

THE NEW SUBURBANITE: PROFILE OF A LOW-COST HOUSING COMMUNITY

Ernesto Garilao, Gabriel Alvarez, Mary R. Hollnsteiner, et al.

THIS article is an attempt to look into the social development of a new, low-cost housing community in Bayanbayan, Marikina, Rizal. Reported here are data gathered from *SSS-Marikina I* residents responding to the following questions: (1) What kinds of people live in the community? (2) What changes, if any, occurred in their household composition in the move to Marikina? (3) How satisfied are the residents with their new surroundings, especially in terms of community services and public utilities? (4) What attitudes do the residents have toward the community?

HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

In May 1969 five Ateneo de Manila graduate students in sociology and anthropology undertook a research project along the lines suggested in a seminar on human

REVISED version of a paper read at the National Convention of the Philippine Sociological Society, Manila, December 6, 1969. Authors assisted by Nina Valmonte-Bley, Ben Cabanban, Juanito Castillo, F.S.C., Cecilio Hojilla, F.S.C., Ma. Rosario Janolo, Ma. Isabel Ongpin, Corazon Manalo, Romana Pahilanga, Ma. Socorro Paterno, Rodolfo Ramin, Ivano Salonia, P.I.M.E. Mrs. Hollnsteiner is associate professor of sociology and anthropology, and director of the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University. Mr. Garilao is a graduate student of anthropology, Mr. Alvarez of sociology, at the Ateneo de Manila University.

factors in private, low-cost housing.¹ Drawing a random sample from a total population of 500, they interviewed 22 men and 28 women in 50 households. All but one of the respondents were married, and their ages ranged from 23 to 56, averaging 36. In November 1969, a second group of eight graduate students analyzed the data gathered earlier.² They sought to verify the specific assumptions made by the management of the Land and Housing Development Corporation (LHDC) as well as some hypotheses concerning urban trends: (1) Residents will fall into the ₱300 to ₱500 income bracket (LHDC assumption); (2) Residents will have a more nuclear family composition (i.e., fewer extended kinsmen in the household) in Marikina than they had before moving to Marikina; (3) Residents will express significantly greater satisfaction with the *SSS-Marikina I* community than with their former place of residence; and (4) Resi-

¹ Nina Valmonte-Bley, Ben Cabanban, Cecilio Hojilla, F.S.C., Corazon Manalo, and Romana Pahilanga — all under the supervision of Mary R. Hollnsteiner. The seminar, "Human Factors in Private, Low-cost Housing in the Philippines," was held in Makati, Rizal, in March 1968 under the joint sponsorship of the Land and Housing Development Corp. (LHDC) and the Philippine Sociological Society. See Mary R. Hollnsteiner and Maria Angelina Esquivel, "Human Factors in Private, Low-cost Housing," included in this number.

² Gabriel Alvarez, Juanito Castillo, F.S.C., Ernesto Garilao, Ma. Rosario Janolo, Ma. Isabel Ongpin, Ma. Socorro Paterno, Ivano Salonia, P.I.M.E., and Rodolfo Ramin.

dents will perceive advantages in the SSS-Marikina I community related to its suburban quality and to their tenure as homeowners; they will perceive problems related to the distance from their place of work and the scarcity of physical amenities.

FINDINGS

A demographic profile of the community

Judging from the total population listed in the 50 households, one easily concludes that the SSS-Marikina I community comprises a young population, with 60 per cent of residents falling in the age bracket of 20 or below. Over one-half of the households (54 per cent) harbor six or seven persons: two parents with the modal number of two children, the rest being either domestic servants or extended kinsmen. Nuclear families constitute the dominant pattern (70 per cent), exactly one-half of these being provided with domestic help, and the other half managing without servants. Adding to the household census are various kinds of pets and a few pigs and chickens.

