

The Harmonies of
Life &
Death

*A Socio-spatial and Cultural Analysis of
Philippine Life and Death Heterotopias*

Mariah Trisha P. Jover

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All Glory to God.

Abstract

Heterotopias are defined as real and effective spaces outlined in the very institution of society that are specifically characterised as “other.” As Michel Foucault explained in his 1967 address to architects, such spaces of “otherness” play an essential role within western and eastern cultural traditions towards life and death, both enclosed within the home and exposed in the public city. Through the western lens, heterotopias which embody life, death and bereavement, like cemeteries, have evolved to become spaces that are disconnected from everyday life (Foucault, 1984). As a result, heterotopias have been conventionally recognised with the connotations of otherness, separate and detached from the familiar everyday. However, in eastern cultures like in the Philippines, such heterotopic spaces have become places where **life and death socially and spatially co-exist, therefore entangling the concept of heterotopias as “other” into notions of everyday life.**

Where honouring departed loved ones is paramount in Filipino culture, the journey of the bereaved through heterotopias starting from a grieving home leading up to, and beyond the cemetery plays a large role in demonstrating the intersection of life and death through the blurring of private and public space. The question of ‘how?’ is therefore brought to light. How does the socio-spatial and cultural aspects of Philippine heterotopias within bereavement practices reveal the intersection of life and death?

This thesis investigates how the union of life and death within Philippine bereavement heterotopias of the home, cemetery and life thereafter challenge the heterotopia’s conventional notions of otherness and disconnection. Through the socio-spatial and cultural analysis of Manila North Cemetery discovered in Orçun Behram’s documentary, *Home to Manila’s Poorest People*, and the reflection of my own bereavement journey, a fresh harmonious perspective of death is illuminated. In the intersection of life and death, **there is therefore an opportunity to reconnect and relearn ways of living in harmony with death through heterotopias.**

Contents

Chapters of study

1	Prelude
5	Chapter 1: Rites of Transition
	The Filipino Home
	Waking the Home
	The Walk of Death to Life
25	Chapter 2: The Heart of the City
	The Traditional Cemetery
	Life in Cemeteries
	Urban Integration
41	Chapter 3: An Eternal Undas
	Heterotopia of the Holy-day
	Undas
	Home's Eternal Undas
56	Postlude

Prelude

Life and Death in
The Philippines

and Heterotopias

Amongst all cultures, life and death have influenced the evolution of social, religious, cultural and spatial aspects of everyday life. These two realities simultaneously juxtapose and intersect to create human experiences which demonstrate urban balance and social cohesion.

In the Philippines, the evolution of life and death have been strongly influenced by indigenous animistic beliefs as well as more pragmatic disciplines including politics and urbanisation. During the pre-colonial period, indigenous Philippines carried diverse beliefs regarding death and afterlife and resultantly, established a variety of practiced forms of burial. Professor of Archaeology at University of Philippines Diliman, Grace Barretto, studies the various indigenous burial practices of the Philippines from the pre-colonial period which ranged from burials beside bodies of water, uninhabited islands and more commonly, burials stacked off cliffs and mountainous caves (Barretto, 2000). This belief system of indigenous practices rooted from the native's engagement with the spiritual world and the desire to connect souls back to their ancestors in the afterlife. In their time, tribes prioritised their reverence towards spirits and deities over allowing the dead to coexist with the living.

This notion of death as separated and disconnected from life is also reinforced in more present times, outside of eastern culture. In the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's lecture on *Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia*, which was published in the *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* Magazine in 1984, the evolution of cemeteries and ideas of death touched upon the period where cemeteries were a key institution that reinforced urban detachment. With reference primarily to western culture, Foucault states that since the 19th century, although it was not rooted from spiritualism, death was defined as an "illness," where the dead "bring illnesses to the living," suggesting death as an opponent to life, unable to harmoniously coexist (1984). These identities of death have influenced the way in which relevant spaces are perceived, experienced and placed under the urban context. Presently, more prominent in western cultures, spaces which are associated with death like cemeteries have become displaced to "the outside border of cities" and are identified as spaces of otherness which reinforces the idea that death is dangerous and taboo to the living (Foucault, 1984). Where western cultures are rapidly becoming pioneers in gradually developing countries such as those in the south-east, there is a risk that this perception of death as an "illness" spreads and affects the way life and death spaces evolve as distinct from the city.

With this convention in mind, spaces of "otherness" that depict a disconnection from the normalcy of everyday life are called heterotopias. As defined by Michel Foucault, heterotopias are "real places — places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society... which are like counter-sites" (1984). Heterotopias are institutions specifically characterised as other where "hetero" is defined as "other" and "topia," "place" because they "interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday spaces," which reinforces the apparent juxtaposition of

heterotopia to everyday life (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2015). This is reflected on the characterisation of death across cultures as an interruption to the ordinary everyday.

However, this implication that death spaces, being heterotopias, are classified as distinct from everyday life is challenged through the way death spaces have been redefined within Filipino culture and the traditional funerary practices since the colonial period of Philippines. Beyond pre-colonial beliefs, Catholicism and Spanish customs have evolved and developed the way Filipinos lament their departed. This shapes the present culture of Philippines in context to life and death practices which include the journey of the bereaved, undergoing different social and spatial stages of honouring their departed through the following:

"Lamay," where the family holds a vigil or wake for extended family, friends and the community to pay their respects and prayers.

"Acompañar," the funeral parade through the public streets, carrying the body in a hearse to the church, before burial.

"Misa," the church service where songs, prayers, readings and eulogies are held for the deceased.

"Sementeryo," meaning cemetery where the body is buried and rests.

"Undas," meaning honour, is the dedicated day for the departed where families congregate in the cemetery to celebrate their dead with songs, prayers, food and activities.

These practices have been embedded and understood by Filipinos as a valuable heritage which needs to be upheld now and for generations to come. Ramillo Mercurio, a research director and master in religious education in the Philippines, whose paper *Religious Practices on Honouring The Dead* focuses on the understanding of traditional Filipino funerary customs emphasises that within Filipino culture, "there is a need to preserve, protect and promote such social practice on honouring the dead" (2021). As a result, the cultural traditions of the Philippines regarding death carries great importance in the identity and lifestyle of Filipino communities and stands as an opportunity to explore how life and death heterotopias can become spaces which synchronise with the city and everyday life.

The research of this thesis will be conducted through a series of methods and resources including theoretical readings, case studies, documentaries and auto-ethnographic evaluations which collectively aim to establish a deeper understanding and analysis of the impacts and value of Philippine life and death heterotopias.

To establish a clear basis for the investigation of Philippine heterotopias, crafted within Filipino traditions in honouring the dead, the thesis will dissect the key principles of heterotopias by Foucault on *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* which are relevant to the stages of Filipino funerary traditions. This will be supported by the works of other writers influenced by Foucault, specifically in the urban context, including *Heterotopia and The City* which contains relevant chapters by Michiel Dehaene, professor of architecture and urban planner, and Lieven DeCauter, a philosopher and art historian who explore the social influence of heterotopias towards the urban environment (2015). These theories will be distributed carefully throughout each chapter alongside its specific connection to the journey of bereavement and its correlating Philippine life and death heterotopias.

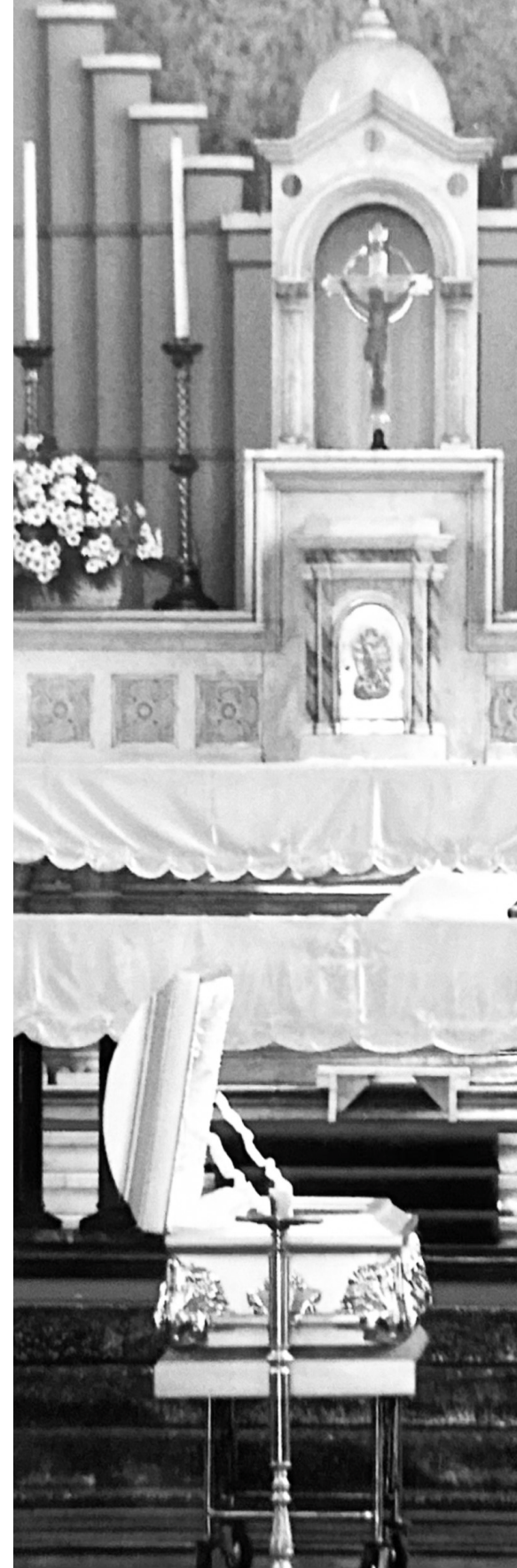
Manila North Cemetery will be utilised as the primary case study to critically explore the relationship between the heterotopias embodied in Filipino funerary practices and their potential to demonstrate the intersection of life and death. It is the largest cemetery in Philippines and is home to over one million of the dead population. Besides a place for the dead, Manila North Cemetery houses over 6000 living residents since the 1950s who have migrated from poorer and rural settlements to find better socio-economic opportunities in the city (Billing, 2018). The *Home to Manila's Poorest People* documentary directed Orçun Behram which highlights the lived experiences of Manila North Cemetery will be the key source where interviews by key stakeholders and dwellers will be translated and analysed in relation to Philippine life and death heterotopias (2023). The cemetery encapsulates the equilibrium between life and death, and rich and poor which brings to light opportune harmonies which can lend necessary to the spatial and experiential union of life and death heterotopias and the city (Behram, 2023). Moreover, to understand the evolution and socio-spatial connotations of Philippine cemeteries, secondary case studies on burial sites like the Hanging Coffins of Sagada will be studied to support the overall research.

