

Utopia, Bensalem, Atlantis and the Philippine City: The Challenges of Linking Selected Arcadian Literature to *Pinoy* Urban Reality

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ABSTRACT

Among the numerous wonderlands and other fanciful places extant in world literature since the 16th-century coining of the word “utopia” by Sir Thomas More, this study revisits three insular ideals whose enduring identities may be called upon to speak to present-day realities of an archipelagic nation-state like the Philippines. The full texts of More’s *Utopia*, Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, and Plato’s *Atlantis* are first reviewed under a historical lens to appreciate contextual aspects that could have influenced the authors’ writings. Next, selected characteristics are compared in so far as these emphasize how such imaginary societies define themselves, how ideal governance is attained, and what geospatial features are required. Using these as a basis, the author then proceeds to problematize how contemporary place-making and urban planning may be either compared or contrasted with such Arcadian literature in terms of civilization, rule of law, and spatiality. Based on the examination of the three texts and discussion of urban projects, the research suggests that while perceptions of historical context and the predisposition of geography have a theoretical influence on the written descriptions and aspirations to utopia, applying the same assumptions to the Philippine case is differently mediated by various factors, such as the urban legacies of a colonial past and the prevailing culture(s) and lay of the land.

Keywords: Utopia, historicism, urban ideal, city plan

“Because utopias tend to be the products of scholars and bookworms, it is not surprising that from the time of the concept’s (or at least the term’s) formal birth in the Renaissance, it has attracted quite a bit of academic attention...”

- Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010
from the Introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions
of Historical Possibility*, Princeton Press.

UTOPIAN LITERATURE AND THE RISE OF URBAN PLANNING

Those who study the progress of civilizations—in particular the florescence, decline, and renewal of cities—will note that theorizing on the urban phenomenon has been invariably accompanied throughout history by a parallel stream of fiction that describes the existence of earthly paradises in which ideal communities thrive. This flux has been both continual and copious, if one harks back to Eden-like notions in exegetic Apocrypha, and considers that fanciful locales like Shangri-La and Oz have captured the imaginations of the literati and kindergarten kids alike, on a global scale. All this took place long before the technical disciplines of urban planning and architecture ever problematized in a classroom setting Ebenezer Howard's seminal *Garden City* (1898) or Le Corbusier's *La Ville Radieuse* (1924). Such literature evokes the rich undercurrent of humanity's utopian aspirations, whose details change and evolve dialectically along with the technology and sociocultural exchanges that represent the possibilities of each passing epoch. This literature has also flowed into, and enriched the discipline of city planning and urban studies in general, which arose from the geometric layouts of draftsmen and artists of the European Renaissance who sought to impose a notion of anthropocentric order upon nature or imbue a place with religious symbolism, although this would sometimes be modified by the nature and massing of landforms in selected sites (Kostof 34-45). Planning came into its own as a distinct spatial discipline, expanding on architecture with sociological and institutional aspects after the Second World War in Europe, and soon thereafter in the Americas (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones 11-54) and in the former European colonies of Asia. Amid all these decades, a small but distinct strain of architectural diagrams accompanied by detailed descriptions of ideal communities appears to approximate the visionary turn in literature, so that one could say that the idea of "utopia" had at least lent its name to the planning field, although contemporary practitioners do include a significant minority whose members still dedicate themselves to developing the discourse on utopian plans per se, as well as the non-technical sources that probably inspired such schema. Returning to the texts, the insights of this integrative discussion draw from three of the earliest exemplars of utopian literature—also called Arcadian literature. Using these texts, the author discusses commonalities, differences, and salient features in order to elaborate the challenges of assembling a bridge, however tentative, between them and developing-country urban realities encountered in the Philippines. It asks the question, which elements of such fictional idylls, in so far as they reflect the historic influences of their times, may resonate differently (or not at all) when one tries to mirror similar representations that influenced Filipino urban reality? And how does this literature speak to, or appear to set, the standard against which attempts to govern urban spaces and portray the good life may be measured?

EXPOSITORY APPROACH AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main thread of thought that runs through all parts of this study is that the events and sociopolitical discourses native to a given historical era, and the corresponding public perceptions that they engender, find their way selectively into the imaginative literature of the lead writers of that age. At the same time, while the same literature that future generations inherit from past eras may inspire or influence *per se*, its robustness as a template or ideal-type conflates with different mediating realities, especially because of changes imposed by later technology, geography, and future authors' perceptions. Some sort of relation or transcendence is therefore called for, to link relatively straightforward readings of text by the critic to the more inconstant boundaries of governance—especially in the planning and city management fields, that may draw on past literature about ideal cities, or the trends and concerns of the day, which in turn give birth to contemporary versions of Utopia. The whole frame is problematized using a Philippine example, *vis-à-vis* three texts whose provenance is remote in space and time from the latter, but which are superficially similar to the group of islands that the author demonstrates is more identifiable as an ideal place after the fashion of its pertinent agenda-setters rather than extracted solely from some foreign utopian archetype.

Apart from a brief tally of basic formalist elements, the opening discussion shall draw initially from new historicist tradition developed by Greenblatt in the 1980s which looks beyond the factual historical provenance of the texts and their authors, and seeks out the possibilities of a more informed or deliberate interplay between the writing of such literature and its context. An erstwhile example of this can be seen in McGann's (1981) interpretation of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; in which McGann recounts the revisions throughout the late 18th to the 19th centuries of the poem in response to criticism of its somewhat mixed ballad elements. As explained alternatively by Dogan: "Literature, for new historicism, is a social and cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness, and it cannot be diminished to a product of a single mind. Therefore, the best way of analysis is achieved through the lens of the culture that produced it" (81).

Taking from Greenblatt and McGann the idea that literature is not just an individual but a social creation, this paper joins it to another set of explanatory ideas in the mass communication theory of agenda-setting, which looks at how other powerful agents (e.g. leaders, colonizers, technical innovators) can set, shape, and otherwise influence the public discourses and perspectives of a given time period. Agenda-setting, first identified by the journalist Walter Lippman in the 1920s, was more

systematically studied by McCombs & Shaw in 1968. The latter defined agenda-setting as the creation of public awareness and concern for salient issues by the news media; in other words, what gets talked about by perceived authorities or legitimate sources tends to assume a veneer of relative importance. Thus, the concerns of a society, in particular an urban society that has regular access to printed media, radio, television, and the internet, can be influenced by the current issues of the day, which have become increasingly more open to conscious manipulation by wealthy and powerful interests that control media and the usual sources of news. This influence extends to literary products, in so far as they are expressions of the authors' knowledge of the world and their aspirations to better that milieu. Literary texts, following this reasoning, are reflections not solely of their historical contexts, but of the perceptions of those contexts as shaped by the dominant discourses of the day.

While there are a huge number of choices of texts that can be analyzed to prove this influence, in order to contain the discussion, neither shall the author discuss more than a trio among the scores of well-known utopias in fiction, nor even the more recent creation of infamous counter-utopias or dystopias represented by *1984*, *A Brave New World*, *The Matrix*, *Cloud Atlas*, and *Hunger Games*. Moreover, rather than prescribing or searching for a Filipino version of utopia, what is emphasized in this essay is the manner in which historical circumstance works its way into period literature or vice-versa, which may in turn allow one to comprehend the unexamined similarity between the Philippines portrayed culturally and touted commercially by media as an archipelagic, tropical paradise, and the distant, uncharted isles upon which the likes of Utopia, Bensalem, and Atlantis may have once been imagined by some serendipitous sailor. These in turn share many similarities with that equally rich set of literature that takes a "spatial turn" or that goes beyond place as mere setting for narrative, but rather sees place and circumstances as something interwoven and assembled, or unfolded as the literary piece develops (Hess-Lüttich 27).

