

Exposing Necroburbia: Suburban Relocation, Necropolitics, and Violent Geographies in Manila

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Abstract: When accumulation in southern cities entails the dispossession of informal settlers, where do they go and what spatialities emerge out of their dispossession? In Manila, this occurs through a violent form of suburbanisation. To make way for modern and investment-friendly spaces, informal settlers are exiled to relocation sites in the suburban fringe. This process of accumulation by suburban relocation engenders necroburbia, a dystopic suburban periphery constituted by distant relocation sites where evicted settlers are subjected into violent and asphyxiating everyday geographies. It serves as a spatial fix to enable metropolitan accumulation. Drawing on Achilles Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, I expose necroburbia as a deceptive and violent space, produced through three spatialities: (1) demolition; (2) relocation; (3) necro-suburbanisms, or everyday ways of necropolitical living. These processes illustrate how urban fantasies of growth in cities like Manila are predicated upon necropolitical realities rendering informal settlers as expendable populations, deserving of everyday brutalities.

Abstrak: Kung ang paglago ng mga lungsod ay nakabatay sa pagpapalayas ng mga maralita, mahalagang itanong kung saan sila napapadpad at anong mga espasyo ang maaring umusbong mula sa kanilang karanasan? Sa Kamaynilaan, naisasagawa ito sa pamamagitan ng marahas na porma ng urbanisasyon. Upang mapasinayaan ang moderno at angkop na espasyo para sa pamumuhunan, pinapalayas at nililipat ang mga maralita sa mga relokasyon na nasa malalayong kanugnang ng Kamaynilaan. Ibini-bunga ng prosesong ito ang nekroburbia, isang marahas na espasyo na dinadanas ng mga tinataboy na mararalita at nagsisilbing aregladong espasyo ('spatial fix') upang ipadaloy ang kapital. Hango sa teorya ni Achille Mbembe na nekropolitiks, nilalayan kong ilantad ang nekroburbia bilang isang mapanlinlang at marahas na espasyo na binubunga ng tatlong proseso: (1) demolisyon; (2) relokasyon at; (3) nekro-suburbanismo o ang marahas na pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay sa ilalim ng nekropolitiks. Ang mga prosesong ito ay nagpapakita sa pantasiya ng kalungsuran kung saan ang paglago ng syudad gaya ng Maynila ay batay sa realidad ng nekropolitiks na ang mga maralita ay tinuturing mga hamak at patapon, hinahayaang mamuhay ng walang katiyakan, at tinitignan na karapat-dapat lamang na dumanas ng hirap at dahas.

Keywords: necropolitics, suburbs, violence, relocation, Manila, Philippines, global South

Mga susing salita: necropolitics, suburbs, karahasan, relokasyon, Maynila, Pilipinas, global South

We are slowly being killed here. (Interview, relocated residents, 2012)

In "off-city" relocation sites of Manila's fringe, death looms as a force defining the lives of residents. Justine Billones, the three-year-old daughter of a relocatee family died of severe diarrhoea, allegedly due to water poisoning in one of the villages

(Reyes-Estropo 2016). Justine is just one of the many narratives of death describing the lives of thousands of relocatees in suburban relocation sites—deaths attributed to starvation, homicide, murder, theft, police operations, and natural disaster. Public consciousness seems to have turned a blind eye, as if deadly incidences among relocatees are unremarkable.

In Kasiglahan (“place of vitality” in Tagalog) relocation site, disenchanting residents have started calling their village a “death zone”, belying its name. Their experiences resonate with residents living in other relocation sites. From these accounts, I propose conceptualising these sites as necroburbia—spaces of death to which relocated evictees are left to live lives of precarity and uncertainty. While dominant suburban discourse tends to conjure images of middle-class domesticity (e.g. Fishman 1987), Manila’s necroburbia is a suburban space of abjection—graveyards of “disposable” and dispossessed populations.

To expose relocation sites as necroburbs, I go beneath the benevolent veneer promulgated by the state, and reveal the violence of accumulation by eviction and relocation endured by informal settlers, urban poor residents who do not possess legal title on land where they live. This paper proposes using “necroburbia” as an operative concept to account for the violent peripheries undergirding rapidly growing megacities like Manila. To facilitate urban accumulation, necroburbia acts as a spatial fix allowing the eviction of informal settlers “guilt free” while sustaining efforts to build a business-friendly, disaster-free, and “sustainable” metropolis. With the combination of the megacity’s booming property market, a discourse promoting resilience and sustainability, and a long-standing negative portrayal of informal settlers as “lazy” and “recalcitrant”, the eviction and relocation of informal settlers is perceived as a necessary cleansing mechanism to create new, profitable, clean, and green spaces (Ortega 2016).

Across the metropolis, relocation patterns illustrate the spatiality of the convenient disposability of informal settlers—useful for metropolitan accumulation until rendered useless *in situ*, and consequently compelled to relocate. Using Achille Mbembe’s (2003) notion of necropolitics in conversation with studies on geographies of violence (see Davies 2018; Davies et al. 2017; Tyner 2016), I expose the deadly spatialities in these sites: demolition; relocation; and necro-suburbanisms. I examine the rise of necroburbs by detailing the “concatenation of multiple powers” (Mbembe 2003:29), involving both direct and slow violence, and dialectical entanglements of (bio)necropolitics (see McIntyre and Nast 2011).

This paper takes seriously urban engagement on geographies of death and violence by situating the spatialities of (bio)necropolitics (see McIntyre and Nast 2011) and exhuming the necropolitics underlying metropolitan growth. This paper suggests using a necropolitical framing to understand emergent geographies of accumulation which incessantly reproduces peripheralisation of spaces and bodies (see Akhter 2019). In a time wherein suburbanisation constitutes most of urban transformation (Keil 2013), necroburbs such as those in Manila will continue to proliferate, and as such, the task at hand is to expose and problematise their emergence and concomitantly account for the multiple efforts to resist and create alternative urban futures.

