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philippine studies

Globalization and Urban Social Action
in Metro Manila

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This contribution argues that specific features of urban struggles at the local level are the result of the interaction between local and global forces. Policies aim at shaping Metro Manila as an industrializing, "global" city in the East Asian region. Large infrastructure work that affects the urban poor is on the urban development agenda. The current global discourse on urban development policy also stresses governance and participation of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). These trends impact on urban social action in Metro Manila. In contrast to the 1970s, when the urban movement and the state were strongly opposed to each other, after the downfall of Marcos, the dominant tendency was to cooperate with the agencies of the state while maintaining a "critical distance." Some time in the 1990s, the urban social movement disappeared. Ironically, this occurred at the same time that the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA), meant to protect the rights of the urban poor, was passed in 1996. It remains to be seen whether the problems of the urban poor can be solved under the existing system.

KEYWORDS: globalization, governance, urban social movement, urban poor, Metro Manila

Around three billion people, or half of the world's population, live in cities today, and their numbers are increasing rapidly. Since no population increase is expected in the countryside, it is estimated that within a few years, the urban population will exceed the rural population. The growth of the urban population will mainly take place in developing countries. Only fifteen years ago, around one billion people lived in the cities of the South; today, this number has doubled. In the coming

decades, more than 95 percent of the increase in urban population will occur in cities of the South, registering an absolute growth of more than two billion. Thus, by the year 2025, four billion people will be living in these cities (UNHCS 1996).

Much has been written about the problems accompanying rapid urban growth, such as the spread of squatter settlements and urban poverty, deterioration of the physical infrastructure, and increase in violence. Naturally, it is the poor in particular who suffer from the worsening conditions in the cities. Yet in spite of the many problems they face, the poor perceive the city as an environment that offers opportunities to pursue their strategies in coping with poverty. Contrary to analyses based on ideas of the "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1965), many among the poor are not merely passive recipients of urban problems. The past decades have demonstrated in several countries, especially in the South, that community-based organizations (CBOs) of the urban poor and supportive nongovernment organizations (NGOs) have been actively involved in improving the urban environment. In some countries, they form umbrella organizations or networks, thus bringing urban social movements into existence at some periods of time.

Castells' (1983) definition that an urban social movement should change the meaning of the city has its merits. I opt, however, for a more restricted version, where a network of urban CBOs and NGOs aims to obtain access to land and collective goods and services (such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare) for the urban poor. The efforts of urban social movements usually contain a dimension of protest and contention, which may embrace different forms. A network is called a social movement if it is capable of mobilizing people for petitions, mass meetings, and demonstrations to support the issue at stake. Worldwide, the urban struggle mainly revolves around four issues: (1) obtaining titles to land, (2) improvement of collective services, (3) forced upgrading of poor settlements, and (4) demolition and eviction without compensation. As these issues indicate, an urban social movement is a geographically relevant actor since it is constantly searching for ways to change the urban geographical environment. In turn, the urban environment in the broad sense of the word, encompassing

physical, economic, demographic, sociocultural, and political dimensions, exerts a significant influence on the way the actor proceeds.

A core political question is whether the urban movement will be co-opted into the sociopolitical system, or whether it will develop as a countervailing power against the existing power structure. Participants in an urban movement are confronted with the permanent dilemma of whether or not, and to what degree, to cooperate with government agencies. The question of the right strategy cannot be answered with the help of abstract theories. There are always changes in the political conditions of cities, regions, and countries that require new responses and a rethinking of strategies by urban communities. It is the particular political situation, fixed at a specific point in space and time, which offers constraints and opportunities for collective action. Actors in the urban movement must always be aware of the political opportunity structure (Assies 1997).

In this contribution, which focuses on Metro Manila, I will elaborate on the question of changing strategies. I will look at the connection between urban struggles at the local level and policy trends at the global level, since the specific features of any urban social movement are the result of the interaction between local and global forces. In Metro Manila, like in other large urban agglomerations in Asia, the rate of population growth substantially surpasses the growth of the national population. In around 1960, Metro Manila accounted for 2.5 million inhabitants, while current estimates vary between 10 and 12 million. Nearly one in seven inhabitants of the Philippines and 30 percent of the country's urban population live in Metro Manila (www.census.gov.ph/data, January 2004; *The Manila Times*, 20 October 2003). Each year, the natural increase of around 100,000 persons is matched by the arrival of the same number of migrants, who join the urban poor in the metropolis.

