

METHODS TO AVOID SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE:
CARMEN GUERRERO NAKPIL, THE DEATH OF MANILA,
AND POST-WORLD WAR II FILIPINO MEMORY AND MOURNING

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I. *Introduction*

The Battle of Manila (3 February to 3 March 1945), the single deadliest urban warfare fought in the Asia-Pacific Theater of World War II, literally annihilated the downtown area of the city and caused an estimated 100,000 non-combatant civilian deaths by “Sword and Fire,” i.e., Japanese mass killings and the indiscriminate shelling of the U.S. While the tragedy of Manila was widely publicized primarily as a showcase of Japanese war crimes in the early postwar years, it had long been the subject of amnesia in Japan, the United States, and even in the Philippines. The 50th anniversary of the battle in 1995 marked the quiet beginning of the protest against forgetting with the erection of a small memorial by the civic group Memorare Manila in 1945. Since then, both the media and scholars have gradually begun to give more attention to the battle and its historical significance with an increasing number of publications reviving memories of the city’s “death” and all the sufferings of the civilians under the siege.

In the hope of serving as a small addendum to the ongoing efforts for a meaningful recovery of the battle’s memory, I will focus on an essay written by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, a war widow and one of the leading writers and journalists in the post-World War II Philippines, as an introduction to the pictorial coffee table book titled *Manila* published in 1976. Nakpil lavishly peppers her celebration of the city’s modern urban landscape with All-American place names while referring to Ermita, a major tourist attraction of the 1970s and the place where she was born and raised in the 1920s to the 1930s, only once as a place that “became tawdry and down-at-heels.” Examining Nakpil’s autobiographies published in the late 2000s, which so vividly and tenderly recalled her childhood in prewar Ermita; Benedict Anderson’s critical anatomy of the 1961 English translation by Leon Ma. Guerrero, Nakpil’s elder brother, of *Noli Me Tangere*, originally written in Spanish by Jose Rizal; and one of Nakpil’s well-known columns in 1967 that poetically summarized her ordeal in the Battle of Manila, more details of which were given in the late 2000s autobiographies, I will discuss how the memory of a major loss as experienced by Manila’s Filipino urban elites who suffered so much during the genocidal experiences in the battle, has been deleted, restored, and mourned by them in their own way.

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II. *Lollobrigida's Manila 1976*

It was in 1975 that Gina Lollobrigida, an Italian superstar actress then transforming herself into a professional photographer was commissioned by the Philippine government to visit the country and shoot photographs for a couple of coffee table books, *The Philippines* and *Manila*. These would later be printed in Florence, Italy and published in 1976 from a publisher in the microstate of Liechtenstein “for the world.”¹ While people had already started to complain about the broken promises made by President Ferdinand Marcos when he declared martial law in September 1972, the masculine regime seemed invincible then. Taking advantage of the enforced calm in the metropolis and tropical resorts around the country, the government was promoting tourism with a passion. For this purpose, First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos personally invited Gina Lollobrigida, whose contract was handled by the Philippine National Bank.

Actual distribution of the two titles, however, was very limited. Copies of *The Philippines* can be found in several libraries around the world including the Library of Congress in the United States, while *Manila* can scarcely be found in any libraries except for a copy at Columbia University in New York, which had the stamp of the Philippine Consulate General Library on the front page. The latter title was full of unimpressive photographs showing clichéd tourist subjects as well as facets of modern metropolitan lives such as the students of the University of the Philippines not rioting but playing cards and cheerfully playing the guitar, the brand new Makati Medical Center and rising skyscrapers in the Makati business districts, the joyful workplaces of clean factories, and of course Mrs. Imelda Marcos posing in front of the gigantic Philippine Cultural Center. Certainly, they are in accord with the official euphoric representations of the New Society (*Bagong Lipunan*), which the Marcos dictatorship claimed it was creating. The postscript by the actress titled “My Manila” confirms a stereotypical self-image of foreign visitors as tempted by “a carefree and relaxed atmosphere” of the metropolis under martial law:

In Manila, even the policemen played the guitar and sang and the people stayed up very late, talking and laughing and simply being themselves... Talk of *la dolce vita*, that's what they have in Manila — the good life.²

Each of the coffee table books has an introductory essay, which was the complete antithesis of Lollobrigida's mediocre postscript in its rhetoric, energy, and intensity. The author was Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, who was born in 1922 into the Guerreros of Ermita, undisputedly one of the most outstanding *ilustrado*³ families that have produced prominent scholars, artists, doctors, journalists, and even a bishop.⁴ Nakpil herself has long been the leading Filipino female journalist and columnist whose second memoir *Legends & Adventures* (2007),⁵ a sequel to the

¹ Gina Lollobrigida and Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. *The Philippines*. Liechtenstein: Sarima, 1976; Gina Lollobrigida and Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. *Manila*. Liechtenstein: Sarima, 1976.

² Lollobrigida and Nakpil. *Manila*, n.p. (The book does not have page numbers).