Urbanisation and (Bio)Necropolitics

Many cities are shaped by uneven geographies of biopolitical and necropolitical dynamics, an interrelationship that demands critical interrogation (see McIntyre and Nast 2011). In geography, biopolitical analyses of various urban issues abound. As a start, biopolitics (Foucault 1978) refers to “make live” exercises of power to manage, regulate, and enable life, often of “legitimate” populations (Lemke 2011). The rationalities of biopolitics underpin multiple facets of urban politics, from planning and governance, to security and citizenship. Planning, for example, acts as a biopolitical strategy that regulates urban populations, both human and non-human (see Certoma 2015; Ploger 2008), while promoting “enjoyment” for “normative” residents (see Rutland 2015). Meanwhile, housing serves as a biopolitical intervention for idealised residents—from formalising schemes that transform informal settlers into homeowners (Campbell 2013) to mortgage arrangements that tie future labour and wellbeing to volatile property markets (Garcia-Lamarka and Kaika 2016). In global South cities, biopolitical strategies influence efforts to improve the vitality of living among the urban poor. These strategies are deployed as development programs (Di Muzio 2008), as projects ensuring security (Zeiderman 2013), or as improvements of benefits and services (Jha et al. 2013). But underlying these strategies are subtle politics of biopower that quietly exclude certain populations and occlude callous consequences, “rather than display itself in its murderous splendor” (Foucault 1978:144).

In certain contexts, however, governance goes beyond biopolitics. Instead of aiming to sustain life, it is pre-occupied with sanctioning death for certain populations. Necropolitics addresses the conceptual insufficiency of biopolitics. From Foucault (1978), Achille Mbembe formulates it as sovereign power enacted through the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (2003:39), involving the “generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (2003:14).

The exercise of necro-power tends to follow spatial classifications of populations and territories, whereby differential rights, forms of subjugation, and extermination, are decreed upon particular bodies in certain spaces. Beyond direct killing, necropower subjects bodies to abject conditions, exposing the “morbid spectacle” of misery and laying bare experiences of “death-in-life” (Mbembe 2003:21). It inflicts “immense wounds that are difficult to close” (Mbembe 2003:35) while bodies are “kept alive in a state of injury” (Mbembe 2003:21). A key aim is to ensure that suffering is “[kept] before the eyes of the victim—and of the people around him or her” (2003:35). In urban geography, a necropolitical lens is useful to foreground dispossession, and marginalisation. For example, Jaime Alves (2014) examines the rise of Sao Paulo as a “black necropolis” as black communities have emerged as targets of state terror. Similarly, Melissa Wright (2011) touches on the necropolitics of gender to grapple with the preponderance of femicide and drug violence in Ciudad Juarez. More recent studies interlink necropolitics with violence, focusing on politically dispossessed subjects such as refugees and undocumented migrants (Davies and Isakjee 2015; Davies et al. 2017), and on the slow violence of toxic environments (Davies 2018).

While necropolitics and biopolitics are distinct modes of governance, they are not necessarily obverse (McIntyre and Nast 2011). Geographers have mapped the spatial dialectics of biopolitical management and necropolitical violence. For example, Williams (2015) analysed how humanitarian migrant care in the border region of Arizona became a necropolitical mechanism to enforce border patrolling and deportation. On a different scale, Murakami-Wood (2010) interrogated the circulation of security knowledge across world cities, and how such has intensified militarisation and regulation of marginalised populations. This duality continues, framing the war on terror as a governance of contingency and protection through purification. From this, Dillon and Reid (2009) examined how Western states function dialectically between waging war that kills “to make life live”.

Necropolitics and Violence

Achille Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics goes beyond direct acts of killing and instead emphasises how control rests over the right to expose people to the potential for death and their subjection into perpetual injury. It involves a deliberate denial of support or protection to undesirable bodies, “letting” them die, as opposed to “making” them (see Li 2010; Tyner 2016). For geographers, this distinction is critical in wrestling with varied power dynamics in the production of deadly and violent spaces. For example, Davies et al. (2017) argue how “active inaction” of the European Union on the plight of refugees languishing in the Calais camp is a violent means of control. Exposing the genocide in Cambodia, Tyner and Rice (2015) stress the culpability of the Khmer Rouge, not just in actively causing suffering and death, but also through intentional inaction to prevent casualties. Meanwhile, Thom Davies' (2018) work on a polluted Louisiana town unravels the racialised necropolitics of minority residents exposed to toxic chemicals. Such toxic geography illustrates the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups to the slow violence of environmental hazards and the varied spatialities that approximate the “repressed topographies of cruelty” described by Mbembe (2003:40) of his post-colony. These spaces serve as death-worlds where necropower has kept colonised bodies in unending states of wounded subjugation.

Critical to these analyses is an engagement with the literature on violence. In particular, Johan Galtung's work is formative in framing violence beyond direct physical contact, defining it as “the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is” (1969:173). As such, violence constrains the potential for life to flourish and actualise (see Tyner 2016). Galtung further characterises violence as banal, obscured, and silent; normalised and legitimised by institutions in wider structures of oppression. Such depictions describe the socio-spatial order, a key thematic interest in geographical analyses. Another important Galtungian concept is physiological violence, referring to the denial of access to biological necessities—air, water, food, and mobility. This concept accounts for the slow violence constitutive of toxic environments, where “expendable” communities inhabit the slow temporalities of gradual injury and delayed destruction (see Davies 2018; Nixon 2011). Therefore, violence should not be viewed as mere acts or outcomes, but also as “processual and unfolding

moment(s)" (Springer and Le Billion 2016:2). In moving forward, Laurie and Shaw (2018:9) suggest the notion of "violent conditions" as an approach in "navigating the ontopolitics of violence". This approach transcends the binary between direct and structural violence, and advocates for exposing multiple forms of violent geographies that "forcefully constrain, traumatize and poison the very resources of our becoming" (Laurie and Shaw 2018:8).

