

Politics and Place: Baguio Center Mall and the Negotiation of Space

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ABSTRACT

Our study investigates how the entry of the global into the local and the engagements of the latter with the former materially reconfigure both. More generally, we seek to complicate existing accounts of how spaces become places, grounding our own in a specific moment in Baguio's history of urban development and recent gentrification. Looking at Baguio Center Mall (BCM) and the displacements/changes it created in barangay Kagitingan, the site of its development, as a sign of globalization processes engulfing Baguio in the wake of the 1990 earthquake, we argue that the local is never fully effaced. Working with the typology of categorical distinctions elaborated by the architect and cultural studies scholar Kim Dovey in his work on "becoming-places" (public/private, day/night, legal/illegal, sacred/secular, local/global), we detail how the Kagitingan community accommodates the encroachments of exogenous forces by troubling the boundaries and dichotomies enforced by the regulatory authorities of late-Capital and what is now called neo-liberal governance. We conclude that in its engagement with global flows, the local is able to deploy particularities of place with remarkable creativity so as not to be overcome by such encroaching forces from without.

Keywords: malls, globalization, space, place, urbanization, gentrification, resistance, negotiation, habitus, rhizome, community, networks

Globalization is commonly construed as a unidirectional flow of power and influence from advanced, usually western, countries. Nonetheless, as Chris Barker posits, globalization should be taken as a complex process of cultural exchange, and not as a "monolithic one-way flow from the west to the rest" (2000, 173). Examining spaces as texts enables a clear appreciation of the multitude of

contending forces that spurs transformations in and of place. These transformations—at base, of “space” into “place”—reflect the interplay of various social, cultural, ideological, and political desires.

According to David Harvey, our new experiences of space and time brought about by “capitalist urbanization,” or what, in several works, he examines as the ceaseless “creative destruction” of the city through cyclical investments in the built environment, show the interrelations obtaining among urbanization itself, transformations in consciousness, and cultural formation (see Harvey 1989; 1993). One of the foremost manifestations of this “built environment” in the late-capitalist city is the production of malls which Harvey describes as “devoted to conspicuous consumption and overt displays of the power of capital.” The mall is designed not only to attract consumers to its fantastic world but to assert the economic supremacy of its owners.

Baguio City, like any other rapidly expanding metropolis, is unspared by the proliferating phenomenon of malls. Baguio Center Mall (BCM), the subject of this study, is conceivably the first “mall” to arise in Baguio prior to the establishment of the more popular ShoeMart Baguio (SM). BCM was erected on a parcel of land across the city market which was traditionally Baguio’s center of commerce, and adjacent to the Dangwa Tranco bus station. At one point, this transport company was the only line that plied the Cordillera routes, apart from also serving as a primary conduit between the Cordilleras and the lowlands. Compared to SM Baguio and other malls in the metropolitan area, however, BCM appears to register a personality all its own, incongruous with our usual expectations of the regular mall.

The common reading of malls is that these imposing structures embody the interests of neo-colonial forces, whose ultimate desire is planetary homogenization. On this view, the mall fosters capitalist consumerism which results in the denial of agency to the subject, in the homogenization of behavior, and in the dislocation of the local.¹ However, Meaghan Morris suggests that an alternative strategy for reading the mall as text can involve more participatory observation methodologies “in order to make a place from which to speak other than that of the fascinated describer” (1993 [1988], 299). This emancipation from captive spectatorship in the discourse of globalization may be achieved through self-directed strategies by which individuals and communities can more critically engage modernization and its many challenges. Our study seeks to interrogate the dynamics between the global and local, and open up avenues of agency toward the reinscription and recontextualization of historicized subjectivities.

The present study focuses on Baguio Center Mall (BCM) and the adjacent area of Kagitingan Barangay to determine the transformations that BCM's presence in this part of Baguio City has engendered. We also examine, conversely, how the locale that it was prior to the ingress of the mall transformed or reconfigured the latter's form. Does the discourse in the BCM area reveal the mall's effective imposition of its powerful presence over the place, or are there significant manifestations of local engagement with and resistance to BCM? Does a reading of the area confirm or challenge classical readings of the mall as a form/text?

The study employs a combination of textual analysis and ethnographic research to enable the reading of both the text in itself and the larger purview of context. Our investigation limits itself to an examination of BCM and the abutting area bounded by Dagohoy, Rajah Soliman, Lakandula and Rajah Matanda streets, including the Dangwa Tranco Station.²

Barangay Kagitingan as Place: Beginnings and Evolution

The scholar Edward Soja observes that academic study has, in the modern era, privileged time and history over space and geography. Modernity has been interpreted too quickly and simply as destroying and replacing traditions. Soja argues for modernity to be read more sensitively as a complex reorganization of temporal and spatial relations (1993 [1989]). In line with Soja's call for "geographical and spatial imagination" in theoretical work, our project deploys the theoretical reformulation of the concept of "place" by architect and urban studies scholar Kim Dovey.

Distinction has been made between the concepts of "space" and "place." Many concur that the two terms may be differentiated along the polarity of absence-presence, "where place is marked by face-to-face encounters and space by the relations between absent others" (Giddens 2003 [1990]; Seamon 2003 [1979]; Harvey 2003 [1993], all cited in Barker 2003, 350; page references to its reprint edition). David Harvey, however, argues that to differentiate along such lines alone may be too reductive because "place has a rather richer range of metaphorical meanings than are encompassed by presence" (*ibid.*). Barker adds:

We may distinguish between space and place on the grounds that the latter are the focus of human experience, memory, desire and identity. That is, places are discursive constructions which are the target of emotional identification or investment. (*ibid.*)

Place can be conceived as the subtle topography serving as the actual arena for concrete forces to converge and diverge in pursuit of their goals and specific agendas. Place, thus, renders and mirrors in tangible forms the contending dialogues in otherwise abstract space. It can be read for manifestations of negotiation in the spheres of identity politics, social construction and reconstruction, and “ownership” such that “the constructedness of space may be struggled over and claimed, rather than being ‘just there’ or ‘given’” (Johnson et al. 2004, 110).³

What is apparent from all previous studies is that the concept of “sense of place” does not so much lie in the stability of a “primordial essence” or “*genius loci*....related to the Heideggerian view of primordial ground of being” (Norberg-Shulz 1980, cited in Dovey 2010, 5) as it emerges from the workings of the politics of the everyday. Rather than a static and an essentializing concept, “place” is a fluctuating terrain of “becoming.” Massey in *Space, Place and Gender* suggests that place is best regarded not as a fixed entity but as one which “is outward-looking, defined by multiple identities and histories, [and] its character comes from connections and interactions rather than original sources and enclosing boundaries” (cited in Dovey 2010, 5). Thus understood, a place, for Massey

....may have a character of its own, (but) it is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares....If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point may be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can be either or both, a source of richness or a source of conflict. (ibid.)

Such is the case with Kagitingan Barangay.

What was once a rugged forested area separated by steep ravine on present-day Magsaysay Avenue across the Baguio City market, Kagitingan Barangay has now grown into a bustling community. A few years before World War II, some families, including those of Jose and Maria Cordoviz and Tora Tamo, cleared parts of the area and built modest houses with the help of their native highlander employees. By virtue of their labor on the land where they built houses, these families claimed these lands as personal property.

