STAYING WHERE THE ACTION IS: RELOCATION WITHIN THE CITY

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My assignment in tonight's session is to examine the issue of squatter relocation from the viewpoint of the urban poor — or more precisely the likely clientele of relocation and urban renewal projects. Presumably my involvement in poverty research, my disciplinary affiliation and my occupational identification give me some degree of competence and, in the parlance of social scientists, the necessary empathy to discuss issues affecting the urban poor.

This sociological analysis which I will be undertaking tonight will attempt to be as objective as professional and academic standards demand it to be, but needless to say, it cannot be immune from the coloring of my own peculiar educational background, experience, predilections, biases and values.

Relocation evokes different meanings to different people. To the urban squatter, relocation is an unpleasant term. It means not only physical transfer to some locality beyond the fringes of the city but economic dislocation as well — as the relocatee finds himself placed some distance away from his source of livelihood. It means higher transportation costs, longer commuting time and separation from the family. It means further the uprooting of established community ties and one's network of social relationships. All these add up to a perception of a harsh government, and legislation meant to discriminate against the squatter, the hawker, the scavenger — for these actions invariably only result in increasing their poverty.

To the non-squatter, perhaps more privileged city dweller, city administrator and urban planner, relocation is a step toward bringing about more order, greater efficiency in city administration, a more livable if not beautiful city comparable to any modern Western metropolis that surely its residents could be proud of. The unpleasantness that goes with the process, the eviction, demolition of houses and uprooting of communities are necessary evils, for, is not squatting illegal after all? One indeed has to be rational and judge the costs against the benefits. A job has to be done. But while this generally accepted view of urban renewal may be advantageous and expeditious to the more privileged sectors of society, one might well raise the dilemma as to whether the requirements of urban esthetics can justify or condone the accompanying social costs incurred upon the dignity and livelihood of the disadvantaged segments of the city, namely the squatters, slum dwellers, hawkers, peddlers, scavengers — those whose limited opportunities constrain them to seek employment in marginal occupations.

It is not my aim to arouse guilt feelings but to dramatize the polarization that has emerged in the past few years on the issue of squatter relocation which in general means a resettlement site outside the city — or back to the country where city migrants came from. It becomes apparent that the problem of relocation is definitely linked up with various other problems in urbanization — migration, housing, and poverty which, if I may be allowed some reductionism, is at the root of these phenomena that have engaged the attention of academicians and planners in the past few years. Quite clearly a conflict of interest exists between the urban poor residents and the city planners-administrators. The interest in administering a city efficiently conflicts with the desire of a large majority of low-income residents to earn a

living. In the final analysis, relocation is a problem that must be placed and examined within the broader context of national development — for the problems of the cities are to a large extent problems of the nation.

The Case for Relocation Within the City

I will now try to answer the main problem of this paper, namely: why relocate within the city? Let me present initially some data, findings and generalizations on various aspects of urban life based on studies of slums and squatter communities in the Philippines, notably those in Metro Manila.

1. The influx of rural migrants in the metropolis, together with a limited economic growth for the country as a whole has resulted in a dramatic rise of slum and squatter colonies in recent years. From 1958 to 1963, the estimated growth of squatter colonies was 188.5 percent: estimated total squatter population for 1968 was 767,112 (127,852 families). Manila had an estimated 35,329 squatter families or 27.6 percent of the total squatter population. Squatter areas grow at the rate of 12 percent per year. As of January, 1973, at least 100,000 squatter families had to be relocated from the Metro Manila area.

2. Income of these groups are expectedly low. Reported average weekly family incomes (1971-72 surveys) range roughly from ₱60. to ₱80. The average combined income of these groups is definitely lower than the average family income for Manila and suburbs but higher than average income for the nation. (A recent survey of Tondo Foreshoreland residents showed a median monthly income of ₱249.) Unemployment rate in Metro Manila is high: 15.7 percent in 1965, 11.2 percent in 1971. Most of the urban poor are in highly marginal occupations — either employed sporadically or self-employed which means generally that they create their own jobs. In income, occupation and overall economic status, they are definitely disadvantaged. The communities where they live are wanting in basic facilities and services — light, water, roads, garbage disposal, sewerage. Houses are makeshift, *barong-barongs* and in

need of repair. Households are overcrowded. In short, housing and housing facilities do not often meet the U.N. minimum standards for decent existence.

3. Despite all these inconveniences and objective deprivations, the urban poor choose to remain in the city. The city, especially the primate city, is viewed as the place of economic opportunity where one can carve a better future, if not for oneself, at least for one's children. The search for better opportunities in general, for employment in particular, is the often-mentioned reason for migration. The city no doubt has its endless store of frustrations and disappointments for the migrant but the belief is strong that as long as one keeps working, he would succeed in finding a place for himself.