Assembling Manila's Necroburb

Drawing upon literatures on necropolitics and urban studies, this paper deploys the term necroburbia to understand the violent conditions of "off-city" relocation sites in Manila's fringe, exposing the necropolitics of eviction, relocation, and everyday living experienced by informal settlers. By framing Manila's necroburbs as "death-worlds" produced through violent conditions of suburban-ward relocation, I reveal how informal settlers bear the burden of urban accumulation and multiple forms of exploitation and the ways in which they organise and resist.

As a concept, necroburbia builds upon efforts in explicating accumulation by dispossession that underpins the production of urban spaces. Following Marx, David Harvey (2003:145) expounds on how primitive accumulation is a "powerfully present" process of change, mobilised by capital's incessant quest for "spatial fixes" for its crisis of overaccumulation. This overaccumulation thesis has been used to explain urban transformation in global North cities, whereby enclosures are made to create new opportunities for investment and yielding revanchist and splintered urban conditions (see Smith 1996). Such theses, however, needs to be rethought if we are to theorise accumulation by dispossession in contexts with different articulations of capital, state, and societal relations (see Parnell and Robinson 2012; Roy 2009). In Manila and other global South cities, which are characterised by widespread informality and constrained state capabilities, the production of urban spaces is mired by multiple forces shaped by class, race, gender struggles, enduring legacies of colonialism, and informal practices of governance (see De Angelis 2007; Gillespie 2016; Roy 2009). Theorising accumulation by dispossession in this context requires close attention to specific conditions, and creative reformulation of theoretical scripts. Particularly relevant are efforts to theorise gentrification as a planetary phenomenon (Lees et al. 2016), which considers diverse articulations across multiple contexts, from "marginal gentrification" in Mumbai (Doshi 2015) to state-led gentrification in Istanbul (İslam and Sakızlıoğlu 2015).

This paper builds on these efforts by conceptualising necroburbia as an emergent space borne out of accumulation by dispossession. Tom Gillespie's (2016) accounting of spatialities of urban capital in Accra provides a useful insight of how accumulation entails the dispossession of informal settlers, who impede the production of profitable spaces and are rendered surplus to the formal urban economy. This surplus labour represents what Schindler (2017:54) considers as the "persistent disconnect between capital and labor" in global South cities. This conundrum clarifies why urban governance in the global South tends to focus not on the improvement of population, but on the transformation of urban

space. No wonder global South cities are sites of ambitious urban projects that are imbued by grand visions (Watson 2014), from investment-oriented megaprojects to new city developments (see Shatkin 2017; van Noorloos and Kloosterbor 2018). Necropolitics provides a valuable lens for coming to grips with the violence of urban dispossession, particularly when the logic of city-making and accumulation is hinged upon the disposal and expulsion of informal settlers.

My objective in proffering necroburbia is to underscore the spatiality of urban necropolitics, whereby the suburban fringe serves as the necropolitical fix to dispossession. Through what McIntyre and Nast (2011) would call the “dialectical unity” between bio- and necropolitical forces, I interlink biopolitical programs associated with urban accumulation with necropolitical violence towards unwanted informal settlers. This violence, which I term as accumulation by relocation, is vividly expressed through the demolition of informal settlements and the expulsion of the settlers to relocation sites. This in turn produces necrourbias, suburban spaces that approximate Mbembe’s “death-worlds” (2003:40), where dispossessed informal settlers are exiled to “death-in-life” (2003:21) conditions, enduring precarity, neglect, and isolation. Necrourbiaa invert the biopolitical promise of 20th century Anglo-American suburbs (see Fishman 1987) and contribute to the global suburbanism’s (Keil 2013) agenda of examining multiple dynamics of suburbanisation taking place in various contexts.

In examining the rise of Manila’s necroburbia, this paper maps the necro-geography of a metropolis that is continuously displacing informal settlers while still attracting more rural migrants, a condition shrewdly conceptualised by Neferti Tadiar (1993) as “state bulimia”. To facilitate urban accumulation, informal settlers are expelled to suburban “off-city” relocation sites to accommodate new urban projects. Relocation legitimises displacement, as it promises new homes for the displaced, which creates a veneer of biopolitical benevolence and social justice. I conceptualise these relocation sites as necroburbia to expose and analyse the violent everyday geographies that are constituted by a “concatenation of multiple powers: disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical” (Mbembe 2003:27). This concatenation imbues the spatial processes comprised of: (1) demolition; (2) relocation; and (3) necrosuburbanisms. Examining these processes reveals the multiple modalities of power, and foregrounds the narratives of deception, exploitation, negotiation, manipulation and consent, which are all critical to allow the production of necroburbia. Furthermore, I detail how they are interconnected to shape the uneven metropolitan geographies of Manila.

Methodology and Study Area

“Do not go there!” was the stern warning from relatives upon learning about my planned visit to Kasiglahan, located in my hometown of Montalban. Growing up, I witnessed my hometown’s transformation, from a sleepy agricultural village to a municipality bursting with new built structures and migrants. I saw vast tracts of land enclosed and converted into new developments, including Kasiglahan. Since 2000, Montalban has become a cul-de-sac of numerous socialised housing projects serving as relocation sites for evicted informal settlers from Manila. This has

led to a dramatic population increase, making it the most populous municipality in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority 2016). This demographic infusion of unwanted *iskwater* (pejorative term for informal settlers as squatters) has caused a collective uproar and sense of fear in the town, marking these relocation sites as “blemish of place” (Wacquant 2007). Given my relationship to the place, the spatial politics of relocation hits close to home, guiding my scholarship and community-engagement work.

