

*Searching for Manila: Personal and Political Journeys  
in an Asian Megacity*

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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Thomas Sykes, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:



Date: 14/05/2018

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## Abstract

*Searching for Manila: Personal and Political Journeys in an Asian Megacity* is an autobiographical travelogue based on a period I spent living and working in Manila, the Philippines in 2009-10, and on two subsequent visits to the city. The book, which is slightly abridged for this submission, addresses themes both personal (such as the difficult processes of deciding what to do with my life, of falling in love and of becoming a surrogate father) and political (the struggles of marginalised communities against official oppression, the impact of neo-liberalism on various aspects of Philippine society and the ideological reasons why Filipinos selectively remember national traumas). I interweave my lived, empirical experiences of people and places with data researched from other Manila-focused texts both historical and contemporary: novels, memoirs, travel books, media reports, statistical surveys and historiographical analyses.

The critical commentary element of my thesis begins with an analysis of what I term ‘Manilaism’, a trajectory of Anglo-American travel writing, literary journalism and realist fiction set in Manila dating from the mid-Victorian era to the twenty-first century, and goes on to argue that *Searching for Manila* contests the reactionary and ethnocentric assumptions of these texts by employing a variety of research methods, narrative strategies and linguistic devices. The result of these creative decisions has been to situate *Searching for Manila* as a ‘radical travelogue’; that is to say radical according to both the formal and political senses of the word: my mobilisation of parody, self-reflexivity and inter-textuality are complemented by my endeavours to evoke Manila through the lens of my leftist commitments to peace, social equality, economic justice, anti-racism and anti-imperialism.

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# *Searching for Manila: Personal and Political Journeys in an Asian Megacity*

## **Part 1**

### **Chapter 1. Pearl of the Orient**

The first I ever heard of Manila was from my grandad. I was six, he was sixty. I was surprised how warmly he spoke of the place. He wasn't known for his warmth.

'Took shore leave there with the navy. Back in '41. We were well looked after. Bloody modern as you like. Elevators that went *whoosh*. Also rather pretty. Palm trees, mangoes, that sort of thing.'

Grandad always spoke in these telegram-like sentences, as if giving orders. While he talked, he'd scratch at his cropped white hair, bold and bright as the target spots of the searchlights he used on HMS *Formidable* to bamboozle kamikazes.

He showed me black and white pictures of Manila and told me how it had been beautified by the American architect Daniel Burnham. According to Burnham's plans, the US colonial authorities widened the tangled streets into acacia-shaded boulevards, dredged its inner city estuaries and grew gardens between handsome villas with *capiz* (oyster shell) windows. Grandad claimed Manila was cleaner and greener than British cities of the time.

For an officer of the Royal Navy, Manila's pleasures were varied and affordable. Grandad frequented the Manila Hotel, another Burnham brainchild. Surrounded by its own custom-built park, this 500-room Art Deco spectacle had champagne suites, string quartets and celebrity guests. One evening, Grandad spotted the imposing bulk and moustache of Mr Ernest Hemingway holding hands with an attractive blonde woman,

but was too shy to approach them. Grandad's memory was probably correct – later I found out that, in February 1941, Hemingway flew into Manila with his then wife Martha Gellhorn, the famous war correspondent, *en route* to Beijing to report on the Sino-Japanese War.

Grandad showed me the silk suits he'd bought from Chinese-Filipino tailors in Intramuros, the walled city built in the late sixteenth century by the Spanish colonisers of the Philippines. He told of lazy afternoons at a café famed for its *bibingka* (rice cakes) that took hours to prepare, and of long nights on the azoteas of colonial bars filling his belly with ice-cold *tuba* (coconut wine) and his pipe with fine local tobacco.

The Army and Navy Club in Luneta Park was the place to go for poker, pink gins and beautiful women. Grandad said he resisted the latter temptation. Not that the six-year-old me really understood such adult things. At the club on Sundays, you could play polo, golf and tennis with the British and American officers. To cool off in the evening, the members would swim in the translucent, indigo waters of Manila Bay, the flower-crested island of Corregidor gleaming in the distance.

Although he was later to scowl at the multiculturalism that reshaped post-war Britain, Grandad marvelled at the diversity of pre-war Manila. He joked with the fast-talking Indian-Filipino traders descended from Sepoys who'd deserted during the British occupation in the 1760s. He was impressed with the erudite, Western-educated *mestizos* of mixed Spanish, Chinese and Malay descent. He bantered with Greek and German and French captains of ships packed with coffee, sugar and hemp bound for Europe, China and the US.

After these nostalgic flights, there was always a point when the glee would slip from Grandad's eyes. His sneer would expose brown, jagged teeth.

'All went to shit in Manila,' he'd growl. 'Japs invaded after Pearl Harbor. Wrested it from the Yanks. Place got hairier than bugger's carpets.' Years later, I

discovered that ‘bugger’s carpets’ was 1940s slang for sideburns. ‘Made it a bloody shambles,’ Grandad would continue. ‘Damned ruthless the Japs, the lot of ‘em. Killed the men. Raped the women. Bloody animals.’ At this juncture, Grandad would snuff out the rest of his glass of Laphroaig and flop back in his armchair.

Grandad didn’t elaborate on the Japanese invasion, but, aged nine, I learned more by listening to stories from other veterans. A great uncle who’d fled Hong Kong after it fell to the Japanese was detained in the Philippines on his way to Australia. He became one of the few British POWs amongst mostly Americans in the horrific New Bilibid Prison, Manila. When I asked him for more details he slowly replied, ‘I’m sorry, Tom, I just can’t go back there.’

To Grandad’s chagrin, my parents sent me to a progressive state middle school run by ex-hippies where we sang Bob Dylan’s anti-war songs in assembly rather than the usual hymns about God, joy and ploughing fields. Grandad was pleased, though, when I started researching a project on the Pacific War. The schoolbooks said that the Japanese, as part of their plot for world domination, had surprise-attacked American forces based in the Philippines. One of my ex-hippie teachers pointed out that, in fact, the US was an imperial power too, hence its presence in the Philippines in the first place. Manila changed hands twice during the war and, by the end of it, was one of the world’s most damaged cities. Grandad gave me an old book of photos of the Battle of Manila, 1945, when the Americans recaptured the Philippines and dealt a mortal blow to the Japanese Empire. The scratchy monochrome of the pictures made them all the more disturbing:

*A shell-shocked GI, pupils dilated behind wide-lens glasses, staggering zombie-like through rubble, holding a wounded little Filipina in his arms.*

*Another GI kneeling to fire a flamethrower, the outline of a Japanese just visible within the cloud of fire. His brother-in-arms looking on coolly, foot resting on a shell case.*

*Filipino civilians executed by fleeing Japanese, lying facedown, limbs and backs curved into the pliable postures of rag dolls.*

*More corpses: Japanese commandos strewn around a bullet-holed truck. One leaning against an oil drum, arm reaching desperately for help that isn't there. Another, on his back, wearing a death grin, floating in a lake of oil-black blood.*

*One side of the Old Congress Building pristine, the other side crumbling like the facial droop of a stroke victim.*

*Finally, a bird's eye view of the city after the Japanese surrender – eerie, blank, nothing left but ash and foundations. Easily mistaken for post-A-bomb Hiroshima.*

These shocking pictures jarred with the exotic images of pre-war Manila I had in my head from Grandad. Now I understood his sadness. It was also important for a young boy to know about these things in order to understand the brutality of the world. I imagine those notorious stills from the Vietnam War – *that* Viet Cong guerrilla about to be shot in the head, *that* nine-year-old girl running naked and napalm-scorched – had a similar impact on those who saw them in the 1960s.

At school, I had a history teacher called Mr Turnbull whose nose was bent because a policeman broke it in 1968. He'd been one of the 6,000 at Grosvenor Square protesting the Vietnam War. A charismatic speaker, he got me interested in Asian liberation movements of the Cold War era. I didn't tell Grandad about that. He hated the political left as much as he hated the Japanese. I came to admire Ho Chi Minh, who led the struggle for Vietnamese self-determination, routing first the Japanese and then the French. After that, his socialist model of development appalled the United States, which was trying to enforce its own market system upon the world. It's little known that Ho

had begun his career as a fan of the US. His initial plans for an independent republic of Vietnam quoted their Constitution extensively. Ho never wanted a confrontation with the Americans, but the Americans saw him as an evil commie tyrant who had to be stopped. They failed, of course, and Ho stands out in history as the only national leader ever to have beaten the United States in open warfare, even though he didn't quite live to see the last American troops flee Saigon in 1973.

I also learned about the Huks, the Filipino Marxist guerrillas who, like the Vietminh, had daringly repelled the Japanese. After the war, they took on the shady, US-backed regime of President Ramon Magsaysay. Aiming to stop feudal landlords from cheating and abusing peasant farmers, the Huks robbed banks, planted bombs and assassinated politicians. By 1950, they were gathering on the outskirts of Manila.

I didn't tell Grandad about my research into the Huks either. Marxists and imperial Japanese were equally unwelcome in the idyllic 'Pearl of the Orient' of his memories. I know now that Grandad's Manila was run by and for rich, white Westerners like himself, and sustained by the kind of monstrous exploitation the Huks railed against. 'And a bloody good thing too,' Grandad might have added.

## Chapter 2. Goodies and Baddies

When I was eleven, my mum took my younger brother and cousin to a country fête. I stayed at home preferring to write and draw adventure comics based on my researches into World War II. (I'd just reached that age when making the sound effects of guns with my mouth while I composed was seen as immature). When they got back to the house, my brother and cousin were unusually silent. After they went to play upstairs, my mum started crying.

‘They wanted to go on the fairground rides,’ she sobbed. ‘I couldn’t afford it. All their friends were going on them but I couldn’t... I couldn’t...’

As I put my arm round my mum’s waist, I had the sharp instinct that what had just happened was wrong. My mum loved us as much as any other mum and was doing as good a job raising us. Why, then, were we kids not entitled to the same basic joys – a five minute jaunt in a toy helicopter or anything else – as our peers?

My parents had recently divorced and my mum was bringing us three kids up on benefits. The propaganda about the upward mobility of the Thatcher period omits families like mine who fell off the social ladder due to deep cuts and mass-unemployment. My mum had moved us back to Hayling Island, where she’d grown up in the 1950s and 1960s. Then a bucolic village of tearooms and cycling vicars, now it was a fanatically Tory suburb of Portsmouth, and not fond of single mothers on the dole. Like a shit-kicking town in the southern US, everyone knew everyone else, outsiders weren’t welcome and a handful of dubious locals ran everything. Freemasons owned much of the land and property. There were rumours that the racism driving the Masonic creed caused these proprietors to up the rent on the only shop on Hayling run by a black man. Priced out, he closed down and left.

My schoolmates wore brand new Reebok Pump trainers, put expensive gel in their hair to emulate footballers like Chris Waddle and went on package holidays to Tenerife. My mum bought our clothes from jumble sales, cut our hair herself and, in the summer, would drive our clapped-out Renault Four to stay with an artist friend in Cornwall, breaking down several times on the way.

I was lucky not to be bullied. Other kids weren't so lucky.

One day at my middle school, a Romany Gypsy girl called Leanne brought in a letter of complaint from her mum. The teacher read the whole thing out to the class, which struck me even then as not the most tactful approach to conflict resolution. As the charges were laid out, I watched Leanne's swart, narrow-featured face cringe as the tears leagued in her eyes.

'Paul Grayson called her a skanky gaylord and locked her in the stationery cupboard. Sharon Williams dropped two pence on the floor and shouted at Leanne to pick it up because her family needed it. Six kids held her down and peanuttied her for being smelly. Karl and Joe Turner have bushed her three times – they are real baddies. She gets teased by everyone for living on a houseboat.' ('Peanutting' was a potentially fatal assault in which the victim's tie would be suddenly tightened around his or her neck. 'Bushing' was shoving someone into the thorn bush outside the school gates.)

As the teacher read on, the kids around me stifled laughter. It wasn't only their malice that worried me. Leanne and I were too similar for comfort. We were in more or less the same socio-economic bracket. She and I both wore hand-me-down clothes and ate free school dinners. Before I was born, my mum and dad had lived on a houseboat opposite the one rented by Leanne's parents, yet it was Leanne who'd been harassed, not me. That she was darker skinned than everyone else hadn't helped her case either.

I grew angrier the more I saw of Leanne crying and the more I heard of the other kids tittering behind their hands. I wish I'd been strong enough to stand up for her in some way.

When I went to study A-levels at Havant College, just over the bridge from Hayling, I was able to place these early shocks into a wider political context. My own family's hardships made more sense when I learned that a minuscule fraction of humanity owned almost all the world's wealth, and that, since the year of my birth, 1979, the wealthiest 1 percent of Britons had quadrupled their mammon while most working people had seen their incomes freeze. After eighteen years of neo-liberal chaos, trains were crashing, hospitals were falling apart and pensioners were dying from the cold. Privatisation was the courteous term for a racket in which assets owned by every man, woman and child in Britain were pilfered by an overclass of venal greedheads.

At Havant my views about war, nationhood and imperialism were challenged. After class one day, I got talking to a German exchange student called Werner. 'I went to go and watch thiss film last night,' he hissed, 'and it was a-bloody rubbish!'

He had only himself to blame – he'd gone to see *The Thin Red Line*. This pompous sham of a movie is one of the few I've walked out of, even if it was on a subject that interested me: the Battle of Guadalcanal, a crucial clash in the Pacific War. Despite some impressive cinematography, not a lot happens beyond a bunch of Hollywood stars relating specious homilies in voiceover about life, death, love, bravery and so on.

'Only 'cos your lot lost,' snorted Ryan, a tracksuit-clad *townie*, which was snobbish nineties slang for *brash working class youth*. Like me, Ryan had a grandfather who'd served in the Royal Navy during the war. Since then, two generations of British males had been raised to revere those who'd shielded Britain from the Nazis. Pop culture reinforced this. As infants, we'd spent our pocket money on toy soldiers, comics

set in the D-Day landings and polystyrene Spitfires that raced off on the breeze when thrown from the beach. Many of the lad-oriented films of my youth, from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to *Saving Private Ryan*, had Nazi antagonists. When England played Germany at football, the tabloid papers would superimpose Tommy helmets onto the heads of Stuart Pearce and Paul Gascoigne. Stereotypes drawn from the Nazi cult were applied to normal, modern German people – they were ruthless, irritable, humourless, despotic and as efficient as their public transport systems.

‘I do not know what you mean by “your lot”,’ Werner replied. ‘Those crimes had nothing to do with me, I was not born then. And every country in the world has been in wars to be ashamed of, yours also.’

‘What you on about, mate?’ Ryan glared.

Werner glared back. ‘The British Empire. This is an example, no?’

‘The British Empire was sorted.’

‘Really? The colonies? The slavery? The famines?’

‘Look mate, I’m gonna deck you in a minute...’ Ryan took a step forward but Werner held his ground. If they’d got physical, I wouldn’t have known who to bet on. While Werner had the tubby cheeks and prescription spectacles of an archetypal geek, his torso was muscle-studded and he had four inches’ height on Ryan’s spare, featherweight boxer’s physique.

After an uneasy instant while it seemed someone was preparing to throw the first punch, Werner continued his spiel, perhaps thinking this was a battle better won with words. ‘I am just asking you to be a little fairer here. I am not saying what happened in my country was right, it was a-bloody rubbish, you know. The damage England did to other countries is also true. Not that you boys are to blame for that either.’

Ryan made a brushing gesture with his hands. ‘Not worth it,’ he said and sloped off to the bike sheds for a cigarette.

Werner got me thinking. What if he was right and the population of a country shouldn't be liable for the actions of its rulers? The assumption of the nationalist or the patriot is that their government always represents and serves its people. Can that be said of dictatorships like Nazi Germany or the USSR that, by definition, don't rule by public consent? Can it be said of many democracies given that a party can win an election with a third or less of the popular vote? And even if, say 99 percent of Britons in 1780 supported slavery or the same percentage of Germans loved Hitler in the 1930s, why should progressive young people like me and Werner, who weren't alive then, be held responsible for such outrages? Furthermore, what if Werner was right and almost every state has cadavers in its military-imperial cupboard? And following that, what if there are no firm boundaries between 'them' (the baddies) and 'us' (the goodies), especially if 'them' and 'us' merely refers to the ruling elites of nation states?

I went on to find proof for Werner's points. Britain, France and Portugal, amongst others, were responsible for the deaths of 30-60 million Africans during the Atlantic Slave Trade. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 60 million Indians perished in famines the British authorities could have prevented. Belgian company bosses in the Congo Free State killed another 10-15 million indigenes between 1885 and 1908. Yet, in the popular discourse, these atrocities – if they get an airing at all – are seen as bagatelles next to the Nazi extermination of 10 million European Jews, gypsies, disabled people and homosexuals, not to say the breaches of the Geneva Convention by the Japanese in World War II. Why? One reason is that history is written by the winners, as shown by the candid admission of Curtis LeMay, the US General in charge of the bombardment of Japanese cities in the war, that, had the Axis powers won the conflict, he'd have been hanged for war crimes.

Furthermore, there are gaps in the histories written by those who won World War II and stopped the Holocaust. They forget that the 'liberal democracies' not only

appeased Hitler but supported him. Most of his ideas about race came from top universities in Britain and the US – some twenty American states had banned interracial marriage and sterilised ‘undesirable’ people long before the Nazi Party existed. Throughout his reign, Hitler had a portrait of Henry Ford on the wall of his office – fitting, since Ford had funded the US publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fake news report on a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. Anglo-American firms from IBM to Ford to the Bank of England did business with Germany throughout the war. In the 1930s, my local newspaper, the *Portsmouth News*, was friendly to fascism – one op-ed was headlined ‘HITLER THE MAN To Lead Germany to Liberty!’ Notable Britons and Americans who agreed with Nazi ideology included Edward VIII, Charles Lindbergh, Errol Flynn and Winston Churchill. Although he’s painted as saviour to Hitler’s antichrist, in truth Winnie would have got on famously with the *führer*. He detested socialism, communism and trade unions. He also detested Indians enough to deny them aid during the 1943 famine, writing at the time ‘Why hasn’t Gandhi died yet?’ Gandhi survived, but 4 million of his compatriots didn’t. Earlier in his career, Churchill had praised British concentration camps in the Boer War, promoted the gassing of Kurds in Iraq (sixty years before Saddam Hussein actually did it) and reckoned racist mass-murder broadly a good thing. ‘I do not admit,’ he wrote, ‘for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.’

I found out – and not from the college-approved reading lists – that profit was the common driver of modernity’s genocides. African slaves were needed for the lucrative mines and plantations of the New World, Indian peasants starved because the Raj was intent on selling the grain on the world market and the Congolese were either

worked to death – or executed for not working hard enough – in the extraction of rubber for export to resource-hungry Europe. While the Holocaust didn't bring any commercial benefit – rather it became a huge burden on the German war effort – it was rooted in economics because the pervasive bigotry towards European Jews in the 1930s hinged on their perceived wealth, avarice and commercial acumen.

My history teachers said we'd learned lessons from these tragedies. 'Never again' was the favoured phrase. I wasn't so sure. Capitalism was still alive and, since the Cold War had ended, now almost ubiquitous. Surely, there'd be more slaughter for greed. A few years later, some of the same states responsible for the imperial crimes above would be violently plundering Iraqi oil. When Bush and Blair said they were on a humane mission of mercy, history suggested otherwise.

I'd spent my childhood not admiring war so much as accepting the need for it in some situations. Now, in my late teens, I questioned the legitimacy of war in all circumstances. It was the resort of the coward and the fool. Haven't humans evolved enough to reason their way out of conflict? If we can build wonders of the world, write great novels and travel into space, why do we have to fight each other like irascible tomcats? On an interpersonal level, if we have a disagreement with a friend or relative we don't typically resolve the problem by launching missiles at them. So why do we lose that basic moral sense when we act *en masse*, as tribes, nations or blocs? Again, I suspected the blame lay with 'the system', modernity, capitalism, or whatever you want to call it.

Our set texts for history stated that the Cold War was all about the democratic USA reacting to the provocations of the despotic USSR. When I read other scholars not on that list – for example, Chomsky on neo-imperialism and Nkrumah on neo-colonialism – I found another angle: under the cover story of the Red Scare, the American-led First World had tried to crush nationalism in the Third World the better to

loot the Third World's resources and make it a market for First World products.

Millions more had died in that process – in Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Korea, Chile, Guatemala and elsewhere.

When I talked about this stuff to my peers, a typical reaction was, 'What's that got to do with us, here, now at Havant College in 1997?'

'Well,' I'd counter, 'formal imperialism and the Cold War may be over, but the rich countries are still attacking and exploiting the poor countries. And if you don't care about what happens to foreigners, the wealth divide in rich countries like ours is getting people bullied, making it hard for our parents to raise us and condemning millions to alienation, hunger and joblessness.'

However, if you made arguments like these you were made to feel naive and passé. You may as well have been speaking another language because the argot of free enterprise had triumphed. We weren't students now, we were 'service users'. Teachers and administrators were 'service providers' and 'line managers'. The principal spoke of our college as 'a brand' and the need for our courses to embrace 'professional development' and 'knowledge transfer'. Thinking critically about the world was off the agenda. It was all about prepping you for a job in HR, or some such sector of the late capitalist economy.

I wasn't interested in a job in HR. It sounded like wage slavery to me and the money and security attached to it was, as Oscar Wilde said of charity for the Victorian needy, 'a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution.' Anyway, I didn't care about money, as I'd been poor and got through it. More than that, I wanted to be free to read and write and learn for as long as possible. I also wanted to be free to travel to the Philippines, although, admittedly, that cost the kind of money more readily available to an HR professional than an A-level student.

### Chapter 3. The Not So Far East

On one gusty September day in 1998, I was standing outside my new home: one of the pyramidal ziggurat buildings of the University of East Anglia. I must be the only person in the world who likes the brutalistic geometry and nickel-grey concrete of UEA's architecture. Its 1960s feel – a consequence, presumably, of it having been built in the 1960s – made it an apt venue for the political meetings and demos that I'd attend during my time there. I was furious about the UN sanctions on Iraq, which were to kill a million children while the privileged of that country were still able to buy fast cars and sharp suits. Kosovo, the first of Tony Blair's wars-for-peace, began in my second term and even a callow young activist like me was suspicious of NATO's 'goodies versus baddies' narrative. Not only did their bombardments of Belgrade provoke the worst barbarities of the conflict – the 'baddie' Serbs slaughtering 10,000 Kosovars – but the 'goodies' we were backing, the Kosovo Liberation Army, had by the end of the war caused more bloodshed than the Serbs. To his credit, the then British Defence Secretary George Robertson confessed as much.

A fellow militant, Walter, also a poet, persuaded me to take some creative writing units as an act of catharsis. 'We on the left normally lose,' he said, 'so you have to get these disappointments off your chest somehow.' I got a first for 'The World Dictators' League', a science fiction story set in the far future when an alien entertainment corporation buys planet Earth with the aim of turning it into a reality TV show. (I was writing this in 2000 when reality TV was *à la mode*). Contestants are installed as dictators of various states, given a budget much like players of *Monopoly* receive £200 every time they pass 'Go' and the viewing public of the whole universe watches as they compete for world domination. Looking back, the internal logic of my milieu was wobbly and I ended the story on a diabolical *deus ex machina* – Earth

exploding or some such thing. At least Walter, who was much better than me and about to publish his first book of poems, praised me for both my technical skill and my political insights.

While I was glad there were some like-minded progressives at UEA, there were only *some*, and they couldn't insulate me from the snobs and bigots also on campus. I was surprised that some of these snobs and bigots came from the sorts of beleaguered, Third World places I wanted to protect through my activism. I once sat down in a lecture theatre next to a black guy wearing Versace glasses and a snowboarding fleece intended to look grungy, but that probably cost what a UEA lecturer earned in a month. I, on the other hand, was wearing a tatty army surplus jacket and jeans ripped by age rather than for a fashion statement. The guy introduced himself as a Ugandan in a plummy English accent bought for a fortune at Eton or Harrow. 'My father is Chief Economic Advisor to the President of Uganda,' he said. 'And what does your father do?'

'He's a carpenter.'

Like a motorist enduring whiplash, the guy's head started to recoil backwards in surprise before he remembered his manners and gave me something between a sympathetic simper and a condescending smirk. 'That's... nice,' he said.

I felt alienated from this person. Not because he was Ugandan and I was British, nor because I was wearing one type of teenage garb and he another. Rather because I was a lower-class, state school boy painfully aware of all kinds of personal and social limitations, while he was the member of an international *haut monde* that had the money, confidence and contacts to do anything it wanted.

We watched the other students file in for the lecture.

'So,' I said at last, 'I bet you were glad to get rid of that bastard Idi Amin, eh?'

'Actually,' he glowered, 'Amin was my uncle.'

A canard held by *Daily Mail* readers is that British universities are hotbeds of lefty insurrection. That they stopped being anything like that in about 1973 was proven when one my friend Dermot went to see one of our professors for advice on an academic career.

‘So you want to be a *literato*, eh?’ The professor let out a squeaky, chest-infected laugh. Dermot was not surprised by his reaction – he’d seen him earlier that afternoon downing paper cups of post-conference wine.

‘Yes.’

‘Have you considered getting a sex change?’

‘No.’ Dermot was unsure how sincere the professor was being.

‘Have you considered blacking yourself up?’

‘Course not.’

‘Then you have little chance of getting anywhere in academia these days.’

If episodes like these were liable to chip away at the optimism required to be a political activist, my curiosity about Manila – now almost thirteen years old – was reawakened when I found a book called *Language of the Street* by Nick Joaquin on a stall at Norwich market. The spring weather scintillating, I went down to the lake near the foot of my ziggurat, sat down on the grass and read the book in one sitting. After what I’d gleaned from a British navy officer, here was a Manileño’s take on Manila. Joaquin showed me a richly distinctive culture that paradoxically owed much to foreign influence. He taught me about the evolution of Tagalog – the official language of the Philippines – from its early appropriations of Spanish to its absorption of Americanisms such as *genoowine* (a compliment paid to a woman with fair skin). With a cool equilibrium that contrasted with my anti-imperialist fervour, Joaquin argued against renaming the streets of his home town for nationalistic reasons because ‘Manila has been a Malay city, a Spanish city, an American city, and is now a Filipino city ... a

people as young as we have surely need of every bit of memory that can surely make us feel more intensely *us*.’ He went on to explore the panorama of Filipino rituals, from Christian-inspired mock crucifixions and festivals in which pigs were dressed up as saints, to the Aztec facets of the Day of the Dead celebrations. (For 250 years, the Philippine colony was ruled by the Spanish viceroyalty in Mexico).

Thanks to the new medium of the Internet, I learned more about contemporary Manila too. The city was becoming the cultural powerhouse of Southeast Asia. The Eraserheads, a band dubbed the ‘Philippine Fab Four’, sold a million albums worldwide and earned followings in Japan, Singapore, Australia and the USA. The Manila-based Filipino film industry began winning awards at Cannes. English language writers like Joel Toledo and José Dalisay scooped grants, fellowships and prizes across Europe and the US. (Dalisay had been a David T.K. Wong Creative Writing Fellow at UEA during my first year, and I was annoyed to only find this out in my second year, after he’d left). All this sounded like a renaissance, but I found no allusion to it in the Western media. It seemed that if an Asian creative wanted to get reviewed or discussed in seminar rooms over here, he or she should have the good sense to come from India, China or Japan, and not the Philippines.

Amongst my fellow students, a different narrative emerged about the post-colonial world. Southeast Asia was rebranded to them as a waypoint on the new Grand Tour. Stuffing their backpacks with parental credit cards and copies of Alex Garland’s *The Beach* – the *On The Road* of my generation – Western kids flew thousands of miles to experience ‘cultural otherness.’ What this actually entailed was large amounts of drinking and drug taking, and almost getting seduced by a misleadingly attractive female impersonator.

But when I came to ask backpackers specifically about the Philippines, it turned out most hadn’t been there. They said it was too far – a whole four hour plane ride! –

from peninsular Southeast Asia. The few who had gone bypassed Manila for pleasure spots such as Boracay Island, which they hailed as ‘like something out of *The Beach*.’

I searched for more books about Manila. I found *The Tesseract*, the novel Garland wrote after *The Beach*. While there’s no denying *The Tesseract*’s narrative velocity and structural innovation, it offered few insights into history or culture. Like a shanty town built from salvaged materials, Garland’s Manila is a rickety composite of American movie tropes. Before the epic-slo-mo-hostage-crisis-shoot-out-finale, we’re shown bloodstained hotels that recall Stephen King or the Coen Brothers. The moustachioed, matchstick-chewing mobster Don Pepe is straight out of a Spaghetti Western. The references to Spanish-named locations (‘Sierra Madre’) evoke cowboys, Indians and Mexican bandits. Moments of slapstick violence such as the bungled shooting of a cat could have been lifted from a film by Garland’s contemporary Quentin Tarantino. Also Tarantino-esque is the book’s splicing of pop culture (junk food, comic books, videogames) with sensationalised tragedy (a baby attacked with acid, a woman driven mad with grief after losing her child to septicaemia).

Published a few years before *The Tesseract*, James Hamilton-Paterson’s *Ghosts of Manila* is just as dark. His vision of Manila as ‘the Khmer Rouge in Disneyland’ is full of barbarity, perversion, rotten luck, broken dreams and psychotic felons. But while the lurid crimes in *Ghosts of Manila* (the illicit corpse trade, police protection of foreign paedophiles, a corrupt official giving a blind man a driving licence in return for a bottle of whisky) were drawn from real life, I was less convinced about *The Tesseract*. When the book deals with the histrionics of Filipino Catholicism, it feels more like one of Martin Scorsese’s expletive-addled quests for redemption. In one unlikely sequence, a homeless boy hurls abuse at a good-natured Irish priest: ‘Jesus Christ! ... I’m not asking about the mind of God or your fucking leg!’ You can almost hear the Brooklyn accent.

I questioned the pounding bleakness of these books. Could any city anywhere really be that disastrous, depressing and dangerous? Where was Manila's cultural resurgence in *their* narratives? I supposed both writers had cherry-picked the most graphic aspects of reality for the sake of a good yarn.

When I graduated from UEA, I was eager to get away from books and out into the world – into Manila specifically. A careers advisor told me that a lot of British graduates were going to Asia to teach English. Sadly for me, such opportunities were in places like China and Japan rather than the Philippines, presumably because Filipinos learn English from junior school and it's the *lingua franca* of law, politics and higher education.

'I could move to China or Japan first,' I said to the advisor, 'and then travel on to the Philippines.' But when it came to filling out applications, I got scared. Perhaps Garland, Hamilton-Paterson and the other scaremongers were right. What if knife-wielding vagabonds lurked in every nook of the Orient, waiting for a Westerner to take revenge on? What would I do then? Stick my hands up and tell them I'm an anti-imperialist socialist who hates American foreign policy as much as they do? I may have been a legal adult with a university education, but in many ways I still felt like a timid, unworldly little boy.

Then I received an offer to travel in completely the opposite direction.

## Chapter 4. The Occidental Tourist

Walter rang me one evening and asked me if I wanted to go to San Francisco.

‘With you?’ I asked.

‘Instead of me.’

‘How does that work?’

‘I bought a ticket there ‘cos I was booked to do some slams in California, but I’ve just been offered this gig teaching engineers in China. It starts next week. And, like most writers, I badly need the dosh.’

‘Can’t you get your money back from the airline?’

‘No, well, I got it online for cheap. You can’t change the flight without paying a grand or something.’

A talented performance poet Walter was, but a practical man of the world he was not.

‘Trouble is,’ I said. ‘I’m skint.’

‘Doesn’t matter, man. I just want someone to use the ticket.’

‘Erm...’ Leaving Walter hanging on the phone, I Googled the distance from London to Manila: 6,666 miles, and then the distance from San Francisco to Manila: 6,963 miles. I’d dreamed of going to Manila for most of my life, so wasn’t it a mite mad to travel somewhere that would put me further away from Manila? Then again, I had no means of getting to Manila at this time and the San Francisco ticket was free.

‘I don’t need your dosh, man,’ said Walter. ‘Just buy me a pint when I’m back in the UK.’

For someone who craved cultural otherness, San Francisco looked discouragingly similar to Britain. At least that’s the way it appeared when I touched down in the middle

of the night. I took the shuttle bus to a grubby youth hostel in Haight-Ashbury, the former hippie hub. A man holding a silver-knobbed cane was at reception. 'I'm Rick,' he said.

'Are you the owner?'

'No. The owner's Afghan. He comes to the States once a year.'

Although it was now two am, I found a restaurant still open. Styling itself an 'English pub', the menu featured 'Churchill's Steak and Kidney Pudding' and 'Thatcher's Full English Breakfast'. The owner was an expat from Chester. When he heard my accent, he put on a video of the England football team's recent 5-1 shock defeat of Germany.

Why did I travel so far to come *here*? I asked myself. When I tried to order something completely un-English, I somehow ended up with fish and chips. Despite my longing for difference, I felt oddly reassured as I pushed my knife through the brittle batter of the cod and dipped a forkful of it into a splash of brown sauce. Perhaps a part of me was stuck in England and didn't want to leave.

Such a simulation of Englishness in America was a perverse inversion. I belonged to the third generation of Britons to have been spoon-fed American film, television, music, fashion and food. A young person in late twentieth century Britain couldn't escape the corpulent shadow of Uncle Sam. If you started a band it'd sound like American rock music. If you ate out you had pizza, fried chicken or hamburgers. You spent your leisure time in a multiplex cinema, a bowling alley or a shopping mall. Now one of the few indigenous aspects of English culture left – the pub – had been exported to the imperial centre.

Halfway through the meal, I nearly fell asleep face-first in it. I tottered back to the hostel.

My sleep was interrupted around midnight. A man outside kept screaming, 'It's fuckin' crazy!' Eventually a passer-by calmed him down. I didn't get back to sleep.

A few hours later, I showered and went into the hostel's TV room. Inside was a woman in an absurdly baggy raincoat and a man with a dense mullet protruding from the back of a blue bandana.

An Australian comedy film called *The Dish* was playing on the TV. It had a scene that made me laugh, if nobody else in the room. A US diplomat is at a function in a hick town in the Aussie outback. The local mayor announces that the band will now play the national anthem of the United States of America. Cut to the confused face of the diplomat as the band launches into the *Hawaii Five-O* theme tune.

I sat beside the woman in the raincoat. She was rocking back and forth in her chair. 'Are you on holiday?' I asked her.

'No,' she whispered, 'I'm on disability.'

I was no expert in mental health, but I doubted that someone with her problems should be living unsupervised in a youth hostel.

*The Dish* finished. Everyone left the room apart from the mullet and I. I picked up a brochure with a grim picture of Alcatraz prison on the front.

'Don't go there, man,' said the mullet in a spaced-out, Southern Californian tone. 'Overrated.'

'I see.'

'You from England, right?'

'Yes.'

'Whoa! Y'got all the sickest bands there, dude. Zeppelin, Sabbath, Maiden. Name's Maurice.'

It was the first time I'd heard Maurice pronounced *Maw-reees*. 'I'm Tom.'

'You had breakfast yet, Tom?'

Maurice led me to a German eatery next door. I opted for a *bratwurst*. Maurice plumped for ‘the full works’: three gigantic sausages soaked with a dozen sauces. His excess reminded me of something I’d read about Elvis Presley’s final years. He loved to eat deep-fried whole piglets and entire loaves of bread filled with bacon, peanut butter, jam and bananas. When Maurice was finished, he wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his denim jacket.

Back at the hostel, I thought about what I should be doing on my first day in San Francisco. Maurice lowered his voice and said, ‘Wanna get high, Tom?’

I looked at my watch. It was ten in the morning. ‘Erm...’

‘C’mon, dude, you know it makes sense!’ He led me out the back of the hostel and on to a paint-chipped balcony overlooking a graffiti-daubed alleyway. Maurice sparked up a clay pipe and took long, deep tokes.

‘So where do you live?’ I asked him.

He expelled a hefty cloud of smoke. ‘Right here, dude. For a year already.’

‘Do a lot of people live here permanently?’

‘I’d say about 70 percent of the guests. Got no choice, most of ‘em.’ He toked some more. ‘So you look at a guy like me and you probably think “What a bum!” Am I right?’

‘Not at all.’

Maurice half-closed one of his eyes, either out of disbelief or due to the smoke.

‘Would it surprise you if I told you that I have six years of college behind me?’

‘No.’

‘And that I’ve got a Master’s degree in politics? And that my dad is a senator?’

‘No.’

A big moronic grin sprouted over Maurice’s face. ‘Then again, I might be fuckin’ with you.’

‘So,’ I said, confused, ‘*are* you fucking with me?’

‘No, man. It’s all true. But I *coulda* been fuckin’ with you!’ He laughed and slapped me far too hard on the back.

‘Right,’ I grimaced.

‘Whoa dude, you Brits are uptight. Want some of this?’ He passed me the pipe. It was a potent strain. One lug made me so light-headed that further intelligent conversation would be unfeasible.

We spent the rest of the day getting stoned on that balcony. By the evening, we were famished and went back to the English pub. The landlord put on the football again. After a Thatcher’s Full English Breakfast, we sat outside for another pipe.

I sunk into a melancholy stupor. I was drifting with no purpose, learning little from this journey and doing exactly what I, an idle twentysomething, would normally be doing in England: drinking beer, smoking weed, eating junk food and talking nonsense. I looked westward out across the street and willed myself across San Francisco Bay, and then the Pacific Ocean, and then Manila.

## Chapter 5. The West is the Best

I met Maurice in the TV room the next morning. 'I got a craving for a pork belly buster,' he said.

'I'm sorry?'

He walked out of the hostel and I followed him. On the journey there, he lit up his pipe. 'Pumps yer appetite up, dude.'

'I think I should go and do something today.'

'We *are* doing something,' he coughed. 'So what do you think of San Francisco so far?'

Was he joking? I'd barely seen a thing. I was trapped inside what Will Self has called a 'micro-world': a tiny portion of a geographically much larger location. I'd travelled all this way to the varied metropolis of San Francisco only to construct my own micro-world within it that consisted of a youth hostel, a pub and a sausage shop. I was understandably bored of it now. At the same time, I didn't have the nerve to escape.

We stood outside the shop to eat our hot flesh in stoned hush. When we finished, I suggested going for a walk.

'Why the hell do you wanna walk, dude?' Maurice gasped. 'This is America, people don't walk.'

'Of course they do. Look around us. There are people walking. Come on, I'm only here for another few days. I don't want to go home and tell people that all I did was eat sausages and get caned.'

'Caned?'

'It means "stoned" in English. I mean, British English.'

'It's not, like, all that safe to just *go* walking here, man. That's why I stay around the hostel.'

‘What sort of dangers do you anticipate?’

‘Badasses, dude. We got 6,000 homeless in this city. Some of ‘em end up in hostels like ours, most don’t.’ He looked the street up and down in paranoid style. ‘I’m just lucky my allowance from the senator covers my rent.’

I tapped his shoulder. ‘It’s alright, Maurice. I’m a seasoned walker. I’ll look after you, mate.’

After a couple of blocks, the limits of my San Franciscan micro-world became disarmingly evident. Vietnam veterans in stained military fatigues were passed out in the street, one of them confined to a rusty wheelchair. A placard was tied to the back of the wheelchair reading WE’RE HUNGRY AND HOMELESS BUT MOSTLY WE JUST WANNA GET HIGH. Maurice and I headed up a street of quaint nineteenth century rowhouses beyond which were fire-blackened tenements and boarded-up bungalows, some with animal pens attached. Until then, I’d associated such gloomy scenes with Africa or Asia, and not with the West.

Maurice halted and looked back at the rowhouses with longing. ‘Let’s go home, dude. Ain’t nothing to see here.’

I was still staring at one of the burned-out buildings. ‘How can people put up with this in the richest country in the world? Why don’t people try and change things?’

‘Waste of time, dude.’

This was an odd thing for a politics graduate to say, I thought.

‘This is America,’ he continued, ‘and nothing changes. This is America and nobody gives a shit.’ He started to stride back whence we’d come. ‘But it ain’t sustainable, know what I mean? We can’t keep slipping down, down, down into hunger and crime and drugs. It’s getting like that Iron Maiden tune.’ He tromped back the way we’d come.

‘Hang on!’ I shouted, not wanting to be left on my own here. I jogged after him.

‘What Iron Maiden tune?’

He craned his head over his shoulder to address me. ‘It’s that lyric: “Where the blood red journey ends.” America’s been on a blood red journey since we whacked all the Indians. Now it’s coming to an end. I know it.’

That night we sat outside the English pub yet again. Maurice prepped his pipe. I refused the first toke.

A black guy hobbled over to us. He was wearing only a kung fu robe and smelled strongly of piss. Maurice went red and looked down at a newspaper on the table, pretending not to notice him.

‘Hey brother, you got a cigarette?’ asked the guy.

I offered him one. He reached slowly for the pack but stopped halfway and clocked my bottle of Budweiser. ‘Ah got a thirst on,’ he said in a pathetic voice. I nodded, not wanting trouble. He took the beer and cigarette simultaneously.

‘Scottish or Irish?’

‘Pardon me?’

‘You Scottish or Irish, brother?’

‘Neither.’

The man frowned at me as he drained the rest of my beer. ‘What is you then, Australian or some shit like that?’

‘No. English.’

‘Well ‘scuse me all to hell!’ he said in sarcastic high pitch.

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘Nationality doesn’t mean that much to me.’

‘Is that a fact? But c’mon, English? Don’t sound it to me.’

In the corner of my vision, I saw Maurice turning away from the table as if he didn't know us.

'You don't talk like that honky who gone got jiggy with a sister,' said the man.

'Who?'

'Yeah, that be him. Hugh.'

I shook my head.

'Hugh Grant, that be him,' said the man. 'So you British brothers got a hard-on for my black sisters right? Woo-hoo, who'd have thought it?'

'Some of us do, I suppose.'

'I bet y'all do,' he said. 'Y'all the same o'er there. 'At's why you dirty motherfuckers done gone to Africa in the first place. For the slaves, sure, but mostly for the sisters.' His scrawny chest expanded as he drew on the cigarette. 'You English, y'all gentlemans I hear. So you is like some motherfuckin' gentleman too, huh?'

'I try to be a gentleman, I suppose.'

'You sure is a *generous* man with ya brews and ya smokes,' he said, flicking the cigarette butt into the road. 'I bid you a good motherfuckin' evenin', gentlemans.'

## Chapter 6. The End

Maurice was late to the TV room today. While waiting for him I reflected on my trip so far. As a colonial subject of the American Empire, I'd been conditioned in my formative years to believe that America was ahead of the rest of the world. I doubted that now. From what Maurice had told me and from what I'd witnessed on our walk yesterday, it was wrong to count America as part of the developed world at all. Unlike Western Europe, it clearly couldn't deliver social security or healthcare to its neediest citizens.

After an hour, I gave up on waiting for Maurice. It was time to find the courage to leave my micro-world.

I boarded a bus with an advert for a film called *American Outlaws* on its side. I got off at Chinatown. It was eerily quiet. Old men played chess under the pea-green canopies of a pagoda. Most of the shops were closed, yet it was a Tuesday. I bought a newspaper, but it offered no clues.

I then saw a policeman with a handlebar moustache lowering the Stars and Stripes to half-mast. It was an affecting symbol of defeat, an anti-Iwo Jima. Fires of wrath burned in the policeman's eyes.

'Excuse me,' I asked, 'could you tell me why you're taking that flag down?'

'Haven't you heard?' the cop bellowed, opening his palms to me. 'America has been attacked! American airplanes have been hijacked! Many thousands of Americans are dead! This is too big-scale for a Timothy McVeigh kinda thing so foreigners *must* be behind it!'

I walked away from the cop and into what had once been Jack Kerouac's favourite bar.

The widescreen TV was showing what has become the most famous video footage in history: *those* planes crashing into *those* buildings. It's almost banal now,

we've all seen it so often. But at that moment, at 11:30am on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, I was seeing it for the first time, and there was something frighteningly new about it. So new as to be unreal. Indeed, later on in my trip a Canadian tourist would tell me that, when he first saw it, he expected James Bond to leap from the cockpit of one of the planes just before the moment of impact.

The caption on the screen read AMERICA UNDER ATTACK – PLANES CRASHED INTO WORLD TRADE CENTER, NEW YORK. The footage was replaying on a loop. I ordered a beer and sat near an office worker whose collar was loose around his pink throat. He kept shaking his fist at each replay, shouting, 'I don't wanna see it no more!' Why was he putting himself through it then? Perhaps he was simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the cyclic image of destruction. He wasn't the only one: more people were coming into the bar, ordering drinks and then shouting at the TV. Someone was holding an 'extra' edition of a local newspaper. I'd never seen an 'extra' before. The front page was a still from what we were watching on the screen. The headline simply read BASTARDS!

The office worker got precariously to his feet. 'I bet the ragheads did it,' he said and left.

As I made my way back to the hostel, I couldn't help but feel a small measure of glee. It sounds like a grody admission to make, but it was true. Of course I felt no glee about the innocents who'd died and I had no glee towards the madmen behind this massacre, but for a leftist like me, who'd spent much of his life studying and opposing US belligerence towards smaller countries, 9/11 – as it was already starting to be known – was a small act of justice, or perhaps merely revenge. A bully was now getting a tiny teaspoonful of his own medicine.

My Manila fixation made me ponder the American Empire, which was arguably born when the US annexed the Philippines from Spain in 1898. After American

diplomats hinted to Filipino nationalists that the US would give them independence, the US decided occupation would be better for everyone, especially the US. American merchants wanted rice, hemp, cocoa and tobacco, not to say access to the China market. American strategists saw the archipelago as a military foothold in the Far East. American race scientists held that *Homo philippinensis* – the native Filipino – was too savage and backward to be allowed to choose his own destiny. ‘Your new caught sullen peoples/Half-devil and half-child,’ as Rudyard Kipling depicted them in ‘The White Man’s Burden’, his panegyric to the intervention.

But the Filipinos didn’t want to swap one bunch of colonial masters for another. An asymmetrical war began that would bear gruesome parallels with Vietnam and Iraq. According to the historian Howard Zinn, Brigadier General Jacob Smith instructed his troops to kill any Filipino of either gender over the age of ten. ‘I want no prisoners,’ he added. ‘I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn the better it will please me.’ The Americans used torture by water-boarding for the first time. ‘His sufferings must be that of a man who is drowning, but cannot drown,’ said Lieutenant Grover Flint.

After three years of fighting, a quarter million or more Filipinos lay dead: a genocide by anyone’s standards. As Mark Twain wrote at the time, ‘We have pacified some thousands of the islanders and buried them; destroyed their fields; burned their villages, and turned their widows and orphans out-of-doors.’

This was also the first time the US had faced suicide attacks from Islamic jihadists. As military historian Barry C. Jacobsen writes, a *Moro* (Filipino Muslim from the southern island of Mindanao) assassin would work himself up into a state of *amok* (meaning ‘insane rage’ and the origin of the English idiom ‘run amok’) by spending all night with a piece of copper wire tied around his testicles. When he was sufficiently miffed, he’d charge at the nearest American soldier and do as much harm as he could

with a sword before getting himself shot, usually with a Colt .45 automatic, a sidearm invented expressly to fend off the *Moros*.

The Philippine conquest announced the twentieth century, the American century. Now, though, we were very much in the twenty-first. Now suicide attacks were happening on American soil, in the nub of American power. Was great change afoot?

Back at the hostel, Rick was sat behind the reception wiping the knob of his cane with a handkerchief. 'Oh hey Tom, how's it going?'

'Disoriented,' I said. 'Have you seen Maurice?'

'Ain't a clue where he is. He got freaked out by, err, this morning's events and checked out for good. He was talking crazy, kept saying he predicted something like this would happen. Said America was finished. Said he was going to ask his dad for money to get out the country.'

A chilly tremor went through me. I suppose Maurice had, in a nebulous way, predicted this. 'What a day,' I said.

'Yeah, what a day.' Rick lifted the cane and swiped it through the air as if it were a *Moro* sword. He looked at me conspiratorially. 'I'm figuring out my self-defence options. After today we dunno what shit might brew up tonight, or tomorrow, or the next day. Know what I mean?'

I couldn't work out whether this was a sincere comment or not. Maybe that old British platitude about Americans having no sense of irony was wrong. Perhaps the fault lay with outsiders who didn't know how to discern irony in Americans.

'Have you heard from your boss in Afghanistan?' I asked. 'What does he make of all this?'

'He called and he's real pissed. I mean, we all are, but he's especially pissed because he thinks Arabs did it. But I guess it's still too early to tell.'

Within forty-eight hours of 9/11, I was reading about hate crimes across the US against South Asians for mildly resembling the nineteen Arabs behind the foray. Racism, violence, crime, poverty, international terrorism – I hadn't expected contemporary America to be quite like this. Bizarrely, the mass media continued to hawk the American Dream of equality and opportunity. Amid the blanket coverage of the Twin Towers, adverts showed billionaire CEOs eating hamburgers and calling their subordinates 'buddy.' On the news, the President wore a baseball cap and talked like a farm hand, despite coming from great privilege.

After my two weeks in America, I returned to Portsmouth where I hoped the unfocused rage towards Islam wouldn't follow me. I was wrong. One day, outside a late Georgian terrace on Clarendon Road, I saw a skinhead scream 'You fucking terrorist!' into the *hijab* of a Muslim woman. Paralysed with anger, I couldn't intervene. As with Leanne, I still feel guilty about it today.

That wouldn't be the last of the hatred in my hometown. The neo-fascist numbskulls of the English Defence League would later gather outside the mosque and throw stones, bottles and fireworks while chanting, 'Allah is a paedo.' A local anti-racist website would publish quotes from a gay- and Muslim-hating children's football coach and photos of a publican giving a *Sieg Heil* salute at a George Cross flag.

I didn't feel comfortable here. I hadn't felt much more comfortable in America, though. Maybe I didn't belong anywhere in the Western world. I badly wanted to be part of something or somewhere else. My curiosity about the East mounted.

## Chapter 7. Fear and Moaning

I felt outstandingly ill. This was due to my drinking beer non-stop over a twelve-hour flight. Now I just wanted to get out of this capsule and into fresh air. As if mind-reading my plea, the pilot announced we'd soon be landing.

I attempted what someone I might have met in San Francisco would call 'positive thinking.' Stay cool, I ordered myself. I had money in my pocket thanks to a graduate loan I'd just taken – this being 2005 and before the economic crash stopped banks from what we now term 'irresponsible lending'. I had a plane ticket that would take me across Asia, from India to the Philippines, then back.

I tried to get back into my book: *Travels with Herodotus* by the eminent Polish correspondent Ryszard Kapuściński. Having relished being one of the few people in 1950s Poland permitted by the Stalinist government to travel overseas, he was now in India. But I couldn't concentrate.

'Your first time coming to India?' asked the Indian man sitting next to me. I hadn't spoken to him yet because he'd fallen asleep as soon as he'd boarded the plane at our stopover in Goa. He wore glasses with bulky frames and dark lenses that couldn't quite hide the constant fluttering of his eyes. His tongue dangled canine from under a frowzy moustache.

'Yes, my first time. I'm Tom.'

'Gopal.' He gave me less a handshake and more a jittery pinch of my fingertips.

'What are you doing for your profession, Mr Tom?'

'Please, just call me Tom.'

'Okay Tom.'

'I'm a sort of... writer.'

'So Mr Tom, you are having gainful employment in Kolkata already?'

‘No, I’m just gathering ideas.’

‘Actually, I personally am a trainee accountant. I have been performing an audit of the Goa Industrial Development Corporation. I am wishing soon enough to be in a position where I can earn a good salary, as my father is growing old and soon it will be my turn to support the family. Do *you* intend to be prosperous, Mr Tom?’

‘Please, just call me Tom. Getting rich isn’t an ambition of mine, no.’

‘So Tom, have you been living with your family at home in England?’

‘I was living in a flat shared with friends.’

Gopal slapped himself lightly on the forehead. ‘Of course you were. You are different like this in England. Also you are having fair wages and good jobs and free health and free schools and no poverty or prejudice too. In these fields, England is ahead of India.’

‘You make it sound utopian,’ I said. I thought of friends of mine who’d reached thirty and were still living with their parents. I remembered all the menial jobs I’d done from sticking barcodes onto boxes of mobile phone top-up cards to lifting crates of beer onto ships at Portsmouth docks. I thought of the scandal of PFI hospitals and how it was nigh impossible to find an NHS dentist nowadays. I thought of headmasters getting stabbed by their own pupils. I thought of all the homeless people in our big cities and the gang activity copied from the US. Lastly, I recalled the harassment of people the same colour as Gopal.

‘Actually I would like very much to visit England. May I ask what the average salary per annum for an English is?’

‘I don’t know. £20,000? That’s-’

‘1.4 million rupees, yes. And also, Mr Tom, may I ask how much income would you be taking home after tax?’

I looked away, too embarrassed to tell him. He'd think I was – relatively speaking – an untouchable.

'You are not in business yourself, yet do you have any relatives who are?'

'Err, an uncle who-'

'Actually, saying if I emailed you my curriculum vitae would you mind passing it on to him? Or perhaps if you have an Indian friend in England who is in business?'

'Don't think-'

'So are you looking forward to Kolkata?'

We both shuddered as the plane thumped onto the runway. 'Honestly, I'm a bit worried. This is my first time.'

'I will assist you, as you are my guest.'

'Please, that's not-'

Gopal squeezed my fingertips again. 'I am from here and you are my guest.'

I was nervous as we filed off the plane. What would my first encounter with the developing world be like? Which theory that I'd read – if any – would be proven right? At UEA, I'd been taught whacky postmodern philosophers who claimed that globalisation was turning the whole world into a kind of Westernised theme park – Coke, McDonald's and Irish pubs wherever you go.

The moment I stepped onto the gangway, I watched that theory dissipate into the stove-hot air saturated with the smells of urine and sweet-sour CO2. This was no duplicate of the West. Far from it.

'Do not let the porters take your bags,' warned Gopal as we rode the escalator past signs warning death for drug trafficking in several languages. Coming the other way was a turbaned Sikh policeman airily drumming his fingers against the barrel of the assault rifle slung over his shoulder. He gave me a deferential nod.

When we left the airport, I had in my head Kapuściński's description of his arrival in Kolkata in the fifties: 'I was struck at once by the poverty of these soaked skeletons, their untold numbers, and, perhaps most of all, their immobility. They seemed a lifeless component of this dismal landscape.'

Little had changed since then. Bodies were pressed together like fruit packed tightly into a punnet. They made a low, humming, moaning noise. As Gopal and I tried to pass, the crowd tautened and surged towards us, as if we were freshly arrived film stars. Hands reached over heads, but they weren't seeking a magic touch of celebrity, they were after just enough money to buy a meal. I registered brown, toothless, prematurely aged faces. A woman in a headscarf squeezed in front of me. She was bowing and I could see an emaciated baby with a head the size of a light bulb asleep in a sling on her back. I started when the woman glanced up at me. The skin on her face looked melted, her cheeks warped and crinkled like a burnt sheet of plastic, her nose drooping towards her mouth like wax dribbling down the edge of a lighted candle. Shaken as I was, I kept looking at her. It seemed heartless not to. She raised a callused hand in a gradual and shaky manner that suggested the action was toil for her. I fished in my pocket, but I had only English money. I shook my head regretfully.

I felt Gopal nudging my elbow. 'Neither the time nor the place to be dawdling, Mr Tom.' He led me on a detour around the crowd.

Outside the car park, a spiv in an Oxford shirt and sporting a brylcreemed side-parting strutted over to us. 'Taxi?'

I looked at Gopal. He said something to the man in Bengali.

The man looked at me again. 'Rickshaw?'

'No thanks,' I said.

'Bus?'

'No.'

‘Helicopter?’

Gopal made a brushing gesture and shouted ‘*Duhro!*’ The spiv backed off and Gopal took me to a battered Ford India taxi.

We wheezed onto a motorway of rusting Ambassador cars, gaudily-coloured autorickshaws and trucks with engines salvaged from farm machinery. We almost collided head-on with a nine-year-old on a bicycle.

‘Are you still feeling unwell, Mr Tom?’ shouted Gopal above the mechanised row.

‘Yes,’ I winced in the direction of the nine-year-old, ‘but that’s the least of my concerns.’

We weaved between men in loincloths with muscular limbs and pot bellies pulling rickshaws by hand. Horse-drawn wagons lugged carcasses swarming with flies. Cyclists somehow balanced on their backs drums of milk as big as their own bodies. On Park Street, the buildings smacked of Portsmouth’s Victorian seafront hotels, but these Kolkatan equivalents were adorned with something you’d never find in Portsmouth: the hammer and sickle flag of the communist government of West Bengal.

‘You are staring in wonder at something, Mr Tom,’ said Gopal, his tongue now pointed upwards and worrying at his threadbare moustache. ‘Or perhaps you are shocked by my home town?’

‘Just curious,’ I said. ‘What’s it like living in a communist state?’ I knew from the guidebook I’d read on the plane that the people of West Bengal had been electing the Left Front, a coalition of Marxist parties, since 1980.

‘Actually a lot of people are complaining of it almost on a daily basis, while I happen to think it is better than the alternatives.’

‘Why?’

‘I must say that this government assisted me personally. I was working as a telephone call agent for an American corporation in Sudder Street. The arrangement was such that I had to obtain a certain sum of commissions over three weeks in order to earn a *bona fide* contract. If I did not meet this very high target, I would not be receiving a single rupee for my labours. It was a kind of slavery.’

‘I should say.’

‘And the conditions were far from acceptable. Actually some of the women doing my job were complaining of eve-teasing.’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘This is to say they were sexually molested by senior members of staff. The CPI(M) – that is, our governing party – intervened on the behalf of myself and a good deal of others, and forced the Americans to pay us what they owed us. They also told the Americans to leave Kolkata, and they did.’

‘Wow.’

‘Actually, yes it was an achievement. Although we have not driven out the Americans completely. I am told that McDonald’s is opening its very first restaurant in Kolkata soon.’

‘But what happened to all the call centre workers?’

‘I found a job, of course. The others? I do not know. If they became unemployed it would have been far better than working for nothing, I think. Better for your dignity.’

‘So it’s normal for a Bengali to describe him or herself as a communist?’

‘Perfectly normal, Mr Tom.’

The Hotel Kwality was covered in black stains and power cables fraying along loose bricks. Above my head more cables bowed and looped and entwined with one another like a convoluted trick performed with a yo-yo.

‘I must be leaving you now, Mr Tom,’ said Gopal, giving me his finger-shake again. He climbed back into the taxi and disappeared into the tempest of traffic.

I saw a naked man lying in a gouge in the pavement. His skin was coated with ashes. Is he asleep or is he dead? I asked myself. I looked for a part of the Hotel Kwality’s barbed wire-wrapped front door to knock on that wouldn’t cut my hand to shreds.

A dwarf in a blue suit and glittering buckled shoes threw open the door to reveal a dust-cloaked reception crawling with cockroaches. The dwarf led me into a cubicle with a single barred window and filthy rags stretched over a bench. I sat down on the bench and reflected on the day.

People dead or dying in the street, hungry children, disfigured women, near-fatal driving – I’d never seen anything like it. I had to keep reminding myself why I was putting myself through this. Witnessing the worst of the world would – or should – sharpen my understanding of humanity and of myself. But this was never going to be easy. I was fighting my own cowardice, a yen to run off back to England. I contemplated all the writers I liked who’d been inspired by unforgiving conditions. In *Playing With Water*, a book about living self-sufficiently on a remote Philippine island, James Hamilton-Paterson turns the point into a rhetorical question: ‘Why the undergoing of extremes to see a few things differently?’

‘Undergo the extremes,’ I muttered. It didn’t work. I started crying and must have cried myself to sleep, although I don’t recall lying down on the rags.

I was woken at dawn by a Black Kite squawking and bashing its wings against the bars of the window. Outside, market traders were yelling ‘*Eyi-dige aashun!*’ Around them the peals of autorickshaw engines grew. From deep within the hotel came the sobbing of old pipes and the gargling of sinks and toilets. It sounded like the digestive workings of a Lovecraftian monster.

I dared not leave this room – horrible as it was – and enter the mayhem outside. If I did I'd be unable to move for beggars, or be run over by an autorickshaw, or fall down a crack in the street, or get sick from the food, or suffer heat stroke, or instantly contract lung cancer from the smog. I hated myself for thinking like this. I'd been looking forward to visiting Asia for years and, now I was here, I was behaving like the most paranoid, xenophobic *Daily Mail* reader.

I spent the rest of the day and night in my room, reading and making notes. I subsisted on food and drink I'd saved from the plane. Next morning it was time to go on to Vietnam.

## Chapter 8. Pickled in History

Hanoi was nothing like its depiction in the Vietnam War films I'd seen. It was a drowsy, parochial town of parasol-capped pavement cafés serving *bia hoi*, a local lager stored in metal barrels and sprayed through a nozzle into punters' glasses. The Red River idled past, the sporadic first drops of the rainy season falling like a faulty yet agreeably warm shower. In fact, I took to Hanoi much like Grandad had taken to thirties Manila, although I didn't share his assumptions of privilege or superiority.

Unlike Kolkata, Hanoi was easy to traverse. That was just as well because I was determined I wouldn't lock myself away as I had in India. Hanoi's roads were broad and traffic-free, save for a few pushbikes and fewer cars. There was no hassle from hawkers – here they sold baguettes, old medals and the conical *nón lá* hats I knew well from movies like *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*. By ten pm, most of Hanoi's attractions were shut and most of its denizens in bed.

On my last morning there, I went to see the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Revolution. His defiance of the Washington Consensus stirred hippie radicals in San Francisco, polo-necked intellectuals in Paris and rural guerrillas all over Africa and Asia. He sought to build an egalitarian Vietnam where every citizen had enough food, work and shelter. It's one of history's improbable sub-plots that Vietnamese peasants (with logistical help from the Russians and Chinese) defeated the most sophisticated military force ever seen. The victory came at a huge price, though. After three decades of hostilities, up to 3 million Vietnamese were dead and the environment had been despoiled by chemical weapons.

Standing in the half-mile long queue for Ho's resting place, I doubted the price had been worth paying. Where did the KFC eatery, Chevron petrol station and Viettel mobile phone stall belong in Ho's vision of a socialist Arcadia? The petty

totalitarianism on show was hardly Arcadian either: earlier I'd witnessed two policemen wave their batons at a girl in *Spongebob Squarepants* pyjamas selling old-school Casio watches. Now, brick-jawed soldiers patrolled the queue I was in, bayonets raised in case we talked or strayed out of single file.

'I don't think they have noticed that I am only wearing shorts,' whispered the Japanese civil engineer in front of me. To visit the body of a man who spent much of his life in mud-stained fatigues you were supposed to wear 'respectful' attire: long-sleeved shirts and ankle-length trousers.

After an hour's wait, I entered the mausoleum. Flanked by four more goons, Ho was lying on his back in an ebony-framed glass casket, a low light accentuating the unnatural paleness of his face. Just as pale were his cotton-wool like hair and trademark wispy, toenail cutting of a beard. Ho is one of a small elect of the embalmed, which includes fellow Marxists Lenin and Mao, as well as leaders on the other side of the political chasm: Eva Peron of Argentina and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines. Ho's face was kind and grandfatherly, perhaps *too* kind and *too* grandfatherly. I knew that a lot of work goes into maintaining an embalmed body – it must be soaked in and injected with preservative chemicals, as well as regularly washed, polished and cosmetically repaired.

But after all this work, how much of the original Ho was left? The more I studied the radiant features the more I was convinced that this was less a man with heart problems pushing eighty and more some idealised replica of that man.

The Japanese civil engineer put it another way. 'It is like something from *Madame Tussaud's!*' The rest of the queue iced over. Not only had this man talked, he had shouted. As the bayonets swung round to his blushing cheeks, I said a silent prayer to whatever higher power might deign to help – God, Buddha, the spirit of Karl Marx or the spirit of Ho himself. Apparently Ho never wanted to be embalmed, thought it a

disgusting and humiliating procedure, but wouldn't he be doubly opposed to the idea of foreign tourists being bayoneted or shot right next to *his* own corpse in *his* own mausoleum?

Fortunately, that didn't happen. The captain of the guard placed a white-gloved finger to his lips. The Japanese nodded briskly. The guns were lowered and we were permitted to exit with our lives.

Once outside I studied the KFC sign. It was fitting to be one moment guessing how much of a great leader's carcass might be authentic to the next moment recalling an urban legend about the US Food and Drug Administration banning this junk food franchise from mentioning the word 'chicken' in its name because there was so little of that meat inside its products.

I winced when a guide asked me if I now wanted to look round Ho's presidential home. How have they commodified *that*? I sighed to myself. Turned it into a drive-in restaurant named 'Hamburger Hill' after the Hollywood 'Nam movie of the same name?

The guide led me to a two-storey bamboo hut on stilts. The politburo used to meet on the upper floor was and Ho and his wife, Tang Tuyet Minh, slept on a plank bed on the lower floor. While I've always contested the conservative castigation of 'champagne socialists', at the same time, I tend to be more trusting of leftists who practise in their private lives what they preach to the public. As with Gandhi, I imagined Ho Chi Minh's popularity had something to do with the fact that he lived like the people he represented and cared about. He ate simple food, dwelled in a modest tribal hut and had just one indulgence: coy carp in a pond beside his home. Unlike a distressingly large number of other post-colonial premiers – on both the left and right – he didn't ransack his country's coffers.

If he hadn't been pickled rigid with formaldehyde, Ho would be turning in his glass grave if he knew what had happened to Vietnam since the war. At least I'd got

some consolation from seeing the intimate details of his home life and the integrity they signified. But there was a paradox here: though I had no time for free market capitalism, cults of personality or those mausoleum goons, it was precisely those forces that were keeping Ho's message and his example alive – as well as his body, in a weird and morbid way.

As I walked back to my hostel, hot beads of rain forming on my head and shoulders, I ruminated on other paradoxes about my trip so far that contested the certainties of my student days. I couldn't get over the twenty-five-year-old leftist regime in West Bengal that protected workers like Gopal from the excesses of multinationals while tolerating McDonald's and heart-breaking poverty. And then there was the paradox of me: a privileged Westerner bumming around the Third World critiquing the global structures that allowed a privileged Westerner like me to bum around the Third World. Inside that was another paradox: how could I learn about the effects of that system on the Third World without bumming around it? I slept fitfully that night.

## Chapter 9. Mr Lucky Leg

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was radically different again to both Hanoi and Kolkata. In some ways it was a pastiche – or perhaps the epitome – of Western consumerism. Capital had been ploughed into glitzy vanity projects like the cloud-kissing Petronas Twin Towers and hi-tech shopping malls with helter-skelters filling their ceilings. I then started to feel that there was something more Western than the West about KL's embrace of Western ways. London and San Francisco were decrepit compared to KL's Spartan streets and glossy, contemporary architecture. Its roads and public transport systems were way faster, more efficient and more logical than their run-down Anglo-Saxon counterparts. The hygiene standards of the humblest food court put any pub or greasy spoon back home to shame.

However, the Chinatown district had avoided such globalised blandness. Arriving at the top of Jalan Sultan Street, my taxi's headlights fell on a temple decorated with dancing Buddhas and dragons breathing curlicues of fire. A man swept a torrent of palm oil, fish balls and cigarette butts into the gutter. The butts reeked of clove, the smell preserved in the humid density of the air.

An elderly woman in a muddied sarong asked if I wanted some flip-flops. I shook my head.

'No sir, you buy!'

I handed over some coins and put the flip flops on. She looked down to below my shorts and saw my birthmark. This accumulation of blood vessels under the skin – known colloquially as a 'port-wine stain' – was shaped like the continent of South America. 'You are lucky,' said the old woman. 'You are Mr Lucky Leg!'

The flip-flops fell apart an hour later, but in every other way I stayed lucky, especially when I travelled deeper into Southeast Asia. I never got ill. I never fell victim

to crime – when I left a pair of shoes on a coach in Thailand I found someone had deposited them at the lost property office at the next station along the route. Despite the warnings of a friend’s father who was a Metropolitan Police anti-terrorism officer, I journeyed to Indonesia, reputedly an Al-Qaeda hotbed. I was greeted by warm, English football-obsessed people who had about as much time for Islamic extremists as any Western neo-con. While snorkelling off one of the Gili Islands, I was sucked out to sea by a potent rip current. That was the first time on my travels I thought I’d die. I thrashed at the water like a ninja waving nunchucks, but couldn’t propel myself an inch. A kind of torpor took hold of me perhaps because my mind and body were resigning themselves to their watery fate. But I kept thrashing away, harder and faster, and eventually washed up on the shore, hyperventilating, my every joint smarting. Had one variable about that episode been slightly different – the rip had been just one foot per second faster or my bicep muscle mass an inch smaller – I might not have made it.

I kept a diary. I hoped I could base some articles or short stories on it when I got home. At UEA, I’d penned imaginative fiction because I didn’t think I had any real-life experiences worth writing about. ‘Writers need problems,’ once said the novelist V.S. Naipaul and I’d learned on my course that every story needs a conflict. I was born and raised in the suburbs, and had never had a problem or been embroiled in a conflict dramatic enough to propel a story that anyone would want to read. Now, though, my Asian sojourn was bringing with it problems and conflicts and other interesting turns of event almost every day. Furthermore, I fretted – somewhat morbidly – about being an old man on my death bed, my time-worn memory struggling to picture what had happened on this trip to the younger Tom. A document, some record of this period might give old-timer Tom some solace and a sense of wholeness about the life he had lived as it neared its end.

My luck ran out in the Bali resort town of Kuta. Heading through the snaky back streets, past women slapping washing against doorsteps and men carving *wayang* shadow puppets, I thought about my flight to Manila, two days away. Would it be a trial like Kolkata or calmer like Kuala Lumpur? Would I find the ethereal pre-war Manila that Grandad went to? The Manila of World War II I'd researched as a boy? Cartoon-noirish Manila of *The Tesseract*? Cool Manila of rock stars and outré movies?

