

Rugged Guy Haven: A Perception of the Tondoeños as a Community of Toughies through Film Productions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the social history of Tondo as the social network that demonstrated the existence of livelihood and community became a factor in the growth of Manila. This cycle continued from time to time, yet it achieved a common goal to survive and blend with the existing norms in the community. Much has been written about the emerging problems accompanying rapid economic growth and the spread of poverty, criminality, financial stability, and the worsening condition of society and humankind attached to the Tondoeños. The social fabric of Tondo is further enriched through films, which became the subject of perception of social situations, especially in the post-war period; hence, this study will use the triangulation of analysis on the selected Filipino films and historical analysis in the district of Tondo. To understand the societal conditions of Tondo Manila, Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism will be used to interpret the human development of the selected film from Post-War to Contemporary, the theory of Robin Woods' Author, Genre, and Auteur, which will discuss the central theme of the selected films despite multiple issues to be discussed in the selected Philippines films.

Keywords: Geography, Film, Economic, Society

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is an interplay between migration patterns, gang proliferation, and the urban development of Tondo. The discussion of sub-topics such as geography will be conducted to understand the concentration of settlers on the streets in Tondo and make a connection to the concentration of gangs or gang communities. Another category that is aligned with geography is labor and employment, which can be considered as a factor for migration. It is also a distinction among the gang members, with the usual mentality that these groups are unemployed, vis-à-vis an understanding of the locale of Tondo as a slum, marginalized, and delinquent social behavior. The significance of the 1970s, as the post-war period, lies in the behavior that typically reflects social and human activity that continues until the contemporary period. The study will discuss how film gives a perception of the community and those living in Tondo that later become subject to social labeling, such as *nakakatakot* and *mapanganib na lugar*.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The emerging social problems accompanying rapid economic growth and the spread of gangs, financial stability, and the worsening condition of society and humankind, as well as the cause of deviance and the unsavory reputation attached to the people of Tondo are contrary to the analysis and passive recipients of Tondo Manila. Several investors, businesspeople, academicians, and supporting nongovernment organizations have actively engaged in improving the urban development and environment to provide intervention and improve the current situation.

Three films will be used to understand filmmakers' perceptions in dealing with the community in Tondo. The independent film *Happy Land* by Jim Libiran in 2010 focuses on the biggest slum community in Tondo, which is the "Happy Land," that later gives birth to the well-known football team organized by the religious community. Another film is *Anak ng Tondo*, directed by Tito Sanchez in 1985, in which the film is generally perceived as breeding ground of violence among gangs in Tondo. Lastly, there is *Batang Bangkusay* from a well-renowned director, Conrado Conde, which was focused on the social movements of Tondoeños in one of the old streets in Tondo – Bangkusay.

In general, employing this method of Social Darwinism would lead to the understanding and interpretation of the development of events, situations, and both medium and short periods. The phenomena of the historical time trace the geographical location of Manila and Tondo vis-à-vis the movement of men in the community for economic and personal purposes, which later created the policy that utilizes men concerning the use of allocated space in the community. It will be focused not only on the geographical sphere but also on the movement of man to its society such as population, migration, livelihood, transportation, and gangs.

Wood's theory will in understanding the condition of the films about the social condition based on the time when the film was created. At the same time, Spencer points out that social organization and its modes as man is by nature a social animal, point to the human as a species, and that significant social organizations explain the social phenomena or conflict between humans and groups. Moreover, the given theories help in better understanding the social conditions in Tondo and the association that enables individual members to cooperate to achieve objectives as a collective, which cannot be achieved by independent individual action. At the same time, Wood's theory will create a context to discuss the ideas of a specific film and the characteristics of each character, their perceptions, and positions, to attain and attempt to raise problems and validate claims about the community of Tondo, Manila.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Geography and Its Importance

Manila, the capital of the Philippines, is on Manila Bay, on the banks of the Pasig River, a tidal estuary that connects Laguna de Bay to Manila Bay. The bay is 120 miles in circumference and accommodates navies around the world. Manila was once the best commercial center on the globe as a significant part of Manila is located on what used to be swamps and marshes, as well as along Manila Bay, which has a coastline of 190km and stretches from Cavite to Metro Manila, all the way to Bulacan, Pampanga, and Bataan. Seven cities bound the city: Navotas and Caloocan on the north, Quezon

on the northeast, San Juan and Mandaluyong on the east, Makati on the southeast, and Pasay on the south.

The lands in Manila are primarily filled with different urban areas. In the beginning, the slums were used for housing and informal commerce. These areas, classified as unfavorable to the available space needed for human settlement, later received support from specific political and economic forces using administrative gaps. Currently, Manila has a computed land area of 42.34km², consisting of six districts, 17 administrative districts, 100 zones, and 896 barangays (Statistical Standard Geographic Code, 2024)

The City of Manila is the country's historical, cultural, political, economic, and educational center. History and culture can be observed in the city's physical character. The opening of the port, railroads, bus companies, and labor opportunities provided a privilege in Manila, especially the provincial locations; the railway equipment was from Britain and used throughout Manila. The sailing vessels were often based on the regional ports, local crew, and captain, and railway operations were concentrated.

The province of Tondo is nevertheless one of the richest, most dynamic, and most populated; in short, one of the most important in the archipelago. On the north, it is bounded by Bulacan and Nueva Ecija; on the east by Nueva Ecija; on the south by Laguna and the Lake of the Bay; on the east by Nueva Ecija; on the south by Laguna and the Lake of the Bay; on the west by Cavite and end of Manila Bay (Mallat, 2021, p.127).

The geographical location made Tondo a distinguished venue from the pre-Hispanic era's local, national, and global perspectives. It started a rustic foreshore community in the Manila Bay Area and evolved into a trading post. Manila was confined within the walls of the city, known as Intramuros. Initially, this area was enclosed by fortifications collectively referred to as Intramuros. In the sixteenth century, the jurisdiction was under Manila, which later became the province of Tondo. It is an ideal entrepot where merchants delivered goods to China, Japan, Sima, and the Malay Peninsula. Foreign merchants also settled in Tondo for international trade before the Spanish colonization. Although Manila Bay functioned as the main trading route at the time, it was somewhat limited, as it lay off the primary trade route of the island.