Globalization and the New
Urban Policy Model

Today's globalization is characterized by the mobility of capital. World capital competes for markets and continuously searches for new production locations. Finance capital, in particular, moves around the globe

at great speed and in incredibly large amounts. Rapid change is characteristic of the global, postmodern society, and cities are drawn into an ongoing process of restructuring to adapt to the changing requirements of capital (Castells 1996; Sassen 2001). In this process, some cities lose comparative economic advantages, while others gain (Duffy 1995).

Since the economies of the South are strongly influenced by the world economy, restructuring also occurs in its cities. In the past, the economies of major cities were shaped by their function as regional or national centers of commerce, government, education, or manufacturing. The manufacturing industry was aimed at the national market and was intended to substitute for imports; hence, the import-substitution industry. Alongside this formal economy, an extensive informal sector came into existence. In this sector, many of the urban poor find employment as contract workers in small-scale industries or construction, or are self-employed in street trading, services, and transport. The existence of an extensive informal sector, where jobs are insecure and poorly paid, has since become a characteristic feature of most cities of the South.

Current globalization forces the large cities of the South to offer modern infrastructure and communication facilities, cheap labor, and tax incentives in order to attract foreign capital and to develop export industry. East Asian cities, such as Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta, Seoul, and Shanghai, are outstanding examples of such policies. In these cities, the export industry has contributed substantially to high economic growth rates (especially during the years before the region's crisis in 1997–1998), and it is a major source of employment, too. Export-oriented policies have led to changes in the labor market. Due to low wages, a new, female urban working class has emerged, as well as a middle class of certain affluence.

These cities are global cities as much as their counterparts in the North and, usually substantially stronger than those in the North, they demonstrate that wide income disparities and exclusionary processes are the dark sides of global postmodernism. Since they are part of a global system, they are drawn into the current global discourse on urban development policy, which focuses on good governance. In turn, good governance stresses interaction and cooperation among the several

sectors of society. Limiting the role of the national state in setting economic policy fits into the neoliberal agenda. Thus, there are three major groups of actors in the development process: the state with its government agencies, the private business sector, and the NGOs and CBOs, both representing "civil society." If there are commercially attractive opportunities, the private sector will get a chance while civil society will take responsibility for public services and other nonprofit activities. Thus, the function of the state ideally is to enable the two sectors to fulfill their theoretical roles and, in doing so, the three will cooperate in the planning and implementation of urban programs and projects. The application of this model in the cities of the South creates a greater scope for poor communities to be involved in urban development processes and to initiate interventions to improve their situation. Therefore, community participation, which comprises both the organization of the poor in urban communities and the facilitation of their access to decision-making institutions, is another key notion in current urban development policy. The more poor communities are organized, the better they can take part in efforts of government agencies to improve the urban environment. In this way, benefits for the poorer segments of the population can be improved in matters such as physical infrastructure, public services, urban violence, and housing. Moreover, community participation is one of the most effective ways of reducing social exclusion, a major feature of urban poverty (Abbott 1996; Cheema 1993; UNDP 1997).

Proponents of urban governance and community participation in developing countries seem to forget, however, that the application of these principles requires certain preconditions. A major precondition is a government that enables participatory processes to occur at the community level, even if these may result in a critical attitude toward government policies or agencies. In other words, the organizational capacity of urban CBOs and community participation depends on the democratic character of local and national governments. It is the government that shapes the political environment in which the development and actions of independent CBOs and supportive NGOs can be encouraged.

Bottom-up processes are difficult to introduce in a political climate where democracy is absent or still in its infancy. By definition, authori-

tarian regimes do not enable communities to organize themselves. Instead, such regimes aim to control urban poor neighborhoods. In such societies, participatory processes, if they occur, are mostly used as instruments for implementing goals predefined by the authorities. The authoritarian character of many governments in developing countries is one of the major factors that prevent poor communities from becoming actively involved in improving their situation.