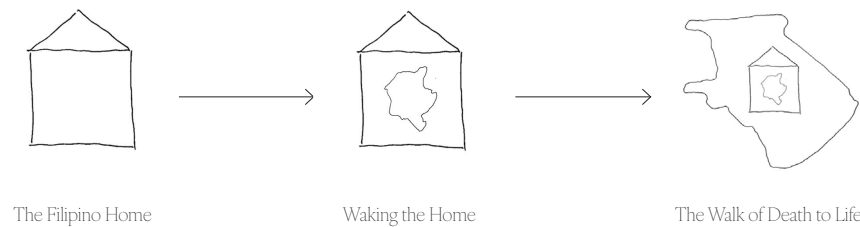
In parallel to the case studies, as one who has frequently engaged in traditional Filipino bereavement practices, my personal experiences and correlating photographs which capture the memories of my family's bereavement and gestures of honour will be presented to further supplement the discovery of the intersection of life and death. Collectively, this union presented through the experience of the wake, processional, cemetery and Undas illuminates a new perspective on the conventional notions of life and death and provides an approach where life and death can coexist to assist eternal honour, peace in loss, and social urban harmony.

Chapter One

Rites of Transition







The exploration of life and death begins in the home. Whilst the Filipino home is structured relative to the western idea of intimate and private domesticity, its additional social, religious and vocational practices pose as an opportunity to challenge western domestic conventions by viewing the home as a transformative heterotopia which accommodates key life and death practices. Specifically, these practices include the pre-burial stages of the wake and processional to the church; *lamay and acompañar*. These are the **rites of transition** for the departed historically rooted from Spanish Catholic traditions that were adopted by Filipinos, including my own family, which spatially demonstrate the union of life and death through the permeation of the private and public presented by the home and the social gesture of mourning and celebration.

The Filipino Home

The notions of the home within the Philippines have both conformed and evolved to challenge the conventional western identities of domesticity. Dr Kay Mohlman, director of NUS Asia Research Institute writes about Philippine domesticity and its vocational overlap in her journal *Conceptualizing Philippine Domesticity in the Context of Urbanization: Chronicle of a Home-Based Workshop* where she highlights the similarities and differences of the Filipino home against western ideals (1998). Throughout her exploration, the western domestic identities are fundamentally introduced as the separation of public and private life. Mohlman describes the home to be a “private domestic sphere that is relatively autonomous from the public world around it” (1998). The home being “autonomous” from the public world demonstrates a clear divide between the two thresholds of the private and public, and the home sits firmly within the private sphere where domestic activities are suggestively concealed from the public eye. One of the western readings which Mohlman refers to in her research is the historical and architectural writing of Witold Rybczynski, a Canadian American architect and professor who sheds light on the evolution of western households and its domestic conventions. He states that that “home brought together the meanings of house and of household, of dwelling and of refuge, of ownership and of affection,” defining the home as a private accumulation of themes including safety, property, authority, and intimacy (1986). This suggests that the idea of domestic privacy is not only represented by the walls which divide it from the public world, but also by “everything that was in it and around it, as well as the people.” This showcases that private domestic spaces can be defined according to its use and experience which commonly is presented through the act of living, sleeping, eating and resting (Rybczynski, 1986). As a country whose history includes western religious, vocational and domestic influences from America, Spain and Britain, the Philippines relatively conforms to the domestic practices of public autonomy which carries similar characteristics to the conventional heterotopia in that it denotes intentions of separation, detachment and spatial distinction.

However, besides the Philippines’ western influences on domesticity, Filipino home life, especially within the urban areas, differs in that domesticity coexists with other disciplines showing how home life in Philippines “might be better seen as an arena of both private, intimate activities and as a series of ongoing negotiations and transactions with the outside world” (Mohlman, 1998). The Filipino home therefore becomes a place where not only domestic conventions are practiced but rather, where the collective disciplines of religion, business and public endeavours integrate, suggesting an alternative perspective on the notions of home. A key example where this public and private divide is bridged is through the Filipino home’s relationship with business. Mohlman describes the Filipino household as “commonplace sites for workers outside the home, institutions that cater to customers of clients who do not belong to the home and activities that bridge the home to the larger world” which demonstrates how the home and the public world come together, challenging the conventional notions of detachment as suggested by Mohlman about western

culture (1998). The diverse home-based businesses practiced within the Philippines include sari-sari stores, karinderya (canteens), repair services like upholsteries, beauty parlours and laundry services. This diversity is further demonstrated in my family homes in the Philippines, where the Prieto and Jover households are not only a private space for living and rest but also a space for public business and entrepreneurship which spatially and socially unify the private and public spheres.

Figure 01 is a plan drawing of the Jover household where the conventional partitions that separate the designated activities of living, dining, resting are primarily distinguished according to its suggested use of furnishings. However, through the inclusion of spaces which invite business and public services, the private home is exposed to the public neighbourhood becoming a “commonplace site” where the family business thrives. The east section of the house shows the karinderya, sari-sari store and upholstery workshop which isolate the east bedrooms, and the north section contains home-based student accommodation which is commonly practiced by households close to universities. Daily, the home becomes grounds for public hospitality where the private compound opens as a canteen for local university students or is invaded by furniture to be tailored at the family workshop. These areas of the home are where the coexistence of the public and private spheres are most prominent as it shows how the home-based businesses subtly permeate the private domestic spaces thus challenging the conventionalities of the home.

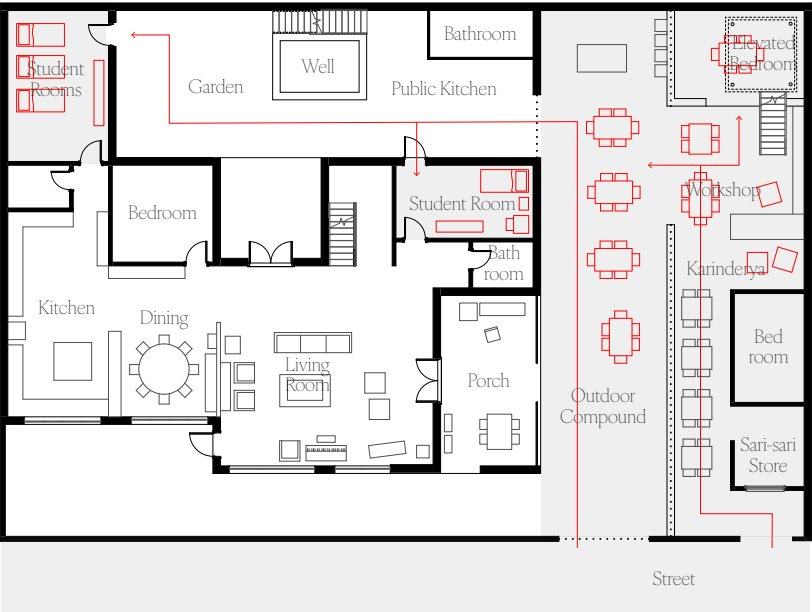


Figure 01: Floor plan of the Jover household highlighting areas of family business open to public in red (Jover, 2025a)

This is reinforced in Figure 02 where the layout of the Prieto household demonstrates the daily invitation for locals to purchase rice, a business established by my grandmother. Business evidently becomes a common motif throughout Filipino households where private and public integration is most apparent.