The city government accorded the inhabitants’ informal claim to the area a measure of acknowledgement when it began collection of a 30-peso rental on the lands occupied by these settlers. At that time, the place bore no specific name; it was just a neighborhood which included the Cordoviz, Tamo, Pinlac, Panglao, Ligpit, Orden, Luna, Davalos, Genove, and Austria families, among others. Some of these early settlers evacuated to the lowlands during Baguio’s turbulent days in WWII but returned to the city when the war ended



Figure 1. This aerial view of Baguio shows that the Northwestern side of Baguio, where Kagitingan Barangay is located, was, at that time, mostly forest area (*Photo courtesy of Mike Ang's Family collection*).

to join those who had stayed to help rebuild the community. These families and other enterprising individuals peddled goods such as rice, camote, and bananas. In 1948, the Ong King family, whose descendants are now prominent businessmen in the city and its outskirts, settled in the area, and was later joined by more Chinese families engaged in various trades. With their increased presence, the area came to be known as the "Chinatown of Baguio." Foreign-owned businesses quickly thrived, given the readiness of foreign entrepreneurs to adapt to the local languages and mores.

From 1950 onwards, a steady influx of assorted business ventures and more settlers from Pangasinan, Manila, other parts of the Cordillera, and China ensured the accelerated development of this central part of the city. A burgeoning and diverse population, plus the sheer variety of business enterprises characterizing the area, soon proved attractive to, and drew, more visitors and intending settlers, frequently resulting in night time brawls and other tensions between the newcomers and locals. Such incidents soon placed the area in much disrepute, becoming known, at some point, as the "Tondo of Baguio." In response to these problems, the residents organized groups of men who patrolled the area at night to keep the peace and reduce the incidence of crimes.

The community came together to rebuild Kagitingan after houses and businesses were razed by a fire in 1960. By the end of the decade (1969), the area was formally recognized as a barangay, a

constituent unit of the city. The first barangay captain of Kagitingan—as it was now so-called, in homage to the heroes after whom the district’s streets were named—was Maria Cordoviz, an original settler, who would serve for thirty-one (31) years. Before the end of the decade, more structures like the Manzanillo Building were built to accommodate growing housing and business requirements, especially as the Dangwa Tranco Terminal began operations in 1969 and jeepney operators transferred their terminals there. This transformation of Kagitingan into a transportation hub allowed more people to travel to Baguio to sell produce, buy provisions, gain education, or seek jobs and entertainment. It also served to consolidate the network of relations within the barangay itself as business owners recruited relatives or townmates from the provinces to help in running their establishments.

The now frenetic pace of business activity in the barangay was interrupted once more by a big fire in 1976, earning for it another monicker, the “Burned Area.” Despite this misfortune and the constraints of Martial Law, businesses continued to flourish, especially the grocery stores that once exclusively catered to local community needs, as owners saw the potential of engaging in wholesale operations with the bus and jeepney terminals conveniently in their midst. The resulting wholesale establishments soon generated a demand, and more employment opportunities, for trusted relatives and townmates, whom the wholesalers could rely on to safeguard their interests and ensure the growth of their businesses. They lived as extended families in apartment-type units. Other enterprises like liquor stores and eateries which served *pulutan* also flourished, including the advent of illegal gambling operations that reinforced



Figure 2. Aerial view of Kagitingan which shows Dangwa Station, Garden Inn, and the “Burned Area” used as terminals for different jeepney lines (Photo from *myBaguio.biz bargains online*).

the notoriety of the place. However, barangay officials continued with organized community efforts to mitigate this negative image and safeguard the emotional and economic investments of the residents in Kagitingan as both their home and source of livelihood.



Figure 3. View of Kagitingan Barangay from the old Dangwa Station overlooking Magsaysay Avenue, the Burned Area, and Hill Top Hotel (*Photo from Panoramio.com*).

Throughout the 1980s, the barangay continued to become a melting pot for peoples of the Cordillera and neighboring provinces attracted to the many business and employment opportunities that it could offer them. But because of peace and order problems, congestion, and the frenzied pace of life there, some resident business-owning families eventually opted to move to the suburbs and other residential areas of the city. The fire in the previous decade had cleared up space which people could use for public community events, and as temporary outlets for an array of goods ranging from clothes and food products to fake jewellery and farm implements. Apart from these makeshift and permanent shops, ambulant vendors peddled their own assortment of goods.

Undergoing many transformations and weathering a multitude of adversities, Kagitingan faced another major challenge when a devastating earthquake struck Northern Luzon and Baguio City on 16 July 1990. The barangay's various infrastructures, such as the Royal Inn, were toppled by the quake and resulted in considerable casualties. Residents took temporary shelter in the open space of the Burned Area, and the devastation caused a significant slump in business activity. But like the rest of the city, the barangay eventually recovered. With the construction of a pedestrian overpass and the



Figure 4. The Royal Inn at the corner of Lapu-Lapu and Rajah Soliman Streets was damaged in the 1990 earthquake. In its place is Jollibee Magsaysay.

subsequent rehabilitation of the surrounding roads, business began to pick up.

The building of Baguio Center Mall (BCM) created significant change. As a prime real estate holding, the BCM presumably modernized the landscape of the central business district. It strategically inaugurated long-term, large-scale development plans for rebuilding the city after the 1990 earthquake and to keep it apace the ongoing modernization and development of other urban centers in the Philippines. BCM's construction and related infrastructure plans brought the local government and the Kagitingan community in direct conflict because the promise of inclusive development did not allay the threat of displacement confronting affected residents.

Community members felt a strong emotional attachment to the place which had served as their home and the locus for their livelihood. BCM would occupy the space where temporary structures housing a variety of business activities had mushroomed, and which residents used for their public and community events. More importantly, the mall threatened their thriving business ventures. Despite the area's notoriety, it was where they had come to master the intricacies of the flows of daily living in the city, enabling them to move across or beyond, and maintain a sense of control over, its territorial boundaries.

Eventually, the development plan prevailed and the opposition against BCM petered out. The mall, in due course, became an integral and central part of the Kagitingan Barangay landscape. With the opening of other malls in Baguio like Abanao Square and SM Baguio, the foot traffic in Center Mall decreased, even as BCM continues to be a vibrant landmark in this part of the Central Business District.



Figure 5. View of Baguio Center Mall from Dangwa Terminal (*Photo from chesswindows.blogspot.com*).

Reconfigurations of Urban Space

Analysis of postmodern architecture reveals a departure from the modernist proclivity for essentialist “univalent” forms—the preference for a “singular theme which dominates structure” (Connor 1997, 79). Modernist architecture was generally characterized by organicism in form connoting self-sufficiency and exclusion. But the autonomy claimed by built structures has been belied by the postmodern style, whose premise is that “architecture always consists precisely in its relationship to what is not itself” (ibid.). In what follows, we examine the Baguio Center Mall and its abutting areas, where a politics in/of place may be discerned in the interplay of power and desire in terms of such a relationship.

One may suppose that the eventual entry of something like the BCM into Kagitingan was inevitable, especially after many years of the area’s untapped economic potential for the city. Following the impetus to rebuild after the devastating 1990 earthquake, the area’s easy accessibility, strategic positioning at the juncture of various economic activities which connect the city with outlying areas in the Cordillera and other lowland locales, density of pedestrian traffic owing to the centrality of its location and proximity to schools, hospitals and public transport terminals, made it ideal for intensive commercial development.



Figure 6. What used to be Kalayaan Street became the access to the underground parking lot of Center Mall.