This paper draws from a variety of sources. To provide background information on socialised housing, secondary data are collected from the National Housing Authority (NHA), a government-owned corporation and agency responsible for socialised housing. But to unravel context-specific experiences of expulsion, and everyday narratives of precarity, I draw from four years of work (2012–2016), involving numerous visits to three informal settlements in Quezon City and to five relocation sites in nearby provinces, as well as participation in public events organised by a mass-based organisation of the urban poor (KADAMAY or National Alliance of Urban Poor Filipinos). During these visits, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 relocated residents, and collected various community documents. For this paper, I focused on data related to Kasiglahan, whereby I selected and analysed ten interview narratives of relocatees, community campaign flyers, NHA notices of evictions, and hand-written notes shared by residents.

Building a New Manila through Displacement

Manila’s recent property boom is heralded as a welcome sign that the country has finally done away with its infamous reputation as “Asia’s sick man” (see Larano 2014). With demand from Overseas Filipinos and business process outsourcing (BPO) operations, the property market has blossomed into one of the most competitive in Asia-Pacific (Ortega 2016; Urban Land Institute and PwC 2017). Because of this, both the state and market are on a roll seizing the opportunity to capitalise on the booming market, often through public-private partnership projects. Several projects are rebranding the metropolis as a “world-class” metropolis of “social inclusivity, livability and reduced vulnerability” (World Bank 2012), from the World Bank-funded “Metro Manila Greenprint 2030” to Japanese-spearheaded “Mega Manila Dream Plan”. These desires for rebranding entail a “metropolitan facelift” (Ortega 2016), whereby the promises of the “good life” (Kleibert and Klipper 2016) or “Filipino dream” (Ortega 2016) are projected to idealised “hardworking” urban residents and/or *balikbayan* (migrant returnees) investors (see Pido 2017).

Underlying this biopolitical veneer is a necropolitical underbelly, expulsing informal settlers to violent and deadly conditions. Like other southern megacities, Manila’s urban transformations are predicated upon a metropolitan-wide “warfare” against informality through demolition (Ortega 2016). Residing in informal communities located on public lands and formerly vacant properties, informal settlers are often seen as “lazy” and “eye sores” responsible for clogging waterways and for “stealing” land. In a highly speculative metropolis, these lands have become prime real estate for profitable developments and infrastructure projects,

consequently making informal communities that sit on them targets for eviction. It is no wonder that over the past few years, Manila has seen the largest demolition of informal settlements in the country's history (Cabacungan 2014).

From older communities in Tondo district to more recent settlements in Quezon City, demolition cases pepper the urban landscape, as infrastructure projects are built and new business districts emerge. Several informal settler communities have organised themselves to resist demolition operations. Demolition encounters vary in brutality, depending on negotiations and resistance between the state and residents, from forced ransacking of homes to fiery exchanges of gunshots, stones, and faeces among contending forces. To divide communities and thwart resistance through barricading, the government has resorted to "pocket" demolitions whereby willing residents "self-demolish" their homes after being paid a small fee. Communities are often not adequately warned about impending demolition or demolition dates stated in notices are not followed, confusing residents and consequently diffusing activist organising. In large communities that have active militant organising, police, military, and other security personnel regularly surveil the area, intimidating residents, and setting-up rules restricting movement.

An example of a large community is San Roque located in Quezon City. From a peak of 10,000 residents, it has shrunk to less than half over the past decade due to demolition operations. Adjacent to San Roque is Vertis North, a newly-built mixed-use development that supposedly "breathes new life into the heart of Quezon City" (AyalaLand 2017). Its advertisements promise to its future residents and clients a bustling urban future marketed as "sustainable", "energising", and "enterprising". Such biopolitical promises tend to occlude the necropolitical violence experienced by San Roque residents who confront threats of demolition, harassment, and militarisation on a regular basis. The land on which San Roque sits is part of a planned World Bank-supported Quezon City Central Business District (QCCBD), a public-private partnership between the local government, the NHA, and private developers. NHA, which legally holds title to the San Roque estate, entered into an agreement with developer Ayala Land to build Vertis North. Because of this, San Roque has faced numerous demolition operations. As a response, San Roque residents have formed various organisations and alliances to combat this project, the most militant of which is KADAMAY-San Roque which has played a key role in galvanising a united front.

The Rise of Necroburbia: Accumulation through Relocation

Let us give the demolition team—Ayala, NHA, Cityhall and Noynoy—a taste of our militant struggle, our united struggle to fight for our homes and livelihood. (Flyer from KADAMAY-San Roque)

To facilitate San Roque's demolition, NHA has offered its residents relocation to "off-city" housing. However, members of KADAMAY-San Roque refused the offer because conditions in the relocation sites are unbearable. In their campaigns, KADAMAY exposes the business logic underlying relocation and demolition and

lambasts the alliance of actors behind these operations—NHA, city government, private developers and the president.

Relocation to “off-city” socialised housing—necroburbia—has been the practice allowing the demolition of informal communities and consequently accommodating new urban projects in the metropolis. Thus, necroburbia serves as a key fulcrum upon which urban accumulation is hinged. This spatial logic is produced through a confluence of interests, as a decades-long housing struggle coalesced with market-oriented agenda and decentralisation. A key moment was the passage of the Urban Development Housing Act (UDHA 1992) which decriminalised squatting and prohibited demolition without appropriate relocation. UDHA also aims to “encourage greater private sector participation” (sec. 20) in socialised housing for the poor. It requires private developers to allot 20% of their project cost to socialised housing, while bestowing them tax incentives and streamlining permit processing. Meanwhile, NHA is tasked as the main agency overseeing socialised housing projects, serving as the state entity partnered with private developers. In terms of relocation, NHA supervises the whole process in coordination with concerned local governments and other state agencies. These provisions laid the template for public-private partnerships in socialised housing and concomitantly to a new round of accumulation by dispossession involving relocation of informal settlers. What has emerged is a condition of accumulation by relocation, wherein relocation is critical to legitimise demolition, since it illustrates state support for housing. Allowing demolition in the metropolis concomitantly accommodates new urban projects.