Another factor is the prevailing social system in developing countries, which for the outsider is often hidden behind formal democratic structures, such as political parties, elections, and laws protecting the poor (van Naerssen, Lighthart, and Zapanta 1996). Storey (1999, drawing on Grindle 1980) uses the term "neopatrimonial state" to refer to situations in which bureaucracies are weak and the state neglects the needs of the urban poor:

> As a mechanism of and for the elite, the state acts both as a means for personal position and gain and ensures, through patronage ties, the subordination and disempowerment of dependent clients. (Storey 1999, 285)

He continues:

> Although altered by time and circumstance and the ways in which successive presidents have exploited it, the patron-client system has been and remains the fundamental political order in the Philippines. (Storey 1999, 285)

The core of today's global ideological forces consists of a neoliberal drive toward liberalization and privatization of the economy, but coupled with a sociopolitical agenda that stresses institutional transparency, governance, and participation. Intergovernment organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and international NGOs are actively involved in promoting these notions. The latter, in particular, offer support to locally organized CBOs and NGOs. Charitable NGOs, like PLAN International and Foster Parents, are usually nonpolitical. International NGOs such as Brot für den Welt, Denchurch, and Oxfam come closer to the ideas of partici-

pation and empowerment of CBOs. They are interconnected and fund projects all over the world, and thus are able to exert a substantial influence. The globalization of grassroots politics (Smith 1995) is a phenomenon that should not be underestimated. It also constitutes an important force contributing to changes in urban development policies.

The Modernization of Metro Manila

Traditionally, the government structure of Metro Manila had consisted of several independent local governments (cities and municipalities) that distributed economic and political interests in the metropolitan area among several competing clans. The system changed under President Marcos (1965–1986). Confronted by strong opposition and a newly established Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which started a guerrilla war in the countryside, Marcos proclaimed martial law in 1972. He was then able to centralize Philippine policy and to create a central Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC), with his wife, Imelda Marcos, as governor and general manager.

Some years later, the metropolis came under the Ministry of Human Settlements (MHS), also with Imelda as its head. The Ministry was given extensive powers and the right to interfere in most planning and decision-making activities concerning public services. President Marcos wanted to achieve industrialization and economic growth by shifting from import substitution to export orientation. The aim was for Metro Manila to attract multinational corporations, so the city had to be modernized and priority given to large infrastructure projects. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) supported Marcos's efforts.

In 1976, the MMC issued a comprehensive plan for the physical and socioeconomic development of the metropolis, "Manila: Towards the City of Man." In the public investment program, the center of gravity shifted to infrastructure. The plan aimed at the construction of an export-processing zone, a new port, and an improved road system (including an inner urban highway, the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue [EDSA], and the Manila North Diversion Road). Building prestigious government centers, international hotels, and luxury residences on reclaimed land at the Bay of Manila was also part of the plan. During the period 1973–1981, the World Bank lent US$2.5 billion to the

Philippines to support these urban development schemes (Bello, Kinley, and Elinson 1982).

After the People Power Revolution of February 1986, which led to the fall of Marcos, President Aquino (1986–1992) came to power. Democracy was restored, which unfortunately also meant the reappearance of old political clans on the political scene. Nevertheless, with free elections and a free press, more "democratic space" was created and the idea of governance gained importance. More specifically, the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, which is widely considered as Aquino's most important piece of legislation, was instrumental in implementing this idea. Under the LGC, substantial authority is devolved to local governments; the local authorities are given the power to design their own organizational structures, and CBOs and NGOs are allowed to elect representatives to defend their interests in local government bodies.

Since the time of the Aquino administration, civil society has substantially gained importance, too. In 1987, the right of independent organizations to participate in decision-making at all levels was included in the new Philippine Constitution. Aquino's successor, Ramos (1992–1998), accepted this principle of participation as legitimate in the discourse among government officials, the educated middle class, and social activists (Carroll 1999). Since then, there is a general agreement that NGOs, CBOs, and other people's organizations (POs), being the major actors in civil society, have had more scope for influencing policy and action than elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Clarke 1998). Estimates of the number of NGOs, for example, vary between 15,000 and 18,000.