4. With his low socio-economic status, the slum dweller admits realistically to a life that's hard, at times miserable, but still better off when he thinks of others more disadvantaged, a life that's decidedly better than the one he had before; he is, in a word, satisfied with the present state of affairs. In the studies reviewed (Guerrero 1975; Hollnsteiner 1972) there is consensus among migrants that life in the city is much better and a majority would not want to return home. For example, the answers of respondents in five slum/squatter communities to the question "If you had a choice would you prefer to stay or move from present community of residence" revealed a decided preference for staying on in present locations. More than one-half of respondents in each of the four slum communities expressed this preference: in one community surveyed (Barrio Magsaysay) three-fourths would like to stay on. Migrants as a whole feel that there are more opportunities in their present location than in former places. The presence of relatives, the accessibility of their home to the place of work, the "goodness" of people in the community — these and other non-material considerations offset the unpleasant environmental conditions. Moreover, there is the promise of moving up the social hierarchy.

5. Accessibility of one's present residence to

place of work is one feature of the community liked best by the urban poor.

A recent survey of hawkers in Manila showed that most hawkers do business within a few kilometers from their homes. Of the Manila peddlers interviewed (N = 644) 72 percent plied their trade within a radius of two kilometers from their homes. Close to one-half reach their places of work on foot, usually taking thirty minutes or less traveling time. Only one out of every three hawkers use the jeepney to go to work (Guerrero 1975: 95).

This locational pattern is also shown in the Sampaloc-Caloocan and Vitas, Tondo samples. Three out of four respondents in the sample drawn from the Sampaloc-Caloocan slum communities work within the city — almost a fifth of them work within house premises. In the Vitas, Tondo sample, about 60 percent work within the Tondo area, with close to one-half of this group working within house premises or within the neighborhood.

Out-of-town Relocation Experience

Government's record of performance for squatter and slum clearance has not measured up to expectations. There are, of course, different versions and explanations for these unattained objectives. To be sure, not one government agency can be held accountable for the poor performance, since a number of agencies participate in the resettling of communities. To illustrate: for the Carmona Resettlement Project alone, some 13 agencies were given assignments and responsibilities: the Presidential Assistant for Housing and Resettlement Administration (PAHRA), to plan and supervise, the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC), the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Department of Public Works (DPW), to take charge of physical development, and the Departments of Health, Social Welfare, Education, Community Development to provide facilities for the area.

Quite plausibly, various constraints on implementation foil many a well-thought out plan. From Bago-Bantay, Bagong Pag-Asa, Camarin, Sapang Palay, San Pedro de Tunasan to Carmona, relocation outside the city has been fraught with problems and difficulties. The provision of sites is hardly sufficient; major complaints, to repeat, have centered on the absence and inadequacy of basic facilities, services and most importantly of economic opportunities. Consequently, the selling of rights to the land, and the return to squatting in the city have been quite common.

The loss of employment in the city, the reduction of an already meagre income are consequences of out-of-town relocation that the poor can ill afford. A distant relocation area not only reduces one's earning power but also jeopardizes family stability as the breadwinner who goes to the city on workdays becomes a part-time or week-end husband and father.

To be sure, these experiences have not transpired without some instructive values to urban planners and administrators. One consequence appears to be the heightened interest of government and other interested sectors in in-city relocation. The Tondo Foreshore Urban Renewal Project is a case in point.

Adopting a systems approach to planning, the project will attempt to look at the total environment of human settlements and develop for the Tondo Foreshore a comprehensive and integrated program aimed at improving the quality of life of its residents.

What is particularly interesting about this project is its promise to employ a "people-centered approach" or a policy of "equal partnership with the people." This is indeed a healthy development in urban planning in the Philippines, knowing that in the past, planning has been functionally elitist. In Tondo, the structures and organizations necessary for effective and genuine people's participation are present and offer tremendous possibilities for cooperation as well as conflict. Needless to say, basic conflicts have to be resolved — among these are land ownership, housing schemes, people's representation.

It is particularly instructive to note that the residents have submitted their own proposal to "permanently solve the squatter problem in Tondo." In their own words, the problem calls

for a government policy of toleration, that is to say "squatter families should be allowed to remain on the land they are presently occupying, while the solutions are being worked out." Their most immediate demands are: 1) the awarding of present lots to the actual occupants of Tondo Foreshoreland; 2) the implementation of R.A. 1597, as amended by R.A. 2439 (this is the act providing for the subdivision of the Tondo Foreshoreland and the sale of lots to their lessees or to bonafide occupants); 3) the reclamation of 458 hectares at Navotas shoreline; 4) the suspension of demolition in the Tondo Foreshoreland until R.A. 1597 as amended has been fully implemented and the relocation site in Navotas has been adequately prepared for occupancy; and 5) the creation of a special committee that will serve as main channel between the government and the people.

