

Mahirap:

A Squatter Community in a Manila Suburb*

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I

We read objective accounts with numerous statistics to support the conclusion that the squatting problem must be solved. Rarely, however, do we find accounts that reveal squatters as people who must deal with the complex problem of day-to-day living. The following presentation attempts to do just that. The main portion of this paper is an account of the daily experiences of some squatters whom we studied and came to know well. We have juxtaposed these highly personal experiences with the impersonal reports that appeared in the local press during the time we studied the squatter community. All conversations recorded here took place, although in some instances, time has been condensed to provide continuity. The afterword provides a brief history of, and some suggested solutions to, the problems of squatters in the Philippines.

The Squatter Community

Mahirap is a real community located in a wealthy suburb near Manila. Its 200 houses, haphazardly clustered together with only winding paths intersecting the community block, occupy a tract of land flanked on two sides by streets and on the other two by factories. The 1200 people who live in Mahirap go about the business of survival in an urban environment which is, in most respects, alien and hostile. But even if the city is hostile, it is, in the minds of many squatters, a place which provides a greater range of opportunities than the province.

The more substantial houses are on the outskirts of the community block. The interior is a maze of winding paths between houses of second-class

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materials built immediately adjacent to one another; in some cases, two houses share a single wall. The narrow walkways of scrap lumber lead to a center-plaza area, which, in the dry season, is used by the men and boys for games of volleyball and basketball. Here, too, in fair weather, the children play. When the rains come, they migrate to the paved streets or to the schoolyard nearby. Surrounding the plaza area are a number of stores, called *tindahan*, or *sarisari* stores, which sell soft drinks, beer, candy and small household items. During the dry season, in the late afternoon and early evening, the plaza is a gathering place for community members. But when it rains, the entire area is a sea of mud, and those who go out at night either gather around the variety stores or gamble at a nearby place called "Mang Tsupino's."

Mahirap is a young community, the average age of the men being 37 and that of women, 31. The youthfulness of the adults indicates that the average family size of 5.7 will continue to increase.

Like other urban squatters, the people of Mahirap are beset by a number of problems. They feel their major problems are unemployment and underemployment. Other problems, as they articulate them, are flooding in many areas during the rainy season, stagnant, mosquito-breeding pools, and poor sanitation—almost everyone in the community mentions at one time or another the lack or inadequacy of toilet and sewage facilities. Flies and other pests thrive in the nearby vacant lots, where garbage is dumped. Children's health is a problem associated with the problem of obtaining the best diet for the family and the problem of income. The pressures of crowding due to the community's growth in size appear to take on greater importance because more and more strangers have moved into the community. The feeling of close-knittedness which characterized the community in the older residents' eyes has given way to more gossip, more rumors to contend with. Moreover, they feel that the appearance of "new people" in the community may exert a bad influence on their children. And, of course, there are the politicians—both a problem and a blessing.

When the first residents arrived in 1959, politicians immediately began to seek their votes. A few houses had as yet been constructed when a neighborhood association was formed; one of the residents even became a *lider*, or district leader, for a mayoralty candidate in the municipal elections. The candidate, in turn, was able to get some electricity installed, a well drilled, and pipes laid to a centrally located faucet. Token amounts of construction materials, such as concrete piping for drainage and materials for bridges across the streams on the low side of the area, occasionally appeared. These donations were ostensibly altruism on the part of the politicians: their speeches always made mention of "land for the landless," and, inevitably, each candidate would express deep sympathy for the plight of "you poor people" and promise to do his best to see that the residents had a permanent place in which to live.

At the same time, a liberal sprinkling of pesos would descend on the community. But implied threats would come more frequently as election day drew closer: "Either vote for us, or we'll see that you are ejected."

The politicians have also exerted control over the activities of a local association called *Samahán ng mga Magkakapitabahay* (Association of Neighbors). Ostensibly, the politicians have encouraged the club's formation, suggesting that it take on traditional activities such as supervising funerals and fiestas. Recently, however, the politicians suggested, much to the dismay of the members, that the president be an outsider—one of the leaders from a nonsquatter area nearby. In addition, the politicians have discouraged constructive projects, such as spraying the area against mosquitoes and providing medicine for the sick.

Mahirap's residents are apprehensive about the future. They are worried about the recent Supreme Court decision which gives the government the right to eject squatters from government lands without court authority. Because the squatters have no legal claim to the land, they know they can be asked to leave any time. In fact, several years ago, they were prepared to move to Taguig, Rizal, after having been informed that a tract of land had been set aside for urban squatters under President Diosdado Macapagal's land-resettlement program. Many were willing to purchase land at reasonable rates of payment and had saved for this purpose. The program failed to materialize, however, owing to the change of administration during the 1965 national elections. So far, the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos has neither activated the plans nor presented alternatives. Nevertheless, the politicians take credit for the community's survival, boasting that the community would have had to disband long ago were it not for them.

Fulfillment of the residents' desire to have their own land, where they can build a house and raise a family, is what the politicians always promise before each election but never deliver. "There are too many elections," the residents say, "and there is no time to make good the promises for each election."

The People of Mahirap

The people we introduce in the following sections are a few of the people of Mahirap whom we came to know very well, and who, we feel, are characteristic of most of the residents.¹

Aling Nitang² has her finger on the pulse of community activities. It is through her that we meet others in the community as they come to purchase their groceries at her sarisari store and exchange a few words of *chismis*, gossip.

¹ Though the characters are real, the names we have given them here are aliases.

² *Aling* is an expression of respect used when addressing older women; *Mang* is the equivalent for men.

To her best friend, Aling Jane, Nitang confides the fears that the turmoil of the last election elicited.

Aling Jane and her husband, Johnny, are leaders in the community. They can be considered more fortunate than most of the residents, able to afford a balanced diet and a few luxuries. Johnny's full-time job and Jane's part-time work enable them to be one of the two families in Mahirap which can afford a maid, a luxury that many middle-class and all upper-class Filipinos enjoy. However, Aling Nitang's sister, Conching, and her husband, Pabling, are not as fortunate. Conching recently lost her job, and the needs and expenses of her family now surpass their income.

A less fortunate friend of Nitang is Maria, who has tuberculosis. Her husband, Martin, lacks steady employment, and furthermore, Martin's gambling habits make it impossible for him to afford medicine and adequate food for Maria and the children. Maria's mother and several of her brothers also live in Mahirap. Her brother, the eldest son in the family, refuses to seek work, preferring the leisurely life of a vagrant and gambler. Maria's younger brother, Osting, is more industrious, and in spite of a dislocated hip, manages to earn a few pesos through odd jobs. Another friend and neighbor of Nitang is the elderly Trining, who, burdened with an unemployed, sometimes rowdy, son, has resigned herself to life in the squatter community.

The politicians exert extensive influence over the lives of the people of Mahirap. Mang Cesar is the barrio captain, but since he does not live in Mahirap, many of the people distrust him. They think that he only wants to impress the bigger politicians. Four leaders exert less political influence—Mang Ponso, Mang Sergio, Mang Gorio, and Mang Tikyo. The Winning Candidate's wife is another influential, though elusive, political force. She goes about the community, noting those who object to the present policies of the party in power and extending favors to people who will later have *utang na loob* (be indebted) to the Winning Candidate.

These representative people share the frustrations that all "have nots" must face—a constant shortage of money and, therefore, a lack of basic necessities. Their lives go on, however, in spite of such insufficiencies, and they manage to survive with what little they have, hoping that the future will improve their lot. Since so much of their lives is controlled by external forces, political and otherwise, they easily assume an attitude of *bahala na* ("Come what may," or "The decision is up to God").