There were early objections against the BCM's construction. Some barangay constituents asserted that it violated building and city laws, one of which was the encroachment of the mall on public access space with its appropriation of what used to be Lapu-Lapu Street. Relatedly, Kalayaan Street, behind the mall, would cease to be a prospective through-and-through passageway as it became the access to the paid underground parking for the mall. Some residents also resented the mall's displacement of part of the area that had earlier been earmarked for a barangay hall, and for which ground breaking had already been made. Community members also railed against what they felt was the mall developers' total disregard for the means of livelihood of the area's small businesses operators.

Other residents, however, anticipated Kagitingan's up-scaling, a lift in its reputation, and the creation of more job opportunities, with BCM's construction (the mall began operating in 1999). For them, the mall would generate more interest in the district, as it would be the first city structure to offer in one location many of the needs, services, and entertainment attractions for Baguio's visitors and residents.

Cultural critiques of architecture and urban development maintain that buildings and other structures such as malls are by no means merely aesthetic and innocuous edifices. As Dovey points out:

Buildings necessarily both constrain and enable certain kinds of life and experience—they are inherently coercive in that they enforce limits to action and enable social practice to 'take place....' The segmentation of space enables and constrains the production of social capital—the resources made available by



Figure 7. View of Baguio Center Mall (BCM) from Magsaysay Avenue. (Photo from *pbase.com*)

participation in the socio-spatial network. Enclaves, security zones and boundary-control techniques often generate privileged forms of social capital. The task of design is an inherently social practice of negotiating socio-spatial structures, space allocations, boundaries and formal expressions of identity....Architects inevitably manipulate modes of spatial encounter—the issue is not whether but how they do so.” (2010, 38–39)

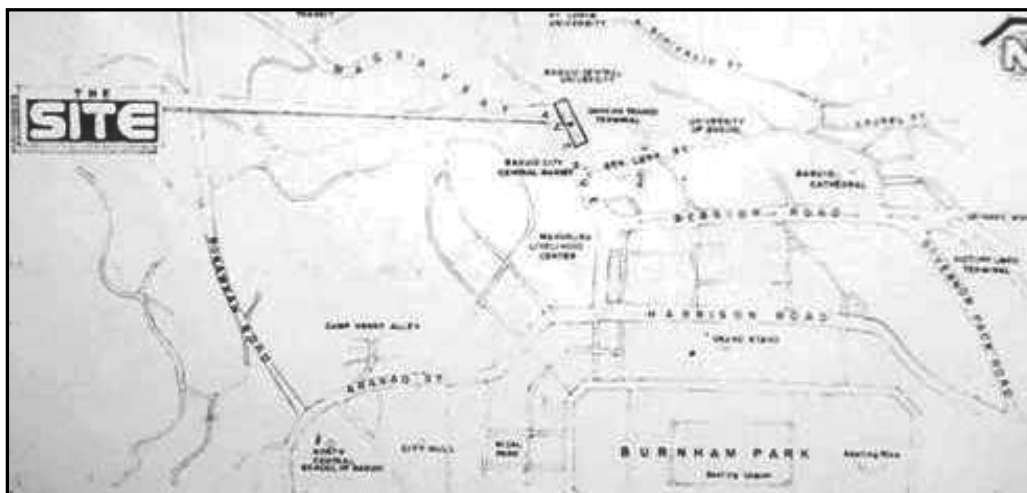


Figure 8. Vicinity map of Baguio Center Mall (BCM).

Blueprint documents and other design plans constitute protean source materials for analysis and may reveal the discursive forces that underlie the built environment. They are not documents which simply function as technical aids for practical engineering. Examining them may reveal the subtle architectonics underlying concrete forms, and the desires or ideology operating in such envisioned and built structures (in our case, BCM).

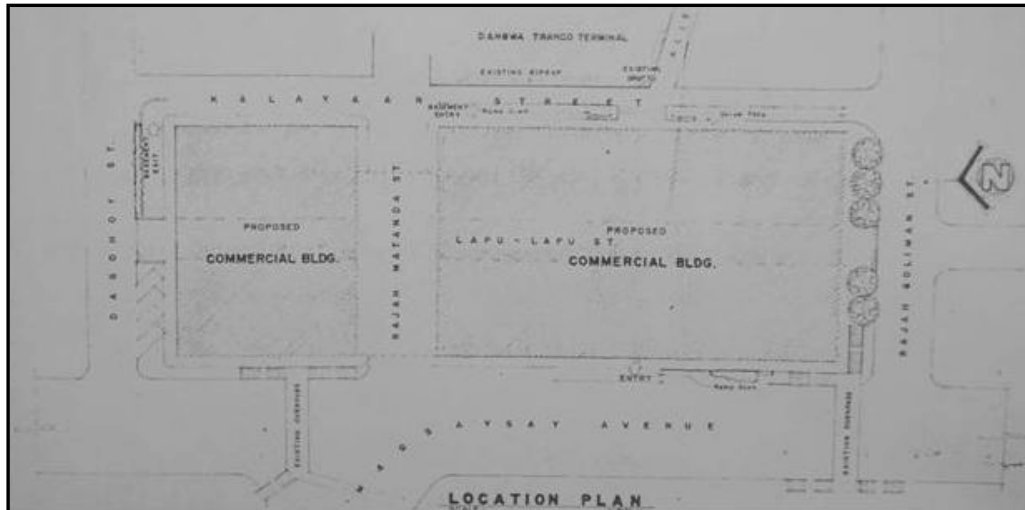


Figure 9. Location plan of BCM proper showing original location of the Lapu-Lapu St. development and what was once a public thoroughfare, and BCM's appropriation of public road for entrance to the basement parking area.

At its inception, BCM was poised to claim a dominant position in the district by the sheer magnitude of the development project as planned, which foresaw great changes in the topography and sought to transform the prevailing way of life in the area through a strategic management and control of space. For one, BCM's development entailed the enclosure of a public access road meant for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Lapu-Lapu St. now exists as the main corridor of the mall's ground floor, open only to pedestrian traffic during regular business hours.

Figure 9 also shows how the encroachment on Kalayaan St. as originally planned sought to sequester the area and prevent through-and-through movement of vehicular traffic. Consequently, primary access to the Dangwa station and the northern perimeter of the barangay is now limited to Rajah Soliman St. Pedestrian access to and from the northern portion of the barangay is regulated through a gated, narrow foot path enclosed by a cyclone wire fence. This passageway was granted to the barangay only because residents contested the mall's encroachment on the public road. The gate at the end of Katipunan Road on the eastern perimeter of the area also allows pedestrian movement from the enclosed area to the north by passage through the private property of the Dangwa terminal. The completed BCM structure would eventually loom large over all the existing structures in the district (Fig. 10). Thus regulated, the section from BCM to the portion more proximal to the city center of Session Road is effectively enclosed and delineated. Activities within the territory can now be more closely monitored in the interest of preserving peace and order, for instance. Its boundaries clearly

defined, the terrain is rendered more viable for further development, with BCM taking the lead and setting the tone for it.



Figure 10. Ongoing construction of Baguio Center Mall (*from a photograph at the Kagitingan Barangay office*).

