

CITY, PROVINCE, OR RELOCATION SITE? OPTIONS FOR MANILA'S SQUATTERS

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A sample of 250 household heads living in Vitas, Tondo, were interviewed in 1971 regarding their background, present level of living, and selected perceptions and aspirations. A comparison of squatters and nonsquatters among the respondents reveals many similarities, but squatters differ from others in a number of ways. Of special importance is their significantly more common commitment to continued residence in Vitas, and their rejection of government relocation. Findings suggest the need to reconsider present strategies for assisting the squatter populations of Manila.

To the economically and socially better-off sectors of Philippine society, the large numbers of squatters and slum-dwellers who choose to remain in squalid urban neighborhoods, rather than return to the rural areas or move to government relocation sites, are foolhardy, stubborn, or just plain irrational. The air in the province, argue these elites, remains fresh and unpolluted, land is available for ownership at reasonable prices, and the idyllic rural setting exudes the peaceful, more relaxed atmosphere that every harried Manila executive dreams of upon retirement. Why then do about 27 percent of metropolitan Manila's population (201,000 squatter families, or 1,206,000 individual squatters) insist on clinging to their fetid perches?

A 1971 lifestyle survey of 250 low-income families in Vitas, Tondo, of whom about one-fifth are squatters, reveals that several criteria, not just that of squalor versus cleanliness and order, influence the choice of residence. The squatter's perceptions of his current environment and, ultimately, his decisions about family location emerge in the context of his past experience, future expectations, and more directly in terms of often shrewd and highly rational calculations as to where the best opportunities for him and his family lie.

Squatter and Nonsquatter Residents

The 250 household heads who compose the

sample are equally divided by sex and proportionally represent the four residential communities that make up the Vitas area. These are (1) the Vitas multistorey government tenement; (2) the government row apartments built before 1941; (3) the ordinary city block exemplified by a mixture of single houses and accesorias apartments along Ugbo Street; and finally (4) Magsaysay Village Blocks 1 and 6 with their completely squatter populations on national government foreshore land.

Backgrounds, lifestyles, and aspirations

Comparing squatter household heads with their nonsquatter counterparts, one notes that the former tend to a significant degree to be younger, more recent Vitas residents, provincial in origin (from towns and small cities rather than barrios), and more heavily Visayan in origin (Table 1). They report about the same employment levels as their nonsquatter neighbors, yet earn significantly less per week (Table 2). Their household possessions are limited in number, and modern items are found much less frequently among them than among the nonsquatters. Thus while a modern stove (electric, gas, or kerosene) and a cabinet (aparador) are found in four-fifths of nonsquatter households, only one-half to two-thirds of squatter households boast these items. What are essential for others may be only semi-necessities for squatters.

Table 1
Household heads of Vitas, Tondo, by selected background characteristics and by place of residence (Manila, 1971)

Selected background characteristic	Total N	%	Tenement	Row apts.	City block	Squatter area	Signif. ^a
a. Age							
Below 30 years	36	15%	11%	11%	17%	23%	
31-40	86	36	44	23	22	45	0.001
41 and above	125	50	45	67	62	32	
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Total N	247	-	95	44	60	48	
No answer	3		0	1	2	0	
b. Duration of Vitas residence							
1-5 years	63	26%	29%	13%	12%	47%	
6-9 years	91	38	64	7	5	51	0.001
10-30 years or more	88	36	6	80	82	2	
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Total N	242	-	95	44	56	47	
No answer, Don't know	8		0	1	6	1	
c. Birthplace of respondents and spouses							
Vitas	53	11%	4%	6%	34%	1%	
Tondo and Metropolitan Manila	109	22	20	32	18	19	
Provincial town or city	219	45	49	44	29	60	0.001
Provincial barrio	101	21	24	18	18	20	
Other	1	1	1	0	0	0	
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Total N	483 ^b	-	186	84	119	94	
No answer, Don't know	17		4	6	5	2	
d. Mother tongue							
Tagalog	124	50%	46%	51%	70%	31%	
Visayan (Cebuano, Ilongo, Waray-Waray)	71	29	35	20	12	46	0.001
Other Luzon languages (Bikol, Iloko, Kapampangan, Pangasinan)	47	19	17	27	13	23	
Other	6	2	2	2	5	0	
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Total N	248	-	95	45	60	48	
No answer	2		0	0	2	0	

^aThe chi-square test for k independent samples was used.