During a breakfast of oysters at a resto-bar oozing the gentle percussions of *gamelan* music, I read an essay from *Language of the Street* in which Joaquin considers the marketing of the Philippines as a tourist destination. He warns against 'picturing the land as a lush tropical paradise, something like a cross between Hawaii and Bali'. Rather he sees the country's USP as a 'push beyond comfort and civilisation' where a Westerner might 'subject himself to the rigours of the travellers of old'. Admittedly, Joaquin was writing this in 1967 and things had surely advanced in forty years, but might parts of his judgement still be true?

'It's hot today, sir,' said a voice, bringing me round from Joaquin. 'You want a lucky cola?'

I looked up to a middle-aged waiter in a *udeng* (head scarf).

'Sure.'

I heard the sound of a blender like a heavy smoker clearing his throat. The waiter returned with a glass of muddy-looking cola. I drank it, noting the bitter taste, then headed for the beach.

On the way, I looked down at my arms and legs. They appeared distant, as if my neck had stretched to the height of an oak tree. Outside the wood-panelled façade of the Bene Hotel, I knelt to look at the paving stones with euphoric curiosity. I saw throbbing Balinese characters shaped like petals, eyelids and candy canes. The more I studied them, the higher they floated into the air.

Everything on Kuta Beach swayed in unison, dancing to the same rhythm: skeletal palm trees, black and yellow parasols, surfboards dug upright into the sand. The night fell and so did I. For some time – I don't know how long – I lay on my side in the sand giggling.

The night came and the spotlights of seafront hotels searched the black sky like the Bat Signal from the *Batman* films, weaving between the smaller, flashing lights of helicopters and planes full of fresh tourists.

I took off my flip-flops and T-shirt, sprinted to the shore and dived into the barrel of a world-class wave. I saw myself from the vantage point of one of the chirring helicopters overhead, watched my helpless frame shoved and slapped about by the water. But I felt nothing.

A brusque pain in my leg woke me the next morning. I looked around, reassured to be in my hotel room. The pain was coming from my birthmark. It had turned into moist scabs ringed with blood and crowned with xanthous pus. I was struck by other realisations. The 'lucky cola' I'd been given must have contained psilocybin mushrooms, a legal high in Bali. What had I done to myself in that altered state? I checked my shorts pockets and found my wallet and passport, albeit both damp.

At the local clinic, I joined a line of surfers with bruised and broken bones. Before the nurse bandaged me up, the doctor said I'd need a skin graft to prevent blood poisoning and/or possible amputation. My travel insurance wouldn't stretch to such an operation. My only choice was to go home and trust in the NHS.

The next afternoon, I was sitting in an internet café in Ngurah Rai International Airport. I received an email from my dad saying that Granddad, the man who'd planted the idea of Manila in my young mind, had died. Over the last decade he'd suffered a

dozen strokes and the latest one had finished him off. I thought of him as I watched passengers board the flight to Manila, a flight I should have been on.

Limping onto the Heathrow plane, I paused on the gangway, looked north – the rough direction of the Philippines – and quoted General Douglas MacArthur: ‘I will return.’

## **Part 2**

### **Summaries of Five Chapters**

#### **Chapter 1. You Will Never Leave This Place**

I awake in agony in Salisbury District Hospital where I have undergone a major skin graft operation on my leg. Unable to move or wash myself and semi-delirious from painkillers, I have happy dreams of my Asian travels and resent missing out on Manila. I interact with a number of fellow patients including Geoff, who has been a sex tourist in the Philippines and holds some disturbingly bigoted views about the country. After a month I am discharged from hospital, my leg not yet healed and requiring bandages.

#### **Chapter 2. Blood is Thinner**

I move into a bedsit in Portsmouth in the run-up to Christmas, depressed about both my injury and the state of the world during the 2007-8 financial crash. I write up some of my Asian experiences from my diary and manage to publish a couple of travelogues in Malaysian and Philippine magazines. I visit my older friend Henry, an intrepid traveller himself, who introduces me to his neighbour Beth, who is my age, and her three-year-old daughter Fiona. Although they are kind to me, I am too miserable and self-absorbed to engage with them.

#### **Chapter 3. The Three-Legged Dog**

I watch on TV as a once-great civilisation, Greece, collapses into civil unrest, I fear that my leg will never heal and that I will be permanently disabled. I stop tidying my bedsit and neglect my personal hygiene. After a call from Henry, I meet him and Beth at a pub. She is an artist and activist who created a number of installations protesting the Iraq War. She says she wants to leave Portsmouth because she associates it with the trauma

of the death of her partner, Fiona's father. This happened when Fiona was just a baby. When I tell her that I'm applying for jobs in Asia she says she envies me. As Henry and I exit the pub later, Henry tells me that Beth likes me, but that I ought to make myself more presentable if I want it to go further. I storm home in anger, meeting on the way some drunks who call me a scrounger because I'm dishevelled, unshaven and limping with a walking stick.

#### **Chapter 4. End Times**

Next morning, I am unable to get out of bed. I have lost all hope. I take the bandage off my leg and leave the wound open. I spend two days under my blanket, ignoring calls from friends and family. Ashamed of my life so far, I am about to delete all my emails when I see a job offer from *Travel SEAN*, a Malaysian travel magazine wanting a Manila correspondent. I start to feel excited and anxious, questioning my ability to do the job and whether, with my leg injury, I will be fit enough to take it on.

#### **Chapter 5. Saved by the Pub**

Three days later, at five pm on New Year's Eve, I receive a surprise phone call from Beth inviting me to the pub. Energised by my job offer, I get up, shave, wash and go and meet her. Although I am very nervous, Beth is flirtatious and kind, mopping my coat when I spill wine down it. A metalhead drunkenly bumps into Beth and I stand up for her, demanding an apology from him. This seems to impress Beth. We talk some more about our mutual passions: creativity, politics and travel. We kiss at the stroke of midnight.

## Chapter 6. Monkeying Around

A disturbing thing started happening to me in Asia. I was moving so fast and so often between places that I'd sometimes wake up in the morning and have no idea where I was. I'd lie in bed, throat contracting with dread, eyes clinched shut while I hunted for that crucial memory of the day before. How did I get to wherever I am, wherever that is? Where did I travel from yesterday? By what method did I travel? Who did I travel with? Where did I go last night and who did I meet? My efforts at orientation weren't helped by the fact that cheap hostels look remarkably the same all over Asia: the scratched parquet floors; the gaudy, thickly-painted walls; the maudlin glow of the lonely light bulb swinging overhead; the tracing paper drapes fluttering in the waft of the ceiling fan; the bunk beds that are always there whether you book a single room or a dormitory berth.

I knew that, after thirty seconds, my memory would return; it always did. Until then, I'd stay quivering in bed afraid of unlikely scenarios. What if I get up and realise I've somehow ended up in the middle of Mogadishu or Pyongyang? What if I've in fact died and this latest identikit bedroom is some backpacker's purgatory, which I'm doomed to spend eternity inside?

The 'where am I?' panic happened again on the morning of New Year's Day. I thrust open my eyes and looked at the ceiling. It was white with cracks in it swerving like ant trails around a pink drum lampshade. There was no fan so this couldn't be Asia. Then I caught the fresh and lemony scent of the plump white duvet over me. I noticed another aroma: sandalwood. It threw me back to Asia. But no, I knew I was in England because I could now recall limping off the plane at Heathrow almost a year ago.

It all came back haltingly. Snowy, black and white scenes from the pub flickered in the cinema of my mind. Shoes squeaking and stools scraping on the pub's sticky,

wood-effect floors. Slaps on backs and shoulders, slurred 'I love yous' between old boys with froth in their beards, arguments settled by Wikipedia on mobile phones. Henry licking the top edge of his roll-up to seal it in the motion of someone playing a harmonica, Beth looking up at the rows of antique beer mats glued to the ceiling. The furry metalhead, eyes dark and smudged as if he'd just come out of a coma, reversing into Beth, her glass falling and flooding the table with house red, some of it absorbed by that day's Portsmouth *News*. Me extracting the apology with rigid eye contact (while inwardly terrified of getting punched in the face). The chat-up clumsy at first – I've never relished the thrill of the chase – then easier the more nicotine and ethanol sailed into my blood stream. Mutual compliments on interests, traits, looks – 'I hate my nose, it manages to be long, wide *and bent*'/'*I looove your nose.*'/'Your nose is far better.' Random topics: the minty smell of dew on Southsea Common, how George W. Bush can fuck right off, where in the world would you most like to live?, children's programmes from our youth, how unthinkable it now is that Gosport, the dreary town west of Portsmouth, used to be a cool, happening hangout. Then the important stuff that establishes whether you can see yourself long-term with someone: evidence of empathy, compassion, helping others for no obvious personal gain, a yearning to connect with another despite the alienation imposed upon us by the selfish-capitalist social order. Then at last the kiss at the stroke of midnight, stolen while the crowd is distracted by *Auld Lang Syne* and the TV showing neckless Jools Holland dwarfed by his own piano. And that's where my memories ran out as surely as the barrel of Hoppy Ending Pale Ale had at 9.30.

Back in the present, I grew aware of the confines of the duvet. It clamped me to the mattress as firmly as my bandage was clamped to my leg. The only part of me I could move was my head and only by about thirty degrees. I spotted some locks of brown hair splayed over the top of the duvet just along from me.

‘Beth?’ I whispered. It must have been Beth unless events had taken a bizarre turn during that gap in my recollections and I’d ended up in bed with someone else entirely. There were of course men with long brown hair. I hadn’t been *that* drunk, had I?

I forced myself out of the top of the duvet. Beth’s face – smooth and fresh despite her long time unconscious – poked up. ‘Beth, thank God it’s you.’

She reached up and kissed me on the brow. My breathing smoothed out.

Fiona charged into the bedroom and stopped when she saw me. She put both hands over her mouth.

‘Morning Fiona,’ said Beth. ‘Remember Tom?’

Fiona giggled behind her hands and ran out of the room.

‘I’m not that smelly!’ I called after her. I heard more giggles from the corridor, then she ran back in, hands now clutching a transparent pencil case with glitter pens inside it. The first time we’d met, I’d been so wrapped up in my woes that I’d barely registered her. But now I could see how beautiful she was. She had an effusive, red-lipped grin and big cheeky eyes with long Betty Boop lashes. ‘Will you play with me, Tom?’

‘Err...’

‘Fiona, it’s early,’ yawned Beth.

‘No problem,’ I said, manoeuvring out of the bed. ‘*Hungry Hippos* or *Game of Life*? Or are they a bit passé?’

‘Let’s do Christmas cards.’

I followed Fiona into the kitchen, where a wide draughtsman’s table was strewn with sugar paper, Play-Doh, pens and crayons. Fiona stood up on a chair, leaned over the table and ripped open a pack of greetings cards illustrated with snowmen and red-breasted robins. ‘I’ll do pictures and you do writing, ‘kay?’ she said.

‘Okay. Who are we sending them to?’

‘First one for...’ She put her fingers to her lips while she thought about it. ‘Uncle Teabags.’

‘Uncle Teabags? What’s his address?’

‘He’s a monkey. Where do monkeys normally live?’

‘India or Africa maybe?’

She made a humming noise to aid concentration while sketching a monkey inside the card. It was advanced for a four-year-old. She used two shades of brown crayon for the face, adding the fine details of a tapering nose and cup handle-shaped ears.

Beth came over and ruffled mine and Fiona’s hair. ‘Do you kids want some breakfast?’

‘Yeaah,’ said Fiona.

‘Who’s Uncle Teabags?’ I asked Beth.

‘I think it’s from that tea advert where they dress monkeys up like humans.’

‘Oh right.’ That advert dated back to when *I* was four, and I’d always found it uncomfortable viewing. If this had been a class at UEA, I’d have bemoaned its Orientalist association of tea – the ultimate colonial commodity – with monkeys whom the Social Darwinists of old crudely likened to people of colour. But I wasn’t at university anymore, I was with a child and this was harmless fun.

‘And why the Christmas cards?’ I asked Beth.

‘No idea. We found a job lot of them in my dad’s house. I let Fiona use them for scrap paper.’

Fiona slammed her pen down and pushed the card along the table to me.

‘Writing time, Tom.’

‘What’s the magic word?’ Beth called from the cooker.

Fiona paused. 'Is it *Tom*?'

'The magic word is *please*. "Can you do the writing *please*".'

Fiona repeated the correct phrase in a thin and babyish voice.

'You did such a good picture,' I replied, 'I think you ought to do the writing too.'

'Don't like it,' she said, staying with the silly voice.

'They're teaching her in nursery school,' said Beth, 'but she just isn't that interested. I don't see any reason to hassle her about it. She'll get into it when she wants.'

'My parents took the same view. I think I got interested in things because I wasn't pressured to.'

'They sound more progressive than my parents.'

'The hippie generation, I suppose.'

Beth put three steaming bowls on the table. 'Did they cook food like this?'

'What is it?'

'Soya milk porridge with organic fruit and Manuka honey.'

'Absolutely. They'd have loved your sandalwood incense too.'

Fiona banged her pink-handled spoon against the table top. She kept shouting, 'News!'

The girls' eyes fell on me.

'What do you want me to do, sorry?'

'Tell us your news,' said Beth. 'It's something they do at Fiona's nursery school each morning.'

'Oh right, well last night I... I went to see a friend.'

'For a play or for a sleepover?' asked Fiona.

‘Initially just to play.’ Rather than mention all the alcohol I drank and how I’d got together with her mother, I said, ‘Then I met a certain girl – a very nice girl – and had a sleepover at her house.’

Fiona frowned. ‘Girl?’

I tipped my head towards Beth.

‘Ah, my mummy! Okay my news now. Today I drew some pictures with Tom and he wrieted and... I think he’s nice.’ She dropped her spoon and, once again, covered her face bashfully.

‘Thanks Fiona,’ I said. ‘Do you want to see something funny?’

‘Yeah!’

I picked up an empty glass, pressed the rim against my mouth and sucked hard enough so that I could let go of the glass with my hands and it remained fixed to my face.

‘Like a bird beak!’ So acute was Fiona’s laughter that she bent double on her chair and disappeared behind the table. She rolled around in mirth under that table for a good minute.

‘Sorry Beth,’ I said. ‘I’m being a bad influence.’

‘No you’re not.’

That porridge was the most nourishing thing I’d eaten for months. With every warm mouthful an unfamiliar sensation grew in me. ‘Happiness’ was too grand a word for it. ‘Comfort’ was nearer the mark. Just ten hours ago, I hardly knew Beth and I’d only briefly met Fiona. Now here I was eating, playing and laughing with them in their home. It felt right. Felt good.

My mobile beeped. I tugged it out of my pocket and saw a text message from Deirdre Wong. Clearly Malaysians, or some Malaysians, or at least this Malaysian worked on New Year’s Day.

‘Happy New Year Tom, have you arrived at a decision regarding the Philippines job yet?’

I read the message twice and then glanced at Beth and Fiona.

## Chapter 7. Waiting for Tommo

I hate making people wait because I hate it when people make *me* wait. In Deirdre's case, though, I had no idea how to reply. I sat gazing at her message with my finger above the keypad for what was surely a suspiciously long time. Then just as Beth was about to ask me something – I assume 'Who is the mystery texter?' – Fiona dropped her spoon on the table with a clang. "Scusing myself." She slid from the chair and sped off to her room.

'Fiona, you haven't eaten enough,' Beth called after her.

'So what are your plans for today?' I asked, keen to divert attention away from my text. I didn't want to tell Beth about the Philippines job just yet. It was early days – hours, in fact – and I wasn't sure how things would progress between her and I. Now was not the time to reveal that I could be leaving Portsmouth for good in a month. Nor was I sure taking this job right now was what I wanted anyway, with or without the prospect of a relationship.

Beth put the bowls into the sink, came over to where I was sitting and placed both her hands around one of mine. She pursed her lips and fixed my eyes with hers. There was something maternal about the manoeuvre. I recalled that Norman Mailer, in his Philippines-set war novel *The Naked and the Dead*, had written that men find women who mother them irresistible. 'Tom, would you do me a massive favour?'

'Anything,' I grinned.

'Could you look after Fiona for a bit while I get some shopping? There's one shop in Southsea open for a few hours today and I need to get some essentials.'

'As long as Fiona doesn't mind.'

'Thank you.'

Fiona came dashing back into the room holding a toy suitcase.

‘Going somewhere?’ I asked.

‘Maybe on my *holly-days*.’

‘Right Fiona,’ said Beth. ‘Tom’s going to look after you for a bit.’

‘Yaaay!’ Fiona shrieked and threw both her hands in the air, the left one still holding the suitcase, which opened with the force of her gesture. A plastic lizard, one of Beth’s hair brushes and a child-sized ruby slipper all spilled on to the floor.

‘I think she likes you,’ Beth mouthed to me. ‘Okay then, see you kids later.’

*Kids* turned out to be the operative word. Far from it being a chore, I relished the opportunity to play with Fiona. I reckon that every grown-up has the urge to transcend the bounds of adult life and return to a state of childish play, a free place of the mind insulated against fear – the fear of being judged by other people, the fear of the consequences of your impulses. Does this yearning explain why so many adults seek out drink and drugs and then behave like kids under their influence?

Since she’d brought the suitcase we decided to play a travel-centred game. We repacked her suitcase minus the lizard. I told Fiona it was cruel to trap Lenny – as I christened him – in there. He should ride with us. Fiona got on her hands and knees and did a screechy bark like a poodle’s. ‘I’m Gracie the dog,’ she announced in falsetto.

‘Where’s Fiona?’

‘I’ve *ett-en* her.’

‘Oh dear, poor Fiona. Well Gracie, it’s time to get on the plane.’ We sat down at the draughtsman’s table and I mimed fastening our seat belts. I cupped my hands around my mouth. ‘Good morning, this is your captain speaking. Welcome aboard this-’ I glanced at my phone to find out the time, remembered the Deirdre dilemma and stared at the wall, stranded in uncertainty. Fiona barked with impatience and pawed my shoulder. ‘Sorry,’ I said, returning my hands to my mouth. ‘Welcome aboard this 9.40 flight to Iceland.’

‘Iceland here we come!’ Fiona stuck out her tongue and panted.

‘Right, we’re here. Hang on, it’s going to be cold.’

Fiona scrambled off the chair, still on her hands and knees.

‘Brrr,’ I said. ‘So much snow and ice. See those white-capped mountains, aren’t they pretty?’

Fiona barked in approval. ‘Pretty yes. But it’s a bit too cold, I *fink*.’

‘I agree. I much prefer hot countries. Shall we get back on the plane and go somewhere else?’

‘Somewhere with tigers.’

We returned to our seats and flew to India. I was on safer ground. I’d been to this place and knew enough details to sustain the fantasy.

We walked over to the wall of piled-up stuff. ‘We can’t go that way,’ I said in a cautious tone. ‘Look how thick the jungle is.’

‘But it’s not jungle, Tom,’ said Fiona, breaking character by standing up and using her normal voice. She pointed to a dusty crate full of old copies of *National Geographic*. ‘It’s a load of old *bookie-wookies*,’ she snickered.

‘Shall we go somewhere else then?’

‘Yeaah,’ she said in Gracie’s voice. She got back into the canine pose and I sat in my seat. She hopped on to my thigh, gripped a lock of my hair and pulled herself up to sit on my shoulders. ‘Oh no, there’s a hole in the roof. She cocked a leg. ‘Psssss. That was just the rain.’

She shifted downward so that she was sitting on my lap and we both shook with laughter. When we’d regained our composure she said something to me that prompted the opposite reaction.

‘I’m glad you’re playing with me ‘cos I don’t have a daddy to play with.’

I could feel my throat narrowing. I didn’t know what to say.

‘Have you seen my daddy?’

‘N-no,’ I croaked. I knew from Henry that he’d died. I wasn’t sure how much Fiona knew about it though.

She looked past me, making that humming noise from earlier. After ten seconds of this she jumped off me and ran towards her room. I was relieved to hear her call cheerily over her shoulder, ‘Need my umbrella for the next *crunchy*.’

I read Fiona an Enid Blyton book at bedtime, changing the un-PC names of characters like the Golliwog and Chinky the Pixie, and editing out whole scenes in which adults slap children when they commit a grievous offence such as drinking too much ginger beer. Fiona was asleep before the chapter was over. I snuck out her room to find Beth with a sketchpad on her lap, drawing a Disney-style Dalmatian perhaps inspired by Fiona’s Gracie the dog character.

‘Good work,’ she said. ‘Fiona loves those books, but I never want to read them because of all that racist, fascist crap in them.’

‘I did my best. I may have stumbled and said “Chinky” instead of “Dink” once by accident.’

‘You’re so good with her, it’s amazing.’

‘It’s no effort at all.’

‘There aren’t a lot of blokes who’d want to get together with a girl in my... position.’

‘I don’t care about that at all,’ I said. I sat down next to her and hugged her shoulders. ‘Look, I want to thank you for a really lovely day. Since I left hospital, I’ve had this tension all over me, like being shackled, and today it felt like the shackles came off.’

Beth rubbed her eyes and nodded. ‘I’ve enjoyed it too.’

‘Right,’ I said, ‘it’s getting late so...’

Beth glided towards me, slightly rolling her skinny hips, in a sort of slow motion dance move. It was alluring. She kissed me and scratched at the bulge in my jeans with her index fingernail like she was doing an erotic brass rubbing. ‘Stay the night?’ she whispered in my ear.

She led me by the hand to the bedroom where we locked our gazes together and made love slowly, delicately. Neither of us felt the pressure to peak soon or at all, or the sometimes crippling obligation to ‘perform’ for the other. Like other men, I’d slept with women I didn’t care much about, usually as part of the fallout from booze, and would the next morning regret the seedy, mechanical nature of what had been a frantic race for short-term release. But now, with Beth, sex felt more like *nourishment*, like cultivating a connection to someone beyond mere lust. There was lust, of course, but there was something else in addition, a feeling closer to the feelings of pride and protectiveness I was more used to having towards close friends or family members; a conviction that you would do everything in your power to help and support and fight for someone without expecting the same back.

‘I love you,’ whispered Beth as she pulled me deeper into her. Yes, I thought, ‘love’ – maybe that was the shorthand for this feeling. But was it too soon to say it? Before last night we’d barely known each other. Then again, last night we’d had such a laugh, such a good time. I decided to stop analysing it all and go with my feelings. ‘I love you,’ I said back.

I was woken a few hours later by a stem of dawn light through a gap in the curtains. Moving cautiously to avoid disturbing Beth, I reached for my phone on the beside table and typed:

Good to hear from you Deirdre. I’ve thought long and hard about your offer and it is indeed a generous one for which I’d like to thank you. I don’t want this to sound ungrateful, but I am afraid due to present family circumstances, I will have to politely turn your offer down.

## Chapter 8. Get Out Now

I settled into a form of family life with Beth and Fiona. We put on scarves and mittens, and went out to lob frisbees on gusty Southsea Common. In the arcade on South Parade Pier, we played dancing videogames and ate fish and chips. At the cinema we watched a film called *Hotel for Dogs*. It put Fiona into a thrilled trance for 200 minutes.

I never found playing with Fiona a chore. I appreciated any excuse for games, silly voices and bad jokes. She liked being dangled by her ankles from the sofa in a less risky version of Michael Jackson's infamous wheeze. She liked the raucous stories I made up about Gracie the dog. At the dinner table, she'd lose her breath from laughter or fall off her chair when I mixed curry, ice cream and Ribena together in a mock scientific experiment. Fionaisms included 'Turkish dislike' for a Near Eastern sweet she hated, 'spice rocket' for a fart and 'juicy boy' for a jellyfish we found washed up on the beach.

At the same time, I was insecure about the lack of an 'official' relationship between us. When someone asked what Fiona was to me, I fumbled for an answer. 'Daughter' was legally and biologically inaccurate. 'Stepdaughter' was a misnomer as Beth and I weren't married. 'My girlfriend's daughter' was an understatement.

Other quandaries arose, minor and major. If it were just she and I out and Fiona needed the toilet, should I take her into the ladies or the gents? I found both options tricky. I was also disturbed by the adult world's contempt for children – I assumed 'seen and not heard' had gone out with the Victorians. At an auction we attended to get rid of the jumble Beth had inherited from her dad, a loathsome, Yorkshire pudding of an old woman pointed at Fiona and snarled 'keep her quiet.' All kinds of public venues – pubs, restaurants, shops – banned children with no explanation. It was callous given that Fiona – along with many other children – had better social skills than most grown-ups.

If adult interactions are often tainted by narcissism, one-upmanship and fear of the other, Fiona would immediately start playing with a new acquaintance, sharing her sweets and listening politely to what he or she had to say. As T.H. White once wrote, ‘Children are about ten times more intelligent than grown-ups. They’re more alive, they’re more perceptive, they’re doing more, they’re more vigorous and more vivid, and are more able to distinguish between right and wrong. If I’m childish then I’m glad I am.’

One morning, I was in the bathroom changing my leg bandage. After I’d tugged the stocking off and unwound the crêpe dressing, I was astonished to see no blood. Better than that, the little islands of grafted skin looked firmer than ever and had begun to join together. This ought to have happened six months ago, according to my doctor. I heard a sucking sound and looked up to see Fiona standing at the door, which I’d forgotten to lock. Her thumb was in her mouth.

‘Fiona, you don’t want to see this,’ I said, hurriedly placing clean gauzes over the wound.

‘Don’t mind,’ she said, thumb remaining in mouth.

After putting on the fresh bandage, I leavened the vibe by shaking my pot of moisturising cream and pretending that I was having trouble getting any of it out. ‘Damn thing!’ I said in an urchin’s voice. ‘Can’t quite seem to...’ I lifted the pot to eye-level and peered inside it. ‘There doesn’t seem to be any left – or is there?’ I then tipped the pot up and the cream dribbled on to my left cheek. ‘Oh no!’ I shrieked. ‘That wasn’t supposed to happen.’ In turn, Fiona shrieked with laughter over this facile slapstick routine.

I’d get to be alone with Beth after Fiona’s bedtimes. Wine-loosened, we laughed and shared insights and learned about each other. We made earnest plans – as drunk people will – to collaborate on a children’s book for Fiona and on a multimedia

installation about war and imperialism. One night, we watched a documentary about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and joked about the moment it got thick enough to constitute a new sovereign state – would a pelican represent it at the United Nations?

On an indecently cold night in late January, when frosty rain was drumming against the kitchen windows, Manila came up unexpectedly in our conversation. Beth and I were bemoaning the state of Britain and the world: the closure of companies we'd grown up with like Woolworth's, thousands laid off as a result; government giveaways to scoundrel bankers who'd almost wrecked our society; the number killed in the Afghanistan War reaching 100,000. As a lone parent on benefits – as my mum had been – Beth was also worried about welfare reforms planned by a nominally 'Labour' government. 'What am I supposed to do with Fiona when I'm forced to go for interviews for dishwashing jobs?'

'You won't have to,' I said. 'That's what I'm here for.'

Her skittish glance away from me implied she wasn't convinced. 'And when will we finally get shot of my dad's crap?'

The stacks of books, tools, LPs and memorabilia in the lounge had at least dwindled enough so that the top third of the bay window was visible.

'We're getting there with a little help from eBay and harridans at auctions,' I said.

'It's not the crap itself that bothers me so much, it's the memories attached to them. Portsmouth holds too many bad memories for me. My dad, Lawrence...'

Lawrence was Beth's ex, Fiona's dad. All I knew about him was that he'd died aged 47 of throat cancer. Henry had told me that. Beth had never spoken about him until now. 'All those long nights in the hospital,' she said. 'I'm only twenty-eight, I shouldn't have spent so much time in bloody hospitals. Lawrence was young. It was so sudden, so cruel.'

'I'm sorry,' was all I could say, all anyone could say.

'It was worse with Lawrence than with my dad. His death had been on the cards for years.'

'How come?'

'He was dock worker who'd breathed in too much asbestos back in the day.'

'I sometimes wonder why I'm still here. In Portsmouth, I mean.'

'No-one's forcing you, us.'

'You've travelled. Does it work?'

'What do you mean?'

'Does moving away geographically also mean you move away emotionally?'

'I think the problems and worries I had in the UK vanished when I went to Asia.

It might have been that a new set of problems and worries came into play, though.

Instead of getting angry with someone on the phone from Virgin Media trying to rip me off, I got angry about the poverty I saw, about the belief people had that I was filthy rich simply because of my white skin.'

'I wish I'd travelled before I became a mum. Having travelled in Asia before do you think you could live there?'

'Yes, but obviously things are different now. *Now* I want to be with you and Fiona. Also, my leg was problematic.'

'Well it's not now. You haven't needed a bandage for ages.'

'True. At my worst convalescing in hospital, I thought I'd never swim in a tropical sea again. Now I know I can.'

'So leaving aside screwing your leg up, what did you enjoy about Asia?'

'Cheesy as this sounds, it was incredible to visit places I'd only previously read about or seen on TV: jungles, active volcanoes, beautiful sandy beaches, 2,000-year-old temples.' I was conscious of sounding like an ad, but I believed every word I was

saying. ‘It’s always hot and mostly dry so you can do activities you could never do here in England on a day like today: diving, fishing, trekking, sleeping on beaches. And, well, I don’t know about you, but I’ve always thought of England as an adversarial culture. There’s so much public fury – you know, people shouting across the street by day, drunkenly fighting each other on the same streets by night, whereas it’s not cool in many parts of Asia to lose your temper in the company of others, at least not in my experience. I think the Cambodians have one word that means both ‘angry’ and ‘insane’. On the contrary, every time I got lost on my travels someone would help me with directions or a cold drink or a lift on a scooter.’

‘I guess foreigners aren’t treated that well when they come here,’ said Beth.

‘Quite. And it’s no coincidence that our national heroes are colonial warmongers whereas Asians celebrate anti-colonial men of peace like Gandhi or José Rizal of the Philippines.’

Beth’s face began to glow like a prospector spotting gold in a pan. ‘Maybe we *should* go then.’

‘Really?’

‘Why not? When we first met didn’t you say you were applying for writing jobs over there?’

‘Ah, that...’

‘What?’

‘Err...’

‘What?’

‘I was offered a job in the Philippines. A good one.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said no because it came up at exactly the same time as you and I got together.’

Beth's glow began to dim. She nodded rapidly and repeatedly, I think to hide her disappointment.

'If... I... I'd known that you...' I said.

'It's okay, darling,' she smiled. 'Is it too late to contact them, say you've changed your mind?'

'Maybe. We're talking almost a month ago now.' I swiped my phone off the table. 'Might as well try.'

## Part 3

### Chapter 1. How to Write?

Manila is a city of contrasts *what city hasn't that been said about?*, an interesting *didn't everyone's English teacher tell them never to use that word?* blend of old and new, East and West, rich and poor, calm and busy *so more or less every contrast imaginable, then.* After decades of stagnation, at last Manila is on the up *because its neo-liberal rulers are resigned to the Philippines' natural place as an economic colony of wealthier nations – hurrah!* The middle classes are growing *they always seem to be no matter which country or historical period* and life is steadily getting better for the poorest *the good old trickle-down theory; these narratives of progress!* The national character *what a ludicrously essentialist concept – as if every single Filipino behaves exactly the same way by the accident of being born in roughly the same place* is typified *that's probably too smart a word for this hack* by inexhaustible politeness, an easy-going manner and an infectious *joie de vivre*. Not for nothing has Manila been called *use of the passive voice excuses the writer from actually bothering to source the following quote* 'the land of smiles' *most of Southeast Asia seems to have that soubriquet, and it's a patronising and infantilising one.* Filipinos love to eat *only people with eating disorders don't* and they delight in playing basketball, singing karaoke and watching American science fiction movies *any mention of home-grown cultural forms or are they all dependent on those wealthy nations again?* At the same time, religious zeal is strong amongst Manileños *tautology alert!* who participate in holy rituals that will seem bizarre to the outsider *the opaque Oriental mind at work.*

Manila's key tourist attractions *yes, that's it, reduce the multiplexities of a 400-year-old global city to a sprinkling of things to spend your money on* are hidden gems

*travel writing cliché #2,395* mostly located in and around the intriguing, ornate and atmospheric *hollow adjectives galore* colonial Spanish quarter of Intramuros *the assumption here is that little or nothing built since 1600 will be of interest to visitors.*

On the other hand, the multinational banks and smart hotels of the business district of Makati will undoubtedly remind the Western visitor of Manhattan or the City of London *foreigners eh? They try to imitate us but not very well.* Here you can feast on everything from sushi to McDonald's *oh the fruits of globalisation!* thanks to investment from the US, Japan, Netherlands and Singapore *keep ramming home that Pepsicolonisation point.*

Backpackers *for they are the lifeblood of tourism in any Third World country* prefer to stay in areas with a little more character such as Ermita, which has cleaned itself up since its days as a notorious sex tourism hub *mention only this aspect of Ermita's history rather than the more complimentary – and less spicy – stuff: It started as a settlement of Australoid tribespeople around 5,000 years ago; expanded from trade with China and Southeast Asia during the medieval Tondo period; was made into a religious hermitage by the Spanish conquistadors; exchanged goods, customs and ideas with Mexico and almost every part of Asia over the next 300 years; was briefly occupied by the British in the 1760s; and was renovated by the Americans in the early 1900s into a colonial quarter of posh dwellings and exclusive clubs.* Nearby Malate boasts *another massively overused travel writing verb* excellent nightlife options including The Hobbit House, a *Lord of the Rings*-themed bar staffed entirely by Filipino dwarves and midgets *an exotically othured yet reassuringly Western pop culture-tinged choice of venue.*

Be warned – Manila isn't all exotic fun. *Really? There's more to it than getting pissed up with comedy little people?* Not everyone has benefited from development. Many have been left behind. *The old passive voice again, this time to exculpate the rich*

*from leaving the poor to rot. And the poor don't even get a mention. And how many is many?*

I'd been on my laptop for four hours and this was the best I'd come up with: a 600-word parody of our Philippines guidebook plus sarcastic annotations. The deadline for my first column was accelerating towards me like a drugged Soviet sprinter and there was no way *Travel SEAN* would accept this deconstructive shtick. Looking at it another way, if I carried on the article in this vein but deleted the annotations, Deirdre might well accept it at face value without grasping the irony. She probably approved copy riddled with 'cities of contrast' and 'hidden gems' every day.

It was close to the end of our third day in Manila. For the umpteenth time, like someone operating a microfiche reader, I wound back through my recent memories, pausing on and magnifying those I might use for my column. The pre-dawn taxi ride from the airport to our new home here in Quezon City – one of the sixteen conurbations comprising the urban region known as Metro Manila – via the 100-foot high Skyway road, the darkness hiding the city below and the skies around us. Fiona, eyes bulging, 'We're flying through space!' Morning kindles, we see colossal billboards – RED HOT SALE, SHAKEY'S HI PROTEIN SUPREME PIZZA IS GOOD FOR 6!, WE ARE YOUR SECURITY PARTNERS, LOAD NA DITO, BUY ONE TAKE ONE, TRUE MONEY – and condos under construction, cloaked in green webbing. On to Katipunan Avenue, the boisterous six-lane motorway named after the secret society that triggered the 1896 revolution against the Spanish. Our taxi trades horns with a tint-windowed SUV, skims a teen in a Jay-Z T-shirt. Hawkers in flip-flops drifting between the windows of jeepney buses modelled on World War II US Army jeeps and covered in vivid graffiti and Catholic imagery. Hip-hop blaring from KFC and McDonald's. Roadside barbecues. Basketball courts. I reach for the hands of the girls, sitting either

side of me on the back seat. ‘Alright everyone? Not far now.’ Beth dumbstruck – so was I my first time in Asia. Fiona pressed against the window, loving everything.

None of this was glamorous enough for my column. I leafed through the current issue of the mag. The spreads were titled ‘Georgetown – Ultimate Romantic Getaway’ and ‘South Korea’s Top Ten Wellness Spas’. Barely concealed advertorials, not an idea in fifty pages. Maybe I should just gulp down my pride and kiss goodbye to my fancy notions about being a *proper* writer. I have a family to feed, I said to myself, and twenty-four hours before the deadline. Just get on and pen the type of corporate trash Deirdre needs.

I stood up and crossed the parquet floor of my new study. I opened the sliding door to the balcony just an inch. It was like suddenly turning the volume up on some avant-garde orchestra. Blasting in from Katipunan were the random, high-tempo honks of car horns that made me imagine a thousand free jazz saxophonists all overblowing at the same time. Beneath it a bass-off between engines of varying sizes all with their own distinctive drones. The tinny high-hats of builders bashing hardened steel nails. Nursery rhyme jingles from carts selling cheese-flavoured ice cream.

Smells as well as sounds came through the gap. Acrid exhaust smoke dominant, next to ammonia-like urine and the piercing saline of fish balls, tempura and *kikiam* (pork and veg enveloped in bean curd) bubbling in crocks of lard. I opened the door further and noticed a sulphuric whiff that was unfamiliar to me. (I would later discover that this was likely to be emanating from a crystal meth lab). It was coming in from beyond the Art Deco-ish buildings on the other side of Katipunan, possibly from as far as the jade-coloured hills of Antipolo, hazy and out-of-focus due to the smog and clotting darkness.

Could I put into the story what I was hearing and smelling right now? No, my molly-coddled readers wouldn’t like it. Readers don’t want the truth, or at least not the

kite-boarding and cocktail-sipping readers of a commercial travel rag. They want reasons to, as the French philosopher Guy Debord said of modern tourism, ‘go and see what has been banalised.’

I slid the door shut and the racket vanished. I went into the lounge-kitchen where Fiona was kneeling on the tiles drawing with gel pens. Beth was scrubbing the doors of the chipboard cupboards. On the table beside her was a kids’ pictorial English-Tagalog dictionary bookmarked with a scrap of paper with her notes on it.

‘I quit,’ I said.

Both ladies glared up from their activities. I flopped down miserably on the sofa. ‘I don’t know how to write anymore.’

‘You’ve forgotten it?’ laughed Fiona, holding the cap of one of her pens between her teeth like a Latin American *generalissimo* with a cigar. She may have seen something like this in a cartoon.

I pointed to Beth’s handiwork. ‘All I feel like doing is smashing my head against that cupboard.’

‘It might do a better job of getting rid of the grime than this thing.’ Beth took her sponge away from the fake laminate and squinted at the orange fuzz gone black.

‘Darling, how many times have you cleaned that since we moved in?’

‘Twice a day, every day.’

‘It’s all that smoke what gets blown around the world ‘cos of cars,’ interjected Fiona.

‘Well the smoke that comes from Katipunan,’ corrected Beth. ‘You could write about *that* for your column, but it might put the poshos off coming here.’

One of the contributing bricks to my writer’s block was made of pure, unalloyed betrayal. I know they’d only meant well, but Deirdre’s ‘people’ in Manila had fixed us up with this flat in Loyola Heights Condominium which, in the email, looked and

sounded splendid. What hadn't been clear from the email was the location: on one of the most busy, noisy and polluted roads in Manila. Whether we closed the windows or not, every morning brought a new film of soot on to all the flat's surfaces. It was almost moist to the touch.

'If I did write about Katipunan in a really lurid way,' I said, 'it might make Deirdre feel bad about sending us here.'

'You mean as a sort of protest?' Beth frowned.

'She'd never publish it, though.'

'It's okay here really. I mean, it's in a better state than our flat in Portsmouth was. What do you think, Fi?'

'I like the lift. *Weee!* Up and down, up and down.'

'I think we could leave Fiona in the lift all day going up and down,' said Beth, 'and that'd be her entertainment sorted.'

'How are you finding it here so far, girls?' I asked.

'Pretty good,' said Beth. 'Everyone's been friendly and helpful.'

'How about you Fiona?'

'Yeah,' she muttered, engrossed in her drawing.

Beth pointed her thumb to the bedroom. 'Right you, time for bed.' She kissed me. 'I'm going to turn in too.'

'Night-night you two. I'd better crack on with the story.' But I didn't do that, I went to the pub.

## Chapter 2. International Relations

I liked F. de la Rosa Street. Its token traffic, studenty coffee shops and foliage splotching over the pavement were a world away from Katipunan's noxious racket. Our condo straddled the two roads – and worlds.

I set off in the direction of Ride N Roll Bar. I hadn't been there yet but I'd spied it on our travels around Loyola Heights, our new *barangay* (neighbourhood). A tricycle pulled up beside me. 'Hey sir, get in,' said a wheezy voice. The driver had an extinguished cigarette slotted into a gap in his teeth.

'I like to walk,' I said, continuing to walk.

He twisted the accelerator and drove alongside me at my pace. 'But sir, rain is coming.'

I accepted his offer not because of the weather. His line of work was tough and badly paid, and he needed my business. I had to bend almost into foetal position to fit inside the tiny sidecar. As we got going, the driver turned to me and I caught the scent of hard liquor on his breath. He said something, but I didn't catch it for the rumble of the engine.

'I'm sorry?'

'You are coming from Australia or America, my friend?'

'England.'

'Ah, Larry Gorgon!'

'What?'

'I said Larry Gorgon.'

I couldn't fathom who or what Larry Gorgon was. I visualised a Jewish-American comedian with vipers for hair.

'Here in Philippines already you can have many woman, Larry Gorgon.'

‘But I’m married.’

‘That is one woman. Have more if like. Keep you fit. How many children, sir?’

I thought it’d be hard to explain the complexities of mine and Fiona’s relationship, so I replied, ‘One, I guess.’

‘Only one? Sorry for you, Larry Gorgon.’

Ride N Roll had sanded floorboards, minimalist furniture and amateurish paintings of Yoda, Luke Skywalker and the Death Star from the *Star Wars* films. As I came in, I was approached by a thirtysomething man with a pigtail sticking out the back of his A Bathing Ape cap. He spoke amphetamine-fast. ‘I’m Al. I’m the owner. How are you? Why are you in the Philippines? Is it your first time here? What do you think of Manila?’ He didn’t give me time to answer any of these questions.

‘What do you do?’

‘I’m a writer.’

‘American or Australian?’

‘I’m a citizen of the world, Al.’

He peered at me in confusion.

‘Okay then, Britain.’

The confusion stayed stuck to his face.

‘England.’

‘Ah, home of Public Image Ltd?’

‘The same.’

‘Tom, you should meet another writer, a poet.’ He showed me to a table where an intense-looking guy with John Lennon glasses and long hair tied back samurai-style was sitting at a laptop. He wore a T-shirt with a distorted, moddish Union Jack on the front. ‘Danilo, this is Tom, a writer from England.’

Danilo pressed the tips of his fingers together to form a steeple shape. 'Please, please sit down. A beer?'

I pointed at a gold San Miguel sign above the bar. 'I'll have one of those please. It's Spanish, right?'

'Nooo,' said Danilo in a hurt tone. 'It is a Filipino company, more than 100 years old. I believe they now brew a version of it in Spain.'

'Oh I see. It's what we call a "premium lager" in the UK, which basically means it's more expensive than other beers.'

'Did you know that in 1945, when the Americans were liberating us from the Japanese, they took a huge risk knocking out a machine gun nest opposite the San Miguel brewery just so General MacArthur could safely enter and enjoy a beer?'

'No I didn't.'

'So you come from England,' beamed Danilo, lighting a cigarette. 'I would love to go there. I have been to Ireland only for a writers' workshop.'

'What did you make of it?'

'They're like Filipinos. They have the same religion, they like singing and they over-drink like us. Tom, do you like a band called Modern English?'

'Can't say I've heard of them.'

'Oh but Tom,' Danilo scowled. 'They were a great English band of the 1980s, my time. What about The Smiths?'

'I like them, but aren't they a bit parochial? I'm surprised they resonate with Filipinos.'

'You kidding? Morrissey's poetic is universal. Every outsider who can understand English will appreciate his sentiments. We may not know where "Dublin, Dundee or Humberside" are, but the chorus we can enjoy: "Hang the DJ."' Danilo sang

a few lines of 'Panic' in a sturdy voice. 'You come from a good country, Tom. You must love being British, no?'

'Not massively. There are some good things – like The Smiths – and some bad things like...' I trailed off. The list was too long. If it hadn't been, I would have stayed. 'So good and bad things, as with anywhere.'

'We Filipinos are divided. We are spread across 7,000 islands, all with our disparate cultures and attitudes. We have twenty-one languages too, many with their own literary traditions that go way back. The *Darangen* epic poem of the Manao people in the south is pre-medieval, but nowadays the centre of our literary scene is Manila, where we write either in English or Tagalog.'

'How do Filipinos outside of Manila feel about that?'

'Ha! Some are very resentful. They talk about "Manila Imperialism" because it is hard to get published and reviewed unless you come to this city and use its local lingoes. Of course you have no chance of recognition abroad unless you write in English.'

'Can anything be done to reduce this resentment?'

'I think it's important that we all unite to find a common identity. This is why I am a nationalist.'

'I get that. You're a new country and you don't have much in your past to be ashamed of... yet. In Britain we still need to answer for our historic crimes: slavery, the empire, Tony Blair.'

Danilo pointed a friendly rather than accusatory finger at me. 'You say "our", Tom, but these bad things of the past were not personally your fault.'

I had a flashback to Werner the German exchange student. Perhaps it took perceptive foreigners like he and Danilo to prompt me to think harder about myself and my own culture. 'Exactly. They were done by rulers in the name of ordinary people.'

The rulers gained from these crimes, the ordinary people didn't.' Al slid another bottle of absurdly cheap San Miguel my way. 'Anyway, don't mean to get heavy. We've only just met. Let me buy you another beer.'

'Thanks and no problem, Tom. If you can't have these kinds of discussions at the bar where can you have them? Tell me, can you understand my accent?'

'Yes fine, although I had a problem with the tricycle driver back there. He asked my nationality and then called me "Larry Gorgon". Who is that, do you know?'

Danilo laughed like the clatter of a road drill. 'I think he was trying to say "Harry Potter". The only two things most Pinoys – Filipinos – know about England is your Harry Potter and your Mr Bean.'

'I see. Then the driver said something about how I would get many women. Funny, I've never regarded Harry Potter as a sex symbol.'

'Potter is young, smart and well-heeled. But most important of all, he is white. That is what girls – and boys – like here because of the *casta* system.'

That word *casta* stirred a memory of a hierarchical chart I'd found in a Philippine history book back in England. At the top of the chart were the *peninsulares*, those born in Spain who formed the colonial ruling class. The ranks below them were crudely defined by parentage – those born in the Philippines to two 'pure' Spaniards were called *Filipinos* or *insulares*, which made them superior to *tornatrás* (those of mixed Spanish, Chinese and Malay heritage) who, in turn, were a cut above *Sangleys* (100 percent Chinese ancestry). At the bottom of the pile were indigenous *indios* (Christianised native Malays) and *negritos*, meaning 'little black people' in Spanish.

'*Casta* is still an issue in the Philippines?' I asked Danilo.

'I would say yes. When I was younger, I was darker and got taunted at school for it. Nowadays if you are quite dark and you stroll around Manila, you may get a rich

person come up to you and ask, “Are you for hire?” They will assume you are a lowly domestic servant.’

‘So race is bound up with class.’

‘Yes. So Tom, can I ask you what is Britain in relation to the UK, England and Ireland? It puzzles me.’

‘We can blame history for that. Today the legally recognised state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.’

Danilo frowned. ‘Strange. When I was in Ireland they were fiercely proud of their independence.’

‘That’s because you went to Southern Ireland. All of Ireland was a British colony for centuries and when the south declared independence we – well, the rulers of Britain – hung on to the north because a majority there remained loyal to Britain. It didn’t stop the loyalist Protestants mistreating the nationalist Catholics in the north.’

‘Which is why the terrorism started?’

‘Yes. So Great Britain is the island comprising England – where I come from – Scotland and Wales. Britain without the “Great” is just England and Wales. When we add Northern Ireland we use the term the United Kingdom or UK.’

‘I understand,’ Danilo said in a wavering tone that suggested that he didn’t fully. He was right not to – I couldn’t think of another country so small whose administrative structure was so needlessly Byzantine.

‘Great Britain and the United Kingdom are, I’d say, artificial constructs. I mean, most Welsh people don’t feel British, they feel Welsh, if they feel anything. Most Scots are Scots first, British second. And then British liberals and leftists aren’t the least bit interested in calling themselves British, English or anything else. In fact, the British people who are proudest of being British tend to live in Spain, which makes you question the validity of the whole set-up. The only beneficiaries of the set-up are the

powerful who have cultivated the idea of Britishness for their own ends. You know, the British Empire, British values, British war heroism etc.’

‘Hegemony,’ said Danilo.

‘It has nothing to do with gardening,’ I said, hoping he’d get the feeble pun. He did, and drilled with laughter once more. He then ordered some food. I was surprised when Al brought us platters of spam, black pudding, hog roast and pork scratchings.

‘You’ve tried this?’ Danilo squirted a polythene bag of vinegar over the little spindles of pig skin.

‘It’s a traditional English pub snack,’ I said.

‘How traditional?’

I didn’t want to speculate. Lots of things the British consider traditional are modern inventions, like Great Britain itself which only started in 1707. The same can be said for everything from Morris dancing (whose rules were only formalised in 1899) to the ploughman’s lunch (devised to boost cheese sales after World War II).

‘You want some, Tom?’

‘Thanks, I’ve already eaten. Actually, all this stuff reminds me of English fare.’

‘Then here is more common ground between England and the Philippines.

*Wasak!*’

‘What does *wasak* mean?’

‘It literally means “destroy”, but we use it as a slang superlative like “amazing” or “cool”.’ He looked past me over to the door of Ride N Roll. ‘Oh. Coach Jay, my colleague at the university where I teach, is here with some of his athlete buddies. Do you mind if they join us? They are a bit *testosterone*, if you catch my drift?’

Jay had a robust, rectangular head with a marine’s crew-cut. With him was a lanky youth called Toto and a flabby fifty-year-old wearing a prayer cap, whom Jay

introduced simply as a member of the Muslim royal family of Mindanao, an island in the southern Philippines. They were all dressed in tracksuits.

‘Let’s get some fuckin’ brews,’ said the royal. Unexpectedly, he had the nasally Midwestern American voice of a jock from a 1980s Brat Pack movie, picked up so I would later learn from a basketball scholarship to the University of Minnesota. He ordered Red Horse – the harshest and strongest of all the beer I’ve come across in the Philippines. Without so much as a hello, he asked me if I was from Australia or the US

‘England,’ I sighed.

‘England? But you sound more British to me.’

‘England is *in* Britain.’

‘How the fuck does that work?’

I explained exactly what I’d explained to Danilo just ten minutes ago.

‘They all got their own soccer teams, England, Wales, Scotland and shit. I saw it on ESPN.’

‘They do.’

‘But they ain’t independent states? They are all part of *this* United Kingdom?’

His cronies chuckled. Danilo picked at the label on his beer bottle.

‘Yes.’

‘And you have a queen not a king, and it’s called a kingdom?’

‘Yes.’

‘But it’s a piss-small country. Why divide it into smaller fuckin’ pieces like that?’

More giggles. I was feeling hectored – and for trying to explain something I didn’t even agree with. Would the royal be just as willing to mock the historical accident of the Philippines being composed of thousands of contrasting islands? I thought not.

‘Do you really talk like that?’ said the royal.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Like you’re talking now. Are you doing a funny voice *now*?’

‘No, this is my normal voice. This is how I speak.’

‘Fucked up, man. I only heard that kinda accent before in *Lord of the Rings*. I thought you UK English spoke like Americans and that you just made up that accent for the movies.’

‘Here’s what I like about England,’ said Jay. ‘At college we used to get drunk and watch your *Monty Python’s Life of Brian*. That bit where they’re all getting crucified. Oh man, that still cracks me up.’

‘No,’ said the royal through a burp. ‘That’s gay shit, that is.’

‘How’s that?’ sneered Jay.

‘All their stuff in England is gay.’

‘Thanks Your Highness,’ I said through gritted teeth.

‘Welcome,’ he said through another burp. ‘Like that soccer we was just talkin’ about.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Jay. ‘Those soccer guys are top athletes.’

‘I saw somethin’ else English on ESPN. Cricket or somethin’?’

‘You hit a ball through a hoop on the ground,’ said Toto.

‘No, that’s croquet,’ I said.

Jay’s eyes sparked with recognition. ‘I know, *I* saw that on ESPN. too!’ He got to his feet and waddled like a penguin while hurling his arms about in Pete Townsend windmill fashion. This was his impression of bowling.

‘That really is the gayest sport in the whole wide world,’ slurred the royal.

‘So how long does a cricket game last?’ asked Jay.

‘Five days sometimes,’ I said.

‘What, twenty-four-hours a day for five days? Or you have time-outs?’

‘They take breaks for lunch and afternoon tea.’

The royal banged his hands against his temples. ‘Afternoon tea? Now that *is* gay.’

‘Anyway guys,’ said Danilo, bolting to his feet and offering his steeple gesture.

‘Great to see you all. I am afraid Tom and I must go now. Goodbye and *matutulog na ako*.’ Danilo nodded at me and then changed the direction of his nod toward the door.

The royal tutted and waved to us patronisingly.

When we were outside Danilo turned to face me. He was blushing. ‘I think you need to learn some Filipino, Tom. Repeat after me. *Putang ina mo*.’

‘*Putahn in a more*.’

‘It’s an *ang* sound. *Putang ina mo*.’

‘*Putang in a more*.’

‘No it’s *mo*. *Mo*.’

‘*Putang ina mo*.’

‘Perfect.’

‘Now I know some Filipino,’ I grinned. ‘What’s it mean?’

‘Your mother is a whore.’

‘Steady on, Danilo, I thought we were friends.’

‘No, no, this is the worst thing you can say to a Filipino. You should say it when you meet guys like that. Homophobic snob assholes every last one of them.’

I found this hard to swallow. He’d been almost monastically meek while these ‘assholes’ had been dishing out abuse. Yet as soon as we were away from them, he’d unleashed his fury. ‘So why didn’t you say that to them back there?’

‘Not worth the stress, my friend. You will learn this about my country while I learn more about yours. See you tomorrow night?’

‘Maybe. As long as the King of the Jocks isn’t there again.’

### **Chapter 3. I’m Not Chuck Norris**

In the flat Beth was still awake, typing a Facebook update. ‘How was the pub?’ she said. A third of her attention was on me, the rest on Facebook.

‘Bad,’ I said. ‘Well, good as well.’ I don’t think I get less articulate the more I drink, but rather I lose the will to elaborate on anything I say, making what I do say opaque.

‘What do you mean, darling?’

‘I mean good because I made friends – well, a friend. Bad because we ended up talking more about Britain than the Philippines.’

‘Well can’t you weave what you talked about into your column?’

‘Not really. We mostly talked about national identity and whether cricket is a sport for homosexuals or not.’

‘Well write a blog about it. Everyone’s writing a blog nowadays.’

I sat back drunkenly and considered it. Isn't social media for foam-lipped egomaniacs spouting off to what they believe is the entire universe but is in fact a tiny sect of like-minded 'friends' hand-picked because they'll always agree with the spouter's half-baked decrees? And the half-baked decrees are too often 'backed up' with other half-baked decrees by pubescent loners sitting in pools of their own sperm masquerading as reliable journalists, scientists or philosophers. I bet with a swift Google you can find convincing-looking sources for the most outlandish opinions, from flat-earthism to the health benefits of mainlining plutonium. The speed of social media means nobody bothers to check these sources.

And then the artifice of it all brings out the brute in people. Grown men who go faint if someone brushes past them in the street suddenly become Chuck Norris online, machine-gunning other people's Facebook pages with taunts and threats.

'I don't think that's the platform for me,' I said.

Beth pushed her laptop to one side. 'But you need an outlet, Tom. You'll get bored stupid writing about fish pedicure all day.'

'Not as bored stupid as when I was laid up in bed and not writing at all.'

'What do you *really* want to write about? I mean, supposing Deirdre lifted all constraints?'

'The legacy of their former dictator Marcos, there are still survivors of World War II-'

'So political/historical stuff,' Beth interjected. 'Why not make some pitches to a political/historical mag either here or back home? There's nothing in your contract with *Travel SEAN* to stop you doing that, is there?'

'It's brilliant!' I almost shouted.

'Shhh, Fi's asleep.'

I got up unsteadily and went over the sofa to hug her. ‘That way I can kill two birds with one stone – while I’m researching my column for *Travel SEAN* I can be gathering info for these other stories.’

‘The idea is copyrighted. You’ll be owing me some royalties.’

‘What’s mine is yours, darling.’

## Chapter 4. The Comfort Woman

‘Comfort women’ is the chilling euphemism for Asian women who were forced into sexual slavery by Japanese soldiers in World War II. 100-250,000 were coerced into ‘army brothels’ in the Philippines, China, Korea and the other parts of Asia the Japanese conquered. Some victims were as young as eleven. Only 30 percent survived their ordeal.

I had to dodge past two surly Alsatians on leashes before entering the modest offices of Pagakaisa ng Babae, a support group for the 174 Filipina survivors of Japanese wartime abuse. I waited in a room with a dining table in its centre. It looked like the lounge of a middle-class Filipino home, albeit with photos, banners and text boards on the walls telling the story of the organisation. I jotted down some key dates for the fact boxes that would accompany my article for *New Inciter*, a progressive journal in London I’d contacted after Beth’s brainwave. Although I knew a fair bit about the Pacific War, there was a fissure in my awareness about the comfort women, which I hoped to fill with the coming interview.

After a few minutes, a slender middle-aged woman in glasses came in, leading an old woman – also slim and bespectacled – by the hand. They sat down, the older woman taking longer about it.

‘Good afternoon,’ said the middle-aged woman. ‘You must be Tom. I am Josefina Jurado and this is Valentina L. Tupas.’ As I tried to think of a polite way of finding out Valentina’s age, Josefina came to the rescue. ‘She is eighty years old and has been a member of our group since 1993.’

I sat with them and switched my recorder on. ‘I’m grateful that you’ve agreed to talk to me. I don’t want you to get upset so please just share with me whatever you’re

comfortable sharing with me.’ I cursed myself – ‘comfortable’ was not the most diplomatic adjective to use.

Valentina preferred to speak in Tagalog, so Josefina translated for me. At the outbreak of the Pacific war in 1941, Valentina was twelve and living with her family on the southern island of Negros. The family was well-to-do, her father a sugar farmer, her mother the owner of a *sari-sari* (convenience) store. When the Japanese occupied the island they closed the sugar mill and forced the Dys to relocate to Candoni, in the south, where they continued farming but with scant resources: one *carabao* (water buffalo), one cow and seventeen chickens. At first, relations with the occupiers were cordial – Valentina’s father would trade eggs and chickens for salt and soy sauce.

In 1943, the Japanese sent Valentina to an airfield in Bacolod City. She was given a half kilo of rice a day for labouring in a human chain to gather stones from a riverbed that were needed to mend an airstrip. After a year of this, a US plane flew over and dropped messages telling Valentina and her colleagues that it was futile working for the Japanese. This was the first inkling she had that the Allies were winning the war.

Valentina was sent back to her family farm to help grow cassava and sweet potatoes. One afternoon, while she was bringing some of the produce to the market, she saw a Japanese truck pull up. Soldiers jumped out. After noticing one of the soldiers staring at her, she ran away, but tripped and fell over. The Japanese dragged her by her hair to the truck. A dozen other Filipinas were inside. They were not allowed to speak to each other.

A single tear formed in Valentina’s left eye and bumped down over the wrinkles on her cheek. Her voice crackled. I started to say to Josefina, ‘She doesn’t have to go on.’ But Valentina went on.

The truck took her and the others to the Dalisay army camp. A soldier led her into a large house and upstairs to a room with a table and a bed within. The soldier

shoved her onto the bed and raped her. She screamed, tried to resist, but her assailant was too strong. When he was finished, another soldier came in and did exactly the same to her. When she tried to roll off the bed and escape, he seized her by the arms and smashed her head against the table.

When Valentina awoke some hours later, a fellow comfort woman was standing over her. 'It's best you don't fight back,' she said, 'or they'll kill you.' From then on, Valentina would close her eyes and put her hands over her ears every time she was raped. She was just thirteen years old.

After three weeks of being violated several times a day, she heard a commotion outside the house. She looked out the window. The Japanese soldiers were packing up their equipment. 'The Americans are coming,' they shouted. That night the soldiers fled to the mountains. Valentina ran out of the house and all the way home to her family. They were sitting around the kitchen table weeping.

'We thought you were dead,' her father said to her.

She was never able to tell him what had happened to her in the room in the large house. It would have brought shame on the family. Her parents had explained her absence to the neighbours by pretending she'd been on holiday. A few weeks later, Valentina gathered enough courage to tell her mother the truth. Although sympathetic, her mother warned her to stay quiet about it. 'What the Japanese did to you is not your fault, my child,' she said. 'Still, Filipinos will think you have been tainted by the Japanese, so hated are they now.'

After the war, Valentina moved to Manila and married. To the day of his death, her husband knew nothing of her time as a comfort woman.

Valentina dabbed a tissue at more tears. I wasn't sure what to say next. Josefina put her hands around Valentina's and said, 'The Japanese paid the Philippines

reparations in 1956. This did not include anything for the 'comfort women'. All we are asking for now is an apology. We hear they are soon to give the Korean women one.'

'Have the Japanese ever acknowledged women like Valentina?' I asked.

'One ex-soldier came here and testified to the existence of the comfort stations. That is all.'

'How are you funded?'

'We receive 80,000 yens a year.'

'Japanese yens?'

'Yes, surprisingly there is support for us from the Japanese public.'

'Are you aware of other nations during the war that used "comfort women"?''

'No side is innocent. The Nazis had military brothels all across Europe. When the Allies invaded and occupied Germany, the Soviets raped maybe 2 million local women and the Americans around 190,000, so the estimates say.'

Josefina went on to explain that Pagakaisa ng Babae does not exclusively struggle for victims of the Japanese in the 1940s. 'Since the war, there have been many cases of Americans sexually assaulting Filipinas. They often get away with it due to the Visiting Forces Agreement which means US personnel are immune to prosecution. Only one rapist, Daniel Smith, has ever been convicted, although he was released after the US government put pressure on our government. The Americans blackmailed us by postponing a prestigious joint exercise with our armed forces until our president agreed to hand Smith over to US custody.'

'Is the situation getting better or worse?'

'I think worse. The Philippine Commission on Women has found that 1 in 5 Filipinas experience sexual abuse and that there's been a 50 percent increase in violence against women only this year.'

'Why does it happen?'

‘The ill-treatment of women – and children – is universal. Oftentimes they have less money and influence than men so this leaves them vulnerable. You know that traffickers go into high schools in poor neighbourhoods here? We have a campaign where we tell the students not to sell themselves even if the high amount is tempting. Other problems come when, after a cyclone or earthquake, people lose their homes and their livelihoods. The only way to avoid starving is to sell your children to a paedophile. He will come to the disaster site in person or contact you on the internet. Many of those men pay enough to keep a family fed for months. Many of those men are from *your West.*’

## Chapter 5. Deferred Disgust

In the taxi to my next meeting, I pondered Josefina's use of that phrase 'your West'. She was right: the West was complicit in sex crimes in the Philippines. In my experience, Westerners either didn't know this or denied it, sometimes hypocritically so.

Nearing Quezon City, I spotted a homeless girl in only a maize-yellow vest that stretched to her knees. Her coat hanger frame drooped as she picked up a length of bamboo from the ground. She paused, turned her head and peered at me with a 'mind your own business' expression. Blushing, I retrained my eyes on my shoes.

'I'm just a dirty bastard,' Geoff back in Salisbury District Hospital had told me. 'It's all about shagging, mush,' a retired welder in a Portsmouth pub had said when I asked why he travelled to the Philippines every year. My daydream then cut to the moment – also back in the UK – when I told my friend Ian about accepting the Manila job. 'Wouldn't go myself,' he scowled. 'Lot of foreign nonces about, aren't there?'

'Sex tourism and child molestation are not the only things that happen in the Philippines,' I thought, wishing I'd said it to those men at those times. 'And it all depends where you look and what you're looking for.' I closed my eyes and discerned against the blackness a blob of the same maize shade as the girl's vest. Neuroscientists hold that the coloured lights you see when your lids are shut may come either from the outside world as photons or from within yourself in the form of signals generated by your own atoms. Was the ex-welder's perverted vision of the Philippines based on external data or inner peccadilloes?

These men's accusations also implied that the same horrors didn't happen in their homeland. A couple of years after my meeting with Valentina and Josefina, I would read a newspaper report that placed both the US and the UK in the top five worst

countries for paedophilia – this being sometime before Jimmy Savile, Rolf Harris et al. The Philippines didn't make that list. This demolishes any notion that sexual exploitation is a culture-specific problem rather than, as Josefina had said, a worldwide human one.

And even if, for argument's sake, the Philippines *had* made it on to that list, the material reasons would be more understandable than those behind the inclusion of developed nations. Can *anyone* in Britain – no matter how broke – ever excuse selling their kids for food as some Filipino families are compelled to? Yet such crimes are more common in the UK than in poor countries stereotyped as cesspits of dark carnality.

There was a slither of truth in Ian's statement – gauche as it was – given that Westerners feature in both the supply and demand sides of paedophilia. There's a frighteningly high volume of headlines like these:

'Australian charged with child abuse in Angeles City.'

'Policemen arrest two foreigners and a Filipino involved in child pornography and cybersex ring.'

'British paedophile builds house next to Filipino school.'

'American couple running orphanage in Philippines charged with human trafficking and child abuse.'

At times, the Doric columns of the British establishment have helped shore up the Philippine sex industry. In 1970, the hereditary peer Lord Antony Moynihan was facing fifty-seven criminal charges in London, amongst them defrauding a casino and bouncing a cheque on a brand new Rolls Royce. He fled to Manila, befriended then President Marcos and constructed a criminal empire that included several whorehouses, one of them within whooping distance of the British Ambassador's home. When Moynihan died in 1991, his siring of two children by Filipina wives – one of whom was a belly-dancer – caused a stir about who'd inherit his seat in the House of Lords. The

Moynihan surname returned to the news a quarter century later when his daughter Aurora was shot to death by anti-drug vigilantes acting on President Duterte's exhortation.

The taxi dropped me outside an office block layered like a cake with rows of shaded glass in between rows of overhanging concrete. As I took the lift to the HQ of Ibig Bansa, a small political party advocating for LGBT rights, I hoped I wouldn't be about to find out that 'my West' also plays a part in the suffering of yet another marginalised group. That said, whatever I found out could either form an additional dimension to my comfort women story or be used for a standalone piece.

I was greeted by Genya Liwag, a transwoman about my age and wearing citrusy perfume.

'I'll start with a question you've probably been asked a lot, if you don't mind,' I said.

'No problem,' said Genya.

'What caused you to become a trans activist?'

'It was after I suffered harassment in the workplace.'

'Can I ask whereabouts?'

'I was working as a corporate lawyer for a firm in Mandaluyong City. Two clients from Thailand came to visit us. During a tour of Taal Volcano these guys started groping my legs and touching my breasts. They were married men, sixty years old. They should have known better.'

'I should say. Did you complain?'

'Yes I did. One of the Thais told the investigating committee, "I'm sorry, I thought she was a woman, that's why I touched her"'. It was as if, had I been a biological female, their behaviour would have been acceptable. My colleagues were no better. One of them said, "Didn't you appreciate being harassed because it validates

your womanhood?” I did not – I felt violated. The supervisor of the project wanted to just sweep it all under the rug.’

‘Did anything come of the complaint?’

‘There was no legal outcome. I am still considered a biological man under the law here. It says a biological man cannot harass a biological man! At least the Department of Immigration and Deportation banned the Thais for life from coming back to the Philippines.’

‘Were they removed from their posts in Thailand?’

‘No.’

‘Did the case become a news story?’

‘Only in the Philippines.’

‘So they’ve been publicly disgraced?’

‘Again, only in the Philippines.’

‘Behaviour like that should ruin someone, no?’

Genya shrugged.

‘When you started your activism what other mistreatment of trans people did you uncover?’

‘We made a documentation for the Congressional Commission on Human Rights about the last ten years of hate crimes against LGBTs. These crimes have increased tenfold. Often those prosecuted only get a manslaughter sentence.’

‘Why?’

‘A transwoman called Jennifer Laude was found dead in a hotel room in Olongapo City. She’d been drowned in the toilet bowl. A US marine, Scott Pemberton, was detained. The court decided it was a homicide of passion rather than premeditated because Jennifer had concealed her gender identity from him. He was sentenced to ten years only, and with good behaviour it could be five years.’

‘If a biological man murders a biological woman is the sentence generally harsher?’

‘Yes, normally it is a life sentence.’

‘You could argue that the sentence should be higher for hate-driven murders.’

‘We are pushing for that. We want the police to investigate more deeply and to recognise patterns of hatred. When the decision was being read out in court we were squirming because the judge referred to Jennifer as a man. The motive given is always either robbery or non-payment for a sexual service. But often the killings are so brutal – there is mutilation sometimes – that the motive *must* be something stronger.’

‘Do these murders usually occur when a heterosexual man is shocked to find out that he is with – how can I put this – a woman who was born a man?’

‘No. Often the murderer has been dating or sleeping with the victim for some months.’

‘Really?’

‘One study shows that the savagery of these crimes is down to the killer feeling shame that he is attracted to a transwoman. Often he himself is a repressed, self-hating homosexual. One transwoman in Baguio – who’d been in a long-term relationship with a guy – was not only killed but her organs were cut out and stuffed in her mouth.’

‘I guess it might be like these Christian fundamentalist preachers who constantly condemn the LGBT lifestyle, and then they themselves turn out to be having liaisons with rent boys and so forth.’

‘Scott Pemberton’s lawyers said he had no idea that Jennifer was trans until he touched her crotch. This we don’t believe because surveys show that most transgender Filipinos would reveal their identities on a first date.’

‘Because they wouldn’t want to risk upsetting their date?’

‘Exactly. The defence also claimed that Jennifer tried to rob Pemberton, but if that were true he, as a US serviceman, could have arrested her and taken her to the authorities. So why overreact and kill her in that horrible way? Another transwoman, Barbie Reilly, was killed by her boyfriend after a month of courting him. He must have known her gender identity from the get-go, as she was a famous gay beauty queen who appeared in pageants. This killing, again, was dismissed by the police as robbery.’

‘But why do these murders happen after, say, a month or year of a relationship?’

‘There is a deep hatred of someone who is different.’

‘I get that, but if there’s deep hatred why would the person engage in a relationship in the first place?’

‘He enjoys it at first – mostly the sex – and will get to know the transwoman. They will dine and drink and go out. Perhaps they even live together. And then a disgust at himself takes hold.’

