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MONUMENTALIZING THE URBAN AND CONCEALING THE RURAL/COASTAL

A SPATIAL READING OF MATNOG, SORSOGON, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

A discursive reading on how urban ideology is monumentalized, this article peels on the spatial experience of Matnog, Sorsogon as it transitions from a rural/coastal nature to the urban. Taking a spatial perspective, with theoretical underpinnings from Lefebvre's concept of 'oeuvre', interlaced with Bourdieu's take on social space and Giddens' arguments on historical time, the article elaborates on the spatial machinations orchestrated to construct polemical spaces that deftly conceal spaces occupied by the poor. Extrapolating from photographs and maps of the place, field notes and interviews with Matnog residents who come from the low-income bracket, elucidated spatial consequences that weave discourses on the spatial problematic that unfolds through the shift in social space and historical time, consequential to the silencing of social differences in the transitioning spaces.

**Key words:** rural and coastal area, urban, space transition, Philippines, spatial consequence

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, with its three main islands: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, is composed of 7,107 islands. With a history of colonization that ended in the 1940s, the country has adopted varied cultural influences. Currently, the country is establishing its status as an emerging country in Asia and moving towards development, but what is observable is that the policies crafted are still patterned after the colonialists, specifically the Americans. Noted by Michael Leifer (Hedman–Sidel 2000: ix), the *‘factor of political change during the last century illuminates the impact of capitalist development of Philippine society...[that] stress the peculiarly American nature of the Philippine state as a consequence of the structures erected and imposed during the course of its colonial era’*. The traces left by colonial rule remain in varied forms that continually shape the development course of our country and implemented through rapid urbanization patterned after our colonizers.

Primarily an agricultural and coastal rural area, the Philippines have rapidly adopted such urban changes that have modified ways of economic production. Observable are the transformation of much agricultural land into subdivisions (for homes) or for trade and industry. Bodies of water have been further utilized, ranging from fishing to transportation and tourism. Looking at how the country has changed through re-structuring of space, it becomes difficult to classify whether Philippine municipalities and provinces are urban, rural, rural/coastal, peri-urban, and the like, because of the varying degrees of economic, social and spatial transition. Michel (2010:38) observed that *‘Third World countries [like the Philippines] were hit in the ground in a place that was neither liberal nor fordist previously, but had dependent or peripheral development regime with strong neo-colonial ties to the former colonial power, and one that has been described in terms of cronyism, “booty capitalism”’*. As the Philippines continue to imitate the urbanization project of the First World, and as land use transitions from rural and coastal to urban, what is clearly produced is uneven development.

The Philippines, then, continue to struggle to achieve progress. Interpreted, in implementation and practice, as urban development, the word ‘development’ has already been strongly associated with what is urban. Adaptation to this new stage has already changed the country’s traditional economic modes of production as well as ways of life that are already being substituted with the new idealized goal: urbanity— because it is believed to be modern, advanced, progressive and will alleviate hardship in people’s lives. To enable transition from the old ways of life, rural and coastal to that of the urban, *‘spaces are the most evidential cue in rural/coastal to urban shift, space additions, deductions, spatial arrangements, etc. becomes the most apparent way to witness the start of a new development history’* (Sta Maria, 2014: 41).

Such is the experience of Matnog, Sorsogon, and a third class Municipality that dreams of becoming a fully-fledged urban area. In this area, the imposing spatial additions are the Pier that has been managed by the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) since 1997 and the development of the Bus Terminal that also serves as a trading post. The Pier serves as points of entrances and exits to the nearby Provinces of Allen, Northern Samar, and Maharlika through the San Bernardino Strait (Philippine Ports Authority, PDO Southern Luzon, 2011) [online] Available: <http://www.ppa.com.ph/legazpi>. The Pier contributes a huge income to the municipality and the bus terminal, aside from giving additional income from terminal fees it also provides opportunities for trade and business for the 40 densely populated barangays. Clearly, Matnog, Sorsogon, a rural/coastal area in the Philippines, is not exempt from this rapid urbanization agenda.

Construction, management and further development of the Pier and the bus terminal areas have circumvented the way of life in the Municipality, as an intervention for poverty and to push for economic development. Soja notes that *'synchronization has punctuated the historical geography of capitalism'* (1989: 27) and is still very evident in the re(construction) of rural and coastal spaces to cater to urban needs. Spaces and spatial arrangements in the urban project are vital in communicating urbanization and signal the shift for the people to adjust their way of life, modify it according to the new needs so as to experience this kind of development. These spaces that have been built before them reify that urban development reality for the people.

A discursive reading on monumentalizing the urban, this article takes to light the spatial experience of Matnog, Sorsogon as it transitions from the rural and coastal to that of the urban. Elaborating on the consequences of spatial transition from rural and coastal to urban, the article expounds on intersecting trends on: 1) the construction of the centre and periphery, and 2) the concealment of the space inhabited by the poor. Highlighting how the urban is monumentalized in Matnog, Sorsogon, is confluent to spatial consequences that leads to the following spatial problematic: the shift in social space and historical time that results in silencing of social differences. Tightening the discourses, the reading the space of Matnog, Sorsogon is drawn from photographs of the place, field notes and interviews of Matnog residents who come from the low-income bracket.

