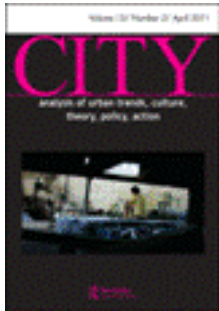


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Shifting spaces of power in Metro Manila

Emma Porio

In this paper, the author argues that to preserve their primacy and dominance, national capitals construct and assert representations and projects of power before the nation and the world. Metro Manila or the national capital region (NCR) serves as the major locus and staging area of capital building strategies and assertions by the state and elite power as well as by the resistance of subaltern groups. The ways that flows of transnational capital, politics, and ideas are organized and channeled into the capital's spatial and social fabric are mediated by local and national politics. In the Philippines, three major forces have shaped the process of capital city building and assertion during the past two decades, namely: (1) the decentralization of national government functions to the local government units of cities, municipalities, and provinces; (2) the democratization of socio-political life; and the (3) nation's bid to be globally competitive where its major insertion to the global economy is anchored on labor migration, business process outsourcing services, and light export-oriented industries. These processes have raised questions regarding the quality of life and sustainability of the NCR, posing challenges to its continuing dominance, desirability, and representation of the nation-state. In international media, contradicting images of high-rise buildings in the financial district and urban poor settlements are presented to highlight these issues. These contradictions have presented erosions and challenges to the national capital's project of hegemony and dominance, in part because of the multiple ways that state power, capital, and democratic movements have become decentralized (multi-sited), heterogeneous, and porous. These processes are reflected in the shifting spaces, symbols, and representations of power in, and of, the national capital.

The colonial/post-colonial heritage of Metro Manila

The creation and reconfiguration of Manila as colonial capital during the Spanish and American colonial periods to the early years of the republic (1946–65) and to the Marcos Authoritarian regime (1965–85) have been described elsewhere (e.g., McCoy and Roces, 1985; Caoili, 1988; Porio, 1995; Berner, 1997; Manasan and Mercado, 1999; Brody, 2001; Shatkin,

2006). Thus, the description here shall be brief.

From a thriving Muslim settlement at the mouth of the Pasig River by the Manila Bay, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi established the capital of Spanish colonization in Asia for the next 300 years (1565–1898). The Spanish built the walled city of Intramuros, where they located their state offices and residences while the indigenous population alongside the small Chinese trading population settled around the

inner city. The following summarize the role of the capital during this period:

'Between 1571 and 1898, the capital of the Philippine archipelago, practically on the edge of Asia, was the meeting point of the Western European world and oriental culture. At the end of the 16th century, an organized city was established ... the first modern city to be created in that geographical area ... an enclave of that westernworld in the heart of Asia, a city planned and designed in the western style but constructed with clearly oriental influences. The galleon Trade plying between Manila-Americas-Europe represented the first phase of globalization.' (Ministerio de Fomento, 1998, pp. 1-2)

American colonial rule (1898-1946) started with their victory over the Spaniards in the Battle of Manila Bay. Manila served as a direct link between the Philippines, its rulers and the world, and the major gateway for agricultural exports/imports. Spanish and American colonial policies developed Manila as a primate city with the countryside exploited to support the colonial bureaucracy (Caoili, 1988). With its developed port facilities and infrastructure, it became the favored location for commerce and industries. Post-war policies deepened this uneven development as reflected in the concentration of urban structures in the national capital. World War II destroyed most of Manila, including the irreplaceable Spanish architectural treasures of the Intramuros, making it the second (after Warsaw) most devastated city in the world.

The historical specificity of Manila as capital lies in its democratic heritage, being the site of the first modern war of liberation in Asia (1898 Philippine Revolution) that installed the first parliamentary democracy as a system of governance. After two decades of authoritarian regime, the 1986 People Power Revolution installed a democratic and decentralized regime of governance. During the last three decades, this specificity has been

reconfigured by its particular insertion to the global economy through labor migration and services to transnational capital in the national capital region (NCR). All these forces are reflected in the significance of new public spaces, buildings, and monuments in what used to be the suburbs of Manila, but now occupy center stage in national politics, commerce, industry, and culture.