‘Thinking about your political and advocacy work now, what are the big challenges?’

‘The big one for us is how do we protect LGBTs? They are often amongst the poorest in society, they have no economic assistance. If you go back to the period before Spanish colonisation, LGBT people – named “*babaylans*” or “the third sex” – were revered in our society as healers and wise people. When the Roman Catholic Church came here with the Spanish, LGBTs became despised.’

‘And the Church is still generally anti-LGBT?’

‘Yes. There is a Church-sponsored group of so-called “ex-gays” who profess that LGBT is just a sinful phase, a disease that can be cured. The main problem for us today is that there are no anti-discrimination or anti-hate crime laws. We have party members in Cebu City whose parents persuaded male friends of the family to rape them

to “cure” their lesbianism. They call it “therapeutic sex”. This is tolerated in some communities, although it is far from legal.’

‘It doesn’t cross these parents’ minds that it might be more immoral to invite someone to rape your daughter than to accept that your daughter is a lesbian?’

‘No. For them it is a corrective measure justified by their religious beliefs.’

‘I take it these people are poor and uneducated?’

‘Not really. We are talking about middle-class and rich families. Sometimes they break our anti-abduction laws. This is when an angry parent will file a kidnapping case against the lover of their LGBT child and the police and judiciary cooperate.’

‘What is the current administration’s attitude towards LGBTs?’

‘It has indicated that it will allow civil unions, but has denounced as “useless” the Commission on Human Rights, which has traditionally been prepared to listen to LGBT voices. Having said that, the main cause of homophobia here is the Church.’

‘It seems like a Herculean task persuading the Church to change its view.’

‘Actually, we no longer have that dream. Where we think we can have an impact is in Congress.’

I left wishing Genya and her party the best of luck with their reforms. I spent the journey home feeling desolate about the two interviews I’d conducted today. There seemed to be a formula of oppression that applied to women, children and LGBTs: they suffered for being powerless, underprivileged, bereft of rights and under the heel of aggressors enabled by the dominant mores, however contradictory and hypocritical these mores were. I tried to console myself with the chance that my reportage on these problems might in some way help people like Josefina and Genya to solve them.

## Chapter 6. Housing the Ego

Seven weeks to the day we'd moved to Manila, I rose before dawn to prepare for a long couple of days in the field. The girls were still asleep. I kissed them both on the brow. Beth didn't stir while Fiona smirked with her eyes shut – she was either semi-aware of me or having an amusing dream. I almost woke them both when I tripped over a cardboard box of Fiona's shoes – ruby slippers, tennis sneakers, Wellington boots. She had a fair few pairs if nowhere near the 4,200 Imelda Marcos had purportedly amassed. Imelda's footwear gluttony is about the only thing most Westerners know about the family that has had more impact on Philippine society than any other.

My first awareness of the Marcoses was when they were deposed by a peaceful revolution in 1986. I was seven and hazily remember a video of several US Air Force planes on the *BBC Six O'Clock News*, an exuberant voiceover stating that the Marcos family were escaping to Hawaii.

A charcoal Isuzu car scuttled up to the condo's front steps. I opened its door and found an old geezer with concentric wrinkles like the hedge maze of a country estate. He flinched trying to lift his jeans-clad legs from the footwell.

'You must be Leopoldo. No need to get out.'

Leopold lowered his feet back into the footwell. 'How are you today, Sir Tom?'

'I'm fine. How are you?' I nodded towards his leg.

'I am the one who has gout.'

'I have some painkillers in my bag.'

'I don't trust.' He let out a grotesquely jangling cough like someone putting a pickaxe through a stained glass window. For the rest of our time together, Leopoldo was to cough like that about every five minutes.

As we set off, I grew guilty about making this dilapidated man work for me. When they hired him, did *Travel SEAN* know about his gout or the causes of his cough?

Katipunan had never been so quiet. As the sun flowered in the murky sky, a handful of bucket-balancing *taho* (a hot tapioca-like tofu drink) sellers and the odd tangerine-toned school minibus came into relief.

‘So sir,’ coughed Leopoldo, ‘you are interested of the Marcoses?’

‘Yes, I’m writing about the Marcos-related sites around Luzon.’

‘I am the one who was driver for Aspiras. You know he? He close man with Marcos. He die 1999.’

‘They were both from Ilocos Norte, right?’

‘My province too.’

‘And Aspiras was Marcos’ press officer, am I right?’

‘You know our history, Sir Tom.’

I also knew that Aspiras had started his career in the 1950s as an apprentice to Edward R. Lansdale, the CIA counterinsurgency expert who’d helped President Magsaysay quash the Huk uprising.

Before I could ask Leopoldo about working for Aspiras, we veered off the skyscraper-bullied Roxas Boulevard and onto Vicente Sotto Street, the waters of Manila Bay to our right bleached blonde by the ascendant sun. At the end of the street was an octagonal cluster of double-storey buildings held up by pillars made from cross-grained coconut shells. One of Imelda Marcos’ more eccentric creations, the 37 million peso (about £500,000) Coconut Palace was constructed in 1981 for the sole purpose of accommodating Pope John Paul II. The glitch was, having witnessed the poverty across the Philippines, the Pope refused for reasons of good taste to stay in such a lavish venue, even if the chandeliers were made of fruit skin rather than crystal. He then upset Imelda further by holding forth on Negros island on the myriad sins of capitalism.

Relations soured between the Marcoses and the Catholic Church. Imelda was arrogant enough to think she could afford to estrange the one Filipino institution that is supposed to transcend politics, money and national pride. Is there a link between the size of one's ego and the size and opulence of the buildings one commissions?

I got out of the car for a better look. Leopoldo followed me, steadier on his feet this time. As he lit a cigarette, I asked him if he remembered the Pope incident. He screwed his face up, his wrinkles contracting closer together so that they formed the same grainy pattern as the coconut pillars. 'It was no problem, as Pope go somewhere else. You know we have other personalities stay there after he? Already, Brooke Shields, actress from America, and Gaddafi, leader of Algeria.'

'You mean Libya?'

'Sorry, Sir Tom. Libya.'

Gaddafi's nationality wasn't the only thing Leopoldo had got wrong. Gaddafi never came to the Philippines. In 1976, the Marcoses erected another boondoggle in Manila, the Golden Mosque, in preparation for a state visit by 'the Mad Dog of Tripoli', but the invite was rescinded after US complaints.

Leopoldo pointed his cigarette at the palace. 'Will you get inside, Sir Tom?'

'My boss tried to arrange a tour for me, but it wasn't possible. I think it's a government office now.'

A few hundred yards south, past the ochre balconies of the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila Hotel, was the Manila Film Center. It was a grody hunk of concrete with zero resemblance to the Athenian Parthenon which had inspired it. The rush to finish construction in time for the 1982 Manila International Film Festival caused 170 plus workmen to fall off the scaffolding and into wet cement. What happened next is disputed. Some say the foreman ordered the surviving men to keep working and pour

more cement onto the trapped unfortunates. To this day, their skeletons are preserved inside the walls.

We lunched at a hole-in-the-wall café. Leopoldo ordered *bulalo*, slow-cooked beef marrow bone in a sauce so salty and fatty a mere spoonful of it gave me a hot flush. I settled for the healthiest item on the menu: *kinilaw* (raw tuna in a vinegar dressing). Leopoldo ate fast. Once he'd forked all the meat into his mouth, he picked up the bone with his fingers and chewed at it like a ravenous St Bernard. 'My doctor he say I should not do this,' he spluttered. 'I like too much, though.' He placed on the table a plastic bottle with a NATURE'S SPRING DRINKING WATER sticker on it. 'You want?'

I nodded, my mouth full. He poured two glasses. I took a big lug on mine and felt the scorch of distilled alcohol in my throat. 'That wasn't water,' I winced.

'It is gin from the province,' he said, pronouncing *gin* with a hard *g* like *good* or *guard*. He finished the bottle. I was too polite to ask him if this might in any way impair his ability to drive us the almost 300 miles north to Marcos country.

## Chapter 7. Fascist Hospitality

On Ayala Bridge we foundered in a traffic jam of tricycles, their lawnmower engines and duck-quack horns grating on me. As we edged forward at a rate of an inch every ten minutes, I ruminated on Marcos' plans for a national rail network. If he'd enacted them would I be stuck here right now?

What is it about the popular consciousness that associates trains with autocrats – especially Hitler and Mussolini – and how the locomotives in their tyrannies supposedly ran on time? Whether or not transport punctuality was a Marcos aim, he did set up the first Light Rail Transit (LRT) line in the capital, brought the Philippine National Railway (PNR) company into a broader infrastructure project and, according to his son Bongbong, planned a further eight lines for the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) before he was overthrown in 1986.

We finally got out of Manila around two pm. We crossed a hinterland of car showrooms, billboards so vast you couldn't see their full extent from a car window and industrial units composed of multi-coloured, Lego-like blocks with names like WIMPEX and STANPAK. A lot of new building was going on – proof perhaps that the Philippines' growth rate was almost 4 percent whereas Credit Crunch Britain's was minus 2.

I was woken by the slamming of Leopoldo's door. I think he slammed it particularly hard with the intention of waking me up. Cold sweat logged my socks and armpits. Filipino drivers tended not to turn on the air-con unless asked, and I hadn't been able to ask because I'd been asleep for the last seven hours. I stepped out into a dimly lit car park to a ringing choir of crickets. A green neon sign blinked HOTEL and WELCOME TO BATAK CITY.

The receptionist wore a cerise silk scarf and an excess of make-up. She slipped me a silver key. 'One single superior room, sir.'

'Do you have a room for him too?' I thrust a thumb at Leopoldo. He'd been yawning and coughing alternately ever since we got out of the car.

'We have.' She led us outside into a spot-lit courtyard and to a sunbed with a bamboo umbrella attached to its back.

'Come on, it's outside!' I hissed. 'You must have something for him inside, no?'

The receptionist goggled at me as if I'd just told her I was the transgender reincarnation of her late grandmother. Clearly round these parts it was routine for a lowly driver to sleep in the open air. 'We are fully booked, sir.'

Leopoldo shook his head. 'This okay, Sir Tom. This okay.' The receptionist looked at Leopoldo and then back at me hopefully. My downcast expression remained.

'Leopoldo, do you want to sleep in my room?'

He and the receptionist looked at each other again. 'No,' he said. 'I cannot.'

'What if he would sleep in reception?' suggested the receptionist.

'He won't get a good night's rest there if it's open twenty-four hours.'

'In our restaurant, sir? Nobody at all would be there until six tomorrow.'

'Do you have a bed he can use?'

'We can find, sir.'

Back in my room, I noticed I'd missed a call from Beth. I returned it. 'Sorry, I was asleep when you rang.'

'Started taking siestas have we?'

'Not intentionally. I'm not used to such early starts. How are you anyway?'

'Stressed. I'll tell you about it when you're home.'

'Sorry to hear that, darling.'

'Fiona wanted to speak to you. She cried when we couldn't get through.'

‘She still awake?’

‘She went to sleep hours ago. Don’t you know what time it is?’

‘Oh well, as long as she’s alright.’

If I was bothered by Fiona’s distress, I was also touched that she was missing me. I hadn’t thought about the nature of our relationship since the dilemma back in Portsmouth about which gendered public toilet to take her in. Since then we’d got on well, as good friends do. But her sadness over my absence implied something more concrete between us. I pondered the terms ‘father’ and ‘father figure.’ A few months ago, when I was a selfish, immature bachelor, I’d have balked at the slightest suggestion of being a parent – far too much responsibility, far too many reasons to worry. But I didn’t feel like this now.

Next morning in the hotel restaurant, a waitress was lifting the lids off trays of rice, *tapa* (dried beef) and harshly salted *bangus* (milkfish). There was no sign of Leopoldo. I went to reception. There was no sign of him there either, although a lad of twenty was crouched over a laptop playing *Candy Crush Saga*. He nodded sluggishly at the door to the courtyard.

Leopoldo was hobbling away from the sunbed, brushing himself down.

‘Leopoldo, why the hell did you sleep out here?’

‘Aaah, restaurant next to graveyard. Me, I scared of ghosts.’

‘Next time we’re getting you a proper bed indoors.’

‘No no. Here almost luxury. When I work for Aspiras, I use to sleep in *carabao* harness in garden.’

As we ate breakfast, I concluded that the Marcos mob’s approach to hospitality said something about their ethical temperament: if you were a social better whom they wanted to suck up to in the hope that some of your prestige might rub off on them,

they'd build you a brand new palace or mosque. But if you were one of their skivvies so loyal you'd die for them, they'd condemn you to a space on the ground next to the dogs and the cockroaches.

## Chapter 8. Official Fibs

We drove past a *barangay* hall with BATAAC: HOME OF GREAT LEADERS on its eave. I flipped my attention to a Philippine Supreme Court report on recent extra-judicial killings in the Philippines. Of more than 300 murders of journalists and political activists – some of them University of the Philippines students gunned down while investigating the plight of aboriginal peoples in the north – only a fistful had come to court. The popular view was that, like Marcos, the current President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was on a mission to wipe out the left. And, like Marcos, she'd imposed Martial Law – 'a state of emergency' was how she spun it – but for only three weeks rather than Marcos' nine years.

Making a comparison of scale between the two regimes would be unfair – the Marcoses killed over 3,000 opponents, after all – but I questioned what had been learned from those diabolical days and whether the conditions that bred oppression had changed much. Then as now, the US and its commercial and strategic interests were fully behind the leader; urban poverty caused violent crime; rural poverty fed the Maoist insurgency; racism and marginalisation fed the *Moro* Muslim struggle for self-determination – and so on. (Of course, even Marcos' hit list would come to look like small beer beside the 10,000 suspected drug pushers and addicts murdered within a year of President Duterte's election in 2016 – more on that later).

The Ferdinand E. Marcos Presidential Center was a Hispanic mansion with lanterns swinging from stucco arcades. It didn't look that pricey considering its founders had allegedly embezzled £6 billion from the Philippine treasury.

I was met by an effete young guide called John-Mark who wore pink skinny jeans and an auburn-dyed pony tail. 'Welcome, Sir Tom.' He gently bit his lower lip and cast his eyes away from mine. I read the expression as somewhere between shyness

and anticipation. ‘Welcome here to our museum that is celebrating a national hero a little like your William Shakespeare or your Tony Blair.’ He let out a trebly chuckle after saying the name ‘Tony Blair’. I hoped it was a chuckle of sarcasm.

In the vestibule was a twenty-four-carat gold bust of Marcos, head held high, expectant eyes staring into a bright future – well, that was more the effect of having a lamp shining directly into his metal face. That such an imposing object should greet visitors the moment they arrived seemed to be a way of stamping the Marcoses’ authority here – we own this place, we control the narrative.

John-Mark led me to a section about Marcos’ early days. It was all hagiography laminated and mounted on paperboard. Beneath a sepia mugshot of a flat-cheeked Chinese *mestizo* with big, anchor-shaped eyebrows, a caption read, ‘From his father Mariano, Ferdinand learned more than just machismo.’ Mariano was, apparently, a ‘prominent achiever’ who could ‘shift effortlessly from English to Ilocano, and even to Spanish.’ Ferdinand’s mother Josieta was a ‘local beauty queen endowed with oratorical prowess’. The dynastic logic was impeccable – Ferdinand was bound to be clever, handsome and articulate because his parents were. These were inherited traits, apparently. I wondered what role nurture had played. ‘Do you think Marcos was under pressure from his parents to become a great man?’ I asked John-Mark.

‘Yes, maybe that. He came from a long line of commanding persons here in Ilocos Norte. His father was a congressman and his grandfather a businessman. His mother’s forefathers were Spanish mayors.’

Even Marcos’ stormiest critics would agree with the next captions about his success as a law student at the University of the Philippines. Endowed with an exquisite memory, he knew the 1935 Philippine Constitution by heart and scored the highest marks ever in the national bar exams. His stellar performance drew accusations of cheating. He agreed to sit a *viva voce*. He passed that just as decisively.

Next we came to the first blemish on Marcos' record – his imprisonment for murder aged just twenty-one. 'Marcos' father and Julio Nalundasan were political rivals,' said John-Mark. 'They were both running to be representative for the second district. Nalundasan won the election and was slain by gun. The first suspect was the neighbour of Nalundasan, but after three months it was boiled down to Ferdinand Marcos. The police found the murder weapon in the locker room of the University of the Philippines Pistol Club. Marcos was the president of that club. There was also a star witness, Aguinaldo, who said he saw Marcos do the deed. Marcos was placed in jail and then he wrote an appeal to the Supreme Court.' John-Mark pointed to a pillow-thick stack of brown-white papers in one of the display cabinets. 'Then, thank the Lord, everybody realised he was not guilty and he was made free.'

Whether John-Mark had knowingly misled me or had done so in good faith, I'll never know. Either way his version modulated or excised certain details that appeared in the Supreme Court decision and other accounts. What John-Mark missed was that Ferdinand, Marino, Ferdinand's uncle Quirino Lizardo and others met on September 17th 1935 to plan, essentially, a mob hit on Nalundasan. They wanted to avenge their humiliation by Nalundasan's drudges who'd driven a car around Batac containing a coffin and two dummies with 'Marcos' and 'Aglipay' (the leader of the Republican Party) labels attached to them.

Ferdinand was chosen as the hitman for his skill with a trigger and the likelihood that, if he were caught, his youth would get him a lighter sentence. To gamble everything – his life, his career, his chance of adding something to the Marcos family legacy – must have required extraordinary loyalty to his father.

At nine pm on September 20th, Ferdinand, Lizardo and a lackey, Calixto Aguinaldo, infiltrated the back yard of Nalundasan's house. Aguinaldo stood watch as the other two drew pistols and positioned themselves in parts of the yard from where

they could aim at Nalundasan while staying concealed. Aguinaldo suffered a panic attack – or perhaps a moral *volte-face* given that he later testified in court against his bosses. As he fled the scene, he heard a shot fired. Ferdinand had put a bullet in Nalundasan's back as he stood at the window brushing his teeth.

As John-Mark said, Ferdinand was arrested, jailed and later acquitted. However, as the historian Sterling Seagrave speculates, Ferdinand wasn't freed because his guilt was disproved. Rather, the Marcos family's 'special relationship' with Ferdinand Chua, Batac's Municipal Court Judge, persuaded President Manuel Quezon, who depended on the backing of the prominent Chua clan, to grant Marcos a pardon. A familiar case of a well-connected person levitating above the law.

Remarkably, Marcos was able to turn this potentially career-sinking scandal into career-lifting publicity. When he went into politics a few years later, the voters didn't see a callow hoodlum who'd been ordered by his domineering family to commit a sordid and cowardly murder in reprisal for minor cheek. What they saw was a macho gunfighter who'd fought the law and won. To sustain the tough guy image, Marcos never denied the rumours of his culpability.

I tried to see things from the perspective of the twenty-one-year-old Marcos. He *must* have felt at least some remorse over Nalundasan. Like so many innocent young soldiers in so many wars across history, did that early experience of killing another human being offer two possible outcomes? Might he have sworn never to kill again and from then on follow the path of peace in the hope of redemption, like those British World War II tank commanders who became vicars after demob? Or would he somehow come to terms with his remorse, morally square with himself the pain he'd caused, and then be ready to cause more of it? Back in the UK a few years ago, a veteran-turned-peace campaigner told me army training does its best to strip new

recruits of their empathy, scruples and compassion. Building the perfect soldier means building a sociopath of sorts.

‘Having literally got away with murder,’ as James Hamilton-Paterson puts it, Marcos was emboldened to go on and do worse, all the time able to dodge both his conscience and the system. One small-town baby-kisser dead in a Batac back yard prefigured 3,000 Filipino civilians done over in almost every corner of the republic. No doubt, each time the body count rose, Marcos found a way to self-justify it morally, politically and psychically.

As the problems of the Philippines multiplied, Marcos cranked up the machismo. When a fresh threat to his power popped up like a plastic duck at a funfair, his reaction was to take an ever bigger hammer to it. In 1969, when two insurgencies – that of the Marxist NPA and the *Moro* National Liberation Front (MNLF) – commenced, he preferred aggression to arbitration. According to José Maria Sison, founder of the Philippine Communist Party, Marcos’ troops used napalm on civilians in Jolo City and deployed a maniacal transvestite lieutenant who claimed to be Christ and practised cannibalism on the *Moros* he captured. Such brutality only fanned further opposition to Marcos.

1970 saw more NPA and MNLF sorties, and the attempted storming of the Malacañang Palace by left-wing students. Marcos wouldn’t talk with any of these parties. Instead, his secret police abducted undesirables and subjected them to sexual assault, water-boarding, electrocution in the genitals and beatings with metal bars and rifle butts. Some of ‘the disappeared’ were caged up like animals, others forced to play Russian roulette. In addition to the dead, a total of 35,000 Filipinos were tortured and 70,000 imprisoned throughout the junta.

The sequence of greater repression followed by greater protest continued until one side had to crack. Ultimately that would be Marcos’. He’d have fallen sooner had

he not been bolstered by the US. When Marcos won his first and only free election in 1965 (he'd go on to brazenly cheat in all subsequent ballots), 35,000 American soldiers based in the Philippines were becoming central to the Vietnam War effort. A year later, Mr and Mrs Marcos were warmly greeted in Washington, D.C. President Johnson was so enamoured of Imelda that he groped her during a dance. In addresses to the American public, Ferdinand confirmed his nation's compact with the US in the tussle against communism. The Philippines, he said, was one of the last outposts of capitalism in a continent fast buckling to the Red Menace.

After that, the US-directed World Bank made favourable loans to Marcos and Filipinos were sent to be trained as soldiers and police officers at US academies. Enlisting American succour may have been in Marcos' DNA, for his grandfather Fructuoso had expanded his rice, coffee and timber concerns thanks to policies instigated by the early US colonial regime. Another influential fan across the Pacific was Ronald Reagan who, unlike Pope John Paul II, had enjoyed the Marcoses' hospitality on a stopover in Manila in 1969. After becoming POTUS in 1981, Reagan dubbed Ferdinand a 'freedom fighter' and shored him up with money, arms and compliments until he was toppled by the People Power Revolution of 1986.

Reagan's assertion that Marcos was 'a hero on a bubble-gum card he had collected as a kid' was fresh in my head as John-Mark and I strolled into a room entitled 'War Years: Valor of the Veteran'. I tried not to smile as I read the captions parroting one of Marcos' most preposterous lies: his 'noble sacrifices for the motherland' by courageously leading a guerrilla unit against the Japanese in World War II.

John-Mark pointed to a clinquant shelf of medals. 'He has the US Congressional Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross, as well as 25 others.' But he was wrong again. As the *New York Times* revealed shortly before Marcos was ousted, the US armed forces have no record whatsoever of bestowing any of these honours.

‘Are there any surviving photographs of Marcos with the guerrillas?’ I asked.

‘We have only this one.’ John-Mark pointed to a snapshot of a forage-capped Marcos. It was hardly smoking gun stuff.

‘Some people say that Marcos was never a guerrilla,’ I said, eyeing the tattered front pages of the *Manila Bulletin* for comparisons of Marcos with Errol Flynn, or suchlike.

John-Mark scowled. ‘It is common knowledge. You can read it in the official life of Marcos by Hartzell Spence.’ He was referring to a biography Marcos himself commissioned. Spence, an American hack credited with inventing the term ‘pin-up’, painted Marcos as an Indiana Jones figure who, so Hamilton-Paterson puts it, ‘single-handedly wipes out nests of Japanese machine-gunners’ and ‘carries out daring rescue missions though mortally wounded’ plus other hackneyed staples of the boy’s own genre.

Extensive research over seventy years has shown that not one of these exploits is true. What is true is that Marcos was drafted into the Philippine Army after law school and fought with the Americans before the Japanese took him POW on the Bataan peninsula in April 1942. Then a curious thing happened: he was set free from the Camp O’Donnell military prison because his family was merrily collaborating with the Japanese. Back in December, his father Mariano had laid on a welcome party for the invaders and gave speeches in their honour right up until he was caught by exactly the sorts of partisans Ferdinand would later pretend to have led. The partisans tied Mariano’s hands to two *carabaos* and spurred the beasts. His body was ripped in half.

‘Those who doubt,’ said John-Mark, sensing that I was one who doubted, ‘cannot explain why Marcos was incarcerated by the Japs.’

It wasn’t worth gainsaying John-Mark about the guerrilla falsehood – his belief in Marcos’ sainthood was held with the bombproof conviction of a brainwashed cultist.

Moreover, he was a mellow kid and it would have been mean to upset him. Maybe his employers knew that hiring such a sweet-natured lad would be a shrewd tactic for averting wrangles with more sceptical visitors.

I noted his use of the epithet ‘Japs’. I’d read it a lot in books by Filipinos, even in ones published long after the war. It was as if the rage towards the Japanese was still fresh enough to excuse casual racism.

Pulp fiction clichés were as pervasive in the room named ‘The Eleven Day Romance of Ferdinand and Imelda’ as they were in the war heroism section. On Tuesday April 6th 1954, Imelda swooned as she watched Ferdinand showing off his debating skills in the Senate. When they were introduced in the Senate cafeteria, Ferdinand was smitten: ‘It was as if he was hit by temporary paralysis ... He stood motionless staring at her.’ He chased her to the beautiful hill station of Baguio during the Easter holiday, but the *dénouement* wasn’t quite Barbara Cartland – Ferdinand got down on one knee and presented Imelda with... a marriage licence to sign. Once a lawyer, always a lawyer.

Ferdinand grew more romantically adventurous later. In 1969, the American actress Dovie Beams secretly tape recorded her and Marcos having sex. Amongst the lowlights were Marcos’ desperate pleas for fellatio, his longing for a half-American baby with Dovie and his penchant for singing traditional Ilocano ditties after ejaculation. Copies of the tapes fell into the hands of student militants who broadcast them non-stop on the University of the Philippines’ radio station. For someone so muscular at managing his public persona, this was PR self-harm of the bloodiest proportions.

John-Mark laid a soft hand on my forearm. ‘Are you ready for the main attraction, Sir Tom?’

## Chapter 9. The Politics of Mummies

Having crossed Ho Chi Minh and Chairman Mao off my list, I was looking forward to a hat-trick of embalmed Asian leaders by spending some time with what was left of Ferdinand Marcos. According to the Filipino essayist Luis H. Francia, the body on display looks healthy and fresh-faced, and nothing like ‘the dictator who died at the age of seventy-two, his features bloated by illness [... and] medication.’ The mortician who did the embalming, Frank Malabed, admitted that he spent three weeks beautifying the corpse before it was sent from Hawaii – where Marcos had been exiled for the last three years of his life – to here in Batac.

Still, rumours abound that Marcos was secretly buried deep underground and that what lies on the silk mattress in the casket here in the Presidential Center, dressed up in a white *barong tagalog* (traditional embroidered shirt) covered in phoney medals, is in fact a waxwork model. It’d be poetic if this *was* a mannequin rather than the real thing – Marcos was so flamboyantly dishonest in life, why not save up the greatest fib of all for his death?

I didn’t know enough about the procedure to answer the question myself. My layman’s eyes, though, were chary about the overly smooth, glossy, painted *papier mâché* quality to Marcos’ face and his back-combed hair that looked too neat, brittle and black, like the industrially dyed synthetic fibres glued to the head of a doll.

Supposing this *was* Marcos, I had to pose the same question I’d posed when seeing Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi: how much of *him* was left after all the work done by the embalmer? After all, the Marcoses had made an art form of cosmetic modification, from spraying the grass outside official buildings green to Imelda’s entourage purportedly injecting themselves with duck embryos to slow the ageing process.

Do those who want to be embalmed have delusions of immortality? Francia suggests that Marcos ‘wanted to reign forever’ and Hamilton-Paterson claims he constructed ‘a superman image of himself’ which required ‘some degree of belief in it.’ Until his early sixties, Marcos was fit and brawny. ‘If I’m this well at this age,’ he may have thought to himself, ‘I can go on forever.’ When he came down with lupus and kidney disease, he refused to name an heir. Perhaps he thought there’d never need to be one. His advisors colluded in the fantasy – they never discussed his illness even when they noticed him bleeding from his sleeve in 1984.

If someone is preserved post-mortem, it must be hard for their friends and family to accept they are gone forever. And, if that someone has wielded great power, does preserving him mean his country can’t let go of his legacy and learn from his mistakes? I pictured the ghost of Marcos rising out of its varnished shell to give the thumbs-up to the current President Arroyo’s own endeavours at Martial Law and opposition-busting.

There could have been other, equally cynical motives behind his embalming. The Marcoses liked to co-opt native traditions in order to counter accusations they’d sold out to the US, and mummification might have been an example. The pre-Hispanic tribes of northern Luzon, with which Marcos shared some genes, practised mummification from about 1200 AD until the mid-nineteenth century. Using similar techniques to modern-day embalmers, the Igorot peoples would dehydrate the organs with salty water, wash and peel off the skin to prevent worm infestation and smoke, and sun-dry the body until it hardened for posterity. The finished article was exhibited inside a special cave.

‘Sir Tom?’ said John-Mark, interrupting my musings. ‘Do you want to give President Marcos a little wave?’ He lowered his gaze obsequiously and made a V-for-Victory sign at the casket. Was he joking or did he genuinely believe Marcos was still

sentient – or at least still sentient enough to appreciate a little wave? I didn't give him a little wave – that would have felt just a bit too silly.

Showing me out the door, John-Mark asked me to 'write only write nice things about our town' and handed me a goodie bag of Marcos paraphernalia. In it was a book whose title alone implied it wouldn't be a classic of disinterested inquiry: *Ferdinand E. Marcos: A Hero in History*. Flicking through it on the ride out of Batac, I was overwhelmed not by its insights or arguments, but by its plodding, repetitive style and use of innumerable devices to fudge, excuse, caricature and downplay pretty much any criticism that's ever been levelled at Marcos. When discussing Marcos' leadership abilities, the author, former politics professor Remigio Agpalo, is heavy on rhetoric and light on details (presumably because they might prove troublesome as, say, the details of Marcos' soldiering record are): 'Here is a leader who philosophizes on the nature of man, of society, of politics comprehensively.' Marcos was himself a dab hand at platitudes so vacuous they could have been uttered by a management consultant. They certainly don't reveal anything meaningful about Marcos' worldview and thereby don't give his detractors anything to get their teeth into.

'Once a champion, always a champion.'

'Freedom is not just declared; it is exercised.'

'The permissiveness of society must be balanced with authoritativeness.'

'There are many things we do not want about the world. Let us not just mourn them. Let us change them.'

Marcos was not the first nor will he be the last man to misuse language for the sake of political survival. Let's not forget Bill Clinton's slippery definition of a sex act or, on a graver level, Tony Blair's simultaneous apologies and denials of liability for the Iraq disaster.

My reading was disrupted by two text messages. The first was from Imelda Marcos' 'people' informing me that the eighty-year-old ex-First Lady wouldn't be available for interview. The other bore better news – I could have a few hours with a Ferdinand Marcos lookalike.

## Chapter 10. I Was Ferdy's Double

'Tom, please excuse me, but have you ever held a dying child in your arms?' asked Francisco 'Frankie' Salazar as he unbuttoned his shirt outside the Marcos Hall of Justice.

I didn't know what to say. I was unable to turn my gaze from his liver-spotted fingers while they worked their way down his chest, the shirt falling apart to expose a vest and silver crucifix beneath. Where would this undressing end?

'Shall we get in the car?' I pointed behind me to the Isuzu parked crookedly under an orange gazebo with a portrait on it of a melon-headed old dear with bouffant hair and superhero sunglasses. Underneath her twin chins were the words CONGRESSWOMAN IMELDA MARCOS WELCOMES YOU TO LAOAG CITY. *HINDI CORRUPT* [not corrupt].

Frankie pushed his horned, half-rim glasses back up the bridge of his nose and bundled his shirt and tie into his leather satchel. We sat in the rear seats while Leopoldo twisted the ignition. The air-conditioning was chilly against my sunburned face. The fifties rock 'n' roll radio station came back, the opening bars of Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode' soundtracking a very fifties American scene – a Total gas station attendant in a red uniform and baseball cap high-fiving a youngster in a vintage-style Yale University basketball shirt.

'Excuse me Tom,' said Frankie. 'Please let me continue my point. Would your David *Cam-ah-rron* hold a dying child in his arms?' Unlike younger Filipinos who speak English with an American accent, his pronunciation of the then PM's name was heavily Hispanic, all rolling *rs* and throaty vowels.

'Probably not, no. He isn't.'

‘Would your war hero Winston Churchill have the courage to hold a dying child in his arms?’

‘He may have done during the war, I really don’t-’

‘I have held, oh, maybe a thousand dying people in my arms. If you are a good politician, a true politician, you have to be close to your people like this. I could have caught diseases from the blood and the mucus falling from the noses of these poor damned souls, but their families respected me for being unafraid.’ He gave me another ludicrously firm handshake. What is it about those men – always men – who have such a forceful grasp? Is it a marker of manliness? A ploy to intimidate a potential adversary? A spasm auguring Parkinson’s or some other muscular malady?

Perhaps Frankie thought the shake added sincerity to what he’d just told me. It wasn’t going to work. I’d been in a sceptical mood about all things political since my visit to the myth-soaked Marcos mausoleum. Now here I was with a man who claimed to have been Marcos’ body double in the early 1980s. How much of what *he* was going to tell me could I believe?

I looked hard at Frankie’s face while he lit a menthol Marlboro and struggled to see his likeness to the Great Dictator. Frankie’s mistily receding side-combed hair lacked the volume and erectness of Marcos’ leonine quiff. His elongated smirk, protruding butterfly-wing ears, and too-small, circumflex-shaped eyes could never be mistaken for the younger Ferdie’s suave, well-proportioned, Oriental Action Man features.

‘How did you first meet Marcos?’ I asked, as we left town and hit the coastal Pan-Philippine trunk road.

‘I was the protégé of one of his ministers, a man named Reynaldo. During my first term as Mayor of Ascension, Reynaldo took me to a meeting at the Malacañang Palace.’

‘What was Marcos like one-to-one?’

‘He had the greatest mind in Philippine political history. He appreciated my work in Ascension and asked if I would avail myself of an opportunity to sometimes ride in one of his limousines. How could I turn down such an offer? I did a good job-’

I wanted more details, but I could squeeze out just one syllable before he carried on, speaking over me. ‘I did a good job, for the President offered me to become a judge in Cebu. I declined for I did not want to uproot my family and leave this province.’ He raised his hands to the ceiling of the Isuzu, turning his palms to face the heavens. ‘God’s own province!’ he declared. By coincidence, the radio was now playing ‘Three Steps to Heaven’ by Eddie Cochran. Frankie replaced his hands by his side. ‘I thank God also that I did not take the role, for the man who did was assassinated in his restroom one week later.’

Frankie’s attention was snared by something out the window. He barked in Ilocano and Leopoldo stopped the car. ‘Tom, please accompany me.’

He led me to a small breezeblock health clinic. ‘As mayor I built this one,’ Frankie said with a proud touch of his crucifix. ‘In 1988, I went to Brussels and presented to your European Union. I said to them, “I give you two hours to decide whether you want to help the Third World.” And when they came back they agreed.’

My doubts were allayed by a sign on the clinic’s gate: WITH GREAT THANKS TO OUR GOOD FRIENDS IN EUROPE.

‘I built five clinics like these, all free for the poor to avail of.’

That seemed a progressive policy to me, but had Frankie enriched himself from it? How could I ask him without coming over rude? In the event, I didn’t need to.

‘I know what you are thinking, my British friend,’ he said. ‘But I am *hindi corrupt*. I mean, if I grafted in my mayoral days, what do I have to show for it now?’ He pinched the collar of his vest. ‘This is fifty pesos from the market. I am still a country

attorney whose peasant clients pay me in chickens. I have just my little house in Ascension, nothing more. I did not send my kids to Harvard or Stanford. You see *they* cannot use any of this against me.'

'Who can't?'

'My opponents in the next election.'

Frankie spent the rest of the drive to Pagudpud beach outlining his bid for a third term as mayor, despite the risks. He was up against the Vizcocho clan, whose dominance of the local judiciary allowed them to peddle crystal meth with impunity. They deployed a hitman against other dealers, nosy reporters and rival candidates like Frankie. On a recent hustings, he'd bumped into the hitman, whom he'd known for decades. 'Are you coming for me now?' Frankie whispered, sliding his hand towards his shoulder holster.

'No,' the hitman replied. 'You're not enough of a threat... yet.'

Unlike the old days, Frankie told me, now candidates could buy votes *en masse* by delivering a new laptop or TV to a *barangay* captain. In return the captain would persuade all his constituents to support the benefactor. 'Except it is not a gift,' added Frankie, 'when it has been paid for out of your own tax money already.'

Had he had any near misses? 'One time these bastards came to my home with shotguns. Praise be to God that I was in Manila that day. They scrambled when they saw my security guards.'

I was surprised by his candour, but I guessed it was all about cultivating the hard man image learned, no doubt, from his idol Marcos. When we could see the wind turbines of Bangui, which look like seventy metre-high Mercedes Benz logos stretching along the coast in a neat row, Frankie unscrewed a bottle of Ginebra San Miguel. 'You like?'

'Bit early for me.'

‘This gin has snake bile added to it.’

‘Sounds scrumptious. So in the upcoming campaign will you have to buy votes too?’

‘No, in God’s name no! It is shameful, undemocratic.’ Frankie took a slug of the gin. ‘And I could not afford it.’ He went on to tell me he’d won his previous two elections by spending time in his constituents’ homes, playing with the children, dancing with the women and drinking with the men. One time, he claimed, he consumed ten bottles of gin and went straight into the office at seven am to begin a fresh day of campaigning. ‘You would never catch the Vizcochos getting up close and personal like I do. The daughter who is standing against me has spent most of her life in California, for goodness sake!’

Frankie said that his lowly upbringing brought him esteem from the common man. From the age of ten he worked on his sharecropper parents’ tobacco farm before supporting his studies as a priest by working nights as the seminary’s janitor. He qualified though never worked as a clergyman, instead moving into law then politics, then back to law and now, if he’s successful in the next election, politics again.

At sundown, we pulled into Evangeline’s Beach Resort in Pagudpud, one of those blissful Asian beaches that encourages young, middle-class Westerners to write cult novels. Except maybe not in this exact instance, as I couldn’t see a single white face amongst the students drinking San Miguel under the parasols, the children trying to surf or their parents on the videoke machines failing to master the tricky ‘aha-ha-ha-ha’ vocal bridge in John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’. I couldn’t envisage these fervent Catholics singing the lines ‘imagine there’s no heaven,’ ‘no hell below us’ or ‘no religion too’.

Leopoldo retired to the drivers’ quarters while Frankie and I grabbed a wonky table on the sand. ‘Please excuse me,’ he said, hooking his glasses into the neckline of his vest. ‘Is your birth name Thomas?’

‘It is.’

‘That is the name of my two favourite saints: Thomas Aquinas and Thomas More. Both Englishmen too, no?’

‘More was, yes.’

‘You know that I researched my family in both Spain and the United States? In Madrid I discovered that the Salazars came to the Philippines in 1583, and in Salt Lake City I consulted the *Book of Mormon*.’

‘Why the *Book of Mormon*?’

‘It mentions all the Christian last names of any importance, and Salazar was there.’ Frankie grinned and his eyes opened out from circumflexes into grand Italianate archways.

‘Does it?’ I said, fairly sure that it doesn’t. On the journey here, I’d warmed to Frankie and come to believe his testimony – or bits of it. I wasn’t sure now I knew he’d placed his trust in the ramblings of a demented sect founded by a convicted conman.

‘Please excuse me,’ he said. ‘I have to prepare my petition to the court to have Miss Vizcocho barred from the mayoral race on residency grounds.’ He thrust his hand at me. I extended mine cautiously. He spotted my show of weakness, I think, and gave me the hardest grip so far. ‘I am sixty-nine years old!’ he exclaimed. ‘And I still have this strength. Tom, excuse me, how old is your father?’

‘Sixty.’

‘Does he have the same strength as I?’

‘Not sure. Well, good luck Frankie and stay safe.’

‘I am not afraid of death. You know why?’

‘No.’

‘Because I have always been close to it. Holding the dying persons is just one thing. I also spend time with cadavers, making them look good before the funeral,

painting their skin, fixing their holes and all that jazz. I made over my mother-in-law so well that she looked like Marilyn Monroe. My father-in-law was more of a challenge – he had been shot in the face with a revolver. I used cotton wool to fill the gap and, well, by the end he looked like James Dean, trust me.’

That night I dreamed of Frankie leaning over Marcos’ embalmed, Madame Tussaud’s-like face, needle and thread in hand. ‘You taught me so much, sir,’ said Frankie to the dead tyrant.

## Chapter 11. Clumsy Driving

After a late lunch at The Pastry Chef in Malolos, a town within screaming distance of Metro Manila, Leopoldo looked more poorly than before. His eyes were fogged over and the bags beneath them scarlet-sore. He interspersed his usual coughs with sniffs so fierce they made his moustache jitter. When he closed his lips they didn't align properly, the upper one hanging over the lower one like a loosened fascia. When I asked him if he was okay, his response was more a rumble of the larynx than any recognisable phrase. He tottered over to the Isuzu in the restaurant car park, scrabbling for his keys in the breast pocket of his Adidas sweater.

I followed him, my arms outstretched and ready to catch him if necessary.

'Leopoldo, you put them in your trousers. Are you sure you're alright?'

He grunted again. Like a cowboy drawing a six-gun, he swiftly tugged the keys from out of his trouser pocket and aimed them at the Isuzu. There was something about these movements that convinced me he was well enough to keep driving. In hindsight, this was prodigiously stupid of me.

The first bad omen was the desperately slow speed at which we entered Quezon City on the hustling NLEX Segment 8.1. We were easily overtaken by a fleet of Phoenix Petroleum tankers, horns bawling as they blazed past us. After them, a bandana-headed tricycle driver slammed a ring-festooned fist against my window.

I reached from the back seat to Leopoldo's shoulder. 'You might want to step on the gas.'

He grunted again.

An inappropriately jovial memory came to me. In Portsmouth, I'd amuse Fiona by pushing her buggy on a wildly weaving route across Southsea Common. We called the game 'clumsy pushing'. As we were getting into Beth's car one morning, Fiona

pointed to the driver's seat and requested I 'do clumsy driving'. I explained to her that anyone attempting 'clumsy driving' would be a menace to society and likely end up in prison.

At a hectic four-directional crossing, I gritted my teeth as Leopoldo accelerated too soon, with ten seconds left on the green traffic clock that gives pedestrians time to cross. Luckily, there weren't any pedestrians, but we did clip the Paisley-design front bumper of a jeepney racing in from our left. A crunch and a clank followed – a piece of that vehicle or ours had fallen off into the road. 'Holy fucking Jesus,' I gasped. If the jeepney had been an inch further forward I'd now be lying in the road 20 feet away, probably covered in glass, probably dead.

'Leopoldo, you *need* to stop the car.'

With another grunt he steered towards the curb. I could feel the tension in my chest easing, my heart rate calming down. But the relief was premature – Leopoldo then steered the other way, not just back into the lane but further, into the centre of the road. A string of oncoming tricycles swerved by us, their horns bleating in grim symphony.

I mustered all the energy I could to shout. 'If you don't stop the car we are going to fucking die!'

It worked. He swerved into the underground car park of a hire-by-the-hour hotel.

I was shaking while I sat in St Luke's Medical Center awaiting news of Leopoldo's fate. My mobile rang. It was Beth.

'Hi darling.' She sounded jollier than yesterday. 'Did you get what you needed from the north? Home today aren't you?'

'Actually, I'm in Manila now, in hospital.'

'What? Are you alright?'

‘I’m fine. The driver isn’t. The doctors don’t know what’s up with him yet. I feel terrible about it.’

‘Why? What did you do to him?’

‘Nothing, but he was clearly ill from the start of the trip. He shouldn’t be working. If he was in England he’d be on disability benefits.’

‘If he was in England they’d be forcing him into work, especially if he has a disability.’

‘You should have seen him. I was screaming at him to stop the car and it was like he couldn’t hear me.’

‘He must have been delirious.’

‘I think he has such a strong sense of service that he was too proud to quit. In his mind, he *had* to get me to my appointment. He’s worked for bigwigs before and put up with a lot of shit from them. And now God knows what’s wrong with him.’

‘Tom, it’s not your fault. It’s *Travel SEAN*’s. And it’s his for not looking after himself.’

‘No, I should have refused to let him drive me the moment we met.’

We were interrupted by a dark-skinned doctor with a frizzy pompadour. I surmised he belonged to the persecuted *Negrato* ethnic group that those University of the Philippines students had been killed by the state for researching. He held a clipboard to his chest with both hands. ‘Sir, you are the employer of Mr Leopoldo Ramos?’

‘Err, indirectly.’

‘Meaning, sir?’

‘He’s employed by the company I work for.’

‘He is your driver, no?’

‘Yes he is. How is he doing?’

‘I am afraid to say he is suffering from extreme nausea due to a cirrhotic liver.

Did you know anything about this issue?’

‘No, not at all. If I had-’

The doctor peered at me austerely, as if I were in a police line-up. ‘If you had, you would not have let him drive you?’

‘Of course not.’

‘He has high blood at the moment. When we have stabilised him, it will be safe to take him home to his family in Pampanga. He has no insurance – all treatments so far will have to be paid for today.’

‘Let me sort that out.’

‘Very good. The he will be in God’s hands.’

‘Can I see him?’

The doctor raised his clipboard up to his chin. ‘Sir, this he does not want.’

‘Why not?’

The doctor lowered his voice. ‘I think he is... ashamed of what happened.’

‘He has no reason to be.’

‘Sir, he feels he has failed you in some way.’

I stepped closer to him. ‘Look doctor, it would mean a lot to me to see him and just, you know, say sorry.’

‘Apologies sir, he told me with certainty he did not want to see you. He said only that he wishes you will hurry to your appointment.’

‘The appointment was five hours ago,’ I sighed.

## Chapter 12. Please Let This Work Out

Though the day's tensions had erased my appetite, I thought I should eat something. I bought some Chips Ahoy! cookies for the taxi home. It was late and Beth was sitting upright in bed reading. As I approached, she put her fingers in my belt hooks and pulled me towards her. She nestled her head in my chest.

'How is he?'

'Stable. I'll ring Deirdre in the morning to make sure he gets paid. That's the least the magazine can do. How have you guys been?'

'Fi's getting on fine at school. She enjoys the whole "learning through play" thing.'

'Good,' I said, removing my shirt. 'And how are you?'

Beth withdrew from me and lay back in the bed.

I lay down next to her. 'Not good then, I take it.'

'It's been horrible,' she murmured.

'What has?'

'That boy.'

'Which boy?'

'I got a taxi to SM Mall yesterday and saw this poor boy walking between the traffic. He must have been thirteen or fourteen, but about Fiona's height. He was begging at each driver's window for the price of a sandwich. He was saying it in broken English, I think, because he saw there were white passengers around. My driver just shouted at him to go away.'

'I've seen that sort of thing before.'

‘The worst bit was that the boy found a motorist who was willing to give him an actual sandwich. But the boy threw it back at him and shouted, “I said the *price* of a sandwich!” It was bloody depressing.’

‘Look Beth, I said that this might be a shock at first. It’s been a shock to me too because I thought Manila would be... easier going.’

‘At first? We’ve been here almost two months. It’s unhealthy, Tom, both physically and mentally. I don’t want Fiona to get sick from the smog. I don’t want to worry about getting run over every time I walk somewhere. I don’t want to be hassled by homeless people and then feel bad because there’s no way I can help them.’

‘I understand. But there *are* ways you can help.’

‘How?’

‘Through your art and your activism.’

‘I want to make, I don’t know, a difference, but here that means seeing horrible stuff first-hand, and that’s tough for me. Maybe you’ve become hardened to these things, but not me. And every time I ask to help out at Fiona’s school people just seem to want money.’

‘Why don’t you try working for an NGO? There are enough of them in Manila. I could ask around for openings.’ Beth turned away from me to face the wall. I touched her hair. ‘Look, the last thing I want to do is stay anywhere that makes you or Fiona unhappy. The whole point of this move was to please everyone. If at any time anyone isn’t pleased then we will leave, I promise.’ She hauled the sheets up so that they were nearly covering her head. ‘I promise,’ I said again. ‘All I’m asking is that we give it a bit more time.’

‘Hmm,’ she said, thinking it over. She turned back to me. ‘You’re right. I need to do something constructive here.’ She kissed me on the brow.

I said a prayer to whichever forces out there might swing things in our favour.

Please let this work out, I thought.

## Part 4

### Chapter 1. Terror in the Si-mall-ation

The drama with Leopoldo had wiped me out. Happily, it was Saturday today and I'd be doing something restful with Fiona because Beth was starting her new job at the Communiterrain NGO. She'd emailed them her CV yesterday morning and by the evening they'd offered her a role. 'They must be desperate,' she said. Her assignment was to go into slums and teach the children writing, drawing and painting.

When Beth left at seven am, Fiona was already up in the lounge watching a kids' TV show on which toothsome young Australians wearing ludicrous outfits were singing these lyrics: 'We're living in a fairytale/We're living in a fairytale/Stories that are sure to surprise.'

I doubted watching TV would be a good use of the day. I suggested we go to the mall. I'd never taken Fiona to a mall in the UK, but in Manila all the best things to do for kids are inside these mammoth basilicas of consumption.

I helped Fiona put on a pink skirt, ballet shoes and *Dora the Explorer* T-shirt. When I brandished her hair brush, she went pigeon-toed and furled her fingers over her face. I looked at the brush with foreboding. Being new to the parenting game, I was good at some tasks, but smartening Fiona's hair without causing her to scream the neighbourhood down was not one of them. 'Alright,' I said. 'Let's just tie it up. Don't tell Mum, obviously.'

She peeled her hands away to reveal a subversive smirk. 'Can I have the thing what I like for breakfast?'

'Mmm. And what might that be?'

'You know, Tom. Something to cool me down.'

'An ice lolly? Not for breakfast you can't.'

‘Err... pop tart then?’ Fiona must have learned something from watching Beth and I haggle at Divisoria Market.

I sighed. ‘Alright. Again, don’t tell Mum. You’re only supposed to have pop tarts on Sundays.’ The rules were going out the window. It was carnival time.

Robinsons Galeria’s south-facing wall was stippled with brand names inviting us to thrilling experiences within: Toys ‘R’ Us, Robinsons Cinemas and – to Fiona’s amusement – a place called Tom’s World. We waited at a double door while a pistol-packing female security guard with a hygiene mask hanging from a broken nose dipped her truncheon into my backpack. She found no jihadist bombs and let us in.

We entered Tom’s World, a simulation of an American funfair – or, more accurately, a simulation based on a Filipino’s idea of an American funfair replete with mini-basketball games, machines that command you to twerk and a selection of luminous-hued foodstuffs that will shorten your life. As is the wont of good ol’ American capitalism, you spend a fortune on the attractions, winning – if you’re lucky – tickets that can be traded in for prizes, except that it takes at least two hours – and thousands of pesos – before you’ve earned enough tickets for a measly pencil eraser that, while it bears the face of an American cartoon character, has probably been manufactured in China by children Fiona’s age and for a fraction of the money you’ve spent on trying to win it.

Anyway, I swallowed my scepticism and enjoyed myself. We whooped at our inexpertise at throwing the little basketballs into the little hoops. I ordered a pus-coloured soda while Fiona went into the kids-only Austin Land, a world-within-Tom’s World whose scaled-down model dogs, cats, bridges, roundabouts and swimming pools were all made from spongy plastic, as if designed for criminally insane people who might do themselves or others harm if exposed to sharp or hard objects. The asylum

analogy was validated by yet another armed guard – a real one – patrolling the rubbery approximation of a picket fence that encircled all Austin Land.

While Fiona frolicked I read my battered old book, *United States Colonies and Dependencies Illustrated* by the American newspaper tycoon William D. Boyce. I found out that simulations had been around a while in Manila. Writing in 1914 at the height of US colonial control, Boyce is thrilled that the swanky boulevard of Calle Escolta was a little slice of Manhattan in the Orient: ‘The Broadway of Manila ... has motion-picture shows galore and a light opera company from England twice a year’. Furthermore, the chocolate ice-cream sodas vended on Calle Escolta are so authentic that one US sailor couldn’t resist drinking five in a row while on shore leave. Perhaps twenty-first-century Tom’s World was a logical evolution from Edwardian Escolta. The distinction was that Escolta was designed to sate the desire of American expats for American products while Tom’s World was designed to sate Filipinos indoctrinated to desire American products.

As I read on, Boyce’s zest for Yankeeified Manila faltered. His nag that ‘the market is full of good things to eat’, but that the problem is ‘poor cooking and poor service’ implied defects in the copy. Maybe it was too much for a staunch Western supremacist to accept that his beloved homeland could ever fully and wholly be grafted on to the shadowy Orient. Boyce’s doubts, printed a century ago, aroused doubts in me, right now in 2010, about the closeness of Tom’s World to some ‘original’ theme park in Boston or Baton Rouge. If the prizes on offer here were made in China how much of the squishy topography of Austin Land – a reference to Austin, Texas? – was also manufactured outside of the US? And how many of the apparently all-American arcade games – from Iraq-sited, first-person shoot ‘em ups to recreations of illicit drag races on the streets of Miami – were in fact created in Japan and South Korea, nations with their own histories of US victimisation? Might, therefore, an electronic reproduction of a classic American activity – whether machine-gunning Arabs or driving dangerously fast

– devised by a Japanese and then exported to the Philippines count as a simulation of a simulation?

Fiona skipped over. ‘I’m hungry,’ she panted. ‘*Star Wars!*’ She pointed to an eatery across the floor called the Sci-Fi Café. Its windows were decked with *Star Wars*, *Batman*, *Terminator*, *Alien* and *Ghostbusters* memorabilia. We sat opposite some students trying on Storm Trooper helmets while one of the *Lord of the Rings* films clanged, roared and whooshed from a flatscreen above our heads. The punning menu added to the ambience. After mulling over ‘The Chickenator’, subtitled ‘fried chicken and Java rice guaranteed to have you saying “I’ll be back”’, I plumped for ‘Planet of the Shrimps’. Fiona ordered ‘Jabba the Hot Dog’. While we munched I made eye contact with the denizens of this otherworld: the blue flashing headlight of a 1:1 scale model R2D2, the loony gander of a suitcase-sized Joker based on Jack Nicholson’s rather than Heath Ledger’s portrayal and the steel-framed squint of a ragdoll Major Toht, the Gestapo antagonist of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Fiona dropped the remains of Jabba onto her plate and started swinging her legs under the table. ‘Bit creepy here,’ she whispered. ‘Isn’t it?’

‘Agreed,’ I said. But if you think this is creepy, I thought, you should have seen Marcos’ corpse last week.

We took another taxi up the road to Shangrila Plaza, a classier mall with a chichi five-star hotel protruding from it like the pot belly of an executive, the sort of executive who might stay in such a hotel, indeed. Though Fiona was tired, we needed groceries from Rustan’s supermarket. To get there we had to negotiate a labyrinth of amenities.

The food court was a corrective to Tom’s World and the Sci-Fi Café. It conveyed a romantic idea of rustic Philippines: baby palm trees, garden furniture, watercolour illustrations of *lechons* (suckling pigs) on spits, waiting staff in *barong tagalogs* and Maria Clara dresses. TVs showed slo-mo parochial food porn – an

exquisite-looking woman in pre-Hispanic headgear at a rural *fiesta* tearing tender pork off the bone and pouring silky eggs into sizzling noodles.

And the puns kept coming. Oriental Seoul, Manilachon (a conflation of Manila and *lechon*), Serious Dough (pizza), Karate Kid (Japanese food) and Sisig Hooray! (*sisig* is fried pig's head and liver).

As we took each escalator up each gigantic floor, I noticed Fiona – who'd just started to read and write – was as transfixed by the names as I was. She double-took at a supermarket called Payless. 'Tom, is that where you don't pay no money at all?'

It was a fair question. 'Payless' could have meant 'pay-less' as in no payment required, but it was unlikely – we were deep inside the overactive guts of a neo-liberal tiger economy, not outside a food bank in Portsmouth. 'I think they're trying to say that customers pay a bit less for things,' I said.

There was potentially a whole episode of *Boardwalk Empire* in the sign that read 'Capone's Dental Health Shop'. The Sugarhouse Bakery was refreshingly honest about the unhealthy nature of its products. The same could be said for The Marlboro Shop, which brazenly vended every smoking accoutrement conceivable plus T-shirts celebrating the brand. A laundromat called Lord of the Rinse was just, well, brilliant. Why a bar specialising in foreign beers was called Smoky Bastard, I couldn't fathom. I assumed Beyond Ablution Massage was so-called in case punters got the idea it offered services of a less holy sort.

We passed boutiques selling everything from pump-action shotguns to bubble tea, drum kits to self-help guides, French bread to Japanese robots. Three times we were assailed by more gorgeous women – trouser-suited and *mesa*-breasted – pressing us to put down a deposit on a yet-to-be-built deluxe apartment. They'd gesture to a table top scale model of the proposed condo. It looked to me like the dioramas I used to play toy soldiers on when I was Fiona's age.

One floor housed a medical-themed mall-inside-the-mall. On either side of its glacé-tiled corridors were petite booths where you could get an FMRI brain scan, your blood pressure checked, your bones X-rayed or *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* quantities of drugs, albeit pharmaceutical ones. GET YOUR FLU SHOT NOW!!! a poster instructed. Why had an optician's been named 'The American Eye Centre'? Perhaps if you put the word 'American' into a title people will trust it. The same principle might apply to 'Irish' pubs and 'French' restaurants.

So far, so intriguing. But then I made the mistake of fixing on the shoppers and my mood wilted. A slim granny on a bench trowelling *halo-halo* dessert into her mouth, beans and coconut shavings stuck to her chin. A baffled family of four clinging to an overflowing shopping trolley forced stationary by a broken wheel. Nuns in full habit around a Formica lunch table, eyes latched to phones, teeth nibbling on wraps. A bevy of toddlers staring in hush at the spasms of an automated massage chair. A glamorous teenaged couple – her with her hands around his torso, him oblivious to her, tapping away at a tablet. I thought of a quote from Iain Sinclair about J.G. Ballard's last novel *Kingdom Come*, partly set in a shopping mall: 'We've gone insane in a way that leaves us in a tranquilised, robotic state. The future is boredom reaching the point when it has to be rescued by terror.'

The people around us certainly looked tranquilised and robotic. Was terror imminent? I thought of a short story called 'Aviary' by Lysley Tenorio about homeless kids who gatecrash Greenbelt Mall in Makati – the homeless are banned from malls in the Philippines as they are in Britain – and vandalise shops and restaurants as a form of class revenge. Then I recalled the geographer David Harvey's research into grand architectural projects from the suburbanisation of American cities after World War II to the reinvention of nineteenth-century Paris as a 'city of light' of roomy boulevards and fragrant lakes. The down side is that these projects are vulnerable to capitalism's quirks.

Boom and bust. What goes up must come down. The dream of a new Paris crumbled in 1868 under the weight of over-speculation. A century later, America slumped and uprisings ripped through its cities.

I grew anxious. Was Shangrila Plaza another grand project ready for an uprising? My throat dried. My breathing went irregular. I had a stinging in my nose like I'd eaten too much mustard. 'Fiona,' I drawled. 'We need to... we should leave now.'

'Oh To-ooom!' she moaned.

'We'll get the groceries later,' I said. As soon as we get out of this place, I hissed to myself, I'll know whether this is a panic attack or a revolution. I'm all for revolutions, just not ones that might hurt me.

On the escalators down, Fiona remained rapt by the signs and symbols while I took breaths through my nose and expelled them from my mouth. As we exited through the double doors, I squeezed Fiona's hand hard out of fright, impelling her to say, 'Ow!'

A man in a balaclava and biker's leathers was striding towards us. Is this it? I thought. Will he brandish a Kalashnikov and declare class war on the Manileño bourgeoisie? Should I start begging now? Tell him that, while I agree with his political sentiments, I'm not sure machine-gunning people shopping for three-piece suites is the best route to emancipation?

No, instead he removed his balaclava and patted Fiona on the head. 'Hey there Tinkerbelle,' he said in a sing-song voice, 'where is Peter Pan?'

## Chapter 2. Rebel With a Smile

People on the left are sometimes accused of being humourless, dogmatic and self-righteous. This isn't true of Mena Zaldivar, a cordial woman in her early sixties who, during our interview in the Figaro Coffee Company at SM Mall, peppered her political musings with voluptuous laughter.

I started by apologising for missing our original date due to Leopoldo's illness. I then asked how she got involved in the pro-democracy movement.

'While a student at the University of the Philippines, I joined Student Catholic Action. Guided by liberation theology, we campaigned on student issues – our civil liberties, the reinstatement of our prohibited newspapers – as well as on matters outside the academy such as the right to strike. On Labor Day, we'd go to workplaces and distribute leaflets. Marcos was bad for students *and* workers.'

Her militancy soon earned her a spot on the junta's enemies list. To avoid detection – and detention – she had to change her name regularly and dash between safe houses.

'Did you ever get caught?' I asked.

She laughed so explosively I couldn't hear the background chit-chat in the café for a good ten seconds. 'Fortunately no!'

'Any near misses?'

'Several. One time in the early 1980s, I was giving out leaflets in Baclaran market. I saw the police coming and had to run. I had to run also from a large Labor Day demonstration in Luneta when soldiers dispersed us with water cannons. Later, after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino (Marcos' leading political opponent), we organised a rally. We thought it would be legal because Marcos had promised to start listening to criticism, but they used tear gas against us. I saw this old man who was in a

lot of pain. I thought, “Should I stop to help him?” If I had, we both would have been arrested.’

‘Did the old man get caught?’

‘Honestly, I do not know. I do not *want* to know.’ Mena’s lips straightened.

‘Was there international support for the democracy movement?’

‘Yes, we had many solidarity groups in Europe, in Australia and even in the US because activists like Ninoy Aquino went there to raise consciousness.’

‘What was the American government’s attitude?’

‘Pro-Marcos, of course. For example, one of my friends in the underground could not get a visa for the US.’

‘Some say that, aside from his repressive measures, Marcos achieved *some* good things. Do you agree?’

‘What good things?’ she giggled.

‘Some say he improved the infrastructure.’

‘No! The problem is we have no movement like the one in Germany after the Nazis to help the populace remember what really happened. The youth here do not know the truth about the Marcoses – they think we had prosperity and discipline then. The newspapers were heavily censored during Martial Law, so it is tough for modern historians to find out the reality of that time.’

‘Has there been any attempt at truth and reconciliation?’

‘We have a reparations law which is trying to get victims to file their personal stories. These will be collated in museums and archives. Our aim is to get all 100,000 cases documented before the Marcoses re-establish themselves.’

‘How will they do that?’

‘Ferdinand’s son Bongbong may run for president next time.’

‘Some people have short memories.’

*'They do. But our slogan is "never again".'*

I checked my watch surreptitiously. Mena had only a few minutes before her next appointment. 'Do you think working-class Filipinos are better off today than they were in the 1970s when you started your activism?'

'Well, the left defeated Marcos. After that we had some gains in land distribution. At the same time, old problems persist like the farm workers who can barely eat because they must give most of their produce to landlords. New problems arise like climate change – it hurts the poorest people through flooding etcetera. Then we still have urban poverty and job insecurity. Actually, a contributor to that is the Chinese-Filipino Henry Sy, the wealthiest man in the Philippines. He owns this very mall. Sy started in business near the end of Marcos' time and forbids unionised labour. He gets around the regulations by using a contractor to hire the workers. Now the rest of the service sector in Manila follows the same practice.'

'If there's still all this unfairness why aren't there protests now like in the 1970s?'

Mena sucked in her breath. 'The problem is complex and the solution complex also. Before Martial Law there would be a riot if the price of gasoline went up by five centavos. We were better organised then. We could act quickly and in unity.'

'Why the change?'

'The left fragmented. Now some factions are open to the parliamentary path and others like the Communist Party persist with their armed campaign.'

'Is there much public sympathy for the communists' approach?'

'Yes because country folk starve. Their houses are made from garbage. There are no doctors, no real schools to speak of.'

'What's the attitude of middle-class Manileños to the problems in the countryside?'

‘Every day, the well-to-do see peasants moving into the city to squat, but they don’t do anything. It’s like, “Oh we are a poor country, we cannot afford to help them.” That is baloney. When some politician plunders 100 million pesos, I ask how many hospitals can we staff with that amount? How many malnourished children can be fed? When the Chief of Staff of our former President Estrada was in prison for theft, he said the conditions were inhuman. If he’d spent the money he’d stolen on our jails, he wouldn’t have ended up in a jail that bad!’ More laughter.

‘What do you do for a living now?’

‘Me, I work on government projects. Ironic, isn’t it?’

‘You were an enemy of the state and now you work for it?’

‘It is a different state now.’

‘I’m surprised you think that. You’ve just been saying it’s riddled with corruption and...’ I trailed off, curbing my cynicism.

‘Sure it has flaws,’ said Mena in a defensive tone. ‘But at least there are opportunities to make improvements now. This was impossible with Marcos.’ She eyed her phone and got to her feet. ‘Right, now I have a meeting with the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources. I made for them an environmental impact assessment of five marine protection sites around the country. That is one improvement I can make.’

### Chapter 3. A People in Between

Dusk doesn't last long in Manila – curt is the shift from daylight to dark. But this morning, on the Day of the Dead, cloud cover was bringing all the effects of dusk only at ten o'clock am. As I surfaced from Abad Santos station, barbecue smoke bore skywards and congealed with the black-grey clouds that were like bubbly nodules of refined and oxidised lead. Women under tarpaulin bivouacs crossed out bingo numbers with pink, green and yellow felt-tips – colours drained of their showy day-gloness by the wan light. Only the burnished Mandarin inscriptions of the Manila Chinese Cemetery's front gates stood out in high-definition against the monochrome of all else.

Deirdre wanted a feature for *Travel SEAN* on the cultural influence of the Chinese-Filipinos, perhaps because she was of Chinese origin herself. 'Mix into it some sightseeing recommendations,' her email had added. I guessed this place would be a good starting point.

The cemetery looked less like a cemetery and more like my neighbourhood in Quezon City. The crypts had all the trappings of middle-class homes. Chrome-plated bath tubs sprawled under pagoda roofs, broadband routers twinkled through polished jalousie windows and deftly chiselled hedges bordered a blue-domed townhouse. Between grilles and balustrades I saw TVs, microwaves, espresso machines, refrigerators and air-conditioning units.

I approached a thirty-strong family sitting on deckchairs around an arrow-shaped tower with psychedelic fragments of stained glass for a façade. When the family started opening polystyrene tubs of food, I was hit by twin whiffs: syrupy corn-starch batter and brackish Knorr stock.

'Mind if I ask why you left a TV in the tomb?' I said to a small boy as he was about to sink his argent-braced teeth into a fritter.

‘Makes the trip to paradise smooth for my godfather, already,’ he said.

‘Sometimes I am the one to sleep in the tomb with him,’ said his aunt – or possibly his mum.

‘Is that very common?’ I asked.

‘Yes. Some people live here full-time. Others are being born here.’ She tendered a greasy paper bag. ‘Have you ate?’

I’ve never been that squeamish, but being around lots of dead people just didn’t give me an appetite. ‘That’s kind, but no thanks. I ought to keep walking.’

I came across other dead people’s relatives placing ribbons, tissues and lucky red envelopes of money on marble coffins and memorial stones. As I watched, I posited the cemetery as some place between life and death, where the living interacted with the deceased in ways I’d never seen before. I strained my brain to recall the last time I’d visited the grave of a loved one. Never, I realised. We in the West don’t do death very well. We either don’t talk about it or we do talk about it – and then we get distraught, nostalgic or sentimental. We certainly don’t have the courage to spend long periods of time with the dead.

It dawned on me that this cemetery was not the only aspect of Chinese-Filipino culture to have the quality of ‘in-betweenness’ to it. The community has long occupied an unstable space amid opposites: hero and villain, native and expat, powerful and powerless; and that middle path between being an object of hatred and an object of esteem – might we call it envy?

The first Chinese came to Luzon in the tenth century AD to import wax, onions, coconuts, cotton and textiles. After the founding of the Spanish East Indies, entrepreneurs from Fujian province brought luxury goods for the Spanish and cut-price food and clothes for the Malay-Filipinos. According to the great Filipino historian

Renato Constantino, the Chinese played ‘a more vital role than the Spanish colonialists’ in ‘the growing linkage of the country to world capitalism’.

Seeing two kids fighting over who’d pin a red envelope onto a Polaroid of a crumpled forebear reminded me that Chinese integration into Manila hadn’t been easy. Chinese prosperity alarmed the early Spaniards. Miguel de Benavides, Archbishop of Manila from 1602-5, cobbled up a conspiracy theory about Chinese ambitions to snatch the entire archipelago. The state opted for divide-and-rule, forcing 20,000 *Sangleys* (non-Christian Chinese) into Parián – a ghetto next door to Intramuros – and a smaller number of Chinese converts to the Dominican order into a place called Binondo – where I was strolling now, 430-odd years later.

I was relieved when a minute but malevolent grandmother inserted herself between the bellicose kids and pacified them with a crooked index finger followed by a thunderous shout. The kids stooped with shame. The conflict was over. The Chinese-Filipinos have seen enough conflict to last them for a lifetime – or rather for six centuries plus an infinite afterlife stuck in their crypts watching *Pilipinas Got Talent* on a 3D 4K Smart TV. Akin to the Jews in Europe, they’d borne demonization, segregation, harassment, expulsion and butchery.

I moved on to Chong Hock Tong, reputedly the oldest Chinese temple in the republic. Without being disrespectful, it seemed to me a tad clichéd with its over-painted terracotta eaves and plasticky emerald dragons stalking the roof. As I stared at it, I wondered idly which cultural group in the world has had the most clichés and stereotypes peddled about it. The Chinese would be candidates. In Hispanic Manila, the upper crust cooked up victim-blaming backbites about the Chinese taste for hard-bargaining and penny-pinching, derived from the fact that, since the upper crust had barred the Chinese from owning land, one of the few vocations left to them was trading. And to be a good trader it does help to bargain and to look after your pennies. A few

thousand miles west, the trope of the crafty Shylock had sprouted from Jews working as interest moneylenders because their Christian persecutors were forbidden by their own faith from doing the same job.

