

Book Review

***Making Sense of the City:
Public Spaces in the Philippines.***

Remmon E. Barbaza, ed.

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019, 236pp.

While there is a long-standing tradition in philosophy to pay attention to cities, many contemporary academic philosophers have neglected such studies. However, the last decade has shown a revival in such a practice. Remmon Barbaza's edited volume, *Making Sense of the City: Public Spaces in the Philippines*, makes this claim evident. Considered as a whole, it reveals that philosophers and like-minded interdisciplinary researchers provide insights into several aspects of public life. By employing the Philippines as a common ground for conversation, the authors reveal that the topic of urban public space in the Philippines has lessons to teach the world's cities. Barbaza deserves praise for assembling them in a fashion that maximizes the research strengths of the contributors.

One asset of this collection is the balance of depth and range that it delivers. The book is arranged into three

sections, each with three essays that focus on a specific area. The number of articles in each section tackles the topics from three different perspectives that are given depth through the writers' inquiries. Reading these articles in tandem provides significant coverage of the subjects, giving the reader a sense of the specific concerns that one finds in Philippine cities.

On the one hand, this multi-lens approach could be appealing to locals as the essays take the ordinary and examine it in a profound way. On the other hand, the authors expose issues that concern specific Philippine cities; but they also exhibit that often such concerns reveal that there are encompassing principles at play that require additional investigation. Bearing this point in mind, we see how the examined cases have lessons to teach us about problems and tensions that arise when discussing and arguing about shared urban spaces. Yet, aside from merely appearing on typed-set pages, these problems and tensions manifest on city streets, public parks, and sacred places—a notion that the authors thoroughly investigate.

The first section, "Contesting Spaces" identifies tensions that emerge from opposing views of common space: the people who govern and those governed; the public and the private; between a perpetually changing urban landscape and historical and cultural identity, zeroing in on subjects such as historic plazas, skyscrapers, and infrastructure. The book begins with Jerik Cruz's "Great Transformation: The Spatial

Politics of City-building Megaprojects in Manila Peri-urban Periphery.” Cruz’s work addresses the power dynamics behind infrastructure, a contribution that will be of great benefit to researchers who are examining urban power. Lukas Kaelin’s chapter, “Struggling for Public Spaces: The Political Significance of Manila’s Segregated Landscape,” explores the concept of the public as it plays out within “the public” and “the private.” While this first section is inherently valuable for the insights that the authors provide, thematically, it sets the stage for ushering in the following section, “Sensing through the Margins.”

The two sections take the urban conversation from the mainstream and move it to the periphery. This collective literary maneuver reveals some of the issues that outsiders would not know about, giving the reader a detailed picture of the specific problems that are associated with some Philippine cities such as Manila and Quezon City. For example, Michael D. Pante’s essay, “Cleaning the Capital, The Campaign against Cabarets and Cockpits,” illustrates the concerns that go beyond issues such as infrastructure and resources.

Along similar lines of thinking, Marc Oliver D. Pasco calls our customary ways of conceptualizing the contours of happiness into question, revealing the specific ways that the urban poor can flourish in a manner that falls outside of society’s established parameters of happiness. The urban poor can still be happy, but they attain it in a manner that

does not resemble the mainstream. Gary C. Devilles's "Sensing and Seeing Manila" continues the practice of exploring the tensions as described above, focusing on people and surveillance. Taking a creative approach, Devilles examines the issue through films.

Having illustrated many of the historically influenced socio-material arrangements that emerge on streets and in urban spaces, the final section looks toward the future. Duane Allyson U. Gravador-Pancho, in her chapter, "Sex(edness) in the City: Reimagining Our Urban Spaces with Abraham Akkerman," examines the masculine character that one finds in cities, holding that this condition inherently favors Western thinking and design. Such a situation creates environments that restrict the feminine. Her thinking challenges us to conceptualize cities as entities that can improve the urban condition in myriad ways.

Along similar lines of questioning established means of thinking about cities, Martin G. Rodriguez's "The City and the Dynamism of Invention and Exploitation" inspires us to reimagine urbanity so that we can create new ways to dwell. Bringing the book to a conclusion, Barbaza continues the Lefebvreian tradition, addressing the city ontologically and revealing many of the pressing questions that we receive from such conditions. In turn, Barbaza's essay invites us to imagine the city beyond the status quo. His insights could serve as a bridge between interpreting the world and guiding the purpose of changing it, nudging us toward the latter.

While this book will be of great value to researchers of several stripes who focus on aspects of the urban condition, it could also be valuable in the classroom. In addition to serving students of urban studies and planning, this collection would fit in exceptionally well in syllabi for cutting-edge courses on the Philosophy of the City that are emerging in forward-thinking universities across the globe. With the above notions in mind, *Making Sense of the City: Public Spaces in the Philippines* not only lives up to its name, but also encourages us to create cities that make sense.

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