The geographical location of Tondo, Manila, has led to various interpretations of the origin of "Tondo" as a place name. One interpretation suggests it was called *Tundoc*, a banana species with violet skin, though the fruit is yellow and sweet (Bonifacio, 1977, p. 52). Tondo, also once called *Tundo*, is a Tagalog for baiting or catching fish; hence, *Tundaan* was a small boat often attached to a much larger fishing boat. The name Tondo may also have been borrowed from *Tandu*, a Malayan or Indonesian word commonly used in place names. Lastly, Tundo may have come from the word *Tuldok* since it was founded on a rocky formation that appears like a small island (Camagay, 1955, p. 4).

Some of the streets in Tondo have meaning and significance as old as the country; some also praise and honor the memories of Filipino and Spanish personalities. There are names based on individuals who lived in Tondo (History and Cultural Life of Manila):² (a) **Baltazar** - named after Francisco Baltazar, who became the first Juan de Sementara of Tondo;(b) **Lakandula** - as an honor to the king of Tondo

² History and Cultural Life of Manila (vol 3). Copy from National Library of the Philippines, Archives section.

who welcomed Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in Manila; (c) **Pilapil** - Rev. Mariano Pilapil, teacher of the great Francisco Baltazar, “Prince of Tagalog Poetry” Father Pilapil is a notable educator among the Filipino Clergy; (d) **Pacheco** - Enrique Pacheco is the secretary of Finance in the Supreme Council of the Katipunan; (e) **Yangco** - Teodoro R. Yangco, Filipino Philanthropist and former Philippine Resident Commissioner to the United States; (f) **Magat Salamat** - the son of Lakandula who conceived an emery plot to regain the “freedom” and lordship with their forefathers, (g) **Soliman** – the last king of Manila who offered resistance to Miguel Lopez de Legazpi and perished at the naval battle at Bangkusay Channel on June 3, 1571; (h) **Dandan** - Father Pedro Dandan, one of the fighting Filipino priests, a noted musician and preacher who in 1896 joined the troops of Riego de Dios.



Figure 1. Map of Manila with its districts and land areas. Prepared by Engr. Christina Echon and Engr. Armado Andres from Manila City Hall.

The country’s historical, cultural, political, economic, and educational center is located in Manila. History and culture can be observed in the city’s physical character and among the districts, Tondo is considered the epicenter of migration from various parts of the Philippines for the following reasons:

First, it is closer to the port of Manila, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was a railway terminal. Tondo is where the railroad begins—to the north, reaching Dagupan, Pangasinan, and to south, extending to the Bicol region and Manila. Several migrants from the Central and Southern Philippines traveled through the inter-island ships of Manila North Harbor in the Tondo foreshore area (Ortega, 2016, pp. 43-45). The railway plan for Luzon was divided into three separate but integrated lines from a focal point in Manila—the Manila-Dagupan line.

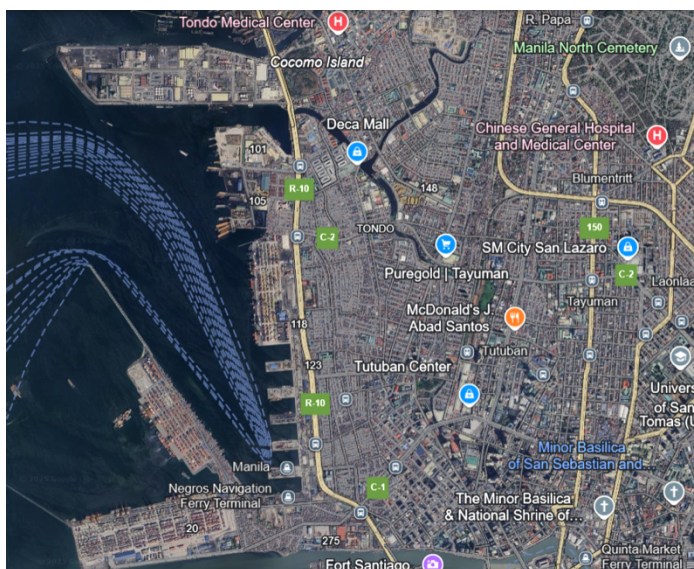


Figure 2. Map of Tondo, Manila viewed using the Google Earth

Second, Manila was the home of two major ports—North Harbor, which was a domestic port where migrants would come in and out of Manila, and South Harbor, which served foreign providers. With the landlocked features of the bay, it opened an opportunity to explore other islands of Luzon and is navigable by ships of greater tonnage. For example, the Pasig River, a broad and deep river that branches into seven channels from the lake of the bay, can carry even a hundred tons, impeded only by a bridge. The port is located nearby,

near the towns; even the most significant ships can be docked and repaired at minimal cost. The river is considered deeper compared to other bay water tributaries, and if it were not for the bridge in Manila, the ships could proceed even further. At the same time, the smallest can extend to Malacañang and even to Pateros via Pasig Bay. Through the presence of the river, the provision for arrival in Manila from the neighboring parts of the island, such as the province of Luzon province was made possible. Thousands of canoes, dinghies, and *paraos* would arrive and travel from the lake to the city or the Bay of Manila.

Third, motorized vehicles were the most dominant mode in the urban transport jungles of early-twentieth-century Manila and Singapore by the late 1920s and the 1930s. Their dominance over non-motorized modes was not surprising, given the technological sophistication of the former. Motorized vehicles were faster, more durable, and capable of carrying more passengers. Furthermore, these modes could compete in terms of passenger fares – reflecting the American idea of the motorization of Manila's urban transportation in the early twentieth century.



Figure 3. Map of Tondo and major streets, viewed using Google Earth

Establishing bus terminals in Manila indicated that Manila is continuously growing based on its status quo. The proposal for the Divisoria terminal highlighted an essential general point of destination and demonstrated an advantage in making a bus terminal (Annual Report of the Manila Railroad Company, 1906). Furthermore, there is no possible way for any bus operator to divide the ultimate destination for most passengers. No matter where the

bus finally stops, most of the passengers will go on somewhere else. The conclusion is that some secondary means of transportation, such as foot or vehicle, are necessary whether the terminal plan is implemented.

