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The Intramuros of Anak Dalita, the Looban of Manila Noir

Geronimo Cristobal and Talitha Espiritu

This article examines Lamberto Avellana's *Anak Dalita* (LVN Pictures, 1956) as a crime melodrama that places Intramuros, Manila's historic walled city, within the cinematic urban geography of film noir. It probes the film's representation of the transformation of Intramuros from a colonial city of cathedrals and mansions to a post-war ruin associated with squatters and urban poverty. Situating *Anak Dalita* within the context of the reconfiguration of Manila's urban space in the two decades that followed the Second World War, this essay interprets the film's narrative about a disabled veteran's quest to regain his self-worth in Intramuros as an allegory of post-war urban rehabilitation. The *looban* (meaning interior space, interiority and a gathering of wills) is proposed as a conceptual tool to critique *Anak Dalita*'s solutions to the squatter problem in Intramuros.

Keywords: cinematic city, Philippine cinema, Second World War, Korean War, suburbanization, war films, masculinity in crisis, *looban*, Manila, city films.

Introduction

> *Yan ang ibig kong sabihin. Buhay pa ang iyong kalooban, Vic. 'Yan ay kalahati ng tagumpay.… Nais ko na mabuo ang katawan at pag-iisip ng mga taong nawasak nitong nakaraang digmaan upang mabalik sa kanilang pag-iisip na sila'y may hinaharap, may kinabukasan.*
>
> [That's what I mean. Your *kalooban* is still alive, Vic. That's half of the victory.… I want the people destroyed by the past war to regain their body and their will (*looban*) in order to restore in their minds that they have something to look forward to, a future.]

These lines, spoken by Father Fidel to Victor, the war-scarred hero of Lamberto Avellana's 1956 film *Anak Dalita* (Child of Sorrow, subtitled The Ruins), tellingly reveal the centrality of the vernacular concept of the *looban* (meaning both interiority and a gathering of wills) to this celebrated drama of the studio era in the Philippines. Produced by LVN studios, the film offers a candid depiction of post-war social problems after the Second World War and the Korean War: the growth of squatter settlements in the metropolis, the re-entry of veterans into society and the growth of prostitution in the city of Intramuros. The plot revolves around a double conflict: a disabled veteran's masculinity in crisis is presented as a metonym of an urban social crisis. Both are depicted using a neo-realist aesthetic that breaks sharply from the light musicals and escapist narratives that were LVN studio's signature fare.

Anak Dalita took home the grand prize, the Golden Harvest Award for Best Picture, at the 1956 Asian Film Festival. It is regarded as a landmark film of the so-called golden age of Philippine movies and as representing a "lasting contribution to the art of the cinema in the Philippines" (Garcia 1983, p. 53). The film was not, however, a commercial success (Sicam and Paredes 1977, p. 80). Its narrative of post-war urban despair flew in the face of the strict formula by the LVN studio head Doña Narcisa de Leon for profit-maximizing entertainment laced with nationalism and escapism—tropes that "dominated Philippine films" at the time (p. 78). As the director, Avellana, put it, LVN's brand of nationalism consisted of an algorithm of "Filipino customs, traditions and costumes" (p. 78). Tony Santos, who plays *Anak Dalita's* disabled veteran hero, similarly noted how the studio's aesthetic may be summed up as "sayawan sa bukid, naka-saya, maka-Pilipino" (dances in the fields, in traditional dress, pro-Filipino) (p. 78). Indeed, almost every LVN feature included an elaborate fifteen-minute dance sequence drawn from traditional folk dances and performed by ensembles of twenty-five performers or more (p. 78).

There are no bucolic idylls in *Anak Dalita*, which instead features an Intramuros buried in rubble, where migrants have built

a makeshift city of squatters' shacks in the city's ruins. There are no musical numbers and its story world is bleak. Shot on location and privileging an insider's view of the post-war urban landscape, the film bears a strong affinity with Italian Neo-realism. Like *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Bicycle Thieves* (1949), *Anak Dalita* features the denizens of the shanty towns of Intramuros playing themselves in their actual makeshift dwellings and wearing their own clothes (Agcaoili 1983, p. 203). Avellana's directorial choices pivoted on bearing witness to their struggles.

Avellana, Agcaoili notes, was drawn to *Anak Dalita*'s topicality; in particular, to the veterans who returned from combat in Korea feeling "as if the new war were just an extension of the old one" (Agcaoili 1983, p. 201). The Korean War is indeed absent from the diegesis, which is instead overflowing with images of Manila's continued devastation five years after the conclusion of the Second World War. Viewing the film from an auteurist lens, Agcaoili notes Avellana's intent to create a "synthesis of the chaos, destruction and confusion that had engulfed his country and people for over three years, and whose effects still remained" in the physical rubble of Intramuros (p. 201). LVN's most accomplished filmmaker took on the project "because of an obsessive conscience crying … for exorcism and expression" (p. 201).

Anak Dalita's topicality extends to its treatment of non-normative couplings in an urban landscape that was being transformed profoundly by the push-and-pull tension between in-migration from the countryside and out-migration as a consequence of post-war suburbanization. Vic's crisis of masculinity registers his sense of displacement in this new urban milieu, which he learns to navigate through the help of a prostitute, Cita, and her orphaned brother, Ipe. The three form a non-normative household. The taboo sexual politics attending Vic and Cita's socially aberrant romance is, by LVN standards, quite shocking. Less sexually explicit and expressed more in psychologically nuanced dialogue and melodramatic incident, their passionate intimacy is difficult to reconcile with LVN's strict moralism. Avellana recalls that, as "dictated by Doña Sisang, [LVN

films] were 'antiseptically rigid'"; sex scenes were strictly forbidden and a 'chaste peck on the cheek after which the camera panned up to the sky' was code for sexual intimacy (Sicam and Paredes 1977, p. 80).

Anak Dalita was a prestige film with serious, adult themes culled from current events. It was created specifically to give LVN a shot at winning acclaim at the Asian Film Festival, which was organized by the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Asia, of which the LVN matriarch and her son Manuel de Leon were founding members. Agcaoili notes the calculus behind LVN's prestige film: the younger de Leon "felt obliged morally to produce a meritorious film, one that would depict Philippine life and culture honestly in a manner that utilized good film form, even if it would not elicit popular patronage" (Agcaoili 1983, p. 204).