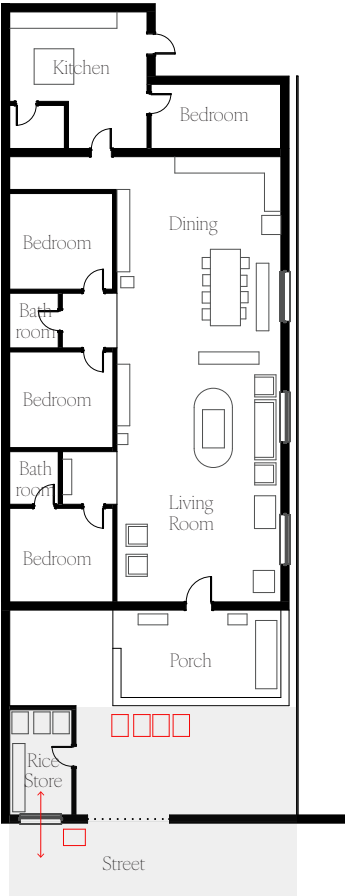


Figure 02: Floor plan of Prieto household highlighting areas of family business open to public in red (Jover, 2025a)

However, one can argue that the degree of integration within Filipino homes still retains a level of separation where, in the core of the home, the dining, living and bedrooms do not always come in direct contact with its vocational zones. As observed through the plans, there remains a level of division between what is completely private and the private which is intentionally exposed. Although Filipino homes highlight Mohlman's theory on Philippine domesticity that suggests its duality of function as both an intimate arena and "a series of ongoing negotiations" between the family and the larger city, the conventional Filipino home still implies degrees of separation between its public and private spaces (1998).

As discovered in this analysis, the Filipino home reflects Foucault's principle that the "heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" due to its natural ability to transform and simultaneously exist as different typologies, portrayed by the home being a store, canteen, public accommodation and workshop, in one. This programmatic complexity demonstrated within the Filipino home invites the home to be viewed through a heterotopic lens, not to reinforce the conventional heterotopic idea of separation but rather to challenge it. In its ability to integrate the public and private, the heterotopia of the home becomes an opportunity to discover the greater ways it can challenge conventional heterotopic characteristics of separation. Through the study of the pre-burial stages of bereavement composed of the wake and processional and its direct relationship with the Filipino home, the permeation of public and private spaces shows how life and death coexist through Philippine heterotopias.

Waking the Home

The heterotopia of the home begins at the first stage of the bereaved which, in Filipino culture, is called *lamay*. The tradition of the wake was established during the Philippine colonial period when Spanish Catholic customs were introduced to Filipino culture and beliefs. However, before Catholicism, Christianity and other religions were introduced, indigenous Philippines already carried strong beliefs regarding life and death, specifically life after death, rooted in Filipino beliefs in Anitism, highlighting how spirits of the departed and ancestors live on even after death (Hislop, 1971). Honouring the dead was therefore a primary pillar in the Filipino culture which caused Filipinos to establish many forms of burial rites including vigils and prayers similar to the wake, to acknowledge the spirit of the deceased (Dilger and Hizon, 2018). Today, these funerary traditions have been evolved into Catholic practices of the contemporary wake.

The Filipino wake which is still being practiced today is often held at the house of the departed and lasts from 3 days to 2 weeks depending on the funerary schedule of the host family. Many Filipinos believe that death is not a sign of the end but rather a transition to new or eternal life (Montesa, 2024). Lamay is therefore a time where the family and public community come together to honour the life of their departed. It becomes a celebration to remember their life on earth as well as their life gained after death. The cultural study of Hope Sabanpan-Yu on *The Practice of Waking the Dead in the Philippines* describes it as a time where "death creates community" which highlights how the act of mourning is translated into a time of social integration within Filipino culture and redefines death in a more optimistic way (2009). Thus, the wake opens an invitation to the outside world to come together which indicates how life becomes prominent in the presence of death exhibiting their interconnection through heterotopias which, in this chapter, is the home.

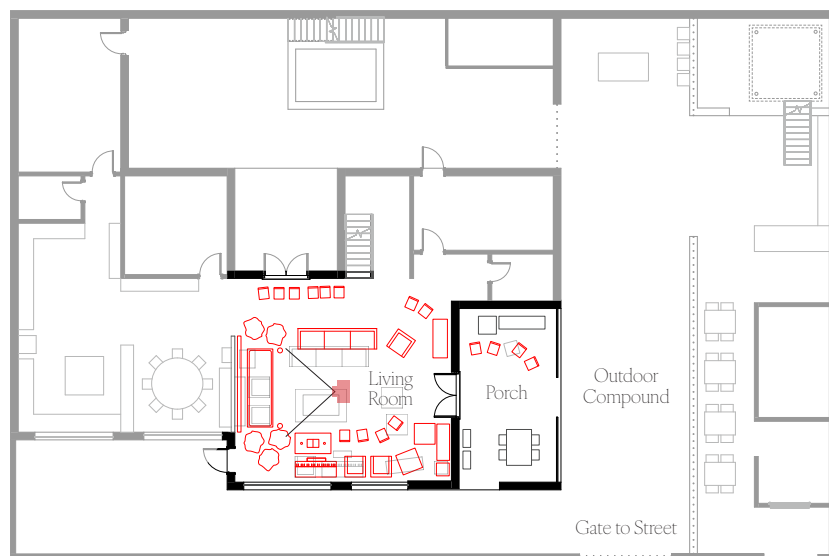


Figure 03a: Floor plan of Jover household with Lorna's wake transformation in red (Jover, 2025b)



Figure 03b (left) + Figure 03c (right): Photographs illustrating the transformation of the living room into Lorna's wake where the sofas are replaced with the coffin (Jover, 2018; Jover 2010)

In 2010, I witnessed the comforting redefinition of my family home in the Philippines. We lost my grandmother, Lorna and soon after hosted her wake in our ancestral home located in the city centre where she started her family and raised her grandchildren including myself. My memory of the house was predominantly held in the living room and the private outdoor compound where I spent most of my time playing Chinese-garter with my classmates and frequently participated in card games in the living room with the student boarders who lived with us. Home was therefore a place exclusively for members who lived there, and a place where my safety was defined by intimate familiarity from the voices I heard at the dining table or the soft touch of the couch I rested on in the living room as my grandmother calls me in for my afternoon naps.

At first glance of the living room during my grandmother's wake, I was not able to naturally recall these memories of my time at home because of how much it changed. The couch became a central coffin with large bouquets of carefully selected white and yellow roses and flickering candles guarding each side of my grandmother. The living space became a space of simultaneous lamentation and more strongly, of social activity where I saw my family members, neighbours and even strangers communed together with comforting embraces and laughter as they recalled their cherished memories of my grandmother. It was then that I felt comforted by being surrounded by a community created by heaven's gain, my grandmother.

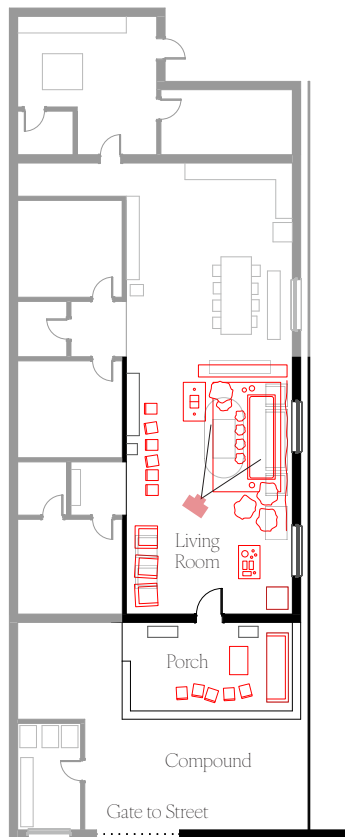


Figure 04a: Floor plan of Prieto household with Toni's wake transformation in red (Jover, 2025b)



Figure 04b (left) and 04c (right): Photographs capturing the transformation of the living room into Toni's wake (Jover, 2024a; Jover, 2015)

In 2015, we mourned the loss of my grandfather on my mother's side, Antonio. Leading up to Lamay, I was present during the time my mother's family home transformed into his wake. This was my second home as a child where I enjoyed the company of my cousins and the smile of my grandfather who contently watched over us as we played with the toys he and his wife spoiled us with whilst amusingly watching Goin' Bulilit, our favourite Filipino kids show on the television. At the time of Lamay, the home furnishings and television made way for his coffin and ornate decorations chosen by Sol, his wife, and the whole living room became an open invitation for the neighbourhood to celebrate his life in death.

The union of life and death is first presented through the wake in that the living space becomes a death space. As presented in Figure 03a and 04a, the wake is placed at the heart of the home which is the central living room. Here, the original footprint of the living space is altered to accommodate the departed's coffin along with candles, flowers, a Bible and seating around it. The central point of the house is translated from a room for living in which holds connotations of domestic privacy, an “arena of the private, intimate activities” as described by Mohlman (1998) into a public space where “one does not wait to be invited to the home of the bereaved but instead, they find their way in to such homes to fulfil a cultural expectation” (Sabanpan-Yu, 2009). This reinforces how through death, represented by the wake, the private space of the living room transforms to accommodate a completely public community which demonstrates how life and death begin to intersect.

Additionally, this integration is emphasised through the change of furnishings within the wake space. Figure 03b-c and 04b-c shows the concealing of the conventional coffee table, television and sofas as it is replaced with numerous individual chairs and a table filled with food and beverages which are furnishings that imply an aim to accommodate for a larger community beyond the family. In the wake, meals are served as gestures of gratitude to the guests who have joined the celebration (Mercurio, 2021). The signs of use and community of my two grandparents' wakes reveal how activity captures this connection between life and death as it exemplifies the social gestures of the public practiced for the departed and highlights Sabanpan-Yu's point that death is a very social experience in the Philippines and “brings into play an open demonstration of sociability, levity and laughter” (2009). The wake is therefore a prominent example of a created heterotopia by the home as it poses as a single real space and simultaneously several spaces which is suggested by it becoming a site for lamentation, dining, social gathering, and celebration. This shows how the integration of the public within private family bereavement becomes socio-spatial evidence to present the intersection of life and death within the Philippine heterotopia of the home.