ON LIMITATIONS AND AUTHOR'S AUTO-CRITIQUE: THE CITY AS AN ELITE STRUCTURE, THE PLANNER AS GAME-MASTER

Apart from the limitation of discussion to the three texts cited earlier, the author hereby also recognizes that any leaning towards critique of text and context must necessarily be circumscribed by the author's own prior disposition towards establishment and structure—a bourgeois sensitivity, some may tend to admonish, although it is difficult to see, from a historical perspective, any urban scholar, or any city for that matter, which in actual fact (or fiction) has been wholly divorced from

some form of class control and direction. Indeed, by definition, cities are implosions of humanity (Mumford 6), out of which a governing elite soon emerges, whether indigenous or exogenous, to direct the division of labor. The urban planner or architect herself/himself is an assumed identity that evolved out of particular historical circumstances in Europe and the Americas, often in reaction to chaotic, unhealthy—some would say organic—forms of human settlement growth. He or she is often thrust into the role of game master, yet is often also caught up by the whole dynamic into which some semblance of rationality is introduced. In any case, the absence of figures or institutions of order, even in the most idealized anarchy, still presupposes some form of internalized, tacit understanding between members of a group that must have brokered a consensus beforehand, a natural hierarchy of strength and ability as in the case of herd animals and hive insects, or a supernaturally-imposed orchestration of sorts. Thus, even the Arcadian writing to be discussed, though it may hint at an emancipatory wish to be free from the restrictions of urban life of its day or the regimentation of class hierarchy or the planner's hand, inevitably falls back on conceptions of leadership and coalition (e.g. Plato), representation and Christian virtues (More), and knowledge categorization and stewardship (Bacon) that are arguably handles used by those who rule or who aspire to rule over others. Without dismissing the possibility that a heretofore untried, non-urban, emancipatory form of group existence may become viable, as in the possibilities aspired to by religious sects, this essay proceeds forward at this point, having made manifest the subjectivity mentioned above.

MORE, BACON, AND PLATO: THE AUTHORS AND THE MILIEU THAT SHAPED THEIR WRITING

The authors of the first two Arcadian, or more broadly, utopian novels to be cited were both Englishmen who lived between the 15th and 17th centuries, and whose careers in government elevated them to influential, far-seeing positions, followed by tragic declines later in their lives. During their tenure as civil servants, they wrote, not for artistic whim alone, but presumably to expound their ideals to the wider public. Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) was a well-educated barrister who underwent monastic training before he built a reputation in legal circles for impartiality and preference for the poor. Thereafter, he rose quickly to favor in the royal court of Henry VIII, and was eventually appointed to the Privy Council. It was shortly before his knighthood in 1521 when he wrote the book *Utopia*. Among several other legal treatises, he wrote a repudiation to Luther and helped to establish rights to free speech in parliament, but his fall came soon after he refused to endorse the King's plan to divorce the queen and remarry. Thomas More thereafter withdrew from public life, citing ill health, but continued to oppose the King's

intended schism with the Roman Catholic Church. For this, and his refusal to swear allegiance to the Church of England, he was incarcerated in the Tower of London and thereafter beheaded on 6 July 1535. He was later canonized, and is known as the Patron Saint of Lawyers. Like More, Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a lawyer, member of Parliament, and Queen's Counsel. He too was knighted during the reign of King James I, and made a member of the Privy Council, eventually reaching the lofty rank of Lord Chancellor. As his philosophical writing matured, Bacon took up Aristotelian ideas, arguing for an empirical, inductive approach, known as the scientific method, which became the foundation of modern scientific inquiry. Interestingly, it was during the latter part of his life when he wrote *Nova Atlantis*—later published in 1627 as *The New Atlantis*, a story of the utopian land of Bensalem, whose society is carefully structured for the purposes of scientific investigation and virtuous living. Lastly, the Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 B.C.) is by any reckoning a giant of Western literary and philosophic tradition, because of his voluminous and thoughtful prose that tackled political and existential issues of his day with an insistent perspicacity that has had universal application. Like More and Bacon, Plato was a citizen of high status who enjoyed access to the circles of power and had first-hand information of current events, especially the struggle for democracy in Athens under a brief oligarchic occupation by Sparta. He was profoundly influenced by the methods and arguments of his teacher, Socrates, whose execution prompted Plato to turn to a life of study and reflection. It is thus clear that all three authors were in positions that offered panoramic vantage points of the controversies and governmental dilemmas of their respective societies. Moreover, they themselves were actually or vicariously caught in the reversals of fortune that caused their ascent and descent in the immediate community. Correspondingly, the exposition of More's Utopia and Bacon's Bensalem often reflect the authors' acts of contrasting between the fictional land and European polities in the form of a prefacing (Utopia) or a running comparison (Nova Atlantis).

On the other hand, Plato's brief anecdote on Atlantis, found in the two dialogues with Timaeus and Critias, respectively, is somewhat different in both elaboration and intent, although it is included in this essay as a necessary precursor to both the archetype of a lost insular kingdom as well as the antecedent namesake of Bacon's *Nova Atlantis*. Atlantis was an immense, proud, and warlike kingdom that sought to conquer the Greek city-states, and was repulsed under the leadership of the Athenians, after which the entire island on which it stood was riven by natural disasters and sank beneath the Atlantic Ocean. The texts, though brief, present a clear geographical and material knowledge and what could be a hint of bias for Athenian leadership. This writing was probably influenced by the historical memory of the Greek defeat

of Persia about a half-century prior, and at the time of Plato's writing, by the subsequent Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), which sorely pitted the naval might of Athens and its network of adherents against the martial prowess of its rival Sparta and its allies—and would after two decades end in Athenian defeat, quite opposite from the victorious mythical portrayal of Athens (and its allies) versus the expansive Atlantis in the texts:¹

[In Timaeus] Now in this island of Atlantis there was a great and wonderful empire which had rule over the whole island and several others, and over parts of the continent, and, furthermore, the men of Atlantis had subjected the parts of Libya within the columns of Heracles as far as Egypt, and of Europe as far as Tyrrhenia. This vast power, gathered into one, endeavoured to subdue at a blow our country and yours and the whole of the region within the straits; and then, Solon, your country shone forth, in the excellence of her virtue and strength, among all mankind. She was pre-eminent in courage and military skill, and was the leader of the Hellenes. And when the rest fell off from her, being compelled to stand alone, after having undergone the very extremity of danger, she defeated and triumphed over the invaders, and preserved from slavery those who were not yet subjugated, and generously liberated all the rest of us who dwell within the pillars....

[In Critias] Let me begin by observing first of all, that nine thousand was the sum of years which had elapsed since the war which was said to have taken place between those who dwelt outside the Pillars of Heracles and all who dwelt within them; this war I am going to describe. Of the combatants on the one side, the city of Athens was reported to have been the leader and to have fought out the war; the combatants on the other side were commanded by the kings of Atlantis, which, as was saying, was an island greater in extent than Libya and Asia, and when afterwards sunk by an earthquake, became an impassable barrier of mud to voyagers sailing from hence to any part of the ocean.