³ The word usually refers to the Filipino educated class during the Spanish colonial period. Definitions and historical roles of the class have long been the contentious subject of Philippine historiography.

⁴ Wilfrido Maria Guerrero. *The Guerreros of Ermita: Family History and Personal Memoirs*. Quezon City: New Day, 1988.

first one *Myself, Elsewhere* (2006),⁶ provides her detailed account on the making of these two coffee table books.

Nakpil recalls that, although having been a personal friend of Ferdinand Marcos and supporting his presidency during the first term (1965-69), the second term political storm convinced her to join the ranks of dissident journalists. After the declaration of martial law (21 September 1972), however, Nakpil decided to make a deal with Marcos to secure the release of her son-in-law, or Antonio Araneta, the husband of her daughter and the former Miss International Gemma. Then she had no choice but to accept whatever assignments she was commissioned by Malacañang Palace (i.e., the Marcoses) such as Secretary-General of the Writers Union of the Philippines, UNESCO representative, Director-General of the Technology Resource Center, and so forth. Nakpil recalls that writing introductory essays to *The Philippines* and *Manila* was but a tiny addition to these assignments in Nakpil's "peonage under Marcos."⁷

According to Nakpil, Lollobrigida and the party returned to Manila after touring around the country with a bunch of photographs "mostly of beaches, forests, palm trees and waterfalls"⁸ and "[t]he great majority of the photos were of the Tasaday, a tiny tribe then recently discovered and patronized by Manda Elizalde [Manuel Elizalde Jr.]."⁹ Nakpil was furious about Lollobrigida's exoticism while Lollobrigida complained that Nakpil's essays, having been written before the party returned to Manila, did not match the photos. She argued that Nakpil did not "know what Europeans are interested in," that the book was for the European market and that Europeans were not interested in Filipinos living modern lives. As a staunch nationalist, Nakpil insisted the book should not be about "a Stone Age tribe in the jungles of Mindanao" but the "45 million people who don't live in trees."¹⁰

The split was so deep and the women argued loudly every time they met. Nakpil went as far as Florence, Italy to persuade Lollobrigida to include modern Filipino lives in the pictorials. In the end *Manila*, separately published from *The Philippines*, was given a certain balance between tourist cliché and cosmopolitan modernity. Even Lollobrigida seemed to yield to Nakpil, admitting in the postscript "Manila was a complete surprise to me. I had expected a city full of Oriental music, quiet, mysterious... But it was a familiar place with a lot of rhythm, fast and modern."¹¹ The small victory over the Italian actress' Orientalism and an opportunity to visit Italy were narrated by Nakpil as a comic relief in the dark days of her "peonage" under martial law.¹²

III. *Nakpil's Manila 1976*

Nakpil in her memoir proudly claims she refused any revisions of the introductory essays and not a single word was changed. Victorious as she was, today's readers may not miss that

⁵ Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. *Legends & Adventures*. San Juan, Metro Manila: Nakpil Publishing, 2007.

⁶ Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. *Myself, Elsewhere*. San Juan, Metro Manila: Nakpil Publishing, 2006.

⁷ Nakpil. *Legends & Adventures*, 170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹¹ Lollobrigida and Nakpil. *Manila*, n.p.

¹² Nakpil. *Legends & Adventures*, 173-175.

the text was but a victim of the enforced euphoria of the New Society: self-hypnotized, manic, and jazzy, but something was missing, giving readers a feeling of hollowness. The essay begins with the mantra of the enchanted city, which is not very far from Lollobrigida's above quoted praise for the city:

Nobody who has been to Manila is ever the same again. The rest of one's life is forever affected by that ardent urban clutter, the millions of smiling, cheerful people milling about in a roar of music and raised consciousness, the psychedelic little buses, the infinite variety of the bright green, pink and white houses.¹³

It is probably only natural for any commissioned writer to avoid writing about the evil of society in a pictorial book that promotes tourism, especially that of a country under martial law. Self-censorship apparently cast a shadow over the whole text, in which the author praises the city projects under Imelda Marcos as Metro Manila's first Governor: air-conditioned buses, slum relocation projects, the Cultural Center Complex, and so forth, while any signs of the growing mass poverty, the lost freedom of press, corruption, and more evils of martial law society were certainly omitted. Self-censorship, however, may not be the single reason for the essay's hollowness. The following is one of the author's celebrations for the city's diversity:

[T]he city is a plural personality, with multiple functions and many faces, each one more colorful than the other. At one end it is Tahiti, then it turns into the New York waterfront, changes into Las Vegas and fades out at Long Island and Miami.