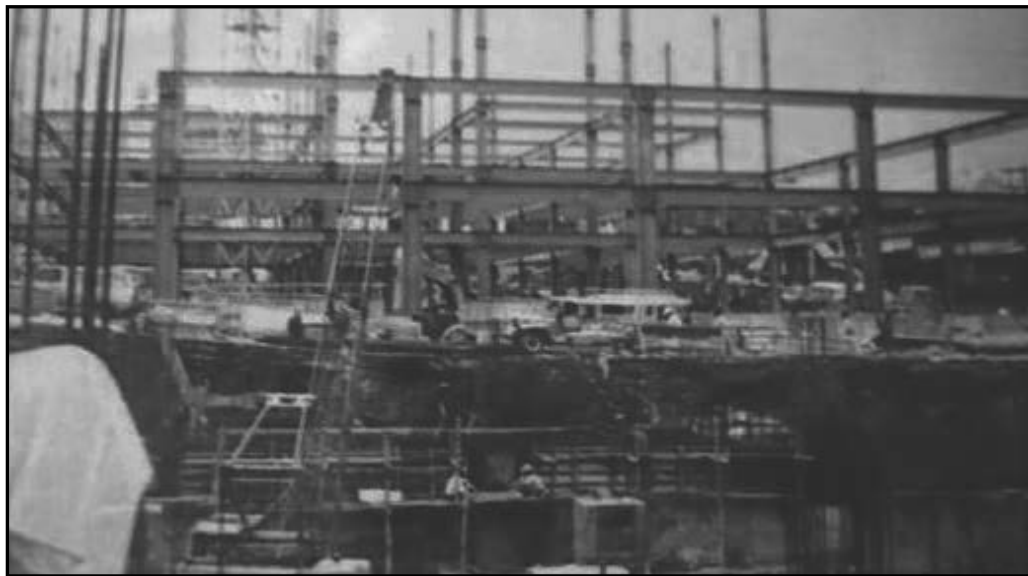


Figure 11. View of ongoing construction with provision for underground parking via Kalayaan St. (*Photo from Kagitingan Brgy. office photograph*).

Close scrutiny of available documentary material reveals the complicity of urban design and architecture with the larger national and global economic forces which work to effectuate the systematic ingress of the global capitalist project into the sphere of the local, and to perpetuate the national government's vision of development, progress, and urban regeneration. As Raco suggests:

The creation of more secure, and aesthetically attractive, urban spaces is increasingly a prerequisite for the design and development of urban regeneration programs. In a context of increasing interurban competition, the creation of attractive or ‘trophy’ developments, which encourage inward investors and visitors, is of growing significance for many development agencies. Places are therefore reconstructed, so that their visual and symbolic meanings are transformed in the interest of market-led development. The strategies, tactics and practice of securing these new urban spaces are essential elements in their marketability. (2003, 1883)

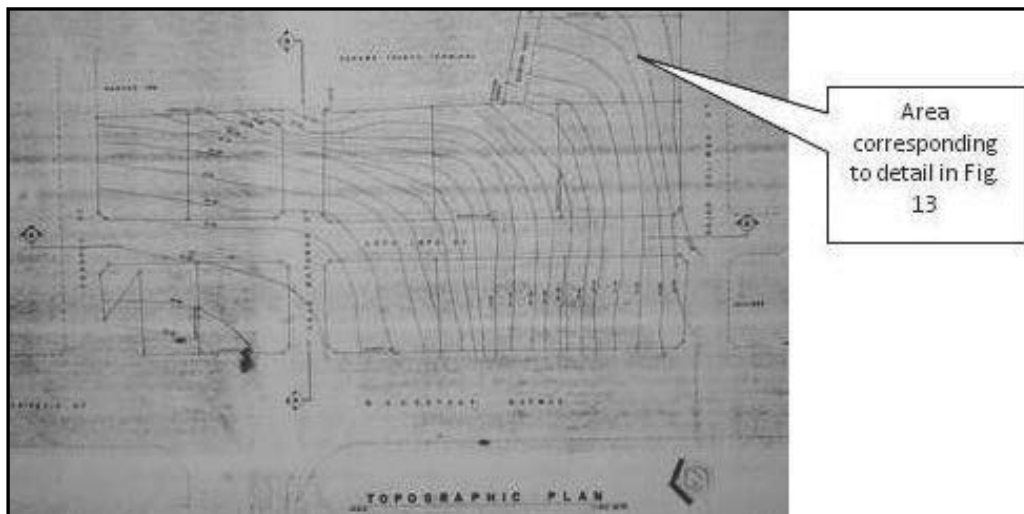


Figure 12. Topographic plan of the BCM development.

As a precise and detailed representation of what appears on the ground, a topographic map functions to provide developers with crucial information such as geographical contours and features that they must take into account in calculating infrastructure production costs, among other and related considerations. The United States Geological Service (USGS) notes that “[a] topographic map shows more than contours. The map includes symbols that represent such features as streets, buildings, streams, and vegetation” (USGS 2012, 1).

Despite the high density of existing infrastructures, the presence of operative business establishments, and some residential quarters, the topographic plan for the BCM construction site (Fig. 12) only gives inerrant representations of the geographical features, the grade of the geographical terrain indicating flat lands and hilly areas, and existing city streets in the district. Only three (3) existing establishments are acknowledged in the topographic representation: the building which houses the popular fast food chain, Jollibee, on the right bottom portion of the map; Dangwa Tranco station toward the upper middle; and an inn on the upper left portion. It

does not take into account the presence of a building which houses business establishments and residential quarters on the quadrant marked with lines along Kagitingan Alley adjacent to the Dangwa Tranco terminal. A superimposition of the plan for BCM ground level development (Figure 13) onto the topographic map enables alternative interpretations.

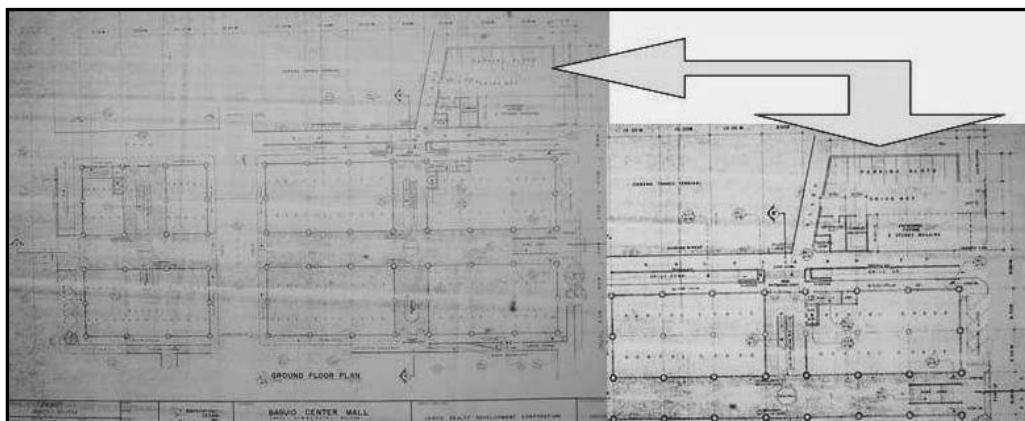


Figure 13. Ground Floor plan of Baguio Center Mall (BCM) with detail of plan for ground level development.

Only the topographic details which the development project considered significant for its purposes are recognized, obviously rendering virtually invisible those which are not. Notwithstanding the presence of existing residential areas and business establishments in the targeted area, the development plan apparently intended not only to appropriate the public access road but also the pertinent quadrant as the proposed location for a two-storey building, BCM's generator room, deep well pump, garage room, and additional ground-level parking slots. The BCM development plan appears as the commencement of a gentrification project aimed at the attainment of maximum economic gain from what its developers perceive as a nonperforming or underperforming real estate asset.