Most of the household heads are employed, and a significant proportion (56 per cent) of the wives also hold jobs in the Metropolitan Manila area. Exactly two-fifths of all residents employed in Manila make the daily trip downtown. Despite the distance from work the vast majority return to Marikina at night (92 per cent) with only a few (8 per cent) maintaining another residence in Manila during the week. The majority (62 per cent) are employee-level workers, while managerial-ranking residents are rare (8 per cent) as indeed are skilled workers (3 per cent). Almost half of the respondents and their spouses serve as clerks (44 per cent), with professionals ranking a poor second at 17 per cent, and manual workers at the bottom of the list at 2 per cent. Although one-fifth paid no rent in their dwellings prior to SSS-Marikina I

either because they were squatters or were living with their parents, over half (56 per cent) paid rents ranging from ₱100 to ₱200 a month.

These findings suggest that householders do not fall into the low-income category anticipated by the LHDC. While questions on actual income were not asked, other data corroborate this suspicion, for example, the number of appliances and other conveniences found in the houses. A significant number of households (36 per cent) have at least three major items — a refrigerator, television set, and car. Another large group (34 per cent) have no cars but own refrigerators and television sets, while an additional 20 per cent possess at least one of the three items. Not all of the residents are so well placed, however, since 8 per cent of the households have none of these luxuries.

The kind of transportation used by residents likewise points to their economic standing. Most of the regularly employed persons take from two to five different bus or jeepney rides en route to their worksites, while fully one-fifth either drive their own vehicles (in six cases, company-owned) or are picked up by a friend or a company vehicle. Nearly half (48 per cent) spend just under ₱15 a week on transportation of respondent and/or spouse, while 20 per cent need between ₱15 and ₱25. These sums do not take into account the fares of children going to school.

Another quasi-indicator of financial standing can be language, if one assumes that those unable to speak English tend to come from lower-income groups. Into this category fall only 28 per cent of the respondents; the vast majority can speak English, with 26 per cent claiming English as their second language, rather than another Philippine language, after Tagalog. Native speakers of Tagalog dominate, and little wonder, since 30 per cent of the respondents were born in

Manila proper or Caloocan City and 22 per cent in the Tagalog provinces of Luzon.

To summarize, the sample household profile reveals a young population belonging to a moderate-income group in which both husband and wife work as clerical employees to earn a combined income certainly higher than ₱300 or ₱500 per month but probably below ₱1,000. Yet, within this group is an income range which gives some residents decided economic advantages over others even though the extremes are not great.

Changes in household composition

The transfer of residence of the 50 respondent families, most of whom originally lived in the Greater Manila area, to the *SSS-Marikina I* housing project some 17 kilometers away did not bring a dramatic change in the overall picture of family composition of the household. Before the transfer to Marikina, the respondent families were composed of 35 nuclear families, 14 extended families, and one household made up of two cousins, a man and a woman. After the transfer, the 35-14 proportion of nuclear to extended families reemerged.

However, changes had occurred in some households, although they cancelled one another out in the total picture. Thirty-three households (66 per cent) retained their previous family composition: 27 families remained nuclear and six families retained their extended status. Changes occurred in 16 families: eight nuclear families became extended while eight extended families became nuclear. The remaining household is the one made up of two cousins, which cannot be classified in any of these categories.

Of the eight nuclear families which became extended in Marikina, five cases involved the entrance of a close relative, either the mother or an unemployed sister of either spouse. This relative plays an

important role. For in the absence of a household helper, she looks after the house and the preschool children while the couple go to work and the older children go to school. In the other three cases, the relatives in question were a cousin studying, a cousin looking for work, and a brother working in Manila.

A different picture emerges in the case of the extended families which became nuclear in Marikina. In six of the eight cases, the families lived with either the husband's or the wife's parents. One case involved two families linked by sibling ties. In the last case, the family shared a household with another nonrelated family. All eight cases were apparently adjustments made by the respondent families in the face of the present housing shortage for people of their means. Given the opportunity to establish their own homes at a reasonable financial investment, these families proceeded to do so.