The example of Atlantis is also instructive in so far as it is prefaced in Timaeus by a discussion on the roles of the different social classes that the discussants appear to be propounding, and is followed in Critias by a description of the Greek polis. Both accounts contain numerous hints and similarities to subsequent constructions of the ideal societies found in isolated areas; these include elements such as an efficient division of labor, rationalization of population, and an ordering of space. Furthermore, Plato's own ideas of the philosopher-king from *The Republic*, and his notes on a Commonwealth are mentioned by the narrator's interlocutor in the opening chapter of *Utopia*, in the context of a discussion on which setups are best for governance versus the prevailing state of affairs in Europe.

Perhaps more important, in terms of historical context, was the fact that the creators of Utopia and Bensalem were living at a time of rapid expansion of geographical knowledge and the discovery of diverse non-European societies (e.g., African, Asian, Native American), which engendered a conceptualization of the Other fed by both awe and prejudice. Although England was still nearly a century away from its inexorable rise to world power status, it was almost certain that news and notions from foreign lands had spread by word of mouth to the Britannic courts. Sailors and mercenaries would doubtless talk of the gains of the Iberian powers since Columbus first set foot in the Americas in 1492, and there was an omni-directional expansion in knowledge and the language that was needed to apprehend new places, peoples, artifacts, belief systems, and habits of existence. Material culture, following mercantilist lines that saw an influx of precious metals from the mines of the New World, derivatives of new flora and fauna, and the growth of trade with the distant Orient, was reflected in the fiction of both More and Bacon.

In Bacon's *Nova Atlantis*, the influence of cosmopolitan knowledge and material wealth from the erstwhile Spanish maritime empire can be inferred from the text because of at least three instances: (1) At the opening of the book, when first sailing into Bensalem, the distressed narrator's crew opts to use the Castilian tongue, presumably as the international lingua franca: "The denial of landing and hasty warning us away troubled us much; on the other side, to find that the people had languages, and were so full of humanity, did comfort us not a little. And above all, the sign of the cross to that instrument was to us a great rejoicing, and as it were a certain presage of good. Our answer was in the Spanish tongue"; (2) the welcoming party replied to the narrator's crew in the same language: "And thereupon the man, whom I before described, stood up, and with a loud voice, in Spanish, asked, 'Are ye Christians?' We answered, 'We were'; fearing the less, because of the cross we had seen in the subscription." Moreover, towards the end of the book, upon the arrival of a Father of Salomon's House (an academic of sorts), the fellow is described as such:

His hat was like a helmet, or Spanish montera; and his locks curled below it decently: they were of colour brown. His beard was cut round, and of the same colour with his hair, somewhat lighter. He was carried in a rich chariot without wheels, litter-wise; with two horses at either end, richly trapped in blue velvet embroidered; and two footmen on each side in the like attire. The chariot was all of cedar, gilt, and adorned with crystal; save that the fore-end had panels of sapphires, set in borders of gold; and the hinder-end the like of emeralds of the Peru colour. There was also a sun of gold, radiant, upon the top, in the midst; and on the top before, a small cherub of gold, with wings displayed. The chariot was covered with cloth of gold tissue upon blue. He had before him fifty attendants, young men all, in white satin loose coats to the mid leg;

and stockings of white silk; and shoes of blue velvet; and hats of blue velvet; with fine plumes of diverse colours, set round like hat-bands. Next before the chariot, went two men, bare-headed, in linen garments down the foot, girt, and shoes of blue velvet; who carried, the one a crosier, the other a pastoral staff like a sheep-hook; neither of them of metal, but the crosier of balm-wood, the pastoral staff of cedar. Horsemen he had none, neither before nor behind his chariot: as it seemeth, to avoid all tumult and trouble.

The excerpt above includes yet another mention of Peru, another source of precious stones from the Spanish empire, from which the author's ship had departed before its ill-fated attempt to cross the Pacific. It would come as no surprise therefore, that even in the opening of Thomas More's book *Utopia*, the author introduces himself as an ambassador sent by Henry VIII to Flanders to try to sort out differences with Charles, the Prince of Castille.

This author argues that it was precisely the opening up of the unknown, initially filtering through the sieve of the Spanish (and Portuguese) empires, and only later directly through aggressive incursions by the Protestant Dutch and English, that provided ample resources for the writers of the day. Rivalry for territory and treasure for royal coffers colored the politics of the era, especially after the break with the Vatican. Captains' logs and sailors' tales found their ways into compendiums and government discourses, into the writings of the learned, and into the popular imagination, thus serving as a medium for the literary—but conflated, as it was in the text of Bacon, with the earlier Greek ideal of an Atlantis, this latter itself of Mediterranean genesis, embellished in the text with the features of cultures being discovered in the Americas and Asia. The exploration of lands and waters whose charting claimed a fair share of lives lost to hostile regions fueled the imaginations of thinkers throughout Europe, which itself was in the throes of intellectual ferment and questioning of medieval institutions that had begun to collapse by the 1400s. Arcadian writing therefore would be expected to draw on both the exoticism of what had just been discovered as well as the potential of what still lay across un-navigated seas, which in those days still held the lure of some fantastic island getaway. As a case in point, maybe this is what the foolhardy mutineers of the *Bounty* believed, they who fled to what later became Pitcairn Island around 1790, and lived for over a decade with illusory freedom until they were tracked by the long arm of the law and repatriated for execution. In the meantime, the authors Thomas More and Francis Bacon witnessed a relatively non-belligose, though often politically-charged reorganization and social transformation of England during their careers. Under Henry VIII, Thomas More would have witnessed the schism with the Roman Catholic church and the slow consolidation of English insular power after the costly Wars of the Roses, which saw the Tudor dynasty (of the Red Rose herald)

consolidate its reforms and claim Ireland, especially upon the succession of the now thoroughly Protestant/Anglican Edward VI. Francis Bacon, in a similar vein, would have witnessed a couple of decades later the reactionary Protestantism of Elizabeth I (against the recidivist Catholicism of her predecessor Mary I, who tried to undo Edward VI's religious policy) in the same epoch that produced William Shakespeare and sea adventurers like Francis Drake and William Dampier (Lewis 114). Enjoying the fruits of that Elizabethan era, the succeeding James I saw the union of the Scottish and English crowns (1603) and a further flourishing of literature, which included, to his credit a translation of the Bible. Given the foregoing, amid reports from English adventures abroad, it is not improbable that the heady sociopolitical milieu of the day would have influenced to no small degree the argumentation, perspectives, and creative writing of More, Bacon, and their contemporaries.²

Other writers of that epoch who produced similar fantasies of place-making included Englishman James Harrington, whose 1656 work, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, suggests another maritime paradise, but is actually a long-winded politico-historic polemic on the successive forms of European government. There is also the 1668 book *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* by the Duchess Margaret Cavendish, and Jonathan Swift, the well-known Anglo-Irish author of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), through which the unforgettable lands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, among others, entered humanity's collective memory. From such writings one can surmise that the treasure of geographic knowledge was indeed growing. In many such cases, the interplay of historical context and creative license is readily admissible here, as Utopia, Atlantis and Bensalem are remote insular destinations, and in the latter instance, it is stated that inhabitants purposely seclude themselves.³ Moreover, the societies found in the islands of Utopia and Bensalem were said to maintain their surroundings in a systematic and orderly fashion, and provide for the basic needs of all, as well as furnish updated resources for intellection of all citizens—simple joys that may be ubiquitous in modern societies, but which were unavailable or denied to the common man, who was oft illiterate, in the 15th to the 17th centuries in Europe.