Lastly, the geographical contribution of Tondo created livelihood opportunities. Fishing sectors along Manila Bay included fishing villages like Bangkusay, Navotas, and Baclaran. Towns like Malate, Malate, Tambobong (Malabon), Las Pinas, and Paranaque had extensive salt beds. Tondo was an entrepot where merchants delivered goods from China, Japan, Borneo, Siam, and the Malay Peninsula and distributed the products throughout the islands. Later, foreign traders settled in Tondo. Manila Bay became the leading trade route for the spice-producing peninsula, especially in the south (Mallat, 2021, pp. 121-122).

The public market is also one of Manila's most significant historical sights. The city's wholesale produce center near the Calle Azcarraga is the Divisoria Market. Together with the neighboring market of Yangco Market, there is a retail shopping center and a textile trade located in Tondo, Manila, and Pritil Market, situated on Nicholas Zamora St. Street across from a cigar cigarette company. New factories have also been established in Tondo, Manila: La Tondeña Distileria, Proctor and Gamble in Velasquez St., Alhambra Cigar and Cigarette Company in Juan Luna, La Fortuna

Distilleries in Gagalangin, and La Filipina Uy Gongco – Philippine Foremost Milling Corporation, located at Tondo, Manila.

B. Film as Transformative Power

The transformative power of cinema, music, and mass media has significantly shaped postwar Philippines. Their convergence, along with the emergence of stars and musicals, was both beautiful and powerful. The Philippine postwar cinema was not just a significant driver but a forceful agent in maintaining the social order of the mestizos, leaving an indelible mark on the societal fabric.

Movies, as depicted by filmmakers and society, blend the make-believe world of film with the social realities of the times. Institutions and communities became witnesses to the adventures and fragments of fantasy worlds, such as the heroic exploits of characters in war (e.g., the bravery of soldiers in battle) or the romantic escapades of lovers (e.g., the enduring love story of a couple amidst societal challenges, like the film *"Giliw Ko"* which depicted the struggles of a couple during the Japanese occupation). These were the films' imaginative and often unrealistic elements, suggesting a search for heroes who could eradicate society's hatred of warlords and bureaucrats.

Postwar cinema witnessed explosive growth, marked by the quick re-establishment of major studios and the production of numerous movies across various genres. The expansion of theatrical distribution throughout the country, which involved the establishment of more cinemas in different regions and the production of films based on the viewer's choice, was a critical aspect and a driving force of this growth. Filmmakers catered to the preferences of their audience by creating films that resonated with their social and cultural experiences, shaping the industry as we know it today. Realistic stories and melodrama were not only the venues for conveying the process of articulating a cultural discourse; Philippine film in the postwar years also presented interesting, significant notions of the community.

The film *"Manila-as-City"* served as a cinematic shortcut in the collective imagination of the "Philippines-as-nation," with Manila symbolizing the very essence of art. On various occasions, cinema congealed the abstract concepts of nation, experiences, and aspirations through filmic imagery, observable through narratives, environment, people, and movement, thereby solidifying Manila's role as a symbol of the nation's collective identity. Likewise, radicalism was evident in the 1960s, the second Golden Age of cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, and its transnational configuration in the 1990s, which reflected a concept of nation and identity.

Reflection on the city's representation is divided into the historical periods of intense social stress, colonization, war, dictatorship, and globalization. The cross-mirroring of the city's representation conflates with the country's political history and film production. The growth of the Filipino nation is paralleled with the changes in society's economic activity. As the country's capital, Manila became the locus of political affairs and the center of film development. As political events gained significance in the capital, so did the development radiate to other parts of the archipelago.

The condition of Manila after the war was a fitting locale to portray the reality of life in the post-war period. Several representations, such as the experience of Filipinos, are conveyed through various emotions of despair, frustration, decay, and corruption. These images of social trauma were not only experienced under colonizers but also through the imposition of Martial Law from 1972 to 1981, where the image of

social violence became a source of anxiety for some. This period of disasters was a double-edged phenomenon, especially for the filmmakers who used the medium to call for social change. Through the foregrounded moments in cinema and their parallels in history, it rose to the occasion of documenting the social trauma experienced by Filipinos in a meaningful and relevant manner.

1. Slums and Migrants.

This independent film's story, *Happyland*, is based on the real story of the barefoot Filipino Football team, composed of players from the slum community of *Happyland* in Tondo. Written and directed by Jim Libiran, it was one of the 2010 Cinemanila Film Festival entries. The story begins by narrating the efforts of a Spanish missionary priest who envisions a project for the young Tondoeños—to build a team for an upcoming football tournament. The priests were also delighted with the Tondoeños and even described them as strong people who could laugh in the face of different tragedies. Their hardiness became a point for these people to survive and become resilient. These people were often labeled as "*salbahe, along aral, at delikado*." However, the Spanish friar described as, "*ang tao ay mabait at marunong gumalang kasi mahirap*."

The film also portrayed the daily activities of youth—some were attending school, while others were already active in labor and employment as pedicab drivers, *namamasura, ulingan, nangangalakal, at nagsisibak*. At some point, the focus on education shifted toward survival for both self and family. Likewise, as a community of migrants who flocked to Tondo for opportunities, some settlers came from different provinces such as the Visayas, Mindanao, and parts of Luzon, and labels were often assigned based on one's place of origin such as *Bisaya*, or *Tagalog*. The title of "slum community" was attributed not only due to the population density but also because of housing conditions—the usual *barong-barong* made of light materials, sometimes a duplex or two-story household composed of six to ten families, each of which typically had an altar with a Santo Niño, rosaries, and sampaguita garlands. Despite the presence of riots, drug addiction, gambling, prostitution, and killings, the religiosity of the community sustained the hope of the Tondoeños. The friar continued to hope and used the football team as a tool to inspire change among the youth.