Figure 04b (left) and 04c (right): Photographs capturing the transformation of the living room into Toni's wake (Jover, 2024a; Jover, 2015)

The Walk of Death to Life

The gate is what separates our private family compound from the public district streets. On the seventh day of my grandmother's wake, a greater mass of people were present at the house, a few of which had already visited every day since Lamay began. It was the day of the acompañar; the processional. The coffin of my grandmother was carried by the pallbearers into the hearse. The house gate was opened, revealing the coffin that was being transported out into the hearse which was patiently parked on the street. As everyone followed the coffin, a crowd behind the hearse was formed with their prayer books and umbrellas opened to protect them from the sun as they anticipate the processional to St. Clements, the church where the misa, my grandmother's funeral service, was held. Once everything was set in place, my grandfather softly recited Bible scriptures as the hearse closed and the processional commenced.

My grandfather was the frontliner of the processional along with the funeral director and many shared in the mourning of our family and respectfully began walking with us. This reflected the gesture of acompañar which means "to accompany" as they joined us in this walk from death to life for my grandmother. As the streets filled with a cheerful hymn to celebrate her life, I noticed more people joining the processional as to suggest a united public front all the way to the grand doors of the church. The processional was evidently the extension of the wake, and considerably an enlarged gesture of honour where our intimate home not only opened the doors for a public internal gathering but additionally opened it further into an urban walk of honour.



Figure 05: View from compound of the Jover home as mapped in figure 06 showing the open gates as the processional of Lorna begins (Jover, 2010)

The next stage is the processional where the ritual of the wake moves into the street. What is concealed in the home, as presented in figure 05 of Lorna's processional, is exposed to the wider community. In Philippines, it is not unusual that crowds follow processionals due to their practices of honour since precolonial times. The processional is a way to demonstrate the belief of Filipinos that the departed is spiritually transitioning from death to life. The walk is therefore a metaphor for the transition of the soul to eternity. This reinforces the heterotopic home extensively flowing into the public sphere, infiltrating into the everyday activities of its dwellers and displays the overlap of the public and private to show how life and death unify. Figure 06 and 07 shows the connection of the home, the compound and the street as the wake visitors embark on the processional towards the church through local roads. This shows how the affairs within the home, though already becoming public through the wake, further integrates itself into the public city to socially imply the connection between death with everyday life through space.

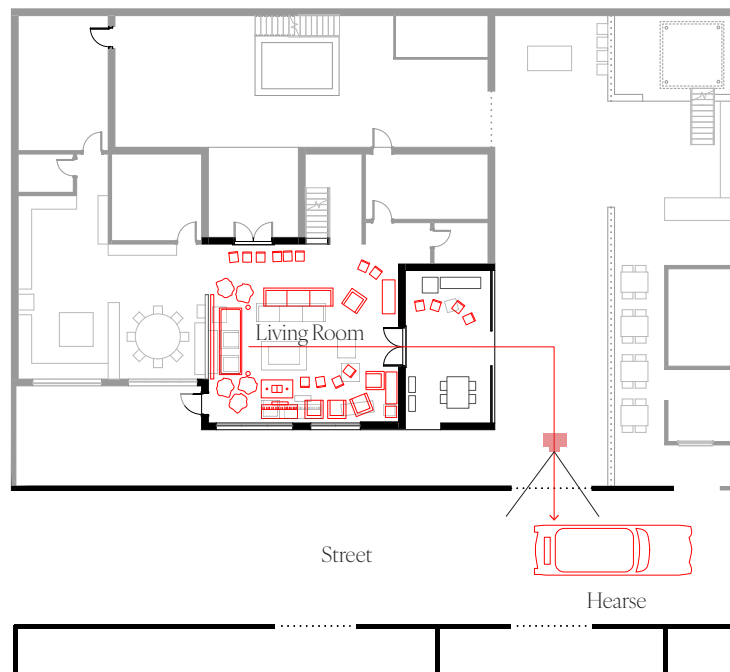


Figure 06: Floor Plan drawing to show the transition of the coffin from the wake to the hearse, exposed into the public streets (Jover, 2025c)



Figure 07: Plan drawing of the city narrating public integration during the processional journey from the Jover home to St. Celements church for the funeral service (Jover, 2025d)

The processional is an honourable gesture that is practiced throughout the whole of Philippines. In addition to my personal experience in this rite, Manila North Cemetery is another example which further highlights the processional's role in the everyday life of city locals. According to the *Home to Manila's Poorest People* documentary which focuses on the everyday experiences of the users of Manila North Cemetery, the narrator states that “funeral processions are a daily occurrence in Manila North Cemetery” (Behram, 2023). As a shared western event which is conventionally perceived as detached from the everyday experiences due to its connection with death, the fact that it is identified as “daily,” challenges the conventions of detachment as it suggests its normalcy and mundane relationship with everyday life in the Philippines which gives an indication of the largeness of Manila North Cemetery and its natural ability to integrate with everyday city users. Manila North Cemetery provides an additional perspective to how the processional experience occurs through the documentary still in figure 08 which presents the quantity of locals that take part in these traditions and its relationship to its surroundings. The documentary captures how death, represented through the hearse, is closely encompassed by life, represented by the people walking; the homes in parallel with the processional; and the tricycles, an everyday mode of transport for Filipinos, traversing besides it. In death's apparent integration to everyday life around it suggested by the documentary's narration of the processionals, the relationship between life and death is further fortified.

Beyond the processionals of Manila North Cemetery, the cemetery itself provides opportunities for analysis on the intersection of life and death. The wake, service and processional are therefore points of entrance to the cemetery along with the discovery of its users which will be explored in the next chapters.



Figure 08: Still from *Home to Manila's Poorest People* documentary showing daily funeral processions (Behram, 2023)

Chapter Two

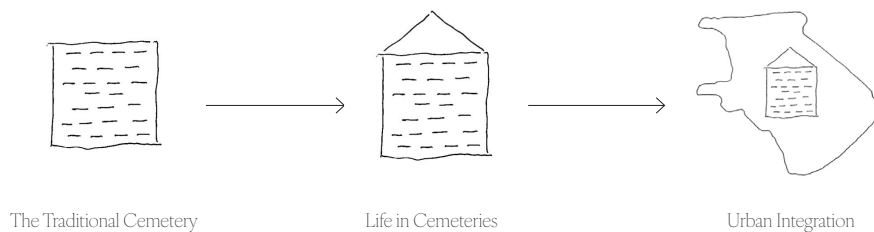
The Heart of the City



The Traditional Cemetery

The conventional notion of the heterotopic cemetery reflects how death is perceived in western culture. The idea of death and the perception of the cemetery therefore have a direct correlation. According to Foucault's historical study on the evolution of cemeteries, there had been an evident shift through time on the views of the cemetery. In the 1700s, cemeteries were considered "the sacred and immortal heart of the city" (1984). This presents cemeteries as pious spaces of importance within the city, usually located adjacent to the church. It carries eternal connotations with the idea that the dead are eternally remembered through the cemetery therefore presenting itself as an essential timeless institution to society providing their need for personal consolation in loss. Moreover, through the description as the "heart", cemeteries were regarded as valuable with its central urban role. The connection of cemeteries to society therefore stood as a metaphor to characterise cemeteries as a type of lifeline beyond death for the living. One of the roots of this identity in the 18th century was from the Christian beliefs of western European cultures where people believed in the immortality of the soul (Aston, 2003). In those days, the church had a strong institutional presence and as a result, death was perceived through the lens of religion being sacred, revered and customary (Foucault, 1984).

However, since the 19th century, Foucault describes a shift in the concept of death wherein people paid "more attention to the dead body" over the soul which drew focus on the corporal side of death concerning sanitation and decay which provided a more repulsive view on death (1984). This was momentous for the heterotopia of the cemetery as cemeteries transitioned from sacred to unsanitary which resulted in their displacement to the edges of urban areas conveying its irrelevance and detachment from the city. With this observation, the increase of secularism in western culture from the 19th century was a possible influence which caused people to separate religion and daily existence and redirect their views to what is tangible over what is perceived by faith (Keddie, 2003). The history of cemeteries therefore reinforces the heterotopic identity suggested by Foucault's second principle in that as a society's history unfolds, "the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another" (1984). Not only is this principle applicable to western cemeteries but also to cemeteries of the Philippines. However, its evolution throughout history is shown in reserve to western evolutions presenting its shift from detached to centralised rather than centralised to detached suggested in western history. This contrast in function between Philippine and western cemeteries is what indicates how Philippine heterotopias signify the present and on-going union of life and death.



The spatial epitome of death is *the cemetery*. This is the next and commonly, most spatially distinguished stage of the bereaved journey regardless of origin. Due to the cemetery's direct connection to death which conventionally is identified as taboo suggested by Foucault's historical research classifying death as an "illness," the cemetery is resultantly defined as a heterotopia, a place of otherness (1984). This is shown through its disconnection from the city, displaced to the urban outskirts affecting its perception by users as a death space not associated with everyday life. This disconnect is not only presented within western cemeteries but also suggested through most precolonial burial practices of indigenous Philippines. However, *Manila North Cemetery* is the key case study where these conventions are challenged. Out of necessity and poverty, Filipino rural migrants have transformed Manila North Cemetery into an informal dwelling place where an entire way of life has flourished in the presence of death. Through the testimonies of workers and dwellers of Manila North Cemetery, the cemetery is spatially redefined as one which becomes more integrated to the everyday urban life both as its own micro-city and a place which serves as *the heart of the city*.

