

## MAKATI CITY AS A 'LIVEABLE CITY'— LINES IN PLEASANT PLACES

Eliseo T. Co

The paper dwells on geography, demographic trends, the character of Makati people, their collective expression in culture and the historical transformations of this urban area. Makati's transformation into a 'livable city' has often been cited as a model of institutional partnership between big business and good governance.

If Makati is the Philippines' 'most livable city' today, old Makati was on the main a swampland that, for the entire period of Spanish colonialism, could not be of any profitable use. However, through a well planned system of land distribution, there has since been swift rural-to-urban development that turned Makati into what it is now.

Old San Pedro de Makati was a center of missionary activities in the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Franciscan religious order made a head start in the deployment of its barefoot missionaries. One of them was Fr. Geronimo Montes y Escamilla (or de San Antonio) who had a good command of the Tagalog language and was comparable in dedication and scholarly stature to Fr. Pedro Chirino, who had also focused on Tagalog culture. Knowledge of the language used by the natives facilitated missionary work. In 1648, the works of Fr. Montes y Escamilla were used in the publication of a lexicon by the Jesuits.

The Jesuits' share in missionary work concentrated mainly on education. They saw Makati as a suitable location for a school and put up the Casa de San Pedro in the then province of Manila (Blair & Robertson 1972(XXVIII):86). As far as the practice of religion was concerned, they gave room for indigenous traditions to interplay with the Catholic faith. The songs and dances of the natives in their festivals of worship were condescendingly admired by the Jesuits as cultural elements done in "all elegance and grace" (Bernad 1972:194). Perhaps the Jesuits never considered the rituals to be syncretistic acculturation, but rather a more contextualized adaptation of native culture to religious life. There was no

attempt on their part to impose a purely westernized practice following the natives' conversion to Christianity (Bernad, 1972:197).

That same tolerance allowed the observance of faith and practice by the Chinese community in Makati in a small church along the Pasig River for their patron saint San Nicolas de Tolentino. The festival defied prescribed norms of the time for it was in traditional Chinese classical drama, amidst gongs, drums and cymbals. Makateños took part in the grand spectacle unfolding before them. An ecclesiastical dispute on jurisdiction resulted in the transfer of the parishioners of the *ermita* to the nearby Guadalupe Church in the last decade of 1700. But nothing was done to suppress this seemingly outlandish tradition and religious practice.

There was a unique suburban character displayed by the communities of San Pedro de Makati in summer time that centered on the display of religious spectacles. The open space in Makati made it a suitable venue for weeklong celebrations. There the climate was described as "...comparatively innocuous and much less disagreeable ..." (MacMicking 1967:75). Old Makati, with its wide open spaces gave way to intermittent cultural displays, although these were quite infrequent as to happen only once a year.

Geography and climate imposed upon Makati the role of purveyor of culture to its adjacent territories, from the *comedia* to *senaculo* of the Spanish era, to the peace time fare of drum and bugle performances at the turn of the century. Makati could easily play host to the yearly celebration of the *caracol*, not so much for the enhancement of an indigenous culture (that did not originate there in the first place), but for its promotion of local tourism that made brisk business for hotels and restaurants in the central business district. *Caracol* came in zamba-like fashion as the *mardi gras* in its display of fun and spectacle to the public. The introduction of the *baile de los arcos* by Fr. Juan Jose Blanco was presumably intended to "supersede the heathen dance" (Roces 2005:32). It has remained a vital part of the cultural milieu of Makati.

Makati's residents enjoyed the unique experience of cultural presentations because they were people with transient orientation; kibitzers wanting some extraordinary events unfolding in their midst. Dr. Alejandro Roces asserts that fiestas were unable to flourish in Manila, "because the people there are from everywhere – except Manila" (Roces 2005:27). True enough, there was no marked distinction between Makateños and Manilans for almost two centuries because Sampiro never had enough residents (except for around sixty or more families). Fr. Joaquin de Zuñiga noted that

the original inhabitants of Makati were not permanent residents of the hacienda for "they generally live in Manila" (De Zuñiga 1973:176). It is one possible reason why the introduction of anything foreign was welcome. The transience in habitation gave them little room to find common ground by way of communal activities to impress an identity trademark. Thus Dr. Roces writes on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Franciscan mission that "fiestas were for spectacles and divertissement" and had become "meaningless and unable to foster tradition". Makateños love for spectacles is as transient as the event; however they always take part in it with pizzazz.

The dark side to Makati was the hilly portion of Guadalupe, a silent witness to atrocities committed against natives and Chinese who were forced to render hard labor. Guadalupe was a stone quarry and the source of *tufa* used in the construction of the fort of Intramuros and official residences in Manila and churches in nearby towns. The Augustinians took over this area and constructed a convent in Guadalupe. However, their stock farm in Maysapan (before it became San Pedro de Makati) remained unproductive because of cattle rustlers who ravaged the countryside (Martinez de Zuñiga 1973:46). The site in Maysapan known as Malapad na Bato was synonymous to the fearful frightful haunt of a variety of supernatural beings.