Manila is H.G. Wells' Time Machine, a film by Fellini and the *National Geographic Magazine*. In it, one moves through time and space — reckoned by centuries and continents — in a celebration of anachronisms and geographic delusions...¹⁴

One may notice that the above text does not contain a single proper noun of the Philippines and the Filipinos. In other paragraphs Nakpil carries the readers on “the time machine” to “a 13th century graveyard in Santa Ana,” “a baroque Spanish church of the 18th century with ikons, monks, and censer,” and “Fort Santiago in Intramuros.” Monks, however, are the only living inhabitants and the past is dead silent in those places. On the other hand, the author's words are most charming and cheerful when she replaces Manila's present scenes with foreign ones, especially those of America:

The most obvious thing in some parts of Greater Manila is that the city is Little New York, specially so in the new exurbia of Makati where handsome, high-rise buildings, supermarkets, apartment-hotels and shopping centers flourish in a setting that could well be Palm Beach or Beverly Hills. Here the houses look like stage sets for *The Great Gatsby* and people lead lives out of a play by Neil Simon or Edward Albee.¹⁵

What is behind the combination of the dead past and the present “geographic delusions?” Why does the author seem to be so comfortable with substituting New York, Palm Beach, and Beverly Hills for the vernacular place names? The author's recent memoir may answer these questions. There is one place in particular, which was so vividly and tenderly recalled in the

¹³ Lollobrigida and Nakpil. *Manila*, n.p.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

memoir but was referred to only once in the introductory essay for *Manila* as the place that “became tawdry and down-at-heels”¹⁶ despite it being Manila’s major tourist attraction in the 1970s. That place is Ermita. The near-neglect of Ermita and over-presence of America in Nakpil’s introductory essay to *Manila* requires several layers of explanation.

IV. Leon Ma. Guerrero’s *Manila* in *Noli* 1961

Nakpil’s “geographical delusion” in her 1976 essay cannot but remind the readers of an intriguing chapter in Benedict Anderson’s *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998) titled “Hard to Imagine,”¹⁷ a critical essay on an English translation of Jose Rizal’s novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) by Leon Ma. Guerrero III, Nakpil’s eldest brother, and published in 1961.¹⁸ *Noli Me Tangere* and its sequel *El filibusterismo* (1891), which exposed the corruption and abuse by the Spanish colonial government and the Catholic Church, ignited the anti-Spanish sentiments among the people leading up to the 1896 revolutionary revolt and thus have long been regarded as the bibles of Filipino nationalism. They remain requisite reading in most high schools in the country today. The novels, however, were originally written by Jose Rizal in Spanish and most of the post-World War II generation of the Filipinos have to read them through English translations among which Leon Ma. Guerrero’s works stand out as the most read, while new English and Tagalog/Filipino translations have become available in recent years.

Born in 1915, Leon had already started his career as a promising young writer, a lawyer and a government official when Japan attacked the Philippines shortly after Pearl Harbor in December 1941. He enlisted as an officer of USAFFE (United States Army Forces in the Far East) and was sent to Capas concentration camp as a POW after the fall of Bataan and Corregidor. Once he was released, however, he started to work for Jorge Vargas, the Chairman of the Executive Commission, an administrative body in charge of civil affairs set up under Japanese military occupation. As the Republic of the Philippines was inaugurated under Japanese occupation in October 1943 and the country now had the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Embassy in Tokyo with Jorge Vargas as the first Ambassador, Leon was assigned to the embassy as Second Secretary in February 1944, which marked the beginning of his career as one of the pioneering diplomats of the country. In March 1945, Jose P. Laurel, the President of the Japanese sponsored republic and his small party arrived in Japan where they took exile during the rest of war. Leon also stayed in Japan until July 1946 when he accompanied Laurel and his party, who were released from Sugamo Prison for being suspected war criminals in Tokyo and allowed to return to the Philippines. He was accepted at the newly created Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippine Republic, which was inaugurated on 4 July 1946, and continued to pursue a career as a diplomat. In 1954 he was appointed Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs under President Ramon Magsaysay. His “Asia for the Asians” speech in 1954, however, would eventually cause him to be *de facto* exiled to Europe

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson. “Hard to Imagine.” *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London and New York: Verso, 1998, 235-262.

¹⁸ Jose Rizal. *The Lost Eden (Noli me tangere): A completely new translation for the contemporary reader* by Leon Ma. Guerrero. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961.

and later to India on ambassadorial assignments. He was the Ambassador to the UK while he translated Rizal's novels.¹⁹

Examining Leon Ma. Guerrero's translation against Rizal's original at great length, Benedict Anderson finds the translator deliberately adopted a series of "translation strategies" including *de-modernization* of Rizal's world by dominantly using the past tense, *de-localization* by eliminating "as much as 80 per cent of these still-recognizable place names" as well as the names of real persons in the 19th century, and *de-Europeanization* by eliminating the Latin and other European vocabularies and quotes, and so forth. As a result, the translation loses much of the original's color, contrast, humor, satire, obscenity, irony, and other traits, which made the original novel so fascinating.