Avellana's award-winning representation of Intramuros has had a lasting impact on the representation of urban space in Philippine cinema. Tolentino notes that Lino Brocka's seminal city films "proliferated the image" of *Anak Dalita*'s squatter colony in *Manila in the Claws of Light* (1975), *Insiang* (1976), *Jaguar* (1979) and *Bonna* (1980) (Tolentino 2001, p. 167). However, a detailed analysis of the film beyond its established neo-realist aesthetic has yet to be written. In this paper, we analyse *Anak Dalita*'s depiction of the returning veteran's fraught masculinity as an allegory for an urban social crisis, adding to the literature by adopting the critical lens of film noir. Film noir, as we use the term here, is less a genre or an empirical category of film than an approach to studying popular movies of the post-war years that engage the psychic crisis of masculinity, exemplified by Vic, and an urban crisis in which centripetal (in-migration) and centrifugal (suburbanization) social forces converge to turn the mid-century city inside out.

In some ways mirroring film noir's demonization of the American city and its abandonment in the face of suburbanization (Farish 2005, p. 97), *Anak Dalita* tells of the transformation of Intramuros from a seat of colonial power and patriarchal authority to a feminized space of abjection. *Anak Dalita* casts the fallen male protagonist

as a mirror image of Intramuros and its iconographic slums, and presents his arc of rehabilitation—psychosocial and spiritual—as an allegory of Manila's restoration.

We offer the concept of *looban* as a new lens for understanding *Anak Dalita*'s narrative. The Filipino word *looban*, according to standard Tagalog dictionaries, commonly means "premises" (Almario 2010). The United Nations Human Settlements Programme defines *looban* as "inner areas where houses are built so close to each other and often in a manner not visible to the general view of the city" (UNHSP 2006). Critical theorist Neferti Tadiar defines *looban* as "a compound, the name residents use to refer to their inner-city neighborhood" (Tadiar 2009, p. 43). The word first came up in a scholarly study in F. Landa Jocano's seminal book *Slum as a Way of Life* (1975), where he used it to mean an interior location of a depressed area. Jocano states that the *looban* is "more than a phenomenon of urbanization"; it contains core characteristics of Filipino post-war psychology and society (Jocano 1975, p. 6).

As a concept, *looban* implies other meanings not necessarily contained by its root word, *loob*, which connotes an inner spirituality grounded in the Filipino experience. The suffix /-an/ marks the relationship of the *looban* to a particular urban place and group of people. From Tadiar's definition we may surmise that the *looban* signals a degree of familiarity with a place used almost exclusively by insiders of a community and always refers to the interior of an urban area.

The *looban*'s psychological dimension centres on the informal and adaptive living arrangements that distinguish this unseen community from others outside the inner city. *Anak Dalita* presents the ethics of care and community survival that structure the *looban* as a communal alternative to the individualized sense of spirituality represented by the Catholic Church, the traditional centre of the colonial city. While the sense of community within the *looban* may overlap with notions of Christian fellowship more generally, the *looban* privileges a more fluid understanding of the inner city as a locus of identity formation and intersubjective identification. It connotes the arts of existence of

marginalized groups and an urban space in constant flux. For this reason, it is a fruitful concept for analysing the tension between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of urbanization within *Anak Dalita*'s film noir narrative style.

We will examine the linguistic moorings of the terms *loob* and *looban* in more detail in relation to our reading of the film through the film noir lens. For now, it is important to emphasize that we see the *looban* as a community. The squatter's city built on the rubble of Intramuros is a *looban* both connotatively and denotatively. It implies both a place and people gathered together by a shared horizon of experience and a collective will to survive. This hermeneutic key is essential to understanding the film's problematic proposition of Catholic charity and individual spiritual renewal as the solutions to the twinned crises haunting the narrative.

In what follows, we shall situate the film against the historical backdrop of the suburbanization of Manila in the 1930s and 1940s and the film culture that emerged between the end of the Second World War and the early 1960s. We then analyse *Anak Dalita*'s representation of the inverted reality of Intramuros and the film's noir-style allegory of post-war rehabilitation. The essay examines the critical power of the *looban* as a vernacular concept and concludes with a critique of *Anak Dalita*'s spiritual solution to the squatter problem in post-war Manila.

Intramuros, Suburbanization and Cinema

Intramuros, the principal setting of *Anak Dalita*'s post-war drama, is a city within a city. It gets its name from the stone walls that enclosed the military, religious and civic centres of Spanish Manila (Ocampo 1992, pp. 310–11). From the onset of US colonialism in 1905 to just before the Second World War, Manila's steady expansion and the relative neglect of the hinterland resulted in continuous in-migration as the rural population was 'pushed' by colonial exploitation and the lack of economic opportunities in the countryside and 'pulled' to the city by the prospect of jobs and better living conditions. These

migrants settled in neighbourhoods like Tondo, Quiapo, Sampaloc, Ermita and Malate just outside the famous walls of Intramuros. The pattern of settlement in the capital city was changed, however, by the destruction of the Second World War: "Poor migrants moved into the ruins of Intramuros, squatting on abandoned rubble and thus converting the once proud center of Spanish authority and culture into a veritable slum" (Campos 2012, p. 146, citing Caoili 1998, pp. 65, 67–68).

Nick Joaquin, the most famous chronicler of Intramuros, describes a post-war Intramuros that never managed to overcome its devastation. Five years after the end of the Second World War, "there was no return to 'normalcy'", Joaquin writes, "because abnormality had become the pattern of our lives" (Joaquin 1990, p. 314). For Joaquin, liberation spawned three "freaks" that became iconographically synonymous with Intramuros: the jeepney, the *barong barong* and the squatter (p. 314).[1] These three 'freaks' figure prominently in the *mise-en-scène* of *Anak Dalita*'s Intramuros.