Manila: presenting/representing identity and power

National capitals serve as representations of power in the nation and before the world. Before the nation and the international community, Manila is viewed synonymously with the Philippines and the Filipino people. It is the seat of political-economic and socio-cultural power. Shatkin (2006, pp. 577-578) describes the metropolis as 'the economic and political epicentre of the country'. Manila connects the country to the world, being the the major transport, finance, political, and socio-cultural hub of the nation. Those living in the provinces call it 'Imperial Manila,' because state bureaucrats, businessmen and residents treat the rest of the country like their vassals.

To decongest Manila, the government decided in 1933 to transfer the capital to Quezon City because its large and less populated area would allow proper urban planning/design of the new capital. This decision, however, was hardly implemented until the Marcoses in the 1970s transferred some of the government offices to the National Government Center in Quezon City.

The congestion of Manila have also led to elite retreat to the suburbs. New Manila in Quezon City developed as an exclusive residential community in the 1930s while Makati (now the financial district replacing Binondo in Manila Chinatown) became a private exclusive development in the 1950s, alongside the development of other suburban areas like Cubao in Quezon City in the 1970s (see Figure 1).

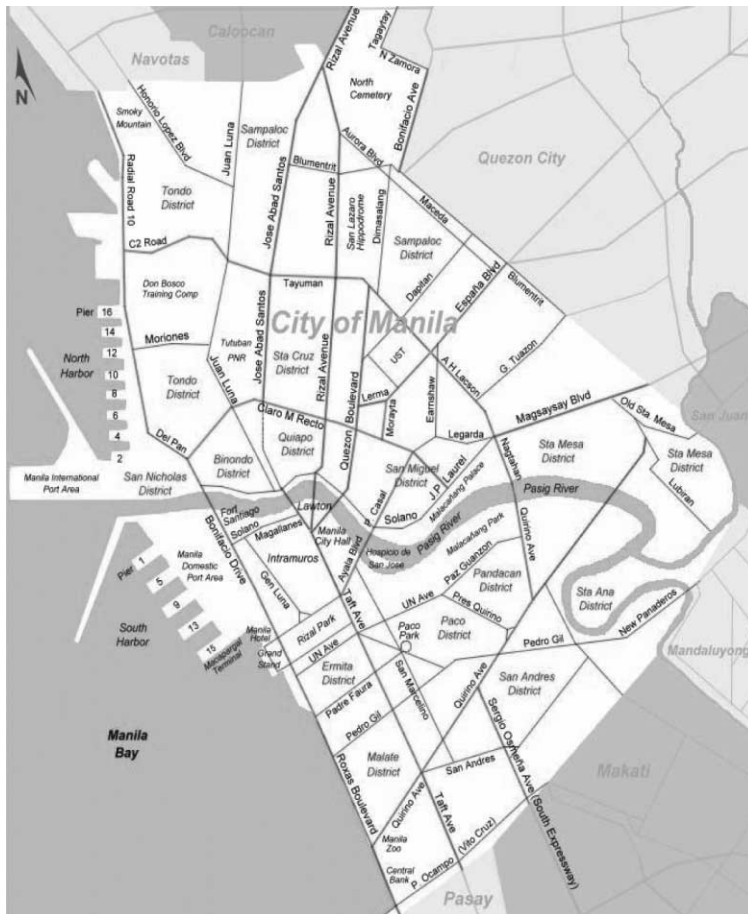


Figure 1 Map of Metro Manila and the City of Manila.

The NCR and the dispersion of Manila

Rapid population growth and congestion led to the sprawl of Manila to the suburbs and surrounding areas. In 1975, Marcos issued Presidential Decree 824, incorporated the 16 cities and municipalities around Manila, formally creating Metropolitan Manila or the national capital region or NCR.

As Manila expanded to become the NCR, the urban landscape got transformed and organized into several sub-centers. Makati became the financial city center alongside exclusive gated communities, expensive hotels, and other high-end consumption spaces. Recent additions to these cities within cities are: Ortigas Center in Mandaluyong, East Wood City and Gateway in Quezon City, Ayala Alabang Center and Mall of Asia in Paranaque City, and Global City in Taguig City (formerly Fort Bonfacio, a military reservation), to name a few.

Socio-demographic and economic characteristics

In 2000, Metro Manila had a population of 10 million which increased to 12 million in 2007 (NSCB, 2006). Currently, it has an estimated daytime population of 16 million. Among world cities, Metro Manila ranks 7th in population size and 15th in population density (10,550 per sq.km.). Among Philippine cities, the next populous is Cebu City with almost one-tenth of the NCR's population and density.