In recent decades, NHA has implemented multiple relocation projects, benefiting mostly Metro Manila informal settler families evicted by large-scale infrastructure and mixed-use urban developments (Ballesteros and Egana 2016). In Metro Manila and surrounding regions, most of these “off-city” relocation sites are in the peri-urban fringe because of the unavailability of disposable land in the metropolis and peri-urban local governments’ provisioning of raw lands for development. A majority of these projects are what NHA would call “completed housing”, whereby NHA-accredited developers are solely responsible for constructing housing projects with units ready for occupation upon relocation. In this resettlement schema, NHA bids or negotiates socialised housing projects with developers while providing financing for the housing units. In many cases, lands used for relocation are owned by local governments.

“Off-city” socialised housing as relocation is big business. For NHA-accredited developers, securing contracts for relocation projects provides a variety of benefits, from UDHA-mandated tax incentives to partisan perks and future opportunities, and an assured captive clientele: informal settlers. For peri-urban local governments who provide the land for resettlement, these projects are opportunities to increase both tax base and political clout of local officials. But for metropolitan local governments, “off-city” resettlement is key to drive urban accumulation because it allows them to demolish informal settlements on prime real estate by promising secure and new homes. With current and future urban projects posed to restructure the metropolis, particularly the current administration’s Build-Build-Build program which is expected to evict 300,000 informal

settler families (Barcelon 2018), it seems as if prospects for accumulation through relocation projects is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. As for NHA, the fact that relocation accounts for 85% of NHA's budget (Ballesteros and Egana 2016) belies the agency's objective of provisioning life-improving housing for the masses. Instead, the focus on resettlement illustrates the neoliberal logic that encourages urban accumulation through displacement of settlers and the concomitant subjection of evictees into mortgage programs, despite the impacts of eviction.

According to the UDHA, the NHA is mandated to provide "decent", "accessible", and "adequate" resettlement to evicted informal settlers. In relocation projects, the NHA is required to treat evicted informal settlers as rights-bearing "beneficiaries" who actively participate in major decisions and as such, need to be "consulted" and "heard" in terms of choosing an ideal relocation that will ensure availability of livelihood. To compensate for their eviction, NHA is required to provide livelihood assistance and support to relocatees. Despite the violence of eviction, such biopolitical promises make relocation an enticing opportunity. In practice, though, nothing could be further from the truth. Reports of unfinished houses, lack of basic facilities, and absence of livelihood opportunities in relocation sites abound. In certain cases, non-government organisations (NGOs) and charitable institutions intervene to provide livelihood assistance and limited financial support. Across multiple relocation sites, rampant unemployment and declining income have been reported, even in sites that received livelihood assistance (Ballesteros and Egana 2016). It is no wonder that opposition to off-city resettlement continues to persist among informal settlers.

Necro-Suburbanism: Everyday Geographies in Manila's "Death Zones"

Isolated. Exhausting. Deadly. These are words repeatedly uttered by relocated residents when describing their lives after relocation. Richard, one of several community leaders in Kasiglahan admonished the government for throwing (*tinapon*) them into what he calls a "death zone". For him, Kasiglahan is unsafe, desolate, and devoid of livelihood opportunities. He was relocated to Kasiglahan with his family after his home in Manila was demolished for being near an *estero*—a drainage canal deemed by the government as a "danger zone". Over the years, he has seen how Kasiglahan has grown, which he likens to a large *tapunan* (receptacle) where Metro Manila's unwanted *iskwater* (informal settlers) were thrown like *hayop* (beasts or animals). Such dystopic depictions are shared by other relocatees, not just in Kasiglahan but also in other sites. As necroburbs, these relocation sites confine, exhaust, and exploit relocatees. Unlike the biopolitical promises of suburbanisms in the stereotypical suburbia, necro-suburbanisms in relocation sites illustrate what Mbembe (2003:21) would characterise as "death-in-life", or life in suspension. In Kasiglahan, accounts of necro-suburbanism belie the purported promises of the relocation program, instead showing the morbid and asphyxiating realities of life on the edge of uncertainty.

Relocating to Kasiglahan

Kasiglahan is one of several relocation sites offered to San Roque residents. Built in 1999, it was part of a Php 2.8 billion (US\$55 million) “city” promoted as the “first ever well-planned socialized housing city” in the Philippines (Florentino-Hofilena 2000). But like many government-led programs in the country, the “city” project “evolved” during succeeding government administrations, with the “well-planned” and “integrated” aspects of the project dropped. Instead, it turned into separate housing projects, each under contract with different developers. The first batch of relocatees who occupied the initial neighbourhood blocks in Kasiglahan were former informal settlers living near the Pasig River. Succeeding batches of relocatees were from various communities across the metropolis—all evicted to make way for infrastructure development, clean-up operations, or mixed-use urban projects.

Narratives of relocation among Kasiglahan residents are ridden with experiences of deception. Nenita, a mother of three and originally from Pinyahan community in Quezon City, claims that she was deceived. When her home was demolished in 2011, she was promised relocation to Kasiglahan. Along with her neighbours, they were taken by NHA to Kasiglahan. What they saw were front-row houses that appeared sturdy and adequate.

I was wowed by the houses. I thought everything was beautiful. I was hopeful that this would be the start of a new beginning for my children. NHA told me they would just hand me the keys to the house and everything would be ready, including electricity and water. (Interview, Nenita, 2012)

Because of the prospect of having a “new beginning” for her children, Nenita looked forward to their relocation, despite their eviction. She was also assured of Php 30,000 (~US\$586) relocation package as compensation. But things turned sour when Nenita and her family actually moved to Kasiglahan. She was asked to pay a reservation fee of Php 1000 (~US\$20) immediately after arriving. When she asked for her relocation package, NHA personnel treated her rudely and subjected her to inconvenient bureaucratic procedures. In the end, she never received the promised relocation package. These experiences were just the tip of the iceberg for Nenita, and other relocatees with the same predicament.