### THE 'OEUVRE'

Lefebvre discussed that in the building of a city, or the establishment of the urban space, 'social and political life' were not the only sources of accumulated wealth, 'but [also that of] *knowledge (connaissances), techniques and oeuvres (works of art, monuments)*' (1996: 66). The oeuvre consists of a whole body of work that composes and constitutes the enmeshing of economic production, modes of thinking and social practice. In the reading of space, the oeuvre is not limited to architectural design, but it is also a way of establishing a socio-historical ideology. Contextualizing Lefebvre in this article brings forth the building of an oeuvre, not only as a work of art, but more so for establishing the urban space as the ultimate artistic representation of development and progress. In this vein, the oeuvre is both art and ideology that is displayed in space that does not merely signify reality but establishes a socio-historical condition. Economic production as the main tenor for transitioning spaces, the urban space and its space representations are taken as oeuvre. In the experience of rural/coastal to urban shift, the urban space as an oeuvre becomes *'a projection of society on the ground, that*

is, not only on the actual site, but at a specific level, perceived and conceived by thought which determines the city and the urban' (Lefebvre 1996: 104). The urban, as represented by spatial structures that are 'new' for the rural/coastal resident communities appear to be more attractive and palatable. Constant exposure to this visual representation of the urban does not only partake of what is visual because knowledge, practice and techniques in the urban space are also promoted and monumentalized.

Understanding this, what it produces then, is what Lefebvre refers to as the 'urban fabric' (1996: 71–72) that weaves the space and its spatial representations as an art or monument, knowledge, practice and technique that covers itself over the rural and coastal space. The urban space and its space representations weave themselves into the knowledge and cognition process of the residents and embed themselves into their spatial practice (Lefebvre 1996). The urban space and space representation becomes the product of conglomerated economic and political decisions. In the case of the Philippines, to re-structure the rural/coastal space into that of the urban, imperative then, is the embedding of new knowledge and practice so that individuals can engage and inhabit the space to define urban knowledge.

When a space experiences a shift from the rural and coastal to the urban, the aim of the space is to make people understand its new goal, which is to urbanize. Urban space additions and arrangements are planned and crafted in thought in order to build a space where everyone will have a re-constructed ideology that is translated in space through knowledge and spatial practice. As an oeuvre, the urban space and its representations are projected always upfront, easily seen and should be identifiable. Therefore, in the case of Matnog, Sorsogon, Philippines, the addition and arrangement of their area is to identify the goal of the space, that is, development which is already connotative of the urban concept. Lefebvre further explains that such presentation of oeuvre also 'exposes the genesis and meaning of the "logic of visual" —that is to expose the strategy implied in such "logic"' (1991: 128). This presents a new socio-historical spatial logic wherein its new space assemblage is 'to promote urbanity as a way of life that is also cognizant of development and progress making any space that is symbolic of rural as something that is poor, backward and counter-progressive' (Sta Maria 2014: 41).

In Matnog, Sorsogon, urban development has already been taken on as a project and is '*recognized and placed on the theoretical and political agenda*' (Soja 1989: 86). Politically, urbanization has been incorporated in varied policies already at the local and national levels, placing the Pier of Matnog, Sorsogon as one of the top earners and contributors to the economy of Matnog that signals that transformation for the people to adapt to such economic changes. The Pier then, is taken as the centre space, an imposing spatial representation that connotes to urban development. As the point of spatial reference, the Pier is constantly being modified to achieve the standards of international port area services. It is well managed, maintained to provide comfort and ease for its passengers and customers. This Pier spells development for the people living in Matnog, Sorsogon and emphasizes progress for them.

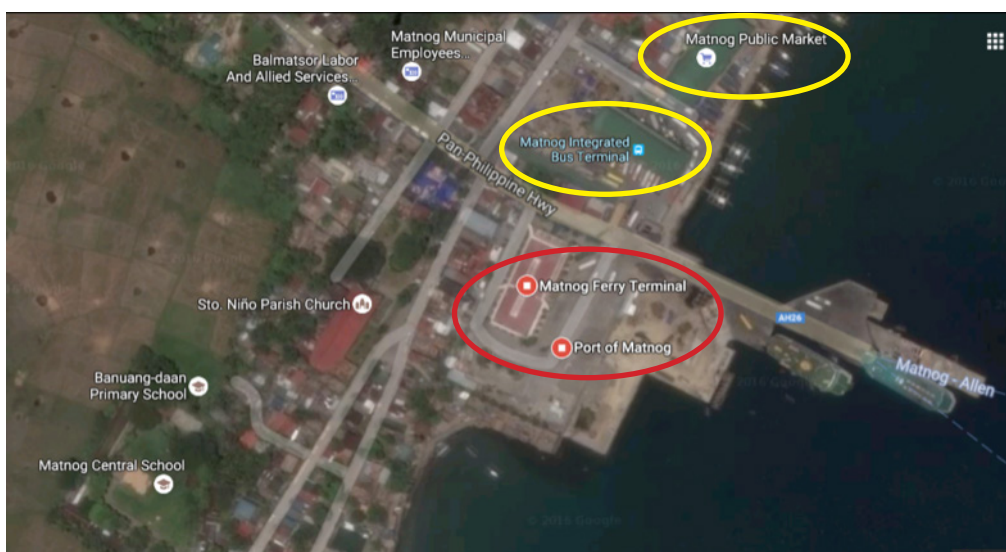
## CONSTRUCTION OF THE CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

In the urbanization project, areas construct a centre that pre-sets the grand plan in the achievement of urbanization. The construction of the centre draws people inwards in the space that will symbolize urbanization for them to participate and be actively engaged in economic trade, imbibe the changes and attempt to have that feeling of what urban life is. The construction of the centre, as a strategy, is done to signal to the people who inhabit the rural and coastal areas to transition into the urban state.

The construction of the centre is not new in the Philippines. Manila, as the capital of the country, and considered as highly urbanized has constructed numerous centres that connote to urbanization. Taking note of Manila's construction of the centre, Michel (2010: 395) observes that these structures are comprised of 'high-rise condominiums, a medium-sized mall, and some office blocks, have risen since the late 1990's.' But this development has not stopped. More centres that combine housing, leisure and entertainment, and business have also been constructed: 'Rockwell Center, Eastwood Cyber City, or Manhattan Garden, and on a much bigger scale, urban megaprojects like Fort Bonifacio Global City, produce urban landscapes' (Michel 2010).