Indigenous Filipinos believed in afterlife where, as one dies, they become an “anito”, meaning “ancestral spirit,” respected among the living (Mercurio, 2021). Like the forgotten western 18th century belief, the focus of death in Filipino culture has therefore always been around the intangible soul of the body over the western 19th century mindset of physical decay and decomposition. During the indigenous period, natives prioritised their divine connection to the spirit world and consequently established burial sites and rites with intention to ensure the departed’s spirit is connected to their spiritual ancestors rather than the living (NAFD, 2022). The Hanging Coffins of Sagada which were pioneered by the Kankanaey people or more widely identified as the Igorots is a prime example which captures the traditional perception of the Philippine cemetery. Although under different belief contexts, the historic burial practices within precolonial Philippines spatially reinforce the modern perception of western cemeteries of intentional urban detachment. Filipino culture differs in that separation from the living was motivated by the focus on the connection of the dead to the spiritual realm whereas in western culture, separation was a result of the loss of religion and focus on scientific reason.

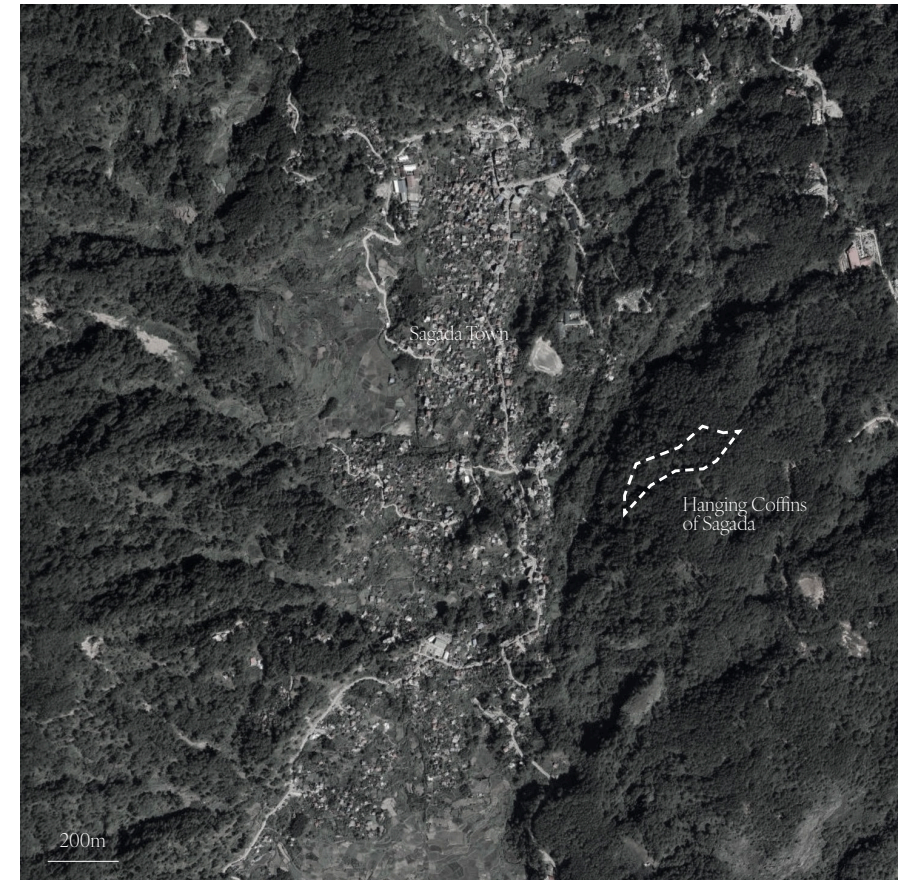


Figure 09: Location plan showing the spatial relationship between the town and the Hanging Coffins of Sagada (Google Maps, 2025a)



Figure 10: Images of the Hanging Coffins of Sagada connected to burial elements including a Cross and suspended death chair (Collett, 2019)

In Barretto's research on burial practices of indigenous Philippines, she describes that the Igorots performed their burials in the outskirts of town which implies this heterotopic notion of detachment (2000). Figure 09, the Hanging Coffins' aerial plan, spatially reinforces Barretto's research as it portrays how the hanging burial site of the Igorots were placed closer to uninhabited mountainous lands rather than to the town. This highlights the priorities of the Igorots as they focused on the connection between the dead and the spiritual ancestors rather than the connection between the dead and living. During their burial process, an indigenous wake was first held, and natives paid respects whilst the deceased rested on a wooden death chair, smoked to prevent rotting and covered with a blanket (Dilger and Hizon, 2018). Then, they buried their general population by stacking coffins on top of another in limestone caves, enclosed from the outside world. The hanging coffins were separately dedicated for the tribal elders where the height of the coffin is influenced by their merit and status in life (NAFD, 2022). The grandeur of the hanging coffins in figure 10 further encompasses the connection of the dead to the heavens, completely inaccessible on the cliff face. Despite suggestions of occupation from the suspended wooden chairs, all components suspended are solely representative of the deceased as a suggestive offering to the spirits. There is evidently no suggested intervention between the living, whether people or animals, and the dead which exemplifies their intention for placing their cemetery outside, in a place where they cannot be disturbed. This approach was not only practiced by the Igorots but also other tribes including Negritos who practiced mountain burials, Manobos who set the dead in high places far from inhabitation, Bataks who buried their dead in the sand near bodies of water and the Badjaos who utilised other islands away from habitation (Barretto, 2000).

Yet, besides the inevitable separation suggested through the historical burial practices of Philippines, what is important to uncover is its evolution. Unlike western culture, Philippine cemeteries today are now placed as the heart of the city, restoring a forgotten identity as the city's "immortal heart." The convention of disconnection from the living suggested by modern western cemeteries are therefore challenged by the Philippine cemetery, specifically Manila North Cemetery, evident through its physical engagement with the city and its function as its own informal settlement. This proposes a reevaluation of the cemetery's place in the urban environment. Through the way life and death work together, influenced by socio-economic factors, Manila North Cemetery displays how heterotopias play a beneficial role in the central city and positively impact the city's everyday users.

Life in Cemeteries

In Manila North Cemetery, over 6000 dwellers have created a community of informal settlements resting within the crevices of mausoleums and uninhabited tomb spaces. These dwellers established new life in the cemeteries out of necessity, due to poverty which was prevalent in the rural areas of Philippines. The city was their opportunity to move past financial hardships and find better opportunities for work and lifestyle (Billing, 2018). This created cemeterial community has evolved the previously traditional death space of Manila North Cemetery into an unbounded place for both the dead and the living. The dwellers embody the civil balance between contrasting states, life and death, which imply their mutual harmony.

Manila North Cemetery is the largest cemetery in Philippines which opened in 1904 (Dean, 2017). It is encircled by the busy, populated urban scape of the capital city, Manila. Figure 11, Manila North Cemetery's aerial plan, shows the prominence of the cemetery located directly in the city which contrasts the secluded indigenous hanging coffins of Sagada. The coming together of life and death is therefore firstly demonstrated by the cemetery's placement which foreshadows an inevitable relationship between the city's users, the living cemetery dwellers, and the buried departed. Behram's documentary captures the inside life of several interviewed dwellers to provide insight in their everyday cemetery life. Despite economic hardships, their lifestyle illuminates how the cemetery communities pose to challenge the conventional notions of the displaced cemetery.



Figure 11: Location plan showing the spatial relationship between Manila North Cemetery and the rest of the city (Google Maps, 2025b)

Christian Rick G. Riniola is a local tricycle driver, coffin bearer and resident of the Manila North Cemetery since birth. He states that

“bawal daw po tumira dito, ang nakatira daw po dito puro patay, hindi daw po puro buhay,”

(Behram, 2023) which refers to the perception of the cemetery by the city locals who say, “It’s not allowed to live here, the dead are the ones who live here, not the living.” Christian’s description of the public’s view on life in the cemeteries pose as a sociolinguistic demonstration of how Filipinos acknowledge the dead and their “living” spaces. The word “nakatira,” meaning “to live” or “reside” denotes the act of occupying space through activities of life which often are associated with and applied by the living. This is then juxtaposed with “puro patay” meaning “all dead” which forms an adverse pair between the living and the dead. This contrasting connection through language plays on the idea that the dead therefore “live” recalling the reverence of Filipinos towards the life gained by the soul in death. Additionally, the act of the dead “living” depicts the cemetery as a residential space which conventionally is associated with the idea of the private everyday home. The Filipino language, as exemplified by Christian, therefore, becomes a social tool to demonstrate how in Filipino culture, the cemetery carries a different function being a residential space for the dead and living, demonstrating life and death’s physical coexistence.