Bourdieu's key concepts of "habitus" and "field" have relevance for our analysis here. He describes habitus as "architectonic spaces whose silent dictates are addressed directly to the body [and] are undoubtedly among the most important components of the symbolism of power, precisely because of their invisibility.... (Bourdieu quoted in Prigg 2008, 46). The term combines "habit" and "habitat." Like ideology, it is a subtle paradigmatic structure which organizes everyday life to generate the effect of a "sense of place," expressed in "the physical configuration of physical space" (Dovey 2010). In BCM's case, one sees physical arrangements of spaces within the larger structure as spurring, directing, and encouraging "preferred behaviours" in the culture of "mallng." In contrast, the

Kagitingan Barangay habitus reflects a proclivity for a “sense of community.”

Bourdieu’s concept of “field” posits that spaces, too, while under the sway of the paradigmatic forces of habitus, are likewise traversed by horizontal/syntagmatic/rhizomatic forces in which what is “at stake” is the loss or gain of capital. Here, Bourdieu does not delimit “capital” to mean only practical economic or monetary gain, and expands it to encompass “cultural, social and symbolic capital.” Cultural capital concerns the superior position one can claim in the social hierarchy because of education and “good breeding,” for example. Social capital comes from enabling networks of social relations involving one’s community, family, friends, or say, one’s membership in elite social clubs. Social capital allows for a sense of “wellconnectedness” which one may wield to exercise influence, or gain access to strategic spaces. Symbolic capital, a type of cultural capital, is seen to inhere in objects or individuals able to acquire iconic status, and exchange it for desirables such as “honour,” “taste,” “class,” and others (Dovey 2010).

Architectural structures possess the capacity to contribute to the accumulation of cultural, symbolic, and economic capital and a reconfiguration of the social capital existent in contemporary sites of development. “From Bourdieu’s perspective, aesthetic producers such as architects and urban designers seem inextricably enmeshed in practices of symbolic domination. Any design that catches the imagination is available for appropriation as symbolic capital” (Dovey 2010, 38). In BCM’s instance, modern building design, and the involvement of a billion-peso corporation with international operations in the area both ensure and increase economic and symbolic capital for its developers, and presumably, in “trickle-down fashion,” for Kagitingan itself. The location of the Dangwa Tranco terminal in the area development plan augments social capital, with the connection between the global and local that it symbolically makes. The image portrayed in the finalized architectural perspective for BCM and its surroundings is that of a modern, progressive enclave. Ground-level actualities are ignored, and replaced with the chimera of development.

Urban development design purveys the “myth of identity” (Morris 1993 [1988], 393) in its pursuit of predetermined ends. It grafts the illusion of upward urban mobility onto space to seduce the potential investor with the promise of increased economic capital and enthrall the viewer with the illusory guarantee of enhanced symbolic capital to neutralize or efface what are conceived as obstacles to progress. In the project of gentrification, what the dominant elite perceives as expendable societal detritus is efficiently erased, rendering actualities of everyday life invisible and illegible.

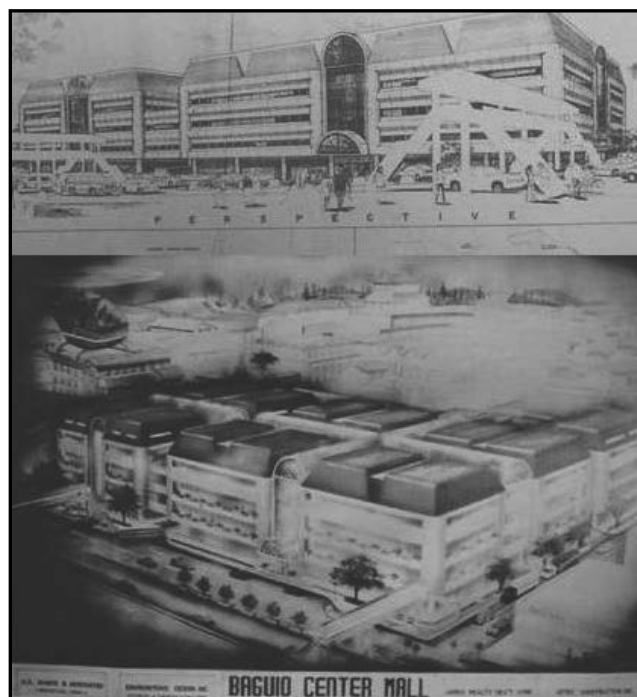


Fig. 14. Final perspectives of BCM development plan (lower image from a photograph in Brgy. Kagitingan office).

For Dovey, “built form constructs meanings through signs and symbols [and the] question is not whether architecture constructs identities and stabilizes meanings, but how and in whose interests.... Architecture is not the givenness that it projects itself to be but “always mediates spatial practices in a semi-coercive manner....it enables and it constrains....” (Dovey 2010, 45).

In BCM’s case, as our study shows, development design has had to contend with the challenges and oppositions posed to it by the affected community. As a result of these engagements, expressions of resistance, and negotiations, both the mall and its outlying areas are transformed. The ideology which originally underpinned mall design and construction has been somehow mediated such that rather than the original architectural vision, what has resulted is a highly-contested field. The ensuing terrain is one of a vibrant hybrid assemblage which shifts constantly between public and private, legal and illegal, sacred and secular, day and night, hierarchical forces and rhizomatic practices, all pulsating in a continuing activity of placemaking or, in Dovey’s terms, “becoming-places.”⁴

Urban Assemblage, BCM, and the Politics in/of Place

In *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power* (2010), Kim Dovey points out that the traditional conception of place is that

of an inert entity unmotivated by the movements of its inhabitants. He observes that this belief ignores important considerations in the examination of place and suggests that there must be a “move from conceptions of place as stabilized being towards places of becoming” (Dovey 2010, 13). Dovey takes off from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze which rethinks the concept of power proposed by Michel Foucault.

According to Foucault, power is decentered in “dispersed micropractices” which means that people are not simply subjected to power, but rather are participants themselves in its uniform fields or operations.

Deleuze takes this Foucaultian concept of power further and says that it is not preexisting beings who hold power or are subject to it, rather power is linked to flows of desire and processes of becoming. For Deleuze, desire is the primary force for life; it is immanent to everyday life and not limited to the human world.... Desire begins as a flow of life, an event of becoming that precedes being and identity. As desire becomes coded and organized it becomes identities, organisms or things and assemblages. (Dovey 2010, 15)



Fig. 15. Community and the “bayanihan” spirit in Kagitingan Barangay. Long-time Brgy. Captain Maria Cordoviz directs community clean-up drive. Bottom right: civic spirit goes to the city center (*Photos from the Cordoviz family collection*).

As an urban landscape, Kagitingan, while a hub of vigorous economic activity, is also a neighborhood in which its inhabitants feel rooted and thereby experience it as home or a community of belonging. Its communal character stems from the historical connections linking the people who first built their homes and established businesses in the place. Its extended family networks

find expression in the spatial configuration of residential structures and quarters: there are no single, detached homes but apartment blocks which house entire families sharing living spaces, or renting out rooms to relatives and townmates. With this communal-domestic arrangement, residents have forged intimate and sympathetic relationships as indicated, for instance, in the shared concern for children who grow up together and attend common schools. Recollecting the community's beginnings, Barangay Captain Reynaldo Cordoviz nostalgically traces his togetherness with neighbors like the Ordens and the Davalos to the childhood games they played growing up on Rajah Soliman street. These relationships have persisted, extending to the members of the next and new generation.