Matnog, Sorsogon has not reached the scale of changes that Manila has, but the development of the Pier area of Matnog has circumvented the social and economic life of the people. As the focal point for economic life, continuing improvements of the Pier became consequential to the development of other spaces and structures to contribute to the earnings of the Municipality. The roads that lead to the Pier are paved and maintained to facilitate the transfer of passengers. The Matnog Integrated Bus Terminal has also been developed to accommodate numerous passengers and it is also a parking area used by cargo trucks. The bus terminal also serves as a trading post for goods. Inside the Pier, one can also see the improvements to meet the national and global standards for shipping lines.

*Figure 1. Map of Matnog, Sorsogon. Circled in Red is the area of the Pier which is geographically the centre of Matnog. Circled in Yellow are the Matnog Integrated Bus Terminal that houses the Trading Post and the Matnog Public Market that are both areas where socio-economic life is located.*





(Source: Google Map) [Online] Available: <https://www.google.com.ph/maps/search/Trading+Post+in+Matnog+Pier+/@12.5818424,124.085875,383a,20y,41.64t/data=!3m1!1e3> )

*Figure 4.*  
*Left: Scanning area of bags upon entrance Right: Inside the Pier where passengers enter and wait.*



*Figure 5.*  
*Left: the bus terminal where cargo trucks are parked. Right: another perspective of the bus terminal where stalls are built*



The area of the Pier, as the centre, becomes a centripetal force for economy and social life. As a central space for economy, interviewed residents of Matnog say that families who are low-income earners (like the fishermen and male farmers) have either found full-time or part-time employment as labourers in the Pier. While some of the women and children sell some of their agricultural produce, cooked native snacks and coffee in the trading area of the bus terminals. Other residents who have higher educational attainment are employed in white-collar jobs in the Pier, while some middle-class earners have rented stalls for selling various products. A woman working in the port area says that when the pier developed, the ones who were hired in office jobs came from neighbouring municipalities. The Pier area also serves as a social space. Teenage girls from low-income families say that they like ‘hanging out’ in the bus terminal. According to them, they sit and chat in these spaces while they wait for their friends. What is observable is that the Pier area, especially the bus terminal, is always full of residents of Matnog communing together in the late afternoons until evening.

As a central space for economic production and practice, the space tends to project and advertise itself as accommodating to all but examining it closely, it is also a space that negates itself by spatially arranging ‘representations of power’ that ‘asserts itself as a “state of mode of production” to proliferate capitalism’ (Soja 1996: 34–35). The centre controls and proliferates competition among individuals and groups for the best skills, techniques and styles among which becomes the key for surviving in the centre. The people of Matnog who are socially-oriented to fish and farm, and who have obtained skills as labourers and lay workers in the Pier area, engage in the centre because there is an increasing difficulty in relying on income that can be earned from the land and the water. Most of them are having difficulties with fishing because they cannot compete with commercial fishing. Tenant farmers cannot compete with the increasing demands for the maintenance of their farms, thus, to augment income, most of them work full-time or as part time workers in the pier area. Most of the people of Matnog, especially those who have higher educational attainment, cannot fully engage in the pier area, especially in white-collar jobs, because they have to compete with applicants who come from nearby municipalities. An observation is that in small scale business, like that of selling, most of the people of Matnog who used to be farmers cannot afford the rent of the stalls, so they are forced to sell their goods outside of the Bus Terminal, while some carry their goods and peddle them in the streets. Residents of Matnog say that most stalls inside the bus terminal are rented by people from nearby municipalities or the middle class of Matnog.

*Figure 6.*  
*Circled in red are residents of Matnog*  
*who are selling food outside the Bus Terminal area.*



The creation of the centre for economic and social practice is in conjunction with *'spatial hierarchy of cores/centre and peripheries as both the product and the instrumental medium of geographically uneven development'* (Soja 1989: 111). It may be true that the centre accommodates everyone in Matnog, but looking at their spatial experience, the ones who belong to the low-income bracket, specifically the fisher folks and farmers who still practice rural and coastal socio-economic modes, are placed at a disadvantaged position because the skills demanded by the centre are not the skills that they possess. Wallenstein explains that the centre produces two dichotomies: 1) class difference, and, 2) economic specialization within a spatial hierarchy (core/centre) versus periphery (cited by Soja 1989: 110).

In urbanization, the construction of the centre is contiguous to the construct of the peripheral space that operates through the accommodation of individuals who cannot live and fully engage in the centre. These are the people who cannot afford the rental fees of houses, the cost of residential land, rental fees of business spaces, etc. In the experience of Matnog, this is mostly articulated by the centre pushing the ones who cannot compete out and placing them in the peripheral areas. The centre, in a way, due to the spatial constructions and additions that tend to mark their boundaries, re-arranges the space to accommodate those who cannot live and fully engage in the centre in order to appear more inclusive.

#### HIDDEN SPACE

Similarly to what is happening in the Manila Area, Philippines, because malls, residential spaces for middle and upper class, leisure and entertainment areas, etc. are constructed at the centre, high gates and walls are built to mark the boundaries of the middle and upper class individuals while the area occupied by individuals from the low income bracket are concealed (refer to Michel 2010). This spatial arrangement is maintained to advance urbanization and to create *'urban landscapes that are free of visible poverty and marginalization'* with the intention to paint an image of wealth that will further forward the interests of the middle and upper class (Michel 2010: 386 and 389). Conjugated within the clauses of urbanization, concealment of the peripheral space where the poor reside is done to *'project an image of an economically successful global city, both to persuade its citizens that its strategies of globalization of the economy are correct, as well as to attract investment and tourism in order to fully realize this strategy'* (Shatskin quoted by Michel 2010: 386–387).