In his postscript, Joaquin returns to his image of the persevering city in the face of government neglect in the 1930s, the Second World War and numerous natural disasters. "The Noble & Loyal", Joaquin writes, "insists on being a survivor—by the skin of its teeth" (van der Wall 2019, p. 243, citing Joaquin 1990, p. 353). He goes on to compare Manila once more to Troy: it "has been many cities and will be many more" (van der Wall 2019, p. 243, citing Joaquin 1990, p. 353).

Urbanization created a perennial housing crisis in the capital city. Thousands of residents "lived in congested informal settlements with inadequate basic services". The city's middle- and upper-class residents, anxious to flee the pressures of in-migration in the capital city, began settling in new real estate developments that mushroomed outside the city limits (Pante 2017, pp. 94–95). As a result, a 'Greater Manila Area' emerged by the 1930s, which incorporated large swathes of the province of Rizal and several municipalities in present-day Quezon City.

Manila's centrifugal expansion was interrupted by the Second World War. The destruction wrought by the war on Greater Manila was staggering: with a population of 684,800, the city saw damage to its infrastructure worth upwards of 335 million pesos. To secure investments for infrastructure recovery, the newly independent government of President Manuel Roxas acquiesced to the marketization of urban land, which became "a privatized and highly contested commodity that was used to cement class power in Greater Manila" (Camba 2011, p. 3). Meanwhile, the housing needs of the great majority of Manila's inhabitants were neglected because of the "lack of public planning" (Camba 2011, p. 7). Erhard Berner describes Intramuros as a remnant of the nation's "traditional centrality" (Berner 1997, p. 209). Here, a protracted struggle for a place in the city was fought by informal settlers from 1945. Several attempts to "clear" the area failed and they continued until the 1970s (Berner 1997, p. 28; Lico 2008, p. 369).

As the city entered a twenty-year rehabilitation period, the local film culture witnessed a rapid resurgence that anticipated the renovation of the city's key civic centres in the 1950s. In 1946, Hollywood distributors resumed operations in the country after a three-year hiatus, sparking the "swift revival" of an industry that was heavily dependent on Hollywood film imports (Deocampo 2016, p. 357). Manila's picture palaces—including the Capitol, Lyric, Avenue and State—were among the city's landmarks that were hastily rebuilt in the immediate post-war years. Film studios and independent film producers that were clustered in the Intramuros suburb of Escolta quickly resumed production of local movies in the vernacular. Made cheaply (at an average cost of 80,000 pesos per picture) and shot quickly (with an average shooting schedule of twelve to fourteen days), around a hundred feature films were produced annually by these companies after the war (Deocampo 2016, p. 367).

In 1946 the majority of films released by Manila's six major studios and one hundred independent producers were war movies. Films like *Fort Santiago* (1946) romanticized the "life-and-death exploits of heroic guerillas" (Campos 2012, p. 145). The trend led one film

critic to remark that while the war film was a sign of patriotism and was clearly helping to revive the film industry its ubiquity begged the question of whether the film industry had "retrogressed" as a consequence of five years of war. By 'retrogressed', the author was referring to the graphic violence portrayed in films that sensationalized wartime atrocities (Agcaoili 1946, quoted in Deocampo 2016, p. 368)

A similar sentiment is expressed by another commentator, who took issue with the incessant focus by local studios on portraying the despair and trauma of the war. Local studios and producers, the author notes, "should marshal their efforts and talents in the restoration of the normal and the peaceful deportments and thoughts of the people" (Crisostomo 1946, quoted in Deocampo 2016, p. 369). Films like *Victory Joe* (1946), which focuses on the rivalry between two military officers, a Filipino and an American, over a pretty country girl, is just the kind of affirmative war film that the author advocates for. "Presenting pictures emphasizing the virtues and beauty of life", he notes, will revive the film industry's "inherent mission of *improving community existence*" (Crisostomo 1946, quoted in Deocampo 2016, p. 369; emphasis added). The concept of the existence of a community is precisely the ideal of the *looban* that emerges in *Anak Dalita*, as we shall later see.

Anak Dalita is not the first Philippine film to use the term *looban* to describe the makeshift dwellings and shantytowns that became emblematic of post-war Manila. A 1953 romantic comedy titled *Looban* starred former vaudeville actors Leopoldo Salcedo and Anita Linda. The film conveys the period's optimism about the rebuilding of Manila, which can also be observed in the LVN romantic comedy *Squatters* (1953), which starred Nida Blanca and Nestor De Villa, and bore the tagline, "Katatawanan! Romansa! Bakbakan! Magagandang aral!" (Laughter! Romance! Action! and Moral Lessons!).

In the two decades that followed the war, films set in Intramuros and its suburbs registered the new spatial textures of the city as the older districts of Ermita, Malate, Paco and Tondo became increasingly decrepit in comparison to the new suburban developments in Quezon City, which was officially declared the new capital in 1939. This

spatial reconfiguration was the basis of city films like *The Moises Padilla Story* (1961) and *Geron Busabos* (1964), in which "Manila was portrayed as the setting of crime and violence" (Campos 2012, p. 146). In this same decade, films like *Mga Siga sa Looban* (1963) and *Mga Tigre sa Looban* (1968) mimicked Hollywood's rebel films, with stories of neighbourhood bullies and the underdog heroes that stand up to them.

Some crime melodramas, such as *Mga Ligaw na Bulaklak* (1957), adopted the themes and visual style of film noir, while melodramas like *Malvarosa* (1958) added a female-centric perspective on the *looban* film (Campos 2012, p. 146). *Anak Dalita* presents a more nuanced variant of these noir-inspired films and melodramas by acutely contrasting pre-war and post-war notions of the *looban* as it is historically understood to refer to Intramuros, the Manila within Manila. Observing the storylines and urban locations of movies from 1946 to the 1960s, one can clearly trace the changing landscape of the post-war city. Within this cinematic urban geography, the vernacular term *looban* emerged as a psychosocial and spatial notion, and it was *Anak Dalita* that firmly established its contours.