To a substantial degree, the plans for combating the central problems of Metro Manila have remained the same, however. The major objective is to attract foreign investment and export-oriented industries. This objective has been strengthened, in the sense that more attention is being paid to the liberalization of trade and industry. President Ramos expressed his vision for the country in the plan "Philippines 2000." This plan also formed the basis of the economic policy of his successor, President Estrada (1998–2001), while the current president, Macapagal-Arroyo, maintains the neoliberal agenda for development. The ultimate aim is that the Philippines should become an industrialized, capitalist country that is firmly integrated into the global economy.

It is clear that, being the national "growth pole," Metro Manila fulfills an important role in this vision. For this reason, priority is being given to large infrastructure work, such as radial roads, new land reclamations, and a huge industrial area south of the metropolis. The metropolis must be recreated and reinvented as a global city in the East Asian region.

According to Jejomar Binay, former Chairman of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA):

> I envision Metro Manila evolving into a humane, world-class metropolis known for its livability, and socio-cultural exuberance. It shall be the center of a growth polygon, which will influence the creation of socio-economic opportunities for areas beyond its political boundaries . . . As a global-oriented metropolis, Metro Manila shall evolve into a major business and transactions center in the Asia-Pacific Region. (www.mmda.gov.ph/vision.htm, April 2003)

Corporate land developers have received this message and, with that perspective, are busy building luxury "gated cities," such as Bonifacio Global City, Eastwood Cyber City, and Bay City (van den Muijzenberg and van Naerssen n.d.). But what can be said about the squatter areas and the urban poor?

The Origins of the Urban Social Movement

Contrary to other cities in Southeast Asia and similar to some cities in Latin America, Metro Manila has experienced an active urban movement. After the Second World War, thousands of families fled from the devastated countryside to Manila and, settling on available vacant spaces, became urban squatters. The main strategy of the government in dealing with the squatter problem had been eviction and relocation to sites outside the capital. Site provisions, however, were minimal, and urban jobs as well as community facilities were scarce. Thus, many settlers abandoned the relocation sites, unable to maintain the payments for whatever lots they had been allowed to buy.

During the Marcos period, this policy continued, but new legislation was introduced and the forms of intervention were different. The urban poor were considered as a pool of cheap labor for export

industries as well as a potential source of unrest. Therefore, part of the "City of Man" plan was to clear the metropolis of its squatter population. To Imelda Marcos, squatters were "land grabbers and eyesores" and an obstacle to the realization of her dream of a modern metropolis. In 1975, squatting was declared a criminal offense under Presidential Decree 772, an important tool for clearing the city. A fine or imprisonment ranging from six months to one year was the punishment for squatting.

This is not to say that low-cost housing was not on the agenda. One of the major programs undertaken by the National Housing Authority was the Tondo Foreshore Plan, which had a decisive impact on the evolution of the urban movement in Metro Manila. Tondo Foreshore Land, reclaimed before the Second World War, was squatted by migrants immediately after the war. In the 1960s, Tondo was considered to be the largest slum area in Southeast Asia, with an estimated population of 175,000. When Marcos unfolded his vision to modernize Metro Manila, the original intention to create an industrial port area in Tondo was revived. The World Bank supported the plan with loans.

However, it was in Tondo that Philippine urban community organizing got its start. With the support of the Philippine Ecumenical Committee for Community Organizing (PECCO), twenty community organizations established ZOTO (Zone One Temporary Organization), an umbrella organization that aimed to improve living conditions through self-help projects and to make demands on city authorities. ZOTO was based on the ideas of community organizer Saul Alinsky. According to these ideas, poor people will experience collective power by confronting outside organizations and agencies on concrete community issues, such as land rights and community services. Community workers were also guided by principles such as "autonomy" of the neighborhood and decision-making by residents. I refer to the approach of the CBOs and NGOs concerned as the territorial orientation of the urban movement, since local needs are at the core of their activities (van Naerssen 1989).