Metro Manila accounts for one-third of the country's total GDP followed by the adjoining provinces of CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) with 12.3%. It has the fastest growing economy, contributing 2.2 percentage points to the GDP and with the highest GDP growth rates at 8.8%, compared to the national average of 5.4% (NSCB, 2006). It receives one-third of the country's total foreign direct investments (FDI) and almost one-half of the growth in services. In 2003, Metro Manila had a real per

capita income of P39,639 almost double that of the second highest, the Cordillera region with P17,836. Metro Manila's standard of living, however, as indicated in its Human Development Index score of 0.777 is quite low compared to other cities in advanced economies (e.g., Hong Kong, 0.916; Singapore, 0.907) but scored favorably with other Philippine cities (Cebu, 0.728; Davao, 0.702).

The NCR is the educational and cultural center, having one-half of the number of universities and educational institutions and the monopoly of the communications institutions in the country. Thus, the demographic, economic, and socio-cultural primacy of the NCR is undisputed. What mars this primacy is its dwindling quality of life and questionable environmental sustainability. Traffic jams, floods, mass protests, impermeable gated communities, exclusive commercial and consumption spaces, empowered urban poor groups in huge informal settlements, among others, make NCR hard to navigate.

Asserting and reconfiguring the capital region's primacy

The projects of the state highlight the ways that its primacy is continually crafted and asserted. These are: (1) the Philippine state as a 'brokering state' support for labor migration; (2) the urban renewal program initiated by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and other flagship infrastructural programs; and (3) incentive support for human resource needs of transnational capital. To support the human resource needs of business process outsourcing (BPOs), the state provides support to educational institutions to upgrade the competencies of supermaids, contact agents, medical transcriptionists, etc.

Representations of the NCR and the nation-state before the international arena is often associated with a weak economy propped by overseas remittances and a weak state threatened by coup d'etats, protests,

and demonstrations. Reinforcing these negative images at the spatial level are the haphazard, uncoordinated efforts at urban renewal, gentrification, and infrastructure development resulting in social and physical divisions. Huge flyovers and highways without connections to mass transport points render the city hard to navigate except by motor-powered vehicles. Mimicking the Los Angeles sprawl, circumferential roads, flyovers, and street patterns assume a vehicle-centered mobility. Yet, only 20% of NCR households own cars/vehicles while 50% of the nation's registered vehicles ply the Manila's streets. Urban planning in Metro Manila reflect how political leaders at various historical junctures assert their urban visions to legitimize their rule (Shatkin, 2006). Thus, urban design and landscape of the capital city reflect the socio-political and economic relations of the rulers and the ruled, between the center and the peripheral areas of the country.

The dwindling quality of life in the national capital is reflected in the ranking of Asia's most livable cities. In 1998, Metro Manila ranked 16th among 35 cities while the secondary city of Cebu ranked higher, 14th. In 1999 and 2000, Metro Manila's rank went down to 25th, while that of Cebu City to 17th (see <http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/features/asiacities2000/cities.intor.html>). To combat the declining quality of life and environmental sustainability, MMDA has launched a series of urban renewal programs to complement the flagship programs of the national government designed to improve the internal/external 'navigability' of the city.

Representations of power in the national capital: shifting spaces and meanings

Dispersion of symbols/sites of power

As Manila expanded to the NCR in the 1970s, institutions and symbols of state and elite power also got dispersed across the metropolis as seen in the loci of capital and nation-

building activities. Malacanang, the residence of the President, the highest official of the land, remained in Manila but the Philippine Congress split and relocated in two cities: the Upper House (Senate) in Pasay City while the Lower House (Representatives), together with some government ministries, got transferred to the National Government Center in Quezon City. But other ministry offices of the executive branch, legislative, and the judiciary are spread all over the metropolis. The old Congress building became the National Museum.

In like manner, ceremonial/ritual places of the national capital have also shifted in importance/significance. The Quirino Grandstand in the Rizal National Park, traditionally, is the place for the oath-taking ceremonies of the newly elected president of the republic. But in 1986, Cory Aquino (widow of the slain Ninoy Aquino), with the strong support of both business and popular sectors in the November 1985 snap elections, took her oath as president in the elite Club Filipino in the suburb of Mandaluyong City. Meanwhile, Marcos, holed in Malacanang, summoned the international/local press for his oath-taking in the Malacanang balcony. Vice-President Macapagal-Arroyo, after the 2000 EDSA II People Power that removed President Estrada, took oath as president of the republic in the stage behind the EDSA Shrine. When formally elected in the 2004 elections, she held her presidential inauguration in Cebu City where she garnered the biggest margin of votes. This is the first time that a presidential inauguration was held outside of the national capital. Meanwhile, the opposition candidates took their oath of office in the national capital, where they obtained their biggest vote margins.

