at large, as well as a more maritime location at a time when the country opened to the world after centuries of self-imposed isolation.

Intermediate Capitals

A second category of localizations for capital cities may be a compromise between several cities. Usually the new capital is geographically located roughly equidistant between the competing population centers. Canberra, Australia, lies between Melbourne and Sydney; Ottawa, Canada, is at the border of Québec and Ontario, halfway between Montreal and Toronto. In the United States, if Washington, DC, was created away from the dominant established urban centers (Boston, Philadelphia, New York), it was in fact chosen on a site close to George Washington's Mount Vernon estate, in a border area between urban America to the north and rural plantations to the south, in a geometrically central position at the time between northern states and southern states alongside the Atlantic seaboard.

Suburban Capitals

A third major category of location for capital cities is the proximity of a major metropolis, close but separate. Versailles was the first clear example, located barely 25 kilometers from Paris, but allowing the king to escape the daily chaos of the big city, as well as having ample space for grandiose palatial and city planning.

Later examples of this spatial strategy, different from the constant refounding of capitals on adjacent sites in ancient China, can be found in New Delhi, adjacent to "Old" Delhi,¹ or Malaysia's Putrajaya (2002) near Kuala Lumpur. The founding of suburban capitals may be linked to the desire to escape congested central areas, both for the convenience of travel and to have ample space to build majestic urban landscapes, yet without getting too far from the previous location of political power. Located on the outskirts of builtup Manila in the 1930s, Quezon City belongs clearly to this category.

The Shape of Capital Cities

Despite their differences in timing and political systems, all country capitals have a number of characteristics in common—as symbols of the state (Sonne 2004), as embodiments of political power and decision making, and as public spaces with private interests. Planned capitals enhance these features in their urbanistic and architectural design.

Most official capitals seek to magnify the majesty of political power through the adoption of a geometric plan. A few general features and models can be observed.

Chinese Capital Cities

Capital cities of the Chinese cultural realm (China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan) have obvious common features, dominated by religious considerations (Pitte 1998). Starting with Chengzhou (eleventh century BCE), their plan has been organized around a cosmologically rich nine-square plan (Wright 1977; Schinz 1996). The city is divided in nine square sections of equal size. The center section is the seat of the king or emperor's power (governor in the case of provincial capitals), often enclosed by an inner square wall. In turn a second square wall surrounds the larger nine squares of the city. Twelve gates aligned with three major north-south avenues and three major east-west avenues pierced the outer city wall. This general pattern was followed later in Qu Fu (Confucius's city in current Shandong), Luoyang, Xi'an, Beijing (Sit 1995; Hou 2014), Chengdu (Sichuan), and Shenyang (Liaoning), as well as in Nara and Kyôto in Japan, Seoul in Korea, and Hanoi and Hue in Vietnam.²

A Central Axis of Monumental Power

Outside the Chinese realm, a major axis of urban power, usually in the form of a wide esplanade peppered with majestic monuments, is a common principle of spatial organization of many world capitals.

Paris is a powerful and early example, with the elongated east-west perspective from the Louvre to Tuileries, ChampsElysées, Avenue de la Grande Armée, all the way to the suburban corporate hub of La Défense. From the royal castles of the Middle Ages (Chatelet) and Modern Era (Louvre, Tuileries) to the contemporary skyscrapers of La Défense, this axis of power has been developed by kings, emperors, and presidents, who left their mark with monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe of Napoleonic times,

the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, and the I. M. Pei pyramid between the Louvre and the Tuileries Garden, as well as La Grande Arche de la Défense dating back to Pres. François Mitterrand's term in the 1980s and 1990s. The presidential palace (Elysée), major museums (Grand Palais, Petit Palais), theaters, and prestigious addresses line this avenue, which is the place chosen for national events (such as the military parade on 14 July) as well as collective celebrations (the final stage of the Tour de France, New Year's revelries, the French soccer team's winning parade after its success in the 1998 World Cup). The spectacular walk down the ChampsElysées by Resistance leader Gen. Charles de Gaulle on 25 August 1944 marked the impending defeat of Nazi Germany, while newly elected presidents traditionally ride up the avenue after being sworn in.

