

# Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia

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### Squatters of Capital: Regimes of Dispossession and the production of subaltern sites in urban land conflicts in the Philippines

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## Abstract

*Squatters of Capital* applies the theory of accumulation by dispossession (ABD) to trends in land grabbing in the Philippine's urban and peri-urban peripheries. A critical review of existing literature seeks to nuance Marxian approaches to primitive accumulation and address the lack of clarity on the concept in the context of the global south, where *ongoing* processes of accumulation by dispossession are leading not to idealised models of industrial capitalist development but to the production of subaltern spaces through uneven development.

At the urban scale in particular, the dual expansion of vast pools of precarious labour and the expansion of investment in commercial real estate, large-scale infrastructure, and business districts by land-seeking elites are creating new cycles of capital formation and dispossession, resulting in the systematic exclusion of subaltern populations through gentrification and violent evictions of urban poor settlements.

These subaltern spaces become sites of *resistance* or sites of *alienation* under regimes of dispossession, brought together by specific and shifting constellations of state power, capital, labour and population flows, hegemonic discourses of development, and neoliberal logics of exclusion. Legal and discursive mechanisms deployed by the state, as articulated through public-private partnerships (PPPs), echo global trends that elevate the private sector to the status of imprimatur of development. In turn, state articulations of subaltern populations as hindering such development, as through the othering of the urban poor as criminal elements draining state resources, offer justification for dispossession that amounts to structural violence.

Similar trends are at work in neoliberal forms of disaster management shaping government responses to climate change. The imposition of no-dwelling zone laws along coastal areas affected by Typhoon Haiyan has prevented displaced residents, but not commercial investors, from rebuilding their homes in Tacloban City - to little avail. In Manila, discourses of fear and othering have been deployed in the clearance of squatter settlements along urban waterways (*estero*) that are considered a major cause of urban flooding.

The insights of Urban Political Ecology and subaltern studies enrich the analysis, offering greater recognition to the production of urban space by informal settlers, the nature of slums as subaltern sites, the specific characteristics that these sites take on when under threat of dispossession – and the political subjectivities of resistance that result.

The paper concludes that dispossession is not a one way process, but is mediated and shaped by diverse sets of actors acting at multiple scales. The ways by which slum dwellers, in particular, have mobilised their collective resources in the production and defence of the new urban commons add layers of complexity to geographies of fear, dispossession and contestation, while drawing attention to the politics of the everyday that have shaped the urban landscape.

Social movements resisting evictions and mobilising around the right to urban space can gain from a more cohesive understanding of the factors driving dispossession in various contexts. Taking structural violence and accumulation by dispossession as lenses through which to deploy counter-narratives expounding on the inherent violence of state-backed capitalist accumulation, discourses of fear and othering can be replaced by imaginaries of resistance and hope.

**Keywords:** urban land conflict, slums, urban political ecology, public private partnerships, accumulation by dispossession, Philippines

## Introduction

Dominant discourses around climate change, state security, the commodification of nature, and the financialisation of global economic processes are driving trends in land grabs in the global south in a process Harvey (2003) describes as accumulation by dispossession (ABD). However, concrete case studies of this process in the production and contestation of subaltern space in the urban context have largely been lacking. A critical review of existing literature on ABD aims to fill some of these gaps, applying the theory to trends in land grabbing in the Philippine's urban and peri-urban peripheries.

The origins of the concept are found in Marx's (1976 [1867]) theory of primitive accumulation, orthodox interpretations of which see the separation of the peasantry from the land and their transformation into the industrial working class, as one manifestation of the historic transition from feudal to capitalist social relations (De Angelis, 2004; Glassman, 2006; Luxemburg, 2003 [1913]). Previous studies have sought to address the lack of clarity on the concept in the context of the global south (Hall, 2012; Kuriakose, 2014), where *ongoing* processes of ABD are leading not to idealised models of industrial capitalist development but to the production of subaltern spaces through uneven development and slum growth (Ayelazuno, 2011; Bond, 2006; Gillespie, 2013; Whitehead, 2013).

At the urban scale in particular, the dual expansion of vast pools of precarious labour and the expansion of investment in commercial real estate, large-scale infrastructure, and business districts by land-seeking elites are creating new cycles of capital formation and dispossession (Doshi, 2012; Li, 2011), resulting in the systematic exclusion of subaltern populations (Arn, 1995; Li, 2009; Tyner, 2013) through gentrification and violent evictions of urban poor settlements (Smith, 1996; 1998; 2001; 2002).

In the Philippines, Manahan et al. (2014) and Borrás, Jr., et al. (2007) note similar dynamics at work in situations as geographically diverse as the demolition of informal settlements on land allotted to central business districts, the displacement of indigenous communities from ancestral domains by large-scale mining projects, and the exclusion of coastal and peasant communities for eco-tourism projects, exclusive economic zones, and the conversion of rural agricultural lands to commercial real estate and agribusiness plantations.

These subaltern spaces become sites of *resistance* or sites of *alienation* under regimes of dispossession (Levien, 2013a), brought together by specific and shifting constellations of state power, capital, labour and population flows, hegemonic discourses of development, and neoliberal logics of exclusion (Escobar, 2004a; Levien, 2012). Legal and discursive mechanisms deployed by the state (Nielsen and Nilsen, 2014), as articulated in public-private partnerships (PPPs), echo global trends that elevate the private sector to the status of *imprimatur* of development. In turn, state articulations of subaltern populations as hindering such development, as through the othering of the urban poor as criminal elements draining state resources, offer justification for dispossession that amounts to structural violence (Blomley, 2003; Escobar, 2004b; Scott, 1998; Sparke, 2014; Springer, 2011; 2013).

Similar trends are at work in neoliberal forms of disaster management shaping government responses to climate change (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). The imposition of no-dwelling zone laws along coastal areas affected by Typhoon Haiyan has prevented displaced residents, but not commercial investors, from rebuilding their homes in Tacloban City – to little avail. In Manila, meanwhile, discourses of fear and othering have been deployed in the clearance of squatter settlements along urban waterways (*estero*) that are considered a major cause of urban flooding.

The insights of Urban Political Ecology (Heynen, et al., 2006) and subaltern studies (Bayat, 1997; 2000; Escobar, 1988; Escobar, 1992; Gramsci, 1971; Roy, 2011) enrich the analysis, offering greater recognition to the production of urban space by informal settlers, the nature of slums as subaltern sites, the specific characteristics that these sites take on when under threat of dispossession – and the political subjectivities of resistance that result (Adnan, 2010; Doshi, 2012).

I conclude that dispossession is not a one way process, but is mediated and shaped by diverse sets

of actors acting at multiple scales with varying effects (Levien, 2013b; McFarlane, 2008; 2009; 2012). The ways by which slum dwellers, in particular, have mobilised their collective resources in defence of the new urban commons add layers of complexity to geographies of fear, dispossession and contestation, while drawing attention to acts of everyday resistance that have shaped the urban landscape (Lefebvre, 1996 [1967]; Loftus, 2012). These in turn provide rich material for new counter-histories and counter cartographies of the city.

Finally, social movements resisting evictions and mobilising around the right to urban space can gain from a more cohesive understanding of the factors driving dispossession in various contexts (Escobar, 2004c). Taking structural violence and accumulation by dispossession as lenses through which to deploy counter-narratives expounding on the inherent violence of state-backed capitalist accumulation, discourses of fear and othering can be replaced by imaginaries of resistance and hope (Springer, 2011).

### *The New Squatters of Capital*

On the morning of 23 September 2010, residents of Sitio San Roque clashed with police as their makeshift barricades succumbed to demolition teams sent by the Philippine National Housing Authority (NHA) and the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), leaving more than a hundred homes demolished and more than a dozen injured in Quezon City's North Triangle (Suarez and Abella, 2010). The seven hour stand-off, not the last in a series of conflicts that have shaken the fabric of metropolitan Manila, was, in the words of NHA officer Francisco Alican<sup>1</sup>, an "interagency effort" to protect property intended for "commercial ventures".

That includes Vertis North – all 29 hectares' worth of prime real estate that is to be at the heart of the 45-hectare Quezon City Central Business District (QCCBD), a Php 65-billion joint venture between Ayala Land, Inc. and NHA, which is the listed owner of the property (Local Government of Quezon City, 2014). The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project is predicted to displace 10,000 families (NSCB, 2010) in a location of "unparalleled strategic importance, bound by EDSA, Agham Road, and North Avenue..." Vertis North, its website boasts, "is the nucleus of a uniquely entrepreneurial city" (Vertis North, 2012).

Two years later, successive major flood events would prompt government agencies to declare canals or *esteros* flowing to Manila Bay as danger zones not suitable for human habitation. Some 104,000 families live in informal settlements along *esteros* in Manila, of which 60,130 live along major waterways<sup>2</sup> (National Housing Authority, 2011; San Pedro, 2013). Under the Flood Management Master Plan for Metro Manila and Surrounding Areas (Department of Public Works and Highways, 2013), around 20,000 are to be moved to in-city or off-city relocation sites in the urban periphery, deemed necessary for the protection of residents endangered by annual flooding and for the cleansing of squatter settlements blamed for clogging the waterways (Arcangel, 2014).