In all, the 50 households sheltered 24 extended kinsmen, or 7.4 per cent of the total household population of 323, distributed over 14 households in the subdivision sample. Of these kinsmen, 58 per cent belonged to the family of orientation of either the husband or the wife.

Satisfaction with community services

Moving to a brand-new house and a newly forming community requires a number of adjustments peculiar to the situation. Since the residents are all newcomers and no traditions of interaction exist, patterns of neighborhood must be developed from scratch. For the same reason community services may still be unorganized.

Although our respondents had moved into the area from one to five months previous to the study, 94 per cent expressed a generally high level of satisfaction with it. An overwhelming number (92 per cent) commented favorably on the people living there. They were also particularly pleased with the peace and order situation (98 per cent) and the roads (94 per cent).

The electric service was fine, except, said a few (8 per cent), for the weak street lights. Most were delighted with the continuous and abundant water supply, especially after their many frustrating, waterless years in Manila and its immediate suburbs. A number commented, however, on the excessively high water bills now presented them. The community service receiving the lowest rating was the garbage collection (46 per cent were dissatisfied, only 36 per cent satisfied).

While most respondents not surprisingly recorded an extremely positive reaction to the community, what did come as a surprise was the satisfaction expressed by 70 per cent with their *former* homes. Apparently the "push factor" had not been significant in their decision to move out of their Manila dwellings. Rather the "pull" factor was at work: *SSS-Marikina I* represented something better, not only because of its suburban atmosphere and amenities, but because it offered them the opportunity to own their homes at a price within their reach. Since 56 per cent were already paying a monthly rental of ₱100 to ₱200, why not obtain the title to a house through a Social Security System (SSS) loan and pay virtually the same monthly sum over the next 25 years? On the other hand, the 16 per cent who registered disapproval of their former living arrangements had experienced stronger "push" motivations for leaving them than the pull of homeownership and the suburban environment.

Attitudes and views of the community

Ideal vs. actual community. What is the best kind of community in which to live? The worst? How would you rate the *SSS-Marikina I* community, and why? Each respondent was asked to react to this set of questions.

The highest level of consensus (42 per cent) on the ideal community centered about the concept of physical envi-

ronment: a quiet community with fresh air and ample space, especially for children to play, far from the nerve-jangling atmosphere of the crowded city. A high premium on good neighbors placed this feature second (38 per cent) on the scale. Third highest (12 per cent) came a community which has all the public services like running water, telephones, a commercial center, and other conveniences. The worst features possible tended to be those directly opposed to the favored characteristics. Respondents under 40 years old tended to give a higher priority to the physical environment than did the older respondents (40 and over), who more frequently cited the need for good neighbors.

Having developed his own standard for rating communities, the respondent was then asked to evaluate the *SSS-Marikina I* on an 11-point scale. Despite the frequently expressed praise for the subdivision, the modal reply fell into the median or neutral numerical category of 5 or 6, with the second highest frequency set at the top rung (10) and an unfavorable rating of 0 or 2 listed by three persons. Explanations given for this pattern suggested that although the community lacked some of the essential services, it nevertheless offered a promising future (16 per cent); the LHDC plans were cited as evidence for this view. Fourteen per cent simply felt that the subdivision was good enough for their needs. Twelve per cent indicated current satisfaction with community services, while an equal number stated that the community lacked many essential services. Owning a home also justified a positive rating from some, while living in a community of people belonging to the same socio-economic stratum pleased others (10 per cent each).

Problems. Without a doubt the greatest difficulty posed by *SSS-Marikina I* is its location. Those who do not own ve-

hicles find themselves greatly inconvenienced by the number of bus or jeepney rides they must take, if these are available at all during rush hours. Hence, the most frequently mentioned problem (52 per cent) is transportation. Second highest mention goes to the factor of distance from important institutions such as market, grocery, church, school, doctor, hospital, and law-enforcement agency (28 per cent).