After the Spanish confined the Sangleyes to Parián knowing that few females were among them, they callously spread rumours that sodomy was rife within this crowded, male-dominated slum of heathens who'd spurned Christian sexual morality. For the Spanish to mock the Chinese for circumstances the Spanish had imposed was not unlike one of the naughty boys I'd just seen thumping the other and then ridiculing the recipient for having a bleeding eye or smashed nose.

The gay smear obtained until the 1600s, when Chinese men were allowed to marry Spanish and Filipina women. In the same century, Spanish capitalists got rich from galleons transporting silver from Acapulco and spices, ivory, porcelain and silk from China, while the Chinese monopolised trade within the provinces. I passed a column of hawkers selling the same wares as their ancestors would have: clothes, shoes, crêpe lanterns, seafood balls on skewers and boxes of rice topped with roast duck.

Later on, Chinese *mestizo* (mixed heritage) business clans did well out of the economic revamp of the Philippines in the late 1800s. Sugar, tobacco, hemp and other lucrative – and often unhealthy – cash crops were grown for the first time and the Chinese earned themselves a fresh rep for greed by undercutting the competition from European and American merchants. Other Chinese were branded cheats for making loans to native farmers in return for temporary use of their land on the proviso that the farmers could buy the land back later. But so rarely could they afford to buy it back that vast tracts of valuable real estate fell permanently into the hands of the loansharks. The Chinese *mestizos* were not the first to act like this – the Spanish friars had done the same before them. But why let a spot of moral objectivism get in the way of a good solid boilerplate?

As the Chinese *mestizos* gained clout, so they expected more from the Spanish *jefes*, such as the right to apply for government posts reserved for *peninsulares* (100 percent Spaniards born in Spain). This mild movement for liberal reform snowballed into the 1896 Revolution. Chinese *mestizos* were at the forefront of that. Indeed, some historians credit the Chinese *mestizos* with inventing the very concept of Filipino nationality, as something discrete from and at odds with Spanish colonialism. The Chinese had come a long way from their marginal status as the pariahs of Parián.

Going into the adjacent Martyrs Hall, I realised that it celebrated those who'd died in World War II. There was a memorial to Dy Hoc Siu, who'd formed the Resist the Enemy League to confront the Japanese. Such credentials should make you the ultimate patriot, but the same men would later be suspected of communist sympathies after Chairman Mao had taken over the mother country. So, again, like the Jews in Europe, the Chinese were paradoxically scammed as both the high priests of capitalism and as its gravediggers. It seemed that whatever the Chinese did they got scapegoated for *something*.

I took a 360 gaze around the graves. How much pain was inside them? Were there casualties here of the 1603 and 1639 pogroms, bodies shorn of heads because the Spanish had jammed them on to spikes and left them around the city like pineapple chunks on cocktail sticks at a birthday party? Were there idealists here punctured by firing squad bullets for dreaming of a free state? Teenage conscripts thrashed to a gory end by the Japanese during the Bataan Death March? Whoever they were and whatever had happened to them, I hoped they'd all found some peace now, at last, amongst their living kin and their all mod cons.

Spotting a pimply youth picking his nose with one hand and playing a game on his phone with the other reminded me to check the clock on *my* phone. I was late picking Fiona up from school.

#### Chapter 4. The Protocols of the Elders of China

‘Montessori School, Loyola Heights, Quezon City,’ I barked at the taxi driver. ‘Quick as you like.’

‘You been in Chinaman graves, sir?’ The driver kept scrunching his nose in a form of tic.

‘Yeah. Let’s go.’ As we zoomed up Ongpin Street, a sand bucket of candles and incense sticks on the pavement blurred into lines of light.

‘You like Chinaman, sir?’

‘Yeah,’ I mumbled. I was distracted by a mental image of Fiona waiting alone outside the school, shedding a fresh tear for every second I was late. Bobby, a Chinese-Filipino I’d met at Ride ‘n’ Roll bar, had told me Chinese-Filipino kids were vulnerable to kidnap because perpetrators could count on a tidy ransom. His family had even obtained dual Australian citizenship should they need to flee if the kidnappings increased or if there was a new wave of anti-Chinese resentment. My family wasn’t Chinese but it was relatively well-off. Did that make Fiona an abduction risk too?

‘You be careful with China-man, sir,’ said the driver. ‘They are already giving problem to my country in South China Sea. They want our islands but they cannot have. Also they have stooges here. You know our President? She Chinese. Aquinos? Chinese. Marcos? Chinese. ‘Specially Marcos, sir.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes, all monies plundered by Marcos family go straight to China already. Early on in, they invest in shopping malls in Taiwan and Beijing.’

I switched off until we got to the school. Fiona was standing at the main door fiddling with a Rubik’s Cube-type device. The Montessori method requires pupils to

play educational games and not much else. Beside Fiona was her teacher Sheila, who wasn't much taller – and didn't look much older – than Fiona.

'Good afternoon, Sir Tom,' said Sheila. Fiona was still engrossed in her game.

'So sorry I'm late. How was your day, Fi?'

'Awright. Bit hungry now.'

I asked the driver to take us to the leafy, sprawling, American-style campus of the University of the Philippines. I wanted to join its library in order to do some research for my next assignment: a feature for *New Inciter* on General Douglas MacArthur.

It was noon and the heat was absurd. The building the driver dropped us at turned out not to be the library.

'Don't like this,' said Fiona.

I fed her water and hauled her onto my shoulders. I glanced around for someone to ask directions of.

I then felt like someone had punched me in the small of the back. I realised that Fiona had passed out while on my shoulders, swung backward and slammed her head into me. I lifted her down on the ground and put more water to her lips. Her eyes crept open. 'You naughty *sock*,' she mumbled.

A preppy youth in a pearly blazer appeared. He had a gelled fringe that flopped over perfectly proportioned features, like those of a computer game character. 'May I be of assistance?' Like other young Filipinos he had a near-authentic US accent, except his was closer to that of an Ivy League professor.

'We'll be fine.'

'Nonsense, you should take a break.' He introduced himself as Ralph and took us to an arty café of terracotta surfaces. 'A glass of mineral water,' he said to the waiter. 'Not fridge-cold, no, room temperature. And then, what do you recommend?'

‘The caramelised spam, sir.’

‘Righty-ho,’ said Ralph. ‘I desire it medium rare and not too crispy on the outside.’

Fiona ordered a bowl of *tocino*, bright orange sausages that she said tasted like Jaffa Cakes.

‘Your daughter is fair-skinned like an angel,’ said Ralph. ‘And her mother is..?’ He left me to fill in the blank, but I couldn’t. ‘Her mother is a Filipina?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Just that many Filipinas marry white so that they can have a Caucasian-looking child. The child might go on to become an actor or a fashion model.’

‘Seriously?’

Ralph straightened his posture and patted his lapels. ‘Do I strike you as someone who would joke?’

‘No, Ralph, you don’t.’

‘How have you spent your day so far?’

‘I went to Binondo this morning. I’m interested in the history of the Chinese-Filipinos.’

Ralph’s mouth went uneven with a smirk. ‘Let me educate you about the Chinese here. You know that only 1 percent of the population of the Philippines owns 60 percent of the economy? That 1 percent is Chinese.’

‘Right,’ I said.

‘Can I have a story?’ interrupted Fiona. In true four-year-old style, she’d eaten less than 1 percent of her lunch. I plugged her ears with iPod earphones.

‘Have you heard the old joke?’ asked Ralph. ‘A Chinese is the only person in the world who can buy something from a Jew, sell it to a Scotsman and make a profit in the transaction.’

This was getting awkward. Was he about to quote me some anti-Sinicist equivalent of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*?

‘But aren’t more than 1 percent of the population of Chinese descent?’ I queried. While I didn’t have the stats to support my point, I had the anecdotal evidence of numerous Manileños telling of their Chinese ancestry.

‘No,’ said Ralph bluntly. ‘You know that when the Spanish first came to the Philippines they wanted to use us as a base from which to invade China?’

‘Yes.’

‘They should have done it,’ he sighed. ‘China has been meddling in our affairs ever since. I know what I am talking about, Tom, I am a junior faculty member in the history department here.’

I couldn’t comprehend how a trained academic could spout the kind of essentialist claptrap I was more used to hearing from taxi drivers – British *and* Filipino. I weighed up the merits of disputing his claims. In many ways arguing is futile. Seldom does either party change their opinion afterwards – let alone learn anything from the other – despite both parties kidding themselves all along that they are keeping an open mind. While an argument may on the surface appear to be about abstract, intellectual concepts, it’s often enough a smokescreen for primitive emotions, an excuse for male – and, in my experience, it usually is male – egos to compete. The arguers might as well be boxing or playing squash to the point of cardiac arrest. I was secure enough in my own beliefs that I didn’t have anything to prove to Ralph. Even if I did have something to prove, what would be the point? I’d probably never see him again after today.

Then again, I was bored of letting his ignorance wash over me. And maybe, if I did retaliate, I could goad him into saying something I could use in a story. If there was a more personal motive for his Sinophobia, that too might make a good story. And it

was still early. I looked at Fiona and she seemed content with her audiobook. Let the joust commence.

‘As a historian,’ I said, ‘you must be aware of the long tradition of Chinese stereotypes and how unjust they are.’

‘Explain.’

‘Well the Chinese can’t win. They’ve done what immigrants are lauded for doing in any society – they’ve prospered, given people jobs, fought loyally against invaders – yet they are feared and loathed.’

‘I am simply relaying you the facts.’

‘You’re being choosy about the facts. You haven’t mentioned the negative influence of the Spanish or the Americans.’ I could feel my temper crumbling. ‘Did the Chinese slaughter one fifth of the population as the Americans did?’

Ralph frowned. ‘The Americans brought us many benefits in return.’

‘And the Chinese haven’t? At any rate, how can you make such a firm distinction between Chinese-Filipinos and other Filipinos? There’s always been intermarriage, right?’

Ralph went quiet and gulped his room temperature water. Taking him on like this hadn’t been clever. My provocations had shut him out. I got to my feet.

Before I could say ‘bye’ he went steely and said, ‘My first girlfriend was Chinese, you know.’

Ah, I thought, now we have the personal motive.

He blinked several times. ‘She was called Erica Lim. We were in love. I kept requesting to meet her parents, as I had some crazy idea about asking them for her hand in marriage.

‘One day she agreed to take me to her family home in Binondo. Two heavy-duty gates protected the house. The first gate opened remotely and Erica and I walked

through hand-in-hand. Perhaps this meant her parents would accept me! Then the second gate opened and she skipped ahead of me and into the compound. I tried to follow her, but the gate slammed shut in my face. She turned to look at me through the bars, tears running down her cheeks. Her father was at the window, vile sneer on his face. I turned, heartbroken, and walked away from that frightful Chinese enclave.

‘From then on, Erica would not talk to me. A minder began to accompany her to school. He told me to leave her alone. She was only permitted to date Chinese boys. Everyone else was inferior and that was the end of it.’

‘Never mind,’ I said. ‘Plenty more fish in the sea.’

‘But unfortunately not many women.’

I was surprised he didn’t know the idiom. It must not have been exported to Filipino-American-English.

At the top of her voice, Fiona screeched ‘Chinky! Chinky! Chinky!’ Ralph froze with his mouth wide open, pink slithers of spam imbedded between his teeth. Other patrons glowered at us. Fiona must have said the word ‘Chinky’ thirty times before I could persuade her to stop.

I plucked the headphones from her ears and put them in mine. I soon figured out that she was no fledgling Farageist – she’d got excited about Chinky the Pixie, one of Enid Blyton’s less right-on protagonists.

We left the café fast.

## Chapter 5. Myths of the MacArthur Suite

General Douglas MacArthur was a shrewd manager of his own public image – the MacArthurian Legend we might call it. He rebuilt his reputation time and again, painting over the stains of scandals and filling in the dents made by wrathful critics. So when the tour guide threw open the doors to the Douglas MacArthur Suite of the Manila Hotel, I wasn't surprised to see that it had been impeccably restored to a supposedly Edenic moment in Philippine history, before World War II levelled Manila, before the Japanese trashed the suite just to get back at MacArthur and before the country fell under the heel of martial law. Although there was nothing original about the mahogany *chaise longues* or the twinkling brass chandeliers, the impression of 1935 was persuasive.

When as a kid I asked my elderly friends and relatives about what they did in the war, I associated their testimonies with iconic photographs. My maternal grandmother's tales of working as a telephonist during the Blitz will, for me, always be illustrated by Herbert Mason's photo of St Paul's Cathedral framed by thick black bomb smoke, yet somehow undamaged and bathed in a heavenly light. Gran had an American friend called Bob. In my blurred recollections, his white, back-combed hair and icy stare make him identical to the actor Lee Marvin. Bob was one of the first GIs to meet up with the Red Army at the Elbe River at the end of the war. He found out the hard way that a new war, the Cold War, had begun when the US Army promptly court-martialled him for fraternising with a Russian soldier. That he had, since the 1930s, been a member of the Communist Party of the USA didn't exactly help his case. I don't know if Bob fought in Berlin, but I still equate him with that hunched silhouette of a Red Army soldier waving the Hammer and Sickle from the roof of the Reichstag, the tower blocks in the background shelled down to their rafters.

In the MacArthur Suite, I spotted another classic image of that conflict: a spontaneous snap of the general himself strutting ashore at Leyte Island in October 1944, at the start of the American liberation of the Philippines. He's fulfilling the highly quoted promise – 'I shall return' – he made two years before, when his spirited resistance to the Japanese floundered and he was forced to retreat to Australia.

Although the claims in the preceding paragraph are widely believed to be true, they are largely false. Mariel, my ginger-dyed tour guide, told me that the photo was far from unplanned. 'It took them three attempts to get it right. The first time, the General believed that he did not look good. The second time, he tripped and fell in the water. The third time, it was a success.'

Moreover, by the time MacArthur arrived at Leyte on that 'historic' day, Filipino guerrillas had already driven the Japanese out of that locality. MacArthur chose this particular beach precisely because he knew it was safe and secure. He could step Moses-like from water to land and play the valiant saviour, without having to be valiant or saving anyone.

As we turned to a cabinet displaying the 'Decorations & Medals of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur', I remembered some of his military mis-steps. As Supreme Commander of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), MacArthur relied on an outdated war plan, ignored a ten-hour invasion warning and neglected to properly clothe and feed his troops. The result was the surrender of 76,000 Filipinos and Americans at Bataan in April 1942. Yet none of this ever came back to haunt him. On the contrary, as James Hamilton-Paterson puts it, 'Douglas MacArthur's most remarkable achievement was to turn this whole unpropitious series of events into a mammoth public relations triumph such that he ended the war a national hero.'

MacArthur's knack for whitewashing himself was matched by an inflated sense of self-importance. When he accepted the role of Military Advisor to the Philippine

Army in 1935, he demanded to be put up at the 100,000-square-foot Malacañang Palace. ‘This was not appropriate,’ said Mariel. ‘The palace is special for Filipinos. Only our governors and our presidents can live there.’ MacArthur’s second choice was the entire fifth floor of the deluxe Manila Hotel. The government complained that the bill would be too high. A compromise was reached: alongside his martial duties MacArthur would act as General Manager of the hotel. Somehow he was able to finagle exactly the same salary as then President of the Philippine Commonwealth, Manuel Quezon.

I glanced back at that pic of MacArthur wading ashore. It reeks of theatrical self-consciousness. Like a Hollywood stereotype, the powerful curve of his chin advances out beyond ritzy sunglasses and taut, stoic lips. The uniform unbuttoned at the neck denotes both rebel individualism and Lotharian glamour. As his torpedo-like legs crash through the sea, his beefy hands are clamped to the waist of his billowing khakis. The body language says: ‘Nothing will stop me.’

In *Ermita*, F. Sionil José’s superlative novel of post-war Manila, a chauffeur names his newborn son MacArthur in anticipation that ‘the General’s good looks, his noble visage and everything worth emulating about the Liberator of the Philippines would somehow be transmitted to the baby.’

MacArthur needed such hagiography to brace his flimsy ego. During bouts of depression, he’d call prostitutes up to the suite. Instead of having sex with them he’d order them to tell him what a wonderful human being he was. He often threatened to commit suicide, only changing his mind after sufficient flattery. Michael Schaller’s biography reveals that, on one particular train journey, MacArthur aide T.J. Davis finally got sick of the General’s histrionics:

“As we pass over the Tennessee River bridge,” MacArthur said in a maudlin tone, “I intend to jump from the train. This is where my life ends, Davis.”

“Happy landing,” replied Davis wryly.’

We peeked into a bedroom. In it was an elegant bed made from *nara* wood, the swirling grains of its four posters starkly sepia next to the fulgent white pineapple-skin duvet.

‘You know that Bill Clinton stayed here?’ said Mariel. ‘And before you ask, no he did not bring Monica with him.’

Clinton wasn’t the first philanderer to inhabit this room. One cause of MacArthur’s blues was his catastrophic love affair with the Scottish-Filipina actress Isabel Rosario Cooper, twenty-six years his junior. MacArthur tried to hide her from public view, first in Manila and then in an apartment in Washington, DC. After two reporters on *The Washington Post* wrote an uncomplimentary profile of MacArthur, the General sued for libel. The reporters got wind of Cooper’s existence, tracked her down and persuaded her to stand as a witness for the defence. Fearing disgrace, MacArthur dropped the suit and paid Cooper \$150,000 to keep quiet and get out of his life.

In MacArthur’s study neither the trademark corncob pipe nor the statesman-like marble-topped desk were ever owned by him. The brass gilded chair was his, though, and dates back to 1939.

‘Sir Tom, do you want to sit in the great man’s chair?’ asked Mariel.

I did so and ruminated on the intimate connection MacArthur’s life had with the wider, triangulated narrative of Manila, the Philippines and the United States.

I looked out the north window over Manila Bay. In 1905, a few years after Douglas’ father Arthur MacArthur Jr. had briefly served as Military Governor of the US-occupied Philippines, the American architect Daniel Burnham was redesigning the bayside for the twentieth century. He wanted to sanitise, modernise and morally enhance the area with new parks, streets, railways, waterways and a lavish Classical Revival hotel on the waterfront.

But, like Douglas MacArthur's biography, there were flaws and feints in this narrative of beautification. Many Filipinos saw Burnham's civilising mission as camouflage for the US' uncivilised conduct in their homeland. While refined American gents were strolling around Manila Bay prating about Greco-Roman columns, elsewhere in the islands the US Army was exterminating women and children. For the cultural critic David Brody, the ultimate monument to the myth of American benevolence is the Burnham Memorial in Baguio City, a hill station four hours north of Manila. The inscription on his bust moralises about 'love, amity and mutual respect' which, for Brody, 'mitigates a tumultuous history that included the bloodshed, loss and cultural trauma that accompanied the Philippine-American War.' Few of Burnham's 'City Beautiful' plans ever got beyond the stage of blabber about progress and harmony. The closest he got to founding a New Jerusalem was a hotel, a highway and a few government offices – the bare minimum required for the US to stamp its authority on Manila.

As Burnham was drawing up plans for the Manila Hotel as an outpost of Western high living amid the boondocks (derived from *bundok*, the Tagalog word for mountain), the young Douglas MacArthur was in the Philippines erecting bridges and conducting surveys with the Third Engineer Battalion. On his tour, MacArthur befriended US businessmen and invested in high-yield enterprises like the Benguet gold mines.

On the marble-topped desk was a record of MacArthur's most important encounter from that time: a snap of him shaking hands with a slight, edgy-looking man in a cream suit. This was Senator Manuel Roxas.

The official history goes like this: after the war, the US government charged Roxas and MacArthur with disbursing \$2 billion in aid to rescue the beleaguered nation. James Hamilton-Paterson's account is closer to the truth:

[In 1945 ... ] MacArthur was given a free hand to arrange his former fiefdom according to his taste. His personal support was crucial to getting his old friend Roxas approved by Washington and elected. So also was his capricious withholding of US aid for the reconstruction of the Philippines after the election, thereby making the aid virtually contingent on Roxas becoming President. Thereafter, the \$2 billion in aid was fought over by various groups of vultures who had good links with the new ruling elite of MacArthur and Roxas. Only very little of this fabulous sum (at mid-1940s value, too) actually went into rebuilding the Philippines' shattered infrastructure and economy.

Roxas and MacArthur smashed any dissent to their shenanigans, sending the CIA in to suppress the Huk rebels who saw no difference between this bunch of gangsters and the Japanese, Americans and Spaniards who'd ruled in the past.

I rose from MacArthur's chair and went to the window. Down on Bonifacio Drive a homeless boy, barefoot and caked in tar-black dirt, was holding a quivering hand up to passing cars. He was a reminder that the injustices that shocked the Huks into rising against the MacArthur 'consensus' persist to the present. Costing \$3,300 a night, the MacArthur Suite today is just as alien to the experience of the 30 million or so Filipinos who live on less than \$1 a day as it would have been to the pickpockets and panhandlers of MacArthur's time.

The Philippine economy is still run by a clutch of dynasties, some tracing their roots back to Spanish colonisation. The country remains in the grip of dollar imperialism, as proven by the ubiquity of Coca-Cola, McDonalds and basketball, although, perhaps ironically, Japan is now the republic's number one trading partner. The Huks have evolved into the Maoist New People's Army (NPA), which continues the struggle on behalf of the peasantry.

I sat back in the chair where, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, General MacArthur did much of his thinking about war, history, politics and business. If he were somehow to be resurrected and find himself in this chair again, would his thoughts about the contemporary Philippines be all that different?

## Chapter 6. Whitewashing the Wretched

It felt wrong to travel straight from the most expensive hotel in the Philippines to one of its most depressed zones, but that's what happened the next morning due to a quirk of scheduling. Isko, a Department of Tourism guide in indigo jeans, met me under the shade of a pure crystal coconut tree in the Champagne Room of the Manila Hotel. If Grandad were still alive and here now, he'd have loved its opulence.

Isko asked how it felt to be in a venue that the Beatles, Michael Jackson, Marlon Brando, John Wayne and John F. Kennedy had all spent time in.

'One day I'll be more famous than all of them,' I quipped. Isko gave me a doubtful grimace.

The history of Tondo is an eloquent refutation of the belief that Western colonialism improved the lives of those it subjugated. From the tenth century AD until the arrival of the Spanish, Tondo was the pre-eminent kingdom in Luzon, spreading across most of the island's 42,000 square miles. It traded with China, Japan, the Indian subcontinent, the Arab World and Southeast Asia, and its people were engaged in mining, weaving, pearl-fishing and wine-making. Most of them, though, were subsistence farmers, which prompted early Spanish observers to libel them as primitive. The *conquistador* Miguel López de Legazpi, who'd go on to found Spanish Manila, was appalled by the native preference for growing food over grabbing gold from mines and rivers. But, as that perceptive chronicler of pre-Hispanic life Renato Constantino points out, 'The reason for such behaviour ... is precisely the absence of an exploitative class as such. Everyone worked for an immediate need and that was all.' The Tondolese couldn't eat gold so they focused on rice instead.

Tondo's social structure was in some ways more enlightened than Spain's. A village headman was often elected rather than born into the role, and he was expected to

muck in with farming, hunting, weaving and construction. The next stratum of society was made up of freemen who'd be given an equal-sized plot of land each, making those very European fixtures – material envy and inequality – redundant. Less progressively, anyone who got into debt or who was taken prisoner after a skirmish with another ethnic group had to work as a slave until the chief deemed their debt repaid or their loyalty proven. However, they were more like 'peons than chattel-slaves', to use Constantino's phrase, and better treated than the Africans the Spanish were trafficking to the New World at the time.

While Tondo wasn't utopian, it did provide food, shelter and a decent living standard for its citizens. That changed when the Muslim rajahs who, by that point, had united Tondo with its bordering kingdoms, were coerced by the Spanish into handing over Manila. At that time it was a settlement on a headland between the Pasig River and the ocean based around a fortress made from coconut trunks and defended by twelve cannons. The Spanish brought in the spectacularly unfair *encomienda* system that required all indigenes to pay tributes of money, food or materials. Some tributaries had to kill their own children to save enough rice to give to the authorities. Certain officials took the daughters of chiefs hostage until the chiefs could pay up. Those who couldn't pay up at all were press-ganged, tortured or crucified. Until as late as 1884, all Filipino men aged between sixteen and sixty had to join the *polo*, a reserve of labourers forced on pain of death or incarceration to work forty days a year without pay as builders, miners and lumberjacks.

I could trace a clear line from the mayhem those Spanish policies wreaked in old-world Tondo to the mess the district was in today. Our minivan sputtered through a flood coming from a cluster of water butts damaged beyond anyone's means to fix. Most who paused to wave at us had teeth missing, facial scars, tubercular coughs, twiggy limbs. I saw a row of lads sitting on the eight-foot-high blackened steel joist of a

burned-out building, white trainer-clad feet swinging casually. Their headgear ranged from bandanas to back-to-front baseball caps. They smoked and chewed gum at the same time.

‘They look sort of... better off than the others,’ I said to Isko.

‘Probably they are gang members already.’

‘Can we talk to them?’

Isko looked out the window, paused and then looked back to me. ‘I do not advise this, Sir Tom. In fact I am under orders of the tourist board to not let you out at all.’

‘Really? But I need quotes for my story.’ This assignment had come out of a Manileño entrepreneur who’d contacted Deirdre about covering some ‘unorthodox’ destinations in the Philippines. The entrepreneur wanted to set up an alternative tour operator that took foreigners to slums, cemeteries and markets rather than the usual beaches, mountains and waterfalls. I had ethical qualms about the job – it smacked of Third World voyeurism to me – but I took it on because I was curious about how the poorest in this city survived.

‘I am sorry Sir Tom,’ said Isko. ‘Me, I would not like to be responsible if something terrible will happen after we let you out.’

‘What’s the worst that could happen? Would someone attack us?’

‘These gangs they are only interested of killing each other. It is not worth them to engage civilians. More like you will be invited into someone’s house for a gimmick.’

All I knew was that ‘gimmick’ in Philippine English could mean a night out.

‘What do you mean, Isko?’

‘You could be asked to drink some local liquors in a competition.’

‘Bring it on,’ I said. ‘I’m from Portsmouth.’

Isko exchanged Tagalog with the driver. Then he said to me, 'Okay, we will try to stop at a place of safety for you to explore.'

We followed the route of a stream so heavily slicked with rubbish that it gave the optical illusion of solid ground. Rabbit hutch abodes jutted on stilts out of its opposite shore. I couldn't see any locks on the doors and a toddler could easily kick in the weather-weakened wood.

When he came to Tondo in 1914, William D. Boyce remarked that its dwellers seemed 'more contented than those in the slums of the big cities in the States.' That the wretched of the earth are happy with their lot is another canard probably invented to make well-off Westerners feel less guilty about adding to the exploitation of these unfortunates by purchasing bargain goods and services from them. The people here were friendly but they didn't look contented to me. Perhaps their ancestors were in 1914, but I doubted it. And why should they have been then and why should they be now? As Oscar Wilde wrote in his masterful polemic *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, 'the best amongst the poor ... are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so.'

We slowed down as a policeman approached the driver's window. There was something odd about him. Stubble clung to his jawline like moss on a boulder. His uniform was more creased than a nonagenarian's crow's feet. He was wearing purple trainers rather than shiny black shoes.

The cop had terse words with the driver. The driver produced a licence and a typewritten piece of blue copy paper. The cop sidled off to his Toyota Corolla.

As the driver tussled with the ignition, I asked Isko, who was staring out the windscreen, what that was all about. Before I could finish my question, Isko muttered something in Tagalog to the driver. I guessed it was a ploy to avoid responding, so I asked again.

‘It was no problem, Sir Tom.’

‘I’d be interested to know why he stopped us.’

‘Soon we will be coming to a neighbourhood where you may get out and look around.’

‘But please Isko, I’d like to know why. Don’t worry. Off the record. Promise.’

Isko cleared his throat. ‘The officer said we ran a red light. This is true. But our driver told him that our boss, the Minister of Tourism, is buddies with his boss, the Director General of the Police, and it would not be welcome for anyone to begin a fight between them. Lucky we convinced him or the driver would forfeit his licence. I think he was also scared off by a white man in the vehicle.’

‘Why?’

‘It might bring publicity if he did make arrests.’

‘Why was he so scruffy?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Is there a chance he wasn’t a real police officer?’

‘A chance, yes. Some bad ones they are stealing police gear and selling it to hoodlums. You can buy a badge for 300 pesos on the black markets. The hoodlums wear the uniforms to do *carnaps* and *estafas*.’

*Car thefts* and *fraud*, I mentally translated. I wouldn’t blame a man for doing such things if he had ten mouths to feed. Or maybe I would if he did these things to me.

We stopped in an area where fragrant sampaguita, gladioli and chrysanthemums grew along the banks of an *estero* (canal) of unusual clarity. Behind the flowers were solid stone houses. Isko walked on ahead and grasped the hand of a youth in check shorts. Isko leaned close to the man and deadpanned him in Tagalog. The man then stepped to me, laughing. ‘Hello sir,’ he said. ‘English no good.’

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘My Tagalog’s worse.’

He laughed again, I think not understanding me. This was the first Filipino I'd met who couldn't speak my language well. I guessed that instead of learning English in school he'd worked to support his family selling plastic bottles or *balut* (semi-fertilised duck eggs).

Further up the bank, Isko was shaking hands with other residents and talking to them sternly too. I was waylaid by a drove of ten-year-olds in *X-Men* masks demanding high-fives.

When I finally caught up with him, he told me we were standing in one of the Mayor of Manila's flagship beautification schemes. 'We have dredged the river and allowed nature to come into the equation,' he grinned. 'What are your thoughts? You know we Filipinos like to know what outsiders think of us.'

'It's lovely,' I said.

Isko gave me a thumbs-up. 'Great. Let's scam.'

'What were you saying to the residents before I spoke to them?' I asked later on, as we ploughed through another minor flood.

Isko scratched his head. 'Nothing, Sir Tom.'

'You did seem to be saying *something* to them.'

'Just the small talk. I know the captain of that *barangay* and his family members already.'

That was all I'd get from him. I reflected on how dependent I'd been on translators since coming to Manila and grew a bit paranoid. What if much of the data I'd received from them so far had been filtered through their own preferences and prejudices? Perhaps I needed to pay more attention to the allegiances and affiliations of these go-betweens. While I couldn't think of a motive for Josefina to mislead me about the comfort women, I had the anxious hunch that Isko had ordered the people we'd met

to be on their best behaviour for the Western journalist who shouldn't under any circumstance come away with a negative angle on the locale. And to be fair, this was in his job description: ministries of tourism exist to do puff and PR. If Isko's bosses had been to the West they'd be aware of the repertory of stereotypes the West has of the Philippines. Whenever the country does penetrate the European or American news, positive initiatives like the one I'd just witnessed don't bleed enough to lead. Drugs, rogue cops (real or impersonated), jihadi bombings, overpopulation, Church tyranny – these are sexier headlines to run with.

I was annoyed not to have gone deeper into Tondo, beyond Isko's stage-management and into the jagged realities of living poor. Would my next destination – the under-threat squatters' camp Beth was now working with – offer more illumination?

## Chapter 7. Squatters' Rights

In the Philippines 'squatters' is the name given to poor people who move from the provinces to the cities in search of work. They don't always find it. The cost of a dorm bed beyond them, they build make-do settlements out of cadged materials on whatever spare land they can find. Squatters were a hot issue in the upcoming elections.

Bourgeois Manileños saw them as pests causing crime, disease and overcrowding. The reactionary media had denounced the Mayor of Quezon City for cynically courting the squatter vote by calling for a halt to their evictions.

Meryl met me at the exit of Santolan station. Her plaited, frost-coloured hair and pointy elven ears gave her a sword-and-sorcery vibe. She was a Communiterrain employee who knew the way to Trinidad Extension. Just as well, for there were no signs to this officially non-existent neighbourhood. You won't find it on Google Maps or in the *Metro Manila A-Z*. Meryl led me through a labyrinth of food stalls with rags attached to spinning motors to chase the flies away. We cut through an alley where cockerels were tied to door handles and babies slept in cradles hanging from beams. The alleyway opened out into a kind of shadow city, a caricature of conventional Manila. I could tell some of the buildings had once been substantial, but now they were full of holes masked with tarpaulin, polythene netting and polyurethane ad banners. Added to the brickwork of one building was an unpainted *molave* balcony shaded by a canopy made from sack cloth marked with the lilac UNILEVER logo. A sweetcorn-yellow strip of plastic reading POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS was draped around a mountain of sun-hardened earth capped with arbitrary trash: straws, cement, sawdust, ice cream cones, a broken cupboard.

I met Beth and Fiona inside a roofless stone chamber with a bamboo table within. Before I could say hello we were mobbed by barefoot, greasy-haired kids.

Meryl introduced Beth to the crowd in Filipino and then said in English, ‘So do you want to learn?’

‘Yes!’ came the unanimous cheer from the kids.

While Beth produced paints and Play-Doh, I spoke to Nancy, the chair of the residents’ association. Trinidad Extension was set up by employees of the Philippine army who couldn’t afford the rooms at a nearby military base. This happened back in 1959, which defied the allegation that all squatters were new immigrants who scampered around Manila like nomads. Nancy and her comrades had been in the same place for over fifty years and had struggled for the right to remain here.

In 2005, a real estate company won the legal right to sequester the land Trinidad Extension stands on. Since then, all 300 families had been scheduled to leave. Their homes were to be demolished to make way for posh condominiums. ‘No one here want to go,’ Nancy told me. ‘We are employed locally in malls serving same people who want us to go to province. Who will cook them *lechon*? Serve them beer? Shine their shoes? Cut their hair? Drive them home at night?’

‘For these people,’ interjected Meryl, ‘relocation will mean destitution.’

‘Have you taken your case to the government?’ I asked.

‘They are too cosy with company,’ said Nancy. ‘But they make different argument. They say, since Trinidad Extension was flooded after Typhoon Ondoy break river banks, we should leave for own safety case it happen again.’

‘Is there any truth in that?’

‘No. Scientist from university tell us *everywhere* in Philippines at risk from flooding due to climate change. Besides, if plan is to build apartments here, how will new structures be more protected than *our* structures?’

Nancy then brought up the most preposterous government claim so far: that the *unpeople* of Trinidad Extension were to blame for the river bursting its banks due to a

build-up of refuse in the water. In fact, these people were so broke they've never had much to chuck away. It was the nearby pig feed factories that had filled the river with waste.

'Are they offering any assistance with relocating?'

'They offer us 10,000 pesos each, but this not last and we have no employment when we get to new land – wherever new land is.'

I helped Beth distribute paper and pens. The kids went quiet while they drew pictures of Trinidad Extension, adding the names of objects in the little English they knew.

I caught the eye of a man working a water pump. Nancy led me over to him. 'One of scare tactics company has use,' she said, 'is arson. After we had fire few years ago, condo company prevent us from reconnecting to power grid. So we build own pumps and generators.'

We walked through more tumbledown dwellings, aerals like pterodactyl skeletons perched on them. We passed shoes hanging by their tongues from washing lines, old women mending clothes, tricycle drivers taking midday naps on the ground. A *carabao* rolled irritably in the muddy shallows of the Pasig, trying to cool itself down. Above it on the bank was a field of corn and cashews. 'We try to be self-sufficient,' said Nancy.

We returned to the derelict classroom. Beth was finishing her lesson. Meryl looked glumly over a newspaper cutting about a new bill called '6405' soon to be put to Congress. 'If it becomes law,' Meryl explained, 'it will punish all *barangay* captains in the Philippines with either a 500,000 peso (about £7,200) fine or life imprisonment if they do not kick the squatters out of their jurisdictions. This is a big incentive for the captains to use any means necessary.'

Nancy told me that last year, in a nearby squatters' camp, a demolition team broke through the human barricade with clubs and water cannons. Scores were beaten. The camp was razed.

'Why is the government so tough on squatters?' I asked Meryl.

'There is no will to assist them. The media and the education system encourage Filipinos to look out only for number one and not care for anyone else unless they are family. I would say even the Church has lost its moral compass – at this moment in time only five bishops now claim to be pro-poor.'

'We once had good friend in Church,' said Nancy. 'Father Frederick. Company they bribe him to turn against us. After, I did not sleep for three days.' She waved her hands in front of her face. At first I thought she was just trying to fan herself. Then she began to weep.

After Beth and Fiona had packed up we were invited into Nancy's home. Though it was small and scraggy, I got the feeling Nancy was as house-proud as any middle-class Manileño wife. Crochery was arranged neatly on shelves below a tapestry of the Last Supper. The floor tiles were so well polished I didn't want to tread my trainers on them.

Nancy cooked us pancakes on a gas stove while Beth worked out with Meryl when she could come back for future lessons. When it was time to say goodbye, Nancy made a simple yet clinching argument for her community's right to exist. 'This is our home. We've been here so long. We don't bother anyone else.'

On the walk back to the station, I decided to ask Meryl a question that had been on my mind all afternoon. 'Do you think they can win?'

'Me, I don't know... I hope.'

'Aren't they up against impossible odds? Someone stands to make a lot of money from that land and money always seems to win.'

‘This is true. We must keep struggling, I guess.’

## Chapter 8. Scary Numbers

When I got home, the figure the government had offered each resident of Trinidad Extension to relocate was stuck in my brain. 10,000 pesos was about £160. A few pounds below the annual bare minimum a Filipino can survive on, according to the Philippine Statistics Survey. If Nancy and her people didn't find employment in their new habitat they'd each have less than a year to live, based on what the government was offering them. For the sake of comparison, I looked up how much you'd need to be considered rich in the Philippines: 2 million pesos (about £32,000) annually. Then how did this all compare to the total revenues of the foreign corporations many Filipinos – rich and poor – worked for? Walmart, which recently opened for business in Manila, earned a cool £383 billion in 2015. In the same year, Shell (a British-owned company) scored £210 billion, Exxon Mobil £195 billion and Apple £186 billion. Contrast these obscene figures to the Philippines' GDP for the same year – £232 billion – and you find that one company is worth more than one of the countries it operates in, and several others aren't far behind.

'I think that's what they mean by "inequality",' said Beth, looking over my shoulder at my number-crowded screen. 'They haven't got a chance have they?' She dropped a parcel onto the table. 'I had to go all the way to the post office for this. Hope it's good.'

'Thanks darling.'

The parcel was post-marked London and had *New Inciter* logo on it. Inside was a freshly published book called *Food Wars* by the renowned Filipino sociologist Waldon Bello. I knew of Bello as a peerlessly energetic activist who'd been on the vanguard of every leftist campaign since the 1960s. As a student in the US, he led sit-ins against the Vietnam War and then spent time in Chile in the Salvador Allende era.

Exiled from the Philippines by Marcos, he broke into the World Bank HQ in New York and pinched some documents proving that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were working with the dictator to dispossess farmers, restrict wages, devalue the currency, remove protective tariffs and subjugate trade unions. The net effect of these policies was to make life worse for the worst-off. The book Bello wrote based on the stolen papers became a spur for the People Power Revolution of 1986.

I flicked to a chapter in his new book on the latest Western maltreatment of the Philippines. It appeared that age hadn't doused the fire in Bello's belly. He related the unsettling story of how, in just twenty years, the Philippines went from being a net exporter of food to a net importer of it. As with other indebted states in the mid-eighties that hadn't gone Stalinist, the Philippines fell under the sway of 'structural adjustment'. On the say-so of the IMF and World Bank, the government made the economy more 'productive' by touting for foreign investment and developing the export sector.

The project failed. A global recession and a dive in the prices of Philippine paper, rubber, ceramics and beverages nearly annihilated several domestic industries. Cory Aquino, who was elected President after Marcos fell, started spending 8-10 percent of the annual budget repaying foreign debt. This too was disastrous for the needy. Lack of cash for the infrastructure caused lay-offs and an exodus from the countryside to the cities like Manila. The pressure on services and resources grew.

I thought of Danilo, whom I'd last seen in Ride N Roll bar a couple of nights ago. When I told him I was off to Trinidad Extension, he said the squatters weren't welcome, they're trouble, they should go home. It was another case of unfairly deeming individuals liable for a situation they couldn't control.

In a bid to preserve the status quo in international trade – in other words, to keep the rich countries rich and the poor countries poor – the World Trade Organisation ordered the Philippine government to abolish quotas on its agricultural imports. Filipino

rice farmers couldn't compete. Thousands went bankrupt and fled to the cities. The subsequent drop in production forced the government to buy in vast quantities of rice from abroad, which, in turn, diminished the price of home-grown rice, causing further injuries to the rural economy. Other types of farmer suffered the same fate no thanks to cheap corn, livestock and vegetables – much of it from trading blocs such as the European Union and North America.

Googling about, I stumbled across another statistic. The West African republic of Côte d'Ivoire produces about 33 percent of the world's cocoa. Chances are, when you eat a Mars Bar or Dairy Milk, it has Ivorian cocoa in it. In 2010, the US multinational Kraft bought Cadbury's, one of the world's largest chocolate companies for £11.9 billion. In comparison, the annual GDP of Côte d'Ivoire is a piddling £24.7 billion.

By now my head was swimming with statistics – and the human pain they symbolised. I wouldn't look at any more today.

## Chapter 9. Selective Memorials

*The clamour of bombs and the fetor of corpses. Under a giant toadstool of smoke a gang of Japanese soldiers, eyes shaded by the peaks of their caps, swoop on a nun in habit. They circle her and throw punches till she's prone. One unzips and forces himself inside her. Behind them, on a shredded fairway of Wack-Wack golf course, other Japanese bayonet civilians tied by their chests to the trunk of a molave tree. I turn to the southwest and picture the lethal fireworks display that is Shaw Boulevard. US marines have knocked out two of the sandbag walls of a machine gun nest, but the few Japanese left inside will never retreat.*

I removed my sunglasses. Like a tacky photo on an estate agent's website, vestal clouds streamed over the pastel greens of Wack-Wack golf course as it was today, in 2010. There were no bombs or corpses now. All I could hear was the rattle of the zephyrs in the trees. All I could smell was freshly trimmed grass. This was a dimension away from what my imagination had just conjured about the Battle of Manila, 3rd February to 3rd March 1945. Nowadays, I guessed the only chance of Japanese-instigated violence happening here would be if a Tokyo businessman on a golfing holiday was short-changed at the club-hire station. That was progress, I supposed.

I moved along the perimeter fence to a pillbox manned by a goon in a hard hat with in-built shades. 'Excuse me, could I look round the golf course?' I asked.

'Are you member, sir?'

'No.'

'Then you are prohibited.'

'But I'm a journalist.'

'You are journalist? Then you are *extra* prohibited.'

I had to concede that the goon was right to be wary – my aim was to find out how and why Filipinos remember some facets of their history, but not others. That might annoy someone somewhere.

Looking back over the course, I realised that my earlier mental reconstruction had rested too much on the narrative the West likes to tell itself about the Battle of Manila. After invading Luzon the day after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese occupied the Philippines for three years before the Americans took back the archipelago, island by island. The strategy was called ‘leapfrogging’. 280,000 troops – the largest number used in any US campaign in World War II – fought their way onto Luzon just before Christmas 1944. Loath to give up Manila, the Japanese threw everything they had left at the Americans. They raped, tortured, stabbed, shot and burned civilians. 100,000 innocents perished.

This account isn’t all wrong, but it *is* selective. Whereas my mind’s eye had seen only Japanese war crimes at Wack-Wack, even a jingoistic Tory annalist like Max Hastings admits that ‘for every six Manileños murdered by the Japanese defenders, another four died beneath the gunfire of their American liberators.’ The explosions I’d fantasised came from just a smattering of the 42,153 missiles fired at Manila by the US over that appalling month. Preserving American lives, reasoned a US official at the time, was more important than preserving ‘historic landmarks’.

Proponents of the Western side of the story may say that, had the Japanese not seized Manila in the first place and then held it to the death, the Americans wouldn’t have needed to shoot it up so heavily. Was it that simple, though?

I went to the Manila American Cemetery in the district of Taguig to learn more. Its clean-shaven lawns and disciplined rows of marble tombstones make it a doppelganger for the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. The American Battle Monuments Commission, a US government sub-agency, owns both. Maybe this is why

the detailed maps and inscriptions in the limestone memorial rooms in the Manila branch offer a slanted view of the Pacific war.

The righteous defence of democracy in the Far East begins as a response to Japan's 'surprise attack' on Pearl Harbor. The only accurate part of that last sentence is that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Various historians recognise that the raid was no surprise – the US was on a war footing with the Japanese long before December 7th 1941. Earlier that year, President Roosevelt had placed oil sanctions on Japan knowing full well that the US serviced 80 percent of its petroleum needs. Predictably, the Japanese started eyeing up the massive oil reserves of Southeast Asia, which Dutch, British and US companies had been pillaging for decades. American ships and aircraft were patrolling Hawaii expecting strife right up to the end of November when the Honolulu *Advertiser* newspaper stated, 'Japan may strike over the weekend.' On November 27th, the aptly-named Admiral Howard Stark had warned in a memo, 'An aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days.'

Another problem with the Western line is the proposition that the conflict in the East was between democratic good guys and autocratic bad guys. As the army scholar John Dower writes, 'Japan did not invade independent countries in southern Asia. It invaded colonial outposts which the Westerners had dominated for generations, taking absolutely for granted their racial and cultural superiority over their Asian subjects.' There was no democracy in the Philippines for the Americans to defend because the Philippines was an American vassal state. The idea that the Allies were out to erase dictatorship and imperialism is laughable when you glance at a map of who owned what in Asia on the day of Pearl Harbor. The Japanese empire consisted of Manchuria, Taiwan, the Korean peninsula and parts of China's east coast. The Western empires ruled – and not by popular consent – what is now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia,

Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and, of course, the Philippines.

It was time to see the Philippines' largest collection of World War II memorials on Corregidor, a spermatozoon-shaped island in the mouth of Manila Bay. As the ferry set off from Esplanade Seaside Terminal near the Coconut Palace, I got back to reading the American media magnate William D. Boyce's reflections on Manila from 1914. He wrote that the Spanish 'did not make the most' of Corregidor's position as probably the best natural defence to a harbour in the entire world. He was right.

In 1574, shortly after the creation of Spanish Manila, the Fujianese pirate Limahong anchored sixty ships between Corregidor and the northern bank of the bay and sent 3,000 heavily armed thugs to sack the city. They came close enough that they killed the most senior Spaniard in town, Martin De Goiti (an ancestor of post-independence Presidents Disodado Macapagal and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo).

By May 1898, when the US Navy cruised in at the height of the Spanish-American War, the Spanish had taken to mining that same northern channel. It didn't work. Admiral Dewey knew all about the mines and so sent his ships through the southern channel instead. Within a few hours, the entire Spanish Pacific fleet was resting in pieces on the seabed.

Boyce's rebuke of the Spanish failure to weaponise Corregidor implies that the new American regime wouldn't make the same mistake. This too is part of a jingoistic tall-tale that Boyce didn't live to see refuted in the space of a mere twenty-four hours when, between May 5th and 6th 1942, a 75,000-strong Japanese army came at Corregidor from the direction of Manila, and overcame forty-five pieces of heavy artillery and 13,000 US and Filipino troops.

As with Wack-Wack golf course, such carnage was at odds with how the place looked today, at least from what I saw when the ferry pulled in to a magnificent, palm-

bordered cove of puff-pastry sand. We were ushered off the boat into a retro tour bus that resembled a 1940s tram. We clunked through the jungle past the spectral ruins of mess halls and barracks. Although they were still erect, pediments hung loose and columns were missing in action. As we drove, the tour guide held up items he'd found hereabouts: a Coca-Cola bottle from 1912 and currency as old as the revolution. He then showed us the *pièce de resistance* of local atrocity memorabilia: a laminated black-and-white photo of a Filipino baby skewered on a Japanese bayonet. 'Bad people,' declaimed the guide. A Japanese couple sat to my right swapped embarrassed glances.

We stopped at Battery Way, a gun emplacement that still had bullet holes in it. The guide told me to look down the barrel of a mortar. I did so and saw a bomb nestling in the base. 'That's still live,' he said, 'but it is harmless.' I backed off anyway.

The centrepiece of the Pacific War Memorial complex was a forty foot-tall abstract sculpture representing the eternal flame. I asked the guide if any other clashes were commemorated hereabouts. He pointed me to the nearby Filipino Heroes Memorial, a much smaller park and museum. There I could only find a brief and vague tribute to those who died between 1898 and 1902 in the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars. Perhaps briefly and vaguely was how the Americans and the modern Americophile rulers of the Philippines wanted to remember this rampage of arson, torture, disease, war crime and racially-driven genocide.

I recalled Noam Chomsky's quote on the double standards of US foreign policy: 'When they do it, it's a crime. When we do it, it's not.' The relative size of the two memorials here showed that, in the popular consciousness, when the Japanese had annexed the Philippines, it was a crime, but when the Americans had done the same forty years before, it wasn't.

I closed my eyes and recreated the Philippine-American War in my head.

*A naked rebel hangs by his thumbs from the branch of a bani tree, yelping as two US privates in khaki tunics light a bonfire under him.*

*Firing squad mouths chew tobacco above fiery muzzles that send pubescent boys to ground like whits of eroded chalk toppling into the sea.*

*In a gutted barn, four officers of the Tennessee Regiment pin a captive on his back and stick a bamboo tube between his lips. They pour half a barrel of water into the tube. The captive's eyes and belly inflate. 'Tell us where that goddamn swine is,' says one of the officers. More water is decanted. The brawny lieutenant stamps on the captive's stomach. A private removes the tube. Blood-tinged water eructs a foot into the air.*

*'Welcome to the suburbs of hell,' laughs a plump colonel as his men force choleric peasants at Krag-point into a reconcentrado (concentration) camp.*

*Occasionally, they pick one out of the crowd to be executed on the bridge and tossed into the river.*

I felt the guide's finger against my elbow and quit my day-mare.

'Time to go, sir.'

'Do you know much about the Philippine-American War?'

'Not really.'

He wasn't the only one. Professor Dylan Rodriguez argues that modern Filipino identity is based upon a 'strategic undertheorizing and misconceiving' of the 'technologies of race, violence, and global white supremacy' that found its apogee in the Philippine-American War.

But why keep neglecting this critical event a century after it happened? The Philippines still relies on American investment, military support and migrant work and education opportunities. It doesn't suit elites in either nation to sour this special relationship by dredging up a 'genocide' (Rodriguez's strong but apposite term) that

undermines the rhetoric of aid, partnership and mutual respect beloved of generations of politicians on both sides of the Pacific. President George W. Bush was often lampooned for public misspeaking, but when he addressed the Philippine Congress in 2003, nobody picked him up for his shifty assertion that the US had teamed up with the Philippines to destroy colonialism in 1898. Nor did anyone but a few academics notice that, when riffing on Uncle Sam's 'part in the great story of the Filipino people', Bush cited the Spanish-American War, World War II, the Cold War and the so-called War on Terror... but not the Philippine-American War.

As historiographer Reynaldo Ileto has noted, amnesia about that conflict started early. The US colonialists outlawed veterans' clubs, libelled rebel chief Emilio Aguinaldo as a scheming autocrat and required schoolchildren to read David P. Barrows' textbook *A History of the Philippines* (1905), which dismissed the rebellion as 'a great misunderstanding'.

Although in recent years Filipino writers and scholars, from Ileto to F. Sionil José to Luis H. Francia, have explored the genocide in-depth, the few Western fictions dealing with it have usually done so badly. Starring Gary Cooper and David Niven, *The Real Glory* (1939) is swashbuckling cant of the tackiest order. In the first scene, nervous natives watch a gaunt Spanish *padre* beg a US army officer to keep his men on Mindanao island, for 'as soon as the American troops are gone, the *Moros* will come down from the hills. They will kill all the men and carry away all the women and children for slavery.' If there was an Oscar for Most Number of Historical Errors Contained in a Single Cinematic Scene, *The Real Glory* would have won it that year. Spanish clergymen weren't renowned for giving a fig about the natives they'd spent 300 years thrashing, swindling and coercing. Mindanaons did not slay or shackle other Mindanaons – they were fighting in self-defence against foreign incursion. And the lie that American firepower is the only way to staunch chaos in some bedevilled backwater

has been repeated so often since then we now have a respectable-sounding name for it: ‘humanitarian intervention’.

Another reason why so many are keen to forget the Philippine-American War is that the American and Japanese occupations were too similar for comfort. Both needed the collusion of native leaders to succeed. Many of the *ilustrados* who collaborated with the Americans circa 1900 did exactly the same with the Japanese in 1942. Both the US and Japan used propaganda to swivel public opinion against rival empires – for the US Spain was the enemy, for the Japanese it was the US. Moreover, ‘the final six months of the war with Japan,’ Iletto observes, ‘were very similar to the final six months of the war with the United States forty years earlier. Homes and buildings were razed; civilians suspected of aiding guerrillas were tortured and executed; disaster accompanied the path of the contending armies’.

On the ferry back to Manila, the sun withdrew and the rain came down hard against the cabin roof. It was like listening to industrial quantities of rice sieved through a huge tin strainer. After two minutes it was all over. Sudden shifts in nature are peculiar to Philippine life – earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions strike from nowhere, cause damage and then life returns to normal. That the tour guide continued his diatribe against the Japanese throughout the micro-storm suggested to me that attitudes to the past don’t change as easily as the weather.

While disembarking, I received a text from Beth: ‘Fiona wanted you to see this pic x x.’ Attached was a photo of a Filipino toddler with endearing mop-top hair. His hands were outstretched, palms turned skyward, the forty-eight-foot tall Manila Cathedral perching on them. At first I thought this was a still from a sub-par B-movie in the mould of *Attack of the 50 Ft Woman*. Then I assumed it was an example of ‘forced perspective’ – the cathedral was, in reality, small because it was far away, but someone

clever on *Photoshop* had made it seem like it was right next to the boy and petite enough to be picked up easily.

For me, the juxtaposition of the young child and the old building (established by the Spanish in 1571), said something about history – and its contrasting interpretations – always being close to the present. Indeed, they are continually graining and warping the present. Wars are picked up, handled and manipulated by politicians after the fact in order to craft a present and a future that will aid their agendas, be they the Japanese viceroy in the forties or George W. Bush in the noughties. And perhaps even a critic of this enterprise like me was guilty of exploiting the past – or at least reading the past selectively. But if this were true, I hoped my motive – to write something fair and humane to sell to a magazine in order to feed my family – had some integrity to it.

## Chapter 10. We Need a Hero

In the Rizal Shrine, once the swank *bahay na bato* (stone house) home of José Rizal, national hero of the Philippines, I got on my tip-toes to see over the spectators who'd linked hands to form a bastion around the hardwood-framed window. I could now spot the José Rizal Day crowd below in José P. Rizal Street, chanting 'José Rizal! José Rizal!', banners bobbing with José Rizal's portrait on them. The signature defiant eyes, fine-line moustache and wavy side-parting form an image that's as important to Filipinos as Ché Guevara's was to Western students in the sixties.

Some of the crowd were mimicking Rizal by donning black fedoras, white shirts and black waistcoats. Others carried a colossal PVC model of Rizal's head, glossy and stylised like a fast food mascot – more Colonel Sanders than Captain-General Bolívar.

I stepped back from the window. I've never been one for cults of personality or for merging with hundreds of bodies. To deserve this much attention 120 years after your death you have to be remarkable. And Rizal *was* remarkable. He travelled widely, practised ophthalmology, wrote successful novels (as a student he won first prize in a Spanish-language writing competition ahead of dozens of Spanish entrants), was well-versed in Western philosophy, knew twenty-two languages (he translated Hans Christian Andersen into Tagalog) and was the leading orator of the Propaganda Movement that peacefully agitated for concessions from the Spanish colonisers, amongst them free speech, secular education, equality under the law for Filipinos and Spaniards, and the right to send elected representatives to the Spanish parliament. It's one of the less funny ironies of Philippine history that Rizal, who was committed to non-violence, was publicly executed by the Spanish in 1896 on fake charges of fomenting an armed uprising. His death wasn't in vain – it inspired the first ever anti-colonial revolution against a European empire in Asia.

Rizal is central to Filipino culture. His face is on the money, hundreds of roads and landmarks are named after him, and his novels *Noli Me Tangere* (*Touch Me Not*, 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (*The Reign of Greed*, 1891) are set texts in schools and colleges.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Gary, who sits on the management committee of the Rizal Shrine. He wore a long-sleeved T-shirt emblazoned with I MIGHT NOT BE GOD BUT I'M SOMETHING SIMILAR. Next to him was a gnomish old woman all in white with a sedate – perhaps sedated – beam on her face.

‘Sir Tom, may I introduce Mrs Bigay. She is one of the Rizalistas you asked for. She is the one who prefers to talk in Bicol language. I will translate for you, if you will accompany us to my office?’

Mrs Bigay told me she was born into the Rizalista faith – others call it a cult – soon after its founding in 1936. Since then she’d travelled every year from Bicol to attend Rizal Day here in Calamba, thirty miles south of Metro Manila. A month ago she’d been diagnosed with a heart condition, but her doctor had let her attend this year’s festivities.

‘How exactly do you worship Rizal?’ I asked.

‘I have a shrine in my home with an etching of him next to an altar for Jesus. His teachings are similar to the Christ’s. When I have a problem I make a wish to Rizal and he usually grants it. We Rizalistas wear white because we must express the purity within on the outside.’

‘What are Rizal’s values?’

‘The Ten Commandments of Rizal are the same as the Bible’s. He is also for defending our nation and against injustice, especially towards women. Rizal was the second son of God after Jesus. He was a miracle worker or how else could he have known so many languages and healed the sick?’

‘Is it acceptable to be married more than once, as Rizal was?’

‘That is propaganda. He had only one wife, Josephine Bracken. There is a song to this effect.’

‘How many Rizalistas are there in Bicol?’

‘More than 1,000. There are followers in seven provinces.’

Mrs Bigay went on to tell me that non-Rizalistas have called her *wasiwas* (crazy) and likened her to a flag, loose and wild in the wind. ‘We may get bullied,’ she said, ‘but the government accepts us as a genuine religion.’

‘Where is Rizal now?’

‘He is still alive somewhere.’ She closed her eyes, perhaps in prayer.

I was tempted out of mischief to get her take on the urban legends about Rizal. The most sensational one is that he was Jack the Ripper, although the proof is circumstantial at best. His stay in London coincided with the Whitechapel murders and his medical training meant he’d be capable of carving the prostitutes up in that notoriously methodical way. Mr Ripper was purportedly a ladies’ man, as was Rizal. And finally, the killings ceased around the time Rizal moved on to France.

More insulting is the allegation that Rizal was Adolf Hitler’s dad. Again, the evidence is sketchy. While studying in Heidelberg in 1888, so the story goes, Rizal bedded Austrian chambermaid Klara Pölzl and gave her a child who grew up not exactly to follow in his father’s footsteps – Hitler, of course, was more interested in slaying than liberating marginal groups and his berserk bid for world domination was rather different to Rizal’s moderate campaign for a freer Philippines. Be that as it may, the legend-spinners cling to the observation that both men had dark eyes and side-partings. A fair sum of men between the 1860s and the 1940s had dark eyes and side-partings, but that doesn’t mean they were all blood related. Supposedly, another shared

trait is short stature. Not true – Hitler was five foot nine and Rizal five foot two – meaning that both men were above average for their time and ethnicity.

Before bidding me farewell, Mrs Bigay said to me through Gary, ‘Watch for Rizal, he will make himself known to you and us all someday.’

I pushed to the front of the crowd. Men and women with Calamba Rotary Club ID cards round their necks carried a twelve foot-tall bronze effigy of Rizal. The rosettes of orchids affixed to his stomach were redolent of the Christian saviour.

Rizal’s deification – and the fusion of alternative religion with political revolt it involves – is nothing new in the Philippines. In 1622, Tamblot, a native priest from Bohol, was visited by a *diwata* (pagan goddess) who advised him to quit Catholicism and erect a temple in her honour in the hills. She promised that he and his flock would be freed from paying tributes to the Spanish if they burnt down churches, desecrated images of the Madonna with spears and assaulted Spanish officials with rocks, crossbow quarrels and sharpened sticks. It took 1,000 troops to quell the insurrection.

Four decades later, a man called Tapar from the wedge-shaped isle of Panay was told by a demon that, if he took up arms against the colonial administration, the mountains would come to life and aid his struggle. Any casualty on the rebel side, the demon continued, would be resurrected and Spanish musket balls would turn in the air like boomerangs and strike Spanish soldiers instead of Tapar’s followers. Tapar established a shadow church, appointing himself God and three of his followers Christ, the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary. None of the demon’s promises came to fruition and Tapar was put to death after some in his cult stabbed a Spanish friar.

In 1762, while Manila was under occupation by the Royal Navy, Diego Silang declared himself ‘Christ’s *cabo mayor*’ and led an insurrection in the town of Vigan. He wanted the Church to devolve power to the indigenes. Although he convinced the British to make him Governor of the Ilocos provinces, they wouldn’t support him

militarily against the Spanish. He was assassinated by a close friend whom the Church bribed to betray him.

Such insurgencies show how, throughout Philippine history, mainstream Christianity has generally been on the side of the powerful, justifying the political status quo as God's infallible will, above and beyond rational scrutiny. When the Spanish came in the 1570s, they set up a 'friarocracy' of perfidious priests who thieved all the land, forcibly converted the natives and introduced the racist caste system – the same one I'd discussed with Danilo on my first night in Manila – that broadly meant the darker you were the further away from God you were. By the time of the US occupation, Father Gregorio Aglipay had founded an independent, Filipinised Church out of solidarity with the anti-Spanish revolution and as a direct challenge to the pre-eminence of the friars. However, according to Luis H. Francia, the established Church supported the Americans' decision to sell 400,000 acres of friar-owned estates to 'wealthy elite families and a few corporations' rather than 'to those who most needed them'. Since independence, Church leaders have largely backed the government of the day, with the exception of the 1970s when a handful of bishops came out against Martial Law. Today, as the investigative journalist Aries C. Rufo has revealed, the Philippine Church has arguably more influence over politics than ever, and is embroiled in numerous graft and sexual abuse scandals.

The throng swelled and I got claustrophobic. As I pushed my way through the bodies, I had the unsettling conjecture that I was amongst a herd of conformists all blindly believing the same thing: the fundamental, unassailable merits of one human being.

However, not every Filipino lionises Rizal. As Reynaldo Ileto avers, Rizal was co-opted by the American colonisers as the 'correct' national idol for the Philippines. He was the politically expedient choice because he didn't live long enough to oppose

the US and his sticky end confirmed American qualms that the Spanish Empire was so degenerate it had to be usurped by a kinder, gentler power such as... the US. Rizal also favoured a slow, gradualist approach to independence which suited American rhetoric about one day equipping Filipinos to rule themselves. The problem was, while the Americans were saying this, they were helping themselves to the Philippines' resources, imposing an American-style education system, introducing American English as the lingua franca and locking up anyone who had the cheek to demand independence. What the Americans bleeped out – or didn't know – was that Rizal had been less than fawning about their country when he'd been there in 1888: 'America is, undoubtedly a great country, but she has many defects.' He also protested the quarantining of passengers on the boat he arrived on because the port authorities had falsely declared that a cholera epidemic was raging in Asia. This was a ruse to stop Chinese and Japanese immigrants disembarking. While Rizal commended the US for its quality of life and industrial progress, he abhorred its veneration of money and its subjugation of minorities: '[It] is the land par excellence of freedom but only for the whites.'

The recuperation of Rizal flouts the fact that, in his lifetime, he was chided for being soft on colonialism by other nationalists like Andrés Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo, who preferred the armed route to liberation. For this reason, neither Bonifacio nor Aguinaldo could ever be the right kind of champion for the Americans.

Aguinaldo is as contradictory a figure as Rizal. A talented general, he led the resistance against the Spanish – whose army he beat on land while the US Navy routed their fleet at sea – and then, when the Americans had gone back on their word to grant Philippine independence after the Spanish had yielded, he took on the US – and lost. But as his correspondence shows, he'd have laid down his guns in exchange for the Philippines becoming an American protectorate inside which his own *ilustrado* class would retain its supremacy. Indeed, his declaration of independence on June 12th 1898

was modelled on the US' in 1789, except it was prefaced with, 'Under the protection of the Mighty and Humane North American Nation, we proclaim and solemnly declare...'

Had the Americans negotiated, they'd have got their foothold in Southeast Asia, no blood spilled. They might then have canonised Aguinaldo instead of Rizal as the figurehead of the new, free-but-not-actually-free Philippines. Not all Filipinos would have cheered that. Some had seen Aguinaldo as a sell-out ever since December 1897 – this being before the US entered the conflict – when he'd accepted 400,000 pesos from the Spanish Governor to go into exile in Hong Kong. Later, his Machiavellian amorality would again dent his chances of national sainthood, even if it saved his neck a few times. After he surrendered in 1901, the Americans spared his life in return for his allegiance. When the Japanese marched into Manila in 1942, he swore allegiance to them too. After the war, he was forgiven for collaborating and lived to ninety-four.

What could I take away from all this about Rizal, Aguinaldo and iconography? Hero worship is silly and usually predicated on a fiction? Ideas like *nation*, *nationalism* and *national hero* are highly ambiguous? As Renato Constantino writes, Rizal, Aguinaldo and the other bourgeois *ilustrados* had a narrow conception of nationalism. Their struggle was not for the liberty and equality of *all* Filipinos at *all* levels of society. No, Aguinaldo was a snob who wanted his country run exclusively by wealthy gentlemen like him. And, as we've seen since the Philippines achieved formal self-determination in 1946, the *national interest* might be more accurately described as the interests of a native elite in league with the elites of the US and other moneyed nations exercising undue influence over the Philippine polity and economy. Not so nationalistic then.

The sun was high now. I felt like my face and arms were being cauterised. I finally got through the crowd and entered the car park behind the Rizal Shrine. I saw a trio of student-age lads all wearing T-shirts with Rizal's face rendered in photographic

negative style against the red, white, blue and golden sun design of the Philippine flag.

One of them said something to me in Tagalog.

‘I’m sorry?’ I said, mopping my brow with a tissue.

The other two laughed and slapped their foreheads. The guy said something else in Tagalog. More mirth from the other two. It was unusual for Filipinos to address a Westerner in Filipino and then mock him for not comprehending. What was this about? My breaching of the consensus by not dressing up like Rizal or having his image on my apparel? My being a foreigner, pure and simple?

As I got into the car, I tried to repress my irritation. If only those kids knew that I was a foreigner with a relatively sympathetic take on their country. If only they knew that I broadly shared their politics, assuming that, like other Filipinos, their nationalism went hand-in-hand with leftist ethics. But if I could somehow make them know any of this would it make any difference? They might just be bigots.

## Chapter 11. Animal Avenue

There are many good reasons to walk. It's the freest form of transport and not just in the sense that it costs nothing. When you walk you're freed up to see more of the world thanks to a degree of peripheral vision not available through the narrow frames of car or plane windows. When you walk you have more control over your own pace. You can pause for as long as you like without fear of being whisked to the next destination by your pilot or driver. It's also easier to interact with your environment when you're on foot. When in a private car or on public transport you can only get so close to passers-by you want to talk to or places you wish to explore.

As walkers we're free to go wherever our legs can take us. We're unrestricted by roads, train tracks, flight paths or other routes imposed on us. For the Situationist intellectuals of the 1960s, walking in random directions (they called it the *dérive*) across Paris was a political act. Napoleon I had built the *grand boulevards* of that city wide enough so that the army could be mobilised against revolt, and the Situationists thought that aimless wandering could subvert such oppressive urban planning. More ambitiously, they held that the anarchic spontaneity of the *dérive* could chip away at the logic of capitalism, based as it is on obedience, banality and conformity.

Coming from a similar if less militant angle, the Filipina travel writer Josefina P. Manahan claims that roaming the streets of Manila is a desirable alternative to the only kind of roaming the Filipino middle-classes are used to: from shop to shop. 'I felt a real concern,' she writes, 'for a generation which was being shaped in the consumerist culture of the mall, completely oblivious to the rest of reality.' According to Jaime C. Laya, who wrote the introduction to Manahan's account of peregrinating around the capital's historic sites, *Street-Bound: Manila on Foot*, walking was *de rigueur* for all classes of Manileños just a century ago, from the gentry promenading along the seaside

Malecon Drive (now Bonifacio Drive) to the paupers using their feet because they couldn't afford cars or horses.

However, there's one glitch in what I've just argued about the freedom of the walker: the presence of too many damn cars. When Fiona and I stepped on to Katipunan Avenue one lunchtime, these natural enemies of pedestrians everywhere stalked us from all directions, their engines rumbling like the bellies of famished predators, their bumpers shining like flesh-tearing teeth. Had Charles Darwin lived long enough to visit twenty-first century Manila, he may have studied Katipunan as a day-and-night arena for lethal competition between diverse species of vehicle and pedestrian. The latter is very much the prey. When trying to cross the road you're at the mercy of elephantine SUVs. You can only hope they'll slow down in time and flash their beady eye-lights, a signal that gives you permission to flee from them. The pedestrian must defer to the motorist because he – and it usually is a *he* – is king of the jungle, the first in the food chain. When he's taking an age to reverse out of a tricky corner you must wait for him. When you step into his path he has the evolutionary boon of a thunderous horn to scare you off. And an adaptive trait that no walker has a chance of withstanding is the menace of Sudden Unintended Acceleration (SUA), wherein Mitsubishi sports cars abruptly shunt forward from a standstill position and run over bystanders. Although no-one is sure whether a design flaw makes the cars accelerate of their own volition or whether it's the fault of the driver treading on the wrong pedal, there's no debating that, according to CNN Philippines, nineteen Filipino pedestrians have died from SUA between 2001 and 2016.

When we first moved in behind Katipunan, I masochistically scanned the news for recent skirmishes in this survival of the fittest. A massive pile-up had demolished several cars and a trendy café. An official of the National Prosecutor's League had

ploughed into two teenagers, killing them instantly. A street kid had been squashed by a yuppie reversing his Toyota Fortuner out of the International House of Pancakes.