^bOf the 483 replies, 250 refer to the respondents themselves, while 233 refer to their spouses.

Vitas squatters fulfill most of the stereotypes associated with squatters in general in terms of basic socioeconomic status and level of living. Further, these characteristics are reflected in their perceptions of family needs or problems. Obtaining basic necessities and money presents

the greatest difficulty (48 percent), followed by unemployment or the need for a better job (Table 3). Yet the solutions that squatters choose reflect active rather than passive, or belt-tightening, strategies — notably more so than solutions proposed by the other groups.

Table 2

Household heads of Vitas, Tondo, by weekly family income and by place of residence (Manila, 1971)

Weekly family income	Total		Tenement	Row apts.	City block	Squatter area	Signif. ^a
	N	%					
P20 or less	8	5%	2%	0%	7%	12%	
P21-P60	35	21	22	18	9	38	
P61-P100	62	37	43	32	36	35	0.05
P101-P140	33	20	20	24	27	6	
P141 or more	28	17	13	26	20	9	
Total N	166	-	54	34	44	34	
No answer	84		41	11	18	14	

^aThe chi-square test for k independent samples was used.

Table 3

Household heads of Vitas, Tondo, by most important perceived family need or problem and by place of residence (Manila, 1971)

Need or problem	Total		Tenement	Row apts.	City block	Squatter area	Signif. ^a
	N	%					
Basic necessities, money	95	38%	49%	31%	18%	48%	
Employment for self, spouse, children	41	16	14	11	18	25	
Other: education of children, acquisition or repair of house, furniture, appliances; water drainage, sewerage facilities; family harmony; health	51	20	15	29	26	17	0.001
"None"	61	24	22	29	35	10	
Don't know, No answer	2	1	0	0	3	0	
Total N	250	-	95	45	62	48	

^aThe chi-square test for k independent samples was used.

Thus, they want to look for jobs or better-paying jobs, are considering engaging in small-scale industries, going to school, or moving elsewhere in search of opportunity; only one in 10 opts for adjusting needs to available resources. Nonetheless, a sobering 30 percent, still the lowest among the four groups, say no solutions are available, reply they don't know what to do, or simply give no answer (Table 4).

While all Vitas household heads, regardless of residence, hope for a happier and better way of life in about equal measure (36 percent), squatters significantly more than the two apartment-dwelling groups include an economic component, aspiring specifically for a means of earning a living and having enough to meet basic necessities. They show a fair amount of optimism, as do the others, regarding the likelihood of their main aspirations for themselves

being achieved. But this drops slightly when they consider their own children's future. Their pessimism on the latter score contrasts sharply with the view found among nonsquatters (Table 5).

Perceptions of place of residence

Despite the objectively poor circumstances surrounding the lifestyles of Vitas squatters, they nonetheless express an overwhelming preference for remaining in Vitas (83 percent). The other three groups (40–67 percent), especially the tenement dwellers (40 percent), show far less commitment to their present place of residence. Asked to indicate their actual expectations regarding the likelihood of moving out that year, all four sets of householders respond with a "No" in almost equal proportions (81–87 percent), but the squatters once more were the

Table 4

Household heads of Vitas, Tondo, by proposed solution to family's most important need or problem and by place of residence (Manila, 1971)

Proposed solution	Total		Tenement	Row apts.	City block	Squatter area	Signif. ^a
	N	%					
Engage in small-scale industries; go to school; savings, insurance, pensions; move elsewhere	49	20%	18%	24%	16%	23%	
Adjust needs to resources available; take care of self and health	40	16	22	9	16	10	
Look for job or better paying job	35	14	14	9	10	25	
Get help from gov't. or private agencies	26	10	7	16	10	13	0.05
Trust in God, pray	1	1	1	0	0	0	
No solutions are available	22	9	11	7	3	15	
Don't know; no answer	77	31	27	36	45	15	
Total N	250	-	95	45	62	48	

^aThe chi-square test for k independent samples was used.