Largely inspired by Paris, since its designer Pierre-Charles Désiré L'Enfant (Jackson 1980) was French, the new capital city of the United States built between 1790 and 1800, after years of erratic movements of the national seat of power in previous years, is also organized around a major axis of power. The center of Washington, DC (Bowling 1980; Reys 1991; Boquet 1995; Abbott 1999; Gournay 2006; Gutheim and Lee 2006), a square area 10 miles by 10 miles (16 kilometers by 16 kilometers) carved out of Maryland, on the left (east) bank of the Potomac River, and Virginia on the west bank (this part of Virginia was later retroceded to Virginia to form Arlington County) is Capitol Hill, the seat of the United States Congress. The city is divided in four quadrants from the Capitol, and the city plan is made up of a series of streets organized by letters (east-west streets) and numbers (north-south streets), while diagonal avenues bearing the names of states provide larger thoroughfares. As in Paris Rond-Point des Champs-Elysées, and later around Place de l'Etoile, a round plaza (Dupont Circle for example) allows a distribution of traffic between lettered streets, numbered streets, and statenamed streets. A similar pattern was later followed in Indianapolis.

Today the wide expanse of land located between the Capitol and the Potomac River is the green Mall, ending near the river with the Lincoln Memorial. Alongside the Mall, a succession of important museums establishes Washington, DC, as a major center of tourism: National Gallery of Art, American History Museum, Natural History Museum on the northern side, Air and Space Museum, Hirschorn Gallery, African Art Museum, Sackler Gallery, Freer Gallery, and most recently the Holocaust Museum

on the southern side. The elongated water body called “Reflecting Pool” is inspired by Versailles’s Grand Canal. The Vietnam War and Korean War memorials are also located on the Mall, not far from the Lincoln Memorial. A shorter, perpendicular, north-south axis extends from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial and its Japanese cherry trees encircling the waterside promenade. At the intersection of both axes stands the majestic obelisk in honor of the first US president: the Washington Monument.³

One of the central concepts of Washington, DC, which other US state capitals followed (Montès 2014), was to give a major urban role to buildings that are symbols of democracy. Hence the central location of the US Capitol on a hill indicates that within the balance of powers, the Parliament, which used to elect the American president, is central to political life. A US president cannot fire Congress, but the Congress may impeach a president. In most American state capitals, the governor’s mansion is inconspicuous, hidden from view, but the capitol building—most often a domed edifice, a replica of Washington’s national capitol—also expresses the majesty of political power. Canada’s provincial legislative buildings follow in the same way and style. The architectural style of the US capitols has inspired official buildings in India, Singapore, and even a number of provincial *kapitolyo* in the Philippines that reflect the City Beautiful era’s taste for white neoclassical buildings (Batangas, Misamis Occidental, Sorsogon, Cebu).

Brasilia, while representing the possession of inland space by a Brazilian nation developed on the coast, was also a major effort in symbolism organized around a major axis of power (Snyder 1964; Vidal 2002; Monnier and Claval 2006; Oliveira 2014). Lucio Costa designed the Plan Piloto the general shape of Brasilia, to be that of a bird (or an airplane) with key buildings drawn by Oscar Niemeyer. The Eixo Monumental (body or fuselage), on a WNW-ESE direction, is quite similar to Washington’s Mall, since the twin buildings of the Brazilian Parliament crown the end of the esplanade. But instead of museums, Brazilian planners have placed mostly the administrative offices of ministries on both sides of the wide-open Esplanada dos Ministerios, as well as the resolutely modern Brasilia cathedral, the Teatro Nacional. The Museu Historico de Brasilia and the Panteão da Libertade, which celebrate famous Brazilians in history, are located near the Congress. The presidency of Brazil, Palacio de Alvorada, less visible than the White House, lies to the east of the Parliament. Located on the western side of this monumental axis are a John F. Kennedy Memorial, the Brasilia

Convention Center, and a planetarium. Crossing this monumental axis, the two wings (Asa Sul and Asa Norte) are residential areas organized in super *quadras* (blocks), following the ideas of Le Corbusier, a modernist architect of the mid-twentieth century. Each super quadra was to be autonomous, with its own school, playgrounds, and commercial area: the idea was that no one would need to go away from home for their basic needs. Everything was available by foot. There was no need for driving. The super quadra design followed a common pattern: eleven apartment buildings, all six stories high, built on pilotis. All super quadras had plenty of green space. In reality 90 percent of Brasilia’s residents live outside the perimeter of Plan Piloto, many of them in substandard dwellings located around the satellite cities (Holanda 2002). Brasilia’s experiment as a new town has failed in its social dimension.⁴

Green Spaces and Circles

Greenery has been a hallmark of most capital city projects, from the Washington Mall to the bucolic setting of Australia’s Canberra and Canada’s Ottawa, largely derived from the ideals of the late-nineteenth-century to early-twentieth-century City Garden and City Beautiful movements (Gordon and Osborne 2004). Unlike most capital cities that have as an essential feature a large central axis, with squares and triangles as dominant structures of the urban fabric, Canberra has been shaped mostly in circles (Hendry 1979; James 2012). Awareness of the value of the landscape as an essential component in the design of the Australian capital (Headon 2003) led to the establishment of an integrated parkland and public open space system, with different recreation facilities, and a softer pattern of roundabouts than in cities designed around a major axis such as Beijing or Washington, DC.