Efforts at conserving the pedestrian species are easily foiled. When the traffic police – the game wardens, as it were, of Animal Avenue – pull someone over for hunting they'll say something like 'I am Jeric Raval' or 'I am Joseph Estrada'. Raval is a film star, the Filipino Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Estrada is the Mayor of Manila, who was himself a film star in the seventies and eighties. The naive motorist will assume the cop has a personality disorder. The savvy motorist will know that this is coded language for a bribe. The amount you must donate depends on the fame of the celebrity cited.

As Fiona and I moved charily along Katipunan, ribbons of bougainvillea brightened the traffic islands and Spanish flags burst across the skywalk overhead. By mid-afternoon when the fumes had built up to a pasty mist, these flowers would shine through – a propitious image, for me at least. All the bad smells of Katipunan – sewage, particulates, burning plastic – were somehow offset by the seductive scent of *siopao* (rice flour buns) and chicken balls frying in pavement skillets. Well-groomed men in shorts sold helium balloons of Disney characters. Skin-whitened, jewel-studded old homemakers stopped and asked us if we needed assistance. Students of Ateneo de Manila and the University of the Philippines thronged in Mexican-style *cantinas*, their laughter competing with the chunky riffs of The Eraserheads and other OPM (Original Pinoy Music) bands. The students' bonhomie was infectious: it always cheered Fiona and I.

On our way home we were almost killed. As the pavement levelled out into two parking spaces outside the Philippine Society of Gastroenterology, a Subaru Forester reversed towards us at full pelt. I picked Fiona up and dodged into the adjacent space.

I put Fiona down and banged my fist on the tinted driver's window. The fury was burning up from the pit of my stomach and into my eyes. Until then I'd thought 'seeing red' was just a metaphor. Now I was *actually* seeing red. It was like I'd put on a pair of anaglyph 3-D glasses with both frames coloured scarlet. I stood there shaking, panting, the self-control bleeding out of me. My free will was evaporating into the air like steam from street food. Instinct overrode any concern for safety, consequence or the law. I wasn't thinking, I was feeling, and the feeling was this: a fucking idiot has almost killed my child and he will suffer.

I banged again on the window, my knuckles numbing. The window zipped down. Inside were well-dressed yet profoundly scared people. Big shots: off-duty lawyers, actors or executives. They cringed, mouths wide as coal pits. 'I'm so sorry, sir. So sorry, sorry, sorry...' They may have wondered who on Earth I was. The only white, unarmed hijacker in Manila with his four-year-old in tow?

It was a pathetic sight. I was appalled by my own capacity to frighten. Whatever switch had flipped in me flipped back. It was like instantly sobering up from a state of intoxication. I un-balled my fist which was hurting now the adrenalin was gone.

I looked to Fiona. Her back was turned. She was eyeing up Dunkin' Donuts. I was relieved beyond expression that she was, first and foremost, still alive and, secondarily, she hadn't noticed my outburst against the yuppies. I recalled the words that had hopped into my head in the passion of that moment – *a fucking idiot has almost killed my child and he will suffer. My child*, the voice had said. *My child*.

Taking Fiona's hand and leading her back to Loyola Heights, I realised that I now regarded her as precisely that: my child. After months of uncertainty, of not knowing what I meant to her or what she meant to me, whether I was her stepdad or a big brother figure or her mum's boyfriend, I now knew that she was, to all intents and purposes, *my child*, and that I would do anything to protect her.

## Chapter 12. The Punisher's Paradise

*'If you are doing an illegal activity in my city, if you are a criminal or part of a syndicate that preys on the innocent people of the city, for as long as I am the mayor, you are a legitimate target of assassination.'* Rodrigo 'Rody' Duterte.

On March 28th 1945, a second child was born in provincial Leyte to schoolteacher Soledad Roa Duterte and her lawyer husband Vicente Duterte. A few months before, Leyte had been the site of an unprecedented series of intense air, land and sea battles between the Japanese and US-Philippine forces. The Japanese hid in graveyards and foxholes, emerging only to throw satchel charges at passing American tanks. It took days of flamethrowing to clear them out. In late October, Japan's countermove was to send kamikazes day and night into US beachheads, warships and cargo vessels.

It was into this war-scarred society that Rodrigo Duterte came into being. As soon as the boy could walk, Soledad was subjecting him to violent discipline. According to Rodrigo's brother Emmanuel, his mother beat the boy so frequently with a horsewhip that she wore it out. His sister Jo recalls that Soledad would constantly scream abuse at her children and make them kneel down on prickly mung beans as punishment for minor transgressions. In contrast, Rodrigo's father Vicente was mild-mannered and had great affection for his offspring.

In 1949, the Dutertes moved to Mindanao and, ten years later, Vicente was elected Governor of Davao province. At school, Rody – as he was now nicknamed – was a poor student but a conscientious troublemaker, which meant he received as many thrashings from his Jesuit teachers as he did from his mother at home. The teenaged Rody drank and brawled the night away. Soledad was so infuriated that she kicked him

out of the family home and made him live in a mosquito-plagued outhouse. To this day, Rody always sleeps under a mosquito net.

He developed a taste for risqué gags and pranks. Aged seventeen, he celebrated passing his pilot's test by flying a plane hazardously close to the windows of the family home. Not one to lose his cool easily, Vicente leaped out of his bed and angrily accused Rody of endangering the life of a neighbour with heart disease. Rody was so upset that he stayed away from his family for three days.

'If you have pain when you are young, you are angry all the time,' his brother Emmanuel told the *New York Times* over fifty years later.

Whenever a suitor of his sister's entered the house, young Rody would stand at the gates holding a pistol. 'It was a miracle if they [the suitor] stayed for 10 minutes,' remembers Jo. He'd also cramp her social life by gate-crashing parties she attended and demanding she come home with him. His voice was so loud that it often eclipsed the music.

When Ferdinand Marcos became President in 1965, he appointed Vicente his Minister for General Services. Vicente didn't take to national politics and soon went back to practising law in Davao. On February 21st 1968, he collapsed in court from heart failure and died.

The end of his father's life made Rody reassess his own. He resolved that it was time to grow up, cut the mischief and take his studies – also in law – seriously.

From his teenage years up to Vicente's passing, Rody would often say to Jo, '*Malay mo* [you never know], some day I will become mayor.'

The first thing that struck me when I exited Francisco Bangoy International Airport in February 2010 was the overlapping shell design of its roof. It was resonant of the Sydney Opera House. The second thing I noticed was the splendid clarity of the air.

A man from the Ministry of Tourism met me in the car park. He wore a too-tight orange polo shirt buttoned up to the top. ‘Welcome to Davao, Sir Tom.’

‘You must be Arnold.’

Arnold took my bag and marched me to a Toyota HiAce van. ‘Sir Tom, can you excuse me while I am the one to phone and arrange your interview with the mayor?’

‘No worries.’

We drove out on a new asphalt road ranked by black orchids and then into a tidy, low-rise township way more mellow than Manila. Old ladies tilted back on stools behind tables bristling with the chartreuse-hued, spiky-skinned *durien* fruit, a speciality of the locale. Backpack-wearing students huddled around phones and tablets. I saw all the customary – and customised – Filipino vehicles (SUVs, jeepneys, motorbikes), though not many. I didn’t hear a single horn honk or a single irate exchange between motorists. Cars froze at crossings, edging slowly off the mark when the lights went green. Pedestrians trotted along the pristine pavements in little herds or stood in hushed attention on bollard-marked traffic islands, eyes skating left and right as they judged the best moment to cross.

I imagined this orderly behaviour was the result of living in a city run by Mayor Duterte. *Time* magazine had dubbed him ‘The Punisher’ for his stern attitude to law and order.

Arnold finished his call. ‘Sir Tom, may I ask you if you will need to smoke?’

‘No, not anymore.’

‘It is just that if we have a guest who wishes to avail himself of a cigarette then there are designated sectors where we can stop.’

‘So you can’t smoke just anywhere outside?’

‘Yes you cannot. Only in the designated sectors. Nor can you in your home, though you may in your car.’

I opened my mouth to say ‘That sounds a bit draconian’, but deemed it undiplomatic. ‘It must have helped people quit,’ I said instead.

Arnold hoisted his eyebrows. ‘Actually not. Already sales of tobacco have raised up since the prohibition.’

‘The forbidden fruit.’

‘Something like that, Sir Tom. By the way, Mayor Duterte’s secretary was just telling me that you can perform an interview with the Mayor tomorrow.’

‘Great.’

‘And you will be asking him about the beautiful things we have for tourists here in Davao?’

I hesitated and then nodded. It wasn’t very convincing. In truth, I planned to ask Duterte about both tourism – for the article called ‘Heaven is a Place Called Davao’ I was writing for *Travel SEAN* – and crime for the political piece I was doing for *New Inciter*. Except I hadn’t told Arnold and the tourist board about the latter story, which was naughty of me. (Looking back to this subterfuge – almost a decade ago now – I can’t say I’m proud of myself for it. Let’s just say that I know things about journalism now that I didn’t then).

I wanted to ask Duterte about his most controversial policy. Some called it a ‘zero tolerance approach to crime’, others, mostly human rights advocates, called it ‘extra-judicial killing’. From time to time, the peace and quiet of Davao City is disrupted by men in balaclavas and often on motorbikes shooting a suspected offender, many of whom have done nothing worse than smoke crystal meth or steal a mobile phone. Sometimes children and young adults are targeted because it’s difficult to prosecute juveniles under Philippine law. According to Amnesty International, over 1,000 individuals have been liquidated in this way since Duterte came to power in 2001. It’s alleged that City Hall sends letters to known crooks telling them to leave Davao. If

that doesn't work, another letter is dispatched to the crook's mother, threatening the same. If this second missive is ignored, the crook ends up dead in the street.

While 'Duterte Harry', as he's known by some, denies personal responsibility for the Davao Death Squads (DDS), it's perfectly clear where he stands on them. On his weekly TV show he once told any lawbreaker watching, 'You will not survive; you can leave [the city] either vertically or horizontally.' To the *Philippine Inquirer* he said, 'Criminals have no place in the city, except in jails, detention centres and, God forbid, in funeral parlours.' **Alluding to the film *Scarface*, Duterte claimed to Reuters that he'd personally pushed a 'corrupt' personage off a helicopter.** When questioned about a wanted rice smuggler, he answered in homage to another Hollywood hard-man, Sam Peckinpah: 'I don't need you to bring the body, just bring me the head of Ryan Yu.' This was no idle threat – Duterte was requesting, quite literally, that Yu's severed head be delivered to City Hall in an ice cooler. The reward was 5 million pesos.

'Sir Tom, here is your hotel,' said Arnold. 'I will let you have rest now. We will pick you at seven p.m.'

The Crowne Regency's façade looked frail, angular and yellow, like a cookie-cut piece of dough. My room was as spotless as the streets outside. Unlike bars and hotels in Manila, the wi-fi here was fast and consistent.

I rang our flat. I needed to speak to Fiona, to hear her call me 'Dad'. While I waited for Beth to pick up, I reminded myself that I hadn't told her about mine and Fiona's close shave on Katipunan. I thought it was the right thing to do given that it would only add to her disenchantment with Manila. Anyway, nobody had got hurt. If Fiona wanted to tell her about it then fine.

'Hi darling,' said Beth. 'What's Davao like?'

'Very nice from first impressions. A lot nicer than Manila.'

'Maybe we should move there then.'

I hadn't told her about all the research I'd done into the death squads. 'Possibly. Let's see how it is after I've been here a couple of days. Is Fiona there?'

'She has a friend from school round but I'll just see...' She shouted for Fiona and Fiona came panting to the phone.

'Hi Dad, I'm playing hide and seek.'

'Oh that sounds fun. Who's your friend?'

'He's called Brandi. Can you get me something nice from your trip please Dad?'

'Of course, sweetheart.'

'Bye then, I need to go and hide.'

Beth came back on the phone to say goodbye. Well played Fiona, I said to myself. You understand the value of discretion, and at such a young age too.

I cracked open my laptop and clicked on the links I'd saved to more front-page exposés of Duterte. They read like airport thrillers. Duterte undercover, posing as a taxi driver to monitor police graft. Duterte commanding a tourist caught smoking in a restaurant to eat the offending butt – or else. Duterte forcing a conman to eat the documents he'd counterfeited to extract rent from squatters on land he didn't own. And other incidents that didn't add up: the case of Sally Chua, a rich Chinese-Filipina kidnapped in Manila who somehow persuaded her captors to take her the 600 miles to Davao where she'd get them their ransom. The police were waiting for them. They rescued Chua unharmed after a gunfight that left all three of her abductors dead. A miraculous, Chuck Norris-esque dénouement if ever there was one.

I received a text from Bobby, a drinking buddy from Ride N Roll: 'How R U in promised land? LOL not so peaceful there owner of ur hotel was killed few months back.'

What did he mean? The owner of the Crowne Regency – where I was staying right now – was murdered? I looked the room up and down. Was he killed *here actually*

inside the hotel? I got up and triple-locked the door. Although I'd given up smoking five months ago, I craved a calming cigarette now. Except, if I'd had one I'd be done under Duterte's rules.

I steadied myself. Perhaps Bobby was joking. Then again, if the story were true, Bobby, a well-connected businessman, would know about it. I texted him back to check. He didn't reply. I tried calling him and got his answering service. Before I could Google 'Crowne Regency', 'murder' and 'Davao', knuckles rapped the other side of my door. I unlocked it down to the chain. Through the crack was Arnold.

'Are you good, Sir Tom?'

I released the chain.

'Excuse me, I forgot to give you this before.' He stepped in and threw a tribal necklace made of hemp and an ivory-like material over my head. '*Maayo unta swertihon!*'

'What does that mean?'

'Good luck.'

'Why are you wishing me good luck?'

'The necklace, early on in our history, traditionally gives luck.'

'Oh. Arnold?'

'Sir Tom?'

'Do you know anything about the owner of this hotel being murdered?'

'Of course, but this is a rare thing now in Davao.'

'Did he die *inside this* hotel?'

'No... well, me, I don't think so.' Arnold tipped his head towards the door.

'Come on, Sir Tom, I want to show you the reason why such bad deeds cannot happen here anymore.'

The Public Safety and Security Command Centre (PSSCC) on Aquino Street was encased in tinted glass. We were greeted in a second floor antechamber by a squat, cheery fellow called Angelo who was clutching a walkie-talkie.

He led us into a darkened room where men in white shirts were bent over computer screens. The far wall was dominated by a mosaic of larger screens, each relaying CCTV images of landmarks and neighbourhoods in Davao: City Hall, the ferry port for Samar Island, a street of squatters' hovels. The camera on the centremost screen was following a young woman in shorts and a tight crop top as she walked a bug-eyed Chihuahua through the market.

Angelo pointed the aerial of his walkie-talkie at her. 'Pretty girl, no?'

'Yes. Is she a suspect?'

'No,' he laughed laddishly. 'She's just pretty.' He said something in Cebuano to one of his operatives. The wall of screens combined to show a montage of traffic accidents.

*A van slamming into the back of a motorbike, the rider flying ten feet into the air before colliding head-first with a wall.*

*An elderly couple reduced to a crimson puddle by a hurtling juggernaut.*

*Jeepneys painted with the Madonna and Manny Pacquiao piling into each other at a frenzied crossroads.*

Angelo chuckled throughout the show. I had to look away several times.

'You see, the camera does not lie,' said Angelo. 'Since we had them installed these terrible incidents are not happening so frequently.'

'How many cameras do you have now?'

'157. And in your country?'

'About 7 million.'

'Whoa, this is too much, I think.'

This made the British surveillance state far bigger and more insidious than Davao's, but I was more shocked by Davao's because I was standing in its nerve centre right now. I'm sure I'd be more shocked by a visit London's equivalent of this place, but the Metropolitan Police know that one way of avoiding public alarm about such shifty undertakings is to stop journalists getting anywhere places like this. By contrast, the authorities in Davao were positively proud of their CCTV system and wanted to show it off. The command centre even had its own Facebook page.

'Angelo, do you ever see Davao Death Squad activities on camera?'

He was more than ready for a knotty question like this. He banged his walkie-talkie into the palm of his other hand. 'We have not identified as such these persons who support the Mayor's advocacy of extreme discipline. We have invited investigation teams to Davao and they have not pinpointed the perpetrators. What we do in the PSSCC is provide the police with what they need to find felons.'

'So despite all the cameras you've never seen one of these assassinations?'

He'd been well-trained not to give straight answers. 'While all around us here in Mindanao there are problems, not in Davao because we are careful. We have a saying in Cebuano, so let me translate: *Life begins here because crime ends here.*'

On the ride to back to the hotel, I feared Arnold had guessed I wasn't just writing a eulogy to his hometown. 'Why, Sir Tom, are you interested in the lawlessness in Davao when you are working for a touristic publication?'

'It's my duty to give my readers some background. If they get into any trouble here they'll complain that the magazine didn't warn them.'

'I see.'

'Have you ever seen one of these extra-judicial killings yourself?'

'Me, I have not.'

‘Do you know how they happen?’

‘Oftentimes captured members of the New People’s Army will be recruited to slay the wanted men. Their choice is be recruited or go to jail.’

‘Who recruits them?’

‘I do not know. Sometimes the assassin will already be waiting only 100 metres away from the police station. He waits for the target to be released from custody – and then *blam!* There was a case early on in the year when a target’s sister jumped in front of him and she took the bullet. She died, he escaped.’

‘How do the killers get away with it?’

‘Normally they are not caught. Also, oftentimes when the assassin engages the target with firearms, the target will fire back. Then the law of duelling applies.’

‘The law of duelling?’

‘Both men are shooting so whoever wins wins, whoever loses loses. And after this the case is closed.’

As he let me out of the van, Arnold said, ‘Please only write good things about Davao, Sir Tom.’

In my room I puzzled over his request. If it were sincere, why had he just told me a lot of disturbing things about Davao? Then again, maybe Arnold didn’t regard the death squads as disturbing. Perhaps he was as proud of them as Angelo was of the command centre.

Next morning, over a breakfast of *pandesal* (salted bread) and Lipton tea, I tried to situate Duterte politically. His bent for brute force, disdain for due process and his *Nineteen Eighty-Four-ish* surveillance set-up was the stuff of right-wing autocracy. But was that too simplistic a verdict?

In preparation for this trip, I'd asked left-leaning Manileños what they made of Duterte. All had some admiration for him, but why? In defiance of big business, Duterte had prohibited mining across Davao 'because it destroys our land and our forests' and had created initiatives to uplift the health, education and social mobility of his constituents. He was on good terms with José Maria Sison, leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, currently banished to Holland for his leadership of a guerrilla war against the Philippine military (assisted by US Special Forces) that was now forty years old. In the febrile atmosphere of the War on Terror, Duterte was negotiating with Islamist *Moro* factions also at war with the state. Rather than taking the absolutist, neo-con line that these terrorists were immune to reason and should be done in, he'd listened to their grievances and supported greater powers for their autonomous region in return for them not wreaking havoc in his city. As a result, Davao was exempt from the jihadist beheadings and suicide attacks that blighted other parts of Mindanao.

Duterte wasn't afraid, then, to take on both the Manila establishment and US hegemony. For some on the left, this mitigated some of his more fascistic foibles. But how to explain the contradiction between his self-described socialism and his bullyboy tactics? Perhaps it dated back to his upbringing. While his father Vicente had been a close ally of the Marcoses, his mother Soledad had, after Vicente's death, been a leading figure in the Yellow Friday Movement to replace Marcos with liberal democracy. It seemed to me that the left-right binary means something radically different in the Philippines than it does in the West. In Britain, only people on the far right would agree with Duterte's short, sharp shock treatment for drug dealers. These same people wouldn't also support workers' rights or ecological protection. And I just couldn't picture Nigel Farage negotiating with firebrand mullahs.

Later that morning, Arnold drove us into the mountains outside the city, where the cool wind carried the scent of pine trees. We got out at the Malagos Garden Resort, where amber shrubs dangled like cowlicks over chunks of sandstone and sage-toned epiphytes cuddled old-world *nipa* huts on stilts. We were served *al fresco* some locally-produced, organic goat's cheese and red wine – both firsts for me in Asia.

At the eighty-hectare Eden Nature Park, we meandered among sculpted flower beds. I smiled tipsily at the happy faces of sunflowers and the impish spurts of *sampaguitas*. If a lover's tiff – let alone a gunfight – was hard to visualise on the sedate streets of downtown Davao, it was even harder to visualise one in this idyll. Only dialectical thinking could make sense of the coexistence of beauty and tyranny here, although I assumed where someone stands socially in this situation determines if they see more beauty than tyranny, or more tyranny than beauty.

### Chapter 13. The Rest-in-Peace Solution

In the Crowne Regency's reception that night I got talking to Eugenio, a cleaner. He must have been older than he looked, as Filipinos born before the 1950s and 1960s are more likely to have Spanish rather than Anglo-American forenames. When I said I was going to interview Duterte tomorrow, Eugenio told me he'd met him a decade ago.

'Me, I was a fire volunteer who rescued a kid trapped on a roof here in Davao. I climbed up to retrieve him and I was electric-shocked at 2,800 volts. I tripped on a live wire. 50 percent of me was all burned up.'

'You look very well now.'

'I am a type of superhero, no?'

'Did you spend a long time in hospital?'

'Six months. It was there that the Mayor gave me a visitation.'

'What was he like?'

'Kindly man. He gave me a medal. He is able to make you feel special when he talks to you.'

'Did he help with your medical fees?'

'No. The fire service did not even. My family and friends put their monies together for me. Actually, I think the electric shock made me more of a man. I had three children since then.'

'Is Duterte doing a good job?'

'I have a family of seven. I work forty-eight-hour shifts in this job to feed them. For a while there were hoodlums making problem in my barangay. They beat up people and tried to sell drugs to my kids. One day, I got back from work and they were gone. It was a relief for me to have this problem no longer. So I support Mayor Duterte's way of doing.'

I went to my room. I dwelled on Eugenio's claim – 'They [...] tried to sell drugs to my kids' – and considered how I'd react if someone did the same to Fiona. Badly, I think. I wanted to hear Fiona's voice again, but it was well past her bedtime.

I got into bed feeling a poisonous brew of emotions – I was miserable about not being able to talk to Fiona and nervous about meeting Duterte. If I worded a question crudely might my mum receive a threatening letter from City Hall? Or worse, would a hitman be waiting for me in the car park?

Other journalists had lost their lives in Duterte's Davao. In 2003, radio pundit Jun Pala was shot nine times in a motorbike drive-by. His brother and bodyguard were with him, but survived the bullets. Pala himself was not a nice fellow – he belonged to a vicious anti-communist organisation – but that shouldn't have warranted his extermination. The police never found a witness to the Pala homicide, let alone a suspect for it.

The interview could go the other way and Duterte might charm me into being soft on him. I have that weakness. That's why Beth sometimes called me a 'yes man.' As Eugenio had said, Duterte can make you feel as if you are the only person in the world worth talking to.

A phonecall woke me at 5.30. 'Sir Tom,' said Arnold. He sounded subdued. 'My apologies for calling you so early on. I am afraid the Mayor is not able to see you today.'

'Right.'

'And I am afraid I am the one to help him today so I cannot guide you around also. Please accept my apologies for that too. I will send the van to pick you for the airport.'

'Arnold, can we-'

‘Goodbye Sir Tom.’ The line went dead. Perhaps he’d finally found out I was writing something contentious about Duterte and didn’t want to give me any more ammo for it.

Part of me was relieved I wouldn’t have to meet The Punisher. But another part of me – perhaps a majority – was disappointed not to get some empirical insights into the man unmediated by what I’d read, heard and seen second-hand.

On the flight back to Manila, I went over the questions I would have asked him. I’d decided there was no point making him repeat his stock ripostes to the death squad criticisms. I wanted more knowledge of his personal life. Then I could understand to what degree his private suffering informed his public actions. Did Duterte share his brother’s opinion that an infancy of ‘Violence in the house, violence in the school and violence in the neighbourhood’ accounted for the grown-up Duterte’s sick sense of humour and waspish disciplinarianism? And how did he square his obsessive loathing of drugs with his own, self-admitted use of fentanyl, an opioid that is up to 100 times more potent than the street heroin you could get killed for peddling around his city? He’d started using the drug to ease two rare conditions: Buerger’s disease, in which the blood vessels become inflamed, and Barrett’s oesophagus, where heartburn and indigestion are caused by reflux of bile. The latter affliction was poetic justice, I reckoned. But what if the fentanyl wasn’t working and his physical pain – along with the psychological variety – contributed to his lousy temperament? I wasn’t sure, though, if I’d have had the balls to ask him about any of this.

One thing I was certain he wouldn’t have confessed to me was the state of his mental health. Natividad Dayan, former President of the International Council of Psychologists, has opined that Duterte has Antisocial Narcissistic Personality Disorder. He exhibits ‘gross indifference, insensitivity and self-centeredness, grandiose sense of self-entitlement and manipulative behaviours and pervasive tendency to demean,

humiliate others and violate their rights and feelings.’ If this diagnosis was correct, no doubt the trauma of Duterte’s regular beatings at home and school played a role in the disorder. So was he psychologically displacing the aggression he’d endured as a schoolboy onto the desperados of Davao? Was his pharmacophobia an instance of psychological projection given his own problems with fentanyl and the fact that his son, Paolo, had been accused of drug smuggling?

Psychology – of the collective type – might also account for Duterte’s allure to the people of Davao. He’d won seven successive elections, after all. Danilo had a quasi-Freudian theory about it: ‘The populace wants a powerful father figure. They crave someone to tell them off, to spank them. They think that, in return, they receive security.’

I then reflected on Duterte in the wider context of the world. Was he much more awful than other leaders? I found an article on the website of Human Rights Watch, a New York-based outfit that the NGO Monitor website has called out for bias and its ‘close links to Western governments’. There were hints of superiority and hypocrisy to the unnamed author’s tone, as if the sorts of violations that occurred in Davao never occurred in his own country or under the aegis of his own government. If the dead could talk, 2,500 Arabs done in by drone warfare – itself a species of extra-judicial killing – might quarrel with him. Duterte and President Obama didn’t have much in common, but both were trained lawyers who knew the meaning of due process, yet they used illegal measures to – so they believed – foil future harm to their constituents. *Counterpunch*’s Charles Pierson goes further: ‘Duterte is an amateur compared with the United States. The US has been in the death squad business for decades. This does not stop the US from lecturing other countries about human rights, much like an 800 lb. man dispensing diet tips.’

At any rate, was the ‘violence-to-thwart violence’ approach a slippery slope too strewn with blood and guts to be worth going down? If you think you’re ethically above your enemies, you don’t stoop to your enemies’ lowdown methods. Enough innocents had died in both Davao and the Middle East to show that the ‘rest-in-peace solution’, as Angelo had put it, was futile. And even when the right man is targeted, what about the notion that bad people can be redeemed, or that they deserve mercy because they were compelled to act badly by no-hope circumstances?

I also doubted the ‘rest-in-peace solution’ was a deterrent. ‘Contrary to expectations,’ argues human rights activist Kenneth Roth, ‘the Davao Death Squad has not reduced crime. In the decade since [the squads] began operating, crime in Davao City has mushroomed ten times faster than the population.’ I imagined all those brothers of the slain seeking revenge for their losses. For the same reasons, it could be said that Bush, Blair and Obama’s War on Terror had encouraged more terrorism in London, Boston, Madrid and elsewhere.

When the goods trolley came round, I picked out a gift for Fiona: three plastic anthropomorphised moths tied together with a pink ribbon.

Later, as I was queuing to exit the plane at Ninoy Aquino International Airport – named, ominously, after a politician who was assassinated in 1983 in the same airport (it was called the Manila International then) – I saw a pundit on ABS-CBN news propose that Duterte run for President of the Philippines in the 2010 election.

Surely he couldn’t win, I thought. That’s as absurd as, say, Donald Trump being elected President of the United States.

## Chapter 14. The Theory and Practice of Love

When I got home, Beth was facing the kitchen wall, her hands buried in a tub of washing up. She didn't turn to greet me. Over the last couple of months I'd noticed that when she was pissed off about something she'd immerse herself in menial work – cleaning the oven even though it was already Spartan, vacuuming every room three times over, tidying Fiona's toys into separate themed drawers and sponging the balcony of the grime accumulated from the carbon emissions floating up from Katipunan. It may have been her way of channelling her sadness.

'Hi love,' I asked. 'What's up?'

Beth continued washing up. 'So you and Fiona were almost run over the other day?'

Thanks Fiona, I said inwardly.

'It wasn't my fault. The idiot wasn't looking-'

'I know, but it just confirms what I've been thinking for a while.' Without turning to me she took her hands out of the tub and dried them on a towel.

'Which is?'

'We should leave Manila.'

'For good?'

'Yes, for good.'

'But what about the work you're doing for Communiterrain?'

'Not important.'

'What *is* important?'

Then, finally, she faced me. 'That I feel scared here.'

'Why?'

She gripped the bow collar of her baggy cream cardigan. ‘You haven’t even noticed, have you?’ She gripped the collar harder. ‘This is typical of you, Tom. Always in your bubble never looking out. You’re unreachable.’

‘I *had* noticed that you’d bought some new clothes,’ I said. ‘But I don’t understand the significance of them.’

‘Do they look sexy to you?’

‘Are they supposed to?’

‘No,’ she sighed, ‘they’re not supposed to. That’s the point. They are what we women call ‘frumpy’.’

‘You know I can’t tell my Armani from my elbow-’

‘It says a lot that you didn’t even think to ask why I’ve started wearing these clothes to work.’

‘Okay, why have you started wearing these clothes to work?’

‘Because I get followed by men everywhere. On the LRT, on jeepneys, when I go for lunch at the market. Heading home yesterday, I noticed a bloke in a Hawaiian shirt get on the train at Gilmore station. He was staring at me all the way. And then he was in the same carriage with me on the next train from Cubao to Katipunan. The last time I got in a taxi with Fiona the driver asked if I was married. I said yes and he said that nobody takes marriage vows seriously, and what was my number.’

I could feel my rage rising again. ‘Why didn’t you tell me this before?’

She massaged her brow. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Who do they think they are? How dare they fucking do that.’

‘Calm down. Nothing’s happened... at least not yet.’ She came over to me and placed her hands around mine. ‘Darling, you know how unhappy I am here. You know that this is just the latest reason why I can’t stay in Manila any longer. We’ve been here six months and it isn’t getting any better for me. It’s getting worse.’

‘What about the rest of us?’

‘I think we can agree that Fiona is the most important consideration.’

‘And she seems to like it here.’

‘For now, yes, while she’s adored as a little white princess. But what about later on when she’s growing up? Do you really think the pollution, the diet, the heat and everything else is good for her – or any of us?’

‘We don’t have to eat out any more and we could move to a suburb with-’

‘Look Tom, picture Fiona aged fourteen. She comes home from high school and complains of being harassed. What do we do then?’

I marched over to the balcony window. I’m not religious, but I looked up at the darkening sky for guidance, or something like it. ‘So what am *I* supposed to do when we go back to the UK? How do we make ends meet?’

‘You must by now have built up enough of a portfolio to make something of yourself as a writer back home. I mean you’re working a lot now for *New Inciter*, which is based in London anyway.’

‘Beth, you know how competitive it is in the UK I have no profile there at all. I’d have to win a prize or something, and about the only prize I’d be eligible for would be The Tom Sykes Award for the Best Piece of Journalism by Tom Sykes This Year. Even in that I’d probably come third. The only reason why *New Inciter* wants my stuff is because it’s about Manila. As soon as I leave Manila, they won’t need me anymore. And I have a good salary from *Travel SEAN*. That’ll go if *we* go.’

Beth sat down on the sofa. ‘Can I be honest with you? I think your work is your main priority. This trip was always about furthering your career, first and foremost. Fiona and I were just along for the ride.’

‘That’s a bit harsh.’

‘Are you sure it isn’t true?’

‘I’m sure it isn’t true.’

‘Then prove it by agreeing to go home with us.’

‘My work is not the only reason why I wanted us...’ I began and trailed off.

We’d been over this before. Reiterating my position wasn’t going to alter Beth’s. I sat down on the sofa next to her. ‘Okay, we’ll go home.’

She threw her arms around me. ‘Thank you darling. Thank you so much. I know you love travelling and you can still do that and when we get back I’ll get a job to take the pressure off and we’ll be close to our friends and families again and everything will be alright. I love you.’

‘I love you,’ I whispered.

That night, after the girls had retired, I went to the 7-11 to buy a bottle of strong Red Horse beer. It tasted like carbonated tar. I swigged it on the walk to Ride N Roll. At the bar I ordered a San Miguel and a Tanduay rum chaser. Both went down in five minutes. ‘Same again, Al,’ I slurred.

Al stopped drying a glass with his apron. ‘You sure about that, Sir Tom?’

‘Yes I am.’

Danilo came in. He’d trimmed his samurai locks down to a crew cut and was without his specs. ‘Bad day?’

‘Absolutely fucking terrible.’

‘Me too.’

‘You first then.’

Danilo pointed the way to a table in the corner. ‘I had a little... how can I say it?’

‘Come on, Danilo, our secrets will be safe with each other.’

‘It was an indiscretion. With one of my students.’

‘That’s normal round here, isn’t it?’ I burped.

‘Not for me, Tom. I feel not so great about it.’

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be-’

‘That’s fine, mate. My marriage has been on the rocks for a long time. “The love we share/Seems to go nowhere”.’

I was counting down to when Danilo would slip in a 1980s British pop reference. ‘So why has it been on the rocks? You didn’t mention this before.’

‘I wish I knew.’ He took such a vigorous slurp of beer that half of it spilled on to his Modern English T-shirt. I pulled some napkins out of the dispenser for him. ‘I wish I knew.’

‘Can I have one of your fags there?’

‘What?’

‘I mean cigarettes.’

‘You had me concerned there for a second, mate.’

‘You need to improve your British English, mate.’

‘I will as soon as you learn some Tagalog.’

‘Touché. So, sorry, where did it go wrong between you and Martha?’

‘The only way I can explain it is that when Jenilyn was born it was like all my love went into her and there was not enough left over for Martha. We stopped sleeping together the moment Jenilyn came along. I don’t know why, I just stopped *wanting* her. We’ve been trying to hold it together for so long and last night it all fell apart, like that Yeats poem.’

‘And how did this liaison with the student happen?’

‘She was interviewing me for the college newspaper and...’

‘One thing led to another.’

‘Exactly. When a beautiful teenage girl offers herself to a middle-aged asshole like me, well it’s hard to turn down. It had been *so* long, mate.’

I signalled for more beer and rum.

‘What about you?’ he asked me. ‘Why was your day so bollocks?’

‘Beth wants to leave Manila. Actually, she’s wanted to leave for some time and I’ve just sort of ignored it, which I feel bad about, of course. But I was hoping the longer we stayed here the more likely things would fall into place for her – and for us. They haven’t.’

‘And are you going to leave Manila too?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Do you love Beth?’

I sipped my beer to avoid having to answer the question.

‘Tom? Do you love her?’

I closed one eye and peered down the neck of my San Miguel. ‘Yes.’

Danilo laughed.

‘Is that funny?’

‘It wouldn’t be if it was honest.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that you didn’t say that in the most sincere way possible.’

‘Okay you’ve rumbled me. I don’t... *think* I do love Beth anymore. We’ve been drifting apart ever since we arrived in Manila. I suppose it takes a radical change of environment to reveal new things about someone’s personality, and those new things I don’t like.’

‘What things?’

‘She isn’t as adventurous as I thought she’d be. She’s hyper-critical. That’s not to say I’m exempt from blame. I’m not around enough. She accused me earlier of putting my work before all else. She has a point.’

‘Do you still find her hot?’

‘Sort of.’ The honest answer was ‘No, I stopped being sexually attracted to Beth a month ago’, but I was too embarrassed to share this just now. The lust deficit was mutual. During the three times we’d slept together these past six weeks, she’d flopped passively out on her back and shunned my gaze, as if wanting it over with as soon as possible. I wasn’t much better: as we did the deed, the dainty faces of teenaged ex-girlfriends and the lithe and petite bodies of mums at Fiona’s school would drift fully invited into my mind’s eye.

‘Well sex is not everything,’ said Danilo. ‘Anyhow, it’s probably too much to expect someone to keep turning you on forever.’

‘It’s not the only reason I feel alienated from her. And then I also feel guilty because I shouldn’t give up so easily. Everyone says you have to work hard to make a relationship last.’

Danilo smiled. ‘I don’t see what the problem is then. You don’t want to be with Beth so don’t be with Beth. Why not stay here? You’ve got it made with the job and all. I’ll introduce you to one of my students, know what I mean?’

I pressed the cold neck of my San Miguel against my sweltering forehead. ‘It’s not that easy.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because I love Fiona.’

‘You love Fiona?’

‘Like she’s my own.’

‘You love Fiona but you don’t love Beth.’

‘Yes.’

‘How the hell’s that going to work, mate?’

‘I don’t know.’

I lurched into the living room at midnight and picked up Fiona's favourite pillow. I gazed morosely at its romanticised tropical design of splaying palm tree leaves freckled with dawn light and festooned by morpho butterflies with marmalade- and merigold-striped hind wings. When Beth and I had first decided to relocate, I used to point to this pillow and promise Fiona we'd see things like this in Manila.

My mind bolted back to a pub garden in Portsmouth a month before we flew out. It was the last hot day of that summer. In front of us, beneath the Union Jack bunting, estate agents were downing Jägermeister. I guessed they were estate agents for two reasons: one, they were irritatingly rowdy and two, they were talking about property. They all wore fat-knotted ties and had the then-modish gel-prickled footballer's haircut that resembles an electrocuted grouse. I winced at Fiona as one of them told this joke: 'Why do the seagulls in Portsmouth fly upside down? 'Cos there's nothing worth shitting on.'

Ignoring them, we ate our lunch off blocks of wood instead of plates. It was some gastropub affectation. We were practising the ancient English art of contentment with mediocrity: Beth's lettuce was bronzed round the edges and my curry tasted decidedly 'ready meal'. At least the London Pride was doing its job. Wearing sunglasses and a grin, I reeled off Asia's merits to the ladies.

'The beaches are great. It's warmer out the water than in... I mean, it's warmer in the water than out. And it's so clear. And you can see turtles and stingrays and what's that pretty fish in *Finding Nemo*, orange with white stripes?'

'Nemo?' sighed Beth.

'Nemo!' cheered Fiona.

In my political journalism on the Philippines I'd been questioning myths about the Philippines. Now I knew *I* was guilty of peddling myths to Fiona and Beth, and they'd been debunked by the act of living here for five months. The greasy food, the

constant smoke, the predators both sexual and vehicular were fine fodder for a writer – problems make for our best material, as V.S. Naipaul says – but they weren't the recipe for family joy. You're right, Beth, I thought, I am, after all, a selfish bastard. I cried into the pillow.

Fiona's laughter woke me at 5.30 am. Somehow I had fallen asleep in a diagonal position with my head and the top half of my body on the carpet and my feet up on the arm rest of the sofa. I manoeuvred myself upright and patted myself down.

'We're flying the helicopter – I mean plane – back to Portsmouth soon,' said Fiona equably.

'So Mum told you already. What do you think about that?'

She sent her eyes northwest as she considered her answer. 'Yeah.'

'And have you had a good time in Manila?'

'Mmm. Some bits.'

'Which bits?'

'Err... new friends, new places, the way it's all different to Portsmouth.'

'You like the difference?'

'Stops me getting bored, doesn't it?'

'Me too.'

'Thanks Dad,' she said and pecked me on the cheek. I'd been trying to kiss her hello, goodbye and goodnight since we'd first met, and always she had scrunched her eyes shut and ducked away from me, from shyness or embarrassment or what, I didn't know. Nor did I know why she'd just thanked me. I didn't much care why – it was an uplifting gesture after my long, late night of lamentation.

Beth came into the room, staring at Fiona with a gratified smile. She came over to the pair of us, gaze still wedged on Fiona, and took our hands as if we were about to play a game of Ring a Ring o' Roses. Just when I was wondering how long she would

keep looking at Fiona for, she finally acknowledged me, just briefly, but her smile fell away when she did so.

## Chapter 15. With Fiona in Manila

Last night's drama had made me forget that I'd promised to take Fiona out today. The trip would now be a swansong for our time in Manila, as Beth had booked our flights home for two days' time. In the taxi, Fiona listened to a Tintin story on the iPod while I agonised over the dilemma of wanting to be with her but not with her mother. I'd taken the coward's route: do nothing and hope my relations with Beth would improve, or that we'd be able to stick together for the sake of family unity if not for any love between us.

The naive basis of this hope had been rocked by Beth's ambiguous glance that morning. Did it mean that she knew – or at least suspected – that I didn't love her anymore? Did it mean she didn't love me anymore? If the answer to either of those questions was yes, did that mean that she was going to put up with us staying together just so that I could remain close to Fiona? If not – and I was going to lose Fiona – why should I bother going back to the UK at all?

A game of hide-and-seek around the 400-year-old battlements of Intramuros took my mind off things. Although in that caricature of our guidebook I'd written soon after we'd moved to Manila I'd been rude about twee tourist traps like Intramuros, I had to confess I was having fun here now. And so was Fiona – I managed to reduce her to titters by pretending to trip over a cannon. Never underestimate a child's love of slapstick. I tried to do it again but was stopped by a guard in period fatigues and a revolutionary's hat with the brim pinned back against the crown.

Arriving at San Agustin Church in a wooden cart the shape of a cable car, the headscarved driver gave Fiona some sugar cubes with which to feed the horse. Inside the church's museum, Fiona was open-mouthed as she eyed the paintings of galleons, the *trompe l'oeil* ceilings and the obligatory statues of Jesus. In the tropical gardens we pretended we were on a jungle expedition, me impersonating a menagerie of beasts that

Fiona had to ‘pour fire on’ by miming shooting me with a flamethrower. Where she’d seen *that* on children’s TV I had no idea.

This morphed into another game of hide-and-seek, if more elaborate. I assumed the identity of a malicious variant on Captain Haddock from the Tintin stories who had claws and a feral roar. Fiona hurtled off behind a bush and I followed her. This time, though, she didn’t emit the usual stranded princess scream. I rounded the bushes and saw her squatting on the ground, head bowed.

‘Fi, you alright?’

She lifted her head. Her eyelashes were wet and thorny. I kneeled beside her.

‘What’s wrong sweetheart?’

She could only sniff in reply.

‘Are you worried about something?’

She nodded.

‘About us, our family?’

She nodded again.

I touched her hair. ‘There’s no need to be. I promise everything will be alright when we get back to England.’

She managed a smile. ‘Dad?’

This was the first time ever Fiona had addressed me as her dad. I ejected a breath of nervous joy. I didn’t want to jump to conclusions, but maybe, just maybe this meant she felt as close to me now as I had felt close to her ever since the near-car catastrophe on Katipunan, and that this mutual love would be the glue to keep the three of us together whatever the state of mine and Beth’s relationship was. ‘Yes Fiona?’

‘I’m hungry now.’

For lunch we found an organic restaurant that served incredible craft ale made in the Philippines and steamed *silaw* beans and *kammungay* leaves – local vegetables I’d

never seen before. Organic veg and craft ale? Had I somehow missed the gentrification of Manila?

‘What shall we do now, Dad?’

‘Whatever you want, darling.’

This time we both enjoyed an in-mall amusement park. And for once, after almost an hour of chucking basketballs, we actually won something – a teddy bear that Fiona christened Philip, after the Philippines.

‘Are you tired now?’ I asked her.

‘Nah,’ she said, trembling with hyperactivity. ‘Go somewhere else, yeah?’

At that moment Danilo texted me. ‘U still leaving us? Join me 4 music and poetry soon @ Night Owls Café on T Morato Avenue.’

We hopped in a taxi just before rush hour. Night Owls contained a black-carpeted stage and a crowd of literati dressed in black. Danilo came over to us with his daughter Jenilyn, who was perhaps a year older than Fiona. The two played ‘it’, weaving between the knees of tray-bearing waiters and musicians tuning instruments. At some point the teddy bear was discarded under a table.

‘Great how kids just hit it off like that,’ said Danilo.

‘“Heaven lies about in us in our infancy!”’ I said.

‘Wordsworth is *not* amongst my favourite British vocalists from the 1980s.’ We exchanged smirks. ‘So are you still leaving us, mate?’

Before I could answer, I had to double-take at the stage. Fiona was on it, clutching the mike with both hands, the young female compère staring at her with maternal adulation. ‘My dad is a writer and I want to be a writer when I am *growed up*,’ said Fiona to the crowd. ‘Here’s some poems what I have done.’ Her little eyes rolled in thought. ‘Bear, hair. Jump, bump. Right...’ Another roll of the eyes. ‘Light. Mean, seen. Run, done. Lop, pop. Tap, rap.’

I turned to Danilo slowly. ‘What did you say, mate?’

‘I think I know the answer already. You’re going back to the UK aren’t you?’

‘Yes I am. I can’t be apart from Fiona. I want to see her grow up. I love her as though she were my own flesh and blood.’

‘But she isn’t, Tom.’

‘So what? My grandad – the one who first got me interested in the Philippines – used to have this saying. I don’t know whether you have it too in Filipino English.’

‘What is it?’

“‘Blood is thicker than water.’”

‘What’s it mean?’

‘It means that people who are blood-related to you will always be more important than people who aren’t. I don’t buy it. And anyway, it was a bit rich coming from my grandad, a cranky old bastard who managed to alienate *all* his blood relations. I mean, think of all the poor abused children out there whose parents stub cigarettes out on their arms. That type of parent hardly stops to think, “Hang on, I shouldn’t do this because I share genes with that little, weak, vulnerable person.” On the other hand, I don’t have the genetic connection to Fiona that those bad parents do with their kids, but I have all the love and care and support in the world to give to her.’

Danilo patted my shoulder. ‘I get it, mate. But do you think you can stick it out with Beth?’

‘I have to try.’

‘You think it’s worth living a lie? Look what happened to me and Martha.’

‘For Fiona it’s worth it.’

‘You must really love her.’

‘Anyway, who doesn’t in some way live the lie of long-standing love? Can any couple who’s been married for more than a decade honestly say they are as close as they

were when they first met? My parents kidded themselves that they still loved each other for years before they had to admit, after a few too many chucked wine glasses, that divorce was the only solution.'

'You don't want to get to the stage of chucking wine glasses at Beth, though?'

'No. I may not love her – we may not love each other – but I think, I *hope* we can continue co-existing peacefully.'

'I hope you're right, Tom. It sounds like an hellacious balancing act, like getting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Good luck.'

To the audience's whoops and cries, Fiona came running from the stage over to us. 'Did you like that, Dad?'

'Beautiful.'

'Your couplets were terse,' said Danilo, 'but the crowd understood you just fine. Do come back.'

I looked to Fiona and she took my hand. 'Me and my dad might come back, okay Danilo?'

Fiona fell asleep as soon as she lay down across half the back seat of the taxi and placed her head against my thigh. My thoughts were a montage of the last six months. Faces from my work and from my personal life came and went in warp-speed – Fiona, Marcos, Mena, Beth, Danilo, Leopoldo. A writer tries to salvage some reason and consistency from the chaos of life; tries to make connections between disparate ideas, events and forces; tries to frame at least just a speck of this bizarre and exacting and infinite world. I didn't know if I'd achieved any of that. I did know that I'd changed a lot, though, personally and politically.

I'd taken a battering these last six months. I'd been shocked and upset and anxious and frightened. I'd questioned my own integrity as a writer and researcher. I'd

seen the easy, them-and-us theories of my student days tested time and again. I'd nearly died twice. Fiona had nearly died once. Mine and Beth's relationship was all but dead.

So what did I have to show for all this, now, on the eve of my return to the UK? Despite the battering, I'd take with me an awed admiration for many things in Manila. I'd never forget the resolute charm and politeness lavished on me. How often had hairy happenings been alleviated by an ice-breaking joke or compliment? Unlike the lonely crowds and competitive 'me-firstism' of Britain and the US, the Philippines was in many ways a more altruistic society – as evidenced by the saintly unpeople of Tondo and Trinidad Extension – that hadn't entirely lost sight of the proto-communism of the pre-Hispanic *barangay*. And, contrary to the horror stories about pederasts and traffickers crowding the Western media, Manileño adults treated children well – maybe even too well, judging from the adulation Fiona received wherever she went, whatever she did.

However, this cordiality and cooperativeness was far from the cutely stoical, put-up-with-any-old-oppression mind-set mooted by starry-eyed Western tourists. Many of the Manileños I'd met knew how to think critically and stand up for themselves when needed. Unlike Britain, where we'd been whingeing about the lack of a proper Left politics since the 1980s, Manila had plenty of brave, selfless activists devoted to the downtrodden, no matter the odds heaped against them. The ones I'd talked to were gracious and selfless in this enterprise, and at quite the opposite pole to J.M. Coetzee's conception of 'politics [as] too convenient and too attractive as a theatre in which to give play to our baser emotions[: ... ] hatred and rancour and spite and jealousy and bloodlust and so forth.'

But what else?

I looked down at Fiona as she slept. There it was – that puckish grin on her face again. I grinned too. Then I drifted off to dream happily about her and Manila.

## **Post-script: The Donald Trump of Asia**

After we returned to the UK and moved to Bristol for a ‘new start’, I tried hard to fall in love with Beth again. I took her out to dinner or the theatre whenever any of Fiona’s school friends’ parents offered to babysit. I booked us into Bristol Registry Office with the aspiration that getting married would heal the rifts between us that had opened up during our stay in Manila. I had to cancel when Beth said, ‘We need to give ourselves more time.’

It took me a long while to accept that a vital ingredient of our relationship – I’ll never know exactly what – had been lost in Manila. Beth, too, sometimes seemed mentally lost or stuck in Manila. She persistently blamed me for selfishly making the three of us continue to stay there against her and Fiona’s will. I thought this was unfair, but my saying so made no difference to her conviction.

More prosaic, day-to-day disputes arose. Beth scolded me for not doing enough chores around the house. I pointed out that I was busy bringing the only income into the family through copywriting for a California-based publisher and occasional lecturing at the University of Portsmouth. We hardly saw each other after the university upped my hours and the longer commute from Bristol to Portsmouth meant I had to get up two hours earlier than her and come home long after she’d gone to bed.

More happily, my relations with Fiona flourished. When Beth started attending weekend Open University classes in psychology, I’d take Fiona out to the children’s play area in the Bristol Museum or to St Nicholas Market for Nutella crêpes – Fiona’s ‘*bestest* food’. As always, there was laughter and silliness and comradeship. One chilly afternoon just before Christmas 2011, Fiona and I were sitting on the Sky View Ferris wheel in Anchor Square pointing at landmarks through the soupy fog. I mentioned to

Fiona that I wanted to write a book about Manila and that it would include interviews with people we'd met.

'Can you interview me, Dad?' she said. 'Please Dad! Pleaaaaase!'

'Of course, darling.'

I was touched one day to hear that Fiona's best friend's mum had said to Beth in her genially twangy West Country accent, 'Tom seems very natural with Fiona. He might as well be her *real* dad.'

The death knell sounded for Beth and I when she booked us on to a relationship counselling course. In the very first session we had a fuming row about whether or not to buy a new sofa.

On the bus home we decided to break up.

'What about Fiona?' I said.

'What do *you* want to happen?'

'To remain part of her life, naturally.'

'Of course you can.'

That evening, while I was sitting alone and silent in my study, Fiona walked in. She was silent too. We may both have been in light shock. She stood on the chair beside me and started rubbing my hair with both her palms. She then took out some items from her jeans pocket. I assumed they were keepsakes: a matchbox-sized furry toy poodle and the plastic moths I'd bought her in Davao. 'It's going to be alright, Fiona,' I said, trying to inhibit my tears. 'I promise I'll come and see you. We'll go out together, have fun.'

Beth was true to her word and, after I'd moved out, I was welcome to visit Fiona on evenings and weekends. While I felt tremendously guilty about my part in dismantling her relatively new family, I was a child of divorce myself and knew that the

child needn't suffer if the parents loved the child. And there was no question in my mind or heart that I'd always love Fiona.

One way of coping with this tectonic shift in my personal circumstances was to throw myself into my Manila book. In February 2014, I spotted a social media campaign calling for Rodrigo Duterte to stand in the 2016 Presidential elections. This must be a hoax, I said to myself.

At any rate, Duterte dismissed the idea, saying he was 'not qualified for higher office.' But then a year later, he revealed on his TV show that he was 'thinking hard' about entering the race after expressions of support from friends and family members. Three months after that came another U-turn: 'I am not running. Sorry.'

Then, on November 27<sup>th</sup>, less than two weeks before the deadline for nominations, he filed his certificate of candidacy. He promised to solve *all* crime in the Philippines using the hard-line methods he'd perfected in Davao. The fish of Manila Bay, he said, 'will grow fat' on the corpses of addicts and traffickers. He knew from decades of provincial hustings that such rhetoric would appeal to blue collar male voters – a key demographic in Philippine politics. So would his spectacularly un-PC wisecracks. 'I should have been first,' he said when asked by reporters about the rape and murder of an Australian priestess in Davao in 1989. He crowed about womanising while on Viagra: 'What am I supposed to do, let this hang forever?' He defended his wolf-whistling a woman journalist on the grounds of 'freedom of expression.'

All of which had echoes across the Pacific, where Donald Trump was embarking on his own shock-populist push for power, his crass gags and tirades aimed at women, Mexicans and other scapegoats endearing him to the disaffected, post-industrial American male. As with Trump, Duterte harnessed jingoism to laddish belligerence. When asked about the Philippines' territorial quarrel with China over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, he promised to 'ride a jet ski [there] while bringing the

Philippine flag.’ And, like Trump, each new controversy made observers think that this time, surely, he’d gone too far and made himself ‘unpresidentiable.’ But each time they were wrong.

Castigating the Catholic Church had been the one taboo left for Filipinos until Duterte said of Pope Francis’ visit in January 2015, ‘*Putang ina mo* (your mother is a whore), go home. Don’t visit here anymore.’ (I remembered Danilo telling me on my first night at Ride N Roll that *putang ina mo* was the worst possible insult in Tagalog). Unlike Trump, whose ratings slipped after his ‘grab them by the pussy’ howler, Duterte’s stock grew after this extraordinary salvo. Other notables he has since called sons of whores include President Obama and Philip Goldberg, US Ambassador to the Philippines.

Shortly after the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan David Duke endorsed Trump, Duterte hit a fresh nadir when he compared himself favourably to Adolf Hitler. ‘There are 3 million drug addicts (in the Philippines),’ he said. ‘I’d be happy to slaughter them. If Germany had Hitler, the Philippines would have...’ He gestured to himself.

But how spontaneous were these outbursts? Senator Alan Peter Cayetano held that Duterte was a ‘master strategist’ whose statements were carefully calculated to ‘provoke a discussion.’ There was evidence of shrewd planning, too, behind his choice of allies. To woo the right-wingers in the north, he spoke of his father’s friendship with Ferdinand Marcos and named Ferdinand’s son Bongbong as his running mate (Bongbong narrowly lost in the Vice-Presidential election that is a separate process to the Presidential contest). To entice the left, Duterte promised to appoint communists and members of the social democratic Bayan Muna Party to his cabinet. Southerners took to him because he proposed federalist devolution of power away from Manila and was on good terms with *Moro* chiefs.

If he did win – which surely he couldn't – I doubted Duterte could satisfy all of these people all of the time, so incompatible were their values and objectives.

Then, on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2016, Duterte did win with 39 percent of the vote, far ahead of his divided rivals. I flew to Manila to investigate.

Although Duterte was yet to be sworn in, the 'war on the poor', as Amnesty dubbed it, had already spread from Davao and out across the archipelago. In my first week in town, police shot dead fourteen putative drug dealers in stings in Manila and General Santos City. The cops claimed they acted in self-defence. This was to become a standard – and increasingly implausible – excuse.

Aside from fattening the fishes, at this stage I struggled to ascertain what Duterte's exact policies would be given his tendency not only to tell jokes but to flip-flop. Numerous times, I watched him on TV strut into midnight press conferences in a pink sports jacket – he'll never don the conventional politician's pin stripes – and make various assertions only to later on retract them or say he didn't really mean them. He pulled away from a confrontation with Beijing over the Spratlys: 'ties [with China] have never been cold [...] I would rather be friendly.' After appearing to justify the assassination of 'corrupt' reporters, he then claimed, 'I do not condone nor tolerate killing of journalists.' After his press office released an apology for the rape remarks, Duterte said he wasn't in fact sorry at all. However, he did apologise to the Pope and has stood by it.

'We have no way of telling what is true and what is not,' an exasperated editor at CNN Philippines complained to me.

By the time I went back to Manila in August 2017, around 10,000 people had allegedly been killed in anti-narcotics operations. I contacted the Philippine National Police for some insights into how the operations were plotted and effected. They didn't respond.

I read about the case of seventeen-year-old Kian Delos Santos. A shy student who liked cheese-flavoured crisps, Santos was arrested by two plain clothes cops at his home in Caloocan, a deprived suburb of Manila, beaten up and dragged into a *cul-de-sac* with a disused pig sty in it. According to eyewitnesses and CCTV footage, the cops blindfolded Kian and put a loaded .45 calibre pistol in his left hand. They didn't know that Kian was right-handed. 'Sir, can I go home now?' he pleaded. 'My father must be looking for me. I have an exam tomorrow.'

A cop told him to fire the gun in the air. He did so. 'Now start running,' said the cop.

Kian started running. The cops shot him. They planted two sachets of crystal meth on his corpse and told their superiors Kian had fired at them first.

Duterte met Kian's parents and expressed his condolences. 'Bring those policemen who are involved in Kian's killing to jail,' he demanded. In this instance the policemen involved have been charged, but hundreds of others continue to kill with impunity.

Thirty-two-year-old Rogie Sebastian was mowed down by masked men at his home while his family begged for his life. Uniformed police arrived at the scene and allowed the masked men to escape on a motorbike. Ogie Sumangue, nineteen, was found riddled with bullets, a .45 automatic in his hand. Given that his sister paid his rent for him, no-one in his *barangay* believed he could afford a gun.

Why would lawmen all over the Philippines frame palpably innocent people in the shabbiest fashion, especially when there were enough authentic crooks to catch? My CNN contact, who'd received emails and phone calls from anonymous sources inside the police and judiciary, told me the motive was above all financial. 'There are cash rewards for police officers and the civilian hitmen they employ. You get 20,000 pesos (£294) for a small-time pusher or user – there is no discrimination between the two –

and 1-5 million pesos (£14,700-£73,500) for a kingpin distributor. Thieves, fraudsters and sex offenders are worth 10,000 pesos (£147) apiece.’

In a country where the average citizen earns 14,651 pesos (£215) a month, bounty hunting must be a temptation, particularly if you have no conscience and everyone around you is doing the same and getting away with it.

10,000 ‘salvaged’ – as the Philippine-English slang had it – in just one year was 7,000 more than had succumbed to the Marcos junta between 1965 and 1986. Duterte harked back to Marcos in other ways too. He declared Martial Law across Mindanao after the Maute, an ISIS-affiliated terror cell, occupied Marawi City, taking a Catholic priest and 200 others hostage. Since then, Duterte has been warning he will expand Martial Law to the entire country to stamp out what he calls a ‘foreign invasion’ of terrorists.

Duterte’s father Vicente would have been proud of Rody’s decision to give Marcos’ embalmed remains a ‘hero’s burial’ in the National Military Cemetery. On September 11th 2017 – Marcos’ 100th birthday, if he’d lived that long – I stood outside the cemetery’s gates with a CNN Philippines anchor and cameramen while dignitaries, their identities hidden by the blacked-out windows of their cars, attended a mass in his honour. Walking out of the cemetery’s driveway, I found myself five metres away from a man in a red crash helmet as he snatched a banner from a protestor. ‘Marcos was a great man!’ he yelled in Tagalog, a CNN cameraman translating for me. ‘In his day, the Philippines had prestige in the world!’ The protestor lunged back, trying to retrieve his banner. Having failed to figure out which VIPs were driving in to the mass, the media were desperate for a story and formed an impenetrable scrum around the two men.

When he heard about larger demonstrations planned for ten days later, Duterte reversed his attitude to Marcos. Once a ‘hero’, he was, now, suddenly, guilty of ‘gross human rights violations, arbitrary state interventions, rampant corruption, and disregard

of fundamental civil liberties.’ Vicente wouldn’t have been so proud to hear that from his son.

I tried to arrange an interview with the President through the Malacañang Palace. As with the police, I never heard back. Duterte seemed to have lost all patience with Western scrutiny. He’d just changed his mind a third time about the status of journalists – ‘You won’t be killed if you don’t do anything wrong’ – which disturbed the United Nations Special Rapporteur Cristof Heyns: ‘A message of this nature amounts to incitement to violence and killing, in a nation already ranked as the second-deadliest country for journalists.’

To which Duterte replied, ‘Fuck you, UN, you can’t even solve the Middle East carnage [...] couldn’t even lift a finger in Africa [...] shut up all of you.’ Later, when the EU condemned his talk of reintroducing the death penalty, Duterte lashed out at France and Britain’s ‘gall’ – their old empires had slaughtered ‘thousands of Arabs’ and were nowadays ‘Western nations bullying small nations’. In his State of the Nation Address, he gave tribute to ‘the gallantry and heroism of our forebears’ who fought in the Philippine-American War and demanded the US hand back three church bells its troops looted after torching the village of Balangiga in 1901. When the US State Department expressed ‘concerns’ about the drug war, Duterte countered that, in the US today, ‘black people are being shot even when they are lying down.’

Coming from a more principled statesman, such critiques of First World double standards would be legitimate. But if Duterte steams up about Ferguson or Libya when a *Channel 4 News* man tries to pin him down on the death squads, it’s not that he cares about global paradigms of accountability – he wants to distract us from his own foul acts.

When I put this to a particularly intelligent taxi driver, who’d just been awarded an MSc in Political Science but hadn’t yet been able to find a white collar job, he said,

‘You should understand, Sir Tom, that Duterte would not be able to say such things to the West if the West hadn’t bombed, burned and dominated countries like the Philippines over the years.’

While I was in Manila this time, I was intrigued to see Duterte open up about his personal strife, although it smacked of a cynical ploy designed to garner sympathy from his critics. He announced that he’d been sexually molested at his Jesuit-run high school by the disgraced American pastor Paul Halvey. ‘How would you complain?’ Duterte said. ‘We were afraid.’ But was this just another self-serving fabrication? If not, it was surely one more formative event – along with getting whipped senseless by his mother – in the brutalisation of the man. In an eerie parallel with Marcos’ own early homicide of his dad’s small-town rival, Duterte confessed to having shot and wounded a fellow student at San Beda College of Law in 1972. The claim is unproven.

I asked Danilo, whose wife and daughter were now living in Singapore, how long Duterte could last. ‘We need a new People Power Revolution,’ he replied. It wasn’t a far-fetched notion, as Duterte’s approval rating had sunk by eighteen points over the first year of his term. He’d also made high-ranking enemies in Congress, the Church, the armed forces and organised crime. The Philippines’ biggest drug lords had all donated to a 50 million peso (about £750,000) bounty on his head. If you live by a Wild West code you might in the end die by it.

After seeing Danilo, I was reunited with some of the activists I’d met in 2009-10. Their angles on the current malaise varied. The comfort women campaigner Josefina Jurado said, ‘It is not as though the salvaging started in the Philippines the day Duterte took office. No, we had them with Aquino and Arroyo and Marcos. All our premiers, actually. The danger of personalising the resistance, of saying “if we can only eject Duterte then things will be hunky-dory once more”, misses the structural problems of our society: the poverty, the inequality, the democratic deficit.’

She then drew an analogy with the US. ‘The issue there is not just the one man, Trump. These issues of racism and sexism and fascism have been brewing in the US for centuries. The liberals there are pining for Obama and the Clintons, when apparently all was well. They forget that these leaders were almost as bad. They only got away with it because they used the language of civil rights and equality.’

Her arguments were reasonable. Mehdi Hasan has found that Obama ‘deported 2.5 million people – more than every single US president of the twentieth century combined.’ In addition to his drone programme, Obama extended the Afghan war, retained troops in Iraq and air-raided Syria and Libya. According to Michelle Alexander, Bill and Hillary Clinton ‘embraced former president Ronald Reagan’s agenda on race, crime, welfare, and taxes – ultimately doing more harm to black communities than Reagan ever did.’ The Clintons, too, had an attachment to attacking punier nations like Haiti, Serbia, Somalia and Sudan, in which thousands died outside of due process.

‘My view,’ continued Josefina, ‘is that the unelected institutions in any society are more powerful than elected figureheads like Trump and Duterte. Primarily, we are talking about business. Then there is the media, the education system, state religions. These must be dismantled before real change can come. Real change cannot come from marking a ballot paper.’

I had tea again with Mena Zaldivar, the veteran of the anti-Marcos movement. ‘Next to Duterte,’ she quipped, ‘Marcos is like Martin Luther King!’ But then she added in a sullen tenor, ‘Duterte has destroyed years of progress, years of good work by me and others in human rights, in land reform, in pro-poor initiatives. We travelled so far and now we are going backward.’

‘What can be done?’ I asked.

‘As always, we will fight.’

And Filipinos are still fighting. Since my last visit there have been hundreds of demos and vigils for the victims, some led by former Liberal Party President Benigno ‘Ninoy’ Aquino and socialist ex-Senator Teddy Casiño. Retired police chiefs have blown the whistle on the machinations of salvaging. On November 10th 2017, the eve of Trump’s official visit to the Philippines, Manila riot police scrapped with red-clad demonstrators chanting ‘fascist!’ and ‘fight US imperialism and plunder!’ As oblivious to this as he has been to every other rebuke of him, Trump congratulated Duterte on his ‘unbelievable job on the drug problem.’

When the men had dinner, another bizarre and cringeworthy incident occurred. In a not-too-terrible voice, Duterte sang to Trump these words: ‘You are the light in my world, a half of this heart of mine.’

A few days later, it was the tenth anniversary of my grandad’s death. The occasion prompted me to wonder what he would have thought and felt had he walked in my shoes in modern-day Manila. Though he was sometimes brusque with children, I would like to have introduced him to Fiona – I’m sure she’d have charmed him. Proud, illiberal and quick-tempered, Grandad might have found common ground with Duterte, Marcos and the other alpha males I’d researched. On the other hand, he’d have dismissed idealists like Mena as spineless pinkos. But, whether he’d been to Manila in 1940 or in the early twenty-first century, as I had, the city would have become a potent preoccupation and a subject for continual debate. For that abiding passion, at least, I owe Grandad a lasting debt.

# *Searching for Manila: Critical Commentary*

## **Introduction**

In its merging of dramatic, character-driven storytelling, based on my lived experiences of people and places, with broader analysis of social, cultural and political phenomena rooted in data researched from other texts, *Searching for Manila* conforms to one of the oldest conventions of the literary travelogue in which writers ‘freely mix ... narrative and discursive’<sup>1</sup> styles and ‘mix ... exposition, description, narration’.<sup>2</sup> Other formal characteristics of my book, such as its mobilisation of ‘landscape portraiture’ and ‘comedy’, would also place it firmly in the travel idiom.<sup>3</sup> However, in other respects *Searching for Manila* is, in both its form and content, profoundly and consciously dissimilar to the vast majority of narratives Westerners have penned about Manila since the 1840s.

Part 1 of this commentary outlines the representational models and ideological sensibilities of these Western texts with regard to their relationship to the precepts of Orientalist discourses, as developed by Edward Said and others. Part 2 analyses some of the linguistic, rhetorical and narrative strategies underpinning Manilaism’s ideological assumptions and explains how *Searching for Manila* contests them by employing methods I have gleaned from a range of oppositional Western and post-colonial creative writers, and from the literary critics Debbie Lisle, Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund.

## **Part 1**

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Raban, *For Love & Money: Writing-Reading-Travelling 1968-1987* (London: Picador, 1988), pp. 253-4.

<sup>2</sup> Kári Gíslason, ‘Travel Writing’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. by David Morley and Philip Neilsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 87-101 (p. 87).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

## 1. Defining Manilaism

The objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel; thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prisonlike or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here.<sup>4</sup>

In his pioneering study *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said uses the above analogy to illustrate his concept of an ‘imaginative geography’ of ‘a geographical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unit called the Orient’<sup>5</sup> that, since the fourteenth century, has been ‘made by the mind[s]’ of European writers and scholars labouring under the hypothesis that ‘both their [the Orientals’] territory and their mentality are [...] different from “ours”.’<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Said argues that Orientalist representations of the Orient are defined by ‘typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation,’<sup>7</sup> and that, by the 1800s, the Orientalist project came to be ‘tinged and impressed with’ the project of European empire-building in Asia and Africa: ‘an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies.’<sup>8</sup>

While in *Orientalism* Said’s critical purview encompasses mainly French and British discursive constructions of North Africa and the Middle East, in the almost forty years since the book was first published, others have adapted its theoretical framework to cross-examine imaginative geographies relating to the Indian Subcontinent, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and Latin America. In the same spirit, this critical commentary applies some of the paradigms of Orientalist discourse analysis to a tradition of signifying practices related to a part of the world largely overlooked by

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Peregrine Books, 1985), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

scholars working in Said's slipstream.<sup>9</sup> My object of enquiry is what I term 'Manilaism', a trajectory of Anglo-American writing on Manila from 1842 – the date of the first Manilaist text by the US Navy officer Charles Wilkes<sup>10</sup> – to 2012 – the date of the most recent by the British memoirist Duncan Alexander MacKenzie<sup>11</sup> – which imagines the city as a textual space founded on a number of (neo-)imperialist, (neo-)colonialist and ethnocentric assumptions. As with other Orientalisms, these assumptions derive from 'the project and practice of colonial modernity [...] constituting and generated by a specific historical discourse of knowledge articulated with the operation of political power'.<sup>12</sup>

While my approach is indebted to Said, my methodology also draws upon the work of others who, since Said, have tracked the long-term evolution of metropolitan literary perceptions of peripheral urban sites. Just as Western visitors to Manila in the US colonial period such as the American literary journalist George A. Miller praise the city's modernity, rational planning and rapid development ('it has joined the ranks of the world's big business centres'),<sup>13</sup> so, according to Jonathan Crush, European life writing portrays Johannesburg, South Africa in its early days as a utopian metropolis of industrial progress. However, after the decline of 'Euroimperial' influence after 1930 (the Union of South Africa gained independence from Britain in 1931), Johannesburg is

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<sup>9</sup> The few who have engaged with Manila include Andrew Pagan, 'From the Darkness to the Family: Evolving Orientalist Representations of the Katipunan in Euro-American Travel Literature, 1899-1917,' *The Forum: Journal of History*, 4 (2012); Raymundo C. Iletto, *Knowledge and Pacification: On the US Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017); Walton J. Netzorg, 'The Philippines in Mass-Market Novels', in *Asia in Western Fiction*, ed. by Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), Meg Wesling, *Empire's Proxy: American Literature and US Imperialism in the Philippines* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) and David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism & Imperialism in the Philippines* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), who has coined the term 'American Orientalism' to describe paintings, photographs and other semiotic repertoires that upheld a US imperialist attitude to the Philippines around the turn of the twentieth century. Part 2 of this commentary incorporates some of these writers' observations into my own research into Manilaism.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Travel Accounts of the Islands (1832-58)* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Duncan Alexander MacKenzie, *The Unlucky Country: The Republic of the Philippines in the 21st Century* (Balboa Press: Carlsbad, 2012), Amazon Kindle edition

<sup>12</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), p. 383.