Occasionally, one can glimpse their inner desires in their casual banter—references to places where they would like to live, services they would like to have, luxuries they would like to enjoy. Often, they make joking references to Forbes Park and Bel Air, exclusive sections of suburban Manila where only the wealthiest can afford to live. While many squatters have learned to accept

their present circumstances without rancor, they still must live with the knowledge that they desire what they cannot have—their own property outside a squatter community, a modest home, and a healthy family.

II

Since the end of World War II squatter settlements around large cities have become a worldwide phenomenon. In the rapidly urbanizing but not yet industrialized countries millions of families from the impoverished countryside and from the city slums have invaded the outskirts of the major cities and there set up enormous shantytowns (Mangin 1967).

Since 1945, they have been coming to Manila from all over the Philippines, settling in vacant lots on the outskirts of the city, along the railroad tracks, in the shadows of factories, along *esteros* (canals) and the banks of streams. They have built crude houses of scrap lumber, cardboard, and tin. Some have improved the houses, adding cement floors and using lumber for roofing and the walls in place of cardboard. In some of the areas, the foundations and even the houses themselves are of concrete and hollow blocks. When forced out of an area, they move to another vacant lot, to another spare piece of unused, unproductive land. Any move within the city is better than returning to the province. If the city offers them little, it is better than the province where life is *malungkót* (sad) and where the daily round is one of tedium and colorless existence, save for the green of the foliage and the brown of the earth.

"In the province it's sad and lonely," says Aling Nitang, "but in the city, life is gay. Here in the city, there are many kinds of work, and there is always some chance to earn money. In the province, it's very hard to earn money."

And so they move, first from the province to one squatter area, then to another, and another.

They entered the land, built houses of second class materials thereon—without the knowledge and consent of the city. Their homes were erected without city permits. These constructions are illegal . . . squatting on another's property in this country has become a widespread vice. It was and is a blight . . . [Squatters' areas] constitute proof that the respect for law and the rights of others, even those of the government, are being flouted. Knowingly, squatters have embarked on the pernicious act of occupying property whenever and wherever convenient to their interests—without as much as leave, and even against the will, of the owner. They are emboldened seemingly because of their belief that they could violate the law with impunity. The pugnaciousness of some of them has tied up the hands of legitimate owners. The latter are thus prevented from recovering possession by peaceful means. Government lands have not been spared by them. They know, of course, that intrusion into property, government or private, is wrong (Sanchez 1967).

The street nearest the squatter settlement is paved, and recently, after the death of a child who was struck by a speeding truck, speed bumps were added. The factories rise on two sides of the community, enclosed by wire fences or high concrete walls to keep the people out. A street sign incongruously identifies the muddy pathway into the community. As one looks into the community, there is a uniformity of weather-beaten grey-brown houses, marked here and

there by potted flowers placed in windows and on porches of the houses. Only one of the houses that front the paved street is painted.

It is possible to enter the community at one end and come out on the street on the opposite side by passing through a narrow passageway in the center of the block. The walkway is elevated, constructed of planking and the ends of wire-cable spools. During most of the year, the north side of the community sits elevated on stilts over a stagnant mudhole. The passageway is narrow, the planking, in some places, less than a foot wide. Doors open directly onto the passageway, and children spill into it, running toward the street to play, or toward the center of the community, beyond the house of Mang Ponso, which stands on the highest ground.

III

The new shantytowns are without public services, unsanitary and in many respects almost intolerably insecure. Most middle-class and upper-class observers are inclined to regard them as a virulent social disease. Conservatives are certain that they are seedbeds of revolution and communism. City planners and architects view them as inefficient users of urban real estate and as sores on the landscape. Newspapers treat them as centers of crime and delinquency. Social workers are appalled by the poverty of many of the squatters, by the high incidence of underemployment and low pay, by the lack of medical treatment and sewage facilities and by what they see as a lack of proper, decent, urban, middle-class training for the squatters' children (Mangin 1967).

Mang Ponso, whose house is on the high ground near the plaza, is the oldest resident here. He came nearly ten years ago and is now one of the leaders for the municipal government. Mang Ponso is not happy this week. The winning candidates are going from house to house because 92 of 200 votes in the community went to the Opposition, and the winners want to discover who constitute the opposition in Mahirap. People passing one another in the narrow corridors look at one another apprehensively. What the Winning Candidate will find out and what he will do when he finds out is the subject of conversations in front of the sarisari stores as the wives gather and talk while making their purchases of five centavos worth of *suka* (vinegar), ten centavos worth of *patts* (fish sauce), a hand of garlic, a *chupa* (about three-eighths of a liter) of rice, and perhaps some sweets for the children.

The campaign posters are gone now. For a few weeks the community had a festive air, but the good-natured speculation about who would win or lose has been replaced with the harsh facts of making peace with the Winner and trying to continue the day-to-day business of living. It is a time of insecurity, and some of the women are afraid.

The coddling of squatters by politicians at this time is understandable in the light of the coming election, but their private gain is at the expense of the rest of the community which believes in the rule of law.

If squatting has reached the massive proportions it has reached today, it is because it has been encouraged by some officials in the government who choose to protect

them for one reason or another. In some cases, protection is bought from policemen or other local officials. Now that it is election time, candidates even work to stop evictions ordered by the courts. . . .

The reasons for all these efforts of politicians are obvious. Even the squatters should realize the selfish motives of their temporary champions whose concern is tied in with the election (Manila Times, September 17, 1967).

Aling Nitang is afraid. She is secure in her sarisari store, it is true, because, even when she was eight-months pregnant, she worked diligently registering voters at the *municipio* (municipal hall), cajoling and convincing the uncommitted that their best interest would be to support those in power. In her conversations about the elections there was always the subtle hint that perhaps people might be ejected from the squatter community if they did not cooperate with the incumbents. Perhaps she is not so much afraid as disgruntled, her philosophy being one of maintaining things as they are. It is best, she says, not to disturb what is in existence; if something is to be changed, it will be changed by those in power. But now, some of her friends may be forced out of the community and she will miss them.

In her sarisari store, which is a window to the plaza area, and to the community as a whole, she sits making her transactions, with Lina, age 4, and little Leo, now three weeks old, her third boy and seventh child. She is proud of her frugality. Her husband, Leo, insisted that she go to a private hospital when she was due to deliver. But when the time came, she got up silently, not waking Leo, and having sent for a friend, went by taxi to the Maternity and Children's Hospital in Sta. Cruz, where delivery and confinement cost only ₱60. In the morning, when Leo awoke, he pretended to be angry; he was, in fact, a little proud. He told his friends again, as he had told them before, that Nitang, even though she is a Filipina from Leyte, would have pleased his mother. Her virtues are almost Chinese.

In the one year that she has been in Mahirap, Aling Nitang has become almost an institution. When she and Leo made the decision to move there, she had agreed that they should take the savings and build a house and invest in a sarisari store. He would keep his job in the store in Quezon City and she would run the store here. The children would have no trouble transferring schools. Teddy, the eldest, was bright, and so was Bong, the third child; all of the girls had passing grades. Besides, they could save a little, since there would be no rent to pay, and the house would be better than the rooms they had previously occupied in Balintawak. In time, they would have enough set aside to be able to buy a little land and build a real house—one of their own—and finally realize their dream. But Leo has always been against buying land with the first savings. "First a store, then land and a house."

Still, things are not so bad now. Her children are in school, and they do well. There is always food on the table with enough to spare. Because she allows people to buy on credit, she has the respect of the people; she does not ask

for payments if she knows the people are hard up. This does not mean necessarily that she can be exploited. If someone has *utang* (debt) to her, and she sees them at the gambling house or drinking at another *tindahan*, she will be hesitant about giving them credit again.