We will now focus on Manila and Quezon City as sites of urban plans for capital cities where the heritage of American architectural and planning thinking was evident in the first part of the twentieth century, especially for the general setting of public space and government buildings.

Quezon City among Planned Capital Cities

When the Philippine Commonwealth was established in 1935, as a transition toward full independence in 1946, Pres. Manuel Quezon expressed the wish, shared by other top politicians, to mark the advent of the new country with a

new capital city. The choice was made to keep it close to the traditional power center of Manila, although geographically slightly off-centered in relation to the archipelago as a whole. Cebu, an early site of the Spanish colonial presence after Legazpi's arrival in 1565, would have been a more central city, but the lack of space in Cebu as well as the rich history accumulated in Manila as a capital during both the Spanish and American colonial periods made the choice of a new capital near Manila a logical one. In 1948, two years after Philippine independence, Quezon City was officially declared the nation's capital.

American Capital Design for Manila

The City Beautiful Movement was not unknown in the Philippines, since Daniel Burnham had drawn plans for both Manila and the Americans' summer capital in Baguio (Silao 1969; Hines 1972; Goodno 2004; Morley 2011, 2012; Palafox 2014). For Manila, Burnham had envisioned a complex of government buildings located at the edge of Manila Bay and higher than the rest of the city, with the Hall of Justice at the highest point. As in Washington, DC, diagonal streets radiated from the civic center, "because every section of the Capital City should look with deference toward the symbol of the Nation's power" (Burnham, as quoted in Hines 1979, 203). The plan called for several rotundas reminiscent of Dupont Circle and other areas in Washington, DC, as well as the ones in New Delhi (Connaught Place) and Canberra (and more recently Putrajaya). Burnham also proposed to clean up and widen the city's esteros to make them water traffic corridors like the canals of Venice. The American urbanist proposed to interconnect esteros and improve connections to the Pasig River, Laguna de Bay, and Manila Bay, in order to reduce the danger of overflow in major channels and therefore address flooding issues in the capital. It was in fact part of the effort to shape the Philippines according to the colonizers' urbanistic and architectural models (Hines 1979; Ng 1981; Karnow 1989; Torres 2010; Vernon 2014) as the British had done in India and Australia (Morley 2013). Neoclassical style, similar to that of Washington, DC, was at the forefront of American colonial urbanism in the Philippines, even if some of the architects were Filipinos. One such architect was Arcadio Arellano, appointed technical director of general assessment for the city of Manila in 1901 by Gov.-Gen. Howard Taft, who also made him his personal advisor on architectural matters.

Of Burnham's proposed government center, only three elements were erected due to insufficient funding: the legislative building (originally planned as the national library, it currently houses the National Art Gallery of the National Museum of the Philippines) and the building of the Department of Finance (currently the Museum of the Filipino People) and the Department of Agriculture (now used by the Department of Tourism), which were completed only on the eve of the Second World War.

Quezon City, the New Capital

With the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1935, thirty years after Burnham's plan, the country was moving toward independence. Plans were drawn up to create a new capital city outside of Manila, which some considered (already!) as too congested and crowded. A proposal to select Tagaytay as the new capital, on the hills near Lake Taal south of Manila, was rejected by Quezon, who argued that it should remain a vacation spot. It was then proposed to assemble land and merge several small towns (Novaliches, Balintawak, and San Francisco del Monte) into a large municipality that would host the new seat of government. In 1938 Commonwealth President Quezon created the People's Homesite Corporation, which acquired 15.3 square kilometers from the vast Diliman estate of the Tuason family, located between Novaliches and Balintawak, to make it the heart of the new capital city. In 1939 Commonwealth Act 457 authorized the transfer of the capital.⁵

Several reasons explained the choice of the new site. It had to be located in a relative inland position to lower the risk of flooding and be less exposed to possible seaside attacks. The Balintawak area suited these requirements and had historical and symbolic value, since it was there in August 1896, as the Philippine revolution was unfolding, that Andres Bonifacio and his companions from the Katipunan destroyed their cedula in an act of defiance against Spain. Quezon also witnessed the rapid growth of Manila at the time and thought a proper direction of expansion of the metropolis would be to the north and northeast of Manila toward the first slopes of the Sierra Madre mountain range (*Quezonian Newsletter* n.d.; cf. Trystram 1984).