PHILIPPINE COASTAL CITIES: REACHING ACROSS TIME AND SPACE FROM THE INSULAR UTOPIAS OF LITERATURE

It is from the Asiatic periphery of the Spanish empire in the 15th and 16th centuries that one might begin to stretch a tenuous link to the utopia-like islands that filled the literature of the Western world. By reading selectively the history of the Philippines as an archipelago and a European *and* American colony, one can draw a

sense of how its own urban traditions were influenced to no small degree by the Spaniards in the 16th and 17th centuries, who were unwittingly the pollinators of imaginative literature in rival lands. And later still was the Philippine tropical ideal shaped by Americans, once-removed from their own English roots, who carried their own paternalistic impulse to educate, discipline, and build in a grand manner that was in vogue in the 20th century. It was, and to a certain extent, still is this colonial diffusion that becomes problematic when one tries to import or translate a utopian ideal into a Third World context—although this will be discussed later. While the Philippines at the time of Thomas More and Francis Bacon might then have been regarded by Europeans as nothing more than an assortment of scarcely-remembered, exotic isles in which to reprovision en route to the more cognizable Spice Islands (Moluccas) or mainland Asia, its place-specific process of urbanization and identity-formation had already begun, in so far as Spanish colonizers invariably chose to settle and reproduce their urban system along the archipelago's leeward western shores, thus founding many a city that soon expanded the advantages of coastal locations for increased trade. This included, first and foremost the capital, Manila (Reed 7-37; Corpuz 59-127). Manila, originally confined to the coastal fortress of Intramuros and its immediate rural suburbs, took advantage of the Pasig River and the enclosure of Manila Bay to become a relatively busy port, although its international access was limited to vessels of the Spanish and their allies until the 1800s. During the subsequent American colonial period in the 1900s, Architect Daniel Burnham maximized the use of the waterfront location by expanding Manila, laying out wide avenues that connected a seafront promenade and highway with the rural interior. Burnham's architectural layouts sport radials in the City Beautiful style, and were drawn up with the purpose of placing civic buildings in prominent places as would befit the capital of the newly-annexed territory (Karnow 211-215). Much later, in the 1960s to the 1970s, similarly taking advantage of its coastal proximity as a space for expansion, the former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos reclaimed a part of Manila Bay straddling Manila and Pasay city, upon which she built the iconic Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 1969; this was in line with her own vision of transforming the capital, through the CCP and her other projects, following her slogan of *Katotohanan* (truth), *Kagandahan* (beauty), and *Kabutihang* (goodness); or equivalently, "the true, the good, and the beautiful." Imelda Marcos did in fact play a watershed role in transforming what her husband, the strongman Ferdinand Marcos, had by 1975 expanded into *Metropolitan* Manila by annexing parts of adjacent Rizal and Bulacan provinces. With her various beautification projects and politically-motivated drive to elevate Manila's image in the eyes of the world, she added yet another distinct layer that would be written about by the country's novelists, like Nick Joaquin (*Manila, My Manila*, 1988) and Amado Hernandez (*Mga Ibong Mandaragit*, 1969; *Luha ng Buwaya*, 1972). Thus we

see in this progression spanning four centuries how, driven by the agenda of the powerful, material culture and literature feed into one another in a cycle that has spanned oceans and epochs. Thus, it can be argued that the Philippines, however remote from the original utopian islands, constitutes—along with other places and peoples alien to the Western writer—the raw stuff upon which enduring literature has been based, always colored by sociopolitical concerns of the moment.

To deepen the reader's appreciation, a further note on urban experiments and beautification projects should be extended here. These had also been previously attempted in Great Britain to build around utopian ideals, such as Robert Owen's 19th century industrial communities at New Lanark, Scotland and elsewhere (Donnachie 20-22), although these have been grand trials often difficult for emerging nation-states to emulate faithfully. To be sure, the Philippines has offered its spaces to grand architectural visions as well. For example, the plans of Daniel Burnham and William Parsons, whose radiating avenues, wide boulevards, and imposing buildings were associated with the City Beautiful movement, were realized in the cities of Manila and Baguio, and are distant kin of Ledoux's own idealistic juxtaposition of Greek columns and boxy main halls. Similar plays on tidy geometric figures, this time embellished in the Art Deco style, are evident in the building of Juan Arellano (of Metropolitan Theater and Manila Post Office fame), who together with Harry Frost created the design for Quezon City that centered around a rotunda-cum-government complex, a repetitive motif in utopian diagrams. Other Philippine architects like Cesar Concio and Juan Nakpil also produced notable works that reflect the possibilities of their context, as well as their personal flair. While such unique works represented the aspirations of their generation of Filipinos, they did not, as a rule, leave behind any substantial volumes of philosophic work that revealed a drive for widespread social reform—perhaps because the country at that time was enjoying relative prosperity under the aegis of the United States. This then is a collection that may not necessarily be construed as a common utopic obsession, but rather as the first fruits of a budding generation of artists in whom nationalistic sentiment could have manifested in any number of ways. That Philippines cities, particularly those constituting Metro Manila, later became afflicted by physical sprawl and uncontrolled in-migration, could not have been foreseen perhaps by these local designers. The subsequent development of urban reality has led to present challenges of pollution, crowding, traffic, garbage, and so on, in the midst of which the iconic architecture remains. Although this is not necessarily dystopic or beyond remedy, there remains much to be done before negative trends can be reversed and brought closer to minimum standards of living and good taste so profusely described or drawn by earlier idealists.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Proceeding deeper into the texts themselves, one can draw out certain commonalities that reveal the human condition in so far as they speak of social perfections to be found in Utopia, Bensalem, or Atlantis. That is, we move forward in this section from reading the text as a mere result of historic influences and political concerns (Renaissance expansion, colonization, leaders' mega-projects) to a work that reflects the aspirations and emancipatory desires of its author. Three features stand out that tie together the three accounts, and that can later speak even to contemporary urban realities: (1) constitution of identity, (2) elaboration of governance, and (3) propagation of urbanism. The first characteristic that one can extract is the clear exposition of the identity of the islanders. Atlantis defines itself as a proud and warlike empire, which subjected parts of Libya, Egypt, and reached as far Tyrrhenia (western Italy) in Europe, until it was repulsed by the Hellenes (Greeks). Utopia, on the other hand, was historically part of a continent, though its founding leader cut it off by ordering a massive ditch dug, and thereafter began the work of educating and edifying its inhabitants. The Utopians have thereafter come to espouse an ethic of living that eschews excessive wealth and mindless hedonism. One example of this can be noted in the following passage:

But, of all pleasures, they esteem those to be most valuable that lie in the mind, the chief of which arise out of true virtue and the witness of a good conscience. They account health the chief pleasure that belongs to the body; for they think that the pleasure of eating and drinking, and all the other delights of sense, are only so far desirable as they give or maintain health; but they are not pleasant in themselves otherwise than as they resist those impressions that our natural infirmities are still making upon us. For as a wise man desires rather to avoid diseases than to take physic, and to be freed from pain rather than to find ease by remedies, so it is more desirable not to need this sort of pleasure than to be obliged to indulge it. If any man imagines that there is a real happiness in these enjoyments, he must then confess that he would be the happiest of all men if he were to lead his life in perpetual hunger, thirst, and itching, and, by consequence, in perpetual eating, drinking, and scratching himself; which any one may easily see would be not only a base, but a miserable, state of a life. These are, indeed, the lowest of pleasures, and the least pure, for we can never relish them but when they are mixed with the contrary pains. (More)

Bensalem, on the other hand, is expounded on by Bacon as a Christian polity, whose citizens were converted upon the discovery of Biblical writings that followed a divine apparition—this taking place two decades after the ascension of Christ to heaven, it had been said. Moreover, the identification of social aspects of Utopia

with Plato's Commonwealth and that of Bensalem with European Christianity serves to cast these ideal places in a familiar light to the readers of their day. By extension, these texts can be related to contemporary societies that have had ethnic traditions of communal living, or that have been evangelized into Christianity. One curious feature of More's Utopia, which interestingly finds vehement opposition in Bacon's Bensalem, is the practice of presenting the prospective bride and bridegroom to one another naked, prior to matrimony. It is defended that such a practice removes all pretensions brought about by dress and contrived appearance, so that the betrothed might well consider whether they do indeed accept the other with all his/her bodily imperfections. By contrast, though it is not explicitly stated that Bacon was referring to More's Utopia, there is a clear disdain indicated for that

Feigned Commonwealth... where the married couple are permitted, before they contract, to see one another naked. This they dislike; for they think it a scorn to give a refusal after so familiar knowledge: but because of many hidden defects in men and women's bodies, they have a more civil way; for they have near every town a couple of pools, (which they call Adam and Eve's pools) where it is permitted to one of the friends of the men, and another of the friends of the woman, to see them severally bathe naked. (18)

Given the taboos against nudity incipient in England in the 17th and later centuries, one can appreciate where such a reaction might be coming from—although in either case, such a venturesome suggestion helps to distinguish such utopias apart from the conservative mores espoused by the townsfolk of the era.

The second common thread is a definitive description of governance that explains how the citizens of these polities thrive, with the exception of Atlantis, whose government Plato does not describe in detail. Utopia and Bensalem are models of public administration, each after its own fashion.

Utopian politics may strike one as akin to Communism upon first reading, what with the institution of communal property and organization of the population into thirty families at a time. Each family is governed by a magistrate called the Syphogrant, and every ten Syphogrants are answerable to a higher magistrate called a Tranibore, with the 200 Syphogrants maintaining the right to elect a Prince for life from four candidates brought forward by the electorate in plenary. But to label this hierarchy similar to the village commune system of modern Vietnam or the Peoples' Republic of China would be to mistakenly interpret More's opus through contemporary lenses. The kind of communist ideal that was preceded by the 1949 proletarian revolution and pushed by Mao Zedong during the 1958 Great Leap Forward implied a somewhat stricter form of rural collectivization that drew peasants into hard labor with little

incentive for innovation or private production. In similar fashion, Stalin's policies in Russia fed state-run industrialization with compulsory labor or exile to some distant gulag, so that in the end, collective output seemed to be the product of mass compulsion rather than an implicit harmony. Rather, the communitarian setup envisioned by the works cited probably built more on Plato's earlier exposition on the virtues of a Commonwealth, where property itself was held in trust for the people, and the nuclear family was rejected in favor of a sharing of parental and tutelary roles within the immediate community, as well as an avoidance of individual vices. Indeed, much utopian writing deals inevitably with the problem of human greed, which in all cases is somehow eradicated by introducing a resource-based economy with fair and efficient distributive mechanisms (Notaro 1-2).

Bensalem, on the other hand, reveals Bacon's predisposition towards empiricism and scholarly investigation, in so far as the pursuits of the community are divided almost like the faculties at university in a vast compound called Salomon's house. There are places for agricultural experimentation, medicinal and chemical essaying, bestiaries and engine-houses (i.e. machine shops), and selected citizens are divided into teams for purposes of pursuing knowledge beyond the island and disseminating this across to neighboring cities. Because of such a structure geared towards forming a community of scholars—which later became reality in the various courts and colleges of Europe, and for which Bacon may be credited—it was recognized that science should be entrusted with the problem of making society wise, kind, and prosperous (Sadeq et al. 133).

While the ideal communities discussed above have many features that appear to be regulated by their respective governments, it should be mentioned here that their authors did not exhaust description of what had to be ruled over, thus allowing the reader to suppose that essential implicit freedoms remained—this being an important contrast to later, 20th century totalitarian visions, say by Adolf Hitler, who advocated the expansion of his "Reich" according to the Germanic concept of *weltanschauung*, a system of life and of thought, and not just a worldview to be espoused by all Teutonic peoples, followed by their lesser, subject colonies thereafter. It was this encompassing philosophy which guided his architect, Albert Speer, to appropriate and renovate in a more pompous, imposing style the key centers of power, such as Berlin and Munich, in order to reflect the identity of a nascent Nazi utopia. It should be mentioned here as well, when contrasting the three selected utopias and modern conceptions subsumed under the later nation-states, that the political organization of these sites was both premised on, and contributory to the maintenance of identity apart from others; this being true at the level of the entire polity just as a native unity was nurtured at the village level. This in turn could have led in its macro-

oriented extreme form, to the prosecution of war with neighboring groups based on a mix of prejudice and a surge in military resources, as did Atlantis and Nazi Germany; or in milder form, as in the case of Bensalem's offshore quarantine and the Soviet-backed Iron Curtain, which maintained strangers at a safe distance while offering minimum courtesies as a statement of political assertiveness. In all such cases, the structure of the polity betrays a typically European version of clean categorization of the Other: the clannishness of the small town is reflected in, or grows in hierarchical steps into an aloof sort of nationhood. Relating this to urban studies, this same tradition of segregation pervaded classic zoning (the legal means to implement plans) until well into the 20th century, whereby a city was chopped up into strict land uses and activities—and one might as well add here, is sometimes an anathema to the more relaxed mixing of people and places in the Asian urban cultural context.