On the surface, Nenita’s experience might illustrate a willingness to relocate. But willingness becomes expulsion when promises become lies. Contracts were not fully explained, often reversing verbal promises made to relocatees. The violence of expulsion is furthered by the dismal living conditions that Nenita and other relocatees have to grapple with, exacerbating their suffering and derailing opportunities for growth. These experiences constitute the three necro-suburbanisms in Kasiglahan: precarity, control, and exhaustion.

Necro-Suburbanism 1: Precarity

Worse than animals! What do they think of us? We were thrown here like animals! (Interview, Nenita, 2012)

Nenita was fuming when she recounted how they were treated “like animals”. She and her former neighbours in Quezon City were transported in trucks like cattle. Walking past the houses of her neighbours, she expressed disappointment to how their lives had become after moving. Assigned houses do not look like the model show homes. Built with substandard materials, houses are incomplete, mostly core structures with walls, roof, and open windows. The one awarded to Nenita did not have a door, window trimmings, or a toilet bowl. She spent thousands of pesos to fix the ceiling and flooring, purchase a toilet bowl and install a door. Months after moving, her living room was still cramped with stacked cardboard boxes, two plastic dressers, a small table, two jugs of purified water and a plastic basin.

After relocation, residents like Nenita struggle to rebuild their lives after the trauma of demolition. They were not only “let die” by the state but were also deceived by unfulfilled promises. Life after relocation has been a life on the edge of precarity. After leaving behind their sources of livelihood in the city, they are left isolated and vulnerable in Kasiglahan, without basic facilities, services, or support. Nenita and her husband both worked in Quezon City, where Nenita was vending vegetables. In Kasiglahan, she could not work as a vendor. Meanwhile, her husband kept his job and ended up renting in another informal community. Other households did not have this option.

Over the years, Kasiglahan has gained notoriety as a crime-ridden community, becoming Montalban’s “black hole”. In other peri-urban towns, relocation sites have also been pejoratively maligned by town residents. Nenita is aware of this and fears for the safety of her children. Kasiglahan residents and local officials admit to the dozens of deaths and crime reported regularly. Homicide incidents due to theft or armed robbery abound. Murders due to personal vendetta or conflicts surrounding loans or illicit transactions are not uncommon. Manong, a relocatee who arrived almost at the same time as Nenita, confirms the incidents that take place in Kasiglahan. Like Nenita, he is worried about his grandchildren and has been taking precautions to protect his family. But for him, the reason behind the crime in Kasiglahan was quite clear—lack of livelihood opportunities. He knows of several residents who committed various crimes due to the struggle to make ends meet. When I inquired about Kasiglahan’s infamous image, he acquired a defensive tone and said:

We were thrown here, the harshest place ever. We are all here, the “squatters” from Metro Manila. How many are we? We are like the fifteen clans of Moses. What do you expect when people do not have any livelihood? But of course, they will steal, holdup. That is why we have incidents of theft here every night. It is because people here just want to live, to survive. What will they do? We don’t have any kind of livelihood here! What was done to us here is too much! (Interview, Manong, 2012)

In Kasiglahan and other relocation sites (Ballesteros and Egana 2016), unemployment is rampant and the inability to earn basic income is commonplace. Such precarity has created a fertile ground for crime to flourish. In fact, the village has cultivated a reputation whereby elites from the metropolis hire residents to commit various crimes, from peddling illegal drugs to assassinating individuals. Killers can be hired for a fee ranging from Php 5000 (~ US\$98) to Php 50,000 (~US \$977) depending on the social status of the target.



Figure 1: Houses in Kasiglahan after the flood of August 2012 (photo: author) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ant.12629)]

For both Nenita and Manong, their concern for the well-being of their families is amplified by Kasiglahan's inaccessibility to affordable and adequate health centres and hospitals. The nearest centre is ill-equipped with facilities, with no medical staff on duty around the clock. This is a major concern, particularly for the sick needing immediate care or emergency cases involving victims of accidents and crime. Long-time residents such as Richard attest to the deaths of more than a hundred residents primarily due to the lack of medical attention.

Several blocks away from Manong's house is the Montalban River. For Manong, the fact that Kasiglahan is located on a riparian zone illustrates the contradictions of the whole relocation project. Like Richard, he was evicted from an area tagged as a "danger zone" by the government, as part of a campaign to "save" informal settlers from "dangerous", "flood-prone" waterways in Manila (Cabrera 2013). However, Kasiglahan is also flood-prone. A block away from Manong is the Montalban River which regularly overflows. In 2012, a devastating flood submerged a whole section resulting in several deaths, destruction of homes, and displacement of residents (see Figure 1). This contradiction was clear to many relocatees, like Manong. He refutes the government's concern for their safety, referring to such operations as *kalokohan* (joke).

Necro-Suburbanism 2: Control and Exploitation

While "letting die" entails inaction (see Davies et al. 2017; Tyner and Rice 2015), relocation to Kasiglahan involves the subjection of relocatees to precarious conditions that are fertile for economic and political exploitation. Keeping relocatees at

bay, away from metropolitan accumulation and maintaining exploitation, requires control.

Contrary to UDHA provisions requiring NHA to involve informal settlers in many aspects of relocation, experiences of relocatees suggests violation. Relocation sites were planned and constructed in accordance with accumulative projects in the metropolis, with specific communities already targeted for demolition and relocation. Narratives of relocation did not include any form of negotiation or consultation. For many, relocation was quick and traumatic, wherein the only option was to move to Kasiglahan or be homeless.