Upstairs, there is a television set to entertain the children. Since the neighbors come to watch, there is often a little trouble. Every now and then, Aling Nitang grows weary of so many people, but she is philosophical about it. "If they are troublesome and take advantage, it's all right. You just have to have a little *pakikisama* (ability to get along with others), that's all."

Little Leo stirs and whimpers, and she unbuttons her dress to give him her breast. She looks at him fondly. "How fair," the neighbors say, "*pogi 'yán.*" It is true that he is fair, but his nose is flat and not long, as she and Aling Jane hoped it would be. Aling Jane had told her that if she stared at long noses all the time during her pregnancy, the baby would have a long nose. Of course, she knew this herself, but maybe it was too late when she began to do it consciously. It must always be done from the third to the fifth month.

This morning, Nitang talked with Aling Jane, who said that if it had not been for her, she would have voted for the Opposition. Jane also admitted she was still angry at the way Mang Cesar had acted just before the elections. Once Aling Jane was outside the store talking with her neighbors. Mang Cesar was a little to one side, listening. Aling Bebang arrived then, and as she approached the store, she shouted, "*Anó ba itó? Miting de avance para kay Mercado?*" ("What's this? An advance meeting for Mercado?"). Then, as she sat down on one of the chairs, she looked at Aling Jane and asked, "*Mercado ka ba?*" ("Are you for Mercado?") and laughed. All the others laughed, too, because they knew that Aling Bebang was working for the Opposition against Mercado, and they knew that Mang Cesar, an Administration lider, would be upset. Now, Aling Jane is upset because Mang Cesar suspects her of voting for the Opposition. "They can go to the precinct and get my ballot if they wish. Because of you, Nitang, I voted for the administration. But only because of you. Mang Cesar is a *buwaya* (crocodile; a greedy person)."

Aling Nitang takes Jane's outburst in silence. People have mixed feelings about Mang Cesar. True, he is the barrio captain, but he does not live in the community. Most of the residents of Mahirap feel that he is interested only in making a good impression on the big liders and that he really does not care about the community. Sometimes his behavior does give that impression. He never has suggestions about improvements. The only thing that he says is, "It is better for you to support Mercado. That way you can stay here. If you don't, you'll have to leave."

Aling Nitang does not really know. Perhaps Aling Jane is right, but one has to look beyond her words and find out what really caused them. Jane is probably again jealous of Johnny, her husband. She complained only a day or so ago

that Johnny insists on sleeping with the baby and Hector, the next to the youngest, between them. Because of this, Jane feels that Johnny has someone else outside. Aling Nitang does not think so; Johnny is good and does not drink or gamble. He even goes to Baclaran with them on Wednesdays to make the *novena* there. As far as Aling Nitang knows, of all the husbands here, he is the only one who does that.

Aling Nitang's housemaid comes downstairs to relieve her in watching the store. Aling Nitang gets up, goes up the stairs to place little Leo in a makeshift crib, and covers him with a light cotton blanket. Since he is sleeping peacefully, she goes downstairs again to prepare the noon meal. Yesterday she got some *maya-maya* (snapper, a species of fish) at the market and kept it in the freezer for today. There is enough for both the noon meal and the evening meal; she follows the habits of the women here and prepares the same things for both meals.

Nitang's family is luckier than most. There is a greater variety of food on her table. And especially now, since the last typhoon, prices are high. Even tomatoes the size of a thumbnail are five centavos each. The women who come to buy from her or from the vendors who peddle their goods in the morning are hesitant in their purchasing. She suspects that many of them have only rice and *tuyó* (dried fish), and maybe only once a day. As she closes the refrigerator door, she remembers that she must pay Aling Jane three pesos for the electricity. At least now she has electricity for 24 hours. When she had a line with another neighbor, it was only in use from noon until midnight, and it was difficult to keep things from spoiling. Aling Jane will refuse the payment, of course. "Never mind, Nitang. What for? I use your refrigerator for storage, so why should you pay me?" Perhaps she will send a large bowl of the *sinigang* (fish boiled with guava, tamarind or the like) with the *maya-maya* for Johnny tonight.

. . . On approaching (the typical squatter community) one notices a peculiar smell, the odor of decay and squalor. One walks not through a street but through a maze of alleys, along narrow wooden bridges raised slightly over pools of dirty water and on which only one person may pass at a time. One passes children playing, bare-footed, dirty, and naked; over there, men who stare at you indifferently, their exposed torsos showing prominent ribs and ominous tattoos; and over there, a woman bathing beside a public faucet, her breasts exposed and dangling, and she does not give a damn. And an old man walks by, shoving a rickety push cart filled with papers, cans, bottles and ill-smelling scrap, gathered, presumably, from the nearest garbage dump. It is not strange to hear so many babies crying at the same time. The houses are built close together, so close some actually touch each other. They are almost of the same size and the same shape, but the materials vary: This house here is made of bamboo, grass and tin; the other house is made of retrieved wood and cardboard; then one finds a structure that is not a house at all but a hovel that has the brown earth for its floor and is protected from the elements by a piece of galvanized roof on top. The structure has one small door and windows; the couple living inside has to stoop when they stand and walk (Harde 1967).

From the house next door, Nitang hears the sounds of Aling Trining shouting at Ramon, who, at 11 a.m., is already drunk. He must have worked yesterday on the road. Eventually, he will come to the store, buy some more *tubâ* (coconut wine) and a Pepsi Cola, and talk nonsense for a while. Aling Nitang will nod, and only half listen. Every now and then she will comment to a customer, "Everyday is a holiday for Ramon, no?" and then a smile, and to Ramon, "'*di ba?*" ("Isn't it?"). Ramon will smile, and nod, and smile and nod again.

Aling Nitang is thankful that Ramon is not troublesome when he drinks. When he is not drinking, he is an industrious boy, working around the house, even helping his mother, Aling Trining, with the laundry. Sometimes, when he is sober and there is no one around, he will come inside to talk with Aling Nitang about how difficult life is. If only he could find a job that was steady, so that he could earn and save a little and continue his studies. "Even a houseboy," he says. "I would be willing to do that." But he knows, as does Aling Nitang, that without a sponsor, it is almost impossible to find a job. Whatever jobs are available for the people here come by word of mouth—two days' labor here, one day's carpentry there—and one always has to be recommended by a friend or neighbor.

Yesterday, Ramon's mother, Aling Trining, came to see Aling Nitang to borrow a cigaret and drink a glass of *tubâ* with her in the afternoon. Aling Trining was also worried about the results of the election, even though she had campaigned hard for the Winner. Once before, the same thing had happened when Aling Trining was living in a community in Manila. Even though the councilor had won, he punished the whole community because it did not support him solidly.

Aling Trining, now 53, looking older, but still retaining some traces of an early beauty, talks much of her life in the city. She and her husband had come from Leyte in 1939. At first, they rented a place in Intramuros, where they stayed until the war broke out. After that came a series of moves—Tondo, then, after the war, Malate for 11 years until the councilor decided to push them off the land. Thence to a squatter area just a few streets away for another eight years. Finally, here, in response to the urging of the Winning Candidate's wife.

Life is not hard here, she feels. At least there is no rent to pay, and it is not *magulô* (troublesome). It is small enough for one to get to know most of the people, and if one knows most people and gets along with them, then life is all right. Of course, she says, it takes experience to learn to live in the city. Life here is different from life in the province. In the beginning, it is better to trust no one, but later, one finds out who can be trusted and who cannot. After a few years, one has friends and compadres and comadres everywhere, and that makes life a little easier.