Shifting spaces of resistance

The sites of resistance have also shifted in the past three decades. Political demonstrations used to be held in public plazas in Manila like Luneta, Mendiola, or Plaza Miranda, the

latter being the site of the 1971 bombings that, in part, led to the declaration of martial law. The marked shifts in the places for popular protests started with the 1986 People Power Revolution along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) in Quezon City and Ortigas, Mandaluyong City—between Fort Bonifacio and Camp Aguinaldo—the bases of the generals/soldiers ordered by Marcos to attack the demonstrators. On this site, groups associated with the late Cardinal Sin

(instrumental in calling the people to both EDSA I and II) and Cory Aquino installed the EDSA Shrine (Figure 2), with Virgin Mary as the main figure as most demonstrators thought her intercession saved them from soldiers' bullets.

During President Ramos' (one of the generals who led EDSA I and a Protestant) term, a more secular monument (The EDSA People Power Monument, see Figure 3) was erected near Camp Aguinaldo, not far from

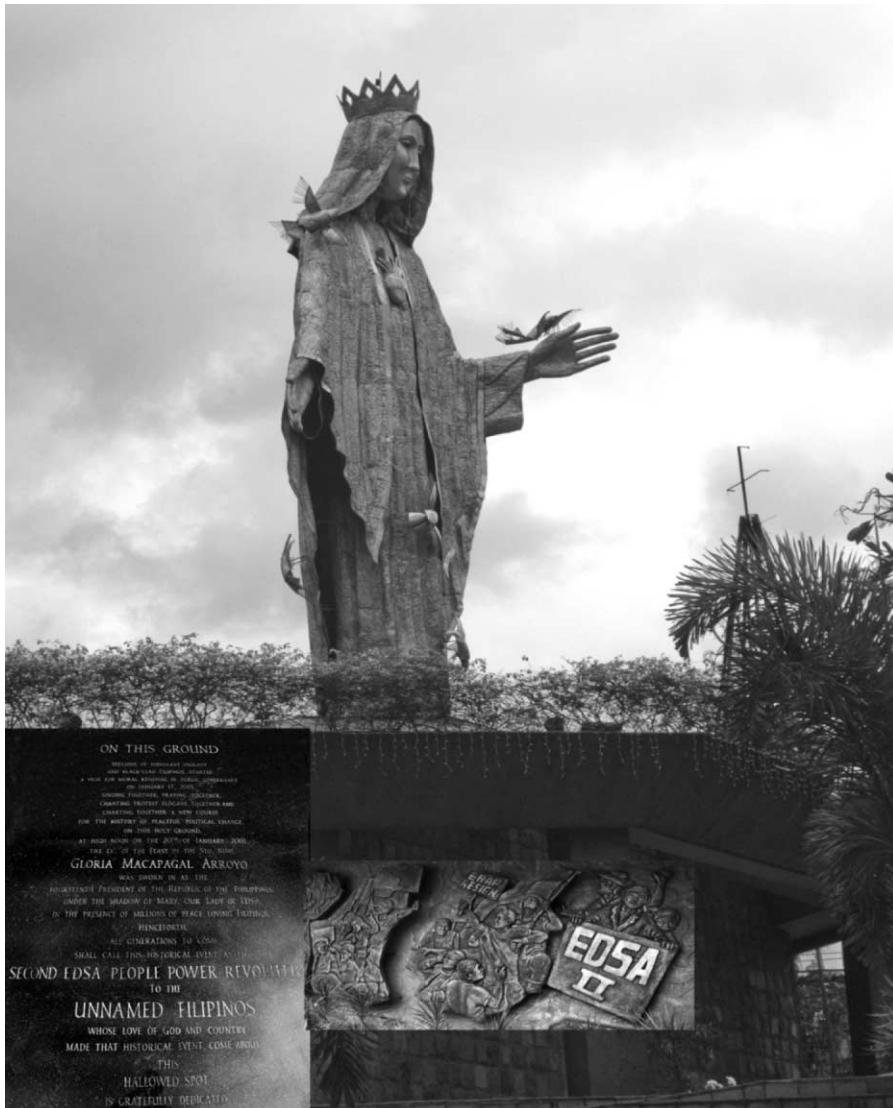


Figure 2 The EDSA Shrine, with Virgin Mary as the main figure. Photograph: Nestor Santiago and Emma Porio.