Matnog, Sorsogon experiences the same fate. Behind the urban development spaces and its representations (i.e. cemented roads, buildings, the Pier, Trading Centre and the like), their houses, their own space is concealed. Obscured behind the spaces that represent urban development is uneven development that is presented before these spaces and their spatial arrangements. Hiding behind the urban structures are the truths and realities of social differences.

To reach the area of the poor in Matnog, Sorsogon, one has to walk along cemented paths until one reaches a narrow road to enter their space.



Figure 7. Yellow arrows indicate the walking path towards the area of the poor. Circled in red is the Barangay where poor people live.

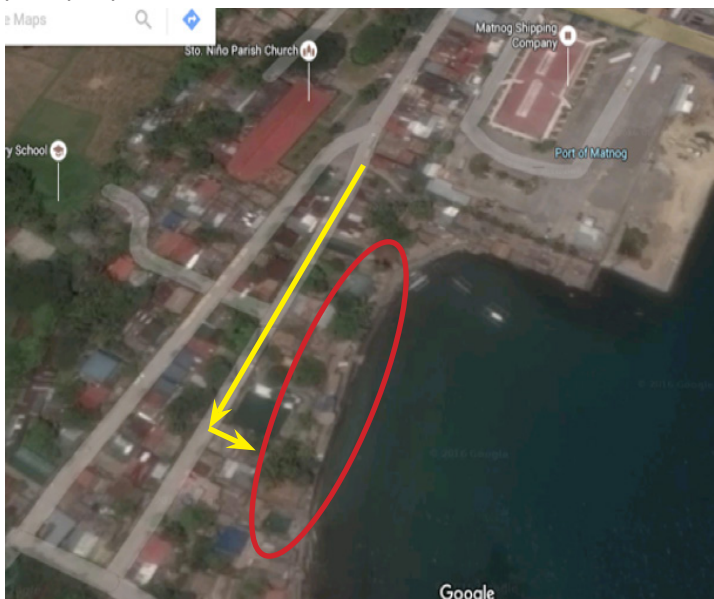


Figure 9. Circled in red are the houses hidden behind the other structures



Figure 10. A closer look at their area





These families belong to the low-income bracket. They survive through fishing and small-scale farming. To augment their income, some of the adults work on the pier as labourers, some women and children sell coffee and food outside the bus terminal or peddle them in the nearby road.

Concealing the spaces inhabited by the poor, Michel says that it is for the promotion of the *'legitimacy of its modernist development project, the shift to corporate-driven and entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance'* (Michel 2010:393), because the spaces in the periphery, inhabited by the poor *'are represented in the local media discourse in terms of deviance, underdevelopment and a passive culture of poverty'* (2010: 387). In the construct of the centre and periphery in spaces, both experienced by Manila and Matnog, the *'aim was to erase what might contradict the image of a promising site for investment'* (Michel 2010: 394). Concealing the spaces of the poor is done so that urban spaces and their representations become the frontage of any viewer – *'a façade – as face directed towards the observer and as a privileged side'* (Lefebvre 1991: 125). This arrangement is creating that notion for any viewer regarding the presence of urban development. Because it is the Pier and other representations of urban development that are the first spaces the viewer sees, it presents urban development as *'monumental'* (Lefebvre 1991). This sets the whole ambience for everyone to see and further believe that this is the kind of development currently being applied, and, this is the kind of life that is being emphasized. It memorializes urban development, setting the stage for everyone that the presence of urban spaces and its representations are the signal for everyone to adapt, shift and take this new form of life as the main goal.

The hiding of spaces occupied by the poor, whether in urban or rural spaces, is interpreted as a form of gentrification. Studies on gentrification are usually attributable to displacement and *'class inequalities and injustices created by capitalist urban land markets and policies'* (Slater 2011: 571). Sassen (quoted by Slater 2011: 573) explains that,

*Gentrification was initially understood as the rehabilitation of decaying and low-income housing by middle-class outsiders in central cities. In the late 1970s a broader conceptualization of the process began to emerge, and by the early 1980s new scholarship had developed a far broader meaning of gentrification, linking it with processes of spatial, economic and social restructuring.*

Michel notes that features of gentrification in the Philippines *'go back at least to the mid-1960s...“slums” and squatter settlements for the first time were dealt with as a political and increasingly moral problem'* (2010:392) and was widely practiced in urban Manila. Through the 'new Society' and 'City of Man' projects, the poor who occupy the slum areas were forcibly relocated to nearby provinces. The construction of middle and upper class spaces has resulted in massive *'evictions of informal settlements and street vendors, especially those living and working near routes visible to the international audience'* (Michel 2010). Continuing on with the practice of gentrification, in 2005, the 'Metro Gwapo (gwapo in Tagalog means handsome)' was implemented that *'revolved around beautifying and reworking the face of the metropolis, its focuses on certain usages of public space heavily class-biased toward an exclusion of the urban poor'* (Michel 2010: 393). Although the gentrification projects in the 1960s and that of 2005 may differ in implementation, noteworthy is that *'this focus on the urban centre and its promotion as a modern space was a key element of the regime's development agenda'* (Michel 2010: 392). As contextualized in the urban Manila area, gentrification is *'the adoption of zero-tolerance policing strategies, and the privatization of urban space [that] are currently among the most common approaches'* (Smith 2001, Smith 2002, Glasze et al. 2006, Atkinson and Bridge 2005, cited by Michel 2010: 400). In Michel's study on the features of gentrification as evident in urban Manila, Philippines, he observes that the construction of middle and upper class spaces have resulted in massive *'evictions of informal settlements and street vendors, especially those living and working near routes visible to the international audience'* (2010: 392).