The new city was to be carefully planned to make it a great capital loaded with symbolism, as most planned national capitals had been. In his address to the National Assembly on 18 September 1939, Quezon articulated his "dream of a capital city that, politically shall be the seat of the

national government; aesthetically the showplace of the nation—a place that thousands of people will come and visit as the epitome of culture and spirit of the country; socially, a dignified concentration of human life, aspirations and endeavors and achievements; and economically, as a productive, self-contained community” (cited in *Quezonian Newsletter* n.d.).

Originally named Balintawak, the new capital was given the name of the Commonwealth’s president after a proposal of Assemblymen Narciso Ramos and Ramon Mitra. President Quezon, despite joking that they could at least wait until his death to name the city after him, let the law pass in October 1939.⁶

To help him select the best sites for the new capital city’s official buildings, Quezon contacted in the spring of 1939 one of Burnham’s close associates, William Parsons, consulting architect and landscape planner for the islands early in the American colonial period, who was advocating a “hybrid colonial style” of permanent buildings suited to the needs and requirements of a tropical country. The death of Parsons in December 1939 led Quezon to retain his associate Harry Frost, as well as landscape architect and planner Louis Croft, an American who had stayed in Manila in the 1920s and 1930s, and Filipino architect Juan Marcos Arellano y de Guzmán to collaborate in designing the general outline of the future capital. Juan Arellano, younger brother of Arcadio Arellano (see above), had worked in America with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and had designed many official buildings in Manila (such as the Legislative Building in 1926, the Post Office in 1926, and the Metropolitan Theater in 1935) and several provincial capitols (Bulacan in 1930, Misamis Occidental in 1935, Negros Occidental in 1936, and Cebu in 1937) before he collaborated with Frost and Croft to design the future capital.

The “Frost Plan” (Bueza 2014), approved in 1941 by Philippine authorities, aimed to develop Quezon City as the Washington, DC, of the Philippines. It would include many parks, greenbelts, and open spaces, in the spirit of Burnham’s City Beautiful in Manila and Ebenezer Howard’s “garden city” principles. These concepts had been implemented in the United Kingdom (Letchworth Garden City, Welwyn Garden City) and the United States (Greenbelt, MD; Greendale, WI; Greenhills, OH) and had greatly influenced the design of colonial and postcolonial capitals in the early twentieth century (New Delhi 1911, Canberra 1913) and colonial hill stations (Baguio in 1900, planned by Burnham; Da Lat in Vietnam,

1907; Ifrane in Morocco, 1929). Quezon City, designed by heirs of Howard and Burnham, was not without precedent as a planned capital in a colonial tropical setting.

A large quadrangle, about the size of New York City’s Central Park, bounded by the North, East, South, and West Avenues was at the heart of the city’s National Government Center. Bisecting the square-shaped government city were two large avenues, the SW to NE Quezon Avenue and the NW to SE Liberation Avenue (now known as Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, EDSA, in honor of a famous Filipino intellectual). At the northeastern edge of the square, planners called for a vast 26-hectare elliptical center encircled by the wide eight-lane, 2-kilometer circumference, Elliptical Road, from which a number of large avenues radiated, akin (in a much larger dimension) to the Place de l’Etoile in Paris. In the middle of the ellipse (a feature found in Washington, DC, on the south side of the White House), they planned to build the capitol of the new nation, the presidential mansion, and the Supreme Court, as well as a presidential library, a museum, and a theater. Government offices, ministries, and agencies were to be located alongside the quadrangle’s avenues, while a park-like space would fill the gaps. Clearly this grand plan was largely inspired by Washington, DC.

A vast American-style campus was planned nearby to relocate the state-run University of the Philippines (UP) from crowded central Manila.⁷ The UP Diliman campus, reached by a majestic entrance branching out of the eighteen-lane Commonwealth Avenue, the northeastern extension of Quezon Avenue beyond the Elliptical Road opened its doors to students in 1949.⁸

In order to further symbolize the capital transfer toward Quezon City, the main link between old Manila and the new center was España Avenue (in Manila) continuing into Quezon Avenue (in Quezon City). A rotunda, the Welcome Circle (now called Mabuhay Circle), marked the boundary between the two cities. Other rotundas were to mark the corners of the quadrangular city (Alcazaren 2001). Today the Timog (South) Avenue/East Avenue and West Avenue/North Avenue corners are overwhelmed by later constructions, especially the EDSA highway and the MRT/LRT rail transit infrastructures. Only the Welcome Rotunda and the gigantic Quezon Circle are still visible.