Both the urban clean-up operations and re-housing projects have involved private contractors and investors as key players, prompting critics to draw links between the flood management plan and major PPP infrastructure projects, including the reclamation and redevelopment of Manila Bay and Laguna Lake into commercial districts (Ibon Foundation, 2013b).

More than eight hundred kilometres away in Tacloban City, similar trends are at work. Tens of thousands of people displaced by Haiyan have been prevented from rebuilding their homes 40 to 200 metres off the coast, ostensibly for their own protection, under a No Build Zone, No-Dwell Zone

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<sup>1</sup>Suarez and Abella 2010

policy<sup>3</sup> (Pendon, 2014) The policy extends to communities along Laguna Lake and Manila Bay, and according to Pamalakaya, a national federation of small fisherfolk, could potentially displace up to 10.8 million more people (InterAksyon, 2014)

Shanties have, in any case, been rebuilt on no-build zones in the absence of suitable resettlement sites, and recovery has been slow for tens of thousands in Tacloban city alone (Hodal, 2014). Under the slogan, “Build Back Better” (Inquirer, 2 June 2014), the private sector has been elevated to a leading role in rehabilitation efforts, with nine of the country’s largest business conglomerates, including mining firm Nickel Asia, invited to build schools, hospitals, and other major infrastructure, with the government assigned to “fallback option” by the head of rehabilitation efforts Panfilo Lacson (Esmaguell II, 2014; Inquirer US Bureau., 2014.).

Common to these events are partnerships between the national government and the private sector that have shaped processes that Harvey (2003; 2014) describes as accumulation by dispossession (ABD). At nearly every stage, private investors or contractors depend on state support to accumulate and protect capital (Baird, 2014). Capital lends the state its liquidity, and the state vests in capital its monopoly of the use of force, its powers for coercion and consent (Gramsci, 1971), through instruments of violence and legality that legitimise property regimes that define with impunity spatialities of exception and exclusion in urban neoliberalisation (Alsayyad and Roy, 2006; Blomley, 2003; Doshi, 2012; Kuriakose, 2014).

The extent to which these “squatters of capital” impact on the politics and production of urban space through PPPs is a theme this paper returns to in later sections. We begin first with the changing nature of ABD as it has evolved in the context of the global south.

## ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

### *Dispossession and the logic of Capital*

Classical Marxist interpretations of primitive accumulation see it as a historical phase, one stage in the development of capitalist society wherein non-capitalist modes of production, as in common land ownership or feudal forms of agriculture, are absorbed by the expansive growth of capitalist social relations. Marx (1976 [1867]) saw this in the forced separation of the English peasantry from the land, through waves of enclosures that systematically dispossessed them of their means of subsistence and prompted them to turn to wage labour for a living. Their subsequent entry into the factories and cotton mills of an industrializing England constituted an uneven process of proletarianisation and urbanization that was driven or hindered, in turns, by the English aristocracy and emergent bourgeois state.

This narrative was at the heart of Marx’s approach to the historical development of capitalism. Implicit here was the assumption that the expansionary nature of capital would inevitably incorporate pre-capitalist modes of production into its fold and mould the world into its own image.

Later authors, including Rosa Luxemburg (2003 [1913]), critiqued certain readings of this that verged on the teleological, arguing that capitalist and non-capitalist social formations could exist side by side without cancelling each other out, and that in fact *uneven* historical and geographical development is an inherent tendency of the capitalist mode of production.

However, in her analysis of the relationship between imperialism and the reproduction of third world peasantries, Bryceson (1978) argues that primitive accumulation is best understood as both (1)

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<sup>3</sup>See draft Executive Order “Adopting fisherfolk shelter for stewards as national strategy to ensure safe and decent settlement in coastal communities and establishing supporting mechanisms for its implementation” or the FISH Stewards Program (November 2013).

a historical process specific to the era of imperialism, and (2) immanent to the dynamics of capitalist expansion that is modified as it comes into contact with semi-capitalist societies. This has resulted in hybrid forms of capitalist development, in which the enclosure of urban and rural commons is driven not by capitalism encroaching on pristine, untouched non-capitalist social formations. Rather, enclosures of the commons take place under economic conditions in a “third world” that is already integrated, however unevenly, into capitalist social relations. Similarly, ABD occurs even in the industrialised north.

These are points echoed by Harvey (2006) and Bond (2006) in their analyses of the history of colonialism, and the attempts by capital to overcome crises of accumulation that have propelled processes of uneven development in both the global north and south (Harvey, 2014).

Far from being a historical stage with a fixed end point therefore, the accumulation of capital in core economies depends on the continuous underdevelopment of the peripheries (Amin, 1976), through unequal trade regimes, resource extraction (Ayelazuno, 2011), the denial of public services to excluded populations, or the search for cheap labour and the commoditisation of nature and culture. These have deepened inequalities at various geographical scales in processes of dispossession – within and between capitalist nation-states, urban cores and rural peripheries, and gender, race, and class formations (Smith, 2008).

Glassman (2006) situates dispossession as increasingly central to capitalist accumulation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, occurring in diverse forms by accommodating itself to various geographical and sociopolitical contexts. In this manner, capital employs hegemonic discourses and the ‘extra-economic’ means afforded to it by the state to incorporate into its fold the world’s extensive (geographical) and intensive (social) frontiers (Glassman, 2006, p. 622). Indeed, dispossession occurs even without outright geographic displacement. The past three decades alone have brought a resurgence in the power of the capitalist class via the neoliberal turn (Harvey, 2005; 2006), as demonstrated by the decline of the Post-War welfare state in the north and state developmentalism in the south, leading to the withdrawal of support for public services and labour protections that had proved important to the social reproduction of a working class capable of resisting outright pauperisation (Li, 2009). Mass de-industrialisation and the rise of finance capital have occurred simultaneously with the growth of the informal sector, the fragmentation of union organisation, and new waves of enclosure courtesy of transnational corporations freed to embark on speculative land ventures (Baird, 2011; Borrás, Jr., et al., 2007).

How exactly this takes place is explained in part by De Angelis (2004), who sees capital as a force, as opposed to capitalism as a totalising system. On one hand, enclosures are an ongoing process, immanent to the present order for so long as capital, with its competitive and expansive logic, retains its dominant position in the global economy. But just as likely is the hopeful possibility that processes of enclosure can be un-made through counter-enclosures and the reassertion of the commons via the right to the city (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1996 [1967]).

While agreeing broadly with the theoretical tenets of ABD, Ince (2013) challenges the very notion of enclosure. Echoing Bryceson (1978), he argues that capital today does not incorporate or enclose anything ‘beyond itself’ – on the contrary, processes of dispossession are bound up with the genealogy of capitalism as “an irreducibly colonial formation with global inceptions” (Ince, 2013, p. 105). In this sense, the dispossessed are neither ‘outside’ nor *entirely* ‘inside’ capitalism, and are more precisely identified as occupying subaltern spaces (Doshi, 2012; Gillespie, 2013) kept in an oppressed state for the benefit of capital, rather than peripheral to, or excluded from, capitalism per se. Like the colonies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, subaltern sites left in the wake of capitalist dispossession are produced even in the interstices of core economies in the global north, in slums or migrant enclaves that become sites of both alienated labour and the production of new urban commons that stubbornly contest the premises of formal property regimes (Bayat, 1997; 2000).

This yields important insights for understanding the production and reproduction of subaltern sites in the context of the global south, where processes of creative destruction (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) – in reality, ABD – leads just as readily to creative resistance (Harvey, 2012; McFarlane, 2012). In what follows, I take ABD and subaltern urbanisation (Roy, 2011) as my points of departure, but draw more explicit links between political economy and labour (Li, 2011), bringing them into discussions of the peripheral status of urban slums, and the ways by which urban informality has provided ready fodder for capitalist dispossession.

I then trace the growth, evolution, and contested nature of Philippine slums, in an attempt to shed light on new forms of ABD that are reproducing these subaltern sites in a period of rapid (subaltern) urbanisation.

## SUBALTERN URBANISATION

### *The Production of Subaltern Sites in the Global South*

With few exceptions (Escobar 2004a; McFarlane, 2008), studies that draw explicit links between urban and rural land dispossession in the global south have been lacking, and even less attention has been paid to land grabs in the urban context (Gillespie, 2013). While mainstream institutions recognise the challenges posed by a world increasingly urban, often left unsaid are the realities of state violence, forced migration, rural dispossession and economic stagnation that drive flight to the cities (Escobar, 2004b; 2004c; Wise, 2013); and it is in the cities where some of the starkest examples of ABD take place (Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1995). Viewing case studies of rural or urban land grabs in isolation therefore risks overlooking broader cycles of dispossession and structural violence (Sparke, 2014; Springer, 2011) that impact on subaltern populations in various contexts.

This is a point taken by Whitehead (2013) in her study of liberalising India, where subalternity is co-produced through accumulation by *dispossession* of pauperized rural populations as well as accumulation by economic *growth* concentrated in the cities, whose benefits go mostly to an urban middle class with a contradictory relationship with the reforms of the post-Nehruvian era (Levien, 2013a). This has resulted in a “politics of erasure in relation to both urban and rural poor” (Whitehead, 2013, p. 296), demonstrated in both the growth and subsequent demolition of urban slums, and in mass displacements of populations in rural areas, spurred on by trends in real estate speculation, or the growth of large-scale investments in industrial enclaves, mineral extraction, and agribusiness.