Davidson and Lees (2005: 1169) argue that there is the permeating experience of *'new-build gentrification [that] contrasts with previous rounds of gentrification because different landscapes are being produced, and different socio-spatial dynamics are operating.'* To support the arguments of Davidson and Lees, given the Third World spatial context, Smith (2011: 443) says gentrification *'has evolved into new landscape complexes that pioneer a comprehensive class-inflected urban remake'* and is dependent on the following: 1) scale, 2) geographical focus, and 3) social balance that contribute to *'differential forms and trajectories in rural places'* (2011: 444,599). What appears to be similar within the thread of argument on gentrification is the forwarding of the urbanization project that hides areas that negate the urban concept and it causes massive displacement; and, usually this is the displacement of the poor.

Understanding gentrification from a spatial lens, as experienced by Matnog, Sorsogon, adheres closely to the defining characteristics of 'new-build gentrification' raised by Davidson and Lees (2005: 1170) as: 1) reinvestment of capital, 2) social upgrading of locale by incoming high income groups, 3) landscape change, and, 4) direct or indirect displacement of low income groups. The table below summarizes Davidson and Lee's characteristics and that of the spatial context of Matnog, Sorsogon.

*Table 1 - Summary of Gentrification Characteristics by Davidson and Lees*

Davidson and Lees' Characteristics	Characteristics Manifested in Matnog, Sorsogon
Reinvestment of capital	Public properties are being privatized. If not, there is a trend of public and private capital in the management of properties. Example: Philippine Ports Authority is government owned but operations management of the port area is privately owned. Huge land areas owned by individuals are sub-divided and sold, while some portions are leased, or they transform them into business structures, rental homes, etc. Expansion of businesses of the middle and upper class Matnog residents Modification of economic mode from fishing and farming to business and trade
Social upgrading of locale by incoming high income groups	Influx of tourists and employees from cities and nearby municipalities that is consequential to providing additional tourist spots. Example: beach, snorkelling, inns, etc.
Landscape change	The pier, bus terminal, market area and the space where the municipal hall is located are being developed. Bodies of water are developed as a tourist spot for swimming and snorkelling. Islands are also being developed to cater to the needs of tourists
Direct or indirect displacement	Indirect displacement

Seeing similar features and characteristics in the concept of gentrification, as presented by Davidson and Lees and as experienced by Matnog, Sorsogon, what needs to be highlighted is how gentrification is experienced by spaces that are still transitioning from rural and coastal to urban. Though displacement becomes an elemental experience in gentrification, the kind of indirect displacement experienced by transitioning spaces are consequential to fixity in the original place and space they occupy and they tend to experience socio-cultural and economic ambivalence.

Fixity in their original space and place is a supporting rhetoric of urbanization. In contrast to the experience of Manila, they possess the capacity to 'evict slum areas' (refer to Michel 2010) and relocate them in nearby provinces because Manila as an urban space, tends to associate the 'poor' with the rural areas. In the case of Matnog, Sorsogon, these low-income groups are already located in a rural and coastal area, which has not fully transformed to the urban. In a way, they cannot be transferred elsewhere due to lack of provinces who be willing to give space to the poor and because most of the municipalities and provinces are also aiming for urbanization. Fixity in space and place, as experienced by the low income groups of Matnog, Sorsogon, further root them to what is 'rural and coastal' that reiterate their socio-economic status because they are bound to stay in their space.

Ambivalence in socio-cultural and economic modes can be seen in the confusion on what social practice to follow. Most of the fisher folks and farmers tend to retain the 'old,' 'traditional,' and 'rural' ways of socio-economic practice, which is in tension with their newly acquired skills as labourers or sellers. Often times, they have to decide which among the socio-economic modes are more rewarding for them. In interviews conducted among low-income residents of Matnog, they said that they find it difficult to leave fishing and farming because these skills is a way of life for them. Admittedly, they say, that it leaves them with no choice but to adopt new skills to be able to provide for their families. Thus, labour work appeals to them because money is regularly given but they still lack some of the skills needed in the port area (i.e. maintaining and cleaning the ships, machinery, etc.) so that they can gain more income.

Socio-culturally, most of the individuals and groups who are concealed have difficulty in coping with the new urban lifestyle. In the interviews with women, some of them say that the younger generation tend to become more materialistic and want things they do not exactly need (i.e. cellular phones, computers, etc.) which can be seen in the shopping areas. Some of these teenagers work, not exactly to help augment the income of the family, but for purchasing luxury items. Understanding this, socio-culturally, the younger generation are now forming a new life schema that involves an urban lifestyle. What appears to be more bothering is that the younger generation, who are witnessing the spatial transition, perceive of the natural spaces (body of water and farming land) as areas that connote to 'kahirapan' or poverty because it is 'pang-probinsya' [provincial, rural].

### SPATIAL CONSEQUENCES

Lefebvre says that *'grounds take up residence in spaces whose pre-existing form, having been designed for some other purpose, is inappropriate to the needs of their would-be communal life'* (1991: 168). The Pier being the centripetal force of their lives becomes the area for augmenting income for the people of Matnog. Unfortunately, not all of them can be accommodated in higher paying jobs in the centre space because most of them lack the education and skills necessary for employment. In the 'urban fabric', as it continually wishes for the space, knowledge and social practice to continue on and cover all geographic spaces, it also produces discontinuities in space. Lefebvre refers to this as the 'ensemble of differences' (1991: 109) that creates patterns in ways of living in which not all inhabitants can engage. The city, or the urban, produces *'confrontations and conflictual relations'* (Lefebvre 1991) – social differences, boundaries and demarcation lines between the ideal (urban) and the un-ideal (rural/coastal).