In 1975, ZOTO formed Ugnayan, a federation covering the whole of Tondo Foreshore Land. As an alternative to relocation to distant sites, it proposed "upgrading" or on-site improvement. A series of

mass protests staged by ZOTO/Ugnayan succeeded in changing the original plans of the World Bank. The Bank decided to reserve one part of Tondo for housing, while occupants who had to move were offered a lot in a nearby area. No security of land tenure was offered, however, and the price that had to be paid for legal land titles was high. For this reason, ZOTO/Ugnayan continued to pressure the World Bank and the government. In due course, ZOTO became more and more politicized. Its strategy changed from territorial to political, since it aimed at structural changes in the political environment to improve the situation of the urban poor rather than focus on their daily needs.

For some years, ZOTO/Ugnayan was the only social organization to challenge the Marcos regime under martial law. It even expanded, with the creation of a larger federation of fifty communities spread all over Metro Manila. Large-scale arrests, however, followed the Habitat Conference in Vancouver in 1976, where Ugnayan presented a "People's Decree." On the occasion of the conference, a large demonstration was staged in Manila that resulted in the arrest of no less than 2,000 participants. Savage repression followed, and it seemed as if the urban movement had been destroyed for good.

In 1982, a renewed and determined effort at slum clearance and relocation occurred. Imelda Marcos proclaimed a "last campaign" and ordered the immediate removal of squatter families. Organizations of urban poor were subsequently revived. In July 1982, an alliance of squatter federations was created, calling itself the Alliance of the Poor against Demolition (ALMA). Its primary goal was to resist slum clearance, using a political instead of a territorial approach. For example, it charged the regime of using development loans from IMF and the World Bank to finance demolitions, with the ultimate objective of making way for U.S. investors.

Decline of the Urban Social Movement

The role of the urban social movement in the People Power Revolution of February 1986 is unclear, although one can assume that the parts of the urban social movement not affiliated with the National Democratic Front (NDF) supported the revolt. Soon after the change in

regime, a new umbrella organization of the urban poor came into existence. It did not live long and soon gave way under the dilemma of whether or not to cooperate with the new government. President Aquino established a special Presidential Commission on the Urban Poor (PCUP), leading to certain expectations by some CBOs and NGOs. They wanted to use the "democratic space" to put urban land reform on the agenda. Other CBOs and NGOs were co-opted by the new government agencies. The fact was that both the territorial and the politically oriented organizations wanted to preserve the character of protest movement. For the politically oriented organizations, resistance to urban development policies was still an instrument for political mobilization against capitalist development strategies.

This is not the place to deal with the many activities and initiatives undertaken by the actors of civil society in those years (see, however, Berner 1997 and Karaos 1993). I will limit myself to some main lines. The PCUP was an advisory committee with minor influence on a weak president. Its major success was the establishment of a large relocation project in Quezon City that ended in confusion. The Commission had no further mandates. It was largely dependent on local governments, which had the authority to decide on matters of land use, and it had to stand by helplessly and observe how the ruthless demolitions, as in those under the Marcos regime, continued. According to a study by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, there were 276 evictions in Metro Manila during Aquino's presidency, involving 600,000 urban poor. In 90 percent of the cases, no effort was made to relocate people or give any compensation (Murphy 1993). In two years (1993–1994) during the Ramos administration, 80 demolitions took place, involving around 80,000 people. In that sense, not much had changed.

However, one cannot deny that the political context was different from that under the Marcos regime. Notwithstanding all the failures, the corruption, and the appalling contrasts between rich and poor, many people from the middle and lower classes appreciated the increased democratic space. The NDF, and in particular the CPP, underestimated this support for the institutions of formal democracy. The NDF started with a boycott of the 1986 snap elections, a strategic mistake, as the logic of that decision marginalized them during the People Power

Revolution. The party then failed in its efforts to devise an appealing strategy to cope with the new political situation.