Anak Dalita's Looban as a Feminized Space of Abjection

Anak Dalita's prologue introduces us to the bombed-out San Francisco Church and the *looban*.[2] From a long exterior shot of a bell tower drenched in blinding sunlight, the camera tilts downwards to reveal a walled courtyard. Deep space composition and a long take depict a group of children dressed in rags playing just outside the arched doorway in the centre of the frame. As the camera pans left, the courtyard is revealed to be the ruins of a great cathedral. All that is left of the structure are the outer walls, which form the ramparts of what has become a makeshift city of squatter shacks. San Francisco Church is thus presented as a microcosmic image of the inverted reality of Intramuros: once a space imbued with colonial power, it is now a space of abjection colonized by a derelict population.

What is striking about this space is its clear feminization. Women and children fill the *mise-en-scène*, and there is a near absence of

men on the premises. We are quickly introduced to Cita (Rosa Rosal), who, dressed in a tight-fitting, black cocktail dress rather than the traditional *saya at patadyong* (the long skirt and tent blouse worn by peasants), forms a striking contrast to the other women in the scene. Cita is heavily made-up and has her hair cut short in apparent imitation of the Hollywood gamine. Hunched over and face downcast, she has the unmistakable gait of a labourer coming home after a hard-day's work. But it is early in the morning, and a closeup reveals that her dress is shoddy, her makeup garish and her countenance that of someone who has been up all night. The *mise-en-scène* clearly codes her as a prostitute.

Cita's appearance conforms to the characteristic visualization of the femme fatale, who is often "shot in tough unromantic close-ups of direct, undiffused light, which create a hard, statuesque surface beauty that seems more seductive but less attainable, at once alluring and impenetrable" (Place and Peterson 1976, p. 328). Like the femme fatale whose hard-edged beauty embodies the "atmosphere of uncertainty" in the noir city and who imbues that setting with "female sexuality and duplicity" (Wager 1999, p. 118), Cita is a metonym for the new urban reality of Intramuros.

The *looban* of San Francisco Church is Cita's domain. She is shown to enjoy female homosociality with the other women in the community, and she is a primary caregiver to Aling Tinay (Rosa Aguirre), an older female resident. When the latter dies in the next scene, Cita makes the funeral arrangements and acts as a mediator between the community and Aling Tinay's son, Vic (Tony Santos), who has just returned from the Korean War. Cita, who is initially abrasive and emasculating towards the disabled veteran, becomes a classic *femme attrapée*, the nurturing woman in film noir who holds the promise of "integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values" (Place 1980, p. 50). The arc of their romantic union begins when Cita asks Vic to move in with her and her ten-year-old brother Ipe (Vic Bacani), a taboo proposition in studio films of the era. Cita, Vic and Ipe's non-normative family demonstrates how the inversion of Intramuros represented not just

a reconfiguration of the physical space of the *looban* but also its class and gender norms.

As a feminized space, the *looban* is populated by strong women like Cita, survivors of the horrors of war, who are nonetheless shown to be figures of abjection. They are slatternly women whose disorderly bodies reflect the non-normative living arrangements that were increasingly becoming commonplace in the *looban*. In several scenes that employ an almost documentary-like realism, they are shown performing women's work or pursuing homosocial activities associated with an urban female underclass: breastfeeding in public, loudly gossiping on their haunches, and smoking while doing laundry in the open street. Like the double-figuration of the prostitute in city films as simultaneously submissive and predatory (Smith 2014), the women in the *looban* are shown to be simultaneously pitiful and threatening in their performances of an abject urban femininity.

As visual signifiers of the abjection of the *looban*, the women in the squatter community furthermore articulate the dog-eat-dog world of the post-war city through their onscreen dialogue. Immediately following Aling Tinay's tearful deathbed scene, four women are shown gossiping over her sudden demise. The oldest woman in the group matter-of-factly tells a young breastfeeding woman to occupy Aling Tinay's shack. "Now you can live there", she says, "that's what your husband's been waiting for." When the younger woman asks about Vic's rightful claim to the dwelling, the older woman says, "Soldiers live in camps", underscoring that Vic is out of place in their domain. She then assuages the latter's apprehensions with an aphorism: "That's life. People die and people are born."

It is necessary to contextualize the old woman's pithy lines and, indeed, the clear dearth of men in the *looban* of *Anak Dalita*. In 1945, three thousand of the city's male inhabitants were rounded up and massacred by Japanese troops, a traumatic moment in the history of Intramuros now known as the Manila massacre. Eyewitness accounts state that the men were herded to Fort Santiago, where they were brutally executed (Legarda 2007, p. 188; Joaquin 1990,

p. 197). This traumatic history, which haunts such war films as *Intramuros: Walls of Hell* (1964), is an important intertext to *Anak Dalita*'s feminization of the *looban.*

The old woman's statement, "soldiers live in camps", comes across as unsympathetic towards veterans, and it suggests that soldiers do not belong in the *looban*. Such a position is understandable, given that displaced veterans represented a rival group in need of public housing. In 1946 the United States government passed two acts of rescission that effectively denied the benefits previously promised to Filipino soldiers by the 1944 GI Bill, which was signed at the height of the war. The delivery of other social services for returning war veterans would take more than a decade to be realized (Capozzola 2020, p. 344). Although a veterans housing facility was built in Quezon City in 1949, a veteran's bank, which would have helped applicants secure loans for housing, would only be realized in 1963. At the time of *Anak Dalita*'s release in 1956, housing for veterans was still a nagging social issue.

The Philippines' participation in the Korean War in 1950, only four years after the end of the Second World War, belies the government's ignominious failure to deliver basic social services to the veterans of the previous war. *Anak Dalita* shows Vic having his arm examined at the Veterans Hospital, which had opened a year before the film's release, in 1955. Before its opening, however, returning veterans had no other recourse but Manila's ill-equipped and under-funded public hospitals ("A Saga of Continuing Progress" 2007).

Anak Dalita depicts a soberer reality than that generally presented in the war films of the reconstruction period. Except for its crime thriller subplot, the film largely examines everyday life in the *looban*. Its depiction of this space of abjection serves as a reminder of the lingering social problems in Manila's new urban landscape—issues that do not fit comfortably in memorials or commemorations (Jose 2010, p. 118).