In the case of Matnog, Sorsogon, Philippines, addition and spatial re-arrangements, as aestheticized and becomes that of the oeuvre, when it hides other spaces and space representation not in cognizance with the urban, is actualizing a visual logic in spatial arrangement and gains the *'the capacity to "incarnate" into the realm of knowledge, and hence, of consciousness'* (Lefebvre 1996: 128). In the spatial transition of the rural and coastal to the urban, it is not merely a spatial aesthetic design in which the urban space and its representations become the frontage, but the hiding of rural and coastal space and space representations is also a strategy to infuse, spread and embed into the onlookers what rural and coastal space and space representations signify. In transitioning spaces, as currently experienced by Matnog, Sorsogon. Bourdieu (1989: 19) says that what is constructed is the habitus which he describes as:

*both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices... habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated...habitus thus implies a 'sense of place' but also a 'sense of the place of others'*

The set of spatial arrangements that conceal the areas of the poor, and taking the so-called rich as its frontage, divides the social class and renders them to their respective spaces. Though all social classes can engage in the urban space and its representations, social practice, in its eventuality, is adapted to the space; thus, interactions become oriented towards the goal of economics: production and gaining. Rarely will the different

social classes intertwine to establish other social goals for themselves (i.e. friendship, group formation, etc.) because the urban space reifies the social distance that proliferates power relations. In the interactions of the social class in the urban space, because the goal is for economic production, there is always the presence of social difference (i.e. employer-employee, fisherman and business owner, farmer and landowner, seller and consumer, etc.) in which *'social distances are inscribed in bodies, or more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time'* (Bourdieu 1989: 17). This iteration in space subconsciously and consciously makes the individual understand that in social interactions and exchange there is an inherent need *'to maintain their rank'* and *'not get familiar'* that is attributable to the inherent sense and affinity to their *'habitus'* (Bourdieu 1989).

Hiding spaces connote as well to unacceptability of these spaces, which is interpreted as the concealment of the people who live in the rural and coastal areas (inclusive of their social, cultural and economic ways of life). As physically concealed, these spaces that denote poverty are not the spaces that one sees upon entry into Matnog. This is done to obscure poverty from the onlooker and to make them focus on the aim: that which is urban development. Lefebvre (1991: 6) says that this arrangement of concealing is an *'impression (is) given that the truth is tolerated, or even promoted, by that "culture."* The existence of spaces that denote poverty as hidden behind the so-called development spaces consciously and unconsciously makes urban development appear to be acceptable to all. This knowledge of urban living becomes idealized, well thought of, cognized, practiced, and eventually accepted. The concealment of the spaces then amounts to the space being rendered as obsolete and not in synch with the new spatial logic.

For the urban development goal is that of *'homogeneity'* (Lefebvre 1991), then their houses are concealed because this is not the spatial prescriptive of urban development. What is different, what is not in the creation of that semblance and notion of urban development, is not the kind of development that anyone should have, and, maybe even see. Such rendering of the inexistence of poor areas as hidden spaces communicates that *'these relations would remain in the realm of pure abstraction... verbiage and empty words.'* (Lefebvre 1991: 129). The urban as an *oeuvre* prefers *'consistency of knowledge'* (1991: 131), thus it is imperative to conceal spaces that run against its logic.

This becomes the genesis of spatial boundaries that reifies social differences, enunciating contrasting concepts such as: urban and rural/coastal, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, progressive and backward, and, centre and periphery. This kind of spatial arrangement not only constructs polemical spaces but also provides a perception of oppositional ways of life and legitimizes urban development as the sole direction to take in order to alleviate the lives of the people of Matnog. This kind of shift to urbanization has made people believe that there is a transitory need to let go of the rural and what it stands for. What the shift to urbanization poignantly says is that their space is not appropriate, that the rural/coastal is hard, difficult, tough, unprivileged, literally and figuratively behind the emerging of a dominant space.

## SPATIAL PROBLEMATIC

### Shift in the Sociality of the Space

Transitioning spaces bring to light the arguments raised by Bourdieu. He explains that a social space presents a trajectory and disposition and that *'position and individual trajectory are not statistically independent; all positions of arrival are not equally probable for all starting points.'* (Bourdieu 1984:110). Evidential in Matnog, even if everyone can engage in the centre, and such areas that represent the urban, it does not necessarily follow that everyone will develop because not everyone comes from a similar social position. Given the existing and permeating social differences in a geographical and social space, most residents of Matnog who come from the concealed area come from the low-income bracket and practice rural and coastal ways. When Matnog as a space started transitioning to the urban state, they were already at a disadvantage, because their social skills came from the rural and coastal. Those who come from the middle and upper class have greater advantage over the others because their skills and social practice enables them to engage fully in the urban space and its representations. Therefore, even if the lower, middle, and upper classes of Matnog come from different social positions, the space that is transitioning into that of the urban, carries with it the elemental tenor of urbanity—not only in spatial arrangement, but also in economic and social practice. This means that all of them will take on the trajectory (path or direction) towards urban goals and their positive disposition (attitude) towards urbanity inclusive of their social practice.

