

**THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND HOUSING STRUGGLE IN THE PHILIPPINES:
QUESTIONING THE LEGITIMACY OF OCCUPY BULACAN**

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Abstract

On March 2017, 10,000 urban poor Filipinos marched to Bulacan, Philippines calling for their rights to housing. Dubbed “Occupy Bulacan,” the march culminated in the occupation of 5,300 empty government-owned housing units – possibly one of the largest housing takeovers in Asia. While the urban poor claimed victory against homelessness and market-based housing policies, critics called the takeover “illegal” and the occupiers “thieves.” Using semi-structured interviews with various social actors, and media sources, this thesis focuses on the legitimacy of Occupy Bulacan and its significance in the context of the Philippine urban poor movement. Taking inspiration from Henri Lefebvre’s *right to the city* and *counter-project*, I assess the respondents’ statements on the legitimacy of the occupation as they present contrasting views on the correct balance between the right to appropriation and the right to property, between use value and exchange value, and between right to participation and the tenets of liberal democracy. I argue that Occupy Bulacan is a social movement’s counter-project that employed occupation as a place-based strategy in taking back rights and wielding power. The urban poor’s housing takeover was a highly contested move because it unsettled neoliberal housing logics, diluted the exchange value of a property, activated the radical citizen, and laid the groundwork for possible commoning.

Keywords: occupation, housing right, right to the city, counter-project, social movement, commoning, Occupy Bulacan, Philippines

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When I was searching for a Geography department for my graduate studies, I made sure that the words “critical” or “social justice” were attached to its programme or research clusters. I considered various universities, but I did not look in North America. And especially not in Canada. It was just too cold for my tropical temperament.

Then my future supervisor came to visit the University of the Philippines and colleagues encouraged me – nay, pushed me – to meet him and inquire about graduate studies. I admit, it did help that his name often comes up in my work. And so, like the children of Hamelin, I followed the Pied Piper – dismissing my concerns about Canada being frigid and overlooking its spatial and temporal distance from my family and friends.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Table.....	ix
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Research Questions and Argument.....	4
1.3 Methodology.....	5
1.4 Map of Chapters.....	10
Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Occupy Bulacan.....	12
2.1 Occupations, Occupy, <i>Occupatio</i>	13
2.2 Occupations, Squatting, and Housing.....	14
2.3 Right to the City.....	17
2.4 Right to Appropriation Against Right to (Private) Property.....	21
2.5 Right to Participation, Democracy, Citizenship.....	23
2.6 Legitimacy of Counter-projects in a Neocolonial Society.....	26
2.7 Chapter Summary.....	32
Chapter 3: The Philippine Urban Poor Movement.....	34
3.1 The beginnings of the Philippine urban poor movement.....	34
3.2 “People’s Power” Forging through the Marcos Regime and Martial Law.....	36
3.3 Coalitions, Division and Decline.....	45
3.4 Post-1986 People Power: Democratic Space, Ideological Formations, and Civil Society Organizations.....	47
3.5 KADAMAY and the Resurgence of the Urban Poor Movement.....	51
3.6 Chapter Summary.....	56
Chapter 4: Occupy Bulacan: The Occupiers and the Housing Takeover.....	57
4.1 The Occupiers: Socio-economic profile and housing tenure prior to the occupation.....	57
4.2 Pre-Occupation: AOM as a Process Towards Accessing Socialized Housing.....	64
4.3 During Occupation: Successful Appropriation of Housing to the Urban Poor.....	71
4.4 Post-Occupation: Alternative Lifeworld Amidst Criticisms and Challenges.....	74

4.5 Chapter Summary.....	79
Chapter 5: Social Actors on the Legitimacy of the Occupation	81
5.1 Government Officials and Government Housing Officers	83
5.2 Media Practitioners	93
5.3 The Public: Netizens and Neighbours.....	106
5.4 KADAMAY Officers, Members, and Leaders	109
5.5 Chapter Summary.....	116
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	119
6.1 State Housing Policies Negates Urban Life	120
6.2 Legal and Legitimate Process of Housing Acquisition: Activating Right to Participation and Right to Appropriation	121
6.3 Conflict of use value and exchange value of idled houses results in crisis of socialized housing	124
6.4 The Propertied and the Deprived: Battling Class Hegemony	127
6.5 A Mob or a Movement: Right to Participation and Creating Alternative Geographies....	130
6.6 Summary and Conclusion: Legitimacy and Significance of Occupy Bulacan	133
References.....	137
Appendices.....	155
Appendix A: Local Housing Office Personal Data Sheet.....	155
Appendix B: National Housing Authority Sworn Application Form	156
Appendix C: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Form	157
Appendix D: Sample Interview Questions.....	158
Appendix F: Sample Verbal Consent Script	161