<sup>13</sup> George A. Miller, *Interesting Manila* (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1929), p. 9.

limned as a dystopian site of ethnic discord and economic catastrophe.<sup>14</sup> Much the same can be said of travel books by DeLouis Stevenson, P.J. O'Rourke<sup>15</sup> and others concerning Manila after it achieved formal independence from the US in 1946.

I have not exclusively embraced the approach of Said and Crush. Critics including Aijaz Ahmad, Kenan Malik<sup>16</sup> and Mathieu E. Courville have acknowledged a tension between Said's 'social constructivism and his epistemological realism' which causes him to oscillate between post-structuralist claims about the inherent instability of all linguistic apprehensions of reality and a more materialist perspective that evaluates the truth status of Orientalist propositions about the Orient.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in Benita Parry's view, Said and those other pioneers of post-colonial theory, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, advance 'an essentially textualist account of culture'<sup>18</sup> that fixates on the 'discursive violence' of signifying practices to the detriment of interrogating the repressive colonial apparatuses that produce such discursive violence.<sup>19</sup> Informed by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's research into the 'philological' and 'reflective' disciplines of literary criticism in which 'The historical context of a literary work [...] is integral to a proper understanding of it' and 'Literary works [...] help us to understand the time in which they are set',<sup>20</sup> I have tried to reconcile the textualist and materialist modes by offering close readings of the tropes and techniques of Manilaist texts while positing their affiliations with the wider social, political and economic conditions of their periods of origin. This could be a boundless, endless exercise, of course – indeed, an entire monograph could be written about, say,

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Crush, 'Gazing on Apartheid: Post-colonial Travel Narratives of the Golden City', in *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon and the New Jerusalem*, ed. by Peter Preston and Paul Simpson (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), pp. 257-271 (pp. 258-261).

<sup>15</sup> DeLouis Stevenson, *Land of the Morning* (St Louis: The Bethany Press, 1956); P.J. O'Rourke, *Holidays in Hell* (New York: Vintage, 1989; repr. New York: Grove, 2012), Amazon Kindle edition.

<sup>16</sup> Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 81; Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 164-180.

<sup>17</sup> Mathieu E. Courville, *Edward Said's Rhetoric of the Secular* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Pearson Education Limited, 2004), pp. 112-13.

the confluence of material-historical forces undergirding just one American author's slur against the Chinese-Filipinos in 1929. Thus, due to the limited space at my disposal, my critique is necessarily brief, although I hope it will at least give the reader some sense of the complex interplay between the world and its literary epiphenomena. Furthermore, by invoking Parry's method of 'intertextual confirmation'<sup>21</sup> – wherein the validity of a data source is established by comparing it to other relevant sources – I have questioned the credibility of Manilaist adumbrations with reference to Western and Filipino texts that, in Walter D. Mignolo's formulation, can be termed 'decolonial' because they defy Manilaists' reactionary and condescending premises.<sup>22</sup>

I have used several criteria to designate and delimit Manilaist texts. Firstly, given that the creative element of my PhD thesis is a travel narrative with discursive aspects set in Manila, it ought to be situated in a canon of Manila-focused books with the same attribute so that correlations and contrasts can be more appropriately made. I have chosen to consider texts that reflect on the city of Manila rather than other regions of the country because the vast majority of Anglo-American writing on the Philippines has focused to some degree or other on the capital city, and much of it exclusively so. These authors' preoccupations with the city can be ascribed to its significance to Philippine, Southeast Asian and world history. Manila was in many respects the site in which certain pivotal junctures occurred in the history of Western imperialism, amongst them the extinction of the Spanish Empire before the ascendancy of the US to global imperial hegemony. The city was also a strategic desideratum for both sides in the Pacific theatre of World War II and underwent such heavy fighting that, by February 1945, 'an American investigation team thought Manila was the second most devastated city after Warsaw'.<sup>23</sup> During the Cold War, when the Philippines shifted from being an official US possession to a significant subject of America's 'informal empire ... shown

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<sup>21</sup> Parry, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> José S. Arcilla, *An Introduction to Philippine History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), p. 124.

up by military bases, economic pressures and military coups',<sup>24</sup> Manila became the epitome of a Third World urban space in the clutches of 'dollar-imperialism', both as a font of profitable human and natural resources and as a market for US-manufactured commodities.<sup>25</sup> From the late twentieth century up to the present day, Manila has been something of a bellwether for what Niall Ferguson has determined as 'the descent of the West' and the 'reorientation of the world'<sup>26</sup> towards Asia; the city's economic ties to the US and Europe have loosened as the Philippines has established trading relationships with China, Japan, South Korea and other emerging regional economic powers.

If some texts are omitted from the Manilaist frame due to their geographical scope, so others must be by reason of their authors' national allegiances and attendant political convictions. Although the specific attributes of Anglo-American Manilism are discussed at length below, at this point it may be useful to summarise what distinguishes these writers from their Spanish, Russian and German counterparts. Whereas British and American writers routinely make uncompromising value judgements about issues of ethnicity, culture, class, religion, labour, enterprise, human development and governmental protocols, a plethora of Spanish letters, news articles, histories and journal entries from the late sixteenth to late nineteenth centuries (collected in the anthology *Colonial Accounts* (2011); the archives of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), the Philippines' oldest university; and in John Newsome Crossley's recent study *The Dasmariñases, Early Governors of the Spanish Philippines* (2016))<sup>27</sup> provide relatively constative descriptions of military or missionary expeditions to outlying

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<sup>24</sup> Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Romein, *The Asian Century: A History of Modern Nationalism in Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York and London: Penguin, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> National Historical Commission of the Philippines, *Colonial Accounts* (Manila: New Day, 2011); John Newsome Crossley, *The Dasmariñases, Early Governors of the Spanish Philippine* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016)

provinces and of the administrative niceties of the colonial church and state.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Anglo-American Manilaist writing – at least from the 1840s until 1898 – is full of often frank opprobrium towards Spanish rule and the archaic, under-developed society it has produced. This, as I state in greater depth below, is a corollary of British and American imperial ambitions on the Philippines that were to culminate in the amphibious invasion of Manila by the US in May 1898.

However, some early Spanish observers promulgate hetero-stereotypes about Malay-Filipinos and Chinese-Filipinos that later Anglo-American writers will repurpose for their own ideological ends. Writing in 1570, Miguel López de Legazpi, the founder of Spanish Manila and the first Governor of the Philippines, conceives of the indigenes as unacceptably blithe about the crucial task of gold-mining: ‘Thus does their idleness surpass their covetousness’.<sup>29</sup> The Filipino Marxist historian Renato Constantino accounts for Legazpi’s bigotry by noting that mineral wealth extraction was of no economic value to the subsistence agricultural societies of Luzon island at that time, and that indifference to gold-mining had less to do with idleness than with ‘the absence of an exploitative class as such.’<sup>30</sup> There was a religious as well as an economic logic behind this early superciliousness towards the natives due to, as Luis H. Francia puts it, ‘the imperative of gaining converts to the Catholic faith’ that fostered a ‘keeping the Filipinos in line’ attitude from the Spanish establishment.<sup>31</sup> Three centuries later, the Spanish literary journalist Pablo Feced Temprano, who owned a farm in the Casmarines Sur province and was a regular visitor to Manila in the 1880s, smeared members of the Tagalog ethnic group as both ‘indolent’ and so pagan that it would be difficult to

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<sup>28</sup> The oldest text held in UST’s Miguel de Benavides Library, *Relaciones de Pedro Teixeira del Origen, Descendencia y Succession de los Reyes de Persia y de Harmuz* (1610), only makes brief mention of the Philippines. A 1691 text by Raymundo Berart analyses the accomplishments of the then Archbishop of Manila, Phelipe Pardo. Eighteenth century Spanish holdings offer relatively uncritical descriptions of government initiatives such as the establishment of a hospice for beggars and prostitutes in Manila.

<sup>29</sup> Miguel López de Legazpi, quoted in Renato Constantino, *A History of the Philippines: From Spanish Colonization to the Second World War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, p. 67.

‘elevate [them] [...] to the height of the most cultured and civilised people.’<sup>32</sup> There was sectarian ire towards other subcultures too. As J. Neil Garcia has indicated, the Spanish were equally scornful of the *Sangleys* (early non-Christianised Chinese immigrants to Manila), branding them sexual deviants because ‘the damning attitude of the Catholic Church in the Philippines toward homosexuality’ was ‘conflated with (xenophobic) issues of race.’<sup>33</sup> A further rationale for the demonisation, argues Edgar Wickberg, was Spanish suspicions about the predominance of male Chinese immigrants in the *Sangley* ghetto of Parián, as few Chinese women settled in the Philippines at that time.<sup>34</sup> The homosexuality slight vanishes from the discourse by the mid-seventeenth century and is not appropriated by later Anglo-American imaginative geographies. Instead, as we shall see later, such texts remodel the Chinese-Filipinos via their professional activities and economic positionality.

At any rate, testimonies such as Legazpi’s and Feced’s are rare. If, as John Newsome Crossley notes, there is a ‘blind spot’ in Spanish colonial historiography then there is an equivalent paucity of primary narrative sources from the Spanish era.<sup>35</sup> The central reason for this, according Paul A. Kramer, is the Spanish Empire’s ‘stunning metropolitan ignorance of the archipelago’ and its concomitant reluctance to extract both cultural artefacts and natural specimens for placement in Spanish museums;<sup>36</sup> a disposition that stands in marked contradistinction to the thirst for knowledge-as-power that galvanised American economists, botanists, sociologists, anthropologists and ‘race scientists’ to exhaustively investigate the Philippines after the brutal and ‘genocidal’

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<sup>32</sup> Pablo Feced Temprano, quoted in Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> J. Neil Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p. 387.

<sup>34</sup> Edgar Wickberg, ‘Anti-Sinicism and Chinese Identity Options in the Philippines’, in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, ed. by Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 153-183 (p. 157).

<sup>35</sup> Crossley, p. ix.

<sup>36</sup> Kramer, p. 51.

annexation of the islands by the US in 1898-1902.<sup>37</sup> Whereas American intellectual interest produced copious popular books on the territory, Spanish apathy produced notably few.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the UK was the Philippines' top trading partner and the US was increasing its imports of cash crops,<sup>38</sup> curiosity about the Philippines amongst Anglo-American readers was greater than in their counterparts in Germany, France, Russia and other nations with weaker economic links with the archipelago, as travelogues of the era like *Recollections of Manilla and the Philippines During 1848, 1849 and 1850* (1851) by the British merchant Robert MacMicking imply. 'I have attempted', writes MacMicking, 'to give some idea of the actual state and prospects of this valuable colony ... with the ... object of directing more attention to these islands than has been hitherto paid to them by our merchants and manufacturers.'<sup>39</sup> Considerably more material on Manila was published in the US and UK than anywhere else in the world; of fourteen Manila-oriented memoirs, novels, and travelogues released between 1859 and 1900 now located in the UST archives, only one originated outside of the US or UK. The Filipinas Heritage Library of the Ayala Museum holds fifty-eight books written by foreigners dating from 1850 to 1900 and that reference Manila to a greater or lesser extent, only three of which were published beyond the US and UK.<sup>40</sup>

Those few eighteenth and nineteenth century chronicles of Manila published outside the US and UK are typically more sanguine about their authors' encounters with people and places. In 1852-5, the Russian novelist and civil servant Ivan Goncharov travelled the world in his capacity as a naval secretary. As he is sailing into Manila

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<sup>37</sup> Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 99.

<sup>38</sup> Constantino, pp. 113-16.

<sup>39</sup> Robert MacMicking, *Recollections of Manilla and the Philippines During 1848, 1849 and 1850* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> Filipinas Heritage Library, 'Filipinas Heritage Library Catalogue', <<http://opac.filipinaslibrary.org.ph/>> [accessed 7 December 2017].

harbour in February 1854, Goncharov is seized by ‘a pleasant feeling of curiosity’<sup>41</sup> about the distant church bells he can hear and, later on, when he has set foot in the fortified Spanish quarter of Intramuros, is admiring of the ecclesiastical architecture therein.<sup>42</sup> These impressions deviate considerably from the habitual vilification of the Roman Catholic Church by his British and American contemporaries, as we will see later. Although Goncharov concurs with the Anglo-American Manilaist assumption that Spanish power is inexorably declining, he does not, as per the Britons and the Americans, regard this state of affairs as an opportunity for usurpation by another empire or as evidence that Manila is a failed city in a failed state:

On my way to Manila I thought, truth to tell, that the spirit of a fallen, impoverished power would blow on me that I should see desolation and a lack of strictness and order – in a word, the poetry of disintegration. But I was amazed by the well-organized appearance of the town and its cleanliness.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike UK and US visitors to Manila in the same era, Goncharov refrains from economically or commercially assaying the city and his elaborate renderings of its ‘beautiful’ (a recurring adjective throughout his text) outskirts appear to be driven by an artist’s yearning for ‘magnificence and ... poetry’<sup>44</sup> rather than an imperialist knowledge-gatherer’s exaltation of ‘landscape aesthetics’ as an ulterior rationale for land-grabbing.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Goncharov is notably nuanced about questions of race and ethnicity, and – in a gesture that is commendably ahead of its time – is inclined to deconstruct the stereotypes that Anglo-American Manilaism takes to be immutably natural: “‘Why indeed,’ I thought, ‘should a Chinese not have fair hair and a red nose just like a European?’”<sup>46</sup> Rather than inciting scorn or anxiety, such cultural and demographic ‘incongruities ... very much aroused my curiosity.’<sup>47</sup> Moreover, a note of

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<sup>41</sup> Ivan Goncharov, *The Voyage of the Frigate Pallada* (London: Folio Society, 1965), p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Post-colonial Explorations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 92.

<sup>46</sup> Goncharov, p. 234.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

compassionate pathos rings out in Goncharov's observations of dehumanised *indio* natives: 'they looked exactly like some sort of victuals put out for show between sides of mutton and gammons of ham.'<sup>48</sup>

Goncharov's more balanced analyses of the church, the colonial establishment, the architecture of Intramuros and Manila's social *mélange* could have been motivated by several dynamics. He was a radical political liberal and a supporter of the Russian Decembrist movement which stood for republicanism, social equality and the replacement of feudalism with public ownership of the land.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, his own nation – of which he was a loyal servant – had no interventionist designs on the Philippines and therefore no vested interest in the outcome of the rivalries hatching in the power vacuum opening up as Spanish authority crumbled.

While the German ethnologist and explorer Fedor Jagor's *Travels in the Philippines* (1875) is harsher than Goncharov towards the 'uneducated, improvident, and extravagant Spaniards,'<sup>50</sup> it is closer to Goncharov's sensibilities when it eulogises the 'wonderfully gentle' Spanish laws.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, that 'it would be difficult to find a colony in which the natives, taken in all, feel more comfortable than in the Philippines' is due, Jagor avers, to the 'uncivilised inhabitants' having 'quickly adopted the rights, forms and ceremonies' of Catholicism.<sup>52</sup> Like Goncharov, Jagor's respect – though qualified – for Spanish governance and his disinclination to appraise Manila as a potential possession is partly determined by the fact that his mother empire had only a minor presence in Asia in the 1870s and would not express an interest in the Philippines until the Spanish-American War two decades later.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>49</sup> Sergei Mashinsky, *The Works of I.A. Goncharov in Six Volumes* (Moscow: Pravda, 1972), pp. 3-54.

<sup>50</sup> Fedor Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Volker Schult, 'Revolutionaries and Admirals: The German East Asia Squadron in Manila Bay,' *Philippine Studies*, 50 (2002), 496-511 (p. 501).

If Manilaist texts can be so-designated according to their British and American provenance, they also have certain formal and generic affinities with one another. Whereas in *Orientalism* Said engages with what he admits is a ‘broadly construed “field”’ of ‘theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts’,<sup>54</sup> my focus is somewhat narrower: on popular literary genres – mostly memoirs, travelogues and novels – many of which, though not all, combine narrative and discursive writing by blending a first-person record of the author’s travels in Manila with researched facts, statistics, anecdotes and rumours about the city. More importantly, these genres have been the Anglo-American public’s main source of information about Manila, and the novels in particular have, according to Morton J. Netzorg, ‘appealed to a mass audience’ and had ‘some chance of shaping American public ideas or impressions about the Philippines.’<sup>55</sup> In addition to prose fiction, Western colonialist travelogues about Asia, Africa and Latin America have, so argues Debbie Lisle, a special capacity for ‘disseminating the goals of empire’ because ‘stories of ‘faraway lands’ were crucial in establishing the unequal, unjust and exploitative relations of colonial rule.’<sup>56</sup> As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan contend, such travel narratives textually produce the non-European world according to Western fixations i.e. the Congo was for Joseph Conrad ‘a mirror to the dark side of the soul’<sup>57</sup> and the Amazon was regarded as a ‘happy hunting ground’ by plucky adventurers.<sup>58</sup> Nineteenth century autobiographical travel writing (which constitutes the majority of early- to mid-Manilaist texts) was particularly effective in this enterprise because it reached a capacious audience and, as Said avers of analogous travelogues on the Near East, ‘contributed to the density of public awareness

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<sup>54</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> Netzorg, pp. 175-195 (p. 175).

<sup>56</sup> Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

of the Orient'.<sup>59</sup> I have excluded a number of reference books, scientific studies and other specialist works from the Manilaist trajectory because they neither belong to the popular genres mentioned nor conform to the narrative-meets-discursive criterion.

The functions and intentions of Manilaist novels, memoirs and travelogues vary immensely. For example, the political pundit Walter Robb's *The Khaki Cabinet and Old Manila* (1926) uses the format of a travel chronicle to chastise – albeit from a liberal reformist rather than anti-colonial position – the American political class's dubious assertion that the Philippines is 'a United States possession, colony or what not' when in fact 'these islands are territory of the United States',<sup>60</sup> while Edward Stratemeyer, author of the children's adventure novel *The Campaign of the Jungle* (1900), declares in his introduction that he hopes his fictional portrait of the Philippine-American War will have a 'general usefulness [...] from a historical standpoint.'<sup>61</sup> Other texts, such as *United States Colonies and Dependencies Illustrated* (1914) by William D. Boyce,<sup>62</sup> are self-professed taxonomies of architecture, urban districts, ethnic groups and political and civic structures, if heavily infused with personal anecdote. However these books may differ superficially with regard to their style, structure or aims, they share enough of the same social, political and cultural postulations to together constitute an imaginative geography of Manila in the sense that Said means in his *Orientalism* thesis. For him, it matters less that Lord Byron wrote poetry, Karl Marx treatises on political economy or Edward William Lane lexicographical guides, and more that these authors viewed the Orient through the lens of – to one extent or another – Western superiority. The same is true of the Manilaist sub-species of Orientalism.

## 2. Manilaist Significations: An Historical Overview

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<sup>59</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Robb, *The Khaki Cabinet and Old Manila* (Manila: Sugar News Press, 1926), p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Stratemeyer, *The Campaign of the Jungle or Under Lawton through Luzon* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1900), p. iv.

<sup>62</sup> William D. Boyce, *United States Colonies and Dependencies Illustrated* (New York: Rand McNally)

I now want to examine several representational tropes deployed in Manilaist literature that can roughly be divided into two categories: constructions of Manila as a built urban environment and hetero-stereotypes of Manila's socio-ethnic groups. In the materialist mode, I trace the progression of these tropes against the background of social, political and economic events, in Manila and beyond, over the last three centuries. Although I reserve the bulk of my critiques of these tropes – and the literary techniques that enable them – for Part 2 of this essay, in this sub-section I do, where relevant, challenge their validity and reliability by utilising Parry's method of intertextual confirmation and Mignolo's delineation between imperial and decolonial sources.

Manilaism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when Britain and France were expanding their influence in Africa and Asia while the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Spanish empires were disintegrating. Indeed, as early as 1624 the British intellectual Francis Bacon was drawing attention to 'the brittle State of the Greatness of Spain.'<sup>63</sup> Britain occupied Manila in 1762-4 during the Seven Years' War, Portugal annexed Spain's West African colonies in 1778 and the US captured West Florida and parts of Louisiana in 1819. By 1865, all of Spain's colonies in Latin America save Cuba and Puerto Rico had gained their independence. In the Philippine context, the Cavite Mutiny of 1872 was the fifth significant anti-Spanish revolt to have occurred that century.<sup>64</sup>

These blows to Spanish imperial authority inspire a consensus in Manilaist literature of the mid- to late-nineteenth century that Spain is losing its grip on the Philippines through a combination of anachronistic economic policies, administrative incompetence and atavistic religiosity. Some early Manilaist representations of Spanish Manila strike a cautious balance. In order to justify the supplanting of Spain by another empire, a variety of British and American novelists and life writers, chastise Spanish rule, implying that a dynamic new foreigner-led administration would bring social

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<sup>63</sup> Francis Bacon, quoted in Constantino, p. 109.

<sup>64</sup> Constantino, pp. 133-42.

reform, economic liberalisation and technological advancement. At the same time, these writers underplay or ignore the growing threat of native-nationalist militancy lest it dissuade Britain or the US from intervening in the archipelago. Part 2 of this commentary analyses more fully several specific techniques employed by these writers to at once upbraid the Spanish and belittle the Malay-Filipinos.

From much the same brand of Hispanophobia emerges what I term the ‘city-as-hell’ trope that has survived to the present day via several mutations. For Nicholas Loney and other early Manilaists, Manila is an impenetrably mystical space dominated by the medieval superstitions of the oppressive Catholic Church; it is both distasteful to and beyond the ken of the rational, Protestant mind. According to Loney’s correspondences from the 1850s, ‘shadows flit [...] about’ the old walled Spanish quarter of Intramuros ‘like unearthly things’ and the lurid paintings of the inferno inside a church are designed to scare the public into ‘properly attending to their religious duties.’<sup>65</sup> Writing after the Americans wrested the Philippines from Spain in 1898, Manilaism mobilises the city-as-hell trope to demonstrate how well and far Manila has progressed from a backward, Hispanic-Catholic outpost to a modern, Protestant-American-directed metropolis. *Interesting Manila* (1929), George A. Miller’s highly figurative account of peregrinating around Intramuros, throws up ‘mysteries as dark as black robes’<sup>66</sup> and ‘deeds of lust and blood enacted behind these gateways’<sup>67</sup> that are incomprehensible to the ‘brusque and program style of the rapid-change American tourist.’<sup>68</sup> Miller’s somewhat Gothic imagery implies that, although its influence has been greatly reduced since the Spanish were ousted, the Catholic Church’s opaque beliefs linger on like a ghostly presence in the state-of-the-art, forward-looking Manila now open to international tourism: ‘The globe trotter [...] has no idea that he treads on

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<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Loney, *A Britisher in the Philippines or the Letters of Nicholas Loney* (Manila: National Library, 1964), p.6.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

the bones of a vanished empire.’<sup>69</sup> For Walter Robb, America’s enlightened, equitable and paternalistic brand of colonialism – ‘a course [that] would entail no injustice upon anyone else, Filipinos least of all’<sup>70</sup> – will rescue an urban infrastructure that has, under the Spanish, been persistently threatened with destruction by fires, earthquakes and other, almost biblical *forces majeure*.<sup>71</sup>

Published shortly after World War II, *Perla of the Walled City* (1946) by the avowedly Protestant author John Bechtel, is the first of many post-independence novels to amplify the religious metaphor and construct Manila in an apocalyptic vernacular: ‘blocks – yes, miles – of twisted ruins and grotesque concrete skeletons.’<sup>72</sup> The scene is, in Bechtel’s bombastic simile, like ‘Mars, the mighty god of War, had tramped down his iron heel and had ground unmercifully The Pearl of the Orient into the dust.’<sup>73</sup> Since Manila – and, more specifically, the church-filled sanctuary of Intramuros – has been desecrated by the heathen Japanese occupiers, the contemporary, Christian ‘Pearl of the Orient’ that the Americans laboured to create is no more. A decade after the end of the war, much of Manila remains a wasteland of ‘bombed-out buildings,’ at least in the gaze of DeLouis Stevenson in *Land of the Morning* (1956), her memoir of accompanying her Catholic clergyman husband on a mission to the Philippines.<sup>74</sup> Stevenson is appalled that ‘80% of church buildings’ were obliterated by the Japanese who profaned the Christian creed by converting ‘Spanish churches [into ...] fortresses during the war.’<sup>75</sup> She has nothing to say about American connivance in the devastation when the facts are clear that the ‘liberation’ of Manila in 1945 killed 120,000 and ravaged its environment, whereas the Japanese invasion of Manila in 1941-2 resulted in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>70</sup> Robb, p. iii.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>72</sup> John Bechtel, *Perla of the Walled City* (Grand Rapids: W.M.B. Eerdmans, 1946), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Stevenson, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

considerably fewer casualties and little structural damage.<sup>76</sup> Instead, Stevenson regards the US church and state as positive forces for renewal that are conjuring order from chaos, as in the case of the Union Theological Seminary on Taft Avenue, now ‘completely rehabilitated.’<sup>77</sup> It is hard not to uncouple Bechtel’s and Stevenson’s impressions of Manila as a city damned by its retreat from Western-Christian hegemony from the historical fact that, as Damon L. Woods argues, ‘After World War II, there was an influx of fundamentalist missionaries to the islands’ who, taking a classically Orientalist stance of cultural condescension, ‘came to the conclusion that Filipinos were incapable of ecclesiastical leadership.’<sup>78</sup>

While a number of relatively apolitical Anglo-American guidebooks and histories referencing Manila are published between the 1950s and the 1970s, there is a dearth of Manilaist writing from this phase, and what little of it there is favours symbolic modes other than the city-as-hell. However, in the 1980s, in travelogues by James Fenton<sup>79</sup> and P.J. O’Rourke (I present closer readings of these authors in Part 2), the city-as-hell is rehabilitated and infused with what Mary Louise Pratt calls ‘third world blues’, a tendency in Western travel writing to depict non-Western ‘cityscapes’ as ‘grotesque’ and ‘joyless’ because they connote the social and political failures of societies that have freed themselves from Euro-colonial oppression, if not from indirect manipulation.<sup>80</sup> The third world blues hypothesis helps us to understand at least two material reasons for the intensification of the city-as-hell conceit in Manilaist adumbrations after 1989. Firstly, the military-strategic value of Asian satellites such as the Philippines has dwindled now Cold War rivalries have ceased and, secondly, Japan has superseded the US as the Philippines’ primary trading partner, with China and

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<sup>76</sup> Arcilla, p. 124.

<sup>77</sup> Stevenson, p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Damon L. Woods, *The Philippines: A Global Studies Handbook* (Oxford: ABC Clio, 2006) p. 125.

<sup>79</sup> James Fenton, *All the Wrong Places: Adrift in the Politics of Southeast Asia* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988; repr. London: Granta, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 217.

Singapore also now doing more business with the nation than any Western state other than the US.<sup>81</sup> That Manila's modern descent may be a consequence of its departure from the Western sphere of influence is hinted at by one of the Filipino characters in Alex Garland's novel *The Tesseract* (1998), who states that the Spanish conquistadors of the 1570s had God on their 'side'<sup>82</sup> when they colonised the islands; the implication here, perhaps, that God may be displeased now the Spanish – and all other Westerners – have relinquished explicit political control over the Philippines. In Garland's Manila, hotels appear 'undead' or remind his protagonist Sean of 'concrete corpses.'<sup>83</sup> A graveyard is infested with 'an army of ancestral spirits, seething in the still air around the tomb, peering out of the statues' eyes.'<sup>84</sup> Like a merciless deity reigning over this infernal domain, the mobster Don Pepe 'moves in mysterious ways' in a turbid moral universe when he orders the maiming of an underling for a trifling offence and then forgives another underling for the mass-murder of innocents.<sup>85</sup> Various faiths and religions have posited hell as a realm subject to almost inconceivably different physical laws to those of the phenomenal world, including unending time.<sup>86</sup> This may explain why Sean in *The Tesseract* feels like he is waiting for an eternity in torment to rendezvous with the criminals he has wronged, and that Manila's otherworldly temporality can never be comprehended, at least not by a Western outsider: 'What about ten minutes ago? Or was it fifteen? Whatever. Ten, fifteen, he'd been a headless chicken.'<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, the entire textual time and space of *The Tesseract* is an unfathomable puzzle articulated by the guiding motif of the novel: 'A tesseract is a four-dimensional object – a hypercube – unravelled ... We can see the thing unravelled, but

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<sup>81</sup> Daniel Workman, *Philippines Top Trading Partners* (2017) <<http://www.worldstopexports.com/philippines-top-import-partners>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>82</sup> Alex Garland, *The Tesseract* (London: Viking, 1998; repr. London: Penguin, 2007), Amazon Kindle e-book (chapter 2, para. 1, location 363).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, location 679.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, location 1005.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, location 565.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas A. Smith, 'The Pleasure of Hell in *City of God*', *Augustinian Studies*, 30 (1999), 195-204 (p. 197).

<sup>87</sup> Garland, location 287.

not the thing itself.’<sup>88</sup> In kindred spirit, ‘Everything [is] thrown into question’ in *Ghosts of Manila* (1994), James Hamilton-Paterson’s arguably eerier vision of the city.<sup>89</sup> Like a horror movie script, the novel begins with a cinematic sweep across the gruesome preparation of corpses for the illegal trade that, ‘smacking of Burke and Hare’,<sup>90</sup> supplies skeletons to medical researchers: ‘Two of the men now take down butcher’s knives from a magnetic rack [...] One takes the upper half of the body, the other lower. Deftly they remove the arms and legs.’<sup>91</sup> The environs are reminiscent of the farthest circles of hell in Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, with ‘water [...] bubbling fiercely’<sup>92</sup> in place of ‘Beneath the water people are who sigh/And make this water bubble at the surface’<sup>93</sup> of the River Styx; and the ‘perpetual slime of the squatter areas’ and ‘noxious black estuaries’<sup>94</sup> in lieu of the Styx’s ‘putrid water.’<sup>95</sup> That Hamilton-Paterson writes ‘sane people chose’ to believe in paranormal creatures such as a hybrid bat-woman who sucks the livers out of babies implies that we, the reader, should take her a little more literally – in the context of this highly contrived, almost science fictive Manila setting – than a mere cipher for an idea or emotion, as would be appropriate in a more naturalistic type of novel.<sup>96</sup> Like the nightmarish metropolis of Dis in *The Divine Comedy*, Manila is a holding tank for every Dantean sinner imaginable: murderers, pederasts, thieves and liars. Whereas in Bechtel and Stevenson Manila is faintly redolent of hell, and its hell-like happenings and topographical features can ultimately be explained rationally in an instance of what Tzvetan Todorov has, with reference to Freud, termed ‘the Uncanny’, in both *The Tesseract* and *Ghosts of Manila*, Manila is a more direct and thoroughgoing metaphor for the inferno; a grotesque urban netherworld closer to Todorov’s concept of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., location 3152-3156.

<sup>89</sup> James Hamilton-Paterson, *Ghosts of Manila* (London: Random House, 1994), p.43.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Mineola, New York: Dover Books, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>94</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *Ghosts of Manila*, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Alighieri, p. 204.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

‘the Marvellous’, wherein events in narratives are often only explicable in outlandishly supernatural terms.<sup>97</sup> As Alberto Manguel puts it in his review of *Ghosts of Manila*, ‘Hell is the present-day Philippines.’<sup>98</sup>

Late Manilaist invocations of religious argot are greatly at odds with Western literary and cinematic representations of other Asian cities, particularly those in China and Japan. ‘Whereas Orientalism,’ write Roh, Huang and Nui, ‘as a strategy of representational containment, arrests Asia in traditional, and often premodern imagery, Techno-Orientalism presents ... an “Orient” undergoing rapid economic and cultural transformations.’<sup>99</sup> In its arresting of Manila in such pre-modern metaphors as hell, sin, curses and mythical beasts, late Manilaism itself, as a system of signification, is in an arrested state itself by not having evolved in step with parallel Techno-Orientalist modes. The disparity might be ascribed to transformations in the power relationship between East and West over the last thirty years. As Martin Jacques contends, China, Russia, Japan and India are growing in prosperity, military strength and scientific capability at a rate that poses a substantial threat to US and EU hegemony.<sup>100</sup> The Philippines lacks the material means to join that order of nations – as yet, anyway – and therefore has not been constructed in the terms of Techno-Orientalism, which often fetishises and exaggerates progress in the East.

Another long-standing Manilaist habit of civic representation that in some ways contradicts the city-as-hell is what I dub ‘the flawed simulacrum.’ Although the trope has undergone different incarnations across time, a constant feature is its rendering of Manila as a facsimile of a Western urban space, albeit with a tell-tale fault or dissonance

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<sup>97</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.

<sup>98</sup> Alberto Manguel, ‘Gouging Out Hell’s Entrails: Ghosts of Manila – James Hamilton-Paterson’, *Independent Online*, 3 June 1994 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/book-review-gouging-out-hells-entrails-ghosts-of-manila-james-hamilton-paterson-jonathan-cape-pounds-1420229.html>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>99</sup> David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Nui, ‘Technologizing Orientalism’, in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, ed. by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Nui (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), pp. 1-20 (p. 3.)

<sup>100</sup> Martin Jacques, *When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 1-89.

that confirms the fundamental inadequacies of peripheral culture. The flawed simulacrum has faint origins in 1898 when, having deposed the Spanish, the US went back on its tacit pledge to grant the Philippines its independence<sup>101</sup> and instead proposed the policy of ‘benevolent assimilation’ wherein the US would rule the Philippines in a supposedly more enlightened, humane and inclusive fashion than had Spain.<sup>102</sup> According to then US President William McKinley, the ‘military administration’ was to guarantee ‘the full measure of individual rights and liberties’ to the people by ‘sedulously maintain[ing] the strong arm of authority’.<sup>103</sup> Paul A. Kramer argues that this new-fangled permutation of colonialism ‘brought metaphors of family, evolution, and tutelary assimilation into a gradualist, indeed indefinite, trajectory of Filipino “progress” toward self-government’.<sup>104</sup> A popular American novel of the time, *Ray’s Daughter: A Story of Manila* (1901) by Charles King,<sup>105</sup> suggestively justifies benevolent assimilation by showing that the Americans will correct or at least improve Manila’s status as a colonial city consciously planned by the Spanish with the intention of segregating communities of natives from zones inhabited by the expatriate ruling class, or ‘worlds cut in two’, as Frantz Fanon has observed of comparable milieux, between the ‘settler’ and the ‘Negro’ (or indigenous equivalent) towns.<sup>106</sup> In King’s starry-eyed vision, US sailors roam freely between the social, racial and cultural frontiers that the ‘antiquated’ Spanish had erected to divide and rule Manileños for centuries:

All over the massive, antiquated fortifications of old Manila into the tortuous mazes of the northern districts through the crowded Chinese quarter, foul and ill savored, the teeming suburbs of the native Tagals, humble yet cleanly; along the broad, shaded avenues, bordered by stately old Spanish mansions, many of them still occupied by their Castilian owners, the Yankee invaders wandered

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<sup>101</sup> Luis H. Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios to Bravos* (New York: Overlook Press, 2014), p. 138.

<sup>102</sup> William McKinley, quoted in James H. Blount, *The American Occupation of the Philippines 1898-1912* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), p. 149.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>104</sup> Kramer, p. 161.

<sup>105</sup> Charles King, *Ray’s Daughter: A Story of Manila* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1901)

<sup>106</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 38.

at will...<sup>107</sup>

King hints that Manila's heterogeneous populace will be unified by these sailors – and the colonial functionaries who will come after them – under a new cohesive identity defined by liberty, democracy and equality. Painting the American arrival in idyllic terms, he cheerily declares that the 'Yankee invaders' are 'brimful of curiosity and good nature [...] making themselves perfectly at home, filling [...] the natives with wonderment through their lavish, jovial and free and easy ways.'<sup>108</sup> (The phrase 'making themselves perfectly at home' is an intriguing choice of phrase given its relational function to the word 'assimilation.')

For King, benevolent assimilation works well for both colonised and coloniser; the sailors who quickly get to know the city as well as 'the streets of their own home villages' are assimilating into Manila life while Manilaños appear happy to assimilate into the American Way.<sup>109</sup> King's romantic conception of a new Manila, about to embark upon a process of Americanisation, provides the groundwork on which succeeding generations of Manilaists will construct simulacra of attractive Western cities. However, this new trope cannot be inaugurated until after the rupture of the Philippine-American War.

The Filipino nationalist rebels under Emilio Aguinaldo rejected benevolent assimilation and took up arms against the Americans in February 1899. One sixth of the population (200-250,000 people) were killed in the conflict due to the US military's reluctance to distinguish between civilians and combatants (villages were routinely torched and some regiments were ordered to slaughter all males and females older than ten years of age), and its tactic of 'strategic hamleting' that caused large-scale starvation and disease.<sup>110</sup> Rodriguez designates the US operation a 'genocide' stimulated by the

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<sup>107</sup> King, p. 173.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>110</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), Amazon Kindle e-book (chapter 12, para. 91 ,location 5923).

same devotion to ‘white supremacy’ that signalled the massacres of native Americans in the late nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup> After crushing the insurrection and re-assuming control of Manila, the US was then, according to the Filipino historian Reynaldo Ileto, ‘able to turn a situation of utter devastation and suffering, for which it was largely responsible, into a redemptive opportunity.’<sup>112</sup> After this moment Manilaists are keen to construe the capital as a successful experiment in democracy that mimics the best kind of Western metropolis replete with all the commodified pleasures a Westerner could want. Writing in 1914, William D. Boyce lauds the Americanised district of Calle Escolta where ‘You can find almost anything you ask for in the shops’<sup>113</sup> and the club life along the harbour affording such all-American pursuits as cocktail drinking and movie-watching.<sup>114</sup> In his 1929 travelogue *Through the Philippines and Hawaii*, Frank G. Carpenter trumpets the ‘modern metropolis’ populated by well-dressed and good-looking people enjoying Euro-American music, food and leisure activities.<sup>115</sup> Such fancies conform to David Spurr’s view that ‘the West seeks its own identity in Third World attempts at imitating it.’<sup>116</sup> But, in the Manila context at least, the operative word here is ‘attempts’, for the simulacrum is always flawed. In this respect, it bears some resemblance to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the second ‘of the successive phases of the [cultural or aesthetic] image’ which ‘masks and perverts reality’ rather than functioning as a ‘reflection of a basic reality.’<sup>117</sup> Therefore, as Boyce points out, while the US-built Manila Hotel is as luxurious and comfortable as any American could hope for, it falls short of delivering ‘bread and pie “like mother used to make”.’<sup>118</sup> Although she is generally upbeat about the quality of accommodation and hospitality in Manila, Mary

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<sup>111</sup> Rodriguez, pp. 98-99.

<sup>112</sup> Ileto, p. 108.

<sup>113</sup> Boyce, p. 229.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>115</sup> Carpenter, Frank G, *Through the Philippines and Hawaii* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929), p. 15.

<sup>116</sup> David Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.15.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 170.

<sup>118</sup> Boyce, p. 251.

H. Fee, an American schoolteacher dispatched to the Philippines as part of an English language educational programme, objects to the ‘cheap, unattractive-looking European wares’ of the shops and the canned food available in her guesthouse; her insinuation is that goods and services in Manila are a shoddy parody of those available at home.<sup>119</sup> In addition, such anxieties about the simulacrum may derive from Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of ‘ambivalence’ wherein a colonial order is never wholly committed to projecting its values onto its subjects for fear they will begin to demand more rights and freedoms from their masters.<sup>120</sup>

In the mid to late twentieth century, Manila’s subordinate status in the international system of ‘dollar imperialism’, that meant ‘much of the world suffered from a degree of dependence on trade with the dollar area’, motivates a string of Manilaist authors to perceive it as a blemished imitation of American popular culture.<sup>121</sup> Although we saw earlier how DeLouis Stevenson limns parts of Manila as war-torn, she extols other districts for looking ‘like the United States in the Far East’,<sup>122</sup> albeit facets of that resemblance are kitschily parodic of rather than tastefully faithful to the original: ‘You’d laugh to see the “jeepneys” – corrected American jeeps – used as buses at 10 centavos a ride.’<sup>123</sup> It is not only the price that is cheap about this tacky appropriation of an iconic American vehicle; Stevenson’s remark that the simulacrum currently has deformities is necessary for her concluding proposition that ‘the Philippines is truly a land of tomorrow’ because, while at this point in time, the country may be falling short of Western ideals, this ‘daughter of the American republic’ will surely grow up into a closer likeness to her father.<sup>124</sup> Frequenting Manila in the late 1970s, the Anglo-Australian writer and filmmaker Maslyn Williams espies ambiguities within the

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<sup>119</sup> Mary H. Fee, *A Woman’s Impression of the Philippines* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1912; repr. Manila: GCF Books, 1988), p. 36.

<sup>120</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), p. 87.

<sup>121</sup> Ian Jarvie, ‘Dollars and Ideology: Will Hays’ Economic Foreign Policy 1922-1945’, *Film History*, 2.3 (1988), 207-221 (p. 210).

<sup>122</sup> Stevenson, p. 14.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos – who, in the name of political expediency, had to, so Hamilton-Paterson contends, ‘play both the nationalist card and the anti-communist card [in order to] become America’s boy’ – that are analogous to the flawed simulacrum.<sup>125</sup> For Williams, the ‘image they [the Marcos family] project [...] is as stimulating as that presented in the US at the beginning of the 60s by the Kennedys’,<sup>126</sup> but such glamour is tempered by Williams’ meeting with ‘relatives of a woman who has recently been reduced to a heap of neuroses’ by torture at the hands of state enforcers.<sup>127</sup> The Marcos junta would survive into the 1980s when tourist arrivals in the Asia Pacific region were increasing by 10% a year<sup>128</sup> and the globalisation of the world economy was boosting Western exports of consumer goods.<sup>129</sup> At this time the Manilaist gaze becomes imbued with what Graham Huggan has called the ‘domestication’ and ‘global marketing’ of post-colonial societies by Western tourism and culture industries.<sup>130</sup> Hence, late Manilaist simulacra are informed by fantasies of play, pleasure, free movement and unfettered consumption of metropolitan goods and services that have been transplanted to the periphery, if imperfectly. The geographer John Connell has detected a coincident process in the regeneration of parts of Manila in the 1980s and 1990s, when new neighbourhoods with titles like ‘Little Italy’ would be ‘Designed and marketed as fragments of Europe in a global era.’<sup>131</sup> In his memoir *Playing With Water* (1987), James Hamilton-Paterson sums up post-Marcos Manila as an ‘Asian re-creation of an American garrison town’<sup>132</sup> catering for the fancies of foreigners, while Pico Iyer’s *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1988) posits Manila’s identity as dependent on the

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<sup>125</sup> James Hamilton-Paterson, *America’s Boy: The Marcoses and the Philippines* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 160.

<sup>126</sup> Maslyn Williams, *Faces of My Neighbour: Three Journeys into East Asia* (Sydney: William Collins Pty, 1979), p. 17.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>128</sup> Amrik Singh, ‘Asia Pacific Tourism Industry: Current Trends and Future Outlooks’, *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 4 (1997), 1-5 <[https://www.hotel-online.com/Trends/AsiaPacificJournal/AsiaPacificTourismOutlook\\_1997.html](https://www.hotel-online.com/Trends/AsiaPacificJournal/AsiaPacificTourismOutlook_1997.html)> [accessed 15 October 2017] (p. 2).

<sup>129</sup> Trading Economics, *United States Exports* <<https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/exports>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>130</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Post-colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), pp. 12-13.

<sup>131</sup> John Connell, ‘Beyond Manila: Walls, Malls, and Private Spaces’, *Environment and Planning*, 31 (1999), 15-24 <[doi: 10.1068/a310417](https://doi.org/10.1068/a310417)> [accessed 25 September 2017] (p. 17).

<sup>132</sup> James Hamilton-Paterson, *Playing with Water: Alone on a Philippine Island* (London: Sceptre, 1988), p. 130.

most vulgar aspects of Western popular culture; a textual space crowded by European pornography, indigenous sex workers dressed like their American counterparts, rock bars where Filipinas sing songs by Madonna and Cyndi Lauper, and steak houses evocative of 'New England' serving food tasting of 'cardboard.'<sup>133</sup> The artifice of it all is emphasised by Iyer's wry allusion to black and white minstrels: 'Master of every American gesture, conversant with every Western song [...] the Filipino plays minstrel to the entire continent.'<sup>134</sup> In a sense, Iyer is updating an attitude long held by Western intellectuals that Oriental cultures are 'repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West)'.<sup>135</sup>

If, as we have seen, early Manilaist portrayals of the Spanish church and state are animated by Hispanophobia, so the same bigotry produces caricatures of individual *peninsulares* (citizens born in Spain now holding influential posts in Manila society) as a lesser breed of Westerner brutally and corruptly clinging onto undeserved power in a marginal backwater. Loney decries the decadence of the current governor owning '25 horses'<sup>136</sup> and Wilkes complains of cigar-smoking officials who devote their three-year terms to enriching themselves,<sup>137</sup> behaving in ways 'so cruel as to be a disgrace to the records of the nineteenth century.'<sup>138</sup> Aside from national-imperialist rivalry, another factor behind these authors' Hispanophobia may be the phenomenon of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism that was being popularised at the time by, amongst others, the British politician Sir Charles Dilke, whose concept of 'Greater Britain' was conceived as 'a cohesive racial and political structure for the global diaspora of an Anglo-Saxon race which continued to share the same language and institutions.'<sup>139</sup> Greater Britain included the US, New Zealand, Australia and parts of Canada, but did not extend to

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<sup>133</sup> Pico Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988; repr. London: Black Swan, 1998), p. 179.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>135</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 62.

<sup>136</sup> Loney, p. 85.

<sup>137</sup> Wilkes, p. 36.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>139</sup> Young, *Post-colonialism*, p. 36.

colonies or ex-colonies of other Western European nations (even, it would appear, a nation such as Germany, which could reasonably lay claim to the nomenclature ‘Saxon’).<sup>140</sup> Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism is covert throughout MacMicking and overt in Loney: ‘Spanish and Anglo-Saxon ideas are so radically different about many things there can seldom be any sympathy.’<sup>141</sup> Loney’s binary is couched in a broader contemporaneous conflict between Spanish and Anglo-Saxon cultural consciousnesses because, at the same time as Anglo-Saxonism was being articulated by Britons and Americans, a corresponding phenomenon known as *Latinidad* was emerging in both Latin America and those Euro-imperialist states whose languages were Latin-based. As Mignolo elaborates, the Colombian intellectual Torres Caicedo drew a cultural and political boundary between ‘Anglo-Saxon America, Danish America, Dutch America’ and ‘Spanish America, French America and Portuguese America’, while French ‘intellectuals and state officers [used *Latinidad*] to take the lead in Europe among the configuration of Latin countries involved in the Americas (Spain, Italy, Portugal and France itself), and allowed it also to confront the United States’ continuing expansion toward the south.’<sup>142</sup> Tensions between *Latinidad* and non-*Latinidad* interests in the Americas would result in a situation where ‘for the *imperial imaginary*, “Latin” Americans are second-class Europeans.’<sup>143</sup> Such prejudices towards Spaniards and ‘Latins’ deriving from the Americas may have been exported to Manila, given the Philippines’ colonial ties with Latin America (from the 1560s until the 1820s it was governed indirectly by Spain via the Mexican Viceroyalty) and the fact that many Manilaist writers of this phase and later were widely-travelled sailors, traders and diplomats who would likely have been aware of the *Latinidad*-Anglo-Saxon binary.

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<sup>140</sup> This may be explained by geopolitical tensions between Germany and Britain and the United States that would culminate in the inter-imperialist confrontation of World War I. Archibald Clavering Gunter, *Jack Curzon (Being a portion of the Records of the Managing Clerk of Martin, Thompson & Co., English Merchants doing business in Hong Kong, Manila, Cebu and the Straits Settlements)* (New York: Hurst, 1898), a Manilaist text that is considered in the next section, is almost as shot through with Teutophobic images as it is with Sinophobic or Hispanophobic ones.

<sup>141</sup> Loney, p. 60.

<sup>142</sup> Mignolo, p. 57.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the end of the Philippine-American War in 1902, Manilaist constructions of Spaniards and native Malay-Filipinos alter in tandem with changing US imperial intentions towards the Philippines. Before the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Manilaist boilerplates about Malay-Filipinos are founded on Victorian ‘racial theory[‘s ...] insistence on the inferiority of non-Western peoples,’<sup>144</sup> limning them as, so Wilkes puts it, ‘disposed to avoid all exertion,’<sup>145</sup> a notion in keeping with the Spanish Empire’s perception of its colonial subjects elsewhere as ‘lazy native[s] ... covered with a discourse whose purpose was to keep him or her industrious and subordinate.’<sup>146</sup> Then, when the war has begun and the US has sided with the Filipino insurgents, one of the US sailor characters in Edward Stratemeyer’s martial novel *Under Dewey at Manila or The War Fortunes of a Castaway* (1898) describes ‘the Tagals, a branch of the Malay race’ in a more sympathetic light, as ‘a good enough set if the Spanish would only treat ‘em half decently.’<sup>147</sup> The ‘good’ natives are strategically signified as victims of the Spanish, whose comparative ruthlessness – earlier in the story, a petty officer declares that he’d fare better as a prisoner under the Chinese or the Japanese than under the Spanish – must be challenged by the Americans who *would*, it is suggested by the sailor, treat the Tagals at least half decently.<sup>148</sup>

Once the Spanish-American War is won and the Philippine-American War is underway, Malay-Filipinos are more directly demonised as barbarians. Hence, an early scene in *Ray’s Daughter* recounts the ‘vexing problem as to what Aguinaldo and his followers might do rather than see the great city given over to the Americans for law and order instead of to themselves for loot and rapine.’<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, having

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<sup>144</sup> Malik, p. 81.

<sup>145</sup> Wilkes, p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 307.

<sup>147</sup> Edward Stratemeyer, *Under Dewey at Manila or The War Fortunes of a Castaway*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1898), p. 233.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>149</sup> King, p. 161.

previously been signified as the helpless prey of Spanish misrule, the Malay-Filipinos are now deemed culpable for the Spaniards' foibles and failings due to the phenomenon of 'going native'<sup>150</sup> in which European settlers in Asia, Oceania and Africa were perceived to have 'wholly degenerated [...] from contact with other races'.<sup>151</sup> The British Darwinian sociologist Benjamin Kidd wrote in 1898 that the Spanish presence in the 'East Indies' was an example of a 'relationship existing between a civilized Power and a tropical possession'<sup>152</sup> that could have an adverse impact on the physical health and moral integrity of those soldiers and officials serving the 'civilized Power': 'In climatic conditions which are a burden to him; in the midst of races in a different and lower stage of development; divorced from the influences which have produced him, from the moral and political environment from which he sprang, the white man [...] tends himself to sink slowly to the level around him.'<sup>153</sup> In like fashion, another Stratemeyer pot-boiler, *Under MacArthur at Luzon* (1901), features a Spaniard who has gone native by defecting to the rebels and adopting the enemy's inclination for molesting captives: "When we got ashore we found ourselves in the hands of a Spanish traitor who had joined the rebels some time before. He was very brutal, and handled us like dogs".<sup>154</sup> In a work of creative nonfiction for *McClure's Magazine* published a year later, the American physician Henry Rowland has more pity for those American soldiers who go native than Stratemeyer has for the Spanish traitor. Rowland blames the psychological deterioration of three US soldiers serving in the Philippine-American War on homesickness, alienation from a strange tropical environment and encounters with 'furtive islanders, cold and stark.'<sup>155</sup> Spending too long amongst 'savages' has a mirror-like effect on a civilised white man's behaviour: 'Their [the soldiers'] lust of

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<sup>150</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 115.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>152</sup> Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: McMillan, 1898), p. 20.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>154</sup> Edward Stratemeyer, *Under MacArthur in Luzon or Last Battles in the Philippines* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1902), p. 203.

<sup>155</sup> Dr. Henry C. Rowland, 'Fighting Life in the Philippines', *McClure's Magazine*, July 1902, p. 149.

slaughter is reflected from the faces of those around them.’<sup>156</sup> If, in this particular variety of going native, American infantrymen have caught the capacity to commit atrocities like an illness from a lower race (that, so Rowland states, is well-versed in committing atrocities itself) then the Americans cannot be morally culpable for their cruel actions any more than sufferers of disease can be blamed for their symptoms. As David Brody has shown, US popular journalism of the early 1900s is brimful of ‘going native’ cautionary tales – often ‘sensationalized’ with medical metaphors or literal references to hygiene and pathology – about American soldiers ‘catch[ing] the bug of infidelity while in the Philippines’, being infected with leprosy from Filipino insurgents and losing their sanity due to the oppressive climate.<sup>157</sup>

When the US has subdued the insurgency and is enacting benevolent assimilation, the Malay-Filipinos once again become the right kind of primitives: child-like, obedient and ‘contented;’<sup>158</sup> in need of ‘uplifting’ by the white man.<sup>159</sup> While the compulsion to condemn the Spanish has dissipated now the Americans have achieved pre-eminence, Hispanophobic caricatures in Manilaist texts of this era serve the ideological purpose of, as per the city-as-hell device, showing the positive impact of American stewardship in antithesis to four centuries of inertia under the preceding regime. Hence, Robb ruminates on an opulent palace that is the nefarious legacy of the ‘tyrant’ governor Fajarde who, not unlike Al Capone and other organised crime leaders in the US of the time, built it with funds extorted from the public.<sup>160</sup> Gangster allusions are present too in an anecdote re-told by the American Methodist missionary Homer Clyde Stuntz about a sadistic friar who had a Katipunan activist flogged and strung up by his thumbs.<sup>161</sup> ‘The wonder is that he survived,’ holds Stuntz.<sup>162</sup> ‘The essentially

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>157</sup> Brody, pp. 69-75.

<sup>158</sup> Boyce, p. 230.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>160</sup> Robb, p. 126.

<sup>161</sup> Homer Clyde Stuntz, *The Philippines and the Far East* (New York: Jennings and Pye, 1904), pp. 124-5.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

vicious theory of colonial government'<sup>163</sup> that led to such misdeeds is now, he assures us in grandiose parlance, being remedied by 'silently wafting the bloom of our civilization over the vast populations of the Orient, pollenizing them with ideals destined to bear fruit where despotism and ignorance and vice yield their apples of Sodom.'<sup>164</sup> As with the Spanish journalist Pablo Feced Temprano examined above, Stuntz's judgements elide faith-based prejudice – 'typical Spanish Catholic intolerance'<sup>165</sup> – with disgust towards the Spanish friars' and colonial officials' land-snatching, 'stifling of all liberty of thought and freedom' and 'their insatiable greed for money.'<sup>166</sup> These comments should be considered against the historical backdrop of, as José S. Arcilla notes, 'the [Americans'] first open efforts to preach Protestant Christianity [...] in earnest'.<sup>167</sup> Reynaldo C. Ileto has acknowledged a coordinate problem in the later American Orientalist historian Stanley Karnow's 'all too simplistic portrayal of the Spanish colonial phase as the "dark age" of the Philippine past supplanted in this century by an enlightened American "new age".'<sup>168</sup>

Ileto also argues that the lineage of reactionary Western historians Karnow belongs to has sought to vindicate twentieth century US imperialism in the Philippines, Vietnam, Iraq and elsewhere by claiming that Filipinos were – and will always be – unfit to govern themselves for some of the same reasons the Spanish lost control over the islands: 'cacique democracy'<sup>169</sup> is bound to descend into 'repressive, manipulative' tyranny, election-rigging, graft, 'clientilism' and clannish 'factionalism.'<sup>170</sup> Hetero-stereotypes based on the same postulations are found in Manilaist chronicles from the Cold War period when the Philippines belonged to the US orbit of geopolitical influence. Mark Kram's reportage on the 'Thrilla in Manila' boxing match in 1975

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 508.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-104.

<sup>167</sup> José S. Arcilla, 'Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines', *Philippine Studies*, 36 (1988), 105 (pp. 105-12).

<sup>168</sup> Ileto, p. 267.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 267-87.

describes Ferdinand Marcos as a ‘small brown derringer of a man’,<sup>171</sup> and ‘the ambitions’ of Init, a congressman from Timothy Mo’s novel *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* (1995), are ‘unalloyed by any concept of public service or hypocrisy which might hinder an occidental: he was in politics for money, to safeguard his family’s existing business interests and to lever open yet more future opportunities.’<sup>172</sup>

Along with Alex Garland, Mo is part of a generation of Manilaist writers whose hetero-stereotypes are informed by the intertextual and ahistorical conventions of post-modernism. Often enough, their frame of reference is Western pulp fiction and popular cinema. In Mo’s graphically violent picaresque, *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup>, a Manileño mobster looks like a ‘Mexican bandido, El Jefe from a Sam Peckinpah movie’<sup>173</sup> and the pages of *The Tesseract* are crowded with film noir *femmes fatale* and maladroit, Quentin Tarantino-esque hitmen. These symbolic standards, selected somewhat randomly from fifty years of Hollywood cinema, tell us more about the political climate and means of cultural production of late twentieth century Britain and the US than anything of import about Manila. Fredric Jameson, in his study of American ‘nostalgia films’ of the 1980s, contends that the crime thriller *Body Heat*’s (1981) blending of a 1930s aesthetic with ‘a contemporary setting’ demonstrates that we in the West are ‘unable to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own experience. But if that is so, then it is a terrible indictment of consumer capitalism itself – or, at the very least, an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history.’<sup>174</sup> Transposing Jameson’s thesis to Mo and Garland, we might propose that these writers are incapable of expressing much of value or meaning about Manila

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<sup>171</sup> Mark Kram, ‘Lawdy, Lawdy, He’s Great,’ *Sports Illustrated Online*, 13 October 1975

<<https://www.si.com/boxing/2012/01/17/muhammad-ali-70th-kram>> [accessed 28 September 2017].

<sup>172</sup> Timothy Mo, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* (London: Paddleless Press, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>173</sup> Timothy Mo, *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup> (London: Paddleless Press, 1999), pp. 57-58.

<sup>174</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Post-modern, 1983-1988* (London: Verso 1998), pp. 9-10.

because they are fixated on cannibalising idioms from representational schemes that bear little relation to the real ‘time and history’ of the Philippine capital.

A more traditional inventory of caricatures can be found in Duncan Alexander MacKenzie’s memoir *The Unlucky Country: The Republic of the Philippines in the 21st Century* (2012). Like Manilaists two centuries before him, MacKenzie infantilises, animalises and sexualises Filipinos: ‘These beautiful, dusky, innocently sensual creatures with their almond eyes, slim physique and graceful movements’.<sup>175</sup> MacKenzie’s childish, unsophisticated and lackadaisical natives are a concomitant of his warning that, in this new millennial world of Western decline and Eastern growth, the Philippines is lagging behind its neighbours economically, and this could have gloomy consequences for the West and the globe: ‘Look to the Chinese and the Taiwanese and the populace of Hong Kong. They have a life-long drive to academic achievement and economic success, and that is why they will rule the region, and perhaps the world.’<sup>176</sup> There is a note of lament for the old days of Western regnancy in MacKenzie’s tendentious distinction between the Philippines’ current ‘problematic’ dealings with China and its historically ‘straightforward and uncomplicated’ relationship with the US.<sup>177</sup>

MacKenzie’s anxieties about China are nothing new in Manilatism; stereotypes of Manila’s Chinese-Filipino community emerge in the mid-nineteenth century from a confluence of early Spanish concerns about the group’s economic penetration of Manila and its un-Christian sexual morality (see above), and contemporaneous Western fears about both China’s perceived threat to Euro-imperialism in Asia and the migration of its peoples to Britain and the US. One ‘pervasive truism’ underlying all these prejudices is, according to the Filipina literary historian Caroline S. Hau, ‘the Chinese [...] association

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<sup>175</sup> MacKenzie, (chapter 1, para. 1, location 438).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, location 3999-4001.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, location 4002-4003

with money'.<sup>178</sup> In *Life in the East Indies* (1872), American novelist William Henry Thomes lists what he dubs 'men of all nations' to be found in Manila, including 'the awkward China man [...] appearing courteous to all, while in his heart he despises the throng for its waste of money in riding in carriages as long as feet are able to support the body.'<sup>179</sup> This parsimony slight may be partly determined by the formal and informal restrictions on the types of work the Chinese could carry out in both the US and in the Philippines. In the US, out of fear of competition for their livelihoods, Irish and French immigrant miners – and, later on, American trade unionists – physically intimidated many Chinese migrants into taking up alternative employment in laundry, horticulture, retail, food services and other sectors thought to require 'enterprising acumen.'<sup>180</sup> Earlier, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines had prohibited the Chinese-Filipinos from farming, leaving them little choice but to engage in mercantile activities. By the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese-Filipino clans were dominating the lucrative sugar and abaca industries, at the expense of Spanish and foreign companies.<sup>181</sup> Predictably then, in Wilkes' view the Chinese-Filipinos are, by dint of their devotion to trade and commerce, 'all activity.'<sup>182</sup> Coming from a hard-nosed Western capitalist who yearns for Manila's marketisation, this sounds like a compliment, but it is mitigated by Wilkes' later proposition that the Chinese-Filipinos are monopolising gainful employment in the city.<sup>183</sup> Such a contradictory praise-and-scorn attitude towards the positioning of the Chinese in the labour market is reflected in a late Victorian edition of the London *Times* which intersows warnings about the influx of Chinese workers to England with

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<sup>178</sup> Caroline S. Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), p.152.

<sup>179</sup> William Henry Thomes, *Life in the East Indies* (Boston and New York: Lee and Shepard, 1875), p. 10.

<sup>180</sup> Peter Kwong and Dušanka Mišcevic, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* (New York: The New Press, 2006), pp. 10-20.

<sup>181</sup> Constantino, p. 118.

<sup>182</sup> Wilkes, p. 17.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

admiration for their ‘hard-working, patient and economical’ disposition.<sup>184</sup> Along the same lines, in the 1840s and 1850s, the stance of US newspapers on Chinese miners in the American West alternated between admiration for their work ethic and disdain of their ‘servile [...] clannish, deceitful’ ways.<sup>185</sup>

Although many Manilaist fictions of the late Spanish period recycle this formula, *Jack Curzon* takes a different tack by illuminating the contradictory role of the Chinese-Filipinos in the social-political-racial configuration of Manila at a significant historical turning point. By the end of the nineteenth century, the new, rising bourgeoisie of Chinese *mestizos* (people of mixed Chinese and Spanish or Malay heritage) would have provoked a mixed reaction among outsiders with a political and commercial stake in Manila. While Western firms were dependent on the goodwill of the Chinese *mestizos* because they dominated the domestic cash crop trade, the centrality of the community to the burgeoning independence movement – not to say the group’s vital intellectual role in defining Filipino national identity – would have caused Western imperialists to label them as subversive.<sup>186</sup> In *Jack Curzon*, the ‘Chinese dandy’ Ah Khy has benefited from contact with Western civilisation, having studied at Yale University, learned upper-crust American slang and assumed a dapper, metropolitan style of dress.<sup>187</sup> On the boat trip from Hong Kong to Manila, Khy impresses Jack Curzon as a member of a regional ruling class whose father owns a multinational shipping company that connived with the father of Maud, Curzon’s lover, to smuggle tobacco out of Manila. While Khy’s wealth and high breeding allows Curzon to accept him as a gentleman and near-equal, the Briton has misgivings about the hybridity of the ‘Chinaman’’s Oriental physiognomy and the authenticity of his

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<sup>184</sup> Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the ‘Yellow Peril’: The Making of a Racist Myth* (Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>185</sup> Kwong and Mišcevic, pp. 44-5.

<sup>186</sup> Antonio S. Tan, ‘The Chinese Mestizos and the Formation of the Filipino Nationality’, *Archipel*, 32 (1986), 141-62 (pp.141-42).

<sup>187</sup> Gunter, p. 40.

‘Fifth Avenue swell.’<sup>188</sup> Moreover, when Khy invites Curzon to conspire with him against the shady German arms dealer Adolph Ludenbaum, Curzon inwardly reflects, ‘Ah Khy is by no means a safe partner in anything that may bring us under the suspicion of the Spanish Government.’<sup>189</sup> Curzon then warns him to avoid entanglement in ‘the insurgent business’ as the Spanish are now shooting Chinese dissenters on the street, prompting Khy to turn pale.<sup>190</sup> Despite his commendable Western airs, Khy is a coward and cannot be trusted because Chinese like him are now enemies of the state.

After the US had crushed the revolt and consolidated its power across the archipelago, the Chinese *mestizo* class retained its socio-economic prominence and there is an attendant decline in Sinophobic boilerplates in Manilaist texts. Indeed, Boyce goes as far as to recommend the Chinese as ‘the best native type.’<sup>191</sup> An exception is the Chinese dry goods trader Miller reports on: ‘every American woman who comes to Manila gets cheated in her first encounter with the wily heathen’.<sup>192</sup> Miller’s castigation of this conman who victimises white women specifically owes more to the symbolic order of bigotry produced by the racial persecution and economic marginalisation of the Chinese in his native US than to the conditions of their counterparts in the Philippines. As Peter Kwong and Dušanka Mišcevic observe, in the first quarter of the twentieth century the US government enacted a series of stringent anti-immigration laws to sate the demands of the leading labour unions who warned that competition from Chinese labourers and entrepreneurs would render their members jobless, and influential eugenics lobbyists who feared that the Chinese influx would weaken the white race through miscegenation.<sup>193</sup> The moral panic played out in the popular Fu Manchu novels whose eponymous antagonist has ‘all the cunning of the Eastern race’<sup>194</sup> and in

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>191</sup> Boyce, p. 237.

<sup>192</sup> Miller, p. 238.

<sup>193</sup> Kwong and Mišcevic, pp. 117-22.

<sup>194</sup> Clegg, p. 2.

Hollywood films that portrayed Chinese men engaged in washing, cleaning and cooking – work that was traditionally the preserve of American women.<sup>195</sup>

Although articulated more subtly than before, Manilaist Sinophobia hinging on ‘economic function’<sup>196</sup> survives into the last quarter of the twentieth century due to a synthesis of material determinations including, in the Philippines, ‘the rise of large-scale retailing [...] concentrated in the hands of a small group of upper-stratum “Chinese Filipino” individuals’<sup>197</sup> and, in the US, the erosion of ‘national identity’ caused by Chinese ‘direct foreign investment’ in New York City.<sup>198</sup> It logically follows, then, that Timothy Mo brandishes canards about the crafty and pennywise tendencies of Danton, a character with ‘a positively Chinese talent’ for the property acquisition board game *Monopoly*.<sup>199</sup> Although Mo, himself a member of the British Chinese diaspora, has won critical accolades for addressing the intricacies of cultural identity, in the final analysis he is a *démodé* essentialist: in the same novel he writes of ‘The immutability of our natures’<sup>200</sup> and, in a July 1999 interview with the *Independent* newspaper, claims: ‘Stereotype has got a negative connotation, in ordinary life and for a novelist. But I’ve never found it a bad word [...] Stereotypes are more likely to be correct than anything else.’<sup>201</sup> Mo is unapologetic about making crudely homogenising denunciations of non-Western societies: ‘It seems to me absolutely demonstrable that cultures are different [...] And if they’re different, they will by definition be unequal [...] A society where you’re taken off in the middle of the night for torture, or your kids fail an exam at school because you don’t pay a bribe to the teacher: they are inferior societies.’<sup>202</sup> Mo’s outlook is indubitably a product of Western hegemonic discourse’s turn away from

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<sup>195</sup> Kwong and Mišcevic, p. 128.

<sup>196</sup> Caroline S. Hau, ‘The “Chinese Question”: A Marxist Interpretation,’ in *Marxism in the Philippines: Continuing Engagements*, ed. by Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem and Laura L. Samson (Manila: Anvil, 2010) pp. 156-187 (p. 157).

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>198</sup> Kwong and Mišcevic, p. 324.

<sup>199</sup> Mo, *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup>, p. 134.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>201</sup> Boyd Tonkin, ‘The Books Interview: Timothy Mo - Postcards from the Edge’, *Independent Online*, 9 July 1999, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/the-books-interview-timothy-mo-postcards-from-the-edge-1105400.html>> [accessed 25 September 2017].

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

race-based value judgements to those of a ‘culturalist’ tenor, as Tzvetan Todorov regards it.<sup>203</sup> ‘What will remain unchanged’ between racism and culturalism, Todorov continues, ‘is the rigidity of determinism (cultural rather than physical now) and the discontinuity of humanity, compartmentalised into cultures that cannot and must not communicate with one another effectively.’ Furthermore, ‘“Culturalism’ [...] replaces physical race with linguistic, historical or psychological race.’<sup>204</sup> In culturalist-era narratives such as *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup> and *The Philippines* (1968) by the American historian Raymond Nelson, aspersions about the insularity and cronyism of the Chinese as a discrete community are more frequent than the often individualised, sometimes biologised *ad hominem*s of previous Manilaists. As Nelson writes, ‘the Chinese minority [...] remains loyal to its cultural heritage’.<sup>205</sup>

While Manilaism has been the prevailing prism through which Westerners have apprehended Manila, it is by no means the only prism available to those wishing to write about the city. We will now examine how I devised an alternative for the creative element of my thesis.

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<sup>203</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>205</sup> Raymond Nelson, *The Philippines* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 116.