Anderson argues one reason Leon Ma. Guerrero adopted this "translation strategy" was to make Rizal's world remote and irrelevant for the present generation and conceal the original novel's flavor of anti-establishment radicalism and actuality, which would encourage criticism of the current Republic dominated by the elite or "post-independence establishment," who were "children of the revolutionary mestizo elite of the 1890s, who had gained enormously in wealth and power under the American colonial system, who had collaborated with the Japanese occupation regime, and who now intended firmly to be full masters in their own house."²⁰ Anderson, however, adds that the mere elite's "bad conscience" and the requirements of official nationalism cannot fully explain Leon Ma. Guerrero's strategy. It was fundamental transformation, Anderson concludes, under the American regime such as the substitution of English for Spanish as a lingua franca as well as a fundamental reshaping of the Filipinos' conception of themselves that made the colorful "creole-mestizo" world of Rizal's novels "so hard to imagine — and impossible to translate."²¹

Certainly in Rizal's Manila, its cosmopolitanism and "creole-mestizo" atmosphere had been made possible and nurtured only through its placement within the late 19th century Asian trade network largely controlled by the British Empire in which colonial seaport cities within the region such as Singapore, Saigon, and Manila deeply connected with each other and beyond with Europe. Since 1909, however, colonial bilateral free trade between the Philippines and the United States gradually but steadily transformed the economic geography and thus reshaped the Filipino mindset and mental maps, in which Manila and the city's urban elite would eventually be absorbed into the enclosure of material culture of the American Empire while losing contact with the neighboring colonial port cities. The void was thus to be filled with things All-American.²²

¹⁹ There are several biographical sources on Leon Ma. Guerrero: Erwin S. Fernandez. "Leon Ma. Guerrero: Writer and Diplomat; A Biography." MA thesis, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman, October 2010; David Guerrero, ed. *LMG: The Leon Maria Guerrero Anthology*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2010; "Leon Ma. Guerrero." Edilberto N. Alegre and Doreen G. Fernandez, *Writers & Their Milieu: An Oral History of First Generation Writers in English*. Manila: the De La Salle University Press, 1984, 69-91; Wilfrido Maria Guerrero. *The Guerreros of Ermita*.

²⁰ Anderson. *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 252-254.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 254-259.

²² This paragraph's discussion largely relies on Nagano Yoshiko's argument in the following work in Japanese: Nagano Yoshiko. *FiripinGinkōshi Kenkyū: Shokuminchi Taisei to Kin'yū (A History of Philippines Banking: Colonial System and Finance)*. Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2003.

V. *Ironies of the Ilustrado's Nationalism*

It is not difficult to see the similarity and connection between the siblings' works published in 1961 and 1976. Both authors were public servants at the time of writing/translating these pieces and they were in such a position to know the requirements of the nation state or the rulers. Both pieces consciously or unconsciously resulted in the elimination of lively features of the city's past by substituting American modernity for Eurasian or "creole-mestizo" diversity. It appears for them to represent the desire of the "post-independence establishment" to be comfortable with the present without recalling the past in which their ancestors as the revolutionary leaders fought against Americans during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902).²³ A leading Filipino historian Reynaldo C. Ileto discusses that forgetting was indeed a necessary survival strategy for the post-Philippine-American War generation of Filipinos to be successful in "the new era," and therefore, they had to forget "there ever was a war." This was the case with Ileto's father General Rafael Ileto (1920-2003), Secretary of Defense under Corazon Aquino's presidency, who was born in 1920 and grew up as a typical "America's boy" without being told anything by his father Ysco (Reynaldo C. Ileto's grandfather) about his involvement in the revolution. Ileto infers Lolo Ysco had maintained his silence since 1904 when Americans recruited him as a schoolteacher.²⁴

What is so ironic about the Guerrero siblings, however, is the fact that, unlike the generation (born in 1915 and 1922) usually labeled as "America's Boys," they grew up in a family that was extremely proud of their Spanish/European heritage and the lost cause of the Philippine Revolution. They never concealed their antagonism towards Americans, who stole the fruit of the revolution, destroyed the republic and colonized their beloved homeland. The Guerrero clan might have been somewhat exceptional, being able to maintain their anti-American memories because they had a very strong professional background and did not have to accommodate the American desire for the Filipinos to collaborate with as well as be grateful for the Americans.

In her first memoir, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil recalls the fondest memories of her childhood in Ermita, surrounded by the uniquely intelligent Guerrero clan. Remembrance of the Philippine-American War and the lost cause of the revolution was, far from being suppressed, alive and being handed down from one generation to another in the everyday life of the family. At the center of the clan was Leon Maria Guerrero Senior (1853-1935), Nakpil's grandfather, who was an eminent botanist, the first licensed pharmacist in the Philippines, and a revolutionary. He joined the first revolutionary republic's parliament as well as the first national assembly under U.S. colonial rule, preaching the sacred cause of nationalism to his sons and daughters, and grandsons and granddaughters. His eldest son, Cesar Maria Guerrero (1884-

²³ The Philippine-American War is another contentious subject of debate among historians especially on the roles of Filipino colonial elites as the revolutionaries, collaborators, and politicians seeking power, wealth, and national independence. See Glenn Anthony May. *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991; Reynaldo C. Ileto. *Knowing America's Colony: A Hundred Years from the Philippine War*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 1999; Brian McAllister Linn. *The Philippine War, 1899-1902 (Modern War Studies)*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000.