The design took elements from different new capitals, with the underlying idea of a classical geometry of space as a symbol of a country moving forward to modernity. The square formed by the North, East, South,

and West Avenues is a powerful reminder of the square shape of Washington, DC, albeit on a much smaller scale. Quezon Circle is a much larger version of New Delhi's Connaught Place; in matters of urban plans, Quezon City was to old Manila as New Delhi was to "Old" Delhi.

Public space and majestic buildings were to be a demonstration that the young Philippine nation was now on a par with older, more established, democracies. However, the irony was that Quezon City, planned to serve as the future capital city of a soon-to-be independent nation-state, used mostly planning principles and architectural designs from the colonizing power, as Manila did under American rule (Cabalfin 2003; Lico 2010).

New Plans for Quezon City

When the Second World War broke out, the Japanese occupation government dissolved Quezon City, which was divided into two parts. The southern district of Diliman comprised the barrios of Cubao, Galas, Murphy, New Manila, Santol, Santa Mesa Heights, University site, and Kamuning. San Francisco Del Monte and Balintawak comprised the northern district. After the city was recreated in 1945, the Republic Act 333 (passed in 1948) gave Quezon City a new charter and officially proclaimed it capital of the Philippines.

The destructions in Manila during the Second World War and the transfer of power from the United States to Filipinos in 1946 led to changes in the original design of Quezon City. There was urgent need to relocate functions still held in badly damaged buildings around Intramuros. President Roxas appointed a committee to study—again—a new site for the national capital. Sixteen sites were proposed, some in or near the Manila area, some elsewhere in Luzon (Baguio and cities south of Manila: Los Baños, San Pablo, Santo Tomas, Tanauan, Tagaytay), some even on other islands (Iloilo, Boracay, Cebu, and Davao). The committee settled on the Quezon City area again, due to its proximity to Manila, giving it easy access to port facilities; it was less than 30 kilometers from the Rizal monument, as specified in the Commonwealth Act 457 of June 1939.

The 1948 act considerably enlarged the geographical area of Quezon City— from 1,572 hectares to 15,660 hectares— in order to provide enough publicly owned land for the new government center.

In 1949 Juan Arellano, now leader of the architects and urbanists team, presented plans for a different National Government Complex. The civic

center (the three branches of government and support offices) would be moved northeast from the Elliptical Circle to a 158-hectare area called Constitution Hill (the present Batasan Hills). There would be three groups of buildings organized around a 20-hectare Plaza of the Republic, in a formal layout that drew inspiration from the UP Diliman campus plan: the House of Congress, to host both the Senate and the House of Representatives; a Hall of Fame (a memorial for heroes and patriots); and a Library of Congress. Next to the House of Congress (in the central position) would be the Palace of the Chief Executive (the residence of the President of the Republic) and the Supreme Court.

The location of this 1949 national civic center was further away from the coastline and outside of the original Quezon City quadrangle. A Katipunan Parkway (named after the revolutionary movement of the late nineteenth century) encircling the whole city was drawn in the new plan. The 1949 plan also provided for a new showplace of the capital city, a major thoroughfare to be called "Republic Avenue," stretching westward from Constitution Hill to a big rotunda, chosen to be the site of a War Heroes Memorial, as in Paris's Arc de Triomphe on top of Champs-Élysées, or in Delhi's India Gate. Republic Avenue was supposed to be lined with a strip of parks on both sides.

The ellipse, now devoid of government buildings in its center, became the Quezon Memorial Circle and was transformed into a park dominated by a Manuel Quezon Memorial Shrine, which was built slowly between 1952 and 1978. The art deco-themed structure rests on a base in the shape of an equilateral triangle measuring 50 meters on each side. From the center rise three pylons representing the three main island groups of the Philippines: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The pylons rise up to a height of 66 meters (Quezon died in 1944 at the age of 66). Atop each pylon rests a statue of a mourning angel holding a wreath of sampaguita, the national flower of the Philippines. The sides of the base are lined with bas reliefs depicting significant events in Quezon's life as well as in Philippine history. Inside a museum displays memorabilia of the late president's life. At the very center of the shrine lies the sarcophagus containing Quezon's remains. As in the Washington Monument in Washington, DC, an observation deck that can accommodate sixty people at the top gives visitors a panoramic view of the city. It is still one of the defining places of the metropolitan area, but it has become known as a complex traffic circle very difficult to navigate at rush hour and a key area for gay sex after dark (Cabalfin 2012).