With the creation of the football team, conflict arose among its members. Competition with other teams increased, and being labeled as someone from Tondo became a source of tension for rival players. However, over time, the belief in the team's mission persisted, and the members grew in number. Female football groups were also created, families became actively involved in the advocacy of the church, some youth earned their degrees, and others gained opportunities to play abroad. Indeed, this film serves as an inspiration and challenges prevailing perceptions of Tondo.

Migration to the Tondo dates back to the immediate post-war period. Families rendered homeless by the war found refuge in Tondo Manila. Settlers from Visayas moved to Manila after World War II. As Tondo continued to grow, most of the settlers came from regions including the Tagalog provinces, Ilocos, Pampanga, the Visayas, and Bicol (Narseen, 1993, p. 15). The growth of the Philippine metropolitan area is largely a result of rural-to-urban migration. Between 1960 and 1970, Metropolitan Manila had an annual growth rate of 4.79 percent, with some sections exceeding 11

percent, which led to the perception of a drastic increase in population from 56.0% between 1948 and 1960 to 61.7% between 1960 and 1970 (Laquian, 1927).

The migration of more than a million people by 1960 was largely spontaneous and received little government support, yet it was surprisingly well organized. However, it did not generate the vitality that often accompanies mass migration. Utilizing family and village networks, migrants from the provinces of Cebu and Bohol in the Central Visayas, as well as some Pampangos from Central Luzon, moved steadily into Northern and Eastern Mindanao. Migrants from Northern Luzon settled in Western Mindanao, while those from Western Visayas moved to the southern province of Cotabato (Stinner, 1987, pp. 3–16). This migration resulted in more complex political networks that extended across geographical regions. The movement of communities from Huk-influenced regions such as Pampanga and Bulacan also indirectly contributed to political and economic development (Stinner & Montilla, 1981, p. 15).

Provincial folks are lured to Manila even though life is increasingly challenging. The unemployment situation in the city is becoming more accurate every day. There is a good demand for skilled workers, but the man who knows no particular job efficiently might as well stay home instead of wasting time attending to the office...Coming to Manila just for a brief visit, it is all right. However, if your purpose is to find work to support a family or finish your studies, someone had a better look twice before leaping into the opportunity. Someone might be completely disillusioned as thousands of once dreamy-eyed provincials in Manila are painfully disillusioned (Ty, 1948).

Among the other foreigners who settled in the area, the most significant groups were Americans and Chinese, who were active as merchants and laborers. The remaining residents included Spaniards, Englishmen, Japanese, and citizens of various other foreign countries (Narseen, 1993).

In Manila's public markets, Chinese merchants operating stalls are still a common sight. This is supposed to be illegal under the provisions of the law, especially the Market Code, otherwise known as Municipal Ordinance No. 2898.

Why is the seeming infraction allowed? Several people, particularly Divisoria Market Vendors Association members, have been asking themselves that puzzling question. The Chinese merchants occupying that market are not Chinese but Filipino citizens. At least they claim to be Filipinos, either through naturalization or election. (Tutay, 1949)

This group of ethnicities lived in Tondo in 1970 (Census of Population and Housing, 1970, p. 68). A total of 433,987 people belonging to various ethnic groups were living in Tondo, most of whom were Tagalog (354,866); Pampango, 17,354; Samar-Leyte, 3,763; Ilocos, 10,329; Bicol, 8,207; Pangasinan, 5,731; Cebuano, 5,636; Hiligaynon, 5,156; Aklanon, 1,453; Chinese, 8,448; All others, 2,833; and Not Stated, 162. Competition for household space and allocated land would later become a significant problem. As a result, homeless provincials (Ty, 1948, p. 8) took on low-paying jobs in the pier area. They built homes made of light materials or *barong-barong* (a colloquial term used to refer to makeshift housing) on nearby vacant lots. Amid these difficulties, both migrants and native Tondo residents struggled to survive. These new settlers faced the challenge of survival and growth, and the promise of a better life in Manila inspired many from the provinces to follow (Ty, 1948, p. 10).

Substantial internal migration was most evident in the Metropolitan Manila area, where the population had significantly increased compared to the period before

the war. In the succeeding years, waves of migrants settled across the metropolis – if not in Tondo, then in the surrounding districts and fringes. By the early 1980s, Manila experienced severe congestion due to economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s, which was driven by the expanding services and manufacturing sectors concentrated in the central region.

Rapid population growth strained the metropolitan area's infrastructure. The increase in water demand prompted the government to invest heavily in water diversion projects. Sewage systems, often inadequate and clogged, led to flash flooding during heavy rains, which blocked some of the city's waterways. In addition to urban residents, workers commuting from nearby provinces using public transportation further contributed to heavy traffic, especially on weekdays.

Thus, while migrants in rural areas and smaller cities were moved to Metropolitan Manila, some city residents may also have relocated to the suburbs. Therefore, the Philippines has urbanized rapidly, and the trend continues. An urbanized and rapid trend now characterizes the Metropolitan area of Manila. Specific locales have become a hub of public violence and the existence of gangs such as Isla Puting Bato, Parola, Angustia, Velasquez, Bangkusay, and Baryo Magdaragat or Tambakan, later known as Smokey Mountain. The concentrated slum community is in Tondo Foreshoreland (Camagay, 2010). The concentration of migrants has resulted in population growth, especially in areas in Manila Bay and Pasig River; meanwhile, the Visayans have concentrated on the streets of Parola, Smokey Mountain, Palomar, and San Nicolas. Most migrants used to construct stilt houses on the shoreline, along the river, canals, railways, vacant lots, garbage depository, under the bridge, *bangketa*, cemetery, abandoned buildings, and container vans. Perhaps criminality, violence, gangs, and deviance also existed in the area (Narseen, 1993, p. 17). Take note also that in every street and alley in the districts, the concentration of many people – children romped, idled, and wandered in dust, mud, trash, and sludge. It served the residents a thousand and one uses, notwithstanding the clogged drainage, ruts, and maintenance holes: playground, *talipapa*, meeting venue, *tambay* of idlers, funeral parlor, an arena for neighborhood squabbles and gang battles, dumpsites, pushcart vendors, and junk collectors.