²⁴ Reynaldo C. Ileto. "Colonial Wars in Southern Luzon: Remembering and Forgetting." *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 33, no. 1 (July, 2001): 103.

1960) devoted his life to the Roman Catholic Church and became the first auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Manila, the highest clergyman among the Filipinos at the time. After World War II, he was accused of collaborating with the Japanese and was prosecuted before the People's Court for treason. Though his case was dismissed in 1946, he slipped out of the mainstream and was installed in the relatively obscure diocese of San Fernando, Pampanga in 1949. His collaboration with the Japanese was largely regarded as a result of his version of nationalism pursuing the Filipinization of clergymen in the Philippines.²⁵

Nakpil's father Alfredo Leon Guerrero (1885-1961) was the second son of Leon Maria Guerrero Senior and a practicing doctor, who was not as much of an enthusiastic nationalist as his father and brother, while his wife and Nakpil's mother Filomena Francisco (1886-1970), the first Filipino female pharmacologist and Leon Maria Guerrero Senior's student, most definitely was. One of the two lullabies Carmen was sung to sleep by her mother was Jose Rizal's "Mi Ultimo Adios," the last poem Rizal wrote on the eve of his execution by the Spanish on 30 December 1896. Another one was a remarkable song in pidgin English to the tune of "There'll Be Hot Time in the Old Town, Tonight," a popular American campaign song during the Philippine-American War.

One, two, t'ree, Americanong na sawi (became ill);
Four, Fie, Americanongnamatay (died);
Mini-hot tie, hot-tie, tonigh²⁶

Carmen Guerrero Nakpil noted that Filomena became a huge fan of Ho Chi Minh in her last years.²⁷ Most possibly sharing with Carmen the lullabies sung by a mother who embraced the Filipino version of the republican motherhood deep in her heart with contempt for Americans, it is no wonder Leon grew up to be labeled as an anti-American diplomat in the age of the "special relationship," whose remarks of "Asia for the Asians" in 1954 as the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs and his subsequent "rude" attitude towards American officials ultimately ruined his once promising career because of the U.S. opposition. Leon died an alcoholic in 1982.²⁸

Nakpil's first memoir, however, also presents the other side of her childhood memories. It was after all the American era that filled her with joy in the lap of luxury in Ermita, which reached the pinnacle of material as well as cultural prosperity under American rule. One of her fondest memories, as she narrated in the memoir, is "of being taken for drives around Ermita in my father's car":

[F]rom our house in *Calle Mabini*...a street that was like a bower, a long, shady, flowery tunnel, Isaac Peral (now United Nations Avenue), and moving on to "Dehwee," Dewey Boulevard, its imposing buildings surrounded by lawns, the American clubs and the Manila Hotel on the Luneta. Then came sweeping, mammoth boulevards, huge buildings with rows of Greek columns, flanked by trees and lawns, down to Taft Avenue and the Post Office, and more new buildings of a different style, lower, with tile roofs and arcades

²⁵ Terada Takefumi. "Japanese Religions Propaganda Program toward the Christian Churches in the Philippines." Ikehata Setsuho and Ricardo T. Jose, eds., *Philippines under Japan*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999, 255-290.

²⁶ Nakpil. *Myself, Elsewhere*, 21-22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁸ Anderson. *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 249-250.

which turned out to be the Normal School and the Philippine General Hospital. As children everywhere do, I thought that all that had always been there.²⁹

Of course, it was then a brand new urban landscape created under American rule. In this way, the Guerreros of Ermita, just like the other urban elites in Manila, were consuming the American material culture, which certainly gave comfort to the affluent who could afford it, while the dark memories of the American imperial oppression of the Philippine Revolution probably remained firmly entrenched in their hearts. The ironies and ambivalence they had to endure were thus painful.

It would not, however, have been so traumatic if there had not been another war. Ermita during the 1930s as Nakpil remembers in her memoir did remain a micro cosmos of rich and diverse “creole-mestizo” cultures, in which English was still only the third language to many of the residents. Hegemony of English of course was about to transform Ermita lives. Nakpil remembers Spanish speaking neighbors, who had been reluctant or given little opportunities to learn English, could not help but live withdrawn lives and some of them used to appear begging at the back entrance of the Guerrero residence. In this way, the “creole-mestizo” world of Manila was slowly dying and was about to become something “hard to imagine.” It was, however, an early state of euthanasia that the Filipino “creole-mestizo” culture was undergoing. In other words, people like the Guerreros, remaining loyal to their Spanish heritage and the lost cause of the Revolution while joyfully living the Ermita’s prewar social lives, had not been prepared for such an abrupt and brutal end of everything as it really happened during the Battle of Manila in 1945.