It must be pointed out that President Marcos has stopped eviction of Tondo residents on government property and has assured residents of resettlement sites near their places of work after a meeting with representatives of Tondo Foreshoreland settlers and the "Alay-Lakad" to Malacañang on November 27, 1974.

It is rather ironical that the government is often perceived as an adversary by the very people it is committed to serve. Quite plausibly this view may have emerged because technocrats and planners hold assumptions, perspectives and values about urban welfare which are different from those of the people they are planning for. For example, an earlier study we conducted revealed marked differences in the perceptions of metropolitan problems and solutions by elites and low-income residents (Guerrero et al. 1972). This finding is reinforced by Hollnsteiner (1974) who identified other areas of divergences between planners and the people on questions relating to 1) who should plan, 2) what kind of time frame and scope are needed for planning, 3) what standards to apply in physical planning, and 4) what strategies are best for improving the socioeconomic life of the masses?

Attempts have been made to harmonize these differences and resolve conflicts of interests among various groups in the city. Among urban analysts and academicians we find some degree of dissensus on what are deemed as feasible schemes and models of development within the context of Philippine socioeconomic realities.

For example, there have been recommendations to reevaluate the minimum standard concept in housing; to "plan slums" (Laquian 1978) to organize communities and involve the urban poor in devising, planning and implementing programs for their own welfare; to stress rural uplift; to create counter-magnets of urban centers; to create sites and services within the city.

Others have endorsed the view that if government cannot provide the low-income sectors with enough opportunities for gainful employment, the least that it can do is to allow them a wide latitude to innovate and cope with the situation in a manner that would enable them to earn a living within legal bounds. Issues of legality however, should not be confused with issues of morality. As one urban sociologist pointed out: "When a significant proportion of a city's residents are squatters (30 percent for Metro Manila) perhaps the law rather than the squatters aspiring for a better life should be questioned" (Hollnsteiner 1973: 216). There is certainly no decree to my knowledge which says that laws and ordinances of another era such as those on squatting and hawking cannot be changed to take care of or accommodate present realities.

It is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to point out University of the Philippines' and Development Academy of the Philippines' President O. D. Corpuz' analysis of liberty in reference to the poor and disadvantaged members of society (1975:22-23):

Alternatively, we may regard them as wretched and un-free, utterly bereft of liberty, because in their plight and in the inability of government to assist in their uplift, they have no hope and relief, they have no capability to attain the fullness of their potential as human beings. This capability to attain the fullness of one's potential is an alternative view of the meaning of human liberty. . .

Conscience moves some of us to alleviate the lot of our unfortunate fellow human beings through individual and private acts of charity. But it is a higher morality to agree, that the collective conscience of the community shall impose upon the government that we establish and maintain the legal and the moral obligation to use the community's substance and intelligence to defend the dignity of every citizen against whatever threat from whatever source. This involves a commitment from all of us to help restore to our fellow citizens the human capability to develop to the fullness of their potential.

This view of liberty is intended to capture the spirit of government plans for reforms in the New Society.

If we accept this norm and if the New Society is to be true to its promise of eliminating a sick society — which in the words of President Marcos is "the sick society of privilege and irresponsibility whose excesses and inequities spawned the unrest and the violence that threatened the political order . . . a society which in its injustice and unresponsiveness to the needs of the greater number, had lost the right to exist . . ." then considerations of morality and humanitarianism to gauge societal problems especially those intimately linked with the dignity of a human being must transcend political and legal criteria.

That certain concerned sectors of the population not only espouse, advocate but actively operationalize the aforementioned viewpoint of liberty should not be considered as subversive, for this would be a very restricted analysis of such action. On the contrary, any action that attempts to concretize these ideals and visions of the new political order must be regarded as a vigorous promotion of the "democratic revolution" under the New Society.

In conclusion we feel there is a place for long-range plans or plans for the year 2000, as there should be a place for middle range and short-run goals. Within this time perspective, relocation within the city may be viewed as a short-run objective as new towns, satellite towns and industrial complexes are being developed. Planned-unit-development, and integrated urban schemes provide interesting models but in the Philippine experience, the progress from the drawing board to the realities of implementation can be a long tedious process.

To be sure, in specific areas of priorities we find that the period between planning and implementation need not be a long drawnout and protracted affair. Perhaps if the welfare of the weaker segments of society receives the same degree of governmental attention and priority, we can expect accelerated official action in ameliorating the socioeconomic conditions of the urban poor. In short, the problem of relocation may simply dissipate if the conditions that create squatter and slum populations are eradicated through a vigorous and enlightened program of social and economic development. That, I imagine will be the future: for the present we cannot but endorse a policy of relocation within the city.

Note

At the time she read this paper Sylvia H. Guerrero was with the Institute of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines System.

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