Although it became clear that urban policy had not changed much during and after the Aquino period, some optimism about the prospects for a radical urban movement existed among progressive political parties and groups. Then the CPP split into two wings. The "Reaffirm" wing returned to the old Maoist positions, while the "Reject" wing rejected the old strategy and wanted to renew itself. The debate between the two wings paralyzed the NDF for many years, and had its effects on the urban social movement as well. The debate centered on the issue of the democratization of the CPP (Rocamora 1994), but the significance of an urban movement was also at stake. While the orthodox Reaffirm wing considered the struggle in the cities as subordinate to the struggle in the countryside, the other wing valued the urban struggle more highly. In this respect, it is significant that the strongly urbanized region of Manila-Rizal belonged to the Reject group. In the meantime, international NGOs and donor agencies became aware of the political implications of supporting specific groups within civil society. They abstained from interfering in the party struggle but generally favored new CBOs and NGOs not affiliated with the CPP. As Carroll notes:

> purely local issues such as demolitions in one or another neighborhood are being transcended . . . in favor of broader sectoral concerns but without the ideological apparatus that in the past proved decisive. . . . Allies such as . . . church leaders, members of academe, sympathetic members of the bureaucracy, congressional staffers, and foreign NGOs have become even more crucial—and in the interaction among these groups one can at times sense the development of a real civil society transcending sectoral and class concerns. (Carroll 1999, 131)

The urban movement in Manila became characterized by a wide spectrum of CBOs and NGOs, consisting of both radical-political and reformist groups. The reformists set the tone. One of their successes is the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA), which was passed in 1996, after six years of advocacy and lobbying with members of Congress (Karaos, Gatpatan, and Hotz 1995). The UDHA sets out the rights of the urban poor regarding evictions and relocations. Also, af-

ter intensive lobbying by civil society groups, President Ramos withdrew the notorious Presidential Decree 772 mentioned above. NGOs looked for new ways to improve the living conditions of the urban poor. Among others, extensive experiments were undertaken with the Community Mortgage Program (CMP), a unique program of social housing to be carried out through community organizations in urban poor settlements. However, like its predecessors (the upgrading policy and the sites and services programs), the CMP generally reached the better-off among the poor. Moreover, it proved that the rights of the urban poor existed largely on paper only. The local governments of Metro Manila often did not implement the UDHA and, in the many urban poor neighborhoods that lacked active CBOs, the poor were, in fact, without rights. In the meantime, the urban social movement faded away.

The administration of President Estrada brought a brief period of policy return to sites and services schemes, which were realized chaotically but strengthened the image of the president as a supporter of the poor. The large Pasig River rehabilitation program, which is carried out in cooperation with NGOs, has had its effects on many squatter families. In both cases, discussions and actions "from below" were limited.

Some actors of civil society have definitely succeeded in using the opportunities offered by the change in political climate since the Marcos period. These opportunities, however, are limited. This is demonstrated by the continuing demolitions and evictions, affecting tens of thousands of families each year. In a number of neighborhoods, CBOs, NGOs, and POs cooperate and succeed in obtaining land titles or in improving the level of collective services. However, while some thousands of families are supported with great effort, the number of urban poor in Manila increases by tens of thousands of families each year. Seen from this perspective, much has yet to be done.

Conclusion

In the foregoing sections, I described some changing strategies of the urban social movement in Manila. Naturally, the movement consisted of groups of various orientations. Whichever orientation ultimately dominated depended on the political climate. In contrast to the 1970s, when the movement and the state were strongly opposed to each

other, after the downfall of Marcos, the dominant tendency was to cooperate with the agencies of the state while maintaining a critical distance ("critical cooperation"). Some time in the 1990s, however, active "bottom-up" support for a metropolitan-wide movement faded away. Ironically, this occurred at around the same time that Congress approved the UDHA. It remains to be seen whether the problems of the urban poor can be solved under the existing system. As long as great social inequalities exist in Metro Manila, the potential for a radical urban movement will remain. Thus, the struggle for structural changes in society might gain momentum sooner or later. The question is when and under what kind of political climate a radical movement will arise, and who the major actors will be.

Globalization forms the backdrop of the urban struggle in Manila. It is neither the sole nor the major explanation for the existence of an urban movement, but the movement has to be considered as a response to modernization within the confines of the global economy, currently governed by neoliberal ideas. More directly, globalization is also noticeable in the interaction between international NGOs and actors of Philippine civil society. This topic, however, is an area for further research and discussion.

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