VI. *Death of Manila*

Three years had elapsed since Japanese Imperial Forces occupied the city of Manila when the battle started on 3 February 1945 with the liberation of some 3,700 Allied civilian internees, mostly Americans, at Santo Tomas University Internment Camp in the northern part of the city. The almost bloodless liberation was made possible through careful negotiation between the U.S. forces and a Japanese unit, which would stand in stark contrast to the near-total neglect of civilian lives in the subsequent month-long urban warfare. By 12 February 1945, the U.S. forces had completely besieged the downtown districts of Intramuros, Ermita and Malate, which would become fierce battlegrounds and horrendous scenes of Japanese war crimes. The US heavy artillery barrage launched from the outskirts of the city wiped out most of the flammable structures in the area, while Japanese forces continued to hold buildings of solid construction such as the Philippine General Hospital, University of the Philippines and Manila Police Station until being annihilated after close combat. Intramuros remained a nightmarish battle zone until 25 February. The Legislative, Finance and Agriculture buildings between the Intramuros and Ermita districts, “huge buildings with rows of Greek columns,³⁰” became the last strongholds of the Japanese and were completely shelled to ruins by U.S. artillery fire. On 3 March, 1945 the U.S. troops took the Finance Building after mopping up all the Japanese soldiers remaining

²⁹ Nakpil. *Myself, Elsewhere*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

inside and thus effectively finished the Battle of Manila.³¹ The body count of Japanese soldiers was recorded as 16,665, whereas American forces counted 1,010 killed and 5,565 wounded. There were no official statistics for the loss of civilian lives, but the postwar Philippine government as well as most scholars have cited 100,000 as the estimated number of non-combatant civilian deaths.³²

The Philippine National Artist Nick Joaquin used the words “by sword and fire” in the last lines of his play, *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1966) to describe how the battle brought about “the death” of “the old Manila.”³³ “Sword” signifies the Japanese soldiers’ bayonets, used to kill so many civilians during the battle, whereas “fire” signifies both the fire of Japanese machine-guns, grenades, and mines and, even more poignantly, the destruction by U.S. shelling. Military historians estimate the U.S. shelling might have been responsible for as much as 40% of civilian deaths,³⁴ arguing that MacArthur’s politically motivated impatience for victory and the field officers’ urge using the heavier artillery in order to minimize U.S. casualties should be blamed for allowing the massive and unnecessary collateral damage to the civilians, who “stoically and philosophically accepted decimation” of their families by the American artillery.³⁵ In one case, at the Remedios Hospital in Malate on 12 and 13 February 1945, apparently misdirected shelling killed almost 400 civilians in and around the hospital.³⁶

Criticism on the U.S. shelling, however, does not change the fact that mass killings and other atrocities committed by the Japanese forces constituted the primary cause of the civilian casualties. In order to secure the operational positions against U.S. forces and to eliminate the hostile population that certainly would have assisted them in the coming battle, Japan’s Manila Naval Defense Forces and the remaining Imperial Army units indiscriminately killed people using bayonets, machine guns, grenades, and by setting fires. Japanese defendants in the war crimes trials as well as the surviving veterans all acknowledged the tactical difficulties in distinguishing guerrillas from civilians. The magnitude of atrocities committed by the Japanese forces during the battle, however, could hardly be justified or explained by such claims.

The investigation reports of the war crimes committed by the Japanese forces during the Battle of Manila might well be counted among the most extensive and accurate among all the World War II war crimes investigation reports. This is partly because the atrocities took place exactly during the time and on the grounds that U.S. forces in each theater were busily organizing war crimes investigation units in preparation for future prosecutions. The atrocities also took place in the exact locations being approached by U.S. forces and where liberation was therefore imminent. This made it possible for the intelligence units to obtain well detailed information and even affidavits from the people including the very victims of rape and the few

³¹ On detailed accounts and chronology of the battle, see Richard Connaughton, John Pimlott and Duncan Anderson. *Battle for Manila*. London: Bloomsbury, 1995; Alfonso J. Aluit. *By Sword and Fire: The Destruction of Manila in World War II 3 February – 3 March 1945*. Manila: National Commission for Culture and Arts, 1994.

³² Robert Ross Smith. *United States Army in World War II. The War in the Pacific: Triumph in the Philippines*. Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army, 1963, 306-7.

³³ Nick Joaquin. *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino (An Elegy in Three Scenes)*. Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc., 1966, 116.

³⁴ Connaughton, et al., 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145; Pedro M. Picornell. *The Remedios Hospital, 1942-1945: A Saga of Malate*. Manila: De La Salle University, 1995.

survivors of mass killings. A vast number of affidavits submitted to the war crime trials are now available in the U.S. National Archives. While it was difficult to identify the individual perpetrators from these affidavits alone and many cases were closed without prosecutions, these documents remain undeniable evidence of what happened to the victims during the battle.³⁷