List of Figures

Figure 1-1. Location map of Pandi, Bulacan, Philippines	6
Figure 2-1. The squat symbol widely used in Europe.	17
Figure 2-2. Process towards the complete urban.	19
Figure 3-1. Location map of significant places in Manila and Bulacan during the 2017 Occupy Bulacan and the urban poor struggle for land and housing tenure in the 1970s.....	37
Figure 4-1. Percentage of occupiers' civil status of (n=960).	58
Figure 4-2. Percentage of surveyed occupiers' age brackets (n=960).....	58
Figure 4-3. Percentage of occupiers' civil status (n=960).....	59
Figure 4-4. Percentage of school-age children's educational status, 6-18 y.o.	59
Figure 4-5. Employment of occupiers.	60
Figure 4-6. Percentage of occupiers' birthplace (N=960).	60
Figure 4-7. Percentage of occupiers' residence in the past five (5) years prior to the housing takeover (n=960).....	60
Figure 4-8. Percentage of occupiers' type of housing tenure (n=960).	62
Figure 4-9. Percentage of housing tenure of occupiers who were informal settlers prior to the housing takeover (n=167)	62
Figure 4-10. Percentage of occupiers' sources of electricity prior to the occupation.	63
Figure 4-11. Percentage of occupiers' source of water prior to the occupation (n=960).	63
Figure 4-12. Relocation sites in Bulacan.	65
Figure 4-13. KADAMAY occupied sites in Pandi, Bulacan.	73
Figure 5-1. Percentages of the 2019 National Budget for housing, other social services and national security.	90
Figure 5-2. Frequency of Occupy Bulacan articles from four online news networks.	93
Figure 5-3. Slant of online news articles over a month after the occupation.....	94

Figure 5-4. Media representation of the occupation.	95
Figure 5-5. Media representation of the occupiers.	95
Figure 5-6. Readership's reaction to an Occupy Bulacan issue briefer.....	100
Figure 5-7. Idled socialized housing units covered with vines and grasses.....	111

List of Table

Table 5-1. Appropriated Budget for Housing, 2008-2019.....	90
Table 5-2. Excerpts and titles from online media articles demonstrating the shift of discourse based on the responses of the government.....	96
Table 5-3. Media ownership and their business or political affiliation	105

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AOM	Arouse, organize, and mobilize
BAYAN	<i>Bagong Alyansang Makabayan</i> (New Patriotic Alliance)
CASER	Comprehensive Agreement on Social Economic Reforms
CTFTO	Council of Tondo Foreshore Community Organization
FQS	First Quarter Storm
HOA	Homeowners Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISF	Informal settler families
KADAMAY	<i>Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap</i> (National Alliance of Filipino Urban Poor)
KMP	<i>Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas</i> (Peasant Movement of the Philippines)
KMU	<i>Kilusang Mayo Uno</i> (May First Movement)
KPML	<i>Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng mga Maralitang Tagalungsod</i> (Congress of Unity of the Urban Poor)
LGU	Local Government Unit
LHO	Local Housing Office
MLM	Marxist-Leninist-Maoist
NACUPO	National Congress of Urban Poor Organizations
NAPC	National Anti-Poverty Commission
ND	National Democratic
NDF	National Democratic Front

NDFP	National Democratic Front of the Philippines
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
NHA	National Housing Authority
PCUP	Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor
PD	Presidential Decree
PECCO	Philippine Ecumenical Committee for Community Organization
PNP	Philippine National Police
PNR	Philippine National Railway
PO	People's organizations
PSA	Philippine Statistical Authority
QCCBD	Quezon City Central Business District
RA	Republic Act
SAMAKANA	<i>Samahan ng Maralitang Kababaihang Nagkakaisa</i> (Association of United Urban Poor Women)
SAPL	Sworn application to purchase lot/unit
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEF	Socio-economic forms
TFDA	Tondo Foreshore Development Authority
UDHA	Urban Development and Housing Act
WCC	World Council of Churches
ZOTO	Zone One Tondo Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