The third salient aspect of such utopian literature is the actual physical disposition of the ideal places, both in terms of geography and construction of the urban. To this one must add the distinct urbanity that was said to have developed in those locations. The account of Atlantis speaks sparsely of an immense insular kingdom, which guarded the passage to the seas beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Notably, Bacon's *Nova Atlantis* recounts the legend with some embellishment, adding a "magnificent temple, palace, city, and hill." Nevertheless, we must be content with this, leaving much to the imagination, yet bearing in mind always that Atlantis was the prior ideal-type in Western Literature that informed later Arcadian writing on such forbidden isles. More clearly expounded is the city of Amaurot, principal among the 54 towns of Utopia. Nestled amid protective hills and sustained by the river Anider, whose fountainhead has been fortified against siege, Amaurot is neatly lined by uniform houses and gardens. The educated reader cannot perhaps help but recall the city of Troy, similarly situated a moderate distance from the sea, with its back to the hinterlands of Mount Ida and fed by the waters of the Skamander. In this city and others like it, the entirety is divided into quarters, at the center of which lies a market in which all bring their produce and take freely as they need, with no monetary transactions, as there is plenty enough for everyone. Meanwhile, the rest of the Utopians tend to their fields, with each man and woman engaged in useful labor, and wont to maintain their houses in excellent condition. In contrast to Utopia's treacherous bay, the passage to Bensalem appeared to the narrator as a "good haven, being the port of a fair city; not great indeed, but well built, and that gave a pleasant view from the sea..." though no errant ship was permitted to dock without the permission of the inhabitants. While the details are less comprehensive, it may be inferred from various details that the urban spaces were likewise arranged

according to function, as could be seen from the modest artistry of the Strangers' House, where the narrator and his company sojourn. These elements constitute the material cradle in which a thriving, cooperative urbanity is nurtured. Taking all these instances into consideration, one may inductively arrive at the conclusion that utopian settings are likely to be situated in well-defended and watered locations, surrounded by productive lands, and laid out according to some regime of order and sanitation that redounds to the well-being of its inhabitants and promotes collaborative work and peaceable civic interaction. The uniformity and functionality of the ordering may be questionable, as such cookie-cutter towns in vogue till the 20th century have been criticized by contemporary urban planners for lacking the essential heterogeneity that carries the charm and interdependency of organically coherent communities. Still, there is a decided attempt to merge harmoniously the man-made with the more encompassing bounty of nature, a theme that resurges throughout the history of Arcadian literature. The sites from the utopian literature cited are anti-modernist in their architectural leanings, eschewing the towering *La Ville Radieuse* of Le Corbusier in favor of the more blended, low spread of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City plan (1932). Again, in a 20th-century elaboration of utopian ideals, F.L.Wright wrestled with the problem of adapting his planned buildings to sites, although the generosity of proportion in his physical diagrams clearly reflects the opportunities of the open lands of the American Midwest and sprawling interior rather than the more compact utopian physicality that characterized European fiction. The contrast is also apparent for instance, against the spatially-restricted Neoclassicist layouts of Claude Nicholas Ledoux, an architect clearly identified with the utopian style or architecture that sought to articulate social ideals through measured use of space, such as the panoptic plan of the Royal Salt Works, partially built at Arc-et-Senans, and his ideal city of Chaux (Gruson). Ledoux's work, though dismissed by some during his lifetime as mere signifiers of the French Monarchy's *Ancien Régime*, is an early example of the utopian style that draws on simple geometries (Wolfe), often spherical, but in grand or impossible scales, and in his case, was preceded by his own published reflections in "Architecture Considered in Relation to Art, Morals, and Legislation" (1804). In either of the latter cases, however, the author wishes to point out that even in the design professions, a utopian current could be found, which like the ideals in literature relies heavily on the utilization of flowing, ordered spaces and universal forms to communicate the notion of perfection, as opposed to the asymmetry, chaos, or ultra-rigidity of a dystopic environs. Furthermore, it has been recognized that the relative isolation of utopian places, as seen both in literature and architectural diagrams, is a necessary prerequisite to separate it from alternative lifestyles in the vicinity that may perhaps exert a corrupting influence on the epitome of cooperative living

that has already been achieved (Zubrycki 1-5). Though trite, this observation of the essential segregation of Utopia and its imitators apart from other places must be mentioned here to complete the analysis.

It should be emphasized however, based on the preceding discussion, that the portrayal of such utopian loci is indexed to urbanity and the beliefs about life amongst a diverse citizenry in a built-up area—rather than a reversion to the wilderness of Arcady or Arcadia, a pristine Greek island from which the adjective “arcadian” was derived. Other references, such as Virgil’s *Eclogues*, under the verses of *Theocritus*, which drew on earlier writing by Hesiod, claim Arcady as more identifiable with Sicily, wherein shepherds dwell on poetry and love as they tend their flocks, in some sort of pastoral ecstasy (Anagnostou-Laoutides 22-24). There is no desire to become the solitary, noble savage⁴ here, but rather an unequivocal aspiration to communion with both fellow-humans and nature in a balanced, orderly physical setting, away from the troubles of a world that are somehow implied to be corrupting or so hopelessly convoluted that it would be better to have a fresh beginning again in some distant land. This is the essential optimistic escapism of such literature, which has an actual physical grounding in all those regions of the world that are little-known or totally unexplored. For as long as there remain spaces for the human race to expand, so can writers capitalize upon the fount of facts and conjecture that accompany reports from the edge of geographic and even extraplanetary knowledge. Simultaneously, such literature represents the edification of fantasy derived from a notional *social imaginary*. As explained by Steger (2009):

Human thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. Indeed, most of human reasoning is based on mental images that are seldom explicit; usually they are merely presupposed in everyday reasoning and debates. Thus, all social imaginaries consist of a series of interrelated and mutually dependent narratives, visual prototypes, metaphors and conceptual framings. Despite their apparent intangibility, however, social imaginaries are quite ‘real’ in the sense of enabling common practices and deep-seated communal attachments. (13)

It is from this unconscious, shared fund of cultural icons and patterns that the utopian is oft extracted, in response to prevailing conditions in society. It follows then that as the fund of the social imaginary changes, expands, and contracts, shaped as it were by the sociopolitical agenda of its heyday, so too do the emphases and features portrayed in the literature of utopian places, which become part of a subset that another writer might call the *urban imaginary*—the literary and iconographic representation of cities, which lend themselves to experimentation and artistic expression (Wunenburger 1).

Having established the rootedness of the utopian ideal in the social or urban imaginary, we must connect it to more contemporary debates on the nature of how the mind appropriates and shapes perceived realities. A treatment here of relevant philosophical thought shall serve only to make the review more thorough in its survey of related ideas. This touches directly on Immanuel Kant's philosophy of Transcendental Idealism, which holds that the objects of human cognition are appearances and not things in themselves. This resonates with New Historicism's own approach that relies more on the perception of historical context by the author rather than historical context per se. Idealism in this sense is not quite about epitomes of, for instance, cities, but about the pervasive centrality of the idea or ideal-type which in plurality forms the inescapable mesh that makes up an individual's grasp of the world. Later German philosophers, notably G.W. Friedrich Hegel, pushed the argument further by asserting that things in themselves do not exist, except as objects of consciousness. This would imply, in relation to this paper's topic, that utopian conceptualizations of the city find themselves co-located on one part of the spectrum shared with experiences of urbanity that for the individual represent reality. That would mean that utopias, being no less conceptions of consciousness, do inhabit the same mental landscape, but fail to display the other material qualities that lived realities otherwise register in our senses. Furthermore, discourse on Idealism extends to the implication of a social construction of whatever consciousness recognizes, which Hegel and later Absolute Idealists also seemed to have realized. As his thought system developed, Hegel advanced to a much more thorough discussion in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821), which tackled, among other finer points, his overall scheme for the good or just society, one that is "rightful" in its structure, composition, and practices—which in some respects continued the centuries-old Platonic tradition. This entire philosophical treatise again echoes the utopian discourse, but merits a separate discussion elsewhere; for purposes of this paper, it would suffice to say that later and indeed, ongoing discourses about utopia are not only ramifying in various directions, but are also becoming increasingly conflated with different constructions of individual and group reality⁵.