In the following section, we will discuss how *Anak Dalita* grounds its allegory of post-war alienation and rehabilitation in Vic's narrative arc, which adheres to a key feature of film noir narratives: the hero's

"lapses from, and failures to achieve … a position of unified and potent masculinity" (Krutnik 1991, pp. 63–64).

Crisis of Masculinity

Noir narratives, as Farish concisely puts it, are "masculine journeys into ethical and spatial uncertainty" (Farish 2005, p. 104). In Vic's case, the journey through the dark city begins and ends in a *looban* he no longer recognizes as his home. During his absence a squatter community has grown within the walled city, and he is considered an outsider by that community. His quest, then, revolves around finding his proper place in the *looban*, which involves rediscovering his self-worth. In classic noir fashion, Vic must confront his demons, or the "otherness within", in order to re-situate himself within a *looban* mired by "the strangeness of others" (Krutnik 1997, p. 89).

From the first moment he sets foot in the *looban*, Vic behaves as though he were a stranger in a foreign city. But, and which is equally important, the city mirrors his internal state of alienation, as is shown when he attempts to settle his tab at a bar by leaving his war medal. "Take it. It's valuable. I was in Korea", he tells an irate manager, who then throws the medal to the ground. Vic ends up physically assaulting the man, who registers the general population's indifference to the plight of veterans. Vic's transgressive violence, which climaxes with Vic demanding that the manager salute him, underscores his fragile mental state. It telegraphs his impaired sense of masculinity as a disabled veteran who cannot find work in the city, and who must rely on a prostitute to support him. Whenever his fragile sense of masculinity is challenged, Vic clings to his identity as a soldier. Indeed, almost to the very end of the film, he literally wears his uniform as a fetish against his psychic emasculation.

Vic's crisis of masculinity is at first exacerbated by his initial encounters with Cita. In one of their earliest scenes together, she castigates him for feeling superior to the squatters in the *looban*: "As if you're not your mother's son. Your mother knew how to live with us", she says. She is referring to the fact that when his

mother was alive, Aling Tinay went out of her way to share the money sent by Vic from Korea to those in the community whom she considered to be even more destitute than she. “This is how we are. When someone dies, we know how to reach out. When they don’t have enough to pay for a proper burial, we pay for it ourselves”, she says. Cita thus reveals that it was not Vic, but the community, who paid for the old woman’s funeral.

Cita’s speech rehearses the moral code of the squatter community of the *looban*. The reference to death and to burial posits their informal living conditions as being under threat of erasure by the marketization of land and the rebuilding of Manila, hence the imperative to live according to a moral compass based on the ideal of *damayan* (relationality), which in turn rests on an insider’s point of view. But Vic remains morally ambiguous and Cita admonishes him to rediscover the insider’s point of view that is the true measure of the *looban*.

Cita’s role in Vic’s crisis of masculinity is to restore his sense of manhood by first teaching him to feel solidarity with the squatters in the *looban* and second by forming the semblance of a nuclear family—the cherished object and instrument of Catholic spirituality—which ultimately grounds his restoration to a position of unified masculinity. In the manner of the self-sacrificing heroine of the “maritorius melodrama” described by Philippa Gates, she sacrifices all “to see the man she loves returned to his ‘proper’ place” in a patriarchal society (Gates 2009, p. 24).

Father Fidel (Vic Silayan) plays an equally critical role in the resolution of Vic’s crisis of masculinity. Taking an interest in Vic’s former trade as a sculptor, the priest takes Vic to a storeroom holding several damaged relics belonging to his parish. “These are the remnants of the last World War”, the priest says, “Things that were left in shambles. Ruined.” The description could just as well pertain to Intramuros and to Vic. “With your skills as a sculptor, perhaps we may be able to restore these things”, the priest says. He then launches into the speech quoted at the beginning of this essay, about his desire to restore the body and minds of the victims of

the war and to convince them that they still have a future to look forward to. Like the statue he is turning over in his hands, Vic must recognize that he, too, can be restored to his former wholeness.

Vic, who began his journey hopelessly lost in the labyrinth of the city, starts to find his bearings with the help of Father Fidel. But he ends up lost once more when he enters the underworld. A fateful meeting with Cardo—a long-lost friend, now a gangland boss—ends with Vic agreeing to work for the latter's money-laundering operation. In a scene set in Cardo's underground club in Binondo, Manila's Chinatown, Vic is offered a bundle of 'dirty cash'. The moment Vic accepts Cardo's money, *Anak Dalita*'s complex narrative abruptly turns into a genre thriller about a smuggling scheme gone wrong. It is not Vic, but Cita, who will determine the course of events. She manages to steal the money bound for Hong Kong, a double-cross that she enacts in her desire to save Vic from the underworld. Her actions trigger a chain of fateful events that explode in a climactic shootout that will claim two lives: Cardo's and, tragically, Ipe's.

Vic never quite discovers the solution to the problem of how to truly 'come home'. He remains morally ambiguous throughout his journey, and when he finally rejects Cardo's world at the film's conclusion, he does so passively. Vic and Cita manage to extricate themselves from the underworld to live another day, but what is left relatively unchanged is the continuing abjection of the squatters in the *looban*.

The *Looban* as a Critical Concept

As a locus for identity formation, the *looban* is an urban phenomenon that refers to the experience of not being able to fit into the spatial configurations and temporal rhythms of the modern city.[3] In its filmic and literary incarnations, the *looban* is the very expression of a contact dilemma; it encapsulates the residual sense of community shared by those sectors marginalized by urbanization who must constantly improvise survival strategies that subvert new social structures in the modern city.

It would be helpful to think of the *looban* as the site and expression of internalized practices, or what Michel Foucault calls "arts of existence" (quoted in Calano 2015, p. 170). In his study of Quiapo Church and its famous image of the Black Nazarene, Mark Calano posits a characteristic of the *looban* that resonates with the depiction of Intramuros in *Anak Dalita*. For Calano, Quiapo Church is governed by the logic of the *looban* inasmuch as it is a home to diverse groups and belief systems. In short, it is a space of contact and cultural mixing: "The *looban* reflects how marginalized and informal communities are multifaceted and plural environments; it shows the relationship among groups, social practices and peoples" (Calano 2015, p. 176, citing Ferrer from Alcazaren, Ferrer and Icamina 2011, p. 191).