Both the 1941 Frost Plan and the 1949 Arellano Master Plans showed Quezon City as a Garden City full of parks, greenbelts, and open spaces. The 1949 master plan; revised again in 1956, proposed a 400-hectare Central Park at the Diliman Quadrangle, bounded by the North, West, East, and South Avenues. It was to be used mostly for recreational activities: a botanical and zoological garden, a golf course, and a sports center (Bueza 2014). The 1949 plan was more comprehensive than the 1941 plan and encompassed a much larger area. It also set up a 35-hectare central public market at the city entrance along Republic Avenue and three business centers (318 hectares near Central Park and the Executive Center, 80 hectares near the La Mesa Watershed in the northern sections, and 45 hectares in the south not far from Camp Crame; it is now known as the Cubao business district). Meanwhile, industrial zones were placed at the outskirts of the city in the northeast. What remained central in the conception of these plans, as in other capital cities, is the idea of a major political center in a majestic green setting, as had been the case since Washington, DC, in the late eighteenth century.

The Quezon City Grand Design: What is Left?

Today the grand idea of a majestic civic center in Quezon City has disappeared. The city ceased to be the nation's capital on 24 June 1976, when Ferdinand Marcos's Presidential Decree 940 returned the seat of power to Manila, arguing that Manila had "always been, to the Filipino people and in the eye of the world, the premier city of the Philippines, it being the center of trade, commerce, education and culture"; Manila "from time immemorial [had] been the seat of the national government of the Philippines" and it had "become a popular site of international meetings and conferences," possessing "modern transportation, communication and accommodation facilities and all the other physical attributes of a modern city" (Office of the President 1976, 6702). The decree extolled the virtues of Manila City without really explaining what could be wrong with Quezon City.

The Philippine president works from Malacañang Palace, in the heart of Manila, on the banks of the Pasig River. The House of Representatives is installed in the Batasang Pambansa Complex, Quezon City, further away to the northeast than what Frost had envisaged. The 1956 plan revision proposed by Filipino architect Federico Ilustre included a legislative building whose cornerstone had been laid in 1948 after the conversion of the previous site to a Quezon memorial had been decided. Due to lack of funding, the

proposed capitol on Constitution Hills was hardly started. In 1976 it was razed to the ground and a new structure was erected, which opened in 1978. Meanwhile, the Philippine Senate sits today in a totally different area of Metro Manila, in Pasay City.⁹

Nevertheless, a number of features of the original 1941 plan for Quezon City have been retained. Any look on a map of Metro Manila immediately reveals the pattern of a square bisected by a cross, and the Elliptical Road is also quite visible at night from an aircraft window. The garden city ideal has been mostly submerged by population growth (108,000 in 1948; 400,000 in 1960; 1,165,000 in 1980; 2.2 million in 2000; 2.8 million in 2010, and still rising) and urban sprawl. However, the green campus of UP Diliman, with its majestic coconut (University Avenue) and acacia (Academic Oval) trees is one of the rare green lungs of the whole metropolitan area, favored by bird watchers (Vallejo et al. 2009, 2010) and Sunday cyclists—a testimony of what was in the mind of the designers of Quezon City in the mid-twentieth century.

Many government offices are still located around the Quezon Memorial Circle, particularly the agriculture offices (Department of Agriculture, Philippine Coconut Authority, Sugar Regulatory Administration, Bureau of Agricultural Research, Forest Management Bureau, Agricultural Training Institute, Department of Agrarian Reform, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources) and some medical centers (Lung Center of the Philippines, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Philippines Children's Medical Center, Veterans Memorial Medical Center).¹⁰

A planned site for the never-held 1946 World Fair¹¹ is now used by the huge SM North shopping mall complex. The eastern part of the 1941 quadrangle, a triangular area located between EDSA, North Avenue, and East Avenue, is the site of the soon-to-rise Quezon City Central Business District (CBD), which has required the forceful eviction of thousands of poor squatters. The rise of squatter settlements owes to the fact that Quezon City, as exemplified by the Quezon Circle, was planned as too big (Murphy and Hogan 2012). Public space was so wide it became empty space and soon became attractive to illegal settlers as the metropolitan area was growing fast.