## **Part 2**

### **1. *Searching for Manila as a Radical Travelogue***

As an antidote to ‘the writing of travel [that] has perpetuated Empire’, which could encompass many of the Manilaist texts critiqued above, Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund propose a sub-genre they style ‘innovative travel writing’<sup>206</sup> that can ‘reveal’ a ‘progressive politics ... wherein the travel writer is self-reflexive about the genre (and his or her participation in it)’.<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, they claim, innovative travel writing is ‘polyphonic’ given that it absorbs ‘diverse narrative voices’<sup>208</sup> and is ‘sensitive to multiple points of view’ because it ‘recognize[s] the power relations – the political

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<sup>206</sup> Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Mobility at Large: Globalization, Textuality and Innovative Travel Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 5.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

agendas – that are often concealed behind the force of knowledge.’<sup>209</sup> A further trait is ‘textual experimentation with language, stylistics and form.’<sup>210</sup> Another contemporary travel writing scholar, Debbie Lisle, argues, ‘In order for travel writers to accept the discursive construction of their destinations, they would have to engage in another *meta*-conversation – this time about fundamental spatial categories underscoring the genre of travel writing as a whole.’<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, Lisle regrets the ‘unwillingness of travel writers to address the difficulties of representing others.’<sup>212</sup>

I now want to examine how the suggestions made and challenges posed by Edwards, Graulund and Lisle have shaped the research and writing up of *Searching for Manila*, the creative component of my PhD thesis. In the first sub-section, entitled Genre Self-Reflexivity, I argue that the persistent dissection of my personal opinions, research ethics and status as a Western professional journalist in a post-colonial site produces a counterweight to Manilaism’s arrogant trust in the authority and authenticity of its own gaze. In the next sub-section, Polyphonic Agendas, I hold that *Searching for Manila* promotes multiple points of view for the purpose of exposing power relations and political agendas in a number of ways, including my attempts to write the ‘shadow’<sup>213</sup> of Filipino rather than Western authors who reduce or excise those aspects of the city they find distasteful. Then, in Textual Experimentation, I demonstrate *Searching for Manila*’s application of parodic idioms and transitional structures designed to variously deconstruct and provide alternatives to the clichés of Manilaist prose. In Challenging Spatial Assumptions, I answer Lisle’s call for travel writers to ‘[identify] the formations of power that make distinctions between here and there seem natural’ and to ‘stop conceiving of the world in terms of the static geographies of Empire’ by interrogating the ontological grounds for Manilaist constructions of urban

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>211</sup> Lisle, p. 273.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

geography and detailing *Searching for Manila*'s attempts to rescue positive value from an often degraded and embattled cityscape.<sup>214</sup> Finally, *Representing Others* explores my use of techniques to overcome 'the difficulties of representing others' such as through illuminating the social, economic and political forces that shape a jaundiced perspective of a person or persons.

Although guided by the categories implied by Edwards, Graulund and Lisle, I also throughout this section draw on linguistic, representational and narrative modes adopted from oppositional post-colonial creative and critical writers. Some of these figures are Filipinos (such as the novelist Jessica Hagedorn and the essayist Luis H. Francia), others are Westerners (amongst them the Australian aid worker/travel author Tom Bamforth and the American historical novelist John Sayles) with whom I share the qualities of textual self-awareness and socio-political emphasis. Whatever their nationality, these figures are consonant in so far as they all critically interpret Manila in fashions that repudiate Manilaist significations. Meanwhile, other anti-hegemonic texts that have inspired me focus on colonial and post-colonial sites other than Manila, but nonetheless yield some valuable tools that I, in my creative practice, have been able to modify for the Manila setting. Moreover, in the words that follow, I justify my adoption of methodologies – amongst them 'history from below'<sup>215</sup> and polyphonic anthropology – rooted in the testimonies of citizens without the advantages of political power and social capital.

The cumulative effect of mobilising these strategies arguably situates my book as a 'radical travelogue.' This appellation seems suitable, as critics have used it to define travel narratives with a discernible leftist political angle, be this reportage on Basque society and politics from a Trotskyist perspective<sup>216</sup> or a chronicle of a journey

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>215</sup> Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), p. 105.

<sup>216</sup> Peter Paul Markin, 'From The New Left Archives – Carl Davidson's Guardian Series – "Trotskyism - Left In Form, Right In Essence" (1973)', *Markin Book Review*, 3rd October 2010

to Palestine's West Bank 'packaged as a noble challenge to Israel's dehumanisation of Palestinians'.<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, my conception of the radical travelogue is commensurable with Tim Youngs' view that Gary Younge's work is 'radical' due to its 'concentration on the social self and the cultural self rather than purely personal self'.<sup>218</sup> Thus, in order to dispute Manilism's reactionary politics and the literary techniques that enable such politics, *Searching for Manila* is both formally radical in the manner that Graulund, Edwards and Lisle favour and ideologically radical given that, following the guidance Kári Gíslason offers travel writers to state 'what you hope to achieve from your travels',<sup>219</sup> my book evokes Manila through the lens of my left-wing commitments to peace, social equality, economic justice, anti-racism and anti-imperialism. These commitments are expressed early on in the story when I am still a student and several years away from travelling for the first time to Asia.<sup>220</sup> In addition, *Searching for Manila* is, by virtue of its acknowledgment of gender and the domestic space, conceivably more enlightened than the prevailing trend of 'masculinist' travel writing which has for centuries peddled a 'predominantly male [...] mythology' of 'wander[ing] and conquer[ing]'<sup>221</sup> and 'heroic risk-taking'<sup>222</sup> to the exclusion of 'feminist'<sup>223</sup> perspectives on 'the politics of everyday life'<sup>224</sup> and the 'private sphere.'<sup>225</sup> My book features numerous scenes set in the apartments in Portsmouth and Manila that Beth, Fiona and I share, and recounts the discussions we have about adapting to a new culture and our future as a family. The major decisions I have to make throughout this period of

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<<http://markinbookreview.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/from-new-left-archives-carl-davidsons.html>> [accessed 26 October 2017].

<sup>217</sup> Brendan O'Neill, 'The New "Niggers" of Global Affairs', *Spiked Online*, 25 January 2013 <<http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/13292#.WfHEbrpFw2w.>> [accessed 26 October 2017].

<sup>218</sup> Tim Youngs, 'Interview with Gary Younge', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 6 (2002), 96-107 (p. 103).

<sup>219</sup> Gíslason, p. 96.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Sykes, *Searching for Manila: Personal and Political Journeys in an Asian Megacity* (unpublished thesis), pp. 13-20.

<sup>221</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 112.

<sup>222</sup> Susan Bassnett, 'Travel writing and gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 225-232 (p. 225).

<sup>223</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 112.

<sup>224</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>225</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 112.

my life – from deciding to relocate to the Philippines to beginning to write for a ‘political/historical mag’<sup>226</sup> – are strongly influenced by Beth’s counsel. On occasions such as the near-car accident I am involved in, Beth’s empathy is a source of reassurance for me: ‘Tom, it’s not your fault. It’s *Travel SEAN*’s. And it’s his for not looking after himself.’<sup>227</sup> All of which is a far cry from the ‘rugged individualism’ and selfish ‘mastery’ of hegemonic ‘masculine’ travel narratives.<sup>228</sup> My editorial choice to include aspects of my domestic life was borne from the political imperative to complement the more traditionally male travel writer or literary journalist’s ‘impersonal’ concerns (broad politics, culture, society and economics) with, as Rosalind Coward avers, subjects such as ‘health, family, emotional life and sexual relationships’ that have become central to media discourses since the ‘feminisation of journalism’ that accompanied women’s liberation in the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>229</sup>

Devising and sustaining a radical political perspective of course requires an appropriate epistemological framework and, to that end, *Searching for Manila* emulates the participatory research approach of the New Journalism,<sup>230</sup> and the preference for subaltern sources of information associated with the history from below and polyphonic anthropology disciplines. I acknowledge that there is a potential contradiction between the ‘ultimate relativity’ that can result from the deconstructive tendencies of the radical travelogue – especially with respect to its dismantling of grand narratives – and its allegiance to the positivist ambitions of the investigative journalist or leftist historian to ‘tell us the way the world *really* is’ – itself, arguably, constituting yet another grand narrative.<sup>231</sup> However, *Searching for Manila*’s approach to knowledge gathering yields

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<sup>226</sup> Sykes, p. 95.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>228</sup> Renée Hulan, *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill’s-Queen’s University Press, 2002), p. 185.

<sup>229</sup> Rosalind Coward, *Speaking Personally: The Rise of Subjective and Confessional Journalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 82.

<sup>230</sup> Nick Nuttall, ‘Cold-blooded Journalism’, in *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*, ed. by Richard Keeble and Sharon Wheeler (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), pp. 129-152 (p. 135).

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

a solution to the ‘ontological conundrum [of ...] either ultimate relativism or universal truth’ by rejecting both these extremes.<sup>232</sup> Rather than claiming that my constructions are somehow closer than those of the Manilaists to the *objective truth* of what Manila is *really* like, I return to Mignolo’s distinction between two groupings of sources in colonial and post-colonial discourses: those that convey an ‘imperial vision’ of ‘events’ and those that convey a ‘decolonial vision’ of them. ‘The point is not which of the two interpretations better “represents the event”,’ Mignolo avers, ‘but, rather, what the power differential in the domain of knowledge is.’<sup>233</sup> For him, those ‘decolonial’ texts on the subordinate side of the ‘power differential’ provide ‘an-other interpretation that brings forward, on one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (and total) interpretation of events.’<sup>234</sup> *Searching for Manila* is hence informed by an inference drawn from Mignolo that listening to silenced voices can be a productive way of contesting the true (and total) pretensions of Manilaism. (Mignolo’s thoughts here would also seem to be compatible with the history from below methodology mentioned previously and assessed in greater detail below). From roughly the same point of departure as Mignolo, Lisle concludes that, rather than assessing the value of travel books according to their verisimilitude and ‘evocative sense of place’<sup>235</sup>, ‘a travelogue can be judged as ‘good’ to the extent that it acknowledges, addresses and engages with its ethical and political responsibility to the other.’<sup>236</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, the other is defined quite broadly to include, as we saw earlier, the counter-narratives of Filipino creative and critical writers, as well as the often anti-establishment viewpoints of the deprived, subjugated and ostracised Filipino citizens I have met in my travels. Once again, Benita Parry’s intertextual confirmation technique has helped me in *Searching for Manila* to test the validity of

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>233</sup> Mignolo, p. 33.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>235</sup> Lisle, p. 262.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

Manilaist/imperial sources by comparing their propositions to those of anti-Manilaist/decolonial sources.

While I am not a post-colonial writer in the sense of hailing from a post-colonial nation or diaspora, I concur with Said's comment that 'I certainly do not believe the limited proposition that only a black can write about blacks, a Muslim about Muslims, and so forth' in so far as my endeavour, as a Western outsider, to represent the voices of marginalised and subaltern Filipinos has at least, I hope, distinguished me as a Western outsider with a more sensitive perspective on Manila than my Manilaist forebears.<sup>237</sup> In *speaking about* and allowing Filipinos to *speak for themselves* rather than me *speaking for* Filipinos in this manner, *Searching for Manila* can, to borrow a notion from David Damrosch, be categorised as a 'glocal' text because the author, who is not necessarily a native of the culture he or she renders, 'treat[s] local matters for a global audience' by '[emphasising] a movement from the outside world in.'<sup>238</sup>

My sensitivity towards the subject matter of my book necessitated my adherence to a range of ethical imperatives, especially with regard to seeking out and conducting interviews. I have been compelled to change the names of and certain details about the Filipinos who appear in *Searching for Manila* due to the increasing volatility of Philippine society under the oppressive Duterte administration; had I not pseudonymised these individuals, they might be identified by the authorities and persecuted. As G. Thomas Couser observes, 'the use of composite, altered or pseudonymically veiled portraits [...] shields subjects from being recognized by others'<sup>239</sup> and from 'violation of privacy.'<sup>240</sup> Furthermore, I obtained the explicit verbal permission of the real persons who have the aliases 'Beth' and 'Fiona' in *Searching for Manila* to include my interactions with them in the text. I will seek their further

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<sup>237</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 322.

<sup>238</sup> David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 109.

<sup>239</sup> G. Thomas Couser, *Ethics and Life Writing* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

authorisation before I publish a book based on the thesis later this year. While all the Filipinos I formally interviewed also gave me their explicit verbal permission to reproduce their responses, others I encountered more casually did not. However, the various tour guides, taxi drivers, and bar and hotel staff I quote were made aware that I was a journalist researching a story for one or other of the magazines that employed me, which means that I adhered to the widely-accepted ethical convention whereby ‘journalists should consider identifying themselves [...] when you go from observation to what seems closer to an interview – recording someone’s words for publication or broadcast, quoting someone by name.’<sup>241</sup> As per the recommendations of the *Reporting for the Media* (2009) handbook, I tape recorded all the interviews that appear in the final text for the sake of producing ‘verbatim and permanent records, so reporters make fewer factual errors, and sources are less likely to claim that they were misquoted.’<sup>242</sup> Such steps taken to guard against misquoting and misrepresentation were crucial because several of my sources, including the transgender rights activist Genya Liwag, the former sex slave Valentina L. Tupas and the ill-treated inhabitants of the Trinidad Extension slum, could, in Couser’s terminology, be identified as ‘vulnerable’,<sup>243</sup> ‘disadvantaged, disempowered, or marginalized’,<sup>244</sup> and therefore ‘those who represent them must take care not to override their interests’<sup>245</sup> or ‘betray’<sup>246</sup> them.

Other encounters documented in *Searching for Manila* were more morally complicated. While in real life I informed Ralph the junior academic that I was a working journalist, my inwardly expressed desire to ‘goad him into saying something I could use in a story’<sup>247</sup> arguably breaches the National Union of Journalists’ dictums

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<sup>241</sup> Online News Association, ‘Concealing your identity as a journalist’

<<https://ethics.journalists.org/topics/concealing-your-identity-as-a-journalist/>> [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April 2018] (2).

<sup>242</sup> John R. Bender, Lucinda D. Davenport, Michael W. Drager and Fred Fedler, *Reporting for the Media Ninth Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 284.

<sup>243</sup> Couser, p. 14.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> Sykes, p. 161.

that a journalist ‘Obtains material by honest, straightforward and open means’<sup>248</sup> and, ‘In obtaining news or pictures, reporters and press photographers should do nothing that will cause pain or humiliation.’<sup>249</sup> At the same time, it is doubtful that my gentle provocations of Ralph cause him pain or humiliation, given that he volunteers to relate the sad tale of his failed romance with the Chinese-Filipina Tina Lim. Moreover, whatever goading I indulge in is potentially legitimated by the media scholar Liz Tynan’s advice to ‘be confrontational if that is needed. Part of being a journalist involves pursuing important lines of enquiry.’<sup>250</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, I have another apparently problematic engagement, this time with Isko, who guides me around the Tondo area of Manila. After I ask him to share with me ‘off the record’ what he said to a group of Tondo residents, I include his further remarks in the final text of my book anyway.<sup>251</sup> However, looking at this issue from a different perspective, I keep my word to him because he does not ultimately tell me what he said to the residents and so therefore I cannot – and do not – put it into the record. Again, like Ralph, Isko knows full well that I am a reporter – indeed the trip has been arranged with him by my editor at *Travel SEAN* magazine – and that anything else he says to me will likely appear in the public domain. A further, final dilemma arises when, in Davao City, I participate in what Richard Keeble calls ‘subterfuge’<sup>252</sup> by misleading another guide, Arnold, about the true purpose of my inquiries: ‘In truth, I planned to ask Duterte about [...] tourism [...] and crime for the political piece I was doing for *New Inciter*. Except I hadn’t told Arnold and the tourist board about the latter story, which was naughty of me.’<sup>253</sup> In this instance, though, I believe my methods were vindicated by the fact that the knowledge I

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<sup>248</sup> NUJ, ‘NUJ Code of Conduct’ <<https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/>> [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April 2018]. (1).

<sup>249</sup> ‘NUJ Ethical Code 1936’, quoted in Tony Harcup, *The Ethical Journalist* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007)

<sup>250</sup> Liz Tynan, ‘Tools 1: Print Media and Broadcast Interviews’, in *Media and Journalism 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: New Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. by Jason Bainbridge, Nicola Goc and Liz Tynan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 72-80 (p. 74).

<sup>251</sup> Sykes, p. 209.

<sup>252</sup> Richard Keeble, *Ethics for Journalists* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p. 55.

<sup>253</sup> Sykes, p. 209.

sought about the vigilante murders in Davao was ‘in the public interest’<sup>254</sup> because it contributed to ‘exposing or detecting crime’ and ‘exposing corruption or injustice’.<sup>255</sup> Whatever the ethical ambiguities marking these episodes, I confess in *Searching for Manila* to my ‘naughty’<sup>256</sup> or improper conduct as a writer-researcher by critiquing my younger, less experienced, less professional Self from a position of hindsight: ‘Let’s just say that I know things about journalism now that I didn’t then.’<sup>257</sup> For Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson, such ‘reflexivity’<sup>258</sup> is an integral component of memoir and autobiography writing, in which ‘the author or at least narrator’ locates him or herself in the “‘present day” in relation to (another) narrative time’.<sup>259</sup> ‘Autobiography says both “I am here” and “I was there”. Its temporally bifurcated narrator stabilises him or herself by “having a foot in” both these moments of narrative time.’<sup>260</sup> Ultimately, Hunt and Sampson aver, when writers are prepared to map their ‘self-in-process’<sup>261</sup> they gain the ‘opportunity of making [their] [...] own unique contribution’ and establish their own ‘particular ways of speaking to others via the page.’<sup>262</sup> The specific benefits such reflexivity can yield for a writer attempting to compose a radical travelogue against the grain of Manilaist and other Orientalist discourses are discussed in the following section.

## 2. Genre Self-Reflexivity

I have attempted in *Searching for Manila* to remain alert to the disputability of my own observations as a tool for refuting Manilaism’s propensity, through devices such as ‘the

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<sup>254</sup> Keeble, p. 55.

<sup>255</sup> ‘BBC Editorial Guidelines’, quoted in Harcup, p. 45.

<sup>256</sup> Sykes, p.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p.

<sup>258</sup> Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson, *Writing: Self & Reflexivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

commanding view', to deem its own propositions unassailably axiomatic.<sup>263</sup>

Furthermore, *Searching for Manila* disturbs the conventions of the Manilaist travelogue by dramatising incidents from my travels that demonstrate the moral and ethical complications of obtaining data from interviewees and other information resources. In this respect, I have been inspired by comparable scenes in Mark Weston's *The Ringtone and the Drum: Travels in the World's Poorest Countries* (2012). My book also questions and lampoons linguistic modality, another contrivance permitting Manilaist authors to disguise tendentious opinions as natural givens about the world. Manilatism also indulges in the 'excision'<sup>264</sup> and 'reduction'<sup>265</sup> of othered cultural phenomena, practices that I have defied by not only grappling with ideas and events that have escaped Manilaist cognisance, but by deducing how and why such excisions and reductions occur.

As H. Porter Abbott notes, 'narrative is always a matter of selecting'; a writer's gaze will never encompass *everything* about the site he or she is trying to represent nor offer a fully rounded, balanced or neutral transcription of that site.<sup>266</sup> In colonial discourses, David Spurr holds that the commanding view Western writers take of non-Western sites is a conscious act of selection intended to 'convey a sense of mastery over the unknown and over what is often perceived by the Western writer as strange and bizarre.'<sup>267</sup> The consequence is 'the organisation and classification of things [that] takes place according to the writer's own system of value.'<sup>268</sup> Although for Spurr the commanding view is used by ethnocentric travel writers to stress their racial-cultural advantages over what they perceive as unevolved societies, the concept can, I think, be repurposed to comprehend the authorial perspective of Nicholas Loney, whom I briefly

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<sup>263</sup> Spurr, p. 15.

<sup>264</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 167.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>266</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 69.

<sup>267</sup> Spurr, p.15.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

examined in Part 1 of this critical discussion. Rather than assuming mastery over a primitive, native-ruled location, Loney takes a ‘monarch of all I survey’ standpoint on the social and economic stagnation of late Spanish colonial rule in Manila.<sup>269</sup> His framing of the city is achieved through the stylistic conceit of structuring his narrative as, so to speak, a virtual tour that he as narrator leads the reader on: ‘Let us in imagination cross together the fine bridge [...] Do you see those provincial crafts of queer shape and dimension?’<sup>270</sup> Loney’s direct addressing and rhetorical questioning of the reader implies an interactivity between author and reader, which in turn might convince the reader to trust in the veracity of Loney’s observations, whether they are trivial asides about, for example, a ‘not ignoble looking building by the river side’ or evaluative statements about the retardation of Manila’s development by Spanish tax bureaucracy: ‘Enterprise grows faint and languid, and Energy grows listless and benumbed.’<sup>271</sup> Loney’s commanding view is symptomatic of Manilaist representations and is a mechanism by which discourses of imperial power, so argue Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, operate under the illusion that their significations of the periphery are ‘authentic’ and ‘normative’.<sup>272</sup> Indeed, never do Loney, Carpenter or any other Manilaist writer before or after them express doubts about their own interpretations of Manila.

By contrast, *Searching for Manila* is unashamedly self-conscious about the limitations of its gaze because, as Edwards and Graulund aver, ‘the innovative travel writer does not position himself or herself as the primary source of authority.’<sup>273</sup> In my creative practice, then, having questioned the ideological interests undergirding certain interpretations of the causes of World War II, I admit that my own interpretation may be partisan too: ‘And perhaps even a critic of this enterprise like me was guilty of

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<sup>269</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, p. 228.

<sup>270</sup> Loney, p. 4.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>272</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, p. 38.

<sup>273</sup> Edwards and Graulund, p. 10.

exploiting the past – or at least reading the past selectively. But if this were true, I hoped my motive – to write something fair and humane to sell to a magazine in order to feed my family – had some integrity to it.’<sup>274</sup> *Searching for Manila* goes further than this in its rejection of Manilaist ‘authorian sureness’ by engaging directly with the ethical and epistemological obstacles that arose during my field research and integrating them into the fabric of its narrative.<sup>275</sup> For Rosalind Coward, this is one of the ‘techniques of classic reportage’, as exemplified by the Victorian journalist Henry Mayhew, who ‘foregrounds how he constructed his research’ by candidly recounting the hurdles he faced gathering data from a ‘costermongers’ girl who is reluctant to be interviewed’, amongst other members of the Victorian London poor.<sup>276</sup> Akin to Mayhew, in my book I elucidate my concerns about distressing Valentina L. Tupas, an elderly woman who survived sexual enslavement in World War II, with my line of questioning: ‘I sat with them and switched my recorder on. ‘I’m grateful that you’ve agreed to talk to me. I don’t want you to get upset so please just share with me whatever you’re comfortable sharing with me’.’<sup>277</sup> If, like other predominate cultural discourses, Manilaism ‘internal[ises] the priorities and fashions of established power’ by ‘set[ting] aside serious doubts’ and lacking ‘scepticism’, the radical journalist or travel writer can resist such a mindset by questioning ‘higher authority and deference to ‘experts’.’<sup>278</sup> In the same manner, the author and development expert Mark Weston, in his political travelogue *The Ringtone and the Drum* (2012), is wary of the ‘cacophony of speculation, theory and reportage of varying authority’ surrounding the assassination of the President of Guinea-Bissau.<sup>279</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, I repeatedly doubt the sincerity of Frankie Salazar, the self-assured provincial politician, and the reliability of

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<sup>274</sup> Sykes, p. 193.

<sup>275</sup> Lisle, p. 270.

<sup>276</sup> Coward, p. 22.

<sup>277</sup> Sykes, p. 97.

<sup>278</sup> John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 486-487.

<sup>279</sup> Mark Weston, *The Ringtone and the Drum: Travels in the World’s Poorest Countries* (London: Zero Books, 2012), p. 81.

his claim to have been Ferdinand Marcos' body double: 'I looked hard at Frankie's face while he lit a menthol Marlboro and struggled to see his likeness to the Great Dictator.'<sup>280</sup>

Another technique used by Manilaists to shore up the supposed normativity of their propositions is what the socio-linguist Norman Fairclough calls 'expressive modality': word choices and grammatical forms that reveal a 'speaker or writer's authority with respect to the truth or probability of a representation of reality.'<sup>281</sup> The eponymous narrator of *Jack Curzon* states 'the Spanish rule [...] is and has been always cruel and bloodthirsty.'<sup>282</sup> For Fairclough, modalising verbs such as 'is' and adverbs like 'always' are the 'conventions routinely drawn upon in discourse to embody ideological assumptions which come to be taken as mere "common sense", and which contribute to sustaining existing power relations.'<sup>283</sup> The reader of Gunter's damning judgement of the Spanish may be persuaded of its legitimacy because its wording shows a 'categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition.'<sup>284</sup> In another iteration of modality, Stratemeyer's martial novels feature pompous introductions that make obdurate claims for historical verisimilitude. 'The author has endeavoured to be as accurate historically, as possible,' writes Stratemeyer in *The Campaign of the Jungle*, before going on to reassure the reader that the story is based on real-life military reports and soldiers' testimonies.<sup>285</sup> In that one sentence, simple present tense verbs such as 'has' and 'are' have the modalising impact of reassuring the reader of Stratemeyer's earnestness about the truth status of his story.<sup>286</sup> *Under Dewey at Manila* begins with the pledge that it will 'trace, incident by incident, just as they actually happened.'<sup>287</sup> The intensifier 'actually' is intended to heighten the authenticity of both Stratemeyer's

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<sup>280</sup> Sykes, p. 129.

<sup>281</sup> Fairclough, p. 105.

<sup>282</sup> Gunter, p. 39.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>285</sup> Stratemeyer, *The Campaign of the Jungle*, p. iv.

<sup>286</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p. 107.

<sup>287</sup> Stratemeyer, *Under Dewey at Manila*, p. iii.

statement and of the source material the statement is based on. In addition to being transparent about the contingency of its own propositions, *Searching for Manila* deconstructs the modalities of Orientalist language by suggesting a line concerning the failure of the Philippine state to combat poverty that might appear in a contemporary, Manilaist-like travel guide: 'On the other hand, the multinational banks and smart hotels of the business district of Makati will undoubtedly remind the Western visitor of Manhattan or the City of London.'<sup>288</sup> My inclusion of the adverb 'undoubtedly' implies that the hypothetical author of this imagined guidebook believes Manila's emulation of Western cities to be a rigid and desirable phenomenon.

Some Manilaist writers choose certain words over others to suit their ideological agendas while others omit certain words and phrases for the same objective. MacMicking shares Loney's contempt towards a waning Spanish Manila, although his construction is underwritten by excision and reduction, techniques Edward Said identifies in the oeuvre of the Victorian Egyptologist Edward William Lane (a contemporary of MacMicking's). Said suggests that Lane was so anxious about the reaction his Western readers would have to the radical otherness of Egyptian sexual mores that he consciously 'excised from [the Orient] what, in addition to his own human sympathies, might have ruffled the European sensibility.'<sup>289</sup> Another of Lane's signifying practices was to understate '[the Orient's] odd calendars, its exotic spatial configurations, its hopelessly strange languages, its seemingly perverse morality.'<sup>290</sup> These 'eccentricities of Oriental life' were 'reduced considerably when they appeared as a series of detailed items presented in a normative European prose style.'<sup>291</sup> According to Said, other Orientalists have applied the reduction strategy to non-Western political situations, as illustrated by the conservative historian Bernard Lewis' 'condescension'

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<sup>288</sup> Sykes, p. 79.

<sup>289</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 167.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

towards events in the Arab world: ‘Revolution is excitement, sedition, setting up a petty sovereignty – nothing more; the best counsel (which presumably only a Western scholar and gentleman can give) is “wait until the excitement dies down.”’<sup>292</sup> In MacMicking’s work, excision and reduction of Philippine politics operate in symbiosis. In order to legitimise the usurpation of Spain by another empire, it is vital that he diminishes Spain’s record as the governing regime while simultaneously downplaying or flatly ignoring nationalist militancy for fear that it will dissuade Britain or the US from deeper involvement in the archipelago. While MacMicking censures Spanish theocracy, metropolitan planning and commercial ineptness, the nearest he gets to acknowledging nationalism is a peculiar anecdote about ‘a party of young men’ who would nightly sail a cargo boat into Manila’s lagoon and fire guns at the buildings on the banks.<sup>293</sup> When MacMicking writes these sorties off as mindless acts of mischief by *tulisanes* (brigands) whose leader was ‘one notorious for his love of fun, and what are called practical jokes’,<sup>294</sup> he is at one with the official rhetoric of the Spanish colonial state of the time that regularly dismissed revolutionary activity as banditry.<sup>295</sup> MacMicking goes no further in analysing these men’s motives or demands, even though, given the political conditions of the 1850s, it is possible if not likely that they were anti-colonial revolutionaries. Laguna province had long been a hotbed of insurrection and in 1840, its population had supported Hermano Pule’s founding of the *indio*-only religious order, the Cofradía de San José, regarded by the Spanish as treasonous.<sup>296</sup> Given that Constantino’s and Luis H. Francia’s *exposés* of the full extent of anti-Spanish rebellion in almost every corner of the Philippines throughout this phase are based on primary sources, we might conclude that MacMicking’s omission is a deliberate endeavour. But leaving aside the solutions intertextual confirmation offer to us and casting a more

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<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>293</sup> MacMicking, p. 138.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>295</sup> Constantino, p. 190.

<sup>296</sup> Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, pp. 105-112.

formalistic eye over MacMicking's text, the internal contradictions of his account suggest that the actions of these 'robbers', as he eventually deems them, are excessive if indeed they are robbers.<sup>297</sup> Obtaining firearms, commandeering a boat and effectively declaring war on the state (and, MacMicking tells us, resulting in 'great efforts to put down the daring troop') do not seem like the actions of petty or even organised criminals.<sup>298</sup> Supposing we take MacMicking at his word, at no point does he go on to claim that they have stolen or tried to steal anything from the neighbourhoods they have bombarded. Stranger still, these desperados take great care 'not to do harm or to kill any one' – behaviour more aligned, perhaps, to the freedom fighter's ethic of not hurting the very people he or she seeks to liberate.<sup>299</sup>

Later Manilaists attempt to reduce and excise Western strategic interference in the Philippines. After the Philippine declaration of independence on 4th July 1946 – the choice of date alone symbolises the limitations of that independence – Manilaist denials about American imperial intrusion into the country are shaped by the geopolitical imperatives of the Cold War. Writing in the mid-1950s, DeLouis Stevenson persistently applauds the American regeneration of post-war Manila while just as often raising the security threat of the Hukbalahap Marxist rebellion then raging in the rural provinces of Luzon. The connection she fails to make between these two phenomena is that, as James Hamilton-Paterson elucidates, a major component of the American intercession was a CIA counterinsurgency operation against the Hukbalahap communists.<sup>300</sup> Such interference, according to Homi K. Bhabha, would come to be the norm in the post-Euroimperialist era's 'sharp growth in a new Anglo-American nationalism that increasingly articulates its economic and military power in political acts that express a neo-imperialist disregard for the independence and autonomy of peoples and places in

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<sup>297</sup> MacMicking, p. 140.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>300</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, pp. 52-55.

the Third World.’<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, just as MacMicking and others in the preceding century reduced Philippine nationalism to opportunistic criminality, Stevenson never pauses to consider the movement’s objectives: a revolution in the name of agrarian justice and wealth redistribution. Such a reluctance to understand feeds into Red Menace paranoia; when the grandson of Bishop Sobrepeña, one of her husband’s colleagues, is kidnapped she immediately presumes the rebels are behind it. As it turns out, a servant maid is to blame.<sup>302</sup>

A more recent doyen of excision – that *Searching for Manila* interrogates – is the British poet and foreign correspondent James Fenton. The expansion of Asian tourism in the 1980s, as discussed earlier, may be one reason why Benedict Anderson, in a 1986 review of Fenton’s reportage on the Philippines for *Granta* magazine, defines Fenton as ‘the political tourist’ a certain ilk of travel writer who has ‘neither ideological nor aesthetic objectives in mind [...] [,] his travels to exotic politics are aimed at the acquisition of slides which will be saleable on the mass market for the vicarious *frissons* they offer to consumers.’<sup>303</sup> Fenton’s fast-moving, package-touristic accumulation of souvenirs, serio-comic encounters and visually spectacular sights constitutes, for Anderson, an exigently superficial outlook that can never adequately engage with ‘Real history [...] because it moves deep within memory, consciousness and custom [...] And it does not lend itself easily to photo-opportunities or piquant interviews.’<sup>304</sup> Anderson then goes on to chart a series of basic historical facts that Fenton’s ‘insouciant illiteracy’<sup>305</sup> causes him to excise, from the Philippine Revolution having been the first victorious anti-colonial struggle in Asia to modern US manipulation of Philippine politics to ensure the survival of its Cold War military bases.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Bhabha, p. 20.

<sup>302</sup> Stevenson, p. 17.

<sup>303</sup> Benedict Anderson, ‘James Fenton’s Slideshow’, *New Left Review*, 158 (1986), pp. 1-11 (p. 1).

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

In the process of writing *Searching for Manila*, to some extent I appropriated Anderson's review of Fenton as a checklist for *what details not to leave out* in my own creative practice. Not only did I ensure I included many of these points but I render them in clear and declarative sentences that connote my approval of the Philippine revolutionary cause: 'His [Rizal's] death wasn't in vain – it inspired the first ever anti-colonial revolution against a European empire in Asia.'<sup>307</sup> My re-inscriptions were also motivated by reading 'How to Write About Africa', Binyavanga Wainaina's sardonic survey of Western literature's expurgation of images that diverge from the metropolitan consensus stance on the continent: 'Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers and intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola or female genital mutilation.'<sup>308</sup> Another African author who has been a fruitful resource to me is Chinua Achebe, who spent his career 'documenting the sophistication of traditional Ibo society' omitted from European literary depictions of his native Nigeria.<sup>309</sup> Although my adoption of Achebe's approach comes with the codicil that I am not a member of the culture I am assessing, my effort to reframe Manila is, I hope, a small compensatory gesture for the absence or devaluation of Philippine nationalism and anti-imperialism characteristic of Fenton and many of his fellow Manilaists.

In addition to foregrounding hitherto neglected data, *Searching for Manila* problematises the conditions that result in historical events being not only expurgated from the Manilaist canon but under-discussed in contemporary media and political discourses. In the chapter 'Selective Memorials', I wanted to test Reynaldo C. Ileto's claim that 'the politics of remembering and forgetting [...] wars is what really constitutes the much-vaunted special relationship between the United States and the

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<sup>307</sup> Sykes, p. 194.

<sup>308</sup> Binyavanga Wainaina, 'How to Write About Africa', *Granta 92: The View From Africa* (2006), 1-5 <<https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>> [accessed 27 July 2017] (p. 1).

<sup>309</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Post-colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5.

Philippines’ by recounting my quest to find a monument to the Philippine-American War.<sup>310</sup> However, all I can locate is ‘a brief and vague tribute to those who died valiantly between 1899 and 1902’, which seems to support Iletto’s thesis that there is indeed an ideologically orchestrated mass-amnesia about the conflict.<sup>311</sup> ‘Perhaps briefly and vaguely’, I go on to write, ‘was how the Americans and the modern Americophile rulers of the Philippines liked to remember this rampage of arson, torture, disease, war crime and racially-driven genocide.’<sup>312</sup> Further than that, in order to compensate for such ‘reactionary forgetting’<sup>313</sup> and the lacunae in the dominant discourse of ‘humanitarian intervention’,<sup>314</sup> this chapter cites counter-hegemonic creative texts such as *Dusk* (1998) by the Filipino author F Sionil José. The novel portrays the flight of a group of *remontado* peasants from Spanish friarocratic oppression and into a Romantically rejuvenating vision of the countryside that can be read as an allegory for nascent Filipino nationhood. In the latter stages of the story, when the US has supplanted Spain as the *bête-noir* of the Philippine Revolution, José renders the marauding American infantrymen as ‘a ruthless enemy who defiled women and bayoneted children.’<sup>315</sup> There is even a meta-textual nod to how the full grisly facts of the conflict will never be properly comprehended in the real world beyond the fictional universe of the novel: ‘Yes, Eustaquio – there is so much the world does not know, how the Americans have tortured our people, committed the most brutal crimes against humanity.’<sup>316</sup>

### 3. Polyphonic Agendas

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<sup>310</sup> Iletto, p. 15.

<sup>311</sup> Sykes, p. 189.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>313</sup> Michele Elam, ‘Mixed Race and Cultural Memory: Carl Hancock Rux’s *Talk*’, in *Signatures of the Past: Cultural Memory in Contemporary Anglophone North American Drama*, ed. by Marc Maufort and Caroline De Wagter (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 83-101 (p. 95).

<sup>314</sup> Sykes, p. 192.

<sup>315</sup> F. Sionil José, *Dusk* (New York: Modern Library, 2013), Amazon Kindle e-book, (chapter 13, para. 1, location 2971).

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 3271-73.

If, as argued earlier, the radical travelogue can disrupt authorial certainty through self-reflexivity, then it can call on multiple voices to challenge the ‘grand narrative[s]’ of the Manilaist mentality.<sup>317</sup> Manilaist antipathy to difference is visible in the narrative technique known as ‘shadowing’ wherein a writer only references texts that endorse rather than test his or her preconceptions.<sup>318</sup> On the other hand, *Searching for Manila* recuperates shadowing for the sake of disclosing the observations of Filipino writers, such as Nick Joaquin, with nationalist, ‘civicist’<sup>319</sup> and cosmopolitan sensibilities. I will sketch out the ways in which Manilaism has, due to its fallacious empirical research methodologies, reproduced Western hegemonic notions about Manila at the expense of the thoughts and feelings of local people. In response to this shortcoming, my own researches endeavoured to canvass the attitudes of Manileños towards various socio-political phenomena such as racism, a thorny topic that Manilaists have typically denied or equivocated about.

In a number of Manilaist travelogues, the rejection of discursive heterogeneity operates in synchrony with the exclusion of the voices of Manileños via shadowing, wherein a traveller-writer explicitly alludes to another Western traveller-writer from an earlier period who limned the same geographical site(s). For Lisle, the device often reinforces a reactionary nostalgia within the later writer because ‘to mimic the adventures of great colonial explorers’ is ‘part of the attraction of reviving colonialism and patriarchy.’<sup>320</sup> Like so, we find twentieth century Manilaists composing in the shadow of previous Western visitors to Manila for the purpose of vindicating their own peccadilloes, such as Ian Buruma’s *God’s Dust: A Modern Asian Journey* (1991) when he cites General Douglas MacArthur to support his point that, long after achieving

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<sup>317</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism*, (London: Open University Press, 1999), p. 66.

<sup>318</sup> Lisle, p. 77.

<sup>319</sup> See Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p.1 for a definition of ‘civicism’ as ‘the sentiment of urban pride’, or a feeling of patriotism about a city rather than a nation.

<sup>320</sup> Lisle, p. 77.

independence, Filipinos remain infatuated with a foreign figure who formerly played a significant role in their governance: ‘There is something extraordinary about a colonised country receiving the general of the colonial power back as a savior.’<sup>321</sup> Occasionally, Manilaists will shadow Filipino writers and intellectuals, but usually to substantiate ethnocentric prejudices. Buruma paraphrases a book by Reynaldo C. Ileto that ‘traces the forms of peasant rebellion back to folk versions of the passion’ that, for Buruma, shows that the modern Philippines remains beholden to ‘ancestor worship’, ‘a succession of messiahs’ and other atavistic customs.<sup>322</sup> In a similar spirit, while James Hamilton-Paterson commends Nick Joaquin for his capacity as a writer to ‘glimpse the palimpsest beneath’<sup>323</sup> the ‘shapeless, confused and unrelievedly twentieth century mess’<sup>324</sup> of Manila’s streets, ultimately what Hamilton-Paterson finds in the shadow of Joaquin is yet another glum Manilaist banality: ‘A pleasurable sense of history is hard won in Manila.’<sup>325</sup> Earlier Manilaists implement a variation on shadowing: a plot device that I have coined ‘the disparaging return’ that customarily involves a character or narrator comparing a later stay in Manila with an earlier one, in order to highlight Spanish cunctation over developing the city. In *Under Dewey at Manila*, the US sailor Striker laments that Manila looks exactly as it did when ‘I was here years ago’<sup>326</sup> while Carpenter appends a paragraph on the overcrowding, polluted canals and insalubrious accommodation he encountered when exploring Manila in 1899 with a subsequent paragraph that fêtes the opulent hotels and efficient ‘motor-car’ taxis he enjoyed on his most recent stopover in 1928.<sup>327</sup> These sumptuous facilities are synecdoches for US colonialism’s putative elevation of all aspects of Philippine life.

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<sup>321</sup> Ian Buruma, *God’s Dust: A Modern Asian Journey* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 71.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>323</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *Playing with Water*, p. 129.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>326</sup> Stratemeyer, *Under Dewey at Manila*, p. 248

<sup>327</sup> Carpenter, p. 11.

In contrary mode, *Searching for Manila* proceeds in the shadow of primary sources composed by Filipino authors with oppositional sensibilities, such as the historian Renato Constantino, the novelist F. Sionil José and the historian and social essayist Luis H. Francia. Like Buruma and Hamilton-Paterson, I also shadow Ileta and Joaquin, although I emphasise the more critical dimensions of their thought. In Part I of the book, long before I first travel to the Philippines, I chance across Joaquin's (writing under the pseudonym Quijano de Manila) *Language of the Street and Other Essays* (1980) and appreciate both its defiance of those Manilaists who underrate Manila's cultural and aesthetic value and its avoidance of an essentialising nativism that glorifies 'pre-colonial, indigenous ways.'<sup>328</sup> Joaquin is passionate about the hybrid influence of Spain, Mexico, China, the US and Europe on Manila's architecture, cuisine, fashion, art, literature, educational institutions and religious festivals. But the fact that, as he writes, 'Manila has been a Malay city, a Spanish city, an American city, and is now a Filipino city'<sup>329</sup> does not mean Manila is confused or uncertain about its true identity – rather this dynamic cultural blend is precisely a precondition for the city's uniqueness and a valid reason for 'civicism':<sup>330</sup> 'When a Manileño speaks, he speaks – whether he knows it or not – with all his past behind him, which is why his voice rings with such authority and pride.'<sup>331</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, my discovery of Joaquin while still a student provides a counterweight to the one-sided narrative my pro-colonial grandfather related to me when I was a child: 'After what I'd gleaned from a British navy officer, here was a Manileño's take on Manila.'<sup>332</sup>

In addition to proposing alternative shadows to productively inhabit, *Searching for Manila* deconstructs the shadows of Western novelists who have 'cherry-picked the

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<sup>328</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, p. 159.

<sup>329</sup> Nick Joaquin ('Quijano de Manila'), *Language of the Street and Other Essays* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1980), p. 87.

<sup>330</sup> Bell and de-Shalit, p. 1.

<sup>331</sup> Joaquin, p. 87.

<sup>332</sup> Sykes, p. 23.

most graphic aspects of reality’ to present the city as ‘disastrous, depressing and dangerous’.<sup>333</sup> I am of course not the first to interrogate the shortcomings of such shadows cast across post-colonial literature on Manila and elsewhere. Nigel Barley’s serio-comic memoir of a field trip to study the Dowayo people of Cameroon, *The Innocent Anthropologist* (1983), reproaches Western ethnographers for having ‘various axes to grind’, whether their constructions are entrenched in a ‘bland assumption of Western cultural superiority’ or, in an equally dubious hypothesis, Africans ‘prove a point about [...] [Westerners’] own society and [...] [allow them] to castigate those aspects of it they find unattractive’.<sup>334</sup> Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1991), an intertextual, temporally disjointed, post-modern novel that charts the fortunes of a well-connected Manila family from the 1950s to the 1990s, is intercut with excerpts from nineteenth century Western texts whose turgid rhetoric ironically counterpoints the gritty, sordid realities of late twentieth century Manila. For instance, an 1898 address by President McKinley to Methodist clergy in which he promises ‘by God’s grace [...] to uplift and civilize and Christianize [...] Manila; then Luzon; then other islands’<sup>335</sup> prefaces a chapter in the book about an American tourist drunkenly harassing a Filipino male prostitute in a dingy 1980s Manila nightclub.<sup>336</sup>

Manilaism’s affection for shadows that sanction its chauvinism is isochronous with an aversion to consulting a broad enough range of sources, especially those that might negate or disprove such prejudices. One of Anderson’s other criticisms of Fenton is that he over-relies on the opinions of upper-class Filipino officials and privileged Western habitués. ‘He [...] misses the opportunity to see a single Muslim’ and meets ‘the owner of a vast banana plantation (but not with any of his 6,000 labourers).’<sup>337</sup> Several decades before Fenton, Carpenter presents a highly selective analect of

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>334</sup> Nigel Barley, *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes From a Mud Hut* (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 94-5.

<sup>335</sup> William McKinley, quoted in Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 71.

<sup>336</sup> Hagedorn, pp. 71-72.

<sup>337</sup> Anderson, ‘James Fenton’s Slide Show’, p. 3.

viewpoints ‘expressed by men I have met in my travels who seem to me to be qualified to speak with authority on the subject [of the future of Philippine politics]’, all of whom just so happen to demur about the viability of full independence and endorse the US’s continued entanglement in the Philippine polity.<sup>338</sup> ‘Possession of the Philippines is a vital necessity to the defence of the United States’ one army officer tells him.<sup>339</sup> An American academic ‘contends that if independence should be granted, the Christian Filipinos are sure to set up a despotic rule’.<sup>340</sup>

To avoid repeating the errors of Fenton and Carpenter, when selecting potential interviewees for *Searching for Manila*, my main objective was to locate a broad, pluralistic spectrum of opinions and experiences.

Carpenter’s preference for elite ways of seeing is reflected in his juxtaposition of the ‘three Manilas’, which exalts the contemporary, Westernised quarter of the city: ‘the Spanish city within the walls; the native, more or less Malay, town of nipa palm shacks, carabaos and fishing boats; and the modern American Manila that is being developed according to plans that will some day make this one of the most beautiful cities of the East.’<sup>341</sup> It would be too chauvinistic for this disciple of benevolent assimilation to bluntly avow that American Manila is superior to the other two Manilas, so instead American Manila is presented as preferable by dint of its altruistic capacity to deliver advancement to the city as a whole. For Miller too, the ‘Empirical democracy of America’ exercises a benign authority over ‘the social mosaic.’<sup>342</sup> Boyce expresses the same sentiment albeit through the more ostentatious metaphor of Manila as a ‘layer cake’: ‘The caramel-coloured Malays form the bottom layer. The next filler is sixteenth-century Spanish. Then comes the blend of these, Spanish and Malay, with a strong dash of Chinese – the upper-class Filipino. The top layer, including the cream, is good old

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<sup>338</sup> Carpenter, p. 265.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>342</sup> Miller, p. 28.

American.’<sup>343</sup> In reproducing the official American stance on urban demographics, Boyce trivialises the social and ethnic divisions in the city by invoking the playful, almost child-like image of the cake and likening its ingredients to skin colour.

*Searching for Manila* dissents from such thinking about race and ethnicity by first of all absorbing the historian Carl H. Nightingale’s conclusion that the US colonial state did little to rectify Spanish segregationism, extending and multiplying Manila’s socio-geographical inequalities by converting the Escolta neighbourhood into a ‘kind of American zone’ and constructing the whites-only hill station of Baguio.<sup>344</sup> To obtain a more nuanced understanding of the issue, I adopted the epistemology of the history from below movement pioneered by Thorold Rogers, Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. The objective of the movement is to revise our understanding of historical change by giving attention to the perspectives of “‘real people” [...] whose lived experiences was thought by scholars to be of no interest’, and in so doing challenge ‘a lofty nineteenth century vision of the great deeds of ruling elites.’<sup>345</sup> Correspondingly, the anthropologist Massimo Canevacci (from whom Edwards and Graulund may have loaned the term ‘polyphony’) asserts that ‘nobody wants to delegate to another professional the right to represent him/herself’, meaning that empirical researchers must appreciate that their human subjects of study are engaged in ‘self-representation [...] understandable only through their autonomous visions and reflections.’<sup>346</sup> In line with this credo, my conversations in *Searching for Manila* with Danilo the poet and Ralph the junior academic (both culturally embedded Filipino nationals who voice their opinions freely) reveal that the Filipino preference for the ‘white’<sup>347</sup> Harry Potter and

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<sup>343</sup> Boyce, p. 229.

<sup>344</sup> Carl H. Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 301.

<sup>345</sup> Black and MacRaild, p. 105.

<sup>346</sup> Canevacci, Massimo, 'Digital Auratic Reproducibility: Ubiquitous Ethnographies and Communicational Metropolis', in *An Ethnography of Global Landscapes and Corridors*, ed. by Loshini Naidoo (Rijeka: In Tech, 2012), p. 252 (pp. 249-260).

<sup>347</sup> Sykes, p. 88.

for ‘Caucasian-looking’<sup>348</sup> mixed race film actors is channelled by an underlying racism that can be traced back to the Spanish *casta* (caste) system: ‘When I was younger I was dark and got taunted at school for it. Nowadays if you are quite dark and you stroll around Manila, you may get a rich person come up to you and ask, “Are you for hire?” They will assume you are a lowly domestic servant’.<sup>349</sup> Another text that inspired me in this respect is Mark Mann’s backpacker memoir, *The Gringo Trail: A Darkly Comic Road Trip Through South America* (1999). Mann offers some piercing insights into how the ‘hidden system of racism and apartheid’,<sup>350</sup> that is a residue of the Spanish Empire, manifests itself in the paucity of native Indian citizens represented in the mass-media of Latin America.<sup>351</sup> Mann characterises the Indians as ‘unpeople’, a concept borrowed from investigative journalism and defined by Owen Jones as ‘millions of people in poor countries who are marginalised or entirely absent from media coverage.’<sup>352</sup> If, as I argue above, sloppy Manilaist fact-finding results in a compromised conjuration of Manila, so faults in the structural design of Manilaist books, the order in which their narratives are presented, can circumscribe and belittle the textual space of Manila, as we will see in the following sub-section.

#### **4. Textual Experimentation**

‘Travel writing,’ argue Edwards and Graulund, ‘has always been a pastiche of diverse textual forms.’<sup>353</sup> Whereas most travelogues imitate memoir, adventure yarn, taxonomy, mythology and other styles in a deferential or even celebratory fashion, a minority –

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>350</sup> Mark Mann, *The Gringo Trail: A Darkly Comic Road Trip Through South America* (Chichester: Summersdale, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>352</sup> Owen Jones, ‘Unpeople? We Used to Call Them Working Class’, *Guardian.com*, 20 March 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/20/unpeople-working-class-media-labour>> [accessed 25 July 2017].

<sup>353</sup> Edwards and Graulund, p. 8.

including works by Julio Cortázar, Carol Dunlop<sup>354</sup> and Bruce Chatwin<sup>355</sup> – mock or ironise such styles in the manner of parody rather than pastiche. *Searching for Manila* utilises the parody form to critique the orthodox values and hackneyed literary conventions of the Manilaist genre. Another formal defect of certain Manilaist travelogues is their authors' poor execution of the transitions between these books' narrative and discursive elements. While drafting *Searching for Manila*, I attempted to concoct more effective alternatives by closely examining the structures of travel books by Salman Rushdie and Colin Thubron. The final products can be deemed textually experimental in so far as they deviate from Manilaist norms.

According to David Spurr, in imperialist discourse the parataxis device serves to classify 'the scene surveyed' into a hierarchy of value.<sup>356</sup> *Jack Curzon* construes the human geography of the new American colonial possession of Manila as a 'commercial emporium' with a clear pecking order: 'More aristocratic San Miguel, the busy hives of enterprising foreign merchants, ingenuous Tagal artisans, crafty Chinese traders, and tireless sweating coolies.'<sup>357</sup> Gunter mentions the well-heeled suburbs and financial centre first, followed by Malay-Filipino and Chinese-Filipino professionals, and, at the foot of the ranks, the coolie menial labourers. Almost a century later, when Manilaist writers are wedded to the conceit of third world blues, Hamilton-Paterson in *Ghosts of Manila* mobilises parataxis to illustrate the unfeasibility of good triumphing in a Manila where the evil of vice is omnipresent. In one scene, the moral innocence of a high school graduation ceremony is just an ellipsis away from the sexual exploitation of children: 'These were good girls and boys, the hope for the future, the something or other...Babs had just fingered his club's owner for kidnapping children and selling them

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<sup>354</sup> Maureen Moynagh, 'The Political Tourist's Archive: Susan Meiselas's Images of Nicaragua', in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. by Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), pp. 199-213 (p. 202).

<sup>355</sup> Alison Russell, *Crossing the Boundaries: Post-modern Travel Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 85-91.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>357</sup> Gunter, p. 66.

in the provinces.’<sup>358</sup> Elsewhere in *Ghosts of Manila*, rapid-fire juxtaposition of lurid media headlines fosters a tendentious impression that Manila is consumed by perpetual and concurrent crime:

Only 1 in 4 Parañaque cops use drugs.  
Kindergarten sex slaves. Tots test HIV positive!  
“Only a little formallin” in Xmas apples.  
“No-one left to kill” claims disgruntled Ranger.  
Child workers win mercury from ball-mill effluent.  
3 bn pesos of Pinatubo relief diverted to ghost projects.<sup>359</sup>

The assumption that Manila life is constantly tainted by murder and mayhem is a gross exaggeration given that, according to the sociologists Zarco, Candaliza-Gutierrez and Dulnuan, in 1994, the year *Ghosts of Manila* was published, there were 449 homicides or 5.1 such incidents per 100,000 residents of Metro Manila.<sup>360</sup> Let us compare these figures, for example, to the 2,016 homicides or 11.1 per 100,000 population recorded in New York City for the same year.<sup>361</sup>

With the intention of reclaiming parataxis to critique some of the guiding ideas of Manilaism, I decided at the beginning of Part 2 of *Searching for Manila* to briefly adopt the persona of a commercial travel writer and compose a parody of a popular guidebook. I then annotated these trite remarks with italicised criticisms:

Manila is a city of contrasts *what city hasn't that been said about?*, an interesting *didn't everyone's English teacher tell them never to use that word?* blend of old and new, East and West, rich and poor, calm and busy *so more or less every contrast imaginable, then*. After decades of stagnation, at last Manila is on the up *because its neoliberal rulers are resigned to the Philippines' natural place as an economic colony of wealthier nations – hurrah!* The middle classes are growing *they always seem to be no matter which country or historical period* and life is steadily getting better for the poorest *the good old trickle-down theory; these narratives of progress!* The national character *what a ludicrously essentialist concept – as if every single Filipino behaves exactly the same way by the accident of being born in roughly the same place* is typified *that's probably too smart a word for this hack* by inexhaustible politeness, an easy-going manner and an infectious *joie de vivre*.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *Ghosts of Manila*, p. 59.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>360</sup> Ricardo M. Zaco, Filomin A. Candaliza-Gutierrez and Marlon R. Dulnuan, ‘Trends in Murder and Rape Incidents in the Philippines and Metro Manila, 1980 to 1994’, *Philippine Sociological Review*, 43 (1995), 43-54 (p. 48).

<sup>361</sup> ‘New York Crime Rates 1960-2017’ <<http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/nycrime.htm>> [accessed 2 October 2017].

<sup>362</sup> Sykes, p. 78.

If, as the scholar of the political uses of comedy Simon Dentith writes, parody ‘typically attacks the official word, mocks the pretensions of authoritative discourse,’<sup>363</sup> the parataxising of ‘the official word’ with subversive comments in this excerpt undermines ‘the authoritative discourse’ of Manilism by revealing its socio-economic dogmas (neo-liberalism, trickle-down theory) and essentialist inclinations towards the national character.

My decision to structure this passage as a dialogue between conflicting points of view was partly inspired by a section in José Rizal’s satire on Spanish colonial tyranny *The Social Cancer (Noli Me Tangere)*. Today regarded in the Philippines as a national patriotic icon, Rizal includes in his novel ‘dialogues between two ... [characters, the *mestizo* protagonist of the story Don Crisostomo Ibarra and the cacique rebel Elias,] ... on whether political reform is possible in the Philippines or a revolutionary upheaval inevitable [, which] continue to this day to be part of Philippine progressive discourse and historiography.’<sup>364</sup> Unlike Manilist strategies of reduction and excision, Rizal’s dialectical device gives equal weight to competing diagnoses of the political future of Manila and the Philippines. Moreover, I was moved to research and record the numerous cultural clichés in the passage after studying Wainaina’s inventory of Western literature’s problematic *idées fixe* about Africa: ‘In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country [...] It is hot and dusty [...] Or it is hot and steamy [...] Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls.’<sup>365</sup>

A further stylistic manoeuvre constitutive of Manilism’s selective purview is the application of the passive voice, a grammatical formulation that Norman Fairclough holds is guided by ‘ideological choices to [...] background agency’ because ‘action[s]’ are described without ‘responsible agents’ or ‘attributed state[s]’.<sup>366</sup> In this passage,

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<sup>363</sup> Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>364</sup> Benedict Anderson, ‘First Filipino’, *London Review of Books*, 19 (1997), 22-23, (p. 22).

<sup>365</sup> Wainaina, p. 1.

<sup>366</sup> Fairclough, p. 102.

note how MacMicking's passive construction sweetens the pill of his call for foreign intervention in the Philippines (the italics are mine): 'There is little doubt that *were foreigners allowed* to settle at Zamboanga, Zooloo, Mindanao, and the entire southern coasts of the Philippines would be open to their enterprise, it would be productive of the most beneficial effects'.<sup>367</sup> The use of the passive verb form 'were allowed' absolves MacMicking – ever the discreet Victorian gentleman – from revealing quite how foreigners would or could be allowed to settle in the southern Philippines. An obvious risk of occupying territories within Spain's jurisdiction would be military confrontation with the Spanish, but this is left unsaid. Repetition of the passive voice throughout *The Campaign of the Jungle* – one of many examples is 'A howl arose on the night air, and one gun went off' – has the cumulative effect of absolving US troops in the Philippine-American War from their active role in the aggression.<sup>368</sup> Returning to the excerpt from *Searching for Manila* above, I slightly re-wrote this travel writing truism – 'Many have been left behind' – to illuminate how such a passive sentence can, as I put it in the text, 'exculpate the rich from leaving the poor to rot.'<sup>369</sup> Furthermore, with Fairclough's warnings about the passive voice's 'ideologically motivated obfuscation of agency, causality and responsibility'<sup>370</sup> in mind, I made sure to employ the active voice as much as possible in the discursive passages of my book in order to convey emphatically the determinants of multiplex, contested histories (such as that of pre-colonial Manila)<sup>371</sup> and the culpability of persons and institutions for controversial and dangerous policies (such as President Duterte's anti-narcotics war).<sup>372</sup>

I now want to focus on the advantages *Searching for Manila's* textual architecture has over its Manilaist antecedents. A prime obstacle for travel writers to

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<sup>367</sup> MacMicking, p. 181.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>369</sup> Sykes, pp. 79-80.

<sup>370</sup> Fairclough, p. 103.

<sup>371</sup> Sykes, pp. 170-72.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., pp. 242-47.

overcome is devising structures – at both the sentential level and on the larger scale of the overall text – that allow them to blend narrative and discursive styles.

MacMicking's *Recollections of Manilla* is a sometimes jarring patchwork of narratives about notable people and places; polemical screeds on geopolitics and economics; and catalogues of information on media, etiquette, transport, food, drink and accommodation, complete with prices, weights and measurements. Although each chapter is governed by a relatively lucid theme – an aspect of Manila life that would intrigue a European trader or investor – apparently little thought has gone into what Abbott terms the 'wholeness' of the book, 'in the sense that everything in a narrative somehow *belongs* and contributes to its meaning.'<sup>373</sup> The wholeness and overall meaning of *Recollections of Manila* is impaired by MacMicking's failure to provide logical links between his sometimes radically disparate chapter topics. For example, second-hand reporting on internecine conflict on the island of Sulu is hastily and inexplicably followed by a discussion of the Philippines' agricultural economy interspersed with statistical tables.<sup>374</sup> Likewise, in *United States Colonies and Dependencies Illustrated*, Boyce mismanages the transitions between summaries of historical or geographical data gleaned from secondary sources and his narration of events from the journey he made in person to Manila. The chapter titled 'Docking at Manila' commences by, in the style of Loney's direct address of the reader, explaining the sea routes to the city in the second-person singular ('If you are working for Uncle Sam, you came to the Philippines on a U S army transport for \$1 a day from San Francisco via Honolulu and Guam'), which implies that Boyce is speaking generally about travel options available to all Americans.<sup>375</sup> After that he switches to a third-person point of view, in the commanding view mould, to discuss the Philippines' history and geographical location. After two and a half pages of such material, the

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<sup>373</sup> Abbott, p. 100.

<sup>374</sup> MacMicking, pp. 275-311.

<sup>375</sup> Boyce, p. 220.

reader finally gets an inkling of Boyce's own personal experience of sailing into Manila harbour: '[Corregidor island] lies between the Boca Chica, or narrow mouth, *which we entered*, and the Boca Grande, or wide mouth.'<sup>376</sup> Boyce's abrupt insertion of himself as a character (at the point I have italicised) into what has so far been a detached report composed from objective facts, dates and statistics leaves the reader confused about the continuum of incidents leading up to Boyce *the character's* passage through the Boca Chica because there has been no mention of him and his exploits since the previous chapter recounting his expedition to 'some stray Pacific islands.'<sup>377</sup> It may be that the inability of MacMicking and Boyce to adroitly signal the shifts between first and third-person focalisation is a corollary of their commanding view sensibility, whereby they are so convinced of their authority as interpreters of Manila that they regard *all* their observations, whether collected from empirical engagement or second-hand research, as definitive, and therefore they have no need to make distinctions between – or properly connect – these various ways of seeing and knowing.

In the writing up of *Searching for Manila*, I experimented with transitional formulae in order to improve the wholeness of my text and, in so doing, make it more alert to the diverse perspectives that elude the commanding view of the Manilaist works just mentioned. According to Andrew Cowan, prose literature should avoid 'bald, factual statements that merely deliver information or name the already named (telling).'<sup>378</sup> Nevertheless, the narrative-discursive hybridity of the travelogue form means that it must contain a certain amount of what creative writing pedagogues term 'telling' alongside 'showing' or writing that 'proceeds ... through the depiction of concrete particulars whose significance is left unstated'.<sup>379</sup> Unlike readers of fiction more attuned to the 'showing' convention, 'readers of travel writing,' argues Gísláson,

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>378</sup> Andrew Cowan, *The Art of Writing Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), p. 51.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

‘have generally been fairly relaxed about the ‘info dump.’’<sup>380</sup> However, Gísláson goes on to advise travel writers that ‘your use of exposition [should be] more than a mere accompaniment to the main thread’ because ‘readers don’t want to be lectured.’<sup>381</sup> While the preliminary drafts of *Searching for Manila* featured a surfeit of physical description and socio-political exposition uttered in a detached, extradiegetic voice, there was not enough, as Paul Fussell defines the travel idiom, ‘autobiographical narrative [that] arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data.’<sup>382</sup> At this early stage of the drafting process, I was at risk of writing an aloof historical or sociological treatise rather than a character-driven story composed of evocative scenes and anecdotes. To strike a balance between these, as it were, subjective and objective paradigms, I tried with my next drafts to intertwine the expositional material with anecdotes of my interactions with my then partner Beth and her daughter Fiona. However, this course of action encountered a new obstruction: I found myself oscillating incoherently between the discursive voice and the narrative voice, not unlike the excerpt from Boyce.

Reading classics of the travel genre such as Salman Rushdie’s *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987) and Colin Thubron’s *Amongst the Russians* (1983), I noticed a transitional formula that adhered to Gísláson’s advice that travel writers should ‘tie exposition to a specific point in the journey.’<sup>383</sup> The formula normally begins with a striking visual or dramatic detail witnessed personally by the traveller-narrator which then impels him or her to reflect upon the wider implications of this detail. As Gísláson reminds us, ‘events in a travel story don’t occur in isolation of their social context.’<sup>384</sup> The key to the formula’s efficacy is the slickness of the

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<sup>380</sup> Gísláson, p. 90.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>382</sup> Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 165.

<sup>383</sup> Gísláson, p. 90.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

transition between the visceral, lived experience of the traveller-narrator and the macro, sometimes abstract idea or thought that follows. *The Jaguar Smile* achieves this, as shown by the extract below:

Meanwhile, across town, seven women poets were reciting in the ruins of the Grand Hotel. Most of the hotel had collapsed in the earthquake. What remained – a central courtyard overlooked by balconies and open, now, to the sky – served the city as a cultural centre. The ruins were crowded with poetry-lovers. I did not think I had ever seen a people, even in India and Pakistan where poets were revered, who valued poetry as much as the Nicaraguans.<sup>385</sup>

The transition comprises the traveller-narrator associating what he has just witnessed (the arresting image of women reciting verse in the ruins of a hotel) with a personal memory (the public adoration of poets in Rushdie's native Indian subcontinent), which then leads on to a more general political point Rushdie wishes to make (that art and literature are highly respected in the new revolutionary society of Nicaragua). This example from *Amongst the Russians* is pithier: 'So we started to drink. Vodka – the colourless innocence! It's the curse and liberation of Russia, a self-obliterating escape from tedium and emptiness, from interminable winter nights, and the still longer, darker nights of the soul'.<sup>386</sup> Thubron's brief sketch of his drinking bout with an engineer in Novgorod opens out into a general cultural comment about the ambiguous presence of vodka in Soviet life. I made a fairly simple modification of the formula in *Searching for Manila*:

As we turned to a cabinet displaying the 'Decorations & Medals of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur', I remembered some of his military mis-steps. As Supreme Commander of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), MacArthur relied on an outdated war plan, ignored a ten-hour invasion warning and neglected to properly clothe and feed his troops.<sup>387</sup>

Here the physical deed of me touching or looking at an historical artefact affords me the rationale to meditate on the broad sweep of historical forces related to or shaping the

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<sup>385</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (London: Pan Books, 1987), p. 40.

<sup>386</sup> Colin Thubron, *Amongst the Russians* (London: Penguin, 1983) p. 68.

<sup>387</sup> Sykes, p. 165.

artefact. In *Searching for Manila*, I am equally committed to uncovering the historical logic behind Manilaist impressions of the built environments of Manila, and it is to this topic that we now turn.

## 5. Challenging Spatial Assumptions

Lisle acknowledges two main deficiencies in the contemporary travel genre's construction of foreign spaces in its bid to uphold 'discursive hegemonies':<sup>388</sup> some texts '[resuscitate] outdated tropes of Empire and colonialism' while others 'promote a version of cosmopolitanism saturated with privilege.'<sup>389</sup> The city-as-hell and third world blues tropes could belong to the first category while the flawed simulacrum arguably belongs to the second. I want to contest all three modes by examining sequences in *Searching for Manila* that accentuate the culturally and socially affirmative features of daily urban existence, opening up spaces in which inter-cultural dialogue can occur, while at the same time acknowledging the risks of overstating Manila's assets to the detriment of engaging with its problems in their proper social contexts. I then analyse a scene in my book that transcends the inadequacies of the flawed simulacrum model by critiquing the economic viability of shopping malls that mimic American consumer culture. Finally, I debunk the claims of Iyer and Buruma that such simulacra are always second-rate compared to the originals with reference to my book's observations that Manila has in some respects superseded the West, at least according to certain Western criteria.

I have tried in *Searching for Manila* to remedy the Manilaist habit of portraying Manila as an inexorably depraved, corrupt and crime-blighted metropolis by broadening my purview to encompass the city's street-level atmosphere of joy, warmth and vivacity which somehow flourishes amid unpromising conditions. Near my home on Katipunan

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<sup>388</sup> Lisle, p. 273.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

Avenue, while the clamour and pollution of the traffic is unwelcome, the ‘ribbons of bougainvillea [...] shine through’ comprising ‘a propitious image’.<sup>390</sup> The potential for this dreary, overheated, fast-paced environment to spiritually alienate is flouted by ‘Students [...] thronged in Mexican-style *cantinas*, their laughter competing with the chunky riffs of The Eraserheads and other OPM (Original Pinoy Music) bands. The students’ bonhomie was infectious: it always cheered Fiona and I.’<sup>391</sup> A relatively modern Filipino text that I feel legitimated my own renderings of the sometimes carnivalesque character of working-class Manila life is *Traveler’s Choice: North to South* (1994), a collection of short chronicles by Madis Ma. Guerrero. In a disquisition on the author’s nostalgia for the ‘group singalongs’ in the ‘beer houses, pub houses and the folk- and rockhouses’ during the dark days of Martial Law (1972-1981), the reader gains an impression of solidarity through hedonistic sociality.<sup>392</sup> Bearing in mind Edwards’ and Graulund’s remark that, in innovative travel writing, ‘there is recognition that the narrating subject is, in part, determined by identificatory markers (nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, class, economic status, religion etc)’, I must state here that my reflections as a foreigner from a very different socio-cultural background to that of a Filipino are far from equivalent to Guerrero’s intimate reminiscences about his youth from the subject position of a native Manileño.<sup>393</sup> I do not claim anywhere like the same degree of authority as Guerrero, nor am I capable of speaking for Manileños of his generation as he does. I would suggest, though, that there is some virtue in an outsider such as myself highlighting the more pleasant features of his city that have escaped generations of other outsiders working in the Manilaist rubric. Correspondingly, Binyavanga Wainaina writes that Western literature’s cognisance of Africa as simply

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<sup>390</sup> Sykes, p. 204.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>392</sup> Amadis Ma. Guerrero, *Traveler’s Choice: North to South* (Manila: Anvil, 1994), p. 77.

<sup>393</sup> Edwards and Graulund, p. 10.