We could thus acknowledge the utopian potentials of the *looban*: it is a culturally dynamic space that has the potential to be an inclusive haven for all who seek refuge in it. These, then, are the positive values embodied by the *looban* as articulated by Cita, who is its expositor and champion. Cita's *looban* is a marginalized community that takes care of its members in the face of institutional failure. As she puts it to Vic in a later scene, "If Ipe and I are starving and there is no one to put food in our mouths, will anybody outside reach out to us?" For Cita, what makes the *looban* a culturally dynamic and inclusive space is the informal nature of the bonds uniting its subaltern members, who must creatively adapt their arts of existence to help each other survive in the inverted reality of Intramuros.

The arts of existence in the *looban*, in other words, imply an intersubjective dimension, or what Virgilio Enriquez describes as the interior aspect of *kapwa* (fellow-being), which he defines as "the unity of the 'self' and 'others'" or "an inner self shared with others" (Enriquez 1992, pp. 63–64). In *Anak Dalita*, this "extended sense of identity" and its pivotal value of *pakikiramdam* (empathy or feeling for or with another) (Enriquez 1992, pp. 63–64, 66) has spatial dimensions. The depth of one's extended sense of identity is measured by one's knowledge of the physical space of the *looban*, where "even the maze-like arrangement of houses … also has

symbolic meanings to the residents … and where knowledge of street intricacy connote[s] membership or estrangement in the community" (Narag 2018, p. 93). That Vic often requires Ipe to act as his guide through the *looban* reveals a deficiency in his ability to experience *pakikiramdam* (empathy), which in no small part accounts for his sense of dislocation in the *looban*.

Cita's understanding of the *looban* is very much in tune with the Filipino virtue ethics of *loob*, where the self is defined by the quality of one's relationships with others, which is necessarily moral. Vic, on the other hand, represents the values of colonial Intramuros, which Father Fidel actively seeks to restore, never mind that the *looban* as a community survived the many social ills that had emerged after the war without the help of the Church. Vic is the agent by which the old order tries to resist this already changed society.

Anak Dalita's narrative proposes that the slums constitute a broken community that only Catholic charity and the restoration of a pre-war patriarchal order can repair. This is essayed in the film through the subplot of the rebuilding of the San Francisco Church, which would necessitate the eviction of the squatter colony to a settlement in an undisclosed suburb in Greater Manila.

This subplot is first presented in a pivotal scene in which the squatter colony reacts to the sudden appearance all over the *looban* of posters announcing the plans by the parish to rebuild the cathedral. Interestingly, the incident is conveyed through a montage sequence showing us rare glimpses of men in the *looban*: two men playing *cara y cruz* (a game of chance) and a barber and his customer reacting to news that the squatters are being forced out by the Church. The montage ends with a shot of Ipe barging in from the street on Vic and Cita with the news. The uncharacteristic appearance of men in this transitional scene and the dramatic standoff that follows suggests that the social problems in the *looban* and, indeed, the future prospects of the squatter community are matters that only the male subjects in the diegesis have the power to understand and to control.

In the next scene, Father Fidel tries to assuage the squatters. Expository dialogue establishes that he is soliciting donations

from the more affluent members of his parish to help the squatter community relocate. “I hope that you will not forget that a cathedral is the house of God”, the priest says. The generally self-absorbed Vic breaks his silence and asks to be heard. “Isn’t the house of God also the house of people in need? People like *them*, who nobody is looking out for?” Significantly, he refers to the squatters of San Francisco Church in the third person, as if to assert that, since he is not himself a recent squatter but an older resident of Intramuros, he possesses the requisite critical distance to engage in debate about the squatter problem.

“For what use are these Church stones if they who once were helped by the Church are about to be abandoned?”, he asks. Despite his sense of separation from the community, he has enough *pakikiramdam* (empathy) to feel compassion towards the squatters whose institutional neglect mirrors his own as a veteran abandoned by society. But a high-angle close-up shot of Father Fidel has the priest delivering the final word on the matter: “Our convictions must come from true faith and hope. Let time decide what is the best solution to our problem.” Father Fidel’s speech works to invalidate Vic’s advocacy for the squatters by positing the latter’s faith—not his critical or emotional faculties—as the true measure of his ability to discern the solution to the squatter problem.

The lack of separation between spiritual and social matters is a marked feature of *Anak Dalita*’s allegory of post-war rehabilitation. This is in keeping with a critical tenet in Filipino philosophy: the notion that the ethical person is one whose body, mind and spirit are in harmony. The ideal of integral harmony is seen in the concept of *pagbabalik-loob* (conversion), which means returning to the original goodness of one’s inner being (Mercado 1994, p. 13). The overall narrative of the film can be summarized as Vic and Cita’s *pagbabalik-loob*—that is, their struggle to return to the identities and roles prescribed by the Catholic faith, a way of life that had been denied them by the social forces turning Intramuros inside-out. However, Father Fidel’s campaign to restore the cathedral ruins—the reason for relocating the squatter community to the suburbs—bears

no resemblance to the historical reality of Intramuros: the plots of land owned by the Church were in fact sold to private corporations, which built secular structures over the flattened ruins of churches.[4]

The restoration of the *loob* in *Anak Dalita* means the rehabilitation of the male subject via individualism, romantic love and a return to individual spirituality. In Cita, it names the value system of the *looban*, but the narrative's melodramatic crime thriller blunts and even directly contradicts her articulation of the utopian possibilities of the *looban.* Cita's earlier claims about *pakikipag-kapwa* (communal fellowship) fall to the wayside as the film relentlessly pursues Vic's rehabilitation as an agent and model subject of the Church.

The Linguistic *Looban* and Two Spiritualities

Film critic Patrick Campos has constructed an opposition between *loob* and *looban* in his analysis of Eddie Romero's 1976 film *Ganito Kami, Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon?* In Campos's dichotomy, the *loob* is a place of restoration, the internal core of personhood that is also a rural space. By contrast, the *looban* is an inner city where corruption permeates both people and things. In this urban centre, every compromise is made in the name of wealth and power (Campos 2016, p. 81). In the following paragraphs, we will illustrate why this dichotomy has little empirical basis in the linguistics of the term.