Fig. 16. Securing the home (Photo from Brgy. Kagitingan photo collection).

The closely knit character of this community stabilizes its identity as a residual neighborhood in the central business district, fostering a desire among younger generations to ensure that their families' homegrown businesses continue to thrive. This desire in the younger generation to carry on with the family business traditions encourages entrepreneurial innovations among them, reinventing certain business practices, for instance, to manage and meet changing consumer and client demands. An illustrative example is the restaurant Ad Laine on the Lakandula Street side of the Manzanillo Building. Like most restaurants in Kagitingan, this one uses a retail strategy called *tukab* (local term for "to open"). With this arrangement, the restaurant displays a variety of dishes contained in sets of aluminum pots arranged on a stand by the entrance. Upon entry into the restaurant, customers open these pots

to select the combination of dishes to be served to them. Customers are then seated in a dining area which consists of wooden tables with chairs that have high shared backrests, there to await for the attendants to deliver their chosen aliments. Recently, this restaurant, upscaled its furniture to leather-upholstered chairs with matching tables. In addition, a glass refrigeration unit was installed to display fancy cakes and confections. The pots have also been replaced by stylish ceramics with clear glass covers to spare customers from having to open every container for their choice dishes. Nonetheless the menu has remained the same. Though still reliant on the old concept of *tukab*, which regular patrons associate with Kagitingan dining establishments, this cosmetic upgrade unquestionably makes them competitive with the grander and more modern BCM restaurants in terms of attracting customers.

The primary product of the mediation and remediation of flows of desires is what Deleuze calls an assemblage. Elaborating this Deleuzean concept, Dovey (2010) describes an assemblage as a whole whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts. It is best regarded as a state of affairs, not as a thing or a collection of components. It is also not an organized system in the sense that its workings are not determined in advance. The parts of an assemblage are contingent rather than necessary. They are aggregated, mixed, and composed; as in a machine they can be dismantled and then inlaid and repurposed in other assemblages.

Kagitingan as a kind of assemblage may be better delineated using another concept developed by Deleuze, that of the contrast between tree-like systems and rhizomatic networks. Deleuze defines tree-like systems as those which are organized hierarchically with roots, stem, and branches, and are therefore focused on the separation of entities in accord with a higher-level order. Rhizomatic ones are those characterized by horizontal lines of movement, network, and connectivity, thus making them more open to exchange, choice, and encounter (Dovey 2010).

With its expressly communal personality, Kagitingan takes on the features of a rhizomatic network rather than a hierarchical arboreal system. Community members participate in a permeable network characterized by strategic decisions for partnerships, assistance, cooperation, and complicities that allow for simultaneous exchange and gain among and between them. Most of the shopkeepers, for instance, have intimate knowledge of each other's location and trade, enabling a wide system of referrals for customers looking to purchase or avail of specific items and services. At Lakandula and Rajah Soliman Streets, a consensual arrangement between permanent shop owners and ambulant vendors tacitly obtains. The shop owners allow the ambulant vendors to sell their goods in front

of their shops and, in return, the ambulant vendors act for such shops either as barkers who invite customers in, or as runners for the owners' errands when necessitated. Participants in this enterprise show awareness of proprieties in relation to space-use. As indication of courtesy, ambulant vendors avoid selling goods in areas where the shops peddle the same or similar merchandise. Among the ambulant vendors themselves, there is a fast-responding network of warning each other when law enforcement is on its rounds to clear the sidewalks of illegal sellers. As opposed to a hierarchy in the mall whose central administration makes single-handed, and sometimes detrimental, decisions based on corporate guidelines, the community's rhizomatic network fosters a cooperative environment that enables everyone to ply their trades.

Deleuze's idea of the tree and rhizome corresponds to his other concept of smooth and striated space. The term 'striated,' in its etymological links to the Latin *stringere* (to draw tight), connotes what is strict and stringent, contrasted with 'smooth' which is understandable as an absence of boundaries or joints, and not as something homogenous. Smoothness implies a slipperiness and movement where one slides seamlessly from one identity, meaning, and image, to another. Striated space is where identities and spatial practices have become stabilized in strictly bounded territories, with the spatial practices choreographed, and the identities socially controlled. Smooth space is identified with movement and instability through which stable territories are erased and new identities and spatial practices become possible. Every real place is a mixture of the two in a reciprocal relation, constantly enfolded into each other. Folding is another key term for Deleuze; it involves a focus away from things, elements, or points of stability, and on the movements between them, especially as one morphs into the other. This focus on the interstitial is a way to rethink binary and dialectical oppositions, and entails the enfolded into each other of the different spaces and functions of public/private, sacred/secular, day/night, legal/illegal and local/global (Dovey 2010).

Public/Private

One manifestation of folding is the blurring of boundaries between public and private spaces. Although official statistics from the barangay indicates that 80% of the area is for business and 20% for private residence, no clearly delineated boundary between private and public space is discernible, as may be gleaned from Figure 17.

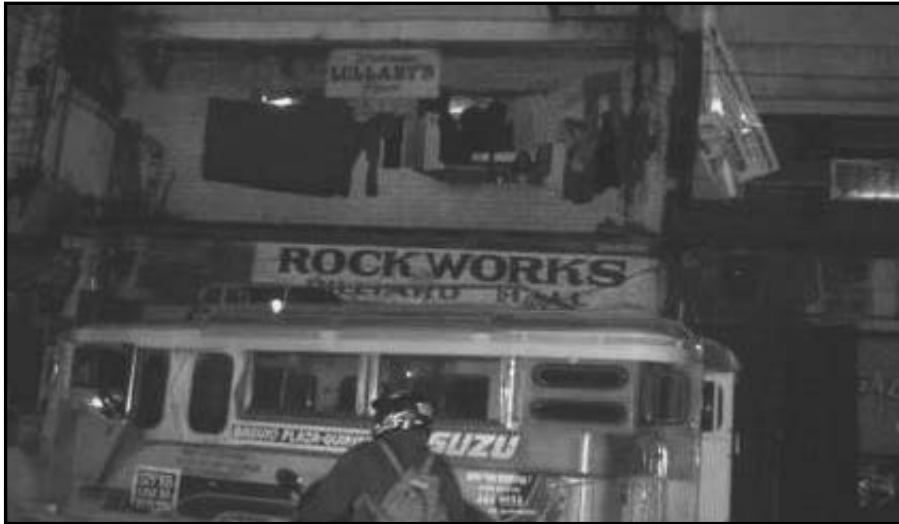


Figure 17. Public and private spaces are not clearly delineated.

In this photographic scene, the image of the jeepney invokes a public character, being for many the usual means of public transportation (jeepneys plying different routes to and from Baguio such as Baguio-Balatok, Baguio-Antamok, Baguio-Sangilo, and others, have their terminals in Lakandula and Rajah Soliman Streets). The message of the advertisement board, “Welcome Lullaby’s Place,” also conjures the “publicness” of the space, pitched as it is to potential customers. But the blurring between the categories private and public may be seen in the laundry hung on a clothesline strewn across the windows. Laundry signifies “domesticity” and the private domain, but in this case is displayed in the same public space as Lullaby’s appeal to prospective customers, who are given a privileged peek of the personal effects of the residents. The building in itself which house commercial enterprises on its first two floors doubles as residence for owners or their relatives/workers on the upper floors, or in some corner rooms of the building’s commercial spaces.