There was also a problem of governance, since the Capital City Planning Commission (CCPC), the lead agency in the master planning of Quezon City, lacked administrative control over the Diliman Quadrangle.

Contrary to the hopes of Arellano and others, its replacement entity (1950), the National Planning Commission (NPC), was not an executive agency but, like the CCPC that it replaced, was a consultative body without any power to supersede decisions of the Quezon City government, whose interests were more municipal (selling land, increasing the tax base) than keeping the lofty ideals of a model garden city (Lopez 1973; Rye 1997). The NPC was not able, both politically and financially, to realize its goals.

Utopian plans conceived in the minds of American or American-trained planners have indeed proven hard to fit with the reality of Philippine urban and political life (Gomez 2013), where private interests, greed, and family clan rivalries dominate over lofty common goals, and the combined challenges of housing, flooding, and mobility are overwhelming (Boquet 2014). Since 1986 most government planning has taken place on the municipal level, and in fact private planning dominates urban development (Shatkin 2006). The idea of a grand monumental civic center seems to have faded away.

Conclusion

Many capital cities have implemented a large part of their original plans and have become spectacular showcases for their respective countries, democratic or not. The theme of a structuring axis of the city is prevalent. The creation of wide, open green spaces to highlight the majesty of political power has been a common feature. There is obviously a filiation between capital cities, from Paris to Washington, DC, then to Quezon City and Brasilia, until today's Astana and others, both in the general setting of the cities, its geometry, the glorification of major political figures (Washington, Napoleon, Quezon, Mao, Nazarbaiev) in the urban fabric, the type of buildings, their architecture (Ziolkowski 1988), and the use of large esplanades as public spaces heavily loaded with national symbols.

However, contrary to most grandiose plans, Quezon City has failed to retain the top elements of power. Nobody will know for sure if, without the Japanese takeover of the Philippines in early 1942, the original Frost plan for Quezon City would have been fully implemented. Ceremonial first stones had been laid in the center of the Elliptical Road, but the buildings did not rise. The spread of government functions across the entire metropolitan area (including two different areas in Quezon City) has not allowed for smooth

operations, even in a time of telecommunications, due to heavy traffic and frequent gridlock.

This failure of implementation may be due to the incompatibility of US-conceived utopian plans with the Philippine urban and political setting, as well as the incompetence, lack of political will, changing priorities, and budgetary constraints of the Philippine state since 1946 and the official end of the colonial regime. Other developing countries such as Brazil or Pakistan have been able to implement most of the planning of their capital cities (Brasilia, Islamabad) in recent decades, while the Philippines did not. In Indonesia, post-Batavia's Jakarta, despite a nice park-like area (Merdeka Square),¹² did not receive special utopian planning, contrary to Kuala Lumpur with its new suburban political center in Putrajaya. Quezon City may have marked the end of an era for colonial city planning (despite the Commonwealth status of the Philippines when it was founded), an end precipitated by the urban chaos brought onto Manila by the Second World War and later a high population growth leading to record settlement densities in the central part of the metropolitan area. Conceived by colonizers at the end of the colonial era, Quezon City as a model capital may have failed because it was planned too late, or maybe because it was planned too early, before the country was able to manage its growth.

Despite the failure to complete the plan, and the fact that only a few elements of the design were retained, such as the large avenues and the concentration of some government activities in the designated area, Quezon City, albeit no longer the capital of the country since 1976, certainly is worth studying in a comparative appraisal of the world's cities that were planned to be capitals. Quezon City appears therefore as mostly a failure to realize grandiose plans for a capital city, in stark contrast with New Delhi or Brasilia, and of course Washington, DC, where most of the planning was successfully implemented. Manila, "Pearl of the Orient" as it used to be called, and its second incarnation as capital in Quezon City, did not fulfill the dreams of their designers.

At the time when the idea of moving the center of power to another part of the country is being floated from time to time, would Filipino architects and planners be able to invent a new city with distinct Filipino characteristics?

Notes

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the "Alternative Urbanities: New Perspectives on Quezon City and an Urbanizing Asia" conference, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, organized by Ateneo's Department of History, School of Social Sciences, 2 Dec. 2014.