LINKING THE UTOPIAN TO THE CONTEMPORARY FILIPINO CITIZEN, AS LITERARY IDEAL AND AS PROBLEMATIC REALITY

How, then, do the aforementioned utopias, which seem distant in terms of historicity and temperament, resonate with the Filipino and his emerging urban reality? Upon closer inspection, perhaps the plight of the contemporary citizen is not so dissimilar from that of his ancient predecessors. Like the utopian cities, the ideals that shaped many Philippine urban projects were directly influenced by the level and amplitude

of apparent material culture, which was mobilized depending on the agenda of the prevailing powers. Similarly, the representation of the Philippines as an ideal never completely departs from the advantages of its insular make-up and tropical climate, yet its portrayal may be questioned on grounds of agenda setting; that is, who shall define the ideal? From an international often-Westernized perspective, the Philippines is after all, among the world's vaunted archipelagic havens, offering island escapades with modern amenities from the commercialized Boracay island in Aklan province to the luxurious Aman Pulo in Palawan, into which Hollywood Stars fly directly. But one needs to probe deeper, possibly even with the lens of social justice—for whom is the Philippines a tropical paradise? Apart from the moneyed elite, one might ask if there is a counter-construction of paradise for the locals themselves, who seem to lack a common indigenous word for paradise (rather than the Hispanic borrowing, *paraiso*); perhaps because they never really needed one? What seems to pass nowadays for real-life utopia-aspirants may contain alternative elements or ersatz landscapes such as the carnival complex *Enchanted Kingdom* in Santa Rosa Laguna, the Philippines' passable local version of a Disneyland—such places that Bryman (7-8) describes as possessing aspects of theming of economic spaces, a blurring of boundaries between shopping and themed areas, merchandising, and the emotional labor that is required to present pleasant behavior to the public in search of a fun, or quasi-utopian experience. There are at least four ways in which the cited utopian literature can be used to interrogate such Philippine urban realities.

First, there is the degree to which city plans and their subordinate spaces resonate with the aspired-for identities and values of the citizen – even surveying the most technical, bureaucratic documents, one might glimpse the latent insinuation of the local's ideal, or at least the notions of those who are in power—a single-detached dwelling, a central business district, a theme park, an orderly patterning of streets, and the introduction of open spaces. Criticism may be leveled at the building boom pushed by modern developers who peddle faux-Italian, faux-Swiss, faux-Balinese, and faux-American condominiums for the rising middle-class, as well as for the powerful elite whose conception of an ideal community may be problematically suffused with unexamined foreign elements. On the other hand, there exists a more down-to-earth popular tradition that may be seen in the socialized housing projects, such as in the villages of Gawad Kalinga, a Filipino charitable organization that has enjoyed massive success in providing socialized housing and community rehabilitation. The author argues here, as in the lines of Zialcita's 2006 work *Authentic Though Not Exotic*, that even in the humblest community redeveloped prescriptively by government or the private sector, the cultural, syncretic, and even counter-discursive element adamantly manifests itself in the manner of

workmanship, the choice of material, colors, and vegetation, and the adequacy given to paths and gathering places. It is in such urban agglomerations, over the long run, that the collective cultural archetype, though perhaps still unconscious or non-explicit, comes to the fore, as it did in “earthquake baroque” churches. It is through the symbols and shaping of material culture, sometimes despite the dictates of the public agenda, that the aspirations of the developing-world citizen are expressed, as was done for instance by children of Baguio, who were asked during the recent Centennial celebration (2009) what they envisioned their future city to be like, many citing a restoration of the cool, sparsely-settled pine-clad retreat of the early 20th century, despite more intensive urbanization taking place all around. Again, the utopian aspiration to live in harmony with Nature resurfaces here in innumerable, subtle ways expressed by young and old alike. As validated by the earlier discussion, how this cultural wish-fulness will manifest in subsequent Filipino literature and actual buildings will be—in future retrospect—directly traceable to the present-day circumstances: social inequalities, stages of material and technological development, religious cleavages, and politico-legal frameworks, in so far as they are made accessible parts of the public discourse.

Second is the manner in which heterogeneity of society is handled in a developing-country setting, as can be found in a multi-ethnic nation-state like the Philippines, which though predominantly Roman Catholic, plays host to sizable Protestant and Muslim minorities. How then does the nation-state move towards a harmonious diversity? This is the *problematique* that utopian literature tries to resolve. While Bacon’s Bensalem has been, to a large extent, conveniently converted to Christianity and incorporates elements of the Jewish Kabbala, it appears to offer hospitality to those of other faiths and races who should wander to its shores. Thomas More details a sharper account of this social policy by showing how civic statutes regulate the sectarian practices of men of different persuasions:

This law was made by Utopus, not only for preserving the public peace, which he saw suffered much by daily contentions and irreconcilable heats, but because he thought the interest of religion itself required it. He judged it not fit to determine anything rashly; and seemed to doubt whether those different forms of religion might not all come from God, who might inspire man in a different manner, and be pleased with this variety; he therefore thought it indecent and foolish for any man to threaten and terrify another to make him believe what did not appear to him to be true. And supposing that only one religion was really true, and the rest false, he imagined that the native force of truth would at last break forth and shine bright, if supported only by the strength of argument, and attended to with a gentle and unprejudiced mind; while, on the other hand, if such debates were carried on with violence and

tumults, as the most wicked are always the most obstinate, so the best and most holy religion might be choked with superstition, as corn is with briars and thorns; he therefore left men wholly to their liberty, that they might be free to believe as they should see cause; only he made a solemn and severe law against such as should so far degenerate from the dignity of human nature, as to think that our souls died with our bodies, or that the world was governed by chance, without a wise overruling. Providence 104.

Whether of different religion or ethnicity, the citizen is invariably accepted into the harmonious utopian community. This is, in other words, what essentially defines all cities: a healthy plurality of people from all walks of life, who interact in a mutually beneficial manner, and by doing so either consciously or unconsciously advance the interests of the larger society. The creation of a similar Filipino utopia, whether in literature or as a matter of development policy, would probably integrate a similar pan-humanistic acceptance governed by a just law to prevent internecine strife and intolerance. The interfaith and tolerance discourse, however, tied as it is to issues of human rights and territory, especially in Mindanao, has often seen-sawed on the sociopolitical agenda, and needs further clarification if it were to be used as a more consistent source of literary scholarship. Scholarly theorizing on utopian projects also reminds us to guard against the construction of degenerate utopias that offer no critique of human affairs, simply because they consist of fortified, involuted spaces that house relatively small and somewhat homogeneous populations (Macleod & Ward 160-161).

The third aspect by which utopian literature speaks to us is the recognition of ownership and the creation of cornucopia within the boundaries of the aspired-for nation-state. All Arcadian literature tackles to a lesser or greater degree the problem of entitlements and the distribution of wealth, and this is in many instances a reaction to the holdings of the powerful. Indeed, many of the problems of the world, it has been observed, stem from misunderstandings or outright covetousness in land administration and food production. Utopic places do away with all this, often by enforcing some form of communal ownership and ensuring the abundance of all basic necessities for every citizen. In an arguably overpopulated country with some 90 million inhabitants, the realization of such a utopian ideal may seem impossibly distant for the average Filipino. Yet nevertheless, one is compelled to ask, how much would be enough—and what would be considered sufficient in an age where such perks as digital interconnectivity and university education have become norms? The abundance or territorial largesse that characterizes fictional lands like Utopia, Bensalem, and Atlantis hinges upon their authors' prior conceptions of what constitutes material and psychological creature-comforts, and this in turn is often informed by scarcity and need in their socio-historical milieu.