Our definition of the *looban* follows philosopher Jeremiah Reyes in his differentiation of his notion of *Lóob* from the general usage of the term in the twentieth century. According to Reyes, *loob* is simply the person's will (Reyes 2015). This assertion is based on two older Spanish vocabularios, where it is mentioned as *voluntad* or 'will' (San Buena Ventura 1613, p. 671; Noceda and de Sanlucar 1860, p. 193).[5]

Reyes observes from the examples given in these sources that there is conspicuously nothing of the 'inner self', 'core of oneself' and so on that twentieth-century Filipino scholars postulate. On the one hand, you have the physical, spatial aspect of *loob* as 'inside'. On the other, you have the non-physical aspect of the human will,

which is sometimes coupled with action. There is no conflation of both meanings into an 'inner self' or 'interiority/subjectivity'.[6]

From Zeus Salazar's analysis of the suffix /-an/, relating to location or direction, based on Jose Rizal's *Die Transcription des Tagalog* (Tagalog Grammar Analysis) (1893),[7] we can deduce that the *looban* in fact means the gathering of 'wills' and the place of this gathering, and it has little to do with 'interiority' or the physical 'interior'. As such, it refers to the place as it is occupied and not to a fixed geographical location. We can see this in the word *samahan* (organizations), with the root word being '*sama*' and the suffix /-an/. The /h/ in /han/ is an aspirate/Hauchlaut that is not written in *looban* because the suffix follows a consonant. *Looban* (verb with an accent on the first vowel) means robbery, plunder or housebreaking. The *looban* (noun with an accent on the second vowel) is the word that concerns our study. Again, noting the observation by Reyes that the dominant definition in the earliest dictionaries of *loob* is not 'interior' or 'interiority' but of *voluntas*, we can thus define *looban* as the gathering of the *voluntas*, or simply the community itself (Reyes 2015, p. 75). The suffix /an/ modifies the subject with a locative focus that connotes a specific locative subject, but *looban* makes no mention of this locative subject and it has become a stand-alone term. This informs how the term is tied to a notion of place and the people that inhabit the place. Such individuals belong to a community.[8]

While a more lengthy and dedicated study of this assertion is yet to be written, for the purposes of our analysis of the film *Anak Dalita*, we refer to the *looban* as the place as it is inhabited by the people—making it therefore variable and moveable—and not to any specific interior parts of a stable geography. The *looban* contrasts starkly with the fixity of Intramuros as anchored in the Roman Catholic and colonial order. The clash of these two concepts is one of the main conflicts of the film, when the *looban* occupies the same space as the ruins of a cathedral.

In *Anak Dalita*, two kinds of spirituality govern Intramuros. On the one hand we see the spirituality of the *looban*, the Filipino

value ethics of *pakikipag-kapwa* (communal fellowship), and on the other is spirituality represented by Father Fidel and the Catholic Church. These two forms of spirituality overlap in many ways, but the main difference is that the former is initiated by the people—a kind of grass-roots common will and a civics of communal survival that transcends many religions. By contrast, Catholic spirituality is imposed from above and issued in an almost catechistic manner with monologues from Father Fidel on love, morality and religion that sound like snatches of typical Sunday homilies. At the start of the narrative, Vic is alienated from both forms of spirituality, but by the conclusion of the narrative his is a spirituality that is squarely located in the Church.

There are distinct spatial contours and textures to the two forms of spirituality governing *Anak Dalita*. Catholic spirituality is visualized in the built heritage and religious imagery of the various churches in the film's diegesis. The spirituality of the *looban*, on the other hand, is visualized in the centre-less, labyrinthine network of makeshift dwellings that convey the arts of existence of the squatter colony. Whereas the former uses religious iconography to establish the controlling gaze of the Church over identity, morality and sexuality in the *looban*, the latter conveys the imperviousness of informal, unplanned structures to surveillance and social control.

These two distinct spaces mesh well with Edward Dimendberg's discussion of how urban space is organized in film noir. Earlier noir films, he argues, depict the tendency of cities to concentrate, resulting in centripetally organized urban spaces. Later noir films, on the other hand, reveal how cities eventually decentralize, resulting in centrifugally organized spaces. The centripetal city is a centred, self-regulating system; the centrifugal city represents chaos, displacement and dispersal. For Dimendberg, the end of the film noir cycle (1939–59)

> coincides … with the end of the metropolis of classical modernity, the centered city of immediately recognizable and recognized spaces.… As spatial dispersal became a ubiquitous cultural reality, centripetal space began to appear excessively

> archaic while centrifugal spatial forms could be more effectively romanticized or negotiated. (Dimendberg 2004, p. 255)

The spatial visualization of the Catholic colonial order in *Anak Dalita* is consistent with its representation in local literature. Joaquin evokes concentric circles to capture the centripetal organization of Intramuros. Intramuros, he writes, is the "the hid heart, the secret soul" of Manila; "an innermost sanctum, a holy of holies" (Gatbonton and Laya 1983, p. 2). It is significant that *Anak Dalita*'s narrative of spiritual restoration ends with the mass exodus of the squatter colony to a promised land in a new suburban reality that is never visualized. As if to say that Greater Manila is no longer comprehensible as a totality, the non-visualized suburbs haunt the diegesis as a symbol of the unknown fate of the squatter colony. *Anak Dalita* thus captures the "nostalgia for earlier urban forms" that can be found in earlier films of the noir cycle (Dimendberg 2004, p. 98). At the same time, the final proposition of a promised land in the non-visualized suburbs reflects the way the latter films of the cycle were less grounded in space and more about a "race against time" (p. 255).

With the death of Ipe, *Anak Dalita* leaves us with a dark image of the future for the *looban*. Not only does Ipe's death magnify the moral consequences of Vic's choices, it profoundly colours the symbolism of the film's final image: the mass exodus of the squatter community from the cathedral ruins as Father Fidel looks on. The diptych formed by these two loaded images—of the dead child in Cita's arms and the endless stream of squatters leaving the *looban* on foot—allegorically captures the uncertain future that lies ahead for the denizens of Intramuros now bereft of their *looban*.