Aling Trining no longer thirsts for land. This is a dream long dead. "Land? What can we do with land if we have no work?" she asks. "If we had steady jobs, then we could pay rent, or save to buy land. That's what we need. A job for Ramon, for myself, even. I could be a *lavandera* (washerwoman) for someone."

Then there is her daughter, whose husband left her and their three children one day last year and did not return. It is pleasant to have the children around, Aling Trining feels, but how can one buy three cans of milk everyday when there are only six pesos coming in—and even that is not steady—and six mouths to feed?

. . . What is most undesirable and hateful about squatting is the odious condition in which the squatters are forced to live. Their occupants are the very poorest of the country. Almost all have no means of livelihood and they fend for themselves the best they could. They live crowded in very small dilapidated shabby rooms living in dirt more like animals than human beings.

It is to be expected therefore that people living in such subhuman conditions could lose all sense of responsibility and virtue. Frustrated in all their simple wants and seeing examples of good living around them, many of them take up a life of wrongdoing if not criminality. Here is where most members of gangs are bred and where most subversives are recruited by agents of foreign ideologies (Lores 1966).

At least life is more quiet now since the election, Nitang thinks. She mentioned this to Jane this morning. "Never mind," she counseled, "things will be all right. The trouble is over, and there won't be any more for another two years."

"That's right, Nitang," Jane answered. "It will be time to fix the roofs here again. Are you going to give me the big sign of Ventura? Johnny can use it to fix a hole in the roof." She laughed. "Politicians!"

Aling Nitang smiled. It was true that the politicians were slippery. But she always thought that it was better to be friends with them than to be their enemies, or even worse, to be indifferent, as many of the people here were. She had gone to the convention this year as a delegate. The Winning Candidate's wife had arranged that. Noise and jokes and many speeches. Jane and Aling Trining had teased her. "You're taking a big chance, Nitang. You know what will happen if you go to the convention? The baby will surely be a politician."

They had asked her if she could talk to one of the councilors about closing down the local gambling place. "Sometimes I can't even collect my *paluwagan* because some of the women have gone there and lost their money," Jane had explained. The *paluwagan* is a kind of savings fund where a certain number of women contribute 50 centavos every week. Each Sunday the woman whose name is at the top of the list receives the whole sum. Jane is treasurer for two of them because all the women know and trust her. Both Jane and Johnny have been godparents many times, and so Jane has many compadres and comadres in the community. Just two weeks ago, Johnny was godfather to

Nitang's sister's son. Sometimes, if someone is sick, Jane makes up the deficit for the family. Sometimes, if someone further down the list is desperate, and has to buy medicine, Jane talks with the other members and tries to convince them that the needy one should get the money, or at least part of it. No one even disagrees because they are all mothers, and all of them know what it is to be without money and have sickness in the house.

IV

Jane and Johnny have been in the community for three years now. Some of the people wonder why they choose to live in a squatter area when there is a house for them in the compound of Jane's father. "There were bad words between Jane and her stepmother," Johnny explains, "and I thought it would be better to move. At least here, we are independent, and we get along better." When they bought the house from Mang Ponso for ₱450 it had only two rooms. Since then, Johnny has added another room at the back and still another upstairs.

Whenever Mang Cesar comes to the community, he always passes by Johnny's house and asks when they are leaving. "Why do you have to stay here?" he asks, "Johnny has a steady job. Let someone else stay here who needs the place."

Johnny does not argue. He simply laughs and says, "That's true, Mang Cesar. But our house in Forbes Park isn't finished yet, so we'll stay for awhile." Johnny admits that they could perhaps rent an apartment, but it wouldn't be much better than what they have now. And it would mean 80 to 100 pesos less per month to spend on food and necessities for the children. Even though tuition is free, the eldest daughter, who is in first year high school, needs uniforms and supplies, and each day she takes a peso for transportation and snacks to go with the rice which she carries from home. The other two girls, who walk to school nearby, need 20 centavos a day. The two younger children each drink a tall can of evaporated milk daily, and they both eat an egg every morning. "See," Johnny says, "that's already about ₱77.50 every month. If we rented an apartment, we couldn't afford those things."

Jane complains that her husband, Johnny, spoils the children, but Johnny is stubborn about their needs and welfare. "Never mind," he says, closing the subject, "it doesn't matter if they spend 20 centavos a day on things they don't need. As long as they do well in school, and their marks are above 80, then let them spend 20 centavos foolishly. You know how many around here go to school with only coffee and a little milk in the morning, and nothing to eat all day." Jane does not argue because what he says is true. Besides, she, too, is lenient with the children. The next to the youngest is *matigás ang ulo* (hard-headed), because he is the only boy and receives more than his share of the attention.

Jane thinks they should have another baby, hopefully a boy, but Johnny does not want any more. He will only have relations with her after each of her periods, for a week. Sometimes she needs him, but he refuses. This makes her think that he has another woman somewhere, and she accuses him of being unfaithful. He admits that before he had all his children, he would go out often with his friends. Now, he prefers to stay in the house and play with the children in the evening; if the company has a basketball game or basketball practice, he plays in it. (The fact that he is tall and is a good basketball player is fortunate since it helped him become a permanent employee after only two months.) But no, he does not want any more children. He is fond of his girls, and there is one boy to carry on the name. He even takes the teasing from his fellow workers with a smile. "I know I am a man. What more do I have to prove?" he asks.

Many of his fellow workers and many of the men in the community agree with him. They want no more children, but they say they cannot control themselves. The one time that Johnny brought home a contraceptive, Jane refused him because she said it was against the law of the church. If she acquiesced, she asked him, how could she go to Quiapo on Fridays and Baclaran on Wednesdays? So he discarded that idea. Besides, it was too expensive. When he told one of his fellow workers about it, his friend told him about an operation that one of his American friends had mentioned to him, called a vasectomy. But Johnny couldn't understand how it was done, and he thought that it was an amputation or some sort of plug. He wants desperately to do something about limiting his family, but he does not know how to go about it. The others, though sympathetic, merely shrug and say, "Well, if that's your fate, then there is nothing that you can do." Johnny is not so sure that this is the right answer. For that matter, he questions many things.

Johnny thinks the reason that Mang Cesar is constantly sniping at him and Jane is because he spoke up at the meeting of the *Samahán ng mga Magkakapitbahay* one evening a few weeks before the fiesta. The liders, Mang Ponso, Mang Sergio, Mang Gorio, and Mang Tikyo had seen to it that there was a platform erected in the central area under the basketball hoop. The liders all sat on the platform together with the Winning Candidate's wife. The meeting was called to form a collection committee for the fiesta and for the funeral expenses of people who had a death in the family—to help them buy food for the novena, and to assist in burial costs. Since Jane was then secretary of the *Samahán* she was on the platform, too. Mang Cesar proposed that each family contribute two pesos a month to a fund to be used for funeral expenses, and that those who could afford to should contribute what they could to the fiesta decorations.

Johnny asked to be recognized to speak, and when Mang Cesar pointed to him, he said, "Why don't we worry about people who are alive—like those children here who have H-fever and El Tor? Maybe the money should be used for medicine or to get someone to spray the area against mosquitoes. All the time we get promises that there will be spraying every week, but it doesn't come, not even once a month." Mang Cesar replied that the purpose of the *Samahán* was to provide help when there was death in the community and for fiestas, and that the people could go to the health unit nearby when they were sick. Didn't Johnny know that? "Sure," he replied, "but when the doctor gives the prescription, the people who are sick can't afford to buy the medicine."