Living a block away from Nenita is Lina, a mother of three who moved to Kasiglahan after being evicted in Quezon City in 2011. Like most evicted residents, any form of consultation or negotiation regarding relocation never took place and she was only offered relocation to Kasiglahan. Unsure about her family's prospects and caught in the frenzy of demolition, she took the offer since there was no other option. But after relocation, Lina was surprised to learn about the fees she had to pay, particularly the mortgage she was required to sign, committing her family to the financial burden of a 30-year housing loan. Based on NHA's mortgage schedule, she would end up paying a total of Php 347,000 (~US\$6783) over the course of the loan, more than twice the cost of constructing the housing unit. Because she and her husband were struggling to find jobs, she was unsure if she could make regular monthly payments. Lina's experience resonates with other relocatees. After the economic devastation of demolition, they are confronted with imposed economic obligations. These additional burdens make recovery difficult, as they drain relocatees of much-needed resources to rebuild their lives.

Further straining their finances, Lina struggles with the exorbitant provisioning of basic facilities. The developer sells and distributes basic utilities, capitalising on the opportunity to profit from the new residents. The cost of water and electricity is significantly more expensive compared to services by public utility providers, with increases imposed erratically at the whim of the developer. Installation is on a "case-by-case" basis, with no logical pattern. It took Lina several months before getting electric power and water whereas more recent relocatees only took a couple of weeks. Service interruptions are common. In Lina's house, two to three hour brownouts were a daily occurrence. Some of her neighbours have resorted to electric meter tampering, tapping into others' power meters for a small fee. For Lina, though, her biggest concern is water. She cannot use tap water for drinking and cooking. Instead, she purchases expensive purified water from private concessionaires, costing approximately Php 50 (~US\$1) per day. She cannot believe that she uses mineral water for cooking rice!

Relocatees are also subjected to political exploitation. Capitalising on their precarity, certain local politicians who partner with NHA have treated relocatees as political pawns. Because relocation involves moving thousands of evicted informal settlers from one jurisdiction to another, officials secure their political bases by negotiating terms and conditions of relocation and by providing dole-outs. During the floods of 2012, Lina and others from her community received mats from their former vice mayor. Others were supposedly "luckier" because their former local officials gave household supplies and cash assistance. This help comes with a

political price. During elections, many relocatees are provided free transportation to travel to their former electoral precincts to vote for politicians who provided them with assistance.

Controlling dissent and maintaining order are critical to sustain exploitation in Kasiglahan. This is spatially expressed through surveillance operations throughout the village. On our way to Lina's house, we were questioned by supposed security personnel about our objectives. Police and/or gun-wielding security personnel regularly patrol the village. Attempts by residents to organise activities are strictly monitored, usually requiring permission from the developer. Those that dare organise without consent are met with intimidation from security personnel. Any complaint or resistance is met by stern warnings and even death threats. Richard, who has been actively organising residents to question NHA and its partner developer, has received death threats. This highly surveilled landscape of Kasiglahan coincides with numerous incidents of death, particularly "mysterious" deaths of adult and teenage males associated with police-led operations. What emerges are violent and risky conditions that constrain and truncate opportunities for relocatees to recover and thrive.

Necro-Suburbanism 3: Exhaustion

Living life in precarity, exploitation, and control exhaust relocatees' bodies and minds. The everyday friction of necroburbia's violent conditions slowly erode the possibilities of recovery. Left with dilapidated houses, lack of basic facilities, lack of access to livelihood, exorbitant utility fees, and unaffordable housing loans, residents struggle to meet daily needs, let alone fulfil their financial obligations.

As Nenita narrated her story of struggle and survival, she quipped *nakakapagod* (tiring) several times. Literally, the everyday grind to make ends meet in Kasiglahan is exhausting to the body and senses. For those who cling to their metropolitan work like Nenita's husband, the daily commute is an arduous journey, as they brave congested roads and take multiple modes of public transport. This everyday commute is also a major economic burden, a typical fare accounts for almost a quarter of the daily minimum wage. To keep their main source of income in the metropolis, Nenita and her husband reconfigured their household's spatio-temporal arrangements. Her husband rents a room with his co-workers in an informal settlement in Quezon City and visits Kasiglahan during his free days.

Look at what happened to our family life. My husband who works in a welding shop in Kamuning spends most of the week in Quezon City. We don't get to see him as much, unlike before. Living here has separated our lives. My children miss him. (Interview, Nenita, 2012)

For Nenita, this spatial mismatch has stretched her family thinly, causing tensions. She is exhausted, unsure about how long their relationship would last so they could make ends meet. This household splitting is shared by other households, wherein parents and guardians rent or live with relatives in the metropolis leaving behind their families in Kasiglahan, just to continue earning money from multiple casual jobs. Nenita blames this condition for the disintegration of other families in

their neighbourhood block, particularly involving abandoned children who struggle with hunger and are pushed to prostitution or theft. These discomfiting circumstances illustrate how relocatees' lives are squeezed and relations stretched to pay for daily expenses, all while attempting to keep their families afloat and intact.

Recovering from the trauma of eviction and relocation is exhausting, even more so contending with precarity and exploitation. Like Nenita, Lina is also exhausted even if neither she nor her husband have to work in the metropolis. As her husband regularly ventures out to do sideline contractual jobs, she grapples with multiple household chores, the stress of budgeting to buy food and pay bills, including the mortgage, and the anxieties of ensuring the safety of her children. This sense of permanent deferral and uncertainty has taken its toll on many residents.

While residents like Lina or Nenita continue to endure life in Kasiglahan, others have given up. Along the row of houses where Lina lives, some houses were left padlocked, with a handful having NHA eviction notices posted on their doors. These residents, out of desperation, left their homes and returned to Manila. Unlike Lina who has been diligently paying her mortgages, many in her block have difficulty in making mortgage payments on time. Other residents have "sold" their homes to outsiders who are able to afford to take over the mortgage through an informal arrangement.