It is this politics of erasure, a term which encapsulates more of the blunt violence of dispossession than enclosure, that characterises exclusionary policies of eviction and gentrification (Smith, 1996). The ultimate objective is to keep the Other – subaltern populations that are surplus to capital (Tyner, 2013) – out of sight.

Of course, drivers of dispossession are rooted in structural economic processes that run much deeper than the prejudices of a middle class aesthete or the blueprints of state planners. In her appeal to recentre labour in discussions over land grabs, Li (2011) notes how the dynamics of capital investment in the global south has led to a situation of chronic low wages, joblessness and homelessness for people who constitute neither a viable market nor a source for skilled labour. The growth of precarious labour or compensatory labour in the informal sector, where wages are often not enough for the urban poor to afford formal housing, has contributed to the expansion of slums and shanty towns, compounded by the lack of investment in suitable mass public housing (Li, 2009).

Read (2002) highlights the geographic unevenness of this process. Where in some areas capital investment through dispossession may lead to formal employment opportunities, in most other cases, capital and “free” labour simply fail to connect. Prospects for breaking free from precarity in this context are negligible, especially at the local level where cycles of dispossession and dislocation mean



poverty is passed down across generations, leading to the growth of surplus populations in these subaltern sites.

In Africa, Bryceson (2006) explains how rural-urban migrations are driven more by the compulsion of rural privation than the lure of urban opportunity, while in India Chatterjee (2008) notes how waves of rural immigrants seeking jobs in the cities are excluded, almost by default, by new capitalist growth sectors in the service and call centre industries that not only demand high skilled labour, but are prone to relocating to regions with even lower wage rates in a classic race to the bottom.

Ayelazuno (2011) and Bond (2006) meanwhile apply ABD in the context of Ghana and post-Apartheid South Africa, where, in a colonial redux, promises of economic development are premised on the mining industry and mineral exports. Setting his sights on urban Accra, Gillespie (2013) zeroes in on revanchist policies of redevelopment that have set about clearing hawkers and informal settlements from the city centre in the name of modernisation.

In nearly all cases, ABD unfolds through either one of two motions: the intrusion and expansion of capital, as well as its withdrawal and relocation elsewhere, ridding people of both land and access to stable jobs in the formal sector. The forms of dispossession that result are partly informed by the nature of capital investment. Kozul-Wright and Rayment (2007) reflect on the geographic unevenness of capital investment in South East Asian and Latin American economies, where a period of radical economic liberalisation and deregulation has fed grist into the mill of financial and real estate speculation, as opposed to job-creating industries or sustainable agriculture. This applies both in the context of foreign direct investment and local capital investment, where Baird (2011; 2014) draws links between domestic investors, money laundering, and large-scale land grabbing in Laos and Cambodia.

Land as commodity is increasingly valued for its speculative or extractive potential – used not as *sites for production*, but toward the organisation of *sites of consumption*: malls, condominiums, commercial business districts. Exceptions include *sites of extraction*, as in the case of large-scale mines, and *sites for cheap labour* in industrial enclaves or exclusive economic zones (Levien, 2012) with limited spill-over effects for local economies and which, in the context of dominant policy frameworks, are vulnerable to capital flight, promoting little in the way of equitable and inclusive growth (Ibon Foundation, 2013a; Kozul-Wright and Rayment, 2007).

These sites are produced by the general dynamics of capital, as a force and social relation (Marx, 1976 [1867]), but their geographic manifestations are shaped by *specific* regimes or assemblages of state power, hegemonic discourses of neoliberal economics, the physical or ecological attributes of contested land, levels of ‘development’ or relative integration into the global capitalist economy, degrees of social resistance, among countless other factors that will vary from site to site (Levien, 2013a).

Here “site” is a more appropriate metaphor for the fluid nature of these assemblages across space and time (Massey, 1985), departing from static dichotomies pitting urban against rural.

Capital does not simply “grab” land or enclose the commons – emerging, as it were, from urban cores to encompass backward rural peripheries – rather, its driving logic is to accumulate by dispossessing whatever fails to align with the imperatives of profit generation, whether in the rural setting or in the interstices of cities. Its interactions with subaltern populations who contest its predations in turn produce space in radically different and uneven ways (Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1996 [1967]). Core and peripheral sites are constantly made and unmade, deepening inequalities between them even while being inseparably bound together. Likewise, peripheries as *subaltern sites* are not fixed, but constantly evolving in relation to the existing balance of social and ecological forces (Whitehead, 2013). Where people are unable to resist outright pauperisation, *sites of alienation* emerge, where dispossession takes place in compounded form. Alternatively, geographies of dispossession at

times boil over into *sites of resistance*.

### ***Urban-Rural disparities and the reproduction of Philippine slums***

Rural-urban migration and rates of natural increase have led to rapid growth of the Philippines' major urban areas. By 2010, 48% of the population lived in cities and semi-urbanised areas, and urban growth is expanding at a rate predicted to exceed the rural population by 2020 (Ballesteros, 2010).

Consistent projections of urban slum growth<sup>4</sup>, however, are often difficult to come by, with government agencies, independent scholars, and international agencies giving widely varying accounts of the informal settler population, owing to differences in methodology and definitions of the urban poor (Ibon Foundation, 2013b). Conservative projections indicate that 640,953 households<sup>5</sup> or 7-8% of the population lived in informal settlements nationwide in 2009<sup>6</sup>. By 2050, a third (34%) of the urban population, and over 50% of Metro Manila's population, will live in slums (Ballesteros, 2010). The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 2012), on the other hand, estimated 41% of the country's total urban population lived in slums as early as 2009.

Reasons for the expansion of slums include, above all, structural factors that have widened rural and urban disparities<sup>7</sup>. Arn (1995) draws our attention to the history of urbanisation in the Philippines, retracing its roots in colonial-era underdevelopment and the concentration of economic power in Metro Manila. The peripheral status of third world capitalism, with its characteristic forms of rural impoverishment and landlessness, have pushed millions into the cities seeking work (Li, 2011). At the turn of the millennium, over 60% of urban population growth in the Philippines was due to net migration from rural areas (Ballesteros, 2010).

As with much of the global south, rural migration flows have fed a steady stream of cheap labour into urban areas where flows of capital and public investment alike have failed to sustain industries capable of absorbing these surplus populations (Li, 2009). Economic growth, moreover, has largely been concentrated in the service sector, in urban centres like Manila and Cebu, where wages and rates of absorption for unskilled labour have been weak amid declining manufacturing and agricultural sectors (Ibon Foundation, 2013a).

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<sup>4</sup>The most conservative estimates, based on the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) suggest roughly 7-8% of the country's entire urban population –or close to four million people – lived in slums in 2010, while the Urban Asset Reform Office of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) reported 4 million slum-dwellers in Metro Manila alone (Ballesteros, 2010). FIES data, collected by the National Statistics Office (NSO) every three years, tend to underestimate numbers of slum-dwellers as the survey accounts only for those living in squatters or illegal settlements, i.e. those without formal title and occupying land without consent. More expansive definitions include blighted areas lacking basic infrastructure or social services, as well as cases where the legality of land tenure is ambiguous, or informal arrangements exist between land-owners and rent-paying tenants who live under conditions that would classify them as urban poor.

<sup>5</sup>The FIES (National Statistics Office, 2000) defines the *family* unit as “a group of persons usually living together and composed of the head and other persons related to the head by blood, marriage or adoption. A single person living alone is considered as a separate family”; while the *household* “refers to an aggregate of persons, generally but not necessarily bound by ties of kinship, who live together under the same roof and eat together or share in common the household food. Members comprise the head of the household, relatives living with him/her and other persons who share the community life for reasons of work or other consideration. A person who lives alone is also considered a separate household.” (Integrated Survey of Households Bulletin, Series 99, NSO). I use these definitions of family or household unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup>Estimates by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)- Economic and Social Database (ESD) Team based on data from FIES. See also Ibon Foundation (2013b, p.3)

<sup>7</sup>Highlights of the 2012 First Semester Official Poverty Statistics, National Statistical Coordination Board (2012). Official national poverty estimates over the past six years have hovered between 22-24% despite economic growth, though even this could be an underestimate, given the low poverty thresholds accounted into official statistics. Urban and rural disparities persist in terms of both income levels and access to basic social services (See also FIES 2006 and FIES 2009).

Real wages elsewhere have stagnated amid inflation and rising costs of basic goods and services. At USD 279 a month, average wages in the Philippines are the third lowest<sup>8</sup> among 72 countries in the world. The daily minimum wage of Php 446 (USD 9.9) in Metro Manila or the National Capital Region (NCR) – which is already more than fifty per cent higher than in rural regions<sup>9</sup>-is barely half of the estimated living wage (USD 23) for a family of five. Numbers of the “working poor” are rising even in the formal sector where precarious or temporary contracts are the norm, and poverty incidence stands at 43.2 % for agricultural workers, 16.5% for industrial workers, and 11.1% for those in the service sector.<sup>10</sup>

While poverty rates tend to be higher in rural areas, pressures for housing are most acute in cities.

High rates of rural migration and high rates of precarity among the urban working class have contributed to a situation where many simply cannot afford formal housing and are pushed into slums. Thousands therefore find themselves on the threshold of homelessness, caught in the nexus between poverty wages and the ever-present threat of eviction. Soaring rents and the persistence of poverty wages (Harvey, 1985) has fed a burgeoning urban underclass, compounded by the lack of adequate public housing provision.