"They have medicine there already," Mang Cesar said.

"For only about an hour in the morning," Johnny replied.

"Then maybe you should get up earlier and get there on time," Mang Cesar said.

"I'm not asking medicine for myself," Johnny said, "but for those people who cannot afford to buy medicine. I can afford to buy medicine for my family. If they are sick, they are treated. But many others are not."

Some of the people muttered agreement with Johnny, but Mang Cesar refused to recognize him again. Jane told him later that the Winning Candidate's wife had asked Mang Tikyo who was making the trouble and had written something down in a notebook. Jane complained that Johnny had embarrassed her. "It's not your business," she complained. "You're too soft-hearted. People come to you and ask for money, and you give it, and never ask it back. What about the two pesos you gave to Ponso last week and the peso to Mang Bino?"

After that night, Johnny told Jane not to bother with the *Samahán* any more, although he contributed money for the fiesta and his name was painted on a winnowing tray and displayed on the bamboo arch over the street. He even gave the two pesos each month for funeral expenses, but each time, he told Mang Ponso how he felt about it. Ponso told him that it was better not to speak up so loudly in front of the Winning Candidate's wife and Mang Cesar. But Johnny and Ponso understand each other, and they are on good terms as long as politics stays out of the conversation. They share a common wall and Johnny has strung a line from his electric connection to enable Ponso to have lights in the evening.

Mang Ponso has been in the community longer than anyone else. When he came in 1958, there were only four houses, and their occupants have long since gone. Some of Ponso's friends came from Tondo, and within a few weeks, there were eighteen houses on the lot. One of the councilors had come during the early weeks of the 1959 campaign, and, because Ponso has a way of asserting himself, asked him if he wanted to be a lider. Ponso had agreed, and that year he delivered 78 votes to the winner's camp. Since then, he has worked

from time to time at the municipio, supplementing his income with odd jobs on construction gangs. He takes note of who comes and goes, and whatever happens in his section of the community is of interest to him. Whenever a stranger comes into the community, he introduces himself as one of the leaders and inquires into the nature of the stranger's business.

Of the leaders, only Mang Sergio has a steady job, as a security guard; Mang Gorio works occasionally on a construction gang. Sergio, the quietest of them all, often settles arguments among the people in his part of the community. The people never argue unless there is drinking, and then, most of the time, arguments are between close neighbors or relatives. For instance, last Sunday, while the neighbors of Mang Sergio were drinking, two sisters-in-law began to shout at each other. Mang Sergio was asleep, and the noise woke him up. But he was not angry. He just went down and asked why they were arguing. One of the sisters-in-law said that the other had accused her of being a bad wife, and of not preparing a proper meal for her husband. Mang Sergio told them that such an argument was foolish, that it was better not to argue about things like that. The community was a peaceful place, and people who made trouble would not be allowed to stay there. He made them agree that the argument was foolish and apologize to each other. After that it was quiet and he could go back to sleep for a while before he went to his job. Everyone agreed that Mang Sergio was good, and if all the leaders could be like him, the community would be a better place to live in.

In the face of these anti-social conditions . . . a great number of squatters have tried to rise above their indignity and count themselves and their families as members of a civilized society. They have made homes of their hovels, keeping clean amid ever-intruding filth, rearing and schooling their children while resisting the encroachments of adversity. But the Furies are beyond them to conquer and slum sections have perennially become breeding places for crime, juvenile delinquency, disease, pollution, vice, immorality. Squatting blights the scenery, hampers community planning, is a deterrent to real estate development, and constitutes a major fire hazard. It creates a huge drain on national funds from the point of view of crime, health and diseases. Most alarming, it is a menace to social order and stable government; how much a menace it will become and how soon this menace will activate itself will depend on the degree of action and attention the government will render to the housing problem in our country (Ilarde 1967).

Aling Nitang looks up from her work at the sound of a car coming. It is probably Pabling, her brother-in-law. But the sound of the engine is too noisy for Pabling, who is a private driver for an American who owns a new, air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz.

Pabling comes every day to take his lunch at home because it is too expensive to eat outside, even at a *turo-turo* (cheap restaurant) where rice and one viand cost 60 centavos. He prefers to save the money for a few cigarets during the day. If he must take his lunch outside, then he must spend only 20 centavos for some bread and a soft drink.

Pabling's wife, Conching, Aling Nitang's sister, is not working now because the factory where she operated a cigaret-rolling machine has been on strike for nearly six weeks. They miss the additional money, and Conching has been looking for another job, but with no success. The rumor is that the strike will be settled soon.

Pabling has talked about quitting the private-driving job and maybe driving a taxi. At least with a taxi, if one is clever, one can make *timbangan*, and earn an extra 10 to 15 pesos a night. *Timbangan* is an arrangement a taxi driver enters into with a prostitute or a pimp. If the driver convinces a passenger to go to his contacts, he gets a percentage of the profit. Conching, however, is apprehensive about the idea, even after the other women have assured her that everyone who drives a taxi does *timbangan*. She says that it is wrong to deceive passengers, especially foreigners. But there are different kinds of *timbangan*, Pabling argues. Besides, what difference does it make whether a cabbie takes a passenger who wants to have a good time to a place he knows or whether a passenger directs a cabbie to such a place? The former arrangement seems better since that way, the passenger is protected against *biniboyos* (homosexuals) and foul play. But, Conching counters, a crooked cop might discover such an arrangement and demand a cut of the *timbangan*. So it's too much trouble. Conching has come to the conclusion that even though Pabling can make more money, it is too dangerous driving a taxi now, especially at night, although *timbangan* is best at night.

Conching's objection notwithstanding, Pabling hopes to be as lucky as his friend who owns his own taxi. His friend sold the land he inherited from his father and bought the taxi a year ago. He has to pay ₱150 every month for the use of a company name, but he runs the car 24 hours, with him driving at night and his brother during the day. It gives him enough income to make the payments on the taxi and to save a little. Perhaps next year, he will be able to buy another unit.

Maria arrives at Aling Nitang's store to buy milk. Today she has money because her husband has landed a job that will last for at least a month. But she is unhappy because the doctor at the charity clinic told her that since she is tubercular, she must not nurse her child. Canned milk is so expensive that sometimes she gives him a bottle of warm water and sugar, with only a little canned milk to color it and give it taste. When she cannot bear the sound of her baby's crying any longer, she gives him her breast. With steady employment, however, she might be able to save enough for the milk and for the medicine which the doctor says she must have. She feels better when she takes injections regularly, but often she cannot afford to buy the medicine. If she could keep Martin, her husband, away from the local gambling place, where even the women and teenagers go during the day and the men at night to play

lucky nine, then she would be able to save. Gambling is the only thing that she and Martin argue about.

"Why do you gamble the money away? You never win," she complains.

"Maybe today I will be lucky," he answers, and takes money from the jar to try his fortune.

Even the women who go there agree that it is a bad place, and that it should be closed. One night the Constabulary planned to raid it, but the policemen came and warned everyone, so that when the PC arrived there was no evidence of gambling. When some of the women complained about this to Mang Ponso, he only shrugged his shoulders and said, "That's the way life is. If the owner pays *tong* (protection money) to the policemen, then they are only keeping their end of the bargain. How can you stop gambling, anyway?" he asked, "It's part of life."

Aling Nitang asks about Osting, Maria's younger brother. He ran away from home the other day, and his mother had him put in the detention cell at the police station for a few hours.

"My, did she do that?" Aling Nitang exclaims.

"I don't think it was right," Maria replies, "but my mother says he disobeyed her and he should be punished."