Figure 3 The EDSA People Power Monument. Photograph: Nestor Santiago and Emma Porio.

the EDSA Shrine. This monument highlights the triumph of freedom (symbolized by the lady) because of the support of different sectors in society (represented by figures of peasants, workers, soldiers, nuns/priests, etc.), with the colors of the Philippine flag at the base. Beside is Ninoy Aquino's statue, whose assassination triggered the popular protests toward EDSA I. Interestingly, the nearby EDSA Shrine is now most associated with EDSA II with the addition of a plaque and bas relief depicting the events/personalities responsible for EDSA I and II. Both monuments, however, remain aesthetically challenged.

During the last 10 years, the sites of protests have shifted among these monuments and urban spaces. Groups associated with the political left/the opposition often hold protests in EDSA People Power Monument (EDSA, Quezon City), Plaza

Miranda (Manila), near Ninoy Aquino Monument in Makati City (currently has an opposition mayor), before the Lower House of Congress (Quezon City), or the Upper House of Congress (Pasay City). Meanwhile, those associated with the political right, social democrats, and/or the Church hold their protests at the EDSA Shrine (Mandaluyong City). In the same manner, the sites of 1989 coup d'état and other destabilization attempts (e.g., 2002 Oakwood Mutiny, 2007 Peninsula Hotel hold-out) have been staged in the financial district (Makati) to highlight the political economy at the heart of the ills of the nation-state and to hit business where it hurts—in their own backyard.

But the February 2008 mass protests against the corruption of the Macapagal-Arroyo regime showed the different fractions of the political-economic elite and the civil society organizations (CSOs) colonizing

different sites of resistance. Oppositionists Erap Estrada and Cory Aquino followers with their allied CSOs staged their protests in Ayala, Makati, near the Ninoy Aquino Monument (symbol of the opposition against the Marcos dictatorship), while pro-administration demonstrators staged their support in the Welcome Rotunda Monument (symbolizing freedom) in Quezon City. It seems both camps did not want their rallies to be associated with the EDSA People Power Monument or the EDSA Shrine, largely because of their frustration with the aftermath of the two people power events (1986, 2000). For most Filipinos, both bloodless revolutions immortalized in the two EDSA monuments, did not bring about fundamental changes they desired in the Philippine political economy.

The two EDSA monuments were erected to symbolize the fight for freedom from dictatorship and abuse of power through a series of sustained massive demonstrations along EDSA Avenue in 1986 and around the EDSA Shrine Monument in 2000. While most Manila residents would argue that the 1986 and 2000 protests occurred nationwide, this is often disputed by those in the provinces, and the installation of these monuments as symbols of Filipino heroism and fight for democracy remain largely inspired by the brokers of power in the national capital.

Manila as the site of the first modern war for national liberation in Asia has created a particular democratic consciousness in the nation. World War II reinforced this imagery and the 1986 EDSA People Power further strengthened it. But EDSA II, EDSA III (May 2000), and several coup attempts have also highlighted the lack of political stability in the national capital and the nation-state as well.

Most of these massive protests and demonstrations are often picked up by the international media (e.g., CNN, BBC), in the process feeding and shaping a negative imaginary of the national capital before the world. In particular, I will focus on protests made

by migrant groups and CSOs against the state's inability to protect Filipino migrants abroad. Two massive demonstrations underscore this phenomenon: (1) those associated with the trial and execution in the mid-1990s of Flor Contemplacion, the Filipina domestic helper in Singapore; and (2) the 2004 hostage-kidnapping of the truck driver, Angelo de la Cruz, in Iraq. The Contemplacion protests created international (strained relations between Singapore and the Philippines) and national repercussions (e.g., affected the outcome of the senatorial elections, caused resignation of a foreign minister, blighted/ruined the careers of two cabinet officials and two ambassadors, revamped the state machinery tasked to manage migration, caused enactment of the migrant rights law, etc.). In both instances, Manila, as the site of popular mobilizations, highlighted the state's brokering role in labor migration, its inability to protect its workers, and the failure of the economy as a whole.