Another reason why Japanese atrocities during the Battle of Manila became one of the most accurately recorded war crimes is because the survivors of the month-long urban battle included the urban and affluent elite, both Filipino and foreign. Warfare in general tends to victimize the less privileged because more means are available for the affluent to evade conscription, to live in or evacuate to safer places, to bribe enemy officers, and so forth. In Manila, however, the privileged and the affluent—including European foreign nationals, and even Germans and neutral Spanish—could not escape the atrocities and were even targeted by the Japanese soldiers. In the Intramuros and Ermita/Malate districts, the people were indiscriminately targeted on the streets from both sides such as Elpidio Quirino, the Second President of the Philippines (1948-53), who lost four out of seven of his family.³⁸ In the Manila Hotel and the Bay View Hotel, Japanese officers disproportionately targeted women with Caucasian complexion, especially those girls who were young and thus were assumed to be virgins, as rape victims.³⁹

These surviving victims among the urban elite of Manila's dwellers, having been affluent and thus able to afford better education, were deemed more reliable witnesses in the war crimes investigation as well as in the courtrooms. They also have had more opportunities to convey their experiences and memories throughout the postwar years especially since the mid-1990s, by writing for newspaper columns, publishing memoirs, novels, poems, theatrical plays, and so forth. One of the earliest and most outstanding examples among them was Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, who was Carmen Guerrero Cruz (married to her first husband) during the battle, a pregnant woman with a baby named Gemma. She was one of the first writers who wrote about the unspeakable experiences of Manilans including not only Japanese atrocities, but also U.S. indiscriminate shelling during the battle. The following is from the well-known article first published in 1967.

I had seen the head of the aunt who had taught me to read and write roll under the kitchen stove, the face of a friend who had been crawling next to me on the pavement as we tried to reach the shelter under the Ermita church obliterated by a bullet, a legless cousin dragging himself out of a shallow trench in the churchyard and a young mother carrying a baby, plucking at my father's sleeve — "Doctor, can you help me? I think I'm wounded" — and the shreds of her ribs and her lungs as she turned around.

I had heard the screams of the girls I had grown up with as they were dragged by Japanese soldiers towards the Bayview Hotel (to be raped, as we later found out) and the mindless groans of the men, tied together by the elbows and machinegunned by stony-faced Japanese. I had seen all the unforgettable, indescribable carnage caused by the

³⁷ The bulk of the investigation reports ("Manila Reports") are filed in RG331: GHQ/SCAP Records, Entry 1214: War Crimes Files, 1946-1950, U.S. National Archives at College Park.

³⁸ Aluit, 217-218.

³⁹ "Manila Report No. 61: Investigation of the Rape of 40 Civilian Women and the Attempted Rape of 36 Civilian Women of Various Nationalities, In Ermita, Manila, P.I., during the period 9-13 February 1945." 12 September 1945. RG331, Entry 1113, Box 1118. NACP.

detonation of bombs and land mines on the barricaded streets of Ermita and the carpet-shelling by the Americans which went relentlessly on, long after the last Japanese sniper was a carcass on the rubble.⁴⁰

This is a summary of her ordeal and sufferings, which could only be poetically narrated in 1967 probably because it was the only possible way for her to tell of the unspeakable events at the time. It was in 2006 that Nakpil eventually managed to give more specific accounts in her memoir. A U.S. bomber had been hit by Japanese anti-aircraft and had released a bomb on Ermita as it exploded during a November 1944 air raid. The Guerrero's quarters were hit hard, leaving Carmen's three maiden aunts and their father all dead (and dismembered). Then in the evening of 5 February 1945, a platoon of Japanese soldiers broke into the Cruz house on General Luna and California St., tying up all the men including Carmen's husband and even a cook, and taking them away to be executed elsewhere. Carmen decided to return to Ermita where she would spend about ten days of horror with her baby Gemma, trapped between Japanese atrocities and U.S. shelling "both were equally deadly."⁴¹ The constant carpet-shelling instilled a great hatred within her towards the Americans "for their ruthlessness and callous disregard for human, civilian, non-combatant lives"⁴² and she "spat on the very first American soldier" she saw on the day of her liberation, but she "was dry-throated and he was not aware of my scorn."⁴³ Thus was created an anti-American woman whose PTSD through decades would make it impossible for her to say a single word to the Japanese, the mere presence of whom "would bring on a dizzy spell."⁴⁴

When the Battle of Manila ended on 3 March 1945, there was nothing left in the Ermita/Malate district but piles of dead bodies and the stench of death. A year later, Carmen, now a widow at 23 years old, was taken out to dinner in a U.S. army jeep by an American lieutenant who was working for the U.S. army paper.

We crossed a bridge I did not recognize, and before I knew it, we were in Ermita, on Isaac Peral, in front of a restaurant called New Europe... I stood beside the jeep gazing in the direction of the chain-link fence, trying to make out the space that had been occupied by our house, the third house from the corner of Mabini and Isaac Peral..