Aling Nitang is surprised because Osting is a good boy. Even though he has a dislocated hip, he is industrious, does his own laundry, and carries water for other people for a few centavos. Last month, he was able to save almost three pesos, which he was going to use to buy a book about electricity. But his mother asked him for the money for his older brother's gambling debt. Osting refused, saying that it was his money and he had worked hard for it. His mother insisted, and so Osting ran away.

"Poor fellow," Aling Nitang says. "Osting is so industrious, and his older brother is lazy. Why does she punish him like that?"

Maria does not know, except perhaps that Osting's older brother is the favorite in the family. But he is lazy, and does not try to earn like Osting. Instead he spends his time with his *barkada* (gang), just going around. "He needs to be working," Aling Nitang remarks. "If he had a job, then maybe he wouldn't be so much trouble to your mother." Maria tells her that he worked for a day or so on the road, but the third day he didn't want to go anymore because he had to give the foreman two pesos out of his daily wage of six pesos.

Aling Nitang shakes her head. "Does he think he is so much better than everyone else? Four pesos a day is better than nothing. He should know that's the way political jobs are—just like the embroidery, no?"

Maria nods. Some of the women here once embroidered abaca panels which were used to make handbags. But they did not get the full price. Instead, somebody who was strong with the local administrator contracted all of them at 50 centavos per panel, then subcontracted them to someone else at 40

centavos per panel. When the women got them here, each of the panels was worth only 30 centavos or 20 centavos per panel. This, for three to four hours' work. Once, some of the women complained, and now they never get any panels at all.

"Life is very hard," says Maria.

"That's true," answers Aling Nitang, "but if you are industrious, you can get by. It's better to prepare food for sale along the street, or when there is some special occasion. Like you did for All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day at the cemetery. That way, you don't have to be strong with somebody. Think of all the women around here who do that."

Maria nods in agreement and prepares to leave, adding, "I almost forgot. Aling Jane says to ask you if you can prepare the *pansit* (rice noodles) here for Hector's birthday party tonight."

V

By the time Nitang arrives at Jane's house, Johnny has rigged a speaker and borrowed a turntable, although there is no music as yet. The children keep asking him to play some records but Johnny refuses. "No, not yet, don't you see the neighbors are praying?" Next door, a group of people from the community have gathered for a kind of prayer meeting. "I think they are *Iglesia ni Kristo*," Johnny says in a whisper. "They are learning how not to eat blood." Nitang smiles at such foolishness but agrees with Johnny that it is best that the music be off for a time.

She joins the women in the kitchen who are putting waxed paper on paper plates. Johnny comes into the kitchen and spoons *pansit* onto a plate until it is heaping. Then he takes the serving plate and half-a-dozen paper plates to the enclosed area in the sala where he and a few men from the community are drinking beer.

The children, perhaps 30 or 40 of them, are playing in the sala and eating biscuits from a large can in the corner. People pass along the boardwalk, stopping to look inside at the children, or, on the other side of the walk, at the people praying silently. The older people greet Johnny and his friends, "*Magandang gabí, pò*" ("Good evening"), and Johnny answers, adding, "*Pasok po kayó*" ("Come in please"), but no one stops except to exchange greetings, although the teenage boys linger a little longer. Aling Nitang greets them, asks after their families as do the other women. They exchange gossip for a minute, and Jane offers them food. They refuse, muttering a thank you, and move on to join their barkada in the plaza area, under the basketball backboard, or in front of one of the sarisari stores, where they talk and sing until one of the neighbors shouts, "*Alis diyán!*" ("Scram!"), and they move on to their houses.

"What a pity," comments Aling Nitang, "there is no place for the teenagers to go. If there were lights, they could play basketball or volleyball. It is not good for them to just 'stand by.'"

Another woman, mixing pineapple juice with water and sugar, says, "It is not so good anymore with so many 'stand-bys.' I think maybe some of the new people have not paid attention to teaching their children properly." She is known here as a stern mother. When her children misbehave, she makes them kneel on dry mongo beans for a long time. This is the sternest measure taken by mothers with the younger children; most of them think a scolding or a spanking will suffice.

In the second room, Johnny talks about the proposed change in the management of the company he works for. "Some people think it will be good; some people don't want it," he says. "But maybe it's true, because the manager used to live in Urdaneta, and now he has transferred to an apartment in Ermita. Imagine, huh, the house he was renting in Urdaneta was ₱1800 a month. Just for rent." The other men look at him wide-eyed.

"*Jesús*," says Pabling, "for three months' rent he could build his own house like that one on the highway near the short cut, there near San Ramon. What is it, prefabricated?"

"That's all right for us," Johnny replies, "but it wouldn't be so good for foreigners. I would like to have a house like that."

"Is it going to be for a subdivision?" Pabling asks.

"I don't know," says Johnny, "but it would be good if the government built houses like that and let us buy them for a little every month. If it did that, there wouldn't be any squatter problem anymore." He seems to be thinking aloud. "You know, most people here would be willing to pay maybe ₱30, or ₱35, like that, if they could have a place of their own."

The other men nod in agreement.

The solution to the squatting problem is not self-operating. It requires a policy and program. It cannot be achieved by eloquence, persuasion, threats of recrimination. The policy must be both humane and firm, taking into account the personal needs . . . of the individuals affected as well as the larger requirements of the communities and strained resources of the national economy. The formulation and execution of a squatter policy requires a careful effort by the city, province, and the national government. It will require investment of sizeable public funds. It requires proper legislation against political interference. It needs the support of civic groups, of the enlightened citizenry and the press. It needs the condemnation of politicians who trade false promises to squatters for their votes (Daguio 1965).

The people next door, who have been praying, now begin to leave the house. Johnny tells his daughter that she can play a record. She smiles, puts on one of the latest popular songs, and the children begin to dance—the shing-a-ling, the soul, the frantic dances that their older brothers and sisters do at parties. Even the baby, who is just beginning to walk, braces herself with one hand on the door jamb and imitates the older children. Johnny and the older men

look on in amusement, and shout to the women in the kitchen to look. Jane takes the cake out of the box and puts it on the *aparador* (clothes cabinet), out of reach of the children, and comes into the room to see if there is still food for the men. "*Pasénsiyá na lang kayó,*" ("Hope you don't mind"), she says. "The caterer didn't arrive on time." The men laugh. She returns to the kitchen, and after a time begins to spoon out pansít onto the paper plates, adding biscuits to each plate. The other women begin serving the children, who eat a bit, then return to dancing for a few minutes, then back to the food.

Mang Ponso walks by and says something to the men. Johnny asks him to come in, but he declines, and Jane, seeing him, asks him to wait a minute while she prepares a large plate for his mother. After he leaves, Johnny says, "No more problems because of the election. Mang Ponso says there will be no trouble. The rumor now is that we can probably stay here for four more years."

The women smile, relieved, and the news passes to a neighbor walking by. In five minutes the community will know. Jane brings more pansít to the men, and asks if they need anything else. They shake their heads. Johnny says, "Eat, feel like this is your own home."

One of the men says, "Four years more. That's good. Maybe the government will do something then, and we can be transferred to the lots that Macapagal promised."

One of the children, who has overheard the conversation, asks, "Where will we go in four years?"

"I don't know," replies Johnny.

"To Forbes Park," says Jane. "In four years, we'll change places with all the rich in Forbes Park. We'll stay there, and they'll come here." She laughs, without rancor, thinking of the rich matrons bending over the *batyá* (wash-basin) at the faucet, washing clothes. The others look up at her and join her amusement. She walks into the kitchen and repeats her joke, and the women laugh, too.