At present, government figures project a backlog of 5.8 million housing units by 2016, with NCR, Central Luzon, and Calabarzon regions representing more than half of total housing requirements<sup>11</sup>.

The National Shelter Program (NSP), operational since the 1970s, has been poorly equipped to deal with the shortage<sup>12</sup>. The NSP is mandated to provide low-cost housing for populations at the bottom 30<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> income percentile, with housing units divided into “socialised” and “economic” housing, each targeted according to a household’s ability to pay. Socialised housing units, for example, cost less than USD 6,000, and are targeted toward households at the bottom 30<sup>th</sup> percentile. Economic housing units, costing between USD 6,000 to 40,000, are targeted at the 30<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup>. In either case, units are to be paid for by households in amortisations or instalments. However only about a quarter of socialised housing projects under the NSP have covered the bottom 30% of the urban poor (Ballesteros, 2009).

On the other hand, commercial housing – in the form of high-end condominiums or gated subdivisions on the fringes of Metro Manila – is private and *exclusive*, oriented toward middle class consumers and priced well out of reach of minimum wage earners, including, paradoxically, the construction workers who build them.

### *The Philippine Slum as subaltern site*

Flows of labour, capital, and resources like energy, water, even garbage, lend themselves to the

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<sup>8</sup>International Labor Organization. 2012/2013 *Global Wage Report*. May 2013.

<sup>9</sup> For wage rates see: National Wages and Productivity Commission and Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES), January and April 2013 <[www.bles.dole.gov.ph](http://www.bles.dole.gov.ph)>

<sup>10</sup>BLES. Working poor and working poverty rate, by sector and by class of worker, 2003, 2006, 2009. See also: Ibon Foundation (2013). *IBON Facts & Figures*, Vol. 36, No. 7. *Jobless Growth*. 15 April 2013.

<sup>11</sup>Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), as cited in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2011-2016 (National Economic and Development Authority, 2010)

<sup>12</sup> Hampered by budgetary constraints and an inability to secure private sources of funding, the 1990s saw the NSP refocus attention from on-site mass slum upgrading to more individualised mechanisms to address the housing gap. This new strategy included (a) provision of formal tenure through the Community Mortgage Program and Presidential Land Proclamations; (b) resettlement through the National Housing Authority (NHA); and (c) housing loans through the Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF) or Pag-IBIG. Yet public housing projects have faced a number of complications. Presidential land proclamations run up against red tape, steady financing for resettlement site development is limited, and unclear laws mediating property disputes essentially prevent the construction of new housing units. Housing loans, on the other hand, are difficult to access by workers in the informal sector without the necessary collateral (Ballesteros, 2009, p. 24).

production of slums as subaltern sites (Loftus, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2011). Inscribed on the urban fabric are informal settlements authored and produced by the urban poor: construction workers, jeepney ‘barkers’ and drivers, market vendors, trash collectors and informal recyclers, among countless others whose economic and social value in the production of the city is often overlooked. Gillespie (2013) calls this the production of new public spaces and new urban commons. That slum-dwellers are also wage-earners with a useful contribution to society is a vital corrective to discourses that project the urban poor as liabilities and tax burdens on the state. Indeed their everyday activity adds to the built environment (Bayat, 1997), but also renders them especially vulnerable to processes of marginalisation.

These processes in turn depends on a confluence of factors, including trends in rent and real estate prices, existing cultural, economic, and political dynamics shaping state intervention in favour of specific class interests, ideological discourses surrounding development, and the level of social resistance to various regimes of dispossession (Levien, 2013b).

The subaltern status of slums is reinforced by their legal ambiguity and their physical location. Some 43% of informal settlements in the Philippines are on public land, 15% are on private properties, and 15% are found on the most precarious and environmentally degraded lands, near flood ways, in port areas, in dump sites, along the coast, or along major roads and railroad tracks. 26% are in otherwise blighted areas, where access to social services and formal employment is limited (Ballesteros, 2010). Processes of gentrification on land previously perceived as too poor for investment, but developed over time by generations of slum-dwellers into thriving communities, have pushed them to even more marginal locations (Harvey, 1985).

As many slum-dwellers live off the informal economy, proximity to their places of work, often indistinguishable from the domestic sphere, adds to their social stigma (Smith, 2001). The Payatas dumpsite tragedy at the turn of the millennium (Sia Su, 2007), which killed hundreds of trash-pickers living next to a mountain of garbage that collapsed after strong rains, brings sharply into focus Yates’ (2011) notion of humans-as-waste.

Other characteristics of slums make them ready scapegoats for broader structural problems. For instance, the tendency for rural migrants to cluster around certain parts of the city as informal settlers owes in part to social networks of relatives and friends that have established roots in these areas in the past, and who have better information to places of work – yet the cramped, overcrowded nature of slums is intuitively linked to overpopulation and pollution (Bayat, 2000).

Occupants of shanties located along waterways or in flood-prone areas are in turn blamed for the annual flooding of Metro Manila due to what are judged to be the urban poor’s feckless waste disposal practices – although overflowing dams and inadequate infrastructure, including a dated floodway network and the lack of formal waste management systems for low-income areas, are often more accurate causes of the problem (Jha, et al., 2012; Teves, 2009). This nevertheless gave impetus to attempts to evict informal settlements located along Metro Manila’s *esteros* and low-lying coastal slums around Manila Bay and Laguna Lake, “whose mere presence put at risk the well-being of 2.2 million Metro Manila residents” (16<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2013, SRN 6). The Flood Management Master Plan identifies three major causes for flooding in the capital city: (1) high volume of water from the Sierra Madre mountain region; (2) drainage capacity constraints in core areas of Metro Manila; and (3) low-lying communities around Manila Bay and Laguna Lake (Department of Public Works and Highways, 2013)

The solution on offer is to target more than a hundred thousand “informal settler families” (dubbed ISFs) for eviction from eight ‘priority’ waterways identified as located in major flood zones (Mines and Geosciences Bureau, 2009) [See Figure 2]. The evictions are to take place every year until

2016<sup>13</sup> (Agence France-Presse, 2013; Ranada, 2013; San Pedro, 2013).

Demolition orders feed off middle class prejudices and media depictions of a city in need of sanitisation and protection against the impacts of flooding (Smith, 2001). These have coincided with new, depoliticising discourses around climate vulnerability and PPPs that render the urban poor passive subjects of either state violence or political patronage. What is left unsaid in such narratives is the nature of ‘development projects’ predicted to displace millions from areas that have been declared danger zones for residential use, but open for commercial business. The Laguna Lake 2020 Project touts itself as a plan to save Laguna de Bay by the year 2020, under the slogan *Ibalik ang Diwa ng Lawa* (“Restore the Spirit of the Lake”). In a revamping of the Laguna Lake Development Authority’s (1995) original master plan, efforts are underway to control traditional fishing practices and conduct scientific mapping of the lake region for the construction of river control structures, alongside the promotion of eco-tourism and the introduction of an environmental fee management system (Laguna Lake Development Authority, 2012).

Yet the same plan simultaneously provides space for high-rise condominiums and luxury real estate enclaves, ferry terminals, even an international airport. Laguna 2020 encompasses 54 projects collectively worth Php 300 billion (USD 6.7 billion), and will displace some 3.92 million people (Calleja, 2011). A road dike project alone could displace half a million lakeshore residents with the construction of eleven pumping stations, four road lanes and eleven bridges, while ensuring private investors 17.6 per cent share of the profits (Carcamo, 2012).

Along similar lines, the latest National Reclamation Plan (NRP) has revived a slew of reclamation projects covering 26,234 hectares of foreshore areas in Manila, Navotas, Paranaque and Las Piñas for Manila Bay redevelopment (Philippine Reclamation Authority, no date). The NRP is to reclaim an additional 38,272 hectares beyond Manila Bay, including projects in Cebu, Davao, among other areas (Sagip Manila Bay Movement, 2012).

Both initiatives have set their sights on 2020, sparking a bidding war among private investors for choice lands targeted for conversion from slum areas of low economic value into ‘revenue-generating’ industrial, residential, and commercial areas. Each wave of reclamation and redevelopment involves mass resettlement of mostly informal settler, fisher folk, and farming communities in a network of PPP infrastructure projects [See Figure 1 and Table 1].

These trends, I argue, reflect discourses around ‘climate resilience’ and ‘inclusive development’ offered by a neoliberal-paternalist state which enlists the support of technocratic experts and the private sector through partnerships targeted at securing the consent of the general populace for ongoing processes of neoliberalisation. What is new today is the degree to which capital has inserted itself in nearly all aspects of social governance through neoliberal technologies of power, including PPPs (Keil, 2002). These offer narratives of the public good, effective governance, and inclusive development through partnerships between private corporations, selected civil society organisations, and international development agencies under the general rubric of the green economy. While ostensibly promoting environmental sustainability and social development, however, profit motives and tendencies toward monopoly control of critical resources and infrastructure projects simultaneously undermine these objectives, encapsulated in what MacDonald (2013) dubs green grabbing.