Lastly, utopian writing inevitably comes face-to-face with the cynicism and desperation that often characterizes developing-world circumstances. Driven by various elite agendas, Philippine urban realities have departed substantially from their picturesque origins in the last century, because in-migration, shoddy policing and economic strategy, and international geopolitics have changed the basic conditions and magnified the ills of society, so that idealists often need to revise their premises. The starting point and the scope of what needs to be idealized for a developing Southeast Asian nation has changed, and so correspondingly, must the utopian ideal, which probably must plan for future cities to accommodate millions with diverse lifestyles in an Arcadian setting. Poverty, poor governance, and small-mindedness in the workaday world may make it difficult for individual readers and communities to draw grounded inspiration from idealistic writing, often dismissing it outright as just another Western pipe dream. Again, here one encounters the problems of transference: because of historical asymmetries in knowledge, power, and endowments, the idealization of cities and communities elsewhere is often all but impossible to emulate in countries like the Philippines—not to mention the fact that it would be uncritical to copy blindly. But it is precisely for this reason that the Arcadian literature persists and continues as an effective antidote to counter the collective sinking into the mire of despair. By constructing, however fancifully, an ideal human condition, removed safely to a perfect time and place, the utopian site serves as a beacon to the generations, as well as a critical mirror that reminds, exhorts, and urges its readers to consider the possibilities, if not to take action or influence others. It would therefore seem that behind the persistence of such idealistic writing is a desire to alter present realities for the better, to benefit at least the majority, which ultimately finds expression in the reshaping of space and social relations of the period. To avoid the pitfalls of poor matching and agenda-setting by obscure power-brokers however, both the urban scholar and the writer should ask if their texts and diagrams are truly borne of local conditions and responsive to profound group aspiration, or even, if such conceptualization of a utopia is necessary or suited to the context at all.

CONCLUSION

Prospects for the Conceptualization of an Archipelagic Utopia

This essay has reviewed early examples of Arcadian writing, with special focus on More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *Nova Atlantis*, and to a lesser degree Plato's *Dialogues with Timaeus and Critias* that mention Atlantis (as necessary forerunner to the earlier two). It has been shown in the discussion how historic context, as interpreted by the texts' authors, has in all likelihood shaped conceptions of utopian cities—and

perhaps just as importantly, how the urban experience in turn becomes grist for the literary mill that churns out descriptions that are both time-bound and timeless—albeit leaning towards the elitist—aspirations for beauty, order, health, governance and tolerance. The approach reviewed the social milieu and key biographical details of Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and Plato, all of whom were well-placed authors whose fortunes rose and fell with the vicissitudes of their socio-political milieu. From there, the discussion and analysis proceeds to the text, drawing out key commonalities in the utopian literature that endure as themes of the human condition, especially in the context of society. These common features include the establishment and maintenance of identity of the ideal community, its manner of governance, and its urban form and civilizing processes. It was deduced in particular that all such writing clearly aspires to a community ideal in a built-up setting, rather than a regression to some primitive ideal state in the wild. Finally, the paper closes with points of possible linkage between realities on the ground and the ideas propounded by the literature. It affirms an argument of Ganjacie, who says that utopian writing influences or informs urban planning in at least two ways: first, utopian models serve as the laboratory for thinking about how our future cities should be, and second, it educates us about the possible catastrophes that may happen if we make the wrong choices (15-16). He adds that since utopian literature is growing (i.e. there are more utopias now, spinning off from the 16th century conception of More), therefore the possibilities for translating the literary into the planned-and-built environment have also diversified (17).

With this foreground, the discussion then offers some reasonable propositions as to how Philippine urban realities might have been shaped—or might yet be shaped by their own past infusion of urban planning or architectural ideas: specifically through the construction of cities in a grand manner, or the building of iconic edifices that in turn have become the building blocks of a younger Philippine literature. Because this piece is limited in so far as it does not draw upon Philippine Arcadian literature, it can only go so far as affirm a linkage between the archipelagic or insular ideal as material reality and inspiration for writing about utopian places. In a similar vein, apart from the direct physical affinity between the Philippines as an archipelagic tourism destination and the ideas for island utopias, this research can only suggest that local sociocultural aspirations (into which unvoiced utopian ideals might be infused) will, in all likelihood, continue to be found in the plans and schemes for modern cities. To this would have to be added the imperative from the field of city planning for heterogeneity—itsself a defining feature of urban existence, where citizens of different creeds and colors live and interact harmoniously for the greater good of the polity. In closing, it is emphasized that by no means is the Philippine

urban experience merely an illustration of Arcadian writing elsewhere, but is itself a source of writing, albeit not necessarily Arcadian, as can be read in the more grounded, even dystopic realities of more contemporary Filipino writers. However, this last point must be reserved for another discussion not within the scope of this paper.

One final caveat from the initial historicist analysis must be added: the production of utopian plans are themselves bound by their historic contexts, and even by the “consciousness-of-ideals” of their proponents, making these necessarily limited or even self-serving. The implementation of such utopias may, in some cases, trespass upon the aspirations of others; to give an elementary example, a leftist ideal city will differ essentially from a rightist ideal city, an anthropocentric one from a biocentric, and so on. This brings the discussion back again to the question of social consensus: are the utopia’s premises espoused by the majority? It was for this reason that highly-placed writers like More and Bacon were able to write responsibly to address the conditions of their times, and suggests that for this same reason, a Philippine utopia, if it would aspire to capture popular appeal, would have to be crafted by one similarly predisposed to appreciating the breadth and depth of the nation’s afflictions, potentials and hopes.

In relation to the art of building cities, utopian writing at the very least remains an enduring and stalwart counterweight to the depression or negativity that one may encounter in the struggle to establish and grow real-world polities. The foregoing discussion also serves as a reminder that there is still a rich stream of literature on utopian ideals that can be drawn upon by architects, planners, and developers looking for inspiration different from the shopworn models of the market. These points direct us finally to the basic elements that we may expect to find in prospective local literature on Filipino utopias, of which there seems to be a dearth. The field remains wide open for pioneering and comprehensive works, which in addition, would undoubtedly be informed by a native cultural hues and aspirations.

END NOTES

- ¹ <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/449362/Peloponnesian-War>, downloaded 12 December 2013
- ² <https://www.royal.gov.uk/HistoryoftheMonarchy/KingsandQueensofEngland/KingsandQueensofEngland.aspx> (various searches within this website, including Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I, and James I.)
- ³ Bensalem is to be found in the South Sea; that is, the Pacific Ocean.

⁴ “le bon sauvage” – a 17th century term in English literature, but most sympathetically played up much later in the Romanticist writings of Rousseau, 18th century, depicting a non-European “other” living in a state of primitive bliss.

⁵ This excursion into Kant & Hegel, though not part of the initial paper, was requested on the first round of review, and complied with by the author in an effort to provide a more well-rounded closure of the main discussion on the three texts. As such, it may seem much, just to prove or establish the social imaginary as a complex mélange. However, the author would rather err on the side of excess and proceed ahead, rather than fail to mention the discourse on Idealism earlier required. It is emphasized here that the discussion is only instrumental to the later discussions of the paper on urban and societal character of the utopian places.

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