A passing neighbor peeps in, asking what the joke was, and Aling Nitang repeats it. The neighbor laughs and continues down the walk between the houses.

Most of the residents are neither resentful nor alienated; they are understandably cynical yet hopeful. They describe themselves as "humble people," abandoned by society but not without faith that "they" (the powers that be) will respond to people's needs for help to create a life of dignity for themselves. Recognizing fully that they are living in "infra-human conditions," the . . . dwellers yearn for something better (Mangin 1967).

A View From the Outside

Squatting, the forcible occupation of public or private land by landless and homeless people, is a serious socio-economic problem in many of the world's

developing nations. The most propitious conditions for squatting exist in a rapidly growing urban area populated by many people who lack land and housing. Often, these people are recent arrivals in a large city, seeking employment and relief from the rural areas, where there is a labor surplus. The need to survive in an unfamiliar setting and the failure to find employment combine to force these new arrivals to construct any sort of shelter for themselves wherever and however they can.

When such a movement of people to an urban area with insufficient housing occurs, squatting becomes rampant, with one person encouraged by another's success. A genuine humanitarian concern for these have-nots often encourages the practice of squatting. Lack of official policies for dealing with the problem, and of clear-cut laws on property rights, further abets the situation. And occasionally, the practice of squatting is a case of mere opportunism, a money-making venture where the squatter demands from the landowner a ransom fee for moving on.

Although following the same general pattern, squatting in the Philippines has several distinctive aspects. Before World War II, the problem was relatively small. However, immediately following the devastation of that war, shelterless people moved into the bombed-out central areas of Manila and built their shanties in the ruins. A while later, a short-lived Huk threat in the rural areas drove many rural folk to the city in search of safety, resulting in a larger group of landless, homeless people. The population explosion, as well as an increase in industrialization, added further to the problem. Seeking an uneasy safety in numbers, the squatters found that by grouping together, they could reduce the risks of eviction. With this beginning, the typical patterns of squatter development then came into play. Out of sympathy, landowners often failed to evict the squatters. In fact, they often accepted a nominal rent from the squatters for their privileges, thus encouraging others.

Since World War II, squatters have continued to come from the province to the city, often expecting some kind of instant success. They arrive without education, without skills, with only a few pesos and perhaps the address of a *kababayan* (provincemate or townmate) or relative who is expected to give them a place to stay. Chances are great that such an address is in a squatter area, and so another family joins the vast squatter populace. As they did in the province, they build their homes in the city using those materials most easily available to them. In the province, they used bamboo, dried cogon, nipa leaves; in the city they use discarded lumber, galvanized-iron sheeting, and cardboard. Thanks to the tropical climate of the Philippines, adequate shelter can be easily improvised with only a few such construction materials.

In the Philippines, the solution to the problem of squatting has been complicated by several factors. Land ownership is in the hands of a few wealthy people, who often have refused either to sell or develop their lands. When

they do sell, it is often for very high prices. Land speculation has also complicated the issue. In addition, the government has had no consistent policy on private land tenure. In some cases, squatters have been given legal right to government lands. The net effect of these factors is that squatters have not been able to afford land or low-cost housing, and have been forced to remain in squatter areas. Furthermore, they have sometimes found it advantageous to do so because it costs much less to live in a squatter area than to pay rent for privately owned dwellings of similar quality.

In Manila, squatters have often settled near the center of the work area. As a result, many have built their one- or two-room shanties of scrap bits of lumber, tin, or cardboard on available land in the central part of the city, wherever unoccupied land exists—near factories, along river beds, on stilts over wet, swampy areas, at the sides of bridges, and along railroad tracks. Low-cost and convenient transportation in Manila and its suburbs enables many of them to take advantage of unoccupied land in the suburbs, and to hold or seek jobs in the city proper. Hence, many outlying areas, as well as the city itself, are now dotted with squatter settlements.

Because many squatters prefer to call themselves tenants by virtue of a few pesos paid to a landlord, statistics on their number are difficult to acquire. Recent estimates quote the number of squatters in Metropolitan Manila in 1966 as 283,000 out of an approximate total population of 1,400,000. The 1960 migration statistics from the Bureau of Census and Statistics indicate that only 60 per cent of the residents of Manila and the province surrounding the city, Rizal, were born in the area—an indication of the rural-urban movement pattern (Bureau of the Census and Statistics 1960: 1-11). The percentage of squatters is variously estimated as 10 to 20 per cent of Manila's population and 20 to 30 per cent of Baguio's; the problem exists to a comparable degree in all cities in the Philippines.

The squatter areas do breed social problems. Authorities are quick to say that a general disrespect or flouting of the law, shown by the act of squatting itself, leads to further crime. Unemployment and underemployment of a vast number of squatters further encourage this lack of respect for the law. Another constant worry is poor health and malnutrition. Because of lack of a balanced diet, resistance to disease is low and death rates are high. The squatters are prone to colds, pneumonia, diptheria, cholera, and scarlet fever. Because only the most elementary sanitary facilities are installed in squatter areas, mosquitoes and other insects abound. In addition, because of the combustibility of the materials used for construction, the homes themselves are firetraps. The fact that fire trucks cannot maneuver in highly congested places heightens the danger of entire areas being razed.

The squatters themselves are aware of these problems. Although many of them have come to the city from the province, where conditison may not have

been appreciably better, the squatters realize that their living conditions in the city are substandard. Many of them have moved to their present sites from other squatter areas in the city and they hope eventually to own their own house and lot. But most are caught up in the vicious cycle of lack of education or skills, lack of employment or contacts to get employment, and lack of money, and therefore find the solution to the problem difficult. This solution is further complicated by a recent Supreme Court decision (March 1967) which gave the government the right to eject squatters from government lands without court authority. Many squatters realize the implications the decision carries, and this knowledge adds to their sense of frustration and feelings of insecurity.

Occasionally, squatters have formed self-help groups within their own communities in an effort to improve their environment. One such group, the *Kapatirang Langgam* (Brotherhood of Ants) was formed in 1962 in San Andres Bukid, with the general purpose of helping the squatters escape poverty. On the theory that outsiders could not truly understand the problem of the squatters, the leaders of the group were squatters themselves. In addition to dealing with the problems that ejection posed, the *Kapatirang Langgam* installed artesian wells and purchased a truck. Such self-help groups have been limited in their accomplishments, however, because outsiders often see the squatters' attempts to help themselves as attempts to organize further or professionalize the practice of squatting.

Government Programs

The government of the Philippines has not ignored the squatter problem, but its attempts at solving it have been largely unsuccessful. The government has recognized that an initial step in solving the squatter problem must be to provide low-cost housing. The People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC) was originally given congressional responsibility to provide low-cost housing for low-income families. However, initial failure to fund the project made it virtually futile. The PHHC became a costly venture because large staff payrolls and high operating costs had to be met. The failure to draw clear lines of authority prevented the PHHC, the Social Welfare Administration, the Land Tenure Administration, and the City of Manila from coordinating efforts to plan operable and effective long-range solutions to the problem.

One of the major resettlement projects for squatters was carried out when many of the squatters in Intramuros and Tondo—heavily populated, poor sections of Manila—were transported to Sapang Palay in San Juan del Monte, Bulacan, a rural area 38 kilometers north of Manila. Sapang Palay was originally chosen as a site by a council for squatter resettlement formed under the administration of President Macapagal in 1963. The PHHC and other government agencies were to coordinate their efforts and develop a master

plan for the resettlement of squatters. Their objectives included assisting in promoting the rehabilitation and social adjustment of squatter families, developing community consciousness and civic responsibility, promoting social integration, training leaders, assisting in community projects, and creating a necessary climate for programs of economic improvement.