Rosel Delos Reyes-Cataneda, officer in charge of Manila North Cemetery reinforces this unity between life and death through language as she describes that

“natutulog sila sa ibabaw ng nitso, kumakain sila sa ibabaw ng nitso, wala silang sariling palikuran, wala silang banyo,”

(Behram, 2023) translated as “they sleep on top of the tomb, they eat on top of the tomb, they don’t have their own toilet, they don’t have a bathroom.” The verbs “natutulog” meaning “sleep” and “kumakain” meaning “eat” are activities that normally refer to everyday domestic acts of living. This is then juxtaposed with “sa ibabaw ng nitso” meaning “on top of the tomb” which creates this divergence between two opposing factors representing both life through “sleep” and “eat” and dead through “tomb.” As proposed by Christian, Rosel exemplifies the range of life activities present within a death space which accentuates how the cemetery becomes a residential space that merges the acts of living with death. This cemeterial lifestyle is reinforced in figure 12 and 13 where Manila North Cemetery residents clearly portray how they live in and around tombs, using them as dining tables for eating and beds for resting (Dean, 2017). The images blur the boundaries between life and death as it displays a lack of spatial definition between the cemetery and the home. The conventional walls, windows, furnishings which define domestic spaces are not typically presented because of the dweller’s socio-economic status in that they are

pressed to reside long-term in unconventional spaces like the cemetery. The lack of spatial definition inevitably conveys how domestic acts such as sleeping, eating and resting, as mentioned by Rosel, are therefore directly integrated within death spaces like tombs emphasising how the cemetery is a shared domesticised space where all that is for the dead is also for the living.



Figure 12: Manila North Cemetery family dwellers dining and resting on top of the tombs (Dean, 2017)



Figure 13: Manila North Cemetery living dweller watching a soap opera in a mausoleum where she lives with her family (Dean, 2017)

Urban Integration

Beyond the cemetery's own economy, the living dwellers also contribute to the wider city as they practice their entrepreneurial business services which assists the daily life of city locals. This indicates the strong relationship between the city's regular activities and the cemetery's social act as an essential urban lifeline.

Jennifer Poreskal is another resident of the cemetery who has established her own cemetery-based floral business. She spends most of her time making floral arrangements and caters for different occasions. Through her business, the inside burial allotment where she conducts her floral duties is symbolically transported through her bouquets that venture out for different city events. She says

“gumagawa kami ng mga wedding, debut, catering, kahit ano. Yan ang aming pinakakakitaan sa pang araw araw ng buhay,”

(Behram, 2023) meaning “we do weddings, debuts, catering, anything. That is how we make a living.” The verb “gumagawa” meaning “to do” shows that the role Jennifer takes as a cemetery resident focuses on servitude. The description of services which she provides include wedding, debut, birthdays and catering which are occasions that are associated with life and celebration that occur arguably everyday across families, communities and nations. Its normalcy in society therefore exaggerates the point that through business, life and death collide and flourish to aid the wider city. Death is represented by the cemetery dwellers and is symbolically imprinted through their services which are spread out for the wider urban community. Additionally, this service is interchangeable in that cemetery dwellers serve the visitors who come into the cemetery to visit their departed. Another cemetery resident states that every time people visit, they bring candles and flowers. The candles and flowers are often bought from vendors of the cemetery, like Jennifer, who make a living out of selling funeral items which are used to bring honour to the departed (Behram, 2023). This emphasises the connection between the city and cemetery where services are not only for those outside the city, but for all the visitors who enter the cemetery too.

Cemetery businesses like Jennifer's floral shop and Christian's tricycle service are two of many services which are spread across Manila North Cemetery. Vocational practices of living cemetery dwellers in Manila North Cemetery range from transportation drivers who navigate around city locals; tomb engravers who create ornate plaques for burials; gaming quarters where cemetery and city locals entertain themselves with gambling as shown in figure 14; and sari-sari store owners who provide the public food, drinks and daily necessities like cleaning supplies as shown in figure 15 and 16 where such stores that sell living essentials are directly embedded between tombs (Behram, 2023; Dean, 2017). Evidently, the abundant services of the cemetery living dwellers reinforce the cemetery's connection to life in the city which breaks away from the notion that the cemetery is a dangerous place forced to be separated from everyday life.



Figure 14: Gambling Nights at Manila North Cemetery (Dean, 2017)



Figure 15: Sari-sari Store at Manila North Cemetery built above a tomb where dwellers sell daily essentials, food and candles usually bought by other residents and visitors (Dean, 2017)

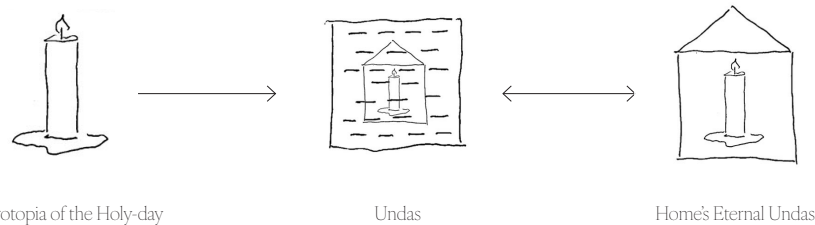


Figure 16: Young dwellers transporting water through Manila North Cemetery streets. The background also captures daily life created in the cemetery and sari-sari stores besides tombs (Dean, 2017)

Chapter Three

An Eternal Undas





The final stage of the bereaved is an eternal act. Caught between temporality and eternity, *Undas*, meaning ‘honour,’ is both an annual celebration and daily practice of honouring the departed which is a tradition shared amongst cultures but most prominent in the everyday Filipino lifestyle which presents a greater level of integration between the living and the dead. Amidst the conveyed conventionalities of this celebration where its annual routine can be considered a disruption to mundane living as suggested by Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene in *Heterotopia and the City* regarding *Architecture of the Holiday*, we witness a hopeful sense of eternity suggested through the evolution of this custom (2015). This is exemplified by the visitors of Manila North Cemetery and further emphasised through the spatial connotations of the family home altars where the departed are eternally honoured, remembered and celebrated. These gestures bring the bereavement journey back to the home and demonstrates the blurring between life and death where the cemetery becomes an extension of the home, and where the home becomes an extension of the cemetery.

Heterotopia of the Holy-day

The journey of the bereaved does not end in the mournful moment of burial, rather, it continues eternally through the devoted acts of honour for the dead motivated by *Undas*. This is a celebration which occurs every 1st-2nd of November. During this time, families visit their dead in the cemetery, sharing food, songs, prayers and stories of their departed loved ones as a form of honour (Behram, 2023). This tradition is also known as All Soul’s Day, a catholic custom introduced in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period which has been adopted and adapted by the Filipino people. Although it roots from western culture, it was not arbitrary for the Filipino people to apply such customs because precolonial Philippines carried similar beliefs of afterlife and respect for the dead. It was therefore a moment in colonial history where the Philippines evolved their existing and well-practiced traditions of honouring the dead under the lens of Catholicism. Outside of the Philippines, similar traditions are also practiced across the world including Dia de Los Muertos, “The day of the Dead” in Mexico.

The annual event of Undas can be viewed through the concept of heterotopia as an instrument to discover the ways in which this festival challenges the notions of “other” and separation. The third and final principle of Foucault’s theory of heterotopia that will be investigated circles around the heterotopia of time. Foucault states that “the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (1984). The idea of “absolute break” suggests an interruption from the regularity of time. When referred to in the context of space, one can interpret this “absolute break” as a moment of discontinuity within space pioneered by an event which breaks the normal perceptions of the same space. It can also be viewed as a space where time exists in different or multiple ways based off the function of the space. Foucault uses the example of the cemetery as a break in traditional time which is implied by the “quasi-eternal,” meaning “almost-eternal” attribute of cemeterial space (1984). This is because the cemetery presents the dead in a space which implies their eternal presence even though, in reality, they are wasting away in the ground. It is eternal in a memorial and spiritual sense, but temporal in the corporal sense of decay.

Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene responds to the time principle of Foucault through the *Architecture of the Holiday* where they present the holiday as a heterotopic concept because it reinforces the suggested break in traditional time (2015). Holiday, as defined by De Cauter and Dehaene, is the English word that “has kept this reference to the ‘holy’ origin of free time, rest and repose” (2015) which reinforces Foucault’s description of the cemetery as a break in time that suggests discontinuity. Holidays are perceived as a break from the normalcy of everyday life as it is presented as a moment where time seemingly temporarily stops implying its polarity from the mundane. This is emphasised by De Cauter and Dehaene who state “holidays, being extraordinary as opposed to the mundane, ordinary character of the everyday, are

the permanent markers of discontinuous moments on the calendar, pacing the continuous flow of everyday” (2015).

One can argue that Undas conforms to the heterotopia of the holiday as in the Philippines, November 1st-2nd are dedicated days where institutions stop their everyday routines to commemorate their departed. This is a clear break in time as routines are formally set aside to accommodate this honourable celebration which reinforces De Cauter and Dehaene’s argument that holidays are “discontinuous moments” that are “opposed to the mundane, ordinary character of the everyday” (2015). However, Undas and the Filipino post-burial traditions, also challenge this notion of discontinuity through the way space is used and redefined in Manila North Cemetery as well as in my personal journey of bereavement. By exploring the experiences of the visitors which go to Manila North Cemetery to celebrate their departed, the heterotopia of the holiday, or in this context, holy-day contrastingly connects the living to the dead. This act of Undas demonstrates the direct correlation of the private family home to the public family grave which spatially expresses the unity between life and death through another private and public pair: the home and the cemetery.

Undas

During Undas, people flood the streets of Manila North Cemetery bearing food, drink, candles and flowers for their departed to show them that they are not alone or forgotten (Behram, 2023). Through this gesture, it metaphorically shows how families bring their home and home activities into the cemetery. Behram’s documentary captures several scenes of families who spend the night with their departed in family tombs which present how families bring the comfortable and familiar setting of the home into the tombs of their departed (2023).