The Kagitingan Barangay Office is, in itself, another instance of the folding of public and private because this space for public service is situated in a private domicile. Immediately before the entrance to the barangay hall on the building’s second floor, one finds a shop that buys gold, silver, and broken jewelry. The shop’s tarpaulins are plastered on the wall alongside the barangay hall’s schedules of services and the listing of barangay officers. Upon entry into the hall, one sees a living room setup, with couches and personal and religious paraphernalia on one side, and office space for the officer on duty and the Barangay Captain’s desk, on the other. This space announces its “official” character with the display of the Philippine flag and the standard studio photograph of the incumbent national

president. These examples show that the boundary between private and public spaces is subject to continuous enfolding, particularly with regard to the ways in which private activities spill into the public domain. Boundaries between and among domestic affairs, government functions, and retail activities that are blurred in these enfoldings are clearly not maintained at all, and this free mixing of them seems to be accepted as a regular practice, despite what might strike credulous observers as its patent incongruities.

Day/Night



Figure 18. Night time economics at Lapu-Lapu Street.

Commerce in this area flows not stop and is round the clock. Enterprise alternates itself to make the most out of day and night. The drugstore seen in Figure 18 operates at daytime and closes in the early evening but its earning potential as a space is seized by nocturnal vendors of instant coffee, instant noodles, and boiled eggs (the usual fare for people on graveyard shifts, like BCM's or Jollibee's security guards or the employees of 24-hour establishments, including the taxi drivers who need their coffee breaks from plying the nightly hours).

The sliding of night into day, or vice versa, may also be seen in the doubling (or tripling) of the use or purposes of space for some businesses. Stalls that buy gold or sell fruits, vegetables, and meat during the day morph into videoke bars or billiard halls by nightfall, a creative strategy for owners or rentiers that maximizes their spaces of operation for profit.

Legal/Illegal



Figure 19. A makeshift newspaper and cigarette stand outside center mall.

As categories, “legal” and “illegal” tend to be maintained rigidly in modern society, with the first term as the positive value invoking legitimacy conferred by regulatory entities, and the second term as the negative value generating disauthorization and lack of status, for those so-labelled. With BCM’s establishment, this polarity between legal and illegal entities was among the issues raised. The open area was once the site for makeshift stalls, although some stall occupants may have been operators who duly paid the proper taxes and fees required by the city government. The open set-up allowed for the possible entry of other businesses able to evade city regulations and due compliance with requirements. The construction of the mall struck some as an effort to eliminate the vendors who, by their itinerancy, could not be easily be traced and taxed. The local government apparently needed to institute a mechanism for this purpose. With BCM, the battle seemed to have been won by the authorities and corporate interests. But the illegal manages to seep into the folds of the legal and to interrupt its comfortable monopoly. Cases of illegal vending of stolen cellphones inside the mall, for instance, eventually came to the attention of BCM managers who had to put up conspicuous signs at the entrances warning the public about and against engaging in these criminal activities. Though it is now weighed down by concrete and steel, the notorious “Burned Area” appears to remind the new occupant that it has not succeeded in eliminating transgressions.

Aside from illegal vendors who invade the inside, itinerant vendors persist in displaying their wares by the mall’s main entrances although they are constantly on watch for mall security and local police out to apprehend or accost them. Figure 20 shows the contrast

between the legal 456 Supermart and Mercury drugstore inside BCM and the illegal makeshift stand selling newspapers, candy, and e-load that is set up at night against the wall, by the sidewalk along Dagohoy Street. To some degree, mall administration and law enforcement have become tolerant of illegal vendor activity, especially at night.

The opening of SM Baguio by 2003 significantly reduced BCM's foot traffic, resulting in the closure of legitimate businesses inside the mall. The most recent changes involved the closure of two of the four cinemas, and of Plaza Fair, a tenant that occupied a large area on the second floor. The space thus vacated is now occupied by tenant stalls that sell clothes for the most part, in a set-up resembling that of makeshift stores in the area before BCM's establishment. Apart from making spaces available to permanent tenants, management now accommodates temporary vendors and grants temporary contracts to tenants who occupy the center aisles of its three floors. These tenants also sell their wares in carts or makeshift stalls. Baguio Center Mall continues to operate, with periodic changes in its original floor plan.

The way these vendors occupy the aisle space recalls the bygone makeshift stalls that lined the former Burned Area. Unlike the earlier itinerant vendors, however, these mall vendors now enjoy a "legitimized" status on account of their monthly rents. But such status seems vague in contrast to the permanent tenants occupying the mall's designated retail spaces. The makeshift aisle retailers appear "illegitimate" with their subsumption of public access spaces. Despite this awkward placement, such makeshift retailers generate much of the mall's economic activity compared to the legitimate tenants. Several permanent tenants closed shop while these makeshift retailers, limited to renewable six-month contracts, have now become permanent fixtures of the mall.



Figure 20. Makeshift shops at the center aisles of the mall.

Sacred/Secular

The contrast between the sacred and the secular is as rigid as the binary between legal and illegal. The sacred is ascribed a web of transcendent meanings such as salvation and divinity, to the disadvantage of the secular, with its vaunted worldliness. Spurring selectivity and exclusion, the sacred and the secular usually do not mix. But the strict demarcation between them is breached by certain typical configurations in Kagitingan such as the juxtaposition of ad copy for a spa and an announcement of a religious event posted on the walls of Manzanillo building shops (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Ad for a spa and a poster inviting the public to a religious event.

A spa is a space for self-indulgence and its hedonistic inflections contradict the doctrine of modesty and restraint preached in religious fellowships. But when these texts appear twinned as they do on many walls in the area, their incongruity is somehow diminished by the people's apparent disinterest in their otherwise clearly opposing propositions as statements.

Such disregard for the division between godly and earthly attributes is manifest in the configuration of Katipunan Street itself, known for an entire block of restaurants that serve dog meat and transform into videoke bars at night. Prostitution is suspected to be rampant, especially after a hotel in Kagitingan opened a new branch on an adjacent street. The hotel's expansion reportedly encourages this flourishing sex trade, from which, in turn, it might have conceivably derived the profits to finance the new extension.

On the corner of Katipunan and Kalayaan Streets behind Center Mall, one finds a shrine devoted to the local Virgin Mary, "Our Lady of Kagitingan." This shrine was put up through the efforts of long-time barangay Captain Maria Cordoviz, a devoted Catholic. According to her son Reynaldo, who succeeded her in the position,



Figure 22. Our Lady of Kagitingan at the corner of Kalayaaan Street.

this shrine was installed after the two big fires that razed the area as an entreaty to the Virgin for protection. In Kagitingan, one might say, the Virgin Mary has no problems coexisting with the Magdalenes. But to recall the biblical narrative, Jesus Christ dared the Israelites prosecuting Magdalene to cast the first stone if they were without sin, and with this act he forgave and accepted her into the fold.

A similar enfolding of the sinful into the holy characterizes this coexistence of Mary and the sex trade workers, together with the outlawed serving and consumption of dog meat by Kagitingan residents and patrons. It is consistent with the pragmatic attitude of people in this community who recognize the need to adjust to the changing times in the productive pursuit of their livelihoods. But beyond this pragmatism, the openness of the community to the mixing of the incompatible, like the maintenance of religious traditions alongside the practice of worldly trade, may indicate the community's anchorage in collective practice for providing members with a sense of belonging despite the powerful forces that constantly challenge their claims to place. Reynaldo Cordoviz observes that the current religious gatherings are not mere collective expressions of religious faith. He reveals that during his mother's extended term as barangay captain, people assembled at certain times of the day to seek divine intercession by praying the rosary at the shrine, but these days, despite plural religious affiliations, people in the community still gather and pray in ecumenism, as prayer no longer follows the distinctly Catholic practice of previous years. These prayer assemblies now function to provide a grounding in "tradition," which enables community members to maintain a sense of place crucial to their resistance against the homogenizing impulses of the global.