Occupying a land area of 38.3 square kilometers, the city of Manila constituted only 0.01 percent of the total Philippine area between 1960 and 1970. Thus, Manila's concentration as the primate city continued alongside the trend toward suburbanization in Manila. Manila had a net migration loss of 932,940 between 1960 and 1970, while the metropolitan area grew (Keely, 1973, pp. 177–178). From a population count of 1,138,611 in 1960, it surged to 1,330,788 in 1970 (National Census and Statistics Office, 1970, p. XXI). The perception of the slum community, mainly because of the house pattern, was that the ground floor was built from strong materials, whereas the upper floors were constructed from lighter materials, unlike typical housing with hollow block walls and concrete.

Moreover, the basic facilities posed a problem, such as clogged canals, lack of electric and water supply, garbage facilities, and poor sewerage and drainage systems. Physical infrastructure problems were also observed as the roads, alleys, and footbridges became settlements. The physical environment was also problematic – cleanliness, congestion, floods, and noise pollution. Lastly, maintaining peace and order was a problem, with drug addiction, drunkards, gambling, gangs, homicide, and other kinds of community trouble.



Figure 4. Pictures of structures that typified the housing work. From the analysis of NHA Research and Analysis Division (RAD)

Manila's urban landscape has seen exceptional growth, transforming it into an urbanized community. Cities have been touted as engines of economic growth and innovation. However, this growth has been accompanied by an increasing population and infrastructure deficits. The advantage of a large land area is that it contributes not only to housing and community but also to transportation, institutions, and public

markets. The increasing population of Tondo from 1960 to 2020 has defined the advantage of the district over other districts of Manila and the outskirts; it is considered the most densely populated urban informal settlement, especially in terms of the number of families per barangay. Compared with the other districts, Sampaloc is the second most populous district in Manila, as this area is closer to bus stations and educational institutions.

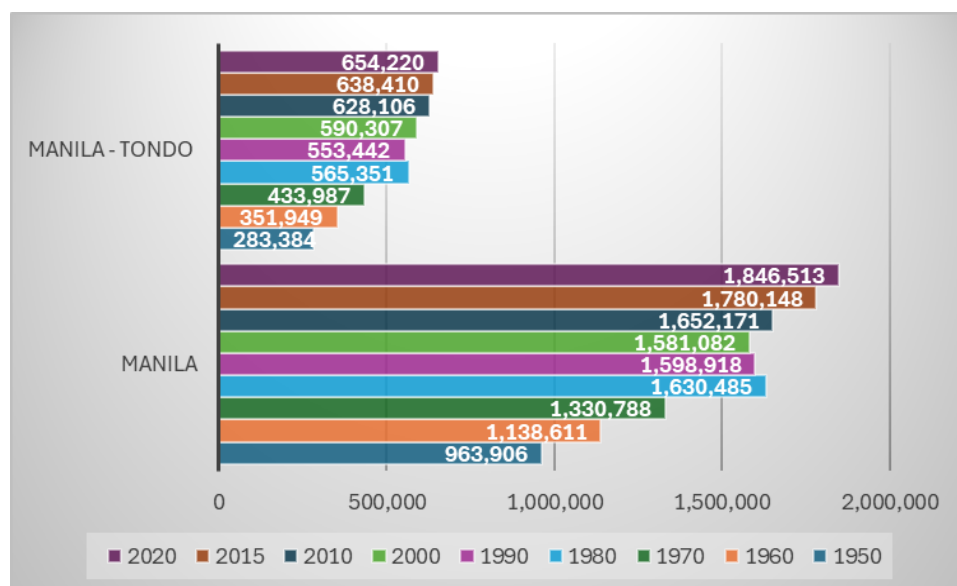


Table 1: Summary of the population in Manila and Tondo from 1950 to 2020. Philippine. Census of Population and Housing.

Despite the problems of living in Tondo, opportunities for earning a living abound in the city. These Tondo-based jobs primarily offer better pay than those in the provinces, and opportunities for living abound in the city. Correspondingly, life, in general, is perceived as an improvement in Manila, as well as in Tondo, over the

province; it promises progress and upward mobility and provides opportunities for land ownership if existing laws are implemented, as well as work and educational opportunities. Therefore, the image of Tondo has become more polarizing—a stereotyped picture in some non-squatters' minds of dangerous slum dwellers, especially with the influence of media and literature.

2. Gangs and Violence.

An action-drama film depicting life in Tondo is generally perceived as a breeding ground for violent confrontation among conflicting parties and gangs, as well as themes of friendship, power, greed, treachery, and lies. Tondo was called “Baluarte ng mga Matatapang.” This action-drama depicts life in Tondo, generally perceived as a breeding ground for violent confrontation among conflicting parties and gangs—friendship, power, greed, betrayal, and lies—the violent world of *Anak ng Tondo*. Erning “Batang Pajo” de Jesus, played by Rudy Fernandez, is an orphan left at the door of Santo Niño de Tondo Church and was adopted by a family native to Tondo.

The story discusses several societal concerns—livelihood and economic issues; in prominent places in Tondo, the marketplace is where the *astigin* or *grupo ng mga astigin* extort money from the *mamimili* or marketgoers. The friends of Berting are among the leading extortionists in Pritil Market, until suddenly Binong Bulul from the group of Medrano appears. The story also provides a view of the market at North Harbor Pier, in which products—both local and international—became a hub for criminality. As stated in the film, products such as guns from Bisayan merchants were traded to the natives of Tondo, like in the case of Erning and his company. Robbery and hold-ups are also prominent in North Harbor Pier; trucks carrying soap products and other undeclared cargo like cigarettes—“laman ng truck hindi lang sabon pero may blue seal”—are targeted by wealthy buyers. Nightclubs are also prominent as a source of livelihood, yet they are also hotspots for gang encounters.

Lastly, *sabong* or cockfighting, which several bettors and watchers consider a perfect place for gang members to hide, also features prominently. In the case of Berting's group, another encounter occurred in the *sabungan*, and several watchers were wounded during this activity.