This was perhaps seen most clearly, and tragically, in Post-Haiyan Tacloban City, where a handful of corporations have been given choice pickings on rehabilitation operations (Esmaguél II, 2014; Hodal, 2014; Pendon, 2014). A PPP framework for post-disaster rebuilding proved difficult and

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<sup>13</sup>The plan could displace some 100,000 to 300,000 people or approximately 20,000 to 60,000 families from Juan River (4,217 families), Pasig River (1,484 families), Tullahan River (3,683 families), Maricaban Creek (1,687 families), Manggahan Floodway (2,997 families), Estero Tripa de Gallina (3,887), Estero de Maypajo (1,415 families), and Estero de Sunog Apog (170 families).

expensive to manage, with government agencies dealing with multiple private contractors all at once, on top of delays in aid delivery and overpriced bunkhouses which added to the controversy (Del Mundo, 2014). In a spate of entrepreneurial land grabbing, the imposition of No-Dwelling zones along the coast echoes responses to disasters like the 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka and the aftermath of the Haiti quake and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Restrictions on residential use of lands deemed unfit for human habitation were followed rapidly by a rush by capital for land conveniently laid open for commercial investors (Klein, 2007). Informal or traditional property tenure systems are in these contexts ignored, and ‘natural’ disasters subsequently become a pretext for turning land over to the private sector.

Thomas (2014, p. 18) describes this as ‘land-grab-induced displacement’, in contrast to ‘disaster-induced displacement’, which tends to direct attention away from the real drivers of dispossession:

On the one hand, ‘disaster prevention’ may be used as a pretext for expropriating economically strategic lands. On the other, the aftermath of a disaster often becomes a scenario for opportunistic land-grabbing. Here the original displacement is actually caused by a disaster, but it is the usurpers who prevent victims from rebuilding their homes.

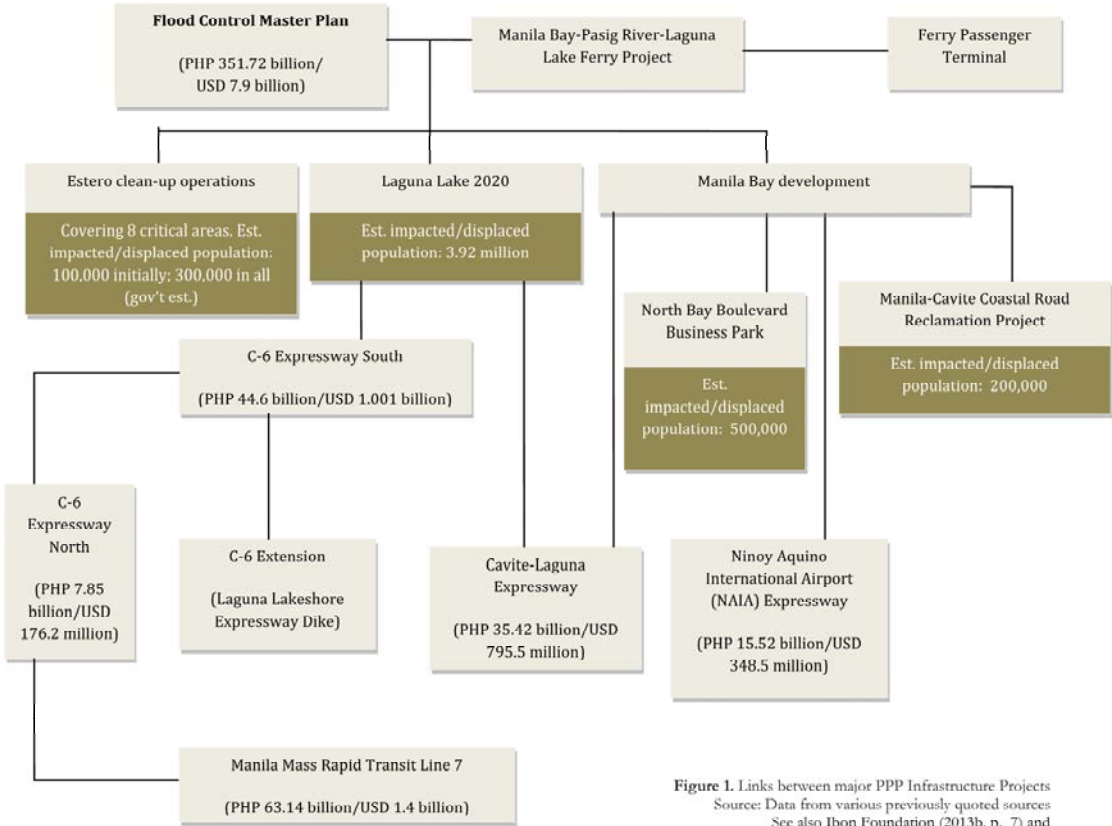
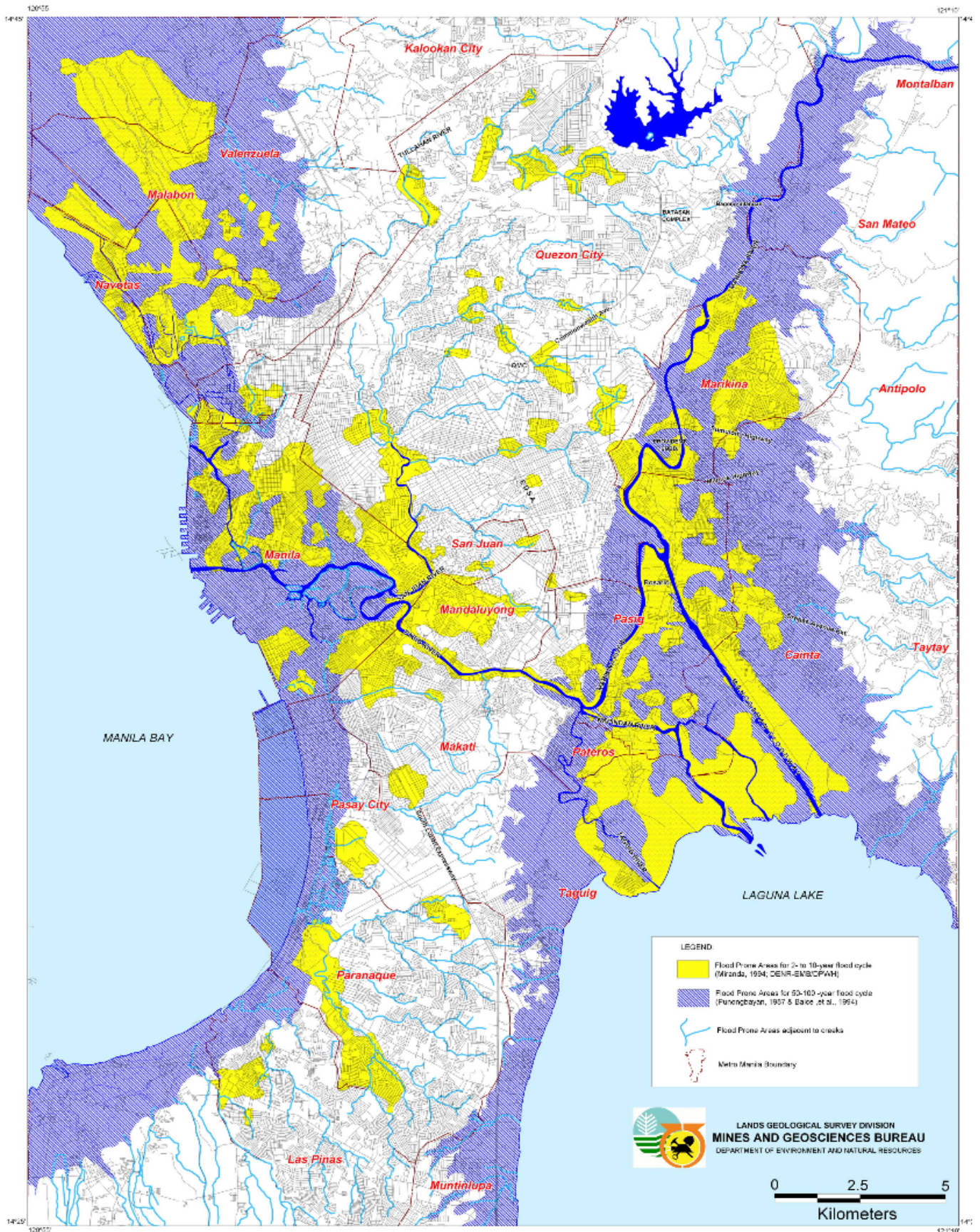


Figure 1. Links between major PPP Infrastructure Projects  
 Source: Data from various previously quoted sources  
 See also Ibon Foundation (2013b, p. 7) and  
 Navarro and Lianto (2014)



**Figure 2.** Source: *Flood Hazard Map of Metro Manila*. Mines and Geosciences Bureau (2009).  
 Legend: [in yellow] Flood-prone areas for 2-10 year flood cycle; [in dark blue] Flood-prone areas for 50-100 year flood cycle