Many of these objectives, however, were not met, and Sapang Palay showed little improvement over the urban squatter area. Perhaps part of the reason for this was that the relocation was effected quickly, and the PHHC was unable to coordinate its efforts with other government agencies. The squatters were transferred to Sapang Palay without preparation for a new environment, creating many problems in adjustment. Because of the long distance from Sapang Palay to Manila and the difficulty of traveling over barely passable roads, many of the men who held jobs in Manila lost them, and high unemployment rates in Sapang Palay resulted. Home industries were not immediately substituted, and social and economic rehabilitation was largely ignored. The lack of fertility of the soil made it difficult to grow vegetables and a food shortage soon became another problem. Because of these factors, the Sapang Palay resettlement project was largely unsuccessful.

Theoretically at least, the financial staffing and implementation aspects of a relocation experiment have become clearer since the Sapang Palay pilot project and extension program. Recently, other possible relocation sites have been selected, and President Marcos has instructed the newly created Central Institute for the Training and Relocation of Urban Squatters (CITRUS); an agency of the Social Welfare Department, to prepare an integrated and systematic relocation program.

Recently, a group of citizens formed SAKAP, *Samahang Katarungang Pantipunan* (Foundation for Social Justice), a private, nonprofit corporation organized to help depressed urban areas by providing training and employment for those who need them. It also aims to help the indigent by allowing them to share in the ownership of the enterprise in which they are employed. SAKAP is now organizing such employment-providing projects as a handicraft-weaving shop, a woodworking shop, a hollow-block factory and a sewing center. If successful, and this organization seems promising at this early stage, it could solve some of the squatters' problems.

On several recent occasions, low-cost housing in apartments has been provided by the government for squatters. For example, one tenement house with a capacity of 250 families was opened in Tondo in September 1965; however, only a few more than 250 families applied. In an apartment opened a month later, 844 families applied for 670 units—a low figure, considering the number of squatters in Manila. The slight interest shown by squatters has been attributed to the fact that squatters prefer to have their own land and houses, and also to a lack of water in the upper stories of the tenement

buildings. Prohibitions regarding the use of firewood as fuel and the presence of animals in the buildings have further discouraged occupancy. Because of Sapang Palay, the squatters are also expecting the government to relocate them, giving them their own land and houses for nominal fees, and are thus hesitant to take advantage of the tenement-housing project.

The recent Supreme Court decision declaring squatting illegal has given the government increased power and the right to eject squatters from publicly owned land. Acting on this recent decision and several laws covering the squatter problem,³ the Slums Clearance Office of Manila has been battling the problem. They have cleared areas, only to find other squatters moving in. The office lacks funds to enforce further the recent Supreme Court decision.

At present, the situation of the Filipino squatter is nebulous. Although the previously mentioned Supreme Court decision upholds the eviction of squatters, the present administration has failed to carry out any sizeable ejections, perhaps because of the recent elections. It is true that the squatters are often manipulable units of power—votes which keep the politicians in power—but other factors also enter the picture. Of more importance is the element of pity and compassion for the squatter that hamstring efforts at their outright ejection. Filipinos and their officials feel that a man has a right to a shelter for himself and his family, however modest it may be. This compassion requires that the personal needs of the squatters be taken into consideration and provisions for their future be made.

In Manila, the problem must now be seen in terms of a crisis—and the solution is not a bulldozer. A bulldozer may clear away the shanties, but what happens to the people is a different story. The urban landowner, job holder, or administrator may view the squatters as he views their dwelling places: as blights on the land which must be removed. Unfortunately, the questions, “To where?”, “How?”, and “Then what happens?” are rarely taken into account.

Without some sort of social-action program, involving massive commitments of time, money, and personnel, and *freedom from political interference*, there can be no solution to the squatter problem. It will simply grow until the ignition point is reached, when even the bitter humor of disillusionment is exhausted, and there is no alternative but violence.

Sapang Palay is proof that mass removal to a provincial area is no solution. The province offers little to anyone save the substantial landowner. Barrio housing is only a slight improvement over that in the squatter areas. At least, in the squatter areas, or very near them, are bright lights and transportation to a movie. It is usually a short walk to a television set in some shop window

³ Article 312, Penal Code (concerning altering boundaries or landmarks) and articles in the New Civil Code covering Nuisance.

where the people may gather, drink a Coca Cola or a glass of tubâ, and be entertained. The city provides diversions which are lacking in the province. Since the city is where the action is, the youth are drawn there. And it will only be when the province is made more attractive that the migration to the city may decrease.

In many respects, the squatter may even be considered, as Abrams (1965) has pointed out, as "the modern-day counterpart of migrants who settled in the American west and the Australian hinterlands." What is often overlooked is the positive aspect of squatting. From a strictly economic point of view, in the larger cities of Asia, where the processes of industrialization and urbanization have begun, the squatter areas provide the only housing for a large percentage of the labor force. Seen positively, these areas provide an entry into urban culture, a place to live which does not deplete the total earnings of the individual, and in effect, allows time for city and national governments to plan—if they are so disposed.

A sober look at reality would clear some of the debris of misunderstanding away from the squatter problem. Some rather striking points can be made which illustrate that Manila is not becoming overcrowded, that Manila is a victim, like other metropolitan areas, not of lack of land to live on, but of poor use of the land. For example, as Blumenfeld (1965) points out, it takes only about 500 square miles of area to house 10 million people on individual lots 30×100 feet in single-story dwellings. Going south, north, and east from Manila, at a rush-hour speed of 20 miles per hour, an hour's ride from the city center would take in an area of approximately 900 square miles. This leaves over 300 square miles of green land to be used for golf courses, parks, recreation areas, etc. These figures are based on a Western-oriented *Lebensraum* of 50 persons, or 12 families, per square mile. We would suggest that the values of Filipino society would require greater population density for a comfortable life. Furthermore, we think that such an area of land is available within an hour's ride from Manila, and suggest that government action—not necessarily expropriation—be directed to the utilization of these lands not for speculation, but for urban-housing projects. In other words, leave the squatters alone until they have some place to go.

In his own way, the squatter is a gallant individual. He is involved in a pitched battle for survival, and his opponents are many. Unemployment and underemployment are perhaps the most vicious of them all. Frequently, the squatter becomes the pawn of a politician who promises him protection and perhaps a part-time job in return for political allegiance. But even then, the politician has the advantage. For example, if the legitimate allocation for public works calls for 500 man-days at six pesos a day, each of the workers will set aside two to three pesos for the politician or one of his subordinates in order to rent the job. The petty politician's practice of literally herding squat-

ters into selected areas to guarantee block voting would indicate that the squatter is not entirely to blame, and that, in the final analysis, the politician is the lawbreaker. For this problem, the only solution would seem to be the Draconian one of disenfranchisement—hardly an answer in a nation which bills itself as a democracy.

Given the Philippine situation, politicians are virtually the only people who could provide even partial solutions. Working within the framework of Philippine politics, programs of birth control, job training, public works, and cottage industry could provide some sort of solution. Urban-housing developments—not necessarily tenement housing—must be undertaken and the rental or purchase prices must be within reach of the squatter. These suggestions presuppose, of course, a political system with members who have a public conscience and a sense of public duty—rare commodities on the lower levels.

Certain action programs, such as CITRUS on the governmental level and SAKAP on the private level, are as yet untested; whether they can survive the politics of the situation remains to be seen. The primary point to remember, however, is that the squatter, generally speaking, is an honest, hardworking individual who is simply trying to survive in the best way he knows, and to provide something better for his family.

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