For over a century and a half, San Pedro de Makati could only boast of small factories that "manufactured roof tiles, bricks, pots earthen wares and other kitchen utensils". However, although the locals paid high prices for these articles, business was in doldrums most of the time. The hacienda remained unprofitable and so its ownership passed on in succession to luckless takers (namely: Marquiz of Villamediana, Don Jose Col, Don Manuel Gomez, then Don Simeon Bernardino Velez) (Duldulao 1996:22). This rustic town had a price tag of 50,000 pesos when Don Jose Bonifacio Roxas (one of the three children of Don Domingo Roxas) bought the hacienda on April 7, 1851. It was to become the commercial base of Casa Roxas, a company along the Pasig River across the old town hall.

It was during turbulent times that Dona Maria Margarita, one of the siblings of the landlord Jose Bonifacio Roxas, managed Casa Roxas and her marriage to Antonio Ayala de Ortiz de Urbina set the business on even firmer foundation (Duldulao 1996:24-25). Casa Roxas gave way to the formation of Casa Ayala after Don Jose Bonifacio (who acquired San Pedro de Makati) left the partnership and when brother Mariano Roxas died a few years later.

The subdivision of the hacienda was initiated by Casa Ayala for their top executives to be able to reside in an exclusive enclave known as Forbes Park. McKinley Road was and continues to be the Millionaires' Row. Forbes Park served as a gigantic magnet that drew more and more people

into the plush subdivisions bordering the commercial business district. Other villages of the new rich and the upper middle class sprouted for it was fashionable to be anywhere near Forbes Park. The land at the outer fringes adjacent to various districts of Manila too sold like hotcakes although they were subdivided as raw lots with little improvement (Duldulao 1996:43-45). It was the most opportune time to buy lots on the outer fringes of the City of Manila as it gave buyers their residences with easy access to the overcrowded city of their workplace. With so many people and businesses coming in, there was a reversal of demographic trends since three centuries back when people who owned property in Makati stayed in Manila. What followed was business-as-usual-in Manila but Makati was home.

Improvements that introduced the water system and electricity to the town of Makati in the 1930s did not jumpstart the transformation of communities. Even if road construction started and health care was made available through the Hospital de Santiago, there was no exodus of people to Makati. Santa Ana was the entertainment district through its famed Santa Ana Cabaret and Santa Ana Hippodrome. Essentially it was the influence of the Ayalas that made Makati a suitable site for in-migration. From the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, development in Makati came from the movers and shakers of business. The central business district was carved out of the rice fields, with runways of the first airport in the country (the Nielson Airport in 1937) becoming the main avenues: Paseo de Roxas, Pasay Road, Makati and Ayala Avenues. The engine of growth for Makati was big business. This contributed to the abundance of financial resources enticing millions to its center. Now, the city has a daytime population of approximately 3.7 million while permanent residents number close to 600,000. Business contributed much to the cultural overflows of superior architectural designs for edifices and the artistic production of gigantic monuments in public and private parks. The family corporation of the Ayalas promoted wedges of green, maintaining Greenbelt Parks and the Ugarte Football Field along with it. Soon, the old indigenous brick tiles and earthen pots business in Makati gave way to progress and disappeared, finding their way to Mandaluyong and Pasig.

The political significance of Makati as an urban center is related to material affluence. Makati is now the 'Financial Center of the Philippines' because it "hosts the head offices of ...472 banks, 1,832 financial institutions, 149 insurance companies and 86 foreign embassies and consulates" (ICRD 2006a:212). The increasing value of land and corporate income brought in much to the coffers of the local government— its first one billion pesos LGU revenue in the mid-1990s. On January 2, 1995, Makati

became a city by virtue of Republic Act 7854. Its revenue has hit the 9.6-billion mark.

This ushered in the era of swift transformation not for the upper and middle classes but for the average households who found equalizing the effect of tax monies channeled to public social services. What could not take place in three centuries, happened swiftly in a few decades to make Makati the 'livable' urban environment of today. The property management expertise of the Ayalas is of great significance in this, but pragmatic governance also gave way to a more populist concern for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. With so much financial resources to expend, Makati City became a veritable 'welfare state'.

The local government states that it is aware of its "place in community building (by) developing the upward spiral cycle of government using taxes from...business...to create...a more conducive atmosphere for the growth of business..." (Binay 2005:114-5). Any local government policy is met by some opposition (and negative reactions from a highly politicized segment of the business sector whose "objectives...are diametrically oppose to those of the other" [sic] as the incumbent mayor sees it [Binay 2005:113]). The relationship becomes less abrasive when there is periodic dialogue with the business sector in areas of mutual interest—such as, zoning, land valuation, public safety and order, rerouting of traffic, etc. The popular support gained via a clean sweep of all elective positions in the local elections gave the city administration confidence in its policy directions.