Table 1. PPP projects, affected populations, and corporate actors involved

Major PPP Projects (Public-Private Partnerships)	Hectares of land grabbed (has.)/ Families Affected	Corporate/Institutional Actors Involved
<b>Quezon City Central Business District (QC-CBD)</b>	340.6 has./24,500 families	Ayala Land, Inc. (Ayala-Zobel) in North Triangle, Quezon City for Vertis North/ International Monetary Fund-World Bank
<b>National Government Center (NGC)</b> , affecting Barangays <sup>14</sup> Payatas, Commonwealth, Batasan, Holy Spirit in Quezon City	444 has./80,000 families	Various government agencies; with relocation sites for displaced residents often built and managed in conjunction with a variety of private sector actors
<b>Welfareville (Mandaluyong) Privatisation</b> – formerly a public-owned resettlement site	108 has./25,000 families	Various government agencies and private sector actors
<b>Sucab Central Business District</b>	60 has.	Vista Land
<b>Manila North Harbor Development Plan</b> , affecting Barangays 105, Baseco, Parola in Tondo, Manila	1,700 families	Manila North Harbor Port, Inc. (owned by San Miguel Corporation and Reghis Romero)
C-5 Northern Link Road Project	40,000 families	Metro Pacific Tollways Corporation (owned by Manuel Pangilinan)
<p><b>National Reclamation Plan</b> (constituting 102 national reclamation projects covering 38,000 has. of coastal areas in total)</p> <p><b>1. Manila Bay Reclamation Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manila-Cavite Coastal Road Reclamation Project (MCCRPP)/Boulevard 2000</li> <li>- North Bay Boulevard Business Park (NBBBP), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion of Radial Road 10 (R10)</li> <li>International Ship Repair Yard</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>2. Laguna Lake 2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Taguig Lakeshore District (golf course and conversion to residential, commercial mixed-use properties)</li> <li>- Muntinlupa</li> </ul>	<p>26,234 has. 1,500 has./38,000 families</p> <p>156 has. of coastal lands along Parañaque, Las Piñas, Manila, Navotas, Bulacan, Pampanga and Bataan/75,000 families</p> <p>3.3 kms in Navotas/1,500 families</p> <p>32,000 families, mostly fisher folk</p> <p>3,000 has.</p> <p>5,000 has.</p>	<p>Manila Gold Coast Development Corp. (William Tieng), SM Development Corp. (Henry Sy), Asiaworld (Tan Yu), Metrobank Group of Companies (George Ty), R-1 Consortium (Jan de Nul N.V., TOA Corporation of Japan, D.M. Wenceslao &amp; Associates, Inc.), Manila Bay Development Corporation (Jacinto Ng)</p> <p>Various government agencies and private sector actors</p> <p>Nautilus Shipyard Repair, Inc.</p> <p>DMCI Holdings Inc., among other real estate developers</p>

<sup>14</sup>A Barangay is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, similar to a district or ward, and is a Filipino term for village



- Los Baños, Laguna	500 has.	Various government agencies and private sector actors
<b>3. In other parts of the country:</b> Southern Mindanao Region (Davao Gulf areas), Cagayan Special Economic Zone, Albay Gulf, Iloilo, Bacolod City, Semirara (Panay), Kalibo (Aklan), Leyte, Cebu, Panglao (Bohol), Antique		
<b>Flood Management Master Plan for Metro Manila and Surrounding Areas:</b> San Juan River, Manggahan Floodway, Estero Tripa de Gallina, Maricaban Creek, Tullahan River, Pasig River, Estero de Maypajo, Estero de Sunog Apog	60,000 families (22,661 families initially targeted for relocation by NHA in 2013)	World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australian Aid Agency
<b>MRT Line 7 Construction</b>	6,000 families	San Miguel Corporation (Danding Cojuangco, Ramon Ang), Araneta Properties, DMCI Holdings, Marubeni Corporation (Japan)
<b>Manila-Clark Rapid Railway System</b> – a “bullet train” system intended to link up vast swathes of Central Luzon to ferry goods and people	42,580 families – Primarily informal settler, farming, and coastal communities blocking construction between Manila and in the provinces of Pampanga, Bulacan, Zambals, Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac and Aurora	Discussions for placing the project under the government’s public-private partnership scheme are underway, in coordination with JICA. Various foreign investors have already expressed interest

Source: Pinoy Media Center (2013) based on data from Alyansa Kontra Demolisyon, Task Force Urban Conscientization, and various previously quoted news reports

### *Urban Neoliberalisation, PPPs, and the new squatters of Capital*

An understanding of the processes driving urban land conflicts in the Philippines requires us to look at the connections between the historical neoliberalisation of the country and new mechanisms of extracting value from the city (Weber, 2002). Regimes of dispossession as they occur across different contexts are bound together by broadly similar processes, i.e. the crises of capitalism and profit motives of the capitalist class (Harvey, 2014); although it would be wrong to suggest that neoliberalisation is a monolithic affair conducted through the same institutions at the local level, with identical results. Indeed Brenner and Theodore (2002) speak of the “path dependency” of the neoliberal project, which takes different forms according to the historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts of the countries where neoliberalisation takes place.

Nonetheless, studies of neoliberal urbanism have largely been conducted in the first world, and the themes developed in these debates can gain from a more complex reading of neoliberalisation in specific geographical and temporal contexts. These include *revanchism* (Smith, 1996) and *creative destruction* (Harvey, 2007), which connote a kind of revenge by the state, or a reclaiming by the capitalist class of the space robbed from them by strong labour movements capable of pressuring the state to concede to their demands in a negotiated class compromise.

This may be true in the context of Post-war industrialised societies and their welfare states, but they are arguably less suitable for an analysis of ABD in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global south. I would argue that in historically underdeveloped capitalist economies locked in current processes of neoliberalisation, creative destruction is simply *destruction*, in the sense that capital does not destroy past formations of industrial capital, as in the case of the first world; rather it destroys the dregs of

already underdeveloped economies, where there is very little for capital to dismantle in cycles or moments of destruction and creation. Capital destroys forms of labour organisation, regulatory mechanisms, and social services that have started from a very low base. It dispossesses and simultaneously reproduces urban slums whose surplused inhabitants are no longer of any use to capital (Li, 2009).

In the case of the Philippines, for instance, there has been very limited support for labour or public housing to begin with, and ABD is less a sign of successful capitalist development than a capitalist colonial redux (Ince, 2013), perpetuating core-periphery relations through cycles of dispossession that do not result in productive, job-creating investments [See Figure 3].

Neoliberal gentrification and revanchism in Philippine cities extend back to the Martial Law era, most notably with Imelda Marcos' urban beautification drives attempting to turn Manila into the "City of Man" (Arn, 1995). But competing narratives of progress, the desire to attract foreign investment and tourism, and mass evictions and displacements of the poor in many ways still resonate in the developmental priorities of the state under the guise of modernisation. The only difference is that these same processes today involve an even wider, globalised web of state institutions, foreign investors and their local counterparts – a transnational capitalist class I christen the new 'squatters of capital' – in mutually beneficial regimes of accumulation, rooted in globalised flows of speculative and extractive capital (Baird, 2011; Smith, 2002).

Capital's squatters reside in public-private partnerships (PPPs) that are the latest modality for ABD, as they sequester wealth via these new modes of accumulation in partnership with the state. Running the gamut from build-operate-and-transfer (BOT) to build-transfer-and-operate (BTO) schemes, PPPs grant certain rights to corporations that extend throughout the duration of a PPP contract, usually a period spanning decades, after which these projects are either to be returned to the state or are managed in perpetuity by the private sector under a set arrangement.

For Keil (2002) PPPs are just one among a number of neoliberal technologies of power enlisted to fulfil the classic functions of the capitalist state as it balances between the interests of capital and securing legitimacy for itself. Put simply, compared to privatisation, placing public before private in the language of partnerships just goes down easier with the electorate. Meanwhile financial deregulation and the deterritorialisation of capital have fed the rise of the "contract state", which arbitrates value in the built environment, attempts desperately to capture the interest of footloose investors, and negotiates the social terrain to ensure the least possible barriers to big business (Weber, 2002).

Drawing links between rising inequality and PPPs as a new channel for financial extraction, Hildyard (2014) argues that whatever their alleged benefits, PPPs are costlier and less efficient in the long run and "provide private companies with contract-based rights to flows of public money or to monopoly income streams from services on which the public rely. So for outsourcing, [private finance initiatives], and BOTs, the income stream is a contract with a public authority. For concessions and loans, the income is from fees from a captive pool of users" (Hildyard, 2014, p. 6).

PPP investments in the Philippines peaked in the mid-1990s, declined in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis (Navarro and Llanto, 2014), but have made a recent come-back with the Aquino administration championing PPPs as its flagship development initiative (National Economic and Development Authority, 2010). Previously limited to infrastructure projects, water and the energy sectors, PPPs are now expanding into healthcare, information technology, mass transit, public housing, even the construction and operation of prisons<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup>A variety of private contractors are involved in the construction and maintenance of a Php 40.29 billion (USD 895.33 million) prison facility in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, in coordination with the Department of Justice. Information on the latest projects are available at the PPP Center website: <http://ppp.gov.ph>

Yet infrastructure still accounts for a significant share of PPP projects, partly to make up for years of ‘woeful’ public spending on the sector (Navarro and Llanto, 2014) – in a telling illustration of capital’s need for speed in the transit of labour and commodities (Harvey, 2014). A battery of new airport terminals, expressway toll way systems, roads, and transit lines are assumed to raise real estate prices, entice tourists, and assure investors of the country’s status as a new Asian tiger ripe for the picking, and are spurring significant transformations of the built urban environment, against which the urban poor are perceived to be literally squatting in the way of progress.