Aside from the marketplace, Fulgeras, a *purok* in Tondo, is a hideout for guns and criminal activity. Moreover, it is not only in the *purok* where gang concentrations exist; in prison, *sanggano* also exist. When Berting was imprisoned because of his behavior in society, he encountered some of these *sanggano*, who had tattoos on their arms and backs. After completing his sentence, Berting returns to Tondo. He looks for his *kasama* (another term for *barkada*), who are now heavily involved in business, money, and territorial control. However, Berting is torn between returning to his *barkada* or continuing his life in the community. Furthermore, Berting's debt of gratitude remains, which prompted him to help his *kasama* take revenge at the port of Manila.

The underworld characters of Manila who make the lives of law-abiding people an endless nightmare are practically the same individuals whom the police have previously arrested. Urban gangsterism once became a model in Manila. Nicasio Salonga, known in famous scenes as Asyong Salonga, was a Filipino gangster whose popularity rose during postwar Manila, amidst the chaos following the city's disastrous retaking by the Americans. Known for being harsh and cunning, his

specialties were robbery, extortion, and murder. The existence of the Angustia gang, led by Salonga, became the most potent underworld group in Manila after a rival gang pledged allegiance to him.

Before the emergence of larger gang communities, notorious gangsters had been infesting Manila since the 1940s. Well-known individuals included Asyong Salonga, Maning Valencia, and the Canare Brothers (1940–1950); Totoy et al. (1960–1970); Pepeng Twari (1960–1980); Victor Lopez (1970–1980); Gerry Escultor (1970–1990); and Turing Simpao (1970–1980). Manila became a widely known city in the 1950s; it was once a place sought out for opportunity and known as a seat of Filipino culture. A famous individual who became a model of urban gangsterism was Nicasio Salonga, or Asyong Salonga, who was considered a notorious figure in postwar Manila (Magno, 1998, p. 61). He was also popular for leading the Angustia gang, which pledged loyalty to him. Despite his criminal behavior, politicians and police gave him protection and leeway; in return, he served their interests. In October 1951, Salonga was killed by a bullet to the head while drinking with a companion in a store in Tondo. The gunman was Ernesto Reyes, a member of a rival gang, who immediately surrendered to the police. In this societal context, individuals like Salonga became well known to the public, and a film was dedicated to him in 1961, which became widely known in society (Philippine Free Press, 1965, p. 15).

Hoodlums are situated not only in Manila but also in the suburban outskirts. In Leonardo Manecio's case, **also known as** Nardong Putik (Magno, 1998, p. 61), he was a prominent, influential figure in Cavite. His active leadership and criminal activity in Cavite included kidnapping, murder, robbery in band, and illegal possession of firearms. His intimate connection with people of power made him well-loved by the people of several towns he considered his territory. Compared to Nicasio Salonga, who is popularly known as a Robin Hood figure because he supported the Tondo community, Manecio was seen as a man who restored peace and order to the community he controlled – a task that local police units should have managed.

This period also highlighted the problem of social security in Manila; several criminals were released from prison, particularly from Muntinlupa Prison, and gangs were formed, establishing territorial grounds and concentrating criminal activities in Manila. The Amanse Gang (*End of a Bloody Trail*, 1946, pp. 11, 17) was one of the most notorious gangs in 1946, and participants were primarily minors. This juvenile delinquency became known not only as a prison gang issue but also as a wider social concern in Manila. Numerous robberies and murders in Manila and Rizal were reported, and the concentration of its members in these locations was due to the presence of gang hideouts.

The term “gang” is used restrictively to mean a group of young people who have banded together in some way for various purposes. Beyond its physical connotation, it is also used loosely to refer to associations of people. Thus, the phrase “peer group” similarly refers to associations of people of approximately the same age and within the same social range. Historically, gangs have been composed of male participants; however, there is an emerging trend of female membership, with women participating in ways that differ from their male counterparts. Female gang members have reported familial and peer influence as primary reasons for joining, rather than needing protection. At the same time, while most participants suggested that women follow their husbands into violent extremist groups, several people have pointed out that some women who support gender equality also join these groups, believing they

should be able to do what men can do – and equally seek the adventure and freedom it can bring.

The central street gangs are frequently reflected in newspaper headlines because of their violent and socially destructive activities. These gangs are the Sigue-Sigue Commando, the OXO, and the Bahala Na. Initially, the two main gangs were the Sigue-Sigue and the Bahala Na. In 1964, some members of Sigue-Sigue joined forces with the Commando and became the Sigue-Sigue Commando. Others affiliated with the Sputniks called themselves the Sigue-Sigue Sputniks.

Within the context of human activity, this reflects the ideological makeup of Tondo, Manila. In the 1950s, individuals – especially along Bangkusay and Velasquez streets – engaged in actions that destroyed the social milieu of security and livelihood. These delinquent individuals were labeled in society as “*tagapamayapa*,” “*tagapamagitan*,” “*protektor mula sa mga kriminal at mapagsamantala*,” and “*namumuno*” (Jocano, 2002, p. 113). Gang members often claimed to be the community’s defenders and sought to protect their “brothers” from outsiders. However, many of these gang members victimized local citizens by robbing, raping, burglarizing, and terrorizing their own communities.

Streets such as Bangkusay, Velasquez, Pitong Gatang, Angustia, Herbosa, Zaragosa, Padre Rada, Moriones, Perla/Sande, and Antonio Rivera were centers of violence from the 1950s to the 1980s. Labels such as “*mamatay-tao*,” “*halang ang kaluluwa*,” “*mabalasik*,” and “*magaspang ang pag-uugali*” were assigned to these places based on the narratives of settlers (Jocano, 2002, p. 113).