The status of Makati City vis-à-vis other new cities of the metropolis is quite distinct for Makati deals with complex cosmopolitan concerns whereas other cities have suburban issues and more provincial concerns. Makati City is in a class by itself.

Makati has no Chinatown, possibly an aftermath of the second Chinese Rebellion in 1639-40. However Korean communities along Jupiter St. and adjacent blocks of the plush Bel-Air Village have mushroomed. The bulk of these expats consist of students and micro-entrepreneurs seeking a turn-around of fortune from the financial crisis they suffered in 1997.

Makati by presidential proclamation became "the Urban Tourism Capital of the Philippines" with a concentration of world-class hotels, entertainment and recreation facilities.

Makati City has maintained the positive image necessary for urban tourism to flourish; it has to make good its boast of greatly reduced crime rate and high rate of solved crime through a professional police force

provided with integrated command, communication and control system to respond to emergency calls.

The city has provided the force with vehicles for a response team equipped with GPS (global positioning system) for easy dispatch and monitoring of the exact location of incidents. Companies in the business process outsourcing operation pose a challenge to the police force to keep up with the nocturnal lifestyle of young professionals employed in call centers. The use of closed circuit TV cameras enhanced the 24-hour monitoring capability of major city streets (ICRD 2006a:87).

The Makati Health Plus (MHP) Program gained international recognition for the city for its free consultation for outpatients and subsidized in-patient care in the city government hospitals. The MHP program is a subsidized program of four categories based on monthly income. (Indicated by colored-card classification codes— the category of benefits for the cardholders ranges from a token of 200 pesos to discounted hospital bills; 90%, 85% and 75% for the blue, green and red cards, respectively (ICRD 2006b:12-13).

Since 1999 in the University of Makati, curricular programs have been completely redesigned following “an innovative model of...course-based foundation that incorporates a mix of academic and industry-led training aimed at providing a career-focused education” (ICRD 2006a:56), and creating in the process its own brands of educational commodities to address needs and concerns of businesses and industry and of the Makati residents. The University of Makati found ways to offer academic programs that matches the human resource needs of the business sector. The new direction permits business, industry and professional organizations to work together in developing ‘relevant, career-oriented, market-driven and practitioner-taught’ programs. Tertiary education in the city is non-traditional. It has carved its own niche in the field of education with unconventional approaches and strategies.

As early as 1986, the local government had gambled on imposing fees on what started as entirely free educational services. Charging token fees for collegiate education was a gamble with possible backlash on election results. However, enforcing the policy that would make the public share the burden for public goods provided was seen as a guarantee (from an economic standpoint) that these goods will not be assigned uses of lower value. The insatiable demand for public goods by an apathetic and indifferent public is truly a cause for worry such that policy-makers considered it to be patently unconscionable to waste resources, even if they are in great abundance.

There are three types of constituents in Makati: the Makateños of old Poblacion; Makateños of the enlisted men barangay organizations, and the Corporate Makati. With these different segments of society, it is inappropriate to imagine the absence of pockets of poverty and of deviant behavior as in most urban societies —e.g., vandalizing of public property, disgruntled constituents belittling services dispensed; apparent anomie among the young and the restless. Not all residents of the city could be satisfied with the management of social services nor everyone avail of the services provided. Still the city reaches out to the ordinary man in the street, through concise information on services listed in the *Makati Citizens' Guidebook* (ICRD 2007). The guidebook zeroes in on target beneficiaries of various programs enabling residents to be able to readily seek public service assistance. All information on services available, the offices dispensing the service, requirements, fees and procedures that are categorized according to clients' needs are in the guidebook. What the local government publishes is a testament to public services and its advocacy for the less fortunate in the city. The guidebook in effect is a social contract between the city and its clientele. It is the city's best effort to make certain that residents are enabled and empowered to do business with local government in an atmosphere of openness and transparency.

School leavers, housewives, retirees and the unemployed were given integrated and complementary welfare packages for continuing education; social services toward gainful employment and productivity matched by short-term training and grass-roots enhancement through cooperative and entrepreneurship development programs and job fairs, often in partnership with relevant agencies of the national government and private sector.

To obliterate poverty and stamp out unwanted informal settlers dotting the railroad tracks there are city-funded relocation sites assisted by the community building programs of the NGO, Gawad Kalinga (*Makati Mirror* 2008:3).

The elderly presently get a wide space in the heart of city governance. They get free city and out-of-town tours thru an allotment of 1.683 million in the annual budget. For the free movies (equivalent to 69,534 tickets in 2009) without limitation for the elderly and persons with disability, the city paid P2,406,724.50 channeled to four cinema corporations (*Makati Mirror* 2009:3). With its huge income, public expenditure in the city need not 'cut the fat without cutting the muscles' as long as programs are drawn out of better planning (Samuelson 1970:148-149) and efficient administration.

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 ✉ **Eliseo T. Co**, Associate Professor, University of Makati.  
 Email: <prof\_eli\_co@yahoo.com>