Perhaps the most solid evidence of general satisfaction with the community, despite the criticisms, comes from the responses to the question of whether residents would recommend living in *SSS-Marikina I* to their friends and relatives. Yes, was the almost unanimous reply (94 per cent), with the rest not answering. Would they themselves do it all over again? Again, a resounding yes (98 per cent), with the rest not answering. Evidently, the new suburbanites' strict criteria for judging a community favorably have been made even more exacting now that they reside in one that comes close to their ideal.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

SSS-Marikina I answers a desperate need in the Philippines today among the upwardly mobile, moderate-income group. It provides decent housing corresponding to the cultural ideal of the single-detached, resident-owned home. Reviewing the initial hypotheses proposed in this paper, one easily concludes that the LHDC's intention of catering to a ₱300 to ₱500-per-month, low-income group is not realized: a moderate income group has actually moved in, as anticipated by the behavioral scientists at the March 1968 seminar. For the total cost of house and lot (₱16,500) lies far beyond the reach of the first group. This is attributable to the high cost of land in the *SSS-Marikina I* subdivision, the 260- to 300-square-meter lots representing approximately ₱6,500, or

40 per cent, of the total price of each house and garden unit.

The original target clientele envisioned by the LHDC may be served if the same ₱10,000 houses were located in areas with lower land values. Since this would mean going even farther out from central Manila, it is clear that housing geared to the low-income group must be planned jointly with improved rapid-transit systems to the downtown core and to outlying industrial clusters.

The second hypothesis predicting a more nuclear family composition stemmed from discussions in social-science literature linking upward social mobility with the decline of extended-family households. While some families did take on a nuclear composition after the transfer, this change was not significant in terms of the whole community, since an equal number shifted from nuclear to extended at the same time. What did emerge of some importance were the data showing that the heavily nuclear composition of the subdivision stemmed from families moving there that were already nuclear in their previous place of residence.

Perhaps this means that the nuclear pattern comes early in the upward-mobility trend, earlier than the stage represented by homeownership in the suburbs. Or perhaps the link postulated between upward mobility and nuclear composition is not borne out in Manila. Indeed another study (Eslao 1966) suggests that middle-income Malate residents have more extended kinsmen living with them than do lower-class Filipinos. If the latter is true, then the nuclear-family pattern of *SSS-Marikina I* may reflect the group's not yet having attained the higher levels of income associated with extended-family households in the city. Another possibility appears in the speculation that nuclear families may have special characteristics that encourage suburban living. One thinks, for example, of a better financial

position, greater independence from kin responsibility, and distinctive concepts of privacy.

The third hypothesis was generally substantiated although not to the degree originally predicted. While respondents were indeed more satisfied with the SSS-*Marikina I* community than with their previous residence, the shift did not represent a drastic contrast to them. The common notion of residents fleeing from abhorrent inner-city slum surroundings to a beautiful haven in the suburbs simply did not materialize. This may be due to the moderate-income backgrounds of the new suburbanites, permitting already acceptable residential surroundings prior to the *Marikina* move. Nevertheless, while the previous residence ranked as fairly satisfactory, *Marikina* represents to them more pleasant physical surroundings and more desirable neighbors. Moreover, it offers a highly coveted status as homeowner in a community of other homeowners. SSS-*Marikina I*'s attraction for prospective residents, then, stems not only from the intrinsic merits of its house and community settings, but from the sheer facts of a housing shortage at the moderate-income level, and an opportunity to avail of liberal SSS financing terms for the LHDC units.

The fourth hypothesis — which identifies suburban characteristics and ownership as advantages and scarcity of physical amenities and distance from place of work as disadvantages — was also borne out. In discussing the problems of SSS-*Marikina I* living, respondents applied more exacting standards of judgment to the subdivision than they did to their former residential environment. Perhaps the untarnished newness of SSS-*Marikina I* limited the number of negative comments possible.