Conclusion

As a spatial entity, the *looban* emerged from the exodus from Intramuros of the affluent classes and the reverse colonization of Spanish Manila by migrants and veterans, the post-war city's *dalita* (sorrow). Avellana shows us a doomed city, the contours of which

strongly echo the discussion of the doomed city in film noir. In both, the creeping centrifugal organization of urban space triggers a nostalgia for the spatial certainties and social hierarchies associated with older, more centrally organized cities.

Anak Dalita's allegory of post-war rehabilitation centres on the crisis of masculinity of its hero who, in classic noir fashion, slides into an abject existence as a disabled veteran but then gains a false sense of redemption when he turns to transgressive sexual and criminal behaviour. The film asserts that the true path to Vic's rehabilitation lies in his submitting to a regime of craft labour under the guidance and supervision of Father Fidel. The moral choice presented in the film, between radical individualist solutions (gangland crime) and servitude to the Church (as craft labour), is extreme and much too simplistic to account for the social pressures confronting a nation coming out of the shadows of US colonialism and reeling from the abrupt transition to independence. The film, which reduces the squatter problem in the *looban* to a psychodrama of masculinity in crisis and spiritual renewal, fails to address the structural sources of the hero's entrapment and powerlessness in the post-war city. This is consistent with Krutnik's observation that "instead of dealing directly with the social forces that made the modern city so 'unlivable', film noir fixates upon the psychic manifestations of such disease" (Krutnik 1997, p. 89).

Our exploration of the *looban* in the narrative of *Anak Dalita* highlights the importance of community existence in the post-war urban experience. The *looban* emerges as both a place and a people marked by abjection. But, more importantly, it captures the collective will of the marginalized to help each other survive in the face of government neglect and the indifference of the public at large. Our reading of the *looban* departs from the accepted dichotomy of an authentic self or rural core (*loob*) that stands in opposition to urban corruption and displacement in the *looban* films of the period. *Anak Dalita*'s post-war *looban* is shown to be a dog-eat-dog world where gender and class norms are upended as the city's marginalized classes

compete with one another for scarce social resources, housing most of all. But, as articulated by Cita, the film's expositor of the post-war inner-city underclass, such a dystopian milieu paradoxically generates an ethics of mutual aid among the marginalized and dispossessed. Indeed, Cita posits *pakikipag-kapwa* (community fellow feeling) as the litmus test of belonging in the *looban*.

Anak Dalita's narrative of *pagbabalik-loob* (conversion) offers two avenues of redemption for its war-scarred hero: one centred on Father Fidel/the Church and the other on the informal and adaptive arts of existence of the slum dwellers themselves. Our exploration of the linguistic dimensions of the *looban* reveals the spatial dimensions of these competing paths to wholeness within the film's diegesis: while the former is based on fixed geographical spaces and seeks to re-establish the patriarchal hierarchy and social norms of a lost colonial order, the other is based on the notion of an urban space that is occupied by the social refuse of a post-war milieu. In the absence of a spatially fixed patriarchal social order, a potentially subversive community led by women emerged in the post-war *looban*. Whatever its utopian possibilities, however, *Anak Dalita*'s *looban* ultimately forfeits its grass-roots vision of urban community and reinstates the top-down version of social reality represented by Father Fidel/the Church. *Anak Dalita*'s immediate solution to the squatter problem is the wholesale relocation of squatter colonies to the suburbs, which the film proposes should be supported not by the state but by Catholic charity. The social conservatism of this vision is of a piece with the conservative outlook of post-war rebuilding in Manila, which resulted in the empowerment of the private-sector at the expense of a swelling urban underclass.

The urban realities depicted in the film have nonetheless become well-established fixtures in city films set in or around Intramuros. By revealing the enduring psychosocial aspects of the *looban* that the film eloquently captures, our analysis of *Anak Dalita* shows how—then and now—it lives up to its promotional tagline: "Makatotohanan, tulad ng buhay" (Truthful, like life).

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Geronimo Cristobal is a lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts at Ateneo de Manila University and a graduate student at the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University; email: geronimo.cristobal@columbia.edu.

Talitha Espiritu is Associate Professor of Film and New Media at Wheaton College, MA, USA; email: espiritu_talitha@wheatonma.edu.

NOTES

1. Jeepneys are improvised buses made from army surplus jeeps. *Barong-barong* is the colloquial term for the shanty dwelling of the city's migrant denizens.
2. *Anak Dalita* was filmed on location at the Recoletos Church and Convent. The church was destroyed in the Second World War during the Battle of Manila. The ruins were demolished in 1959 after they were declared a hazard by the City of Manila.
3. Personal interview with Zeus Salazar in Manila on 2 July 2018.
4. The ruins of the Recoletos Church, where the film was shot, were sold to the *Manila Bulletin*.
5. Reyes observes how the 1860 dictionary is particularly interesting because it has two separate entries for *loób.* He says that one can consider also its use in the 1703 Tagalog Pasyon play by Gaspar Aquino de Belen: "*Loob co, y di co paranin, cundi ang iyong loob din, ang siya cong totoparin* [My own will I will not allow, unless it is your will also, which I will fulfill]" (Aquino de Belen 1990, p. 94, quoted in Reyes 2015, p. 73).
6. While interrelated with other Filipino concepts, *Loob* should be seen as a stand-alone concept when applied to our understanding of *Looban*. In "*Pagkataong Pilipino: Isang Teorya Sa Lalim Ng Banga*", Ramon Guillermo critiques Prospero Covar's analysis of the *loob* in relation to *labas* (outside) and *lalim* (depth) by comparing human beings to the Manunggul Jar. Guillermo faults Covar's universalist claims and rigid evidence because they cover up the ideological aspect that shapes Covar's interpretation as a Filipino steeped in this particular historical era and social situation (Guillermo 2016, p. 11). See also Covar 1993.
7. Personal interview with Zeus Salazar in Manila on 2 July 2018.
8. See "The Focus and Aspect of the Suffix /an/ in Tagalog" 2021.

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