In his explorations of the post-political city, Swyngedouw (2011) reflects on the entrepreneurial nature of the built environment of the city, which has increasingly come to depend on flows of fictitious or speculative capital (Harvey, 1985). The living conditions of informal and precarious labour, by contrast, have been steadily undermined. Couched in the language of competitiveness and efficiency these costs are touted as the inevitable price of modernisation and *the new* in the global city. But PPPs are variations on an old theme, inasmuch as popular democratic forms of accountability in the Philippines have always been limited, and a parasitic privatised state has actively underwritten capitalist accumulation by a narrow subset of political cliques and rent-seeking capital (McCoy, et al., 2009; Tyner, 2009).

In contrast to the rhetoric around promoting competition, PPP projects are concentrated in a small number of elite. Five business conglomerates shouldered 51.3% of the total cost of PPP deals in infrastructure alone between 1984 and 2012 that were collectively worth close to USD 60 billion (The World Bank Group, 2014). These have included old players like San Miguel Corporation, Aboitiz, and Ayala Corporation – owned by politically well-connected clans with landholdings inherited from the Spanish colonial era – as well as the nouveau riche, like Metro Pacific Investment Corporation, a joint venture between stock market tycoon Manuel V. Pangilinan and Indonesia’s Salim group, and Megawide Construction, owned by mall tycoon Henry Sy (Ibon Foundation 2014; PPP Center, 2014).

Traditional forms of political power in the Philippines, including the landed oligarchy and corporate monopolies, are thus *reinforced* and simply adapt to emerging neoliberal trends. Local landed elites are transitioning from their traditional bastions in the sugar or tobacco industries toward more corporatized models of business and speculative real estate (McCoy, et al., 2009), responding to the state’s generous incentives and open calls for the privatisation of public space (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

As Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 27) note: “The neoliberal project of institutional creation is no longer oriented simply towards the promotion of market-driven capitalist growth; it is also oriented towards the establishment of new flanking mechanisms and modes of crisis displacement through which to insulate powerful economic actors from the manifold failures of the market, the state, and governance that are persistently generated within a neoliberal political framework.”

Neoliberal forms of urban policy and redevelopment are the default developmental framework of the Philippine government, fuelled in part by the historical momentum of the fall of the Marcos regime, and the associated inefficiencies of a stigmatised government bureaucracy and public sector. The Asian financial crisis made subsequent governments even more responsive to neoliberalisation, and the private sector has since been elevated to the status of imprimatur of development. While historical underdevelopment of the country’s manufacturing and agricultural sectors persist, local elites have come to depend even more on state support for their speculative investments (Ibon Foundation, 2013a).

In this context, what PPPs bring to the table is an open question, not least in terms of whether the sacrifices they entail on the part of the dispossessed are a price actually worth paying. In the next section, I explore the ways by which a number of PPPs have ushered in fresh waves of urban dislocation and structural violence in their wake, and are driving evictions while overseeing housing projects for the displaced.



***Law, Violence, and Governmentality in the Subaltern Slum***

*“Buhay at kinabukasan ng pamilya naming ang nakasalalaydito. Bahagi din kami ng pag-unlad. Kung aalis lang mga demolition teams, tatahimik ang mga tao. Wala kaming ipinakikiusap (kundi) buksan ulit ang negosasyon.”*[Our lives and the futures of our families are at stake here. We too are part of development. Once the demolition teams leave, we will be at peace. We ask for nothing more than open negotiations with the government.]

- Myrna Lacdao<sup>16</sup>, Community Leader, Sitio San Roque

As we move more firmly into a world where market logics dominate, desires to become ‘globally competitive’ are increasingly in tension with the anachronisms of both patronage politics and post-Martial Law era democracy, normalising the raw, unfiltered violence behind the law (Blomley, 2003; Springer, 2013b). Indeed neoliberal capitalism has marked a reprisal of violence in its naked form –

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<sup>16</sup>In an interview for GMA News TV’s “24 Oras” newscast at the height of a suite of demolitions of informal settlements along North Triangle, Quezon City  
<<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/news/nation/barricades-block-qc-north-triangle-demolition-14-hurt-in-clashes>>

violence not outside the rule of law, but bound to the very nature of capitalist society and coursed through a “trilateral of logics” (Springer, 2013a, p. 611) where the state as sovereign and the subaltern as bare life meet in an uneven topology of power. Between both lies the *state of exception*, where law and civility do not apply and capital reveals its savage other (Agamben, 1998). Here both the callous violence of structural market forces and the direct violence of the state perpetuate processes of violent accumulation and leave behind subaltern sites subject to displacement and alienation.

Swyngedouw (2011, p. 20) argues along similar lines: “a consensual state-police form has now become more deeply entrenched, whereby the state functions to organise the survival of capitalism by guaranteeing continuing capital flows on the one hand and repressing the various forms of radical discontent that ripple throughout the urban field on the other.”

Violence also takes on discursive forms with slums portrayed as blockages to the flow of capital investment, and their inhabitants rendered in terms of the excluded Other. The struggles of the urban poor against evictions and for decent housing tend to have even less legitimacy in the eyes of the state and the middle class, given prevailing ‘common sense’ (Keil, 2002) that links criminality to the lack of legal documentation and private property rights, and the association between urban slums and humans-as-waste (Yates, 2011). The recriminalisation of poverty and normalisation of precarious labour leaves these sites especially vulnerable to emerging and sophisticated regimes of dispossession (Levien, 2013a). Social polarisation has fed into what can be argued is an emerging neoliberal caste system, pitting the middle class against a precariat surplus population, which has in turn helped fuel the violence of the capitalist state.

Over the past five years alone, evictions have turned increasingly violent, with thousands displaced by PPP and government infrastructure projects, resulting in numerous reported injuries, killings, and illegal arrests of slum-dwellers (Ibon Foundation, 2013b) [See Table 2].

But not all is bare violence, and while dispossession via coercion occurs through violent demolitions and forced evictions, it also takes place through the manufacturing of consent (Gramsci, 1971).

In relocation sites, for instance, a variety of legal and discursive mechanisms surrounding the relocation process endeavour to encourage informal settlers to enter into the fold of formalised citizenship (Roy, 2009).

Government agencies have allocated billions of pesos for eviction drives<sup>17</sup>, while promising space at a designated resettlement area or cash hand outs for affected families (Burgonio, 2013; Cupin, 2013; Department of Interior and Local Government, 2014), who are given about a month’s notice to leave their homes (Urban Development and Housing Act 1992). Cash transfers act as a mechanism for neoliberal or civic governmentality (Roy, 2009), with those who refuse stigmatised as ‘professional squatters’ or associated with left-wing groups. A token fee is often given as direct substitute for permanent housing for evictees, while those who insist on staying put face the threat of demolition (Ibon Foundation, 2013b).

Moreover, public housing initiatives tend to be ad hoc affairs, planned out after people have already been displaced or are about to be displaced. Selection of housing beneficiaries is shaped by relations between government officials and evicted communities that take on clientilistic forms. These echo state-evictee relations under the Martial Law era (Arn, 1995), where the ability to secure housing units depended on one’s relations with local patrons or power-holders.

What is new is the extent to which corporate actors have entered into the scene. PPPs are found even in the context of public housing projects, which are either managed by private contractors in

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<sup>17</sup> General Appropriations Act FY 2013. Department of Budget and Management [online] Available at: [http://www.dbm.gov.ph/?page\\_id=5280](http://www.dbm.gov.ph/?page_id=5280) [Accessed 5 Dec. 2014]. See also: “P10B allocated for transfer of informal settlers” <<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/breaking-news/2013/06/24/p10b-allocated-transfer-informal-settlers-289016>>

deals between construction and utility companies and the NHA, or are provided for by the state to clear land for private investment. The Quezon City Central Business District (QCCBD) is a case in point. Slum-dwellers displaced by Vertis North have been moved to relocation sites provided for by the NHA, which is in strategic alliance with Ayala, Inc. Evictions have taken place in stages, limiting dissent through a mix of coercion and consent, and with evictees scattered across disparate resettlement projects in Bulacan, Rizal, Cavite, among other far-flung locales (Pinoy Media Center, 2013; Silverio, 2011).

Housing units must still be paid for in amortisations often far in excess of what families without stable wages can afford, and conditions in relocation sites are in many ways no different from the slums they were evicted from. In many cases, housing units are poorly constructed, with limited access to water and electricity (Ballesteros, 2010). Relocates pay significantly more for basic utilities sourced via informal or illegal networks, as companies are far less willing to invest in formal services for people in relocation sites due to the possibility of sunk costs and high risk owing to their inability to pay. The success of these housing projects are in turn measured in individual terms, neglecting issues surrounding community security, the specificities of local economies, and environmental integrity (Ballesteros, 2010). An ideal community is therefore one that pays for itself (Smith, 2002).

Additionally, while the law prioritises on-site relocations or slum-upgrading in cases of redevelopment (Urban Development and Housing Act 1992), resettlement of the urban poor is overwhelmingly off-site, located far from places of work. And because they are located in the cheapest possible land, relocation sites tend to be found in danger zones prone to flooding or landslides – take the case of Kasiglahan or San Isidro village, in Montalban Rizal, built between denuded mountains in a flood plain<sup>18</sup> (Ellao, 2013).