The second case is of particular significance because the kidnapping of a Filipino truck driver in Iraq inserted a seemingly internal labor migration issue into the politics of global terrorism, in the process highlighting Manila both in international and national arenas. The mass protests/demands of migrant groups led Macapagal-Arroyo to withdraw the Filipino contingent in Iraq, to save the life of the migrant driver who had to leave his family in order to support them. This political accommodation dismayed the officials of Washington D.C. and Canberra, major partners in the coalition against terrorism. Labor migration and workers' rights have assumed a prominent role in the diplomatic agenda and state negotiations. In the 2006 ASEAN meetings in Cebu City, workers' rights became a thorny issue. In early 2007, Macapagal-Arroyo appealed to the King of Saudi Arabia to pardon 800 Filipinos in Saudi prisons. Over the past 30 years, diplomatic and trade relationships between Manila and Filipino labor-receiving countries have been heavily saddled with labor migration issues, underscoring the national

capital as the stage for these communications/negotiations.

Globalization of civil society politics and migration

Adding complexity to this dynamics of state-capital-labor nexus is the 'globalization' of civil society politics supporting migrant rights across multiple and shifting political, socio-cultural borders. International negotiations between Manila and the labor-receiving nations are strongly mediated by international/local NGOs (e.g., Migrante International, Coalition for Workers Rights, etc.) with offices and representatives in major capitals with large Filipino migrant labor (e.g., Hong Kong, Rome, Spain, San Francisco, Washington D.C., etc.). Thus, the politics of assertion and representation both by state/elite and subaltern groups moves fluidly along local-national-global lines.

Decentralization and carving power from the capital

The decentralization of governance in 1992 posed a serious challenge to the hegemony of the national capital. Designed to decongest the metropolis and unleash the potentials of localities in carving their socio-economic destinies, decentralization allowed secondary cities to capture some of the investments in BPO services and export processing zones, giving stiff competition (lower rents/cost of living, no traffic congestion, etc.) to Metro Manila's suburban centers (i.e., Eastwood in Quezon City, Ortigas in Mandaluyong City, Global City in Taguig, etc.).

The current boom in real estate and services that has transformed NCR's landscape is mainly due to these flows of transnational capital and services: (1) overseas remittances; and (2) FDIs mainly channeled to BPOs and light-export oriented industries. National and local politics very much mediate the insertion of these capital flows to the spatial fabric and

social structure of NCR. These mediations are often expressed in the debates and conflicts (among different state and elite factions) about contracts regarding flagship programs in infrastructure development (light rail transit system, bridges/skyways/flyovers, modern airport, modern communication systems, etc.) that will make the city attractive to transnational investments. Because of these conflicts, multi-million dollar infrastructure projects meant to make the city more attractive to investors often get stalled (e.g., Terminal Three of the Manila International Airport).

Meanwhile, the local economy is kept afloat by overseas remittances and the expansion of services (e.g., BPOs) for transnational/local capital. In 2008, nine million Filipinos (10% of the population or one-fourth of its labor force) working abroad sent about US\$17 billion dollars, 20% higher than overseas development assistance (Porio, 2007). Meanwhile, the government is proceeding with projects that the NCR expects to capture part of the increasing demand for outsourcing, pegged at US\$180 billion by 2010.

Conclusions

Metro Manila today continues to dominate the political-economic and socio-cultural life of the nation, the major platform for articulating this position to the world. But its articulation of power and representation is strongly shaped by the character of its urban politics and the ways it is inserted into the global economy through labor migration and outsourcing services. The ways that transnational capital and politics gets channeled into the metropolis' spatial fabric is largely mediated by its fragmented urban politics. These political-economic forces are reflected in the shifting spaces and symbols or representations of power in, and of, the national capital. The expansion of Manila into the NCR started the dispersion of symbols and sites of state power from Manila to the different suburbs or component cities. In the same

manner, ritual/ceremonial spaces and sites of resistance got shifted or created in other parts of the metropolis by different factions of both old and new political-economic elite or by democratic movements spearheaded by NGOs/CSOs. In part, this has been brought about by decentralization of urban development and the fragmentation of urban politics in the capital region, strongly mediated by local, national, and global processes.

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