Local/Global

Nowadays, local government units are fond of the term “glocalization” or the slogan “think locally, act globally.” Usually delivered by politicians to rally their constituents around a sound-bite cosmopolitanism, such expressions work as mere slogans that make parsimonious what are otherwise derivative ideas. On Holland Restaurant in Lakandula Street, however, a productive merging between the local and the global can be observed. Figure 23 shows that the restaurant’s name is emblazoned on a traditional musical instrument called the *solibao*; next to it are other cultural icons: the *gangsa* (gong), *kulaleng* (nose flute) and the horn of a cow depicted here as a trumpet.



Figure 23. Holland Restaurant at Lakandula Street.

One may read the superimposition of “Holland” on a local instrument as a sign for the literal merging of the local and the global. Holland certainly refers to the European country where, according to the waitresses, the owner (who hails from Kapangan, Benguet) works as a nurse. The restaurant then becomes a material realization of the flow of global resource into local enterprise. Often, when the global comes in, the local is written over because of the asymmetry in power involved in this equation. But the obliteration of the local does not happen in this case because the local and the global coexist unproblematically. This restaurant like the entire barangay (including Baguio Center Mall), is a vibrant locus for the enfolding of smooth and striated spaces that traverse and mediate the desires of both the mall developers and local community members.

A recent phenomenon on Katipunan Street involving Katipunan Café, an establishment owned by the family of Paul Sunggay, an artist who belongs to the Victor Oteyza Community Art Space (VOCAS) Group of Artists, is most telling. Originally an eatery with

a menu that featured, aside from the regular fare, traditional *pulutan* usually consumed with gin, it has slowly evolved into an alternative art space for performances and exhibits within the past five years. For example, this café was the venue for 2012 KAPWA Conference activities, which sought to bring together various indigenous community representatives with academics and local community members in the interest of cultural exchange.

This particular site and phenomenon deserves further investigation, evincing a “cosmopolitanization” at work (the most immediate indicator of which is the adoption of the term “café” for the establishment). The phenomenon and discourse of cosmopolitanization that this refunctioning of the establishment indicates is clearly subject to mediations in and of place. In BCM-Kagitingan Barangay’s case, the forces of “gentrification from without” are engaged and redirected by the forces of what might be termed as “gentrification from within,” suggesting that forces in and of place allow individuals and communities to mediate and redirect externally-imposed forces to effectuate change “on their own terms.”

Conclusion

BCM’s establishment in Kagitingan presumably sought to gentrify it and keep it apace with the march of urbanization and modernity, and aligned with the vision for a Baguio as premier tourist destination. Such development of the area was partially encouraged by a desire to countervail, if not change, the image of notoriety that it had acquired through time. It also inaugurated the series of infrastructure developments that ensued there in later years.

From the small, closely-knit neighborhood of several families who first cleared land and resided there, Kagitingan has grown into a bustling mixed-use (commercial and residential) space. Many of the original inhabitants have left; the core community has been dispersed but some still remain. New establishments have taken root and despite the presence of a modern mall, businesses outside the mall continue to thrive, primarily due to established relationships cultivated through the years between business owners and customers. The mall effectively displaced seasonal business enterprises whose temporary stalls and occasional business activities in what was once an open area constituted the practice that had long been associated with the place. Such business patterns and practices were perceived to run counter to the image of an orderly urbanized landscape. But despite initial opposition to the mall, the community eventually accepted and accommodated it. Although an initial agreement that the mall would house the barangay hall did not materialize, the mall

remains open for barangay activities: a case of a public space being accommodated, in turn, by a privately-owned structure.

The construction of the mall drastically changed the landscape, and disrupted the regular rhythm of community life in Kagitingan. But by the same token, the projected vision of developers was not fully realized, with patterns of Kagitingan as lived space inducing a reconfiguration of mall practice. Rather than the common rigid experience of mall order and regimented movement, operative processes in the community outside found a way into mall space. The mall was compelled to make concessions (e.g. regarding use of spaces) so that a return of the investment in its construction could be recouped, and for it to remain a viable space for business. Unable to quash small-scale community enterprises even as it effectively displaced them, the mall, with the persistence of local practices withstanding, if not deflecting, its onslaught, failed to impose an order over the abutting areas and maintain a boundary between its legitimized space and the host community's.

Our study of the BCM area reveals that against the classical reading of the mall, which attributes primacy to global forces, the local is never fully effaced. Just as BCM transformed the locale, community forces likewise reconfigured global processes embodied by the mall as a structure. And in its engagement with global flows, the local is able to deploy particularities of place with creativity so as not to be overcome by such encroaching forces from without.

NOTES

1. A related study presented at the 2009 Baguio Centennial Conference by Ruth M. Tindaan, "SM Baguio and the Politics of Space," confirms this pattern. Tindaan notes that SM Baguio enlists nostalgia by appropriating the old colonial story to re-inscribe its presence in the world of contemporary Baguio. Regarding the mall's architecture, she observes how traditional structures are rewritten in the interest of appropriating the trope of Baguio as a "romantic space" and site for perpetual rejuvenation. Consequently, SM conjures for the mall-goer an illusion of omnipotence, primarily pandering to voyeuristic desires to enable capitalist access to the consumer's wallet. Finally, she calls attention to the displacement of the "ethnic" and notes that although the latter is given a measure of accommodation in this space, his/her presence is still reduced to ambiguity. In the end, Tindaan argues that this accommodation/appropriation of local culture continues to recapitulate the old colonial story of the peripheralization and displacement of the native.
2. A document from the Records and Archives Management Division of the Baguio General Services Office titled "Brief History of Baguio

Barangays," and compiled in 2002, includes a history of Kagitingan Barangay prepared by the Sangguniang Barangay headed by the Barangay Captain Maria Cordoviz.

3. Previous studies (see Pred 1999 [1990]; Tolentino 2004; Morris 1993 [1988]; Yeoh 2009; Venturi 1997 [1977], as cited in Connor 1977) have shown how such engagements, rather than the recourse to an essentialist core, are integral to the activity of "place making" and are what account for anyone's "sense of place."
4. Dovey's notion of "becoming places" (2010) frames our readings and mappings of the cityscape altered by BCM's erection in Baguio's central district. "Becoming" here is used not as a verb but as a verb in progressive form functioning as an adjective to describe the concept of "place" as dynamic "fields of activity" rather than homeostatic states of being. Central to the work of Dovey is the idea of place as in constant flux with the continual engagements between and among internally-driven and externally-propelled socio-economic forces which intermittently come to states of relative stability and equilibrium (Dovey deploys Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the plateau here) and get propelled into movement, re-organization, and change in response to historical contingencies. This concept of "place" leaves the field open for the inclusion of a theory of agency in global-local encounters. Place and being "in place" is what allows individuals and communities to claim historicity (i.e. a "grounding" / presence in history as opposed to being absent in it and therefore 'ahistorical') to effectively engage with the homogenizing, de-historicizing, hegemonic forces of globalization. Discussion subdivisions in this section are adopted from Dovey and Polakit, "Urban Slippage: Smooth and Striated Streetscapes in Bangkok," in Dovey (2010).

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