What are constructed then are not merely spatial constructions and re-arrangements but a homogeneous disposition directed to urbanity. Bourdieu succinctly explains that:

*homogeneity of dispositions are associated with a position and their seemingly miraculous adjustment to the demands inscribed in it results partly from the mechanisms which channel towards positions individuals who are already adjusted to them, either because they feel 'made' for them –this is the 'vocation'... this trajectory effect no doubt plays a large part in blurring the relationship between social class and religious or political opinions, owing to the fact that it governs representation of the position occupied in the social world and hence the vision of its world and its future (1984: 110–111)*

What is already presented before the people of Matnog are spatial representations of the urban, and the rural and coastal as connotative of what is 'poor' and 'backward' should be hidden, becomes embedded in the consciousness of everyone. The urban project not only reconstructs space, but even more so entails the arrangement and coherency of economic and social practice to emphasize the urban spatial syntax.

A dire consequence of social adjustments of activities and practices in a new space is the possible *'break-down of mechanisms of biological and social reproduction brought about by the specific logic of symbolic domination is one of the mediations of the process of concentration which leads to a deep transformation of the class'* (Bourdieu 1984: 108). In the case of Matnog, what is produced is additional class in the existent social hierarchy. To illustrate, the poor in which classifications are added that denote to their economic capacity (i.e., fisher folks, farm people, labourers, peddlers, etc.); and, additional sub-divisions of the middle class (lower middle class and upper middle class) that convolutes the understanding of social classes. To cope with this confusion, the space compensates by arranging them. To illustrate, the upper class belong to the private

subdivisions; upper-middle class are located near the centre (given the practicality of the distance between residence and work); lower middle class are compounded in one area; while the classifications of lower class are either located in the hidden areas of the space or are in-between the residence locations of the middle class. In a way, the urbanization project has resulted in classifying social class based on space.

### Shift in the Historical Time

A spatial consequence for transitioning areas is the shift in historical time. Giddens refers to this as “emptying of time” as a precondition of for the “emptying of space” (1990: 18). According to Giddens, because of modernity, direct links between space and time are diminishing (refer to Giddens 1990). In the study of space and place, Giddens explains that ‘place means idea of locale, which refers to physical settings of social activity as situated geographically’ is in synch with time that shapes social activities (Giddens 1990: 18). Looking into the case of Matnog, in the past (as per pre-urban), time and space is coordinated with motions of the natural spaces: for agriculture there is a planting and harvest season; for fishing there is a time to cast nets and wait for a catch. In transitioning spaces, Giddens explains that:

*it tears space away from place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. ...place becomes phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influence quite distant from them (1990: 18–19).*

Exemplified in the space of Matnog, everyone, regardless of class and spatial origins is working in the centre. To achieve urban needs, the fishing and agricultural locales do not recognize these changes because everyone is working (employees, teachers, etc.) within a time frame that is unfamiliar and far from the agricultural and coastal time they were used to. This results in disorientation in time. The ‘busyness’ in movements in the centre or the urban space does not allow them to interact, nor the time and space to discuss their social status and plight because these social relations are new as well. What structures the ‘locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the “visible form” of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determines its nature’ (Giddens 1990: 19). Naturalization of socio-economic activities led to the emergence of a complex set of hierarchical positions (i.e. labourer-supervisor-employer; fisher folk-middleman-businessman owner of market or grocery; etc.) that brings about homogeneity of socio-economic activities, which is synchronized to the urban spatial and time demands. Resistance is rare because everyone, regardless of social class, is working in the urban space, which rationalizes the existence of urban life.

### RENDERING SILENCE IN SPACE

The shift in historical time, from the rural and coastal to that of the urban, has produced silence and acceptance of co-existence in the space, because the urban space has ‘inserted into time and space a life with a new impetus’ (Giddens 1990: 20) that is slowly eradicating the old ways and presenting and embedding that of the new impetus—the construction of a new space with a new set of social activities. Historical space is changing. And, since there modification of rural and coastal socio-economic activities that is very much urban in goals, the insertion of urbanity is not exactly hinged on the past because there is the need to learn new skills (labour, selling, etc.) and a new way of life.



The diminishing links between time and space, as experienced by Matnog, has already been pre-planned as 'the epitome of reification' (Lukacs quoted by Soja 1989: 87). In building and constructing spatial additions and representations of urban development, the people living by the coast in that which is hidden and beside the spaces that denote to urban life are made to feel that they are somewhat located in a 'developed area'. It is the kind of *'false consciousness that is manipulated by state and capital that becomes collective and homogenizes thought and action'* (Soja 1989: 87). It is that new mode of false consciousness on spatial arrangements and representations (paved roads, concrete houses, buildings, Pier, etc.) that communicates that 'hope' of having and achieving development. But unfortunately, it is not theirs and they are just located beside and alongside it.

Because *'the production of space was accommodative, conformal, and directly shaped by the market and state power'* (Soja 1989), resistance to this transition is difficult for the people living on the coast, because these urban spaces and their representations know how to compromise. Those who live by the coast of Matnog are compensated with these presentations to make them think that their lives are becoming better because of these spaces. When people are 'happy', 'satisfied', etc. resistance is avoided because there are many compromising factors and arenas in these urban development spaces. But what they do not know is that the urban spaces and their representations will not survive without cheap work and labour, and, that without them selling alongside the trading centre, consumption will not be achieved.

The people who live by the coast of Matnog do not know is that this urban development will not proliferate without them. They are falsely made to believe that they benefit fully from these urban spaces and their representations; thus, *'culture, politics, consciousness and ideology and along with them the production of space were reduced to simple reflections of economic base' and in this kind of space becomes 'absorbed in economism as its dialectical relationship with other elements of material existence was broken'* (Soja 1989: 87). There is no room for cognizing inequality and social differences anymore for the people who live by the coast of Matnog because they are more occupied in their struggle for everyday life in which the urban space and its representations are 'helping' them.