‘900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating’ shuns ‘many other things, but your reader doesn’t care about all that.’<sup>394</sup>

Be that as it may, *Searching for Manila* proposes that, while a Westerner such as I will always be a stranger looking in to a non-Western cultural formation, forever wary of the question Lisle poses – ‘what *right* do travel writers have to speak for and represent others?’<sup>395</sup> – opportunities for ‘cross-cultural communication’ can arise when a travel writer productively engages with an aspect of an unfamiliar culture with an open and empathetic mind.<sup>396</sup> In my case, this engagement was also motivated by a yearning to abandon the chauvinistic preconceptions of Orientalism, epitomised by Gunter’s use of a Manileño crowd at a cockfight as a metaphor for the impracticality of dialogue between people of disparate national and ethnic subjectivities: ‘These are all chattering and jabbering in as many lingos, dialects and mixed languages as were ever heard together upon this earth [...] their varying clatter runs into a kind of maddening symphony that would make the author of Volapük [the short-lived “international” language that was based upon English and German for, so it was argued, the sake of clarity and accuracy] cry: ‘I am outdone!’’.<sup>397</sup> Gunter’s pessimism here relates to early-to mid-Manilaist anxieties about going native, as examined in Part 1 of this thesis.

The final chapter of *Searching for Manila* diverges from both Gunter’s anti-integrationism and the going native trope. Fiona and I are flattered to be invited to a poetry event – itself featuring an amalgam of Western and Filipino oral literary traditions – organised by my Filipino friend Danilo. The implication is that, to some extent, Fiona and I have been accepted into a particular local subculture of creative intellectuals – and one, incidentally, whose positive contributions to Philippine society have seldom been reported in three centuries of Manilaism. When Fiona later gets up on

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<sup>394</sup> Wainaina, p. 1.

<sup>395</sup> Lisle, p. 270.

<sup>396</sup> Edwards and Graulund, p. 3.

<sup>397</sup> Gunter, p. 126.

stage and starts extemporising verse for the Filipino audience's delight, the bi-directional nature of the encounter is complete: *we* have appreciated *their* hospitality and *they* have appreciated *our* response to it. As Danilo says of Fiona's performance, 'the crowd understood you just fine. Do come back.'<sup>398</sup> Manila's literary scene is shown to be not only thriving, but is intelligible to outsiders and outsiders are intelligible to it.

However, it would be as disingenuous for *Searching for Manila* to focus solely on the myriad assets of Manila and other Asian cities as it has been for Manilaists through the ages to report exclusively on the Manila cityscape's defects. To overcome third world blues by simply ignoring or whitewashing Manila's problems runs the risk of establishing a different – yet equally problematic – repertoire of fallacies based upon the lionisation of destinations and the subdual of their less desirable traits, as Holland and Huggan remind us with their exegesis of the 'neofeudal fiction' of the British travel writer Peter Mayle.<sup>399</sup> Mayle's writings on the Luberon region of southern France betray a 'nostalgic appreciation for a regional way of life ... characterized by the apparent absence of class conflict, by the happy coexistence of the local peasantry with the landowning bourgeoisie.'<sup>400</sup> A comparable text in the Manilaist canon is *Two for the Road* (1998) by Anita Feleo and David Sheniak, a lowbrow fusion of tourist itinerary and unreflective life writing that rests on superficial lists of trivia and innumerable clichés ('living history', 'to walk in his footsteps' etc).<sup>401</sup> While *Two for the Road* lauds the touristic value of Manila's topography, there is political pusillanimity towards neo-liberal economic development. Amid the bland praise for the 'well done' *trompe l'oeil* paintings found in Intramuros is a swift mention of the 'squatters' (a Newspeak term used in the Philippines to describe poor, homeless people) who were driven out of the district during gentrification, but the authors do not care enough to investigate what

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<sup>398</sup> Sykes, p. 237.

<sup>399</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 40.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>401</sup> Anita Feleo and David Sheniak, *Two for the Road* (Manila: Anvil, 1998), p. 64.

happened to the squatters after their eviction.<sup>402</sup> Worse than Fenton, this is political tourism with next to no politics: the full extent of Feleo and Sheniak's critique of US interventionism is a short summary of the American treasure hunter Charles MacDougal's unintentional destruction of antique buildings while excavating for hidden Japanese gold.<sup>403</sup> *Two for the Road* represents one of the dangers of confronting centuries of Orientalist *idées fixe* on the worst of urban Manila with an equally dogmatic triumphalism that concentrates solely on the city's positive attributes, at least as they are defined by elite political and commercial criteria (it is telling that Feleo and Sheniak habitually recycle Department of Tourism public relations copy).<sup>404</sup>

To avoid the representational hazards of both third world blues and the idealisations of Mayle, Feleo and Sheniak, *Searching for Manila* delves into poverty, corruption, conflict and sexual exploitation while grasping these phenomena in their proper material contexts and drawing attention to the abetment of the powerful – both inside and outside Manila – in their propagation. Pratt holds that the exponents of third world blues Paul Theroux and Alberto Moravia fail to explain the global seeds of the local predicaments they render by refusing the 'history tying the North American Theroux to Spanish America or the Italian Moravia to Africa, despite the fact that much of what they are lamenting is the depredations of western-induced dependency.'<sup>405</sup> In *Holidays in Hell* (1989), P. J. O'Rourke describes a slum in northern Manila – a 'pile of rotting, burning trash'<sup>406</sup> – before holding the actions of President Cory Aquino – who has recently succeeded the despot Ferdinand Marcos – responsible for both the regression of living conditions in the slum in particular and for Manila more generally remaining 'the same squalid mess it's always been.'<sup>407</sup> At no point does O'Rourke

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<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-124.

<sup>405</sup> Pratt, 218.

<sup>406</sup> O'Rourke, (chapter 9, para. 15, location 1708).

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, location 1675.

suggest that the blame for the ‘mess’ could be spread more widely to the Philippines’ subordinate position in the world economic system as an epiphenomenon of his own country’s capitalist-imperialist policies. After gaining formal independence in 1946, the Philippines became the classic dependant of a superpower that M.G.E. Kelly defines ‘economically in terms of capital flows [... and] militarily by the ability to project military power across the world – the premier contemporary example of this is the US.’<sup>408</sup> If the rubbish dumps, warehouses and polluted rivers of late Manilaist textual spaces such as P.J. O’Rourke’s are presented as immutable fixtures that cannot be imputed to political-economic-systemic flaws, counter-hegemonic renderings of Manila that have strongly informed my own work often gesture towards the bellicose role of globalised capital in the formation of these gloomy sites. While the Filipino poet and essayist Luis Francia deprecates contemporary Manila as ‘a city of bad dreams’ in his memoir *Eye of the Fish: A Personal Archipelago* (2001),<sup>409</sup> he attributes the city’s decline to a ‘mass-market capitalism’ serving the rapacious demands of foreign corporations, tourists and paedophiles.<sup>410</sup> In *Deep Field: Dispatches from the Front Line of Aid Relief* (2014), the Australian humanitarian coordinator Tom Bamforth visits Manila’s finance district to solicit donations for the victims of a typhoon in the southern Philippines only to be spurned by Western businesspeople whose definition of aid, informed by ‘Bush-era prejudices,’<sup>411</sup> amounts to exploiting recruitment opportunities in the south which, as Bamforth learns, perpetuates the ‘physical, sexual and economic abuse’ of migrant workers and increases the ‘vulnerability of children and families left behind.’<sup>412</sup> Although a realist novel rather than a nonfiction travelogue like Bamforth’s, *Soledad’s Sister* (2007) by José Y. Dalisay nonetheless follows a convention of

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<sup>408</sup> M.G.E. Kelly, *Biopolitical Imperialism* (London: Zero Books, 2015), p. 18.

<sup>409</sup> Luis H. Francia, *Eye of the Fish: A Personal Archipelago* (New York: Kaya Press, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>411</sup> Tom Bamforth, *Deep Field: Dispatches from the Front Line of Aid Relief* (New York: Abrams, 2014), p. 139.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

modernist travel writing in which ‘landscape [... do[es] the work of symbol and myth’<sup>413</sup> by mobilising the grimly nondescript site of Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) in Manila as a cipher of the mistreatment of OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers). The novel opens with a description of the dehumanising process by which the corpse of ‘Cabahug, Aurora V.’ arrives at NAIA in crates, is stamped by apathetic officials and then left to be claimed by relatives.<sup>414</sup> The body, we later learn, has been misidentified and in fact belongs to Soledad, Aurora’s sister, who is just one of around 600 deceased OFWs per year shipped back to the airport from foreign lands. Unlike the unexamined voyeurism of similarly foreboding scenes in Garland or Hamilton-Paterson, the fate of Aurora is synecdochal of the predicament of Filipinos who become second-class citizens when they migrate to the rich world, vulnerable to neglect, derision and molestation. Aurora’s remains have come from Saudi Arabia with ‘no police report, no autopsy’ and no passport, ‘which was customarily confiscated from foreign workers by their employers.’<sup>415</sup> Later on, we find out that Aurora, in her quest for a better life, had left behind a ‘son many thousands of miles away’ in Manila.<sup>416</sup> Bamforth’s and Dalisay’s exposés of the damage done by labour migration to communities and environments in Manila and abroad are substantiated by M.G.E. Kelly’s thesis that the Global North’s ‘biopolitical’ care of its citizens – which includes giving them access to free or affordable education and healthcare – relies upon the exploitation of human resources in the Global South, and that such a ‘parasitical’ arrangement contributes to the ‘pitiful conditions’<sup>417</sup> of many Third World geographical spaces blighted by hunger, ‘environmental devastation’<sup>418</sup> and ‘inadequate medical and educational systems.’<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Samuel Lynn Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930’s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), p. 144.

<sup>414</sup> Jose Y. Dalisay, *Soledad’s Sister* (Manila: Anvil, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>417</sup> Kelly, p.93.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Just as the forsaken families in *Deep Field* and the wretched corpses in *Soledad's Sister* betoken a much larger-scale, dialectical relationship between mass-suffering in the Philippines and the fiscal self-interest of the rich world, so my chapter 'Squatters' Rights', about my peregrinations around the slum community of Trinidad Extension, emphasises the connections between the micro, human-scale horrors of poverty and policies made at a macro, institutional level. But while Bamforth and Dalisay grapple with the deleterious consequences of overseas migration, I argue that Manila's informal settlements are necessitated by internal displacement partially caused by 'IMF and World Bank' guidelines designed to make 'the economy more "productive" by touting for foreign investment and developing the export sector.'<sup>420</sup> From a technical perspective, my approach here is closer to Bamforth's than to Dalisay's in so far as I make my point in expositional fashion whereas Dalisay, as a novelist, presents individual characters within a narrative of interpersonal events, the larger political meaning of which is left unsaid and up to the reader to decode. To achieve such an effect, I append the more narrative-driven chapter on Trinidad Extension with a discursive chapter that, informed by the research of the Filipino sociologist Walden Bello, examines how 'global recession and a dive in the prices of Philippine paper, rubber, ceramics and beverages' resulted in 'an exodus from the countryside to the cities like Manila. The pressure on services and resources grew.'<sup>421</sup>

If there are Manilaist texts that fetishise inner-city ruin there is also a tradition, as we saw in Part 1, that reframes the more affluent, tourist-friendly 'contact zones'<sup>422</sup> of Manila as simulacra of ostensibly more refined Western urban spaces. *Searching for Manila's* response is informed by Benita Parry's argument that post-colonial theory – and post-colonial literature, we might reasonably infer – has all too often complacently embraced mimicry, hybridity, cosmopolitanism and other 'reconciliatory' categories

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<sup>420</sup> Sykes, p. 183.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>422</sup> Pratt, p. 7.

that are ‘drained of any political connotations’<sup>423</sup> while deemphasising the human exploitation, racial domination, ‘minimal and strategic infrastructure[s]’ and ‘apparatus[es] of administrative coercion’ that are features of the colonial and neo-colonial eras.<sup>424</sup> Therefore, while Iyer is amused by the quaintly mediocre consumerist experience on offer in Manila, he never considers the hardship and privation of those Manileños who labour to make this experience possible for rich tourists like him, let alone those other Manileños who are excluded from sharing in it. In my chapter ‘Terror in the Si-mall-ation’, after Fiona and I are overwhelmed by the surreal scale of two Manila shopping malls, I question the desirability of such decadent and divisive business ventures: ‘Boom and bust. What goes up must come down. The dream of a new Paris crumbled in 1868 under the weight of over-speculation. A century later, America slumped and uprisings ripped through its cities [...] Was Shangrila Plaza another grand project ready for an uprising?’<sup>425</sup>

It is not just the political desirability and economic sustainability of the simulacra that must be probed. *Searching for Manila* also takes issue with late twentieth century Manialism’s belief in the inherent subordinacy of these imitations, a belief that has been invalidated by global material changes since the publication of many of these texts. If a more contemporary Manilaist like Duncan Alexander MacKenzie is vexed that an increasingly multipolar Asia will diminish Western pre-eminence in the continent and hamper Philippine development, less parochially-minded Westerners, such as Sam Miller in his *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity* (2010), assert that the recent recalibration of the economic power balance in favour of the East has brought with it mechanisms of urbanisation that undermine Orientalist canards about Western metropolises as superior ‘archetypes of urban existence.’<sup>426</sup> Instead, as Miller sees it,

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<sup>423</sup> Parry, p. 11.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>425</sup> Sykes, p. 148.

<sup>426</sup> Sam Miller, *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 1.

‘London, Paris, Rome and Athens [...] are being dwarfed and prettified’ while ‘it’s the new and ancient cities of Asia that are the pulsating giants of the twenty-first century.’<sup>427</sup> Asian cities that were established by Western colonialism – as, in some cases, simulations of ‘originals’ in Britain, the US or France<sup>428</sup> – have, in terms of their size and vibrancy, now superseded the cities they were modelled on or inspired by. Construing Miller’s point as an intriguing refusal of the flawed simulacrum conceit, in *Searching for Manila* I speculate that, far from the Asian cities I visit inadequately emulating Europe or the US, ‘there was something more Western than the West’ about Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia given that ‘London and San Francisco were grungy and decrepit compared to KL’s Spartan streets and glossily novel architecture. Its roads and public transport systems were faster, more efficient and more logical than their run-down Anglo-Saxon counterparts.’<sup>429</sup> As I intimate in the final chapter of the book, not only has Asia, according to certain indices, overtaken Western civic progress, it has also extended and finessed emancipatory political values that had their genesis in European urban contexts: ‘Unlike Britain, where we’d been whingeing about the lack of a proper left politics since the 1980s, Manila had plenty of brave, selfless activists devoted to the downtrodden, no matter the odds heaped against them.’<sup>430</sup>

## 6. Representing Others

‘Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,’ so wrote Mark Twain.<sup>431</sup> The process of researching and writing *Searching for Manila* has shown me that the progressive travel writer has several means at their disposal to query prejudicial, bigoted

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>428</sup> As we learn from Miller’s book, New Delhi could be construed as a colonial simulacrum because, like Daniel Burnham in Manila, the British architect responsible for the new metropolis, Sir Edwin Lutyens, imbued his designs with neo-Classical motifs and envisaged residences, palaces and shopping areas that would suit the tastes of the British expatriate clique.

<sup>429</sup> Sykes, p. 53.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>431</sup> Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1869; London: T.W. Press, 2013), p. 312.

and narrow-minded constructions of individual persons and socio-cultural groups located in foreign spaces. Firstly, we can debunk stereotypes by exposing their empirical or ontological illegitimacy through ‘lived engagement’.<sup>432</sup> Our second option is to deconstruct the material determinants behind stereotypes. I then explore my endeavours to, in the words of Jack Shaheen, ‘project’ individuals ‘as ordinary and decent citizens’ in order to ‘contest [... the] harmful stereotypes’ of the Manilaist and Orientalist repertoires.<sup>433</sup> Drawing on the example of John Sayles, I argue that the cautious and respectful incorporation of indigenous vocabulary, vocal rhythms and grammatical forms can help to de-stereotype other cultures. Lastly, I explain how *Searching for Manila* repurposes Barbara Korte’s concept of ‘inverted patterns of travel’<sup>434</sup> whereby post-colonial writers satirise or in other respects cross-examine metropolitan mores as a tactic for critiquing the varieties of supremacism and exceptionalism that underpin Western consensus ideas about non-Western peoples.

*Searching for Manila* repeatedly tests Manilaist stereotypes against my encounters with real, ordinary people around the city, and the result is often to disprove the credibility of such constructions. To this end, I have tried to follow the example of the ‘New Journalists’ of the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom, as Nick Nuttall has pointed out, intimately ‘participated’ in the ‘object of study’ by interviewing people at great length – amongst other research methods – for the purpose of achieving a fuller understanding of ‘the thing or event.’<sup>435</sup> Rosalind Coward argues that the ‘extended participant observations’ of Norman Mailer, Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe and other New Journalists ‘focus[ed] on ‘real’ people rather than the ‘lofty’ subjects of traditional journalism’.<sup>436</sup> If stereotypes are integral to the West’s consensus view of Manila, then

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<sup>432</sup> Mark Lance, ‘Life is not a Box-Score: Lived Normativity, Abstract Evaluation, and the Is/Ought Distinction’, in *Meaning Without Representation: Essays on Truth, Expression, Normativity, and Naturalism*, ed. by Steven Gross, Nicholas Tebben, and Michael Williams, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 285-299 (p. 290).

<sup>433</sup> Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press), p. 35.

<sup>434</sup> Korte, p. 216.

<sup>435</sup> Nuttall, p.135.

<sup>436</sup> Coward, p. 57.

my adoption of the ‘authentic experience’<sup>437</sup> epistemology in order to engage first-hand with ‘real people’ has highlighted the rupture between Manilaist character assassinations and the often decent, honourable and conscientious Manileños I come across in my own journeys. As explored in Part 1, the works of early Manilaists such as Wilkes, Loney and MacMicking all invoke the adjective ‘idle’ – or its synonyms – when representing Malay-Filipinos, whereas, in *Searching for Manila*, Eugenio, the hotel employee in Davao, could not be further from the lazy native caricature: he works ‘forty-eight-hour shifts in this job’ to feed his family.<sup>438</sup> Similarly, Leopoldo, the chauffeur for my trip to the north of Luzon, is so dedicated to his duties that he ignores the considerable pain he is in and is hospitalised with a serious liver complaint.<sup>439</sup> My approach here also owes something to an episode in *The Social Cancer (Noli Me Tangere)* in which the *mestizo* protagonist, Don Crisostomo Ibarra, interrogates the reductionism of the ‘lazy native’ model to the consternation of the Spanish clergymen he is dining with: ‘Does this indolence actually, naturally, exist among the natives or is there some truth in what a foreign traveler says: that with this indolence we excuse our own, as well as our backwardness and our colonial system.’<sup>440</sup> Furthermore, by giving characters such as Eugenio and Leopoldo prominence in my narrative, I have answered Lisle’s call for travel writers to ‘present counter-examples’ to contest the ‘patronising and racist stereotypes’ ubiquitous in Western travel writing.<sup>441</sup> Coward asserts that, as told in *Armies of the Night* (1968), Norman Mailer’s ‘participation in [anti-Vietnam War] protests’ and his political ‘partisanship enhanced his insight into the hatred of authority motivating the young people on the marches’, thereby articulating complexities and contradictions – ‘ignorance and fear; brutality and evil, decency and

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<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>438</sup> Sykes, p. 218.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>440</sup> José Rizal, *The Social Cancer (Noli Me Tangere)*, trans. by Charles Derbyshire (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912; repr. Project Gutenberg: Salt Lake City, 2004), Amazon kindle edition (chapter 1, para. 29, location 800).

<sup>441</sup> Lisle, p. 270.

foolhardy heroism’, as Peter Lennon puts it – far removed from the dogmatism of stereotypology.<sup>442</sup> Time and again in *Searching for Manila*, I disclose how my lived involvement with people and events produces forms of knowledge and emotional meaning that help to overcome whatever preconceptions I may have about a site or destination. When I touch down in Kolkata, India, the theories of the ‘whacky postmodern philosophers’ I’d been taught at university ‘dissipate into the stove-hot air saturated with the smells of urine and sweet-sour CO2.’<sup>443</sup> Towards the end of the narrative, when I go to a mass for Ferdinand Marcos I gain a visceral impression of the depth of feeling some people still have about the legacy of the dictator when I find ‘myself five metres away from a man in a red crash helmet as he snatched a banner from a protestor’.<sup>444</sup> In addition, I learn that the ‘media were desperate for a story’ when they ‘formed an impenetrable scrum around the two men.’<sup>445</sup>

Lisle’s allegation that ‘travel writers rarely bother to examine the history or reproduction of [...] stereotypes’ prompted me to consider how *Searching for Manila* might remedy the reluctance of Manilaists to admit causalities between Western power and its damaging consequences for Manileños, while often negatively stereotyping minority populations for this dialectical condition.<sup>446</sup> As discussed in Part 1, such appetite for blaming the victim has been most virulent in constructions of the Chinese diaspora. In a direct provocation of this iteration of Manilaist Sinophobia, a chapter concerning my walk around the Manila Chinese Cemetery is interlaced with historical illustrations of the Spanish ruling order’s proclivity to ‘mock the Chinese for circumstances the Spanish had imposed’ such as ghettoisation and professional discrimination.<sup>447</sup> The unfairness of this centuries-old practice has, I go on to state,

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<sup>442</sup> Coward, p. 58.

<sup>443</sup> Sykes, p. 43.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>446</sup> Lisle, p. 270.

<sup>447</sup> Sykes, p. 156.

merged with other dissonant and irrational attitudes towards the group, such as the patriots who ‘confront[ed] the Japanese [...] would later be suspected of communist sympathies after Chairman Mao had taken over the mother country’, to foment a feeling inside me that the Chinese-Filipinos have ‘long occupied an unstable space amid opposites’<sup>448</sup> meaning that ‘whatever the Chinese did they got scapegoated for *something*.’<sup>449</sup>

Such stereotypes, holds Shaheen, are a means by which a prevailing discourse can ‘dehumanize’ a ‘people’,<sup>450</sup> and are generated by the crude reduction of human beings to ‘barrages of uncontested slurs’ such as Arabs are ‘the villain’.<sup>451</sup> We have seen how pulp-textured Manilaist fictions from Archibald Clavering Gunter to Timothy Mo relegate Manileños to the position of sly, amoral and/or mendacious terrorists, fanatics, molls, hired guns and gangland bosses. In Shaheen’s view, ‘even-handed’<sup>452</sup> writers and filmmakers have ‘contested’ such stereotypes by presenting foreign characters as ‘human’ and as ‘regular person[s].’<sup>453</sup> I strive in *Searching for Manila* to depict the Filipinos I meet as multi-dimensional, morally complicated human beings. Danilo is at once hospitable towards Fiona and I, and arguably cruel to his wife to whom he has been unfaithful. Mena Zaldivar, who spent most of her earlier life as a dissident, anti-establishment campaigner, comes across in my interview embarrassed by the fact that she now works indirectly for the Philippine state: ‘Me, I work on government projects. Ironic, isn’t it?’<sup>454</sup>

Another Western discursive practice that dehumanises subaltern subjects, albeit one that derives more directly from colonial and neo-colonial state policies, is what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin call the ‘power which comes from the control of the

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>450</sup> Shaheen, p. 4.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>454</sup> Sykes, p. 152.

language'.<sup>455</sup> Such linguistic colonisation requires the imposition of a *lingua franca* (English, Spanish, French, etc) by the metropolitan centre alongside an 'illusory standard of normative or "correct" usage'<sup>456</sup> that assumes command over the 'means of communication' in the peripheral space.<sup>457</sup> Boyce attempts linguistic ownership of the Philippines and Manila by observing that the Americans now spell the former designation with a 'Ph' rather than an 'F', as the Spanish had, and the latter with only one 'l' rather than two, as had been the habit previously.<sup>458</sup> Mary Fee is pleased that the *cocheros* (coach drivers) of Manila now shout the English phrases 'Git up!' and 'Whoa boy!' at their steeds instead of Tagalog or Spanish equivalents.<sup>459</sup> In opposition to this objective of imposing American English on a different culture, other Western travel writers have sought to depict foreign people more fairly and faithfully by rendering their speech in authentic vernacular. As Kári Gíslason states, 'use the specific terms that the culture uses. This will give your writing credibility.'<sup>460</sup> Claudia Capancioni remarks of the British Victorian travel writer Janet Ross, 'Her Italian [which] ... is always accurate even when it transcribes the phonetic pronunciation of local dialects ... shows deep respect.'<sup>461</sup> In a similar manner, John Sayles' *A Moment in the Sun* (2011)<sup>462</sup>, perhaps the most politically progressive novel penned by a Westerner about Manila and the Philippines – for this reason it cannot be deemed a Manilaist text – consummately approximates the various dialects of English spoken by white American, African-American and Filipino characters engaged in the Spanish and Philippine-American Wars. Slang, cadences, prosodies and grammar patterns specific to ethnicity and nationality appear both in the direct speech of the characters and in the third person

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<sup>455</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), p. 88.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>458</sup> Boyce, p. 220.

<sup>459</sup> Fee, p. 36.

<sup>460</sup> Gíslason, p. 91.

<sup>461</sup> Claudia Capancioni, 'Victorian Women Writers and the Truth of the "Other Side of Italy"', in *Women, Travel Writing, and Truth*, ed. by Claire Bloom Saunders (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), pp. 109-124 (p. 114).

<sup>462</sup> John Sayles, *A Moment in the Sun* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2011), Amazon Kindle edition

limited narrative voice recounting their thoughts and actions. One early paragraph relaying the contemplations of the student activist Diosdado Macapagal about his place within the Gordian class system of colonial Manila is peppered with Spanish and Tagalog words ('*dueñas*', '*bombones*', '*balintawak*', '*indios*').<sup>463</sup> From a *Kirkus* review that recognises *A Moment in the Sun*'s debt to the 'radical-revisionist school' of historical research rooted in the lived experience of ordinary people, we can infer that Sayles' aim here is to courteously grant a measure of autonomy to his characters, so that when a Filipino or Filipina speaks they sound much more like a Filipino than, as per Manilaism, a villain from a penny dreadful or a generic, non-specific Anglophone.<sup>464</sup> In *Jack Curzon*, Gunter unpersuasively channels a decidedly Anglo-American, pre-World War I Teutophobia through the implausibly baroque dialogue of the bestial revolutionary Ata Tonga: 'When I catch the stink of the German, it is like the oily, fetid, sickening, pickle-flavor of the anaconda, who twines about, crushes, and then devours his prey.'<sup>465</sup> While to their credit – and despite their other shortcomings – Fenton and O'Rourke capture something of the speech patterns of the Filipinos they interact with, other late Manilaist non-fiction authors lack such nuance. Regardless of their class background or educational level, all the indigenes in Buruma's book could be mistaken for fairly eloquent, middle-class, English-speaking Westerners ('Well, during the Japanese times, it was the Americans who saved us [...] But then they helped Japan and left us on our own' a retired mayor tells him),<sup>466</sup> and, more problematically, MacKenzie very seldom quotes the direct speech of his subjects, preferring to paraphrase their statements. Taking a cue from Sayles, I try in *Searching for Manila* to convey the distinctive colloquialisms and vocal rhythms of Filipino English to achieve, as James Wood puts it, 'solidly realised' portraits of the Filipinos I have met during my

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<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, (chapter 5, para. 1, location 424).

<sup>464</sup> 'Kirkus Review: A Moment in the Sun', *Kirkus*, 18 April 2011 <<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/john-sayles/moment-sun/>> [accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>465</sup> Gunter, p. 10.

<sup>466</sup> Buruma, p. 6.

fieldwork.<sup>467</sup> In these lines of Isko the tour guide's dialogue, I offer a flavour of Filipino adaptations of English words and the prolix diction of Filipinos with limited education in the English language: 'Some bad ones they are stealing police gear and selling it to hoodlums. You can buy a badge for 300 pesos on the black markets. The hoodlums wear the uniforms to do *carnaps* and *estafas*.'<sup>468</sup>

In addition to overturning stereotypes, the radical travelogue can dispute the supremacist convictions behind them by scrutinising aspects of metropolitan society using the strategy of 'inverted patterns of travel', as Barbara Korte demonstrates.<sup>469</sup> For Korte, R.K. Narayan's recollections of dwelling in and touring the US, *My Dateless Diary* (1988),<sup>470</sup> 'turns the notion of Western progressive civilisation upside down' by irreverently meditating on how far American society seems to be lagging behind India with regard to its attitude to time, its consumerist values and the quality of its fashion, cuisine and transport.<sup>471</sup> She alludes also to Caryl Phillips's ironising ethnography, *The European Tribe* (1987),<sup>472</sup> which intimates that Europe's 'primitive' racism, nationalism and militarism morally invalidates European disapproval of African cannibalism and Islamic attitudes to women.<sup>473</sup> Although *Searching for Manila* cannot exactly be inserted into the genus of writers Korte describes because their interventions arise from their journeys around 'the imperial centre',<sup>474</sup> my chapters set in the Philippines frequently allude to my past experiences of living in Britain, pointing out the flaws, excesses and contradictions of my culture of origin as a means to dispute the essentialist selectivity of those Westerners who imagine that certain types of repugnant behaviour are unique and exclusive to Eastern, othered populations. After revealing to me disturbing evidence about an epidemic of sexual abuse in the Philippines, the

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<sup>467</sup> James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 94.

<sup>468</sup> Sykes, p. 174.

<sup>469</sup> Korte, p. 159.

<sup>470</sup> Narayan, R.K., *My Dateless Diary: An American Journey* (London: Penguin, 1988).

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>472</sup> Phillips, Caryl, *The European Tribe* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986).

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

women's rights advocate Josefina Jurado reminds me that paedophiles, 'many [...] from your West,' descend upon disaster zones to purchase children for sex.<sup>475</sup> Later on, while travelling in Davao City, I complain that an article by an American human rights journalist sounds as though 'the violations that occurred in Davao never occurred in his own country or under the aegis of his own government.'<sup>476</sup> I go on to write, 'If the dead could talk, 2,500 Arabs done in by drone warfare – itself a species of extra-judicial killing – might quarrel with him.'<sup>477</sup>

Inverted patterns of travel are potentially vulnerable to the *tu quoque* fallacy in which 'An argument [...] consists in retorting a charge upon one's accuser.'<sup>478</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, I have addressed the perils of *tu quoque* by stressing that an moral objectivist attitude towards socio-political ills is more just and rational than the sanctimony of Manilaists detractions of the Philippines. As the philosopher Andrew Spear notes, '*tu quoque* can be used legitimately to question whether a particular moral principle is in fact one we endorse and, if so, whether everyone is consistently following it.'<sup>479</sup> In *Searching for Manila*, after I cite a survey that puts Britain and the US amongst the 'top five worst countries for paedophilia' and does not mention the Philippines, I aver that 'sexual exploitation' is not a 'culture-specific problem' but a 'worldwide human one.'<sup>480</sup> At the same time, I am wary of the calculated misuse of *tu quoque* in the opportunistic, anti-imperialist discourse of President Duterte when he tries to gainsay Western denunciations of his human rights record with examples of Western crimes such as racial oppression at home and military adventurism abroad: 'If Duterte steams up about Ferguson or Libya when a *Channel 4 News* man tries to pin him down on the

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<sup>475</sup> Sykes, p. 100.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>478</sup> Jeremy Butterfield, *Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage, 4th edn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 422.

<sup>479</sup> Andrew Spear, 'Hypocrisy and Responsibility: On the Uses and Abuses of *tu quoque* for Life' (Michigan: Grand Valley State University, 2017) <<https://www.gvsu.edu/seidman/ethics/module-news-view.htm?storyId=CD0BC3F2-D254-A741-C4495405CDC5B795&siteModuleId=9C6681B1-92E9-F4F1-7B4DF17EDBE5D2DC>> [accessed 27 July 2017] (1).

<sup>480</sup> Sykes, pp. 101-2.

death squads, it's not that he cares about global paradigms of accountability – he wants to distract us from his own foul acts.’<sup>481</sup> Even so, in the interests of balance, I go on to quote a Filipino taxi driver who suggests that it is precisely the West’s long record of misdemeanours that undermines the ethical lead it tries to take over Third World leaders: ‘Duterte would not be able to say such things to the West if the West hadn’t bombed, burned and dominated countries like the Philippines over the years.’<sup>482</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This commentary has explored how, over three centuries, the Manilaist imagination has demeaned cultural forms and habits, slandered a plethora of individuals and subcultures, castigated the social and economic policies of both the Spanish colonial regime and post-independence administrations, and undermined or trivialised the aspirations of native anti-colonial and social justice movements. I have suggested a causality between certain social, political and economic formations and Manilaist strategies of signification, and how they have been confronted and resisted by recent counter-hegemonic historiography and literary criticism. I hope then to have made the case for my own creative text, *Searching for Manila*, as a radical travelogue that itself opposes Manilaism by drawing on the resources of social psychology, the history from below movement, New Journalism, innovative travel writing, and post- and anti-colonial prose narratives.

Although certain of the older Manilaist observations I have critiqued may appear at face value passé and irrelevant to twenty-first century discourses – given that such issues as phobia towards the now obsolete Spanish Empire are no longer timely – I nonetheless feel that, by tracing the evolution of these sentiments and identifying the linguistic and narrative tools actuating them, I may have contributed to a better

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

understanding of the contemporary Orientalist imagination, that is both an epiphenomenon of and a contributing factor to the ongoing tensions between the American-led West and the nations of the East. While the motives behind current Orientalisms may differ from their Age of Empire forebears – states such as Russia and China are today more likely to be perceived as geopolitical competitors rather than potential colonial possessions – the mechanics of representation have changed little. The hypocrisy, self-denial and ‘reactionary forgetting’<sup>483</sup> that typify Manilaist reproofs of Spanish and Filipino administrations in the Philippines are redolent of a new Russophobia promulgated by the Western state-corporate media which omits NATO’s provocations from its doom-laden reporting on Russia’s mistreatment of Crimea or Ukraine or heckles ‘the Evil Empire’<sup>484</sup> with charges of ‘gangster’<sup>485</sup> capitalism while seldom acknowledging the US’s collusion in fashioning the modern Russian state after the disintegration of the USSR in 1989. Just as Manilaists condensed a heterogeneous metropolis of individual human beings into a handful of sweeping clichés, the survey research of the cultural theorist Edina Lilla Mészáros reveals that EU citizens currently hold ‘common misperceptions and stereotypes’ about Russians as steadfastly ‘cold’, ‘blunt’, ‘corrupt’, alcoholic and ‘still commie.’<sup>486</sup> As Western states tussle with debt, stagnation, and widespread unemployment, their media and academic discourses have become reminiscent of much Manilaist Sinophobia: Chinese enterprise must be simultaneously envied, feared and admired.<sup>487</sup>

No doubt, as international relations alter in the future, new Orientalisms will emerge. While they may manifest themselves in new textual media and genres quite

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<sup>483</sup> Elam, p. 95.

<sup>484</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russophobia: Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 32.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>486</sup> Edina Lilla Mészáros, ‘The EU-Russia “Uncommon Spaces” Stereotypes and Growing Russophobia: Does Cultural Diplomacy Stand a Chance in Shaping Future EU-Russia Relations?’, in *Culture and Paradiplomatic Identity: Instruments in Sustaining EU Policies*, ed. by Alina Stoica, Ioan Horga, and Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016), pp. 52-67 (p. 53).

<sup>487</sup> Roh, Huang and Nui, p. 12.

different to the 250 years' worth of codex novels, memoirs and travel books that comprise the Manilaist canon, it is probable that these Orientalisms will continue to invoke reduction, excision, modality, third world blues and other linguistic and literary devices explored in present-day studies like mine.

Having admitted in the introduction to this commentary that my analyses of the material conditions effectuating Manilaist texts are necessarily truncated, they could nonetheless provide useful points of departure for other scholars who, in the future, may wish to develop a more comprehensive study. Furthermore, the analysis of my own struggle to write a critically-minded radical travelogue could serve as a helpful guide to other creative writers striving to attain, to use Edward Said's formulation, a 'libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective' on unfamiliar cultures and societies.<sup>488</sup> While the literary modes examined in this thesis – from parody to inverted patterns of travel – are not my own inventions, it would seem from the existing literature I have reviewed that my decision to harness these techniques and relate them to the creative methods underpinning *Searching for Manila* in functional terms other radical travel authors can comprehend amounts to a novel and distinctive contribution to the research. While there is of course a profusion of published manuals offering practical formal tips for the novice, none of them dispense explicit advice on negotiating the practical, ethical and political challenges of researching and writing a radical travelogue. As we have seen from the critiques of contemporary travel writing by Lisle, Edwards, Graulund, Anderson and others, the radical travelogue would seem to be a necessary – if not timely – corrective to the chauvinism, distortion and parochial thinking that obtains within the genre.

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<sup>488</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 24.

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## **Appendix: Samples of Articles Published by Thomas Sykes in Travel SEAN and other Magazines**

As with the creative element of this thesis, certain people in these articles have been pseudonymised and other details changed to protect the privacy of real individuals.

Our Man in Manila

(15<sup>th</sup> October 2009)

I'm pleased to announce that this column has taken a new direction – in terms of both theme and geography. I am writing this not from freezing cold Britain but from the roof garden of Loyola Heights Condominium - my new home in Manila - watching the burnt-out semicircle of the sun drop behind the skyline of tower blocks and pastel-coloured churches. Amidst a sprawl of palm trees, I spot the walkway from the MRT station to the gigantic shopping mall where earlier today I had my backpack searched by unfailingly polite security guards packing pump-action shotguns. Security has been stepped up since the controlled explosion of a terrorist bomb in Quezon City earlier in the week. Running parallel to the walkway, right alongside the yuppies strolling to the office, the students in expensive hip hop gear heading for UP and Ateneo, the rich landladies off to buy jewellery and skin-whitening cream, is a slum where immaculate McDonald's and Shaky's shirts hang from roofs made from stolen boards advertising San Miguel and Tanduay Rhum. Pensive teenagers smoke out of balconies made from chickenwire. Hens peck at mailbags overflowing with rubbish. Old women playing bingo and selling sweetcorn berate kids for setting off firecrackers beneath the licorice jumbles of live wires.

I swivel in the stray office chair I have commandeered and see an imposing mountain range to the east that in the evening light looks stylized, drawn-on, like an illustration from my 4-year-old stepdaughter's *Learn Tagalog* book. The janitor tells me this region is called Antipolo. I imagine its air is cool and clean and would be great respite from downtown Manila.

So you're probably itching to ask many questions all prefaced with 'why'? Why have I moved from the first world to the second, or even third? Why have I traded a safe, clean and secure country for one full of risks such as the Philippines?

There are several answers. I am here for work reasons, to be immersed in a favourite writing subject of mine: Asia. Various stories I've written and books I've

edited over the past 5 years have tended to focus on this fascinating part of the world so I'm here partly to load up on inspiration. Furthermore, both living and studying in the Philippines is considerably cheaper than the Occident.

Most importantly, though, I am here for the sake of my family who wanted a fresh new experience far from home. My partner and I are both ashamed of the 'children should be seen and not heard' attitude that still obtains in Blighty - nowadays children are barred from all kinds of public places, including pubs after a certain time (due to paranoia about underage drinking would you believe?) and particular restaurants, theatres and meetings. Here in the Philippines things could not be more different with my stepdaughter being welcomed, cuddled, stroked and generally told how amazing she is by almost everyone we meet. We must be careful though that all this praise doesn't go to her head and create a cult of personality around her to rival that of Ferdinand Marcos himself! Furthermore, such is the level of respect for children in the Philippines that they often enjoy free travel and accommodation, which is definitely not the case in Britain where all too often they are cynically viewed as lucrative commercial opportunities: 'Buy this new computer game, all your schoolmates have it! Go on, pester Mum and Dad for it!'

Before I made the big move, a political activist friend voiced concerns about the quality of democracy in the Philippines, suggesting that therefore I shouldn't come here. True enough, this nation has its fair share of corruption and skulduggery – just like any other – but what my friend's implicit ethnocentrism couldn't grasp was that the Philippines is relatively new to democracy after being held back by centuries of colonialism followed by decades of dictatorship. Give them a chance! Furthermore, my friend should have reinforced his glass house before throwing stones at someone else's. For example, Britain still has the appalling anachronism of The House of Lords which doesn't look good next to far younger democracies in the world that at least elect their

second chamber. I was actively opposed to Britain's involvement in the Iraq War which many considered opinions regarded as a war crime. Should I therefore leave Britain and never return? Of course not because the government are not the people and the people are not the government. In most elections across the world, only about half the electorate actually bother voting so the winning party can hardly claim to be properly representative. The political class in the Philippines may be shifty – as they are in any country – but I'm not here to hang out with *them*, I'm interested in ordinary Filipinos who, on the whole, have been warm, funny and extremely amiable.

So what are my other reasons for coming to the Philippines? Here they are in brief: the glorious weather, the stunning mountains, the gorgeous beaches, the food (particularly lechon kawali and halo-halo), the drink (San Miguel, buko juice and sugarcane juice) and the tricycles (which thrill my stepdaughter to bits). I'm sure there are more but that's enough for now.

#### The Politics of Squatting - An Investigative Visit to Trinidad Extension (15<sup>th</sup> January 2010)

Here in the Philippines 'squatters' is the name given to poor people who move from the provinces to the big urban centres in the hope of finding work. Unable to afford the high rents in cities like Manila, they build makeshift settlements out of whatever materials they can salvage on whatever spare land they can find. Squatters have become a key issue in the upcoming presidential and mayoral elections. Many middle-class Filipinos regard them as pests who spread crime and disease and add to the already chronic problems of crowding and poverty. The Mayor of Quezon City, where I live, has been attacked in the media for cynically courting the squatter vote by declaring a moratorium on their evictions. The more radically-minded argue that squatters are the victims of

economic inequity; a debt-ridden nation like the Philippines simply does not have the funds to develop its rural regions and so people cannot be blamed for making the exodus to better work prospects. In a country that has no free health care and limited social security, not having a job can literally be the death of you.

Unsure which argument to believe, I am pleased to be given the opportunity to visit a squatters' community called Trinidad Extension. I am to accompany my partner Beth who, by arrangement with the Communiterrain NGO, has volunteered to teach art to the children of the community.

Locating Trinidad Extension is not easy. My guide, Communiterrain operative Meryl, leads us from Santolan train station through a labyrinth of street stalls that use rags attached to spinning motors to chase the flies off their food. We cut down an anonymous alleyway where cockerels are tied to door handles and babies sleep in cradles hanging from beams. The alleyway opens out into a kind of shadow city, a caricature of conventional Manila. The buildings here are decrepit and full of gaps filled in with green polythene netting, tarpaulin, leather ad banners. Unpainted wooden porches and balconies have been added to the brickwork, which gives a Wild West feel to the place. Canopies made from sack cloth marked 'AQUA SERV' protrude from these extensions. There are also several animal coops fashioned from plastic tubing. I am entertained by the ironic reappropriations of signs, such as one reading 'POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS' draped around a mountain of sun-hardened earth capped with random debris: straws, yellow ice cream cones, a broken cupboard.

Beth's classroom has been adapted from a roofless, half-ruined chamber. Inside it are bamboo benches and a tiny coffee table. Tarpaulin inscribed with Chinese characters keeps the sun off our heads. Within seconds, Beth and my stepdaughter Amber are surrounded by kids of all ages, grinning, unstopably curious, wearing T-

shirts ranging from pictures of Mickey Mouse to cheeky phrases like 'I'M TOO SEXY FOR MY SHIRT'.

Meryl introduces Beth and I in Tagalog and then says in English, "So do you want to learn?"

"Yes!" comes the cheer from the kids.

While Beth produces paints and Play-Do, I talk to Meryl and Nancy, the president of BILHOA, the resident's association. Trinidad Extension was set up by employees of the Philippine army who could not afford the accommodation provided at Camp Acenza, the nearby military base. I am amazed to discover that this happened back in 1959, which contradicts the complaints I have heard about squatters being a recent phenomenon, casually moving around Manila like nomads. Nancy's community has been in the same place for over fifty years, although they have had to struggle hard for the right to remain there.

In 2005, a local company won a legal claim for the land that Trinidad Extension is built on. All 300 families are due to be driven out and their homes demolished so that the company can build luxury condominiums for the rich. The government's ruling is part of a broader scheme to seize 19 hectares of land along the Pasig River from various groups of squatters. Attempts have been made to bribe and intimidate Nancy but she has remained steadfast. She says that no one in Trinidad Extension could or would ever leave: most of the residents are employed locally as tricycle drivers or in the nearby cockfighting stadium and relocation would mean destitution. The government argues that, given Trinidad Extension was flooded after Typhoon Ondoy burst the banks of the adjacent Pasig River, the community should leave for its own safety in case this happens again. However, a respected scientist from the University of the Philippines has told Meryl that, due to climate change, *everywhere* in the Philippines is at risk from flooding. Furthermore, if the plan is to build condominiums on the land, how much

more protected from natural disasters are these structures as compared to slum dwellings?

Nancy then tells me the most preposterous government claim so far: that Trinidad Extension was to blame for the river bursting its banks because of the rubbish they supposedly dumped in it. In actual fact, the community is so poor that they have almost nothing to throw away. If anyone has filled the river with waste it is the numerous pigfeed, chemical and plastics factories that operate along the banks.

Sometimes, says Nancy, the scare tactics have been extreme. A major fire devastated Trinidad Extension in 2006 and the residents suspected arson. After that incident, the condo company successfully prevented the community from reconnecting to the power grid. It is fortunate, then, that I can see a man working a water pump just over Nancy's shoulder. The man stops pumping and smiles at me with missing teeth. He comes over and asks in basic English if I'd like to see more of Trinidad Extension. I reply that I would love to.

He and several children lead me through more tumbledown dwellings with TV aerials perched on them like skinny birds, past shoes hanging by their tongues from washing lines, old women repairing shoes or playing the card game *bingo tungit*, working men taking midday naps on the ground, and down to the Pasig River. A bull rolls around in the muddy shallows, trying to cool itself down. This elicits plenty of laughter from the children. We walk up the river bank to a field where sweetcorn and nuts are growing. I am told later by Meryl that these crops allow the community to be partly self-sufficient.

We return to the classroom where Beth is finishing up her lesson. Nancy and Meryl are looking glumly over a newspaper cutting. Meryl explains to me that the article is about a new bill called '6405' that is being proposed in Congress. If it becomes law it will punish all *barangay* captains (local council leaders) in the Philippines with

either a 500,000 peso (about £7,200) fine or life imprisonment for failing to drive squatters out of their jurisdictions. This would be a powerful incentive for *barangay* captains to use any means necessary – including violence - to destroy communities like this one. Nancy is chillingly reminded of what happened to a nearby squatter’s community last year: a demolition team broke through the human barricade with water cannons and clubs.

I ask if any of the presidential hopefuls will champion the rights of squatters. Nancy says that most people here support Liberal Party candidate Noynoy Aquino while they regard his main opponent Manny Villar of the Nationalist Party as a corrupt tycoon, despite his humble origins. Meryl laments the lack of political will to help the poor because the media and the education system encourage Filipinos to look out only for themselves and their own families. Even the Catholic Church which supports NGOs like hers has lost its moral compass, with only five bishops left in the country who claim to be pro-poor. When Nancy found out that Father Robert, a friend and supporter of Trinidad Extension had been bribed into working for the enemy, she didn’t sleep for three days.

Beth packs her materials up and we are invited into Nancy’s home for refreshments. Despite its small size, it is clear that she is as house-proud as the most middle-class of housewives. Crockery is laid out neatly on shelves alongside a picture of the Last Supper hanging on the wall. The floor tiles are so smart and polished that I don’t want to tread my dirty trainers on them.

Nancy cooks us some very tasty, sweet pancakes while Beth works out when she can come back for future lessons. When it is time to say goodbye, Nancy reiterates what seems to be the clinching argument for her community’s right to exist. “This is our home. We’ve been here so long. We don’t bother anyone else.” I find myself agreeing. What is admirable about Trinidad Extension is the way that they endure pretty awful

living conditions – even compared to elsewhere in a poor country like the Philippines – sleeping five or ten to a room, next to busy railway tracks and polluted rivers. It is strange then that some of the criticism directed at squatters – from politicians, priests and businesspeople i.e. those far more affluent than them – sounds almost jealous.

### Corregidor: Island of War and Beauty

(1<sup>st</sup> March 2010)

As the ferry pulls in to a pine-fringed cove of ivory-coloured sand, I find it hard to imagine Corregidor Island as the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific theatre of World War II. A strategic outpost guarding Manila from sea invasion since the 1500s, Corregidor was attacked from the opposite direction by the Japanese in early 1942. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the US Army Forces in the Far East, was forced to flee the island by PT boat to Australia, famously vowing 'I shall return'. In two days, a 75,000-strong Japanese army fought their way past 45 pieces of heavy artillery and overwhelmed 13,000 US and Filipino soldiers. Three years later, MacArthur made good on his promise and liberated the island in a daring air and sea assault that turned out to be even bloodier than the first Battle of Corregidor. The US victory was to prove decisive in ending the war in Asia.

When we reach land, I'm ushered into a charmingly retro tour bus that resembles a wartime tram and away we go into the depths of the jungle. We pass the grey, spectral ruins of barracks and mess halls, some held up by shaky foundations either damaged by shelling or worn thin by age. As we drive, our tour guide holds up a selection of items he's found strewn around Corregidor, amongst them a Japanese bayonet, a Coca-Cola bottle from 1912 and US and Filipino currency dating back 150 years.

We stop at Battery Way, an emplacement of mortars that still have bullet holes in them, despite a thick and recently applied coat of paint. Our guide tells me to look

down the barrel of one of the guns. I do so and see a bomb nestling in the base. 'That's still live,' says the guide, 'but it is probably harmless.' I back away with a fake smile. A delicious lunch of pork adobo and *pancit canton* (flour noodles with vegetables and seafood) is served on the Spanish-style veranda of the Corregidor Inn. It's possible to stay the night at the Inn and use it as a base for activities such as kayaking, ziplining and all-terrain vehicle driving.

Our next stop is the moving Pacific War Memorial and its 40 foot-tall abstract sculpture representing the eternal flame. The rotunda features stone-etched memorials to those who died in every conflict the Philippines has been involved in, including the often under-reported Spanish-American War of 1898 when the US wrested control of the archipelago from the Spanish Empire.

For many, Corregidor's *pièce de resistance* is the Malinta Tunnel complex, that in its heyday housed a field hospital, an electric tram system, shops, storerooms and General MacArthur's operational headquarters. The American and Filipino garrison made its last stand against the Japanese inside Malinta and just a few months before that Manuel Quezon was sworn in here for his second term as President of the semi-autonomous Philippine Commonwealth. Although a close friend of MacArthur's and a supporter of the US presence in his country, Quezon is reported to have exploded with anger after listening to a speech by President Roosevelt about the war in Europe and shouted, 'How typical of America to writhe in anguish at the fate of a distant cousin, Europe, while a daughter, the Philippines, is being raped in the back room!'

With the aid of torches, we make our way through the curve-arched main tunnel and peer into alcoves containing life-size metal models of soldiers, engineers, doctors, nurses, MacArthur himself and his second-in-command General Jonathan Wainwright. Normally there's an audiovisual presentation detailing the history of Malinta, but for technical reasons it isn't available right now.

I am suitably sobered as we emerge from the tunnel and ride the tour bus back to the ferry port. All in all, Corregidor is a captivating insight into a momentous event in history and a poignant tribute to the thousands of young men who died in the most destructive war of all time.

### Myths of the MacArthur Suite

(22<sup>nd</sup> April 2010)

When the tour guide throws open the doors to the Douglas MacArthur Suite, I'm fairly sure what to expect. The American general it's named after was known for astutely managing his public image, concealing his weird private foibles and rebuilding his hero's reputation after professional fiascos. Likewise, the Suite he lived in for six years has been impeccably restored to a supposedly Edenic moment in Philippine history, before World War II levelled Manila, before the Japanese destroyed the entirety of the Suite just to get back at MacArthur and before the country fell under the hammer of martial law. Although there's nothing original about the mahogany *chaise longues*, the slightly musty *sampaguita* scent or the gently sparkling brass chandeliers, the impression of 1935 is persuasive and beautiful enough.

What is the most iconic image of World War II? Britons might think of Herbert Mason's photo of Blitz-era St Paul's Cathedral framed by thick black bomb smoke, yet somehow undamaged and bathed in a heavenly light. Russians would likely recall the hunched silhouette of a Red Army soldier waving the Hammer and Sickle from the roof of the Reichstag, the tower blocks in the background shelled down to their rafters. Americans would nominate either the US Marines hoisting the Stars and Stripes into the gloomy skies of Iwo Jima or the picture I spot on the wall on the MacArthur Suite's sitting room.

It's a spontaneous snap of the General strutting ashore at Leyte Island in October 1944, at the start of the American liberation of the Philippines. He is fulfilling the highly quoted promise -- 'I shall return' -- he made to the Filipino people two years before, when his spirited and tactically adept resistance to the Japanese failed and he was forced to flee to Australia.

Although the claims in the preceding paragraph are widely believed to be true, they are largely false. The tour guide tells me that the photo was far from unplanned. 'It took them three attempts to get it right,' she says in a lilting accent that mixes American stressed vowels with rolling Spanish "rs". 'The first time, the General believed that he did not look good. The second time, he tripped and fell in the water. The third time, it was a success.' Moreover, as Professor Vicente Villan of the University of the Philippines has discovered, by the time MacArthur arrived at Leyte on that "historic" day, indigenous guerrillas had already driven the Japanese out of the island. MacArthur chose this particular beach precisely because he knew it was safe and secure. He could step Moses-like from water to land and play the courageous saviour, but without actually having to save anyone or be in any way courageous.

As we turn to a glass cabinet displaying the "Decorations & Medals of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur", I'm reminded that he made some disastrous military decisions, especially during the early phases of the war. The historian James Hamilton-Paterson observes that, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), MacArthur ignored a ten-hour invasion warning, failed to provide his troops with basic rations and clothing, and relied on an outdated war plan that resulted in the surrender of 76,000 Filipinos and Americans at Bataan in April 1942. Yet none of this ever came back to haunt him. On the contrary, as Hamilton-Paterson puts it, "Douglas MacArthur's most remarkable achievement was to turn this whole unpropitious series of events into a mammoth public relations triumph

such that he ended the war a national hero, receiving the Congressional Medal of Honour for his defence of Bataan and Corregidor."

When the tour guide tells me these 'are not real medals', my heart skips a beat as, for a moment, I entertain the notion that MacArthur's entire war record is bogus. Then she justifies her allegation: 'What we are seeing here are just facsimiles. The actual medals are inside the General's tomb at Norfolk, Virginia.'

MacArthur's weakness for whitewashing his career went hand-in-hand with an inflated sense of self-importance. When he accepted the role of Military Advisor to the Philippine Army in 1935, he demanded to be put up at the 100,000-square-foot Malacañang Palace. 'This was not possible,' says my guide. 'The Palace is special for Filipinos. Only our governors and presidents had ever lived there before.' MacArthur's second choice was the whole of the fifth floor of the deluxe Manila Hotel. When the government complained that the bill would be too high it was agreed that, alongside his military duties, MacArthur would be made General Manager of the Hotel. Somehow MacArthur was able to finagle exactly the same salary as the then President of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon.

I glance back at that photo of MacArthur wading ashore. It reeks of theatrical self-consciousness. Like a Hollywood stereotype of a military leader, the powerful curve of his chin advances out beyond ritzy sunglasses and taut, stoic lips. The uniform unbuttoned at the neck denotes both rebel individualism and Lotharian glamour. As his torpedo-like legs crash through the sea, his beefy hands are clamped to the waist of his billowing khakis. The body language says: "Nothing will stop me." In *Ermita*, F Sionil José's superlative novel of post-war Manila, a chauffeur names his newborn son MacArthur in the hope that "the General's good looks, his noble visage and everything worth emulating about the Liberator of the Philippines would somehow be transmitted to the baby." That this oft-photographed flabby and sour-faced old man could be

popularly regarded as good-looking is a testament to the power of propaganda to generate intense affection for the MacArthur myth amongst Filipinos and Americans alike. (An idle question crosses my mind: has MacArthur's physical appearance in some way influenced contemporary beliefs about male attractiveness which, as a visit to any bar or mall in Manila will reveal, seem to allow unprepossessing middle-aged white men to have their pick of nubile local beauties?)

A textbook narcissist, MacArthur needed such hagiography to buttress his somewhat rickety ego. During bouts of depression, he would call prostitutes up to the Suite, but instead of having sex with them he demanded they tell him repeatedly what a wonderful human being he was. He often threatened to commit suicide, only changing his mind after sufficient amounts of flattery from colleagues. In Michael Schaller's biography *MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*, MacArthur aide T.J. Davis tells of how, during one train journey in the US, he finally got sick of the General's histrionics.

'As we pass over the Tennessee River bridge,' MacArthur said in a maudlin tone, 'I intend to jump from the train. This is where my life ends, Davis.'

'Happy landing,' replied Davis wryly.

MacArthur got the message and never again talked about killing himself.

According to the diplomacy scholar Laura A. Belmonte, MacArthur's behaviour was partly a response to his domineering mother Pinky's yearning that he be a "glorious Apollo, Roland and George Washington all in one". As his fame grew during World War II, this yearning behind closed doors became a very public expectation. This only upped the pressure on his fragile sense of self.

We peek into the guest bedroom which, either by accident or design, contains many shades of the colour brown. The 1970s-style zigzag carpet is ecru, the teak bedside table seal-brown. The centrepiece is an elegant bed made from nara wood, the

swirling grains of its four posters starkly sepia next to the fulgent white pineapple-skin duvet.

'You know that Bill Clinton stayed here?' says the guide. 'And before you ask, no he did not bring Monica with him.'

Clinton wasn't the first philanderer to stay here. One of the other contributing factors to MacArthur's depression was his catastrophic affair with the Scottish-Filipina actress Isabel Rosario Cooper, who was 26 years his junior. MacArthur made every effort to hide her from public view and – perhaps more importantly for him – from his mother, first in Manila and then in an apartment in Washington, DC. After two reporters on *The Washington Post* wrote an uncomplimentary profile of MacArthur accusing him of being "narrow-minded, opinionated, vain, egotistical, and dismissive of civilian authority", the General was compelled to sue them for libel. However, the reporters got wind of Cooper's existence, tracked her down and persuaded her to stand as a witness for the defence. Terrified of a career-ruining scandal, MacArthur quickly dropped the suit and paid \$150,000 to Cooper to keep quiet and get out of his life.

In MacArthur's study are a number of personal affects that epitomise both the man and the myth. Predictably, neither the trademark corncob pipe nor the statesman-like marble-topped desk are original. The brass gilded chair is, however, and dates back to 1939.

'Sir Tom, do you want to sit down where the great man used to sit down?' asks the tour guide.

'Are you sure?' I frown. 'I probably weigh more than MacArthur and I don't want to go down in history as the tourist who broke the only authentic item in his Suite.'

'Please don't worry sir, we have had many thousands of tourists sit there.'

I ease myself down into the chair. It feels as sturdy as a gun emplacement. If there's a secret centre to the MacArthur Suite, an axis around which everything else

revolves, then this chair is it. From here, I feel I can start to understand Douglas P.

MacArthur's life and its close connection with the wider story of Manila, the Philippines and the United States. I look out the north window over Manila Bay. In 1900, just as Douglas's father Arthur MacArthur Jr. was being sworn in as Governor-General of the US-occupied Philippines, the American architect Daniel Burnham was busy re-designing Manila Bay for the twentieth century. His stated aim was to sanitise, modernise and morally improve the area by building new parks, streets, railways, waterways and a lavish Classical Revival hotel - the hotel I am sitting in right now - overlooking the bay.

But, like MacArthur's own life story, there were flaws and feints in this narrative of beautification. First of all, Burnham's civilising mission was seen by many Filipinos as an attempt to conceal the United States' profoundly uncivilised behaviour in their homeland. While the US was plotting to seize the Spanish Empire's possessions in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, a nationalist revolution had broken out near Manila. Washington struck a deal with the Katipunan, the revolutionary movement, whereby the US would grant full independence to the Philippines in return for the Katipunan's assistance in defeating the Spanish. In a scoundrelly move, Washington reneged on the deal and decided that *it* wanted to rule the archipelago directly as the new imperial overlord. Almost as humiliating for Filipino patriots had been Spain's decision to sell the Philippines to the US for a paltry \$20 million. Furthermore, while mild-mannered American gentlemen were strolling around Manila Bay pontificating about Greco-Roman columns, across the rest of the archipelago the US Army was involved in a counter-insurgency operation that, by 1910, would kill twenty per cent of the population, including thousands of innocent women and children. For the cultural theorist David Brody, the ultimate physical expression of the myth of American benevolence is the Burnham Memorial in Baguio City, a hill station near Manila. The

inscription on his bust moralises about "love, amity and mutual respect" which, for Brody, "mitigates a tumultuous history that included the bloodshed, loss and cultural trauma that accompanied the Philippine-American War."

Moreover, few of Burnham's 'City Beautiful' plans ever got beyond the stage of blabber about progress and civic harmony. Rather than founding an urban utopia, he was more successful in stamping US cultural superiority over Manila. As Burnham was drawing up plans for the Manila Hotel as an outpost of Western metropolitan luxury amid the colonial boondocks, the young Douglas MacArthur was fast becoming the personification of the abusive and exploitative relationship between the US and the Philippines. After graduating from West Point in 1903, MacArthur joined the 3rd Engineer Battalion in the Philippines, where his father had just been put in charge of the Department of the Pacific. MacArthur was sent out into the jungle to conduct surveys and build bridges as part of the efforts to cement US military authority. During his tour he made contacts within the new American business elite and invested in such lucrative operations as the Benguet gold mines. As Deanna Springola, author of the *Power Elite Playbook* has observed, during the early 1900s, the US Congress "passed tariff acts allowing free US entry of all Philippine products; this would make the Philippines dependent on the US."

On the marble-topped desk is a reminder of MacArthur's other significant encounter during his early visits to the Philippines. It's a photo of him shaking hands with a slight, nervous-looking man in a cream suit. This is Manuel Roxas, MacArthur's close friend, military aide and, later on, political crony. The official history goes something like this: after World War II the Philippines lay in ruins and the US government tasked Roxas and MacArthur with disbursing \$2 billion in aid. The enlightened Filipino humanitarian and the Hollywood hero of the Pacific spent the

money on reconstructing and modernising the nation, raising living standards for all.

However, James Hamilton-Paterson's account is closer to the truth:

[In 1945] ... MacArthur was given a free hand to arrange his former fiefdom according to his taste. His personal support was crucial to getting his old friend Roxas approved by Washington and elected. So also was his capricious withholding of US aid for the reconstruction of the Philippines after the election, thereby making the aid virtually contingent on Roxas becoming President. Thereafter, the \$2 billion in aid was fought over by various groups of vultures who had good links with the new ruling elite of MacArthur and Roxas. Only very little of this fabulous sum (at mid-1940s value, too) actually went into rebuilding the Philippines' shattered infrastructure and economy.

There was understandable public outrage. Backed by the Office of Strategic Services and later the CIA, MacArthur and Roxas ruthlessly crushed dissent in the media, the intelligentsia and the rural poor. In some ways, such gangsterish autocracy blazed the trail for future US interventions throughout the Cold War, from Iran to Vietnam, Chile to Nicaragua. In 1946, the Hukbalahap guerrillas (nicknamed the Huks), who had boldly resisted the Japanese during the war, tried and failed to overthrow the central government in Manila.

I rise from MacArthur's chair and shuffle closer to the window. Down on Bonifacio Drive -- named after Andres Bonifacio, a founder member of the Katipunan -- a homeless boy, barefoot and caked in tar-black dirt, is holding a frail and quivering hand up to passing cars. It's a grievous reminder that the injustices that shocked the Huks into rising against the MacArthur consensus persist today. Costing \$3,300 a night, the MacArthur Suite in 2014 is just as alien to the experience of the 30 million or so Filipinos who live on less than \$1 a day as it would have been to the pickpockets and panhandlers of MacArthur's time. 76% of the Philippine economy is still owned by an oligarchy that can trace its roots back to either Spanish or American colonisation. The Philippines remains in the grip of "dollar imperialism", as proven by the ubiquity of Coca-Cola, McDonalds, basketball, and rock and hip-hop music. Having just become the country's number one trading partner, Japan is now arguably exerting more

influence over the Philippines than at any time since the war. The Huks have metamorphosed into the Maoist New People's Army, which struggles – often violently – on behalf of landless peasants and urban squatters.

I sit back in the chair where, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, General MacArthur did much of his thinking about war, history, politics and business. If this mythical figure were somehow to be resurrected and to find himself in this chair again, would his thoughts about the contemporary Philippines be all that different?

### The Comfort Woman

(8<sup>th</sup> May 2010)

I had to dodge past two surly Alsatians on leashes before entering the modest offices of Pagakaisa ng Babae, a support group for the 174 Filipina survivors of Japanese wartime abuse. I waited in a room with a dining table in its centre. It looked like the lounge of a middle-class Filipino home, albeit with photos, banners and text boards on the walls telling the story of the organisation.

After a few minutes, a slender middle-aged woman in glasses came in, leading an old woman – also slim and bespectacled – by the hand. They sat down, the older woman taking longer about it.

‘Good afternoon,’ said the middle-aged woman. ‘You must be Tom. I am Josefina Jurado and this is Valentina L. Tupas.’ As I tried to think of a polite way of finding out Valentina’s age, Josefina came to the rescue. ‘She is eighty years old and has been a member of our group since 1993.’

I sat with them and switched my recorder on. ‘I’m grateful that you’ve agreed to talk to me. I don’t want you to get upset so please just share with me whatever you’re comfortable sharing with me.’ I cursed myself – ‘comfortable’ was not the most diplomatic adjective to use.

Valentina preferred to speak in Tagalog, so Josefina translated for me. At the outbreak of the Pacific war in 1941, Valentina was twelve and living with her family on the southern island of Negros. The family was well-to-do, her father a sugar farmer, her mother the owner of a *sari-sari* (convenience) store. When the Japanese occupied the island they closed the sugar mill and forced the Dys to relocate to Candoni, in the south, where they continued farming but with scant resources: one *carabao* (water buffalo), one cow and seventeen chickens. At first, relations with the occupiers were cordial – Valentina’s father would trade eggs and chickens for salt and soy sauce.

In 1943, the Japanese sent Valentina to an airfield in Bacolod City. She was given a half kilo of rice a day for labouring in a human chain to gather stones from a riverbed that were needed to mend an airstrip. After a year of this, a US plane flew over and dropped messages telling Valentina and her colleagues that it was futile working for the Japanese. This was the first inkling she had that the Allies were winning the war.

Valentina was sent back to her family farm to help grow cassava and sweet potatoes. One afternoon, while she was bringing some of the produce to the market, she saw a Japanese truck pull up. Soldiers jumped out. After noticing one of the soldiers staring at her, she ran away, but tripped and fell over. The Japanese dragged her by her hair to the truck. A dozen other Filipinas were inside. They were not allowed to speak to each other.

A single tear formed in Valentina’s left eye and bumped down over the wrinkles on her cheek. Her voice crackled. I started to say to Josefina, ‘She doesn’t have to go on.’ But Valentina went on.

The truck took her and the others to the Dalisay army camp. A soldier led her into a large house and upstairs to a room with a table and a bed within. The soldier shoved her onto the bed and raped her. She screamed, tried to resist, but her assailant was too strong. When he was finished, another soldier came in and did exactly the same

to her. When she tried to roll off the bed and escape, he seized her by the arms and smashed her head against the table.

When Valentina awoke some hours later, a fellow comfort woman was standing over her. 'It's best you don't fight back,' she said, 'or they'll kill you.' From then on, Valentina would close her eyes and put her hands over her ears every time she was raped. She was just thirteen years old.

After three weeks of being violated several times a day, she heard a commotion outside the house. She looked out the window. The Japanese soldiers were packing up their equipment. 'The Americans are coming,' they shouted. That night the soldiers fled to the mountains. Valentina ran out of the house and all the way home to her family. They were sitting around the kitchen table weeping.

'We thought you were dead,' her father said to her.

She was never able to tell him what had happened to her in the room in the large house. It would have brought shame on the family. Her parents had explained her absence to the neighbours by pretending she'd been on holiday. A few weeks later, Valentina gathered enough courage to tell her mother the truth. Although sympathetic, her mother warned her to stay quiet about it. 'What the Japanese did to you is not your fault, my child,' she said. 'Still, Filipinos will think you have been tainted by the Japanese, so hated are they now.'

After the war, Valentina moved to Manila and married. To the day of his death, her husband knew nothing of her time as a comfort woman.

Valentina dabbed a tissue at more tears. I wasn't sure what to say next. Josefina put her hands around Valentina's and said, 'The Japanese paid the Philippines reparations in 1956. This did not include anything for the 'comfort women'. All we are asking for now is an apology. We hear they are soon to give the Korean women one.'

'Have the Japanese ever acknowledged women like Valentina?' I asked.

‘One ex-soldier came here and testified to the existence of the comfort stations.

That is all.’

‘How are you funded?’

‘We receive 80,000 yens a year.’

‘Japanese yens?’

‘Yes, surprisingly there is support for us from the Japanese public.’

‘Are you aware of other nations during the war that used “comfort women”?’

‘No side is innocent. The Nazis had military brothels all across Europe. When the Allies invaded and occupied Germany, the Soviets raped maybe 2 million local women and the Americans around 190,000, so the estimates say.’

Josefina went on to explain that Pagakaisa ng Babae does not exclusively struggle for victims of the Japanese in the 1940s. ‘Since the war, there have been many cases of Americans sexually assaulting Filipinas. They often get away with it due to the Visiting Forces Agreement which means US personnel are immune to prosecution. Only one rapist, Daniel Smith, has ever been convicted, although he was released after the US government put pressure on our government. The Americans blackmailed us by postponing a prestigious joint exercise with our armed forces until our president agreed to hand Smith over to US custody.’

‘Is the situation getting better or worse?’

‘I think worse. The Philippine Commission on Women has found that 1 in 5 Filipinas experience sexual abuse and that there’s been a 50 percent increase in violence against women only this year.’

‘Why does it happen?’

‘The ill-treatment of women – and children – is universal. Oftentimes they have less money and influence than men so this leaves them vulnerable. You know that traffickers go into high schools in poor neighbourhoods here? We have a campaign

where we tell the students not to sell themselves even if the high amount is tempting. Other problems come when, after a cyclone or earthquake, people lose their homes and their livelihoods. The only way to avoid starving is to sell your children to a paedophile. He will come to the disaster site in person or contact you on the internet. Many of those men pay enough to keep a family fed for months. Many of those men are from *your West.*'