Geographies of fear and insecurity prevail in relocation sites, with rising crime rates tied to alienated social networks, lack of access to social services, unemployment and related impoverishment, but for the same reasons can also become sites of resistance, with residents organising around issues of the everyday (Loftus, 2012). A number of grassroots organisations have organised against water, rent, and electricity charges, and have mobilised for decent living conditions in relocation sites (Arellano, personal communication, 27 November 2014)<sup>19</sup>. Demands by relocates often revolve around issues of proximity to employment or sources of income, as well as access to public infrastructure and basic social services. Such efforts have succeeded on a number of occasions, with residents able to press for the integration of their communities into formal energy grids.

Over time, relocation sites do have the potential to be ‘re-developed’ by the displaced into relatively stable and economically developed communities. Once the value of land begins to rise, however, these sites once again become targets for dispossession, or are converted to other uses. Toward the end of the Marcos dictatorship, the Payatas dumpsite itself used to be land allotted for relocation sites, dubbed *lupang pangako* (promised land). But a number of relocated residents have been displaced multiple times owing to the need to make room for Metro Manila’s waste and new waves of urban poor relocates displaced by new investments in urban centres (Arn, 1995).

In any case, government policy toward informal settlers often result in cycles of eviction and resettlement, while neglecting the structural poverty and landlessness that are the root causes of urban

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<sup>18</sup>High risk areas for flooding, landslides, and storm surges. Department of Science and Technology’s *Project HaNDA (Hazard Notification, Dissemination, and Awareness)*, 2014. Available from <http://drrm.region4a.dost.gov.ph/critical-areas.html>

<sup>19</sup> Bea Arellano is the national chair of Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY), an urban poor solidarity group that has mobilised against issues of dispossession and for decent living conditions in relocation sites since the early 2000s. This conversation took place during discussions for a re-launching of the Sagip San Roque Campaign in the UP All Workers’ Union office at the University of the Philippines-Diliman on 27 November 2014. An audio and English transcript can be provided upon request.

slum growth.

The end result is that between 30-40% of those resettled return to their places of origin (Gilles, 2012).

On either end of the cycle of urban dispossession, therefore, capital resurrects even the refuse of its operations into additional sites for capital accumulation. Such compounded dispossession can only be described as double, even triple, violence. While capital has managed to exploit subaltern marginality to its own ends, utilising new technologies of power to meet its physical infrastructural needs via state patronage, informal labour is relegated to sub-standard housing, even homelessness, alongside the stripping of public services and social infrastructure (Harvey, 2014).

**Table 2.** Incidents of forced eviction and related human rights violations

Place of Incident	Date	Families Affected (displaced or resettled)	Injured	Killed	Illegally arrested	Reason behind eviction
Silverio Compound, San Dionisio, Parañaque	7 March 2012	25,000 families	40+ (10 with gunshot wounds)	1	33 (2 women, 6 minors, 1 senior)	PPP Project
	23 April 2012					
Corazon de Jesus, San Juan City	25 January 2011	122 families	68		23	Construction of City Hall and Commercial Projects
	11 January 2012	121 families	18			
Interior Dama De Noche, Kadiwa, Barangay San Roque, Navotas City	February 23, 24, 25, 28, 2011	466 families	22			Government Project
	March 1-2, 2011					
	May 5-6, 2011					
	May 11, 12, 17, 18, 2011					
Philippine National Railway Site, Muntinlupa	Over ten demolitions took place between 2009-2012	The homes of some 23,000 families were demolished in 2009 and 355 families remain in makeshift tents				Government Project; railway modernisation
Laperal Compound, Guadalupe, Makati	28 April 2011	4,000 families	19			Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
Dypac Compound, Juan Luna, Tondo, Manila	12 December 2011	300 families	9			Private property (land ownership dispute)
Various parts of Quezon City, including Barangay Commonwealth, Batasan, Holy Spirit, Payatas, National Government Center	Over ten demolitions took place between 2008-2012	3,000 families				Reblocking, Road extension, Selling of government-owned lots
Barangay Sipac-Almacen and Navotas West,	Five demolitions between August to September, 2010	4,000 families				North Bay Modernisation

Navotas City						
Barangay Mariana, New Manila, Quezon City	August 11-12, 2010	200 families				Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
Manggahan, Kawayanan, Parañaque	5 August 2011	16 families				Private property (land ownership dispute)
	15 August 2011					
Sitio Fatima, Parañaque	5 October 2011	42 families			3	Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
Fastrack, Sitio Fatima, Parañaque	October 21, 24, 28, 2011	200 families				Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
	8 November 2011					
	21 December 2011					
San Roque, North Triangle, Bagong Pag-Asa, Quezon City	23 September 2011	3,000 families				For Quezon City Business District (QCCBD)
Bagbag, Novaliches	February 2012	500 families				Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
Old Balara, Quezon City	26 August 2011	1,000 families				Redevelopment (land ownership dispute)
Welfareville, Mandaluyong City	17 October 2011	46 families				Redevelopment following privatisation of previously government-owned resettlement site
Pangrap Village, Caloocan	28 April 2011	8,000 families		2		MRT 7 and Business Centre
<b>TOTAL</b>		73, 013 families	176	4	59	

Source: Ibon Foundation (2013b), based on data from Demolition Watch

Urging scholars to give proper weight to the agency of the dispossessed, Doshi (2012) draws our attention toward the political subjectivities of displaced slum dwellers in Mumbai, where mass evictions are carried out by the state through technologies of exclusion and inclusion. Whether through frequently violent forced evictions or market-oriented resettlement projects, processes of capital “accumulation by differentiated displacement” have varying impacts on slum populations divided along class, gender, and ethnic lines.

Attempts to clear away squatter settlements for ostensible reasons of urban sanitation or safety is in reality nothing new, with Philippine law already providing for the clearance of slums from ‘danger zones’, including esteros and coastal areas, as early as the 1990s (Urban Development and Housing Act 1992). Implementation, however, has been beset by resistance from slum communities, as well as a contradictory legal terrain that, while providing for the protection of private property, must also deal with the progressive spirit of a Constitution that has at its core the proviso that all “use of



property bears a social function”<sup>20</sup>, alongside laws that recognise the realities of entrenched inequality and socialised measures to address this.

Rivalries among political elites and their respective voter bases among the urban poor are an additional factor – come election season, promises to lift or delay eviction orders are a source of significant political capital (Gilles, 2012) – bringing to the surface the contested production of urban space that refute depictions of dispossession as a straightforward process. Ultimately, the inability to deal with the structural causes of poverty and regional inequalities has failed to stem the tide of rural migration and urban slum growth.

## CONCLUSION

Merging the insights of political economy, subaltern urbanism, and urban political ecology, I have attempted to contribute to a better understanding of the production and reproduction of subaltern sites in the context of the global south. I then traced the growth, evolution, and contested nature of Philippine slums, in an attempt to shed light on new forms of ABD that are reproducing these subaltern sites in a period of rapid

Using the lens of urban political ecology and political economy, I underscored how the production of subalternity in urban slums is coursed through specific constellations or assemblages of political power, capital, and labour. Discourses surrounding development and climate adaptation reinforce capital’s hegemonic claims, rendering the social and geographic manifestations of poverty and underdevelopment into subjects for urban sanitisation. These in turn justify the violence of the state against slums-as-subaltern sites that are simultaneously reproduced by the dynamics of capital in the global south.

What results is a spiral of structural violence, limited only by the extent to which the urban poor are able to mobilise and carve space for themselves against ongoing threats of eviction and marginalisation. For not all is a one-way street. Capital is constantly made to modify its strategies toward the subaltern according to a variety of geographic and political considerations. Implicit in this is the potential for subaltern sites to turn into sites of resistance to the predations of capital, offering hope that the urban commons can be reclaimed.

I conclude that there is a need for more attention to dispossession at the urban scale, and to the dynamics between urban and rural dispossession that has provided ready fodder for capitalist dispossession. Such themes could form the basis for powerful urban ethnographies, counter-mapping and counter-histories by the urban poor. Indeed such attempts are already underway through joint efforts by academics and urban poor solidarity groups like the Urban Poor Resource Center of the Philippines (UPRC)<sup>21</sup>. A better grasp of urban dispossession can, in addition, aid social movements in the mobilisation of the informal sector as a terrain for political action in the city. The challenge is to empower communities on the ground for reasons beyond their utility for a political agenda in the singular – as the urban terrain is necessarily complex, multifaceted, and contingent – while sustaining resistance and connecting varied sites of struggle across geographic borders.

By analysing and contesting the inherent violence of state-backed capitalist accumulation, discourses of fear and othering can be replaced by imaginaries of resistance and hope.

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<sup>20</sup>Sec.6, Article XII, 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines

<sup>21</sup>Two such counter-history exercises were organised by UPRC in 2014, through conferences focussing on the history of Sitio San Roque, with insights provided by generations of urban poor community leaders, activists, and recent migrants [For more information about UPRC, please see <http://uprcp.wordpress.com/>]. I owe a debt of gratitude to the organisers of these seminars, as well as to Kristian Saguin and Andre Ortega of the University of the Philippines-Diliman, and Chester Arcilla of the University of the Philippines-Manila, all three of whom have focussed intensively on issues surrounding land dispossession and the urban poor.

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