Transitioning space is silencing but violent because it gives them that notion that their lives will become better when what they actually have is temporary, and, that these small improvements in their lives and the space surrounding them is not enough to alter their own state. As the people of Matnog remain silent, *'differentials are maintained geographically and sectorally with uneven allocations of capital investment and social infrastructure...'* (Soja, 1989: 107). As the space changes, the people living by the coast of Matnog will eventually become urban poor... and one conceptual meaning remains: poor. This kind of silence that emanates from them and their spaces, urban development furthers its legitimacy and becomes the *'legitimizing hegemony rather on direct force and oppression'* because this urban development becomes that consciousness that will become *'rooted in the phenomenology of [their] everyday life'* (1989: 90). This non-resistance and silence is taken as acceptance which is difficult to challenge because one cannot undo spaces. This makes uneven allocations and social differences continue their course. The spatial arrangement muffles and silences social differences that *'naturalize social relations'* (Soja 1989: 128), making the people who live by the coast of Matnog, temporarily contented with their current state and condition.

Bourdieu (1985: 728) points out that because *'the social world is an act of construction... the essential part of the experience of the social world and of the act of construction that implies takes place in practice... more like a class unconscious than a "class consciousness."* Due to the spatial syntax constructed by the urban project, and as supported and facilitated fully by spatial arrangement in accordance to one's social class, there is already the acceptance of *"one's sense of one's place."* Bourdieu elaborates that *'consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take for granted, rather than to rebel against it ... the sense of one's place, as a sense of limits ("that's not for the likes of us", etc.), or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected'* (1985: 728). Urbanity becomes a 'common sense, the explicit consensus, of the whole group' (Bourdieu 1985: 729). As an example, a poor fisherman who lives in the poor community but sees development representations in space, has to adjust to the social practice thus unconsciously imbibing the urban schema because there is already a written policy on urbanity and an unwritten agreement among people in Matnog and because urbanity aims for socio-economic movements, the fisherman takes on the practical struggle to attempt at uplifting oneself in the space to survive. Because in truth, where will he go?

### MONUMENTALIZING THE URBAN

The concepts of the 'rural' and the 'urban' become a *'symbolic struggle for power to produce and impose a legitimate world-view and, more precisely, to all the cognitive 'filling-in' strategies that produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or past'* (Bourdieu: 1985: 724). This spatial presentation of the urban also becomes a clear pronunciation of social differences that reifies spatial consciousness. It makes coherent that urban life, and any space that represent such development, is the only way to achieve such progress. Arrangement of adjacent spaces into contrasting modes (rural and coastal versus the urban) suggests to the people living in Matnog that urban development is possible, workable and is far better. Through these arrangements, options are provided in thought that make idealization of the urban more provocative because in space, this kind of development is tangible. The space, as re-arranged, denotative of the urban, visually reminds people living in Matnog that they do not have that kind of development yet. And, because the spaces that represent urban development can be seen, it sends a promising message that the transformation of rural and coastal areas into those of the urban is the only way to achieve development. And, for those who resist this urban project, the spatial transition conveys to them that this is the development for everyone because, in truth, no one wishes to remain hidden and no one hopes to remain in the concealed space.

Urban space and its representations present the *'illusion of substantiality, naturalness and special opacity that nurtures its own mythology'* (Lefebvre 1991: 30). The urban then becomes the 'impetus' and the sole goal of social life. In monumentalizing the urban as knowledge and practice, its machinations began in space. Lefebvre says that the space, as the impetus for a new life, presents ease and comfort in conforming because of the *'view of the space as innocent; as free of traps or secret places'* (Lefebvre 1991: 28). The reconstructions and additions in space appear to be neutral and limited to tangible, physical space devoid of any agenda, which is deftly hidden behind the new structures and arrangements. The space then conjugates for the people the

need to adjust and adopt a new set of movements and practice that is conformal of the space. This is a way of accepting the urban project.

Lefebvre warns that the urban, as monumentalized, becomes the 'encrypted reality' (Lefebvre 1991: 29). As Matnog continues to transition, their people takes in the locus of the urban which is monumentalized in space, social, cultural and economic practice. In this re-arrangement and spatial additions, there is also the de-materialization of 'old,' 'traditional,' 'backward', and in this reading of the space—the rural. The rural life then is being dissolved and rendered as unacceptable and non-conformal to the space. The people of Matnog then take root in the new historical time: the urban.

Understanding the case of Matnog, Sorsogon, as it transitions, what it actualizes is the re-appropriation of the natural spaces (body of water and land); and, consequential to this is the construction of unnatural spaces. In the monumentalizing of the urban, what is being naturalized is the unnatural ways of life in which the people are now adopting and allowing themselves to be rooted into. And, in this rooting from the unnatural space, artificial social life is being built.

As this discourse draws to a close this question remains: What will happen to the people whose spaces are being concealed? As they imbibe a new spatial practice, they will keep on repeating these newly acquired skills that will be exercised and done repetitively until both the spaces and the people forget the socio-cultural practice of farming and fishing. A formation of new memory emerges, and, the monumentalizing of the urban as the ideal space for social, economic and cultural practice will always ensure its continuity.

When the people of Matnog forget rural life, upon monumentalizing the urban, there is also the acceptance of its consequences: 1) the shift in the social space that will direct anew social and cultural practice even if unfounded and unnatural of the space and the people, and, 2) the shift in historical time that becomes an impetus that is unrelated to the old ways of life, that produces silence and naturalization of social differences. In the monumentalizing of the urban, the consequences become memorialized as well.

The urban, as an oeuvre, appears before us in the Philippines as the most ideal space which has reshaped social, economic and cultural practice. And, as we continue to move in synchrony with the urban space, it will now appear as the new us and our new history. Given the dire consequences of spatial transition from rural and coastal to the urban, the oeuvre is not just an oeuvre.

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