When she was asked "what is it?" she simply did not want to tell him that she "was looking for a town called Ermita and the house where I was born, and turned away to walk into the restaurant. I needed a drink badly." Nakpil's first memoir ended here.⁴⁵

The ending suggests that we may add one thing to Benedict Anderson's analysis on Leon Ma. Guerrero's translation strategy: the grave consequence "the Death of Manila" had on the Filipino urban elite's imagination. On the last page of *Twilight in Tokyo*, the memoir Leon published soon after he returned to the Philippines with Laurel and the party who were released from Sugamo Prison and repatriated in July 1946, he recalled what he saw from the sky when the airplane carrying them was descending towards Manila:

⁴⁰ Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. *A Question of Identity: Selected Essays*. Manila: Vessel Books, 1973, 204-205.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴² Nakpil. *Myself, Elsewhere*, 186.

⁴³ Nakpil. *A Question of Identity*, 204.

⁴⁴ Nakpil. *Legends & Adventures*, 145.

⁴⁵ Nakpil. *Myself, Elsewhere*, 190-191.

The plane circled lower, over the land now, that strange disfigured city. We began to recognize landmarks and to miss them, to puzzle over the odd new roofs in such peculiar combinations.

And then a sadness pierced me suddenly. This whole battered stumbling city could fit nicely into only one of Tokyo's vast flattened wards but the razed desolation of the imperial capital was not half so tragic as this. There at least ruin was complete, nothing was left to excite the memory, the sense of regret lost itself in the uniform gray anonymity of ashes.

But Manila was not dead; or what was dead of it, was not yet buried, so that the returning native must endure the horror of recognizing with a start the gaunt scarred face he remembered as once lovely.⁴⁶

VII. *Conclusion*

The Battle of Manila not only physically destroyed the metropolis and indiscriminately slaughtered a massive number of civilians by atrocities and shelling, but ruined the culture and way of life, which certainly had been on the decline but was still colorfully alive, to the extent that the following generations could barely imagine what it had been like. Although the postwar physical reconstruction was quick thanks to the U.S. rehabilitation money pouring into the Philippines, prewar culture and society were never to be restored without the people bearing the emotional cost of it. Even the survivors had no enthusiasm to rebuild their lives on the very site of their traumatic experiences, which would soon evacuate elite families from the Ermita/Malate district to Forbes Park and the newly fortified gated communities around "Little New York" Makati. All that was left in Ermita was Asia's largest night-time pleasure zone and the center of prostitution that attracted the Japanese and other foreign tourists for "sex tours." The elimination of place names in Leon Ma. Guerrero's *Noli* might represent the depth of despair he had of postwar Manila, or even a Manilan's desire to suppress the memories attached to the place names. Such was the case of Carmen Guerrero Nakpil in 1976, the height of Japanese sex tours to the district. What else could she possibly do but describe Ermita (and Malate) as a place that had "become tawdry and down-at-heels."

Nakpil's second memoir vividly depicts postwar Philippine society during the late 1940s to the 50s in a manic state, in which she was working as a widow journalist, going to work late morning and returning close to dawn, loving dances, drinking, and bar-hopping with a gun like any other Manilan. Americans were everywhere as these were the days of the Cold War that brought more Americans into Filipino elite society than ever before as government supervisors, foreign assistance officials, military advisors and other intelligence officers, and businessmen and carpetbaggers who benefited from the parity amendment of 1946. As U.S. War Damage checks and other money poured into the devastated country, everyone's life was dependent on the former suzerain. The U.S. government was determined to restore every public building and rehabilitation money from the U.S. quickly allowed Manila "to rise from its ashes, tragically different and enormously challenged, to live again."⁴⁷ Then she writes in her memoir:

⁴⁶ Leon Ma. Guerrero. *Twilight in Tokyo*, Manila: Oriental Communication Company, 1946, 75-76.

Ermita of the 21st century is indistinguishable from the disorderly, effervescent ugliness of most of the rest of Manila.⁴⁸

It seems Nakpil's mourning of the lost city having been through several stages of grief, finally reaches acceptance, more than six decades after the battle.⁴⁹

The works of the Guerrero siblings, of Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Leon Ma. Guerrero, certainly represent all the ironies and ambivalence a certain generation of the Filipino elite had to embrace, in which the United States played a myriad of contradicting and even schizophrenic roles. Sometimes the enforced ties with the United States caused great loss to the Filipino people. Eventually, however, every loss and void had to be filled up with things All-American to the extent that an "anti-American" woman writer peppered her strange essay for *Manila* with the comfort of American place names and an "anti-American" diplomat adopted a translation strategy that made it extremely difficult for contemporary Filipino readers to imagine their rich "creole-mestizo" past. Their methods to avoid speaking the unspeakable for many years show that the violent Japanese intervention into the Philippine-U.S. ambivalent relationships during World War II may certainly have prolonged and even defined the ties, in which the Death of Manila will continue to haunt those who seek ways to remember and mourn the unspeakable loss.

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⁴⁷ Nakpil. *Legends & Adventures*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁹ The author discussed the significance of applying psychological conceptions of mourning and melancholia to the understandings of Philippine modern history in Nakano Satoshi. "Memory and Mourning: Six Decades after the Two Wars," Fujiwara Kiichi and Nagano Yoshiko, eds. *The Philippines and Japan in America's Shadow*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2011, 152-177.

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