Famous gang groups in the 1960s included the following:

1. **Sigue-Sigue Sputnik Gang:** Considered the best-organized conflict gang in the Manila City Jail. At the time of this study, the Sigue-Sigue Sputnik group’s motto reflected its confrontational nature: “*He who comes to destroy us will himself be destroyed.*”
2. **OXO Gang:** This other large conflict gang was formed in the National Penitentiary at Muntinlupa in 1956 (Castillo, 2012), in response to “maltreatment by the Tagalogs.” This is a direct reference to the *Province Mates*, such as the Visayan OXO group. The Sputniks observed a growing number of Visayans in Manila and noted the name’s origin and meaning with consensus.
3. **Bahala Na Gang:** The literal translation of this gang’s name, “Here come what may,” reflects its orientation (Ashburn, n.d., p. 137).
4. **Sigue-Sigue Commando Gang:** As far as this investigation could determine, the majority of the Sigue-Sigue Commando members came from the province of Pampanga, where the group has existed since the late 1940s and early 1950s (Ashburn, n.d., p. 138).

Apart from the stated gang group, the concentration is in Tondo and several areas in Manila and provinces. The *Tres Cantos Gang* and *Red Apache* are prominent gang groups in Tondo, specifically in the streets of Herbosa-Bangkusay-Velasquez. The group and members are popular with the Manila Police Department and Detective Bureau, from the written article of Emmanuel A. Tejada published in Taliba dated 1960, *hinamon ng mga maton ng Tundo na hindi pa nadarakio ang pulisya ng Maynila na dakpin sila sa kani-kanilang mga pinagtataguan* and Mide de Luna, *habang nagsisikap ang pulisya sa Maynila sa pangangalaga sa katiwasayan nh mha naninirahan sa purok ng Tondo ay patuloy naman ang mga kapaslangan labanan ng mga maton*.

Isang aksidente ang naitala kung saan isang mamamayang naglalakad at estudyante na nagnganga;ang Lucrecio Urdansa, 20, na nakatira sa 183 10th Avenue Grade Park, Kalookan, Rizal ang napagkamalan at pinatay. Magiika-7 na ng gabi ng maidala sa Mary Johnston Hospital sa Tundo. Ang nagging hinala ng pulisya na ang labanan ng Sigue-Sigue at OXO, dalawang pangkat ng preso sa Muntinlupa na nagpatayan sa loob ng bilangguan, ay umabot hanggang sa kamag-anak sa Tundo.

The gangs mentioned in this chapter continue to grow in the streets of Tondo. However, primary groups such as OXO, Sigue-Sigue Sputnik, Sigue-Sigue Commando, and Batang City Jail continue their criminal activities in selected streets of Tondo, Manila. They engage in petty crimes, target the periphery of trucks from the provinces, commit robbery and hold-ups, operate in a territorial manner, and, lastly, provide mutual protection to their brothers and sisters in times of trouble.

3. Social Activities in Tondo, Manila.

Manuel Conde's *Batang Bangkusay*, a 1957 film which he directed, describes the community pattern in Bangkusay. As the name implies, "*ang mga kasamahan ko sa Alta Siyudad ay takot na takot sa lugar ninyo.*" The film depicts typical street behavior such as fights among drunk men, *saksakan* (stabblings), and *patayan* (killings); the presence of families with many children; and the usual livelihood of fishing and agriculture due to its geographical location.

The character of Rita Gomez as "Siling" portrays the unusual behavior of a woman in the community, as she boldly stands up in drinking sessions and confronts her brother's problems. With the lack of a permanent livelihood, she is forced to work in construction as a sideline and encounters a group of men who disgrace her. In response, Siling forms a group with her family members and friends – "*parang ikaw ay isang lalaking sanggano, napakababang uri at nakakadiri.*" Another label given to someone living in Bangkusay is *batang lansangan*, referring to youth who live on the streets.

The film also highlights the significance of Bangkusay's geography, as its proximity to the Port of Manila provides laborers with job opportunities and access to smuggled goods like imported cigars. Most gangs or *pangkats* serve as protectors of business owners transporting and purchasing goods from the port. Aside from the port and the usual fishing activities and trade in Divisoria, factories are also located near Bangkusay—such as the La Tondeña Distilleries featured in the film. Beyond these activities, the film reflects the needs and aspirations of people today and proposes an alternative that is socially oriented, more humane, and acceptable. The plan encompasses the full range of human activity and interweaves the social, economic, and physical aspects of the environment.

The image of Tondo has become increasingly contested, especially due to portrayals in media and literature. In the 1980s, Tondo became associated with *pook maralita*—a hub of squatters, overcrowding, and sanitation problems (Caoili, 1988, p. 15); a fearsome community filled with uneducated men, rudeness, criminality, and gangsters (Jocano, 1975, p. 33). Specific locales have become hubs of public violence and gang activity, including Isla Puting Bato, Parola, Angustia, Velasquez, Bangkusay, and Baryo Magdaragat or Tambakan, later known as Smokey Mountain. The

concentration of slum communities lies in Tondo Foreshoreland, Parola, Kagitingan, Luzviminda, Isla Puting Bato, Baryo Magsaysay, Bangkusay, and the Port Area.³

Geographically, Tondo was once a fishing and agricultural sector located in the district of Gagalangin, with orange gardens, tropical fruit plantations, and vegetable farms. Different parts of Tondo and the Pasay Estate actively planted sugar cane, rice, and corn. Fishing sectors along Manila Bay included fishing villages like Bangkusay, Navotas, and Baclaran. Towns like Malate, Tambobong (now Malabon), Las Piñas, and Parañaque had extensive salt beds. Tondo served as an entrepôt where merchants delivered goods from China, Japan, Borneo, Siam, and the Malay Peninsula, distributing products throughout the Philippine islands. Later, foreign traders settled in Tondo and Manila Bay, which became a leading trade route for the spice-producing peninsula, especially in the south.

A significant role in the colony's economic life was the production of rice, sugar cane, corn, fruits, and vegetables on its cultivable lands for local consumption. Given that various areas in Tondo, Manila were suitable for cultivating fruits and vegetables, Gagalangin was identified as a center for oranges and also a source of carabao milk, cheese, and butter. Balut, Vitas, and Sunog-Apog were known for their fishponds. Small factories known as *rambutan* produced *tinapa* and *tuyo* and were located along Pacheco and Velasquez Streets. Tondo was also known for its textile production—silk and cotton fabrics were sewn and worn as *armadillos*, *tapis*, and *saya* (Mallat, 2021, p. 121).