Figure 17 captures a still through a family tomb where members of family have come together to feast, play and spend time with their departed. On the right, the dining table filled with empty plates, food and drinks placed within the tomb shows how domestic activities are translated into the cemetery spaces during Undas. This portrays how the integration of life through the cemetery visitors communes with death during a holiday which conventionally embodies discontinuity through its heterotopic identities. This is further emphasised by the quantity of living that are within the tombs which suggests the strong connection of the cemetery to the outside world, where visitors, even children, consider the cemetery as a safe space as they commune to honour their departed. The cemetery is therefore no longer perceived as an “illness” but rather a sacred communal space, highlighted on holy days like Undas.

Additionally, this observation of space is reinforced in figure 18 which presents the gateway of the family tomb from the cemetery’s streets. The threshold created by its four walls, a main door, a series of windows with tranquil curtains and pillows resting on the tombstones in the background recreate the dimensions and qualities of a home within the cemetery illustrating how the home for the dead simultaneously becomes a home for their external families. The domestic doormats with household slippers left by the entrance of the tomb further mirror the tomb’s home-like nature during family visitation as the leaving of shoes by the door are common gestures of domestic respect in Philippine culture. In figure 19, the tomb follows the language of domesticity where another family inhabits the departed’s living room playing games and socialising. The space also contains stairs, as though to imply another room above to house the departed and during Undas, the living. The tombs present a transformation into a home leaving a blurring between what is for the departed and what is for the family visitors.

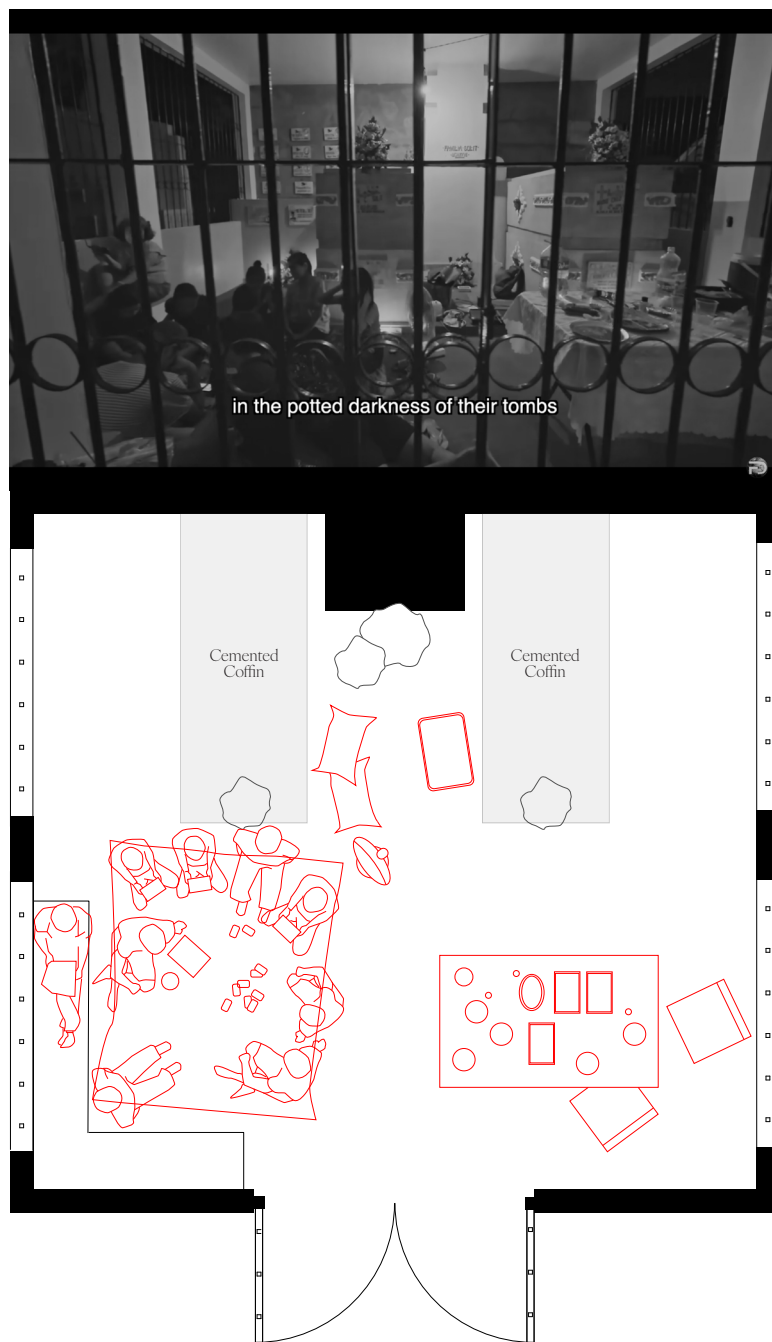


Figure 17: Still Image of gathering in the family tomb during Undas at Manila North Cemetery with my observational plan illustration on the domestic qualities of the tomb outlined in red (Behram, 2023; Jover, 2025e)



Figure 18: Image still of family gathering in tomb during Undas at Manila North Cemetery with my observational plan illustration on the domestic qualities of the tomb outlined in red (Behram, 2023; Jover, 2025e)

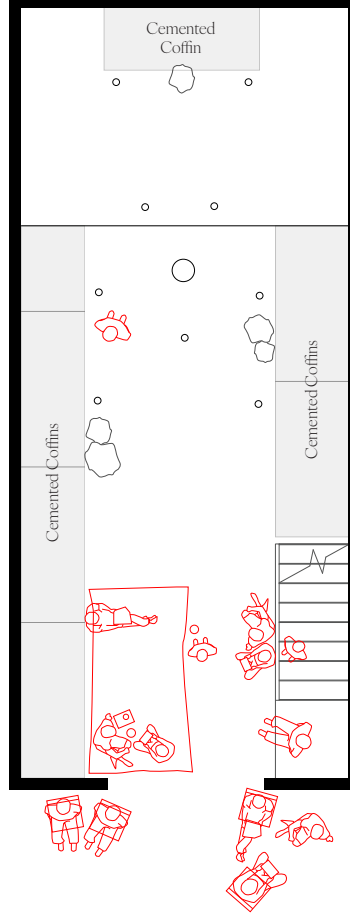


Figure 19: Still image of family gathering in their tomb during Undas at Manila North Cemetery with my observational plan illustration on the domestic qualities of the tomb outlined in red (Behram, 2023; Jover, 2025e)

Even external tombs, demonstrated in figure 20, which are not covered by four walls reflect the same nature of domesticity highlighting the fact that the social activity of the space such as the family eating, socialising and laughing together besides their departed also play a large role in how such conventionally cemeterial spaces are eternally defined. Rosel Delos Reyes-Cataneda states that this practice is not only applied during Undas but also during Christmas, birthdays, and regular days which reveals the frequency of this practice beyond the conventional holiday where visitors leave their regular homes to gather in their home outside of home, the cemetery (Behram, 2023). Through the domestic translation in these tombs, regardless of season or occasion, the intimate connection between life and death is clearly executed.

This mirrors the spatial representation of the permanent cemetery dwellers shown in chapter two where the lack of spatial definition which implied an integration of life and death was created due to factors like poverty which one would hope is a transitory hardship. The cemetery dwellers integrated everyday life in death spaces through their domestic acts on tombs caused by lack of space and furnishings. Contrastingly, the temporary cemetery visitors show how life and death coexist in how they translate their external domestic lifestyle into their family tombs, transforming mausoleums of four walls, windows and a roof, much like a home, into an eternal place of domestic gathering with the departed. Despite the suggested economic inequality, both show ways in which the home merges into the cemetery. However, what is depicted by the visitors suggests one that is more intentional and eternal, motivated by honour.



Figure 20: Family gathering in a more spatially exposed tomb during Undas at Manila North Cemetery (Behram, 2023)

Home's Eternal Undas

Amidst the losses experienced in my family, the altar which illuminates the presence and memory of our departed that peacefully rests in our home is another form of honour that eternalises the comfort that is learnt with loss. Our home altars that are alive to this day became a part of my life growing up. As a child, I would tirelessly walk down beautiful images rested on the walls of the staircase of my grandmother, Tia who I had only spent four years of my life with before she passed away. She was placed in an ornate frame besides our ancestors including her beloved parents and the shelf located just above the stair landing had candles with pools of wax to recall every time it had been set alight in their honour.

When I went back home to the Philippines in 2024, I had noticed another altar added in our home, placed in the living room by the timber partition which separated it from the dining space. My aunty Catherine passed away in 2021 however because of lock down, we were never able to go to the Philippines to see her. It was not until 2024 that I saw her smiling on a canvas which laid beside two candles, biblical scriptures, flowers daily cultivated by my little cousin, and a small bowl of her favourite chocolate that my uncle places on her table every day to show her that he still remembers. Every morning for the month I was there, I was welcomed to the living room with the memory of her.