Resistance and Solidarity

Far from being passive victims, relocatees who endure necrosurbanisms have attempted varied ways of raising attention to authorities about their situation. Some have allied with charitable organisations and NGOs that provide various forms of support, from financial assistance to household goods. For Nenita and Lina, the deception and exploitation are quite clear. They are members of a local chapter of KADAMAY which have facilitated a collective sense of resistance among several residents. They actively mobilise other residents to expose the absurdity of the relocation program and call for better living conditions, including access to livelihood. They have also marched with various urban poor groups from the metropolis and other relocation sites to collectively raise their concerns to NHA and call for a halting of demolition. For residents who decide on leaving Kasiglahan to return to informal communities in the metropolis, allied communities facilitate their return by practicing *tumbalik*, from the Tagalog words, *tumba* (fall) and *balik* (return). *Tumbalik* collectively consolidates various support to rebuild homes in demolished sections of communities and allows the smooth return of evicted settlers. But perhaps one of the most dramatic acts of resistance by relocatees involves the occupation of idled housing units by the homeless, informal settlers, dispossessed farmers, and evicted relocatees. In 2016, almost a thousand idled housing units were occupied by evicted relocatees. Upon occupation, residents barricaded their neighbourhood, instituted their own community organisation, and set up regulations that were amenable to the community. In another relocation site north of Kasiglahan, 6000 units were similarly occupied (see Dizon

2019)! These acts of resistance are illustrative of how informal settlers and evictees are exposing and disrupting the necropolitics of urbanisation.

Conclusion

This paper contributes by using necropolitics as a lens for coming to grips with Manila's urban transformation, particularly through taking stock of the underpinning processes of accumulation by dispossession and relocation. For southern cities like Manila where immense surplus labour has prompted a territorial mode of urban governance (Schindler 2017), the exercise of necropower through eviction and relocation is critical to driving the wheels of accumulation. For Manila to sustain its real estate boom and build a globally competitive metropolis, it has invigorated what Ortega (2016) calls a "war on informality" which targets and evicts informal settlers. However, as I have shown in this paper, demolition is permitted, and thus, legitimised through the state's biopolitical promise of relocation to "off-city" socialised housing.

I conceptualise the relocation sites in Manila's fringe as necroburbia in order to expose the deception of the relocation program for evicted informal settlers. Instead of providing adequate housing and opportunities for life to flourish, the program acts as a neoliberal manoeuvre, encouraging dispossession as a means of "resolving" the informal settler problem, considered to be inimical to urban accumulation. Building on Gillespie's (2016) notion of urban dispossession in global South cities, necroburbia serves as a spatial fix to enable urban dispossession and concomitantly allow metropolitan accumulation. Through empirical material presented in this paper, I flip the biopolitical deception of relocation into a necropolitical narrative. As relocatees, they are subjected to the violent conditions of precarity, control, and exhaustion.

The empirical accounts I have presented illustrate how relocation to necroburbia has meant the stifling of relocatee efforts to improve their lives, hindering their recovery from the trauma and exhaustion of dispossession. The narratives of necrosuburbanisms in Kasiglahan illustrate the contingency of action and inaction, whereby the "letting die" of relocatees to precarity and uncertainty subjects them to conditions that facilitate economic and political exploitation. Despite promises of cash compensation, livelihood assistance, and a better life in general, Kasiglahan relocatees are held hostage in the violent conditions of decrepit homes, lack of basic services, and lack of access to livelihood, and consequently subjected to mortgages, expensive basic utilities, and political control. These conditions are punctuated by numerous incidents of actual death and crime. Despite being exhausted, many residents have been organising various efforts to resist demolition and relocation, and advocating for better living conditions. As such, Kasiglahan has been the site of intense surveillance which in one way or another is meant to quell dissent and assert control. What these accounts illustrate is a "concatenation of multiple powers" (Mbembe 2003:29), whereby through both action and inaction, biopolitical activity and necropolitical exercise goes hand-in-hand in producing violent urban conditions of necroburbia (Davies et al. 2017; McIntyre and Nast 2011). And more broadly, these accounts show the dialectics between

the biopolitics of building megacities and the necropolitics of relocating informal settlers to necroburbia.

This paper speaks to efforts in urban geography that advocate for “extending the ecosystem of possibilities” (Leitner and Sheppard 2016:228) in urban theorisation and to consider global South cities in “generat(ing) productive and provocative theoretical frameworks for all cities” (Roy 2009:820). By conceptualising necroburbia drawn from a southern terrain where eviction and relocation of unwanted informal settlers imbues the production of urban space, I hope to extend the concept’s contextual empiricism beyond Manila, or even global South cities, and further interconnect with other spaces of peripheralisation, to which immigrants, non-white population, and urban poor are exiled and contained (see Dikeç 2017; Ruben 2001).

To end, I hope to emphasise the critical task of problematising the production of necroburbias and other necro-geographies. The proliferation of these spaces is hinged upon the normalisation of oppression of marginalised populations, as if their suffering is expected and commonsensical. Heeding to Laurie and Shaw (2018:15) who encourage us to “render common sense as nonsense”, this paper attempts to unsettle the normalised brutalities endured by evictees and reveal the deception enabling their dispossession. In the Philippines, public discourse tends to cast informal settlers as “criminals” worthy of dispossession and/or “spoiled” and *maswerte pa nga* (lucky enough) to be provided housing. Such characterisation tends to normalise relocatee suffering. While analyses of necropower cast it as either on full display (Mbembe 2003) or “out of sight” (Nixon 2011), my accounting of necroburbia in Manila emphasises the necropolitical deception, whereby necropolitics is rendered invisible to prospective relocatees, but once exposed, normalised by the general public. However, as the necropolitics of urbanisation reshape urban terrains in Manila and beyond, it is crucial to also forefront efforts of relocatees and the marginalised poor who resist dispossession and struggle in creating transformative possibilities towards truly sustainable and socially-just urban futures.

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