Table 5

Household heads of Vitas, Tondo, by perceived likelihood of aspirations for children being achieved and by place of residence (Manila, 1971)

Perceived likelihood	Total		Tenement	Row apts.	City block	Squatter area	Signif. ^a
	N	%					
Poor	30	13%	6%	5%	15%	31%	0.001
Fair	120	51	62	54	37	47	
Very good	65	28	26	28	43	11	
Don't know, no answer	19	8	7	13	5	11	
Total N	234	—	90	39	60	45	
Not applicable	16		6	6	2	3	

^aThe chi-square test for k independent samples was used.

closest to unanimity in this regard (89 percent). Comparing their life in Tondo to what it was like in their place of residence just prior to coming to Manila, over half of the squatters see their current location as better than the previous one. The same general trend, although less pronounced, appears in the other groups.

Perhaps the best judges of Vitas would be its 162 non-Manila-born migrants. Having previously lived in the provinces, they can make more realistic comparisons than the Manila-born. Seven out of 10 of these migrants believe Tondo offers more opportunity than their hometown; squatters show the highest percentage of favorable opinions (83 percent). Many maintain it is simply easier to earn a living in Manila than in the province.

Migrants were asked, "Would you like to return to your hometown if you were given the chance?" The great majority (65 percent) reply that they would not. Yet a fairly high proportion of squatters (30 percent) appears unsure on this score, suggesting that the answer depends on the availability of jobs, credit, money, and viable sources of livelihood in their hometown.

Responding to a question asking squatter residents what they would do if offered relocation to Carmona or Sapang Palay, and non-squatters what they thought local squatters

would do in such a case, almost half of the residents indicate that they would not accept relocation — at least not voluntarily. Again squatters display a sharp difference from the rest in the degree of their Vitas commitment, 70 percent saying they would not choose relocation (the range for other groups was 27—49 percent). The major reason cited by all groups is the great distance of these relocation sites from their jobs and the children's schools.

Ratings of current housing arrangements and of the Vitas neighborhood round out the picture of local perceptions of residence. Half of the squatters give medium or high ratings to their present housing accommodations. Positive though this may seem, their neighbors report still more favorable assessments of their own housing arrangements. Put another way, significantly more squatters than nonsquatters give low ratings to their current dwelling structure: more than one-third of the squatters report themselves unhappy in this regard, compared with less than one-fifth of the nonsquatters (difference at the 0.001 level). It seems clear, therefore, that while squatters perceive their housing as better than, or at least as good as, previous accommodations they have had, they also recognize that it is far from ideal.

Shifting to a rating of their neighborhood as

a whole, we note once again the squatters' relatively greater enthusiasm, some 80 percent of them giving their immediate environment medium or high ratings. Favorable residents believe Vitas is a peaceful, quiet, and comfortable place in which to live. The people are generally good, friendly and happy. Others say they are simply used to the place. The small proportion of negative raters points to the darker side of the picture, citing the dirt, garbage, unpleasant physical surroundings, failure to improve the area, and the social problems brought on by economic depression.

Discussion

The overall trend among the four neighborhood groups is a general satisfaction with Vitas, especially in relation to former or projected alternatives. Squatters especially appear to attribute comparatively greater advantages to Vitas or Manila living. Perhaps the recency of their lackluster provincial experience gives metropolitan residence that glow associated with upward mobility. When one begins at the bottom of the scale, after all, the only direction he can move is up.