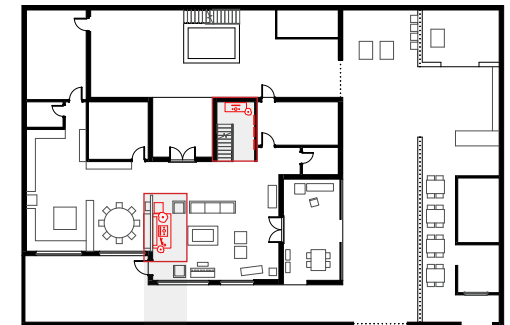


Figure 21: Floor plan of Jover household showing location of the home altars (Jover, 2025f)



Figure 22: The home altar of Aunty Cathy in the Jover household located as a central piece in the living space (Jover, 2024b)

Our family altars were not limited to the Philippines but extended to our home in the UK where my grandfather spent most of his later life after losing his wife, Lorna. The altar my family and I made for my grandfather, Filemon who passed away in 2020 composed of all the items that reminded us of him. His scent, his favourite watch, and contagious smile alongside a figure of the cross. His altar rests in his bedroom which we daily visit as we care for his favourite plants and the candles which remains aflame throughout the day.



Figure 23: The home altar of Filemon in the UK (Jover, 2025g)

Honouring the dead extends for a lifetime (Mercurio, 2021). Besides the eternal honour spatially presented by visitors of Undas, another physical manifestation of this belief is through the home altars dedicated to the departed. The Filipino home altar is also connected to Spanish Catholic customs, specifically applied during All Soul's Day. However, for most Filipinos, this is a tradition that is practiced every day and is therefore viewed as an eternal Undas that is reverently practiced in the Filipino home. They are symbolic of how the home poses as an extension of the cemetery, where the family return their departed to their first place of rest, their home. This gesture further breaks the "discontinuity" suggested by the concept of the holiday that Undas constitutes to and portrays the harmony of life and death on the time scale of eternity.

The altar of Cathy follows the composition of traditional Filipino home altars. Often, as shown in figure 22, this includes a youthful photo of the memorialised departed; candles which are used to represent their life, soul and presence; religious ornaments which vary between scriptures and images; and personal items such as their favourite food or their favourite scent presented in figure 22 and in figure 23, the home altar of my grandfather, Filemon in our UK home. Altars are suggestively placed in areas of the home which are most lived in such as the living room or a bedroom which demonstrate the social desire for these altars to be closely integrated in the everyday routine and lifestyle of Filipino families. Although these altars presented in the ordinary spaces of the home can imply a sense of interruption in space as described by De Cauter and Dehaene who argues "heterotopias interrupt the continuity of space," it does not conform to the connotations of discontinuity but rather presents cohesion with the everyday because of its eternal act of embedding into everyday space, becoming an element which is familiar rather than "other." The heterotopia of the altar further welcomes the unity of death with life through space and personal interaction, where the memory of the lost are eternalised within the intimacy of the home and becomes routinely to the family's lifestyle.

Postlude

The Harmonies of
Life and Death

through Heterotopias

In the presence of colonial influence and urban evolution, what is highlighted in Filipino culture is that their reverence towards life and death remains constant through the unique practices and lifestyle rooted in their beliefs towards death and devotion to honouring the dead. Since precolonial Philippines, natives established a deep commitment to burial rites including those who buried near coasts, on uninhabited islands or suspended off cliffs to be closer to their spiritual ancestors like the Igorots (Barretto, 2000). However, in some ways, this reflected the western conventions discovered by Foucault where death spaces are perceived as heterotopias that carry notions of urban separation in its function, spatial representation and timescale (1984). In the context of life and death, the cemetery and all bereavement spaces fell under this conventional heterotopic identity.

By discovering how life and death heterotopias are presented in the Philippines, the western views towards death which imply urban detachment are challenged through the harmonious intersection between the home, the cemetery and city which have become the key architectural stakeholders of this thesis. Through the socio-spatial analysis conducted on Manila North Cemetery and the auto-ethnographic evaluation of my bereavement experiences, it is evident that the Filipino people continue to preserve, protect and promote the traditional practices on honouring the dead to illuminate the union of life and death through space (Mercurio, 2021). In loss, the rites of transition of **lamay** and the **acompañar**, uncovers the heterotopia of the home and its distinct transformation into the wake and processional which shows the integration of life and death through the overlap of the private and public spheres. Additionally, the Philippine **cemetery** breaks the heterotopic notions of “illness,” presented by Foucault (1984) as it becomes an essential urban lifeline at the heart of the city highlighted through the testimonies of Manila North Cemetery dwellers, employees and visitors. Finally, through **Undas**, the harmonies of life and death are eternalised as we discover how the cemetery becomes an extension of the home where families establish home-like tombs to dwell with their departed, and how the home becomes an extension of cemetery where families bring their departed to their homes through the altar integrating the departed in their everyday life spaces.

“Nakaugalian na nating Pilipino yan. Na ang buhay ay alalahanin, pati ang patay kailangan alalahanin yan. Habang buhay natin yan” (Behram, 2023).

“It’s ingrained in our culture as Filipinos. We care about the living, and we need to also care about our dead. This is for the rest of our lives.”

The heterotopia of the home and cemetery and its eternal connection through Philippine bereavement practices are what solidifies the harmonies of life and death. In their union, the notion of the heterotopia shifts from what is conventionally “other” to one that is more cohesive with everyday life and the city. It poses as a tool to highlight the urban necessity of unfamiliar and often disconnected spaces, like the cemetery and shines a new identity on spaces which are more mundane and often

overlooked for its familiarity, like the home. Both of which have been presented as heterotopias. Foucault’s final principle of heterotopia states that “their role is to create a space that is another, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled” (1984). As discovered in this research, the Philippine heterotopia of the home and cemetery become interchangeable spaces that become “another,” or more importantly, **one another** through Undas. In its heterotopic identity, the home and cemetery break the conventional notion of detachment by illuminating an eternal union between juxtaposing realities, life and death which are comparable to Foucault’s contrasting descriptions of “perfect, meticulous, well arranged” and “messy, ill constructed and jumbled.”

Such heterotopias are therefore an essential piece that compliments and completes the framework of the urban environment. They are essential in navigating through the notions of death, life and bereavement, and enables society to gain an alternative, non-westernised, perspective on heterotopias that hold a harmonious place in the city. In the harmonies of life and death, the heterotopia returns to its institutional position in the everyday city and is eternalised in the shape of architectural inventions, the home and cemetery. Thus, in all the discovered forms that the bereaved find peace in loss, the city finds peace with its heterotopias.

*“Their role is to create
a ^{cemetery}space ^{home}that is ^{home}another,
another real space, as
perfect, as meticulous, as well
arranged as ours is messy, ill
constructed and jumbled.”*

(Foucault, 1984)

Lamay
The Wake

Acompañar
The Processional

Misa
The Church Service

Sementeryo
The Cemetery

Undas: Pagbisita
Honour through Visitation

Undas
Honour through Home Altars



Figure 24: The Journey of the Bereaved

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live,

even though they die. John 11:25.

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List of Illustrations

All figures are by the author unless stated / All figures by the author are referenced as (Jover, Year)

Figure 01 + 02: Jover, M. (2025a). *Floor Plan Diagrams of My Family Home and Business Zones: Jover Household and Prieto Household*. [Illustration].

Figure 03a + 04a: Jover, M. (2025b). *Floor Plan Diagrams of My Family Home During Lamay: Jover Household and Prieto Household*. [Illustration].

Figure 03b: Jover, M. (2018). *Living Room of the Jover Household*. [Photograph].

Figure 03c, 05: Jover, M. (2010). *Lorna Jover's Wake, Processional, Church Service and Burial*. [Photograph].

Figure 04b: Jover, M. (2024a). *Living Room of the Prieto Household*. [Photograph].

Figure 04c: Jover, M. (2015). *Antonio (Toni) Prieto's Wake*. [Photograph].

Figure 06: Jover, M. (2025c). *Floor Plan Diagram of the Jover Household During the Processional*. [Illustration].

Figure 07: Jover, M. (2025d). *Illustration Mapping of Lorna Jover's Processional Walk in Iloilo City, Philippines*. [Illustration].

Figure 08, 17-20: Behram, O. (2023). *Home to Manila's Poorest People / Stories from the Hidden Worlds: Philippines / Free Documentary*. [Documentary Still Image] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX3d9AvAleM> [Accessed 27 Nov. 2024].

Figure 09: Google Maps (2025a). *Aerial Plan of Hanging Coffin of Sagada, Philippines and Local Town*. [Online Map].

Figure 10: Collett, R. (2019). *Dark Tourism: The Hanging Coffins of Sagada*. [Online Image] Travel Tramp. Available at: <https://www.travel-tramp.com/hanging-coffins-of-sagada-philippines/> [Accessed 17 Nov. 2024].

Figure 11: Google Maps (2025b). *Aerial Plan of Manila North Cemetery in Manila, Philippines*. [Online Map].

Figure 12-16: Dean, A. (2017). *Hard Life Among the Dead in the Philippines*. [Online Image] The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/25/world/asia/manila-north-cemetery-philippines.html> [Accessed 17 Nov. 2024].

Figure 17-19: Jover, M. (2025e). *Observational Plan Drawings of Manila North Cemetery Family Mausoleums/Tombs during Undas as Narrated by Behram in the 'Home to Manila's Poorest People' Documentary*. [Illustration].

Figure 21: Jover, M. (2025f). *Floor Plan of Jover Household Home Altars*. [Photograph].

Figure 22: Jover, M. (2024b). *Catherine (Cathy) Jover's Home Altar Since 2021*. [Photograph].

Figure 23: Jover, M. (2025g). *Filemon Jover's Home Altar Since 2020*. [Photograph].

Figure 24: Jover, M. (2025h). *Collage Illustrating the Journey of the Bereaved* [Photograph].