- 1 In the early–twentieth-century New Delhi, designed by British architect Edwin Lutyens, planning inspiration came from other imperial models and new capital cities: the Paris and Champs-Élysées of Baron Haussmann, Wren's unbuilt plan for London, as well as L'Enfant's plan for Washington DC. Other planning ideas came from contemporary British experiments in urbanism: the Royal Crescent at Bath for Connaught Place, and Hampstead Garden City for the residential suburbs of New Delhi (Irving 1981; Singh 2002/2003; Joardar 2006).
- 2 The general principles were as follows (Chang 1977; Sit 2010): (a) capital cities were to be placed on level land, near water, in clear alignment to the four directions, north, east, south, and west; (b) city walls were built in the form of a square or a rectangle; and (c) the south was the preferred orientation of major buildings, temples, and halls. The main gate to the city was the southern gate, with a preferred axis from south to north showing a progressive advance toward the seat of power, with access restrictions increased as the visitor moved further north. In the case of Beijing, this axis of power has been maintained until now, since Tiananmen square lies at the southern edge of the Forbidden City and both the People's Heroes Monument and Mao Zedong's Mausoleum have been erected directly on this north-south axis. However, the communist regime introduced a major intersecting east-west axis with Chang An Jie Avenue, where most ministries and prestige monuments of the Chinese capital, such as the recently built Opera House, have been built.
- 3 Today's Mall reflects both the original intent of L'Enfant (as well as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who played a major role in the concept) and its rediscovery by the 1901 McMillan plan nurtured by the ideas of landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted and Daniel Burnham (Walton 1980; Lee 1983; Peterson 1985) and the City Beautiful movement (Gillette 1989), which are also obvious in Chicago and Ottawa, among other cities (Gordon 1998, 2002).
- 4 Similar experiments in planning a sustainable city with separated traffic, in addition to the majestic design around a central axis, were attempted at the same time in Pakistan, where Islamabad (Doxiadis 1965; Jamoud 1968; Frantsekakis 1995, 2009; Kreutzmann 2013) was viewed as the perfect antithesis to Karachi.
- 5 Section 1 of the Commonwealth Act 457 reads: "The construction of National Government and other public buildings on the site set aside as government center in the Burnham Plan for the improvement of the City of Manila, or a site to be selected by the President of the Philippines within a radius of thirty kilometers from the Rizal Monument in the said city, including the acquisition of privately-owned lands and buildings; the alteration and improvement of the official residences of the President of the Philippines in the Cities of Manila and Baguio; the acquisition, by purchase or otherwise, of building sites and privately-owned buildings needed for governmental purposes in the Cities of Manila and Baguio; the construction of new public buildings in the cities of Manila and Baguio; and the alteration, extension and improvement of existing National Government

buildings in the cities of Manila and Baguio, including the completion of the office building for the Bureau of Customs on the Port Area, Manila, are authorized: Provided, That the total sum to be allotted under this Act for the completion of the office building for the Bureau of Customs shall not exceed one million two hundred thousand pesos" (Chan Robles Virtual Law Library n.d.).

- 6 In the USA, George Washington had also allowed his name to be used for the new capital in 1791, even as he was president (1789–1797) and the city was in construction.
- 7 A major public university is located in or very near over half of American state capitals. Political science students have an opportunity to observe government in action and may intern with the state legislature, local interest groups, non-profit agencies, corporations, and political parties.
- 8 With more than 22,000 students, the University of the Philippines Diliman is now the largest component of the University of the Philippines System.
- 9 From 1926 to 1972, the Senate had held its sessions in the Old Legislative Building in Ermita, Manila, close to Intramuros. In 1978, under martial law, the unicameral Congress settled in the Batasang Pambansa Complex of Quezon City. With the post-Marcos restoration of a two-chamber system in 1987, the Senate returned to its old previous building, leaving the Batasang Pambansa Complex to the House of Representatives. Then the Senate moved in 1997 to its current site in Pasay.
- 10 However, some of the most powerful, regalian departments, such as Justice (Manila near Intramuros), Labor and Employment (Intramuros), and Foreign Affairs (Pasay), are not located in Quezon City, while the Defense Department is in Camp Aguinaldo, Cubao, another part of Quezon City.
- 11 Manuel Quezon planned to host a world's fair on the site in 1946 to celebrate the planned independence of the country and the rise of its capital, Quezon City, to bring the best of the world to the new republic and highlight to the world the achievements of Filipinos. The project did not push through because of the Second World War and Quezon's death in 1944.
- 12 Crossed by four diagonal streets which form an "X" with the National Monument (Monas) at its center, and surrounded by museums and official buildings such as the Presidential Palace and the Ministry of Defense, Medan Merdeka (Independence Square) is a larger version of the traditional *alun-alun* (central urban square) of Javanese (Yogyakarta) or Balinese (Denpasar) cities.

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