Entrepreneurship also thrived in Tondo, Manila. The Chinese and Chinese mestizos manufactured soap, dye, and candy; tanned leather; distilled alcohol; and operated lime kilns, oil presses, tobacco factories, and lumber yards. They were active in both wholesale and retail trade. Native entrepreneurs owned and operated public horse-drawn carriages, which were designed and labeled for public use—namely: *carwaje*, *calesa*, *carromata*, and *quilez*. Tioco was well known for artisan shops composed of the old carriage-makers of the early colonial period, particularly *calesas*. Other entrepreneurs produced local specialties, such as *tuba*, a fermented drink made from coconut or nipa palm in Tutuban; Ylaya and Lemery had dye factories; and cigars, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco were produced in factories located in Gagalangin and Aceyteros, along Padre Rada Street.

The public market was also one of Manila's most significant historical centers. Divisoria Market, near Calle Azcárraga, served as the city's wholesale produce center. Together with the neighboring Yangco Market, it formed a retail shopping and textile trade center located in Tondo. Pritil Market, a local market, was closer to streets like Yangco, Velasquez, Corcuera, and Herbosa, to name a few.

New factories were also established in Tondo, Manila. One of the most prominent cigar companies was the Compañía General de Tabacos de Filipinas, better known as Tabacalera. Originally established as a sugar production facility in Oriental Negros (Fast, 1987, p. 43), it later operated in Manila. Other factories included the Philippine Manufacturing Company in Vitas Street, La Tondeña Distilleries, Alhambra Cigar and Cigarette Company in Juan Luna, La Fortuna Distilleries in Gagalangin, and La Filipina Uy Gongco.

In the Tondo portion are two busy and popular sites—hubs of economic activity and people movement: the Tutuban Railroad Station and the Divisoria Market. In the

³ Locations are based on the data gathered from Moriones police station gathered data from the records of those gang members whose criminal activities are usually from the streets in Tondo.

given geographical distribution, dwellers in the Tondo district are exposed to job opportunities for both skilled and unskilled laborers. North Harbor employs many stevedores and laborers, while Divisoria and nearby markets provide livelihood to numerous *kargadores* and small vendors, showcasing the diverse job opportunities available in Tondo, Manila. Several factories and shops also offer employment. The proximity to Sta. Cruz and Quiapo, along with the affordability of jeepney transportation, encourages the settlement of poor residents downtown, including sidewalk dwellers and vendors.

The Tutuban Railroad Station, under the modernization concept, was transformed into an integrated wholesale-retail commercial complex. The complex consists of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 buildings, each two to three stories high. The former building was used for general merchandise—primarily garments and textile stores.

Changes in livelihood followed during American colonialism, which introduced technology transfer and paradigm shifts. The arrival of motor vehicles and public health innovations were part of these imported notions of urbanism. Transportation became a vital aspect of Manila's geographical reconfiguration. The colonizers were optimistic about the improvement in mobility, which they believed would benefit Manila and surrounding districts.

The district of Tondo offered a variety of livelihoods, including agriculture, horticulture, printing, textiles, machinery, and transportation. It later grew into a commercial and residential hub, subject to adaptive changes and enhancements over time.

IV. CONCLUSION

As Tondo became more congested during this period, demographic problems such as poverty and squatting arose. Gangs, or social networks of individuals who came together in time and space—engaging in community activities and producing collective identity—also emerged. The geographical conditions of Tondo and the social network coverage demonstrated by gangs understandably influenced behavior.

Much has been written about the emerging problems accompanying rapid economic growth, the spread of gangs, financial instability, and the worsening condition of society and humankind. However, there have been few studies about the causes of deviance and the negative reputation attached to the people of Tondo.

The existence of livelihood and community became a factor in the growth of Manila, and this cycle has continued over time, always striving toward a common goal—to survive and blend with existing community norms. Chronic difficulties and widespread suffering might characterize slums. However, moments of shared togetherness articulate feelings of contentment, belonging, and emotional attachment to the group. These transform basic impulses into purpose and reality. Such elements of group identity are found in communication and the mutual sharing of life—real or imagined. Some may leave to pursue better opportunities, others might move out by force, and some may pass away, but new faces continue to perpetuate slum and gang life.

Because of the multiple elements in a film, viewers also encounter different genres, which sometimes complicate analysis. Wood's theory offers a more specific theme, providing a clearer lens for interpreting the film. Spencer's framework suggests that the behavior of Tondoeños is rooted in survival, and their actions are deeply expressed in the name of the community, reflecting their hardiness. Contrary to the view of Tondo residents as passive recipients of circumstance, several investors,

businesspeople, academicians, and nongovernmental organizations have actively worked to improve urban development and provide intervention. The label imposed by society continues, yet it overlooks the reality that other neighborhoods may experience similar or even worse conditions than Tondo.

The triangulation of film perspective, social conditions, time elements, and existing references deepens the analysis of how filmmakers portray Tondo—often based on newspapers and publicly available articles. Historical texts, maps, data, and news archives enrich the understanding of the contrast between realism in marginalized communities and magical realism in film.

Lastly, as a contribution to historiography, Philippine cinema presents the Filipino people's imaginative interpretation of societal movements—not only about man and man, but also about contending forces in a multivalent society engaged in dialogue. In effect, an individual becomes one's interlocutor, interpreter, subject, text, narrative, and witness to the articulation of what we call "memory." Further integration of historical research and theory enhances the consciousness of readers and viewers about time, making it a powerful tool for understanding local history and the roles of art, literature, and film in shaping society and individual well-being.

V. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research is a springboard to understanding the condition of Tondo, Manila, apart from the usual perception from films and literature and this perception of man to Tondo, which lasted until now. It is also a valuable tool for identifying the story in a local setup, gathering perceptions from localities, and collecting societal events that narrate the daily encounters apart from what is presented in printed literature and media.

Apart from the negative image of Tondo, note that hardiness and resilience can also be viewed positively. Several *Tondoeños* also rose from marginalized communities, and most became politicians, businesspeople, philanthropists, and artists. In short, successful individuals from Tondo, Manila.

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