Location, the most frequently mentioned difficulty, is a problem not anti-

ipated in the original scheme for the subdivision. As initially conceived, the plan was to serve a clientele composed of employees of nearby factories and other adjoining establishments. Hence, residents would not have to journey far to and from work, and could avoid burdening Manila-bound vehicles with their patronage. Certainly there were enough such large business institutions within a five-kilometer radius of the subdivision to allow customers aplenty. However, the Social Security System later decided to open the drawing of lots to its members at large, apparently to enhance the democratic process and to avoid charges of favoritism. The result is a community which feeds more than half of its working populace into the already clogged transportation systems serving the Metropolitan Manila routes. The LHDC's hope that residents would have an added advantage in short trips to work has given way to other priorities.

Another problem not mentioned by the residents themselves but predictable in the data gathered is the kind of community organization possible in a "bedroom community" such as SSS-*Marikina I*. Most of the responsible adults (all the men and a majority of the wives) leave the community early in the morning and return only in the evening. Hence they are home only at night and on weekends. What kind of action can they take for ensuring peace and order, increasing entertainment facilities, enhancing social and civic activities, and other such undertakings for their community? The behavioral scientists suggested at the March seminar that teenagers, young adults, and housewives take on the burden of community activity, and that households be represented in a local council, not necessarily by their head but by any member the household designates. Eliciting the interest of those actually present in the community most of the time can help

improve the quality of suburban living. But clearly the urban pattern must be applied to the subdivision, despite the occasional presence of pigs and chickens for home and commercial uses. This means that the municipal government of Marikina must provide law enforcement agents, sanitation crews, and all the services that city people expect. The rural model of residents engaged in joint community action cannot be extended too far here.

Given the dearth of convenient services, one can also speculate that patterns of neighboring with nearby houses will intensify. The large number of nuclear households makes neighborly dependence for general sociability and for emergencies almost mandatory. The fairly homogeneous class composition with its healthy income range should also enhance mutual identification and esteem. Of great benefit for more intensive interaction would be the application in forthcoming subdivisions of the street layout scheme suggested in the seminar report; houses would cluster along a U-shaped road forming discrete groups of dwellings able to unite for block improvement on the basis of common interest.

The need for continued research on new suburban communities is apparent. Facing an unfamiliar ecological setting, the residents' reactions and adaptations now may well emerge as the prototype of future suburban attitudes and lifestyles in the fast-expanding metropolitan fringe.

REFERENCES

- ESLAO, NENA B.
1966 The developmental cycle of the Philippine household in an urban setting. *Philippine Sociological Review* 14(4): 199-208.
- HOLLNSTEINER, MARY R.
1967. Inner Tondo as a way of life. *Saint Louis Quarterly* 5(1-2):13-26.
- INSTITUTE OF PLANNING
1968 A planning strategy for Metropolitan Manila, A.D. 2000. Manila, Institute of Planning, University of the Philippines. (Mimeo.)
- JOCANO, F. LANDA
1969 Some aspects of the emerging youth culture in the Philippines. *Solidarity* 4(7):53-63.
- LAQUIAN, APRODICIO A.
1968 Slums are for people. Manila, Local Government Center, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines.
- POETHIC, RICHARD P.
1969 An urban squatter policy for Metropolitan Manila. *Solidarity* 4(11):20-32.
- STONE, RICHARD L., AND JOY MARSELLA
1968 Mahirap: a squatter community in a Manila suburb. In *Modernization: its impact in the Philippines III* ("IPC Papers," No. 6). W.F. Bello, and A. de Guzman II, eds. Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press. Pp. 64-91.
- WAGNER, BERNARD
1968 The squatter problem. In *Housing and urban development in the Philippines*. Manila, U.S. Agency for International Development. Pp. 47-53.