Thus, even though objectively the Vitas squatter is worse off than his nonsquatter neighbors, subjectively he sees himself as better off than he himself would be elsewhere. Despite its faults, the city remains for him the place of economic opportunity and hope. So many others have improved their lives, why not he? With striving and luck, he can find that job or income-producing slot somewhere out there. His children can go to school, and his wife can earn a supplementary income as a sidewalk vendor, laundress; or embroiderer. Difficult as city life can be, it offers him more than the stagnant countryside of former days did. It also offers work and income opportunities that relocation sites far from the city cannot.

The results of this study show that more than aesthetic considerations guide the residential preferences of squatters and other low-income neighborhood dwellers. They realize that their physical environment is far from ideal. But economic opportunity and educational advantages substantially outweigh these criteria.

Being near centers of work opportunity allows survival at least, and perhaps eventually upward mobility. Surely this constitutes a rational view, not a foolhardy one.

The sheer mass of metropolitan dwellers, spanning the entire income scale, allows the creation of an enormous range of service jobs, the largest source of livelihood open to the generally unskilled squatter populace. The presence of industry and transportation systems further enhances the probability of locating a job as a laborer or semiskilled worker. This the province or relocation sites cannot provide in significant measure at the present time, no matter how healthy their environments. Nor do even lowered commuter fares from Carmona or Sapang Palay encourage squatters to move there. They simply cannot afford a ₱1.00 or higher round-trip fare when they only earn an unsure ₱3.00-₱8.00 a day in the city.

But if after eviction from the metropolis they must live at Carmona or Sapang Palay, then the breadwinners frequently find it necessary to board with relatives or friends in Manila while the family remains at the relocation site. The results, judging from the experience of Sapang Palay since 1963, are high abandonment rates, broken families, and for those unwilling to risk these difficulties, a return to some other squatter site in metropolitan Manila. Of the 6000 squatter families resettled in Sapang Palay since 1963-64, government statistics report that an average of 550 families left each year over a six-year period, a total of 60 percent. Only the somewhat more affluent squatters can afford to maintain a home in the country when their incomes are city-derived.

Conclusions

The above considerations suggest the need to reappraise strategies for dealing with the urban poor, especially its squatter segment. The heart of the matter lies in providing them with work opportunities in the city and the necessary skills to improve their income-generating capacity and their levels of living. It also lies in providing satisfactory housing accommodations along the lines of the sites-and-services approach used in relocation sites, but centering them *in the city*.

This does not necessarily imply that out-of-town settlements like Carmona and Sapang Palay should be discontinued, for they do answer a need felt among the less poverty-stricken squatters who can afford and want to live there. Indeed, once these areas become economically viable in themselves, there will be no dearth of squatters and others among the urban poor (or rich for that matter) who will clamor for land there. But until that time, a realistic approach suggests that some alternative be provided the poorest-level squatters. Nor is a return to the province seen as desirable by most squatters, especially the landless ones, because of the generally stagnant economy there as compared with the city. Naturally, for those seeking to return home, accommodations should be made to get them there.

If the land on which squatters reside cannot be ceded to them but must be taken over by the government or private owners for uses more beneficial to the city as a whole, then in-city resettlement sites may prove acceptable substitutes. For under this arrangement, the poor can continue to pursue the often makeshift jobs they create for themselves near their places

of residence, so long as society offers them no better alternative. In this manner they contribute to their own support instead of turning into the mendicant, welfare burden that opportunity-less Carmona or Sapang Palay breeds by its very structure. In any event some consideration of urban land reform to improve the lot of slum and squatter populations now seems appropriate.

Note

This is the slightly revised version of a paper read January 20, 1973, at the National Convention of the Philippine Sociological Society, held at Bocobo Hall, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Q.C. Ms. Hollnsteiner, director of the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila, did her undergraduate studies at Cornell University and received the M.A. in sociology from the University of the Philippines (1960). She wishes to acknowledge the financial and other assistance she received from the Bureau of Family Welfare and the Bureau of Training, Research, and Special Projects, Department of Social Welfare, in connection with the Vitas research on which this paper is based.

Scholars who have written on Philippine political dynamics and political philosophy are requested to send the titles of their works to:

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