On 8 March 2017, 10,000 Filipino urban poor marched to Pandi, Bulacan, an area immediate north of Manila, Philippines. They called for their right to housing, and ended up occupying over 5,000 idled government-built and -owned socialized housing units. While the urban poor claimed victory, not everyone welcomed the occupation. Government officials called the takeover “illegal”, “a step to anarchy”, and online commentators tagged the “occupiers” (instead of occupants) as “thieves,” “lazy,” and “professional squatters.” The occupiers defended their action as valid, noting that 15,000 housing units in Bulacan were in various states of deterioration, while thousands of families were homeless or living in slums. This exposé prompted a Senate inquiry and a year after the housing takeover the President signed a joint congressional resolution, authorizing the distribution of the occupied houses to eligible beneficiaries. While publicly the houses were known to have been awarded to the occupiers, the reality is less positive. Occupiers are without legal proof of being beneficiaries, they have no proper supply of electricity and water, they are being constantly vilified in social media, harassed by the police and armed civilians, and are even being arrested with trumped-up charges.

Dubbed ‘#OccupyBulacan’ (Occupy Bulacan, henceforth) and led by the urban poor group KADAMAY (*Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap* or National Alliance of Filipino Urban Poor),¹ the occupation took the country by surprise. People were used to hearing reports of informal settlers barricading their homes against demolition, but occupying houses was unprecedented. When the news came out, there were more lashes than lauds. They were called “thieves” as they occupied the empty housing units that were originally intended for uniformed personnel and those being resettled after displacement from urban redevelopment sites. The occupiers argued that they were urban poor themselves. They were called “lazy” and “people who don’t pay taxes” and vilified for forcibly taking houses instead of buying them with hard-earned money. The occupiers defended themselves saying that they too work hard as vendors, drivers etc., and they do pay taxes through the goods they buy. No matter how they defended themselves, detractors considered the takeover as “illegal”, and thus a crime. Even the President

¹ ‘KADAMAY’ can also be translated as ‘ally’.

threatened to have KADAMAY members “clobbered” or shot if they perform another occupation (Ranada, 2017).

The poor have long been asserting their right to housing but have been consistently stigmatized as well. They are perceived as the dregs of society, the “usual suspects” in robberies, the drug addicts, and the faces of other anti-social activities. These stereotypes were reinforced when the news of the housing takeover came out and the occupiers’ rationale for their action was drowned out by criticisms and name-calling. Even after the government had ceremoniously adjudicated in favour of the occupiers, they were still deprived of their housing rights and were constantly being repressed and maligned by the state itself, the media, and online commentators. There must be an underlying reason behind the persistence of these stereotypes and the reluctance to award the houses to the occupiers, notwithstanding the fact that the country has a chronic informal settlement problem.

The Philippines had a population of 100.9 million in 2015, with 51% living in urban areas (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2019). The National Housing Authority (NHA) estimated that at least 15% or 7.7 million of this urban population were living in informal settlements or in varied stages of housing inadequacies (ICF International, 2014),² rendering them categorically homeless. Also, in 2015, 8.3% of the country’s urban population was living below the international poverty line, which was set at USD1.90/day using 2011 prices (PSA, 2018b). Such economic conditions prevent the poorest of the poor from owning a house, making extra-legal housing occupation an attractive alternative.

The urban poor have difficulty accessing socialized housing due to the state’s low prioritization of housing services, as manifested through its small budget allocation, and adherence to market-based housing. In 2018, only 0.12% of the national budget was allocated to the housing sector, the lowest in 10 years. From the proposed PhP 68.7B, the approved budget was cut down to PhP 4.7B (Department of Budget and Management, 2019; Pasion, 2017d). The housing backlog in the country, both for low-cost housing and relocation sites, was at 3.9 million houses in 2011. This figure is projected to balloon to 6.5 million by 2030 if no special housing program is created to address the deficit (DTI/BOI, n.d.). Most of the budget goes to the

² This is a very low estimate when compared to the United Nations Statistics Division’s figure of 38.3% or 18.4 million urban informal settlers living in the Philippines (2019).

construction of relocation sites allotted to informal settler families (ISFs) who are scheduled to be removed from danger areas such as river banks, railways or bridges, or to be displaced due to government infrastructure and priority development projects.

True to its market-oriented strategy, the government produces and manages socialized housing in partnership with the private sector. Private developers construct socialized housing units while purchasing is accessed through various government-based financing schemes. Those ISFs who are not affected by the above-mentioned conditions and those from the low-income groups are encouraged of avail these schemes. However, the cost of the house and the amortization payments are beyond their reach. Studies have shown that the housing financing schemes, and even community-based housing programs, are afforded instead by unintended beneficiaries (M. Ballesteros, Ramos, & Magtibay, 2015; Llanto & Orbeta, 2001). Moreover, the application for socialized housing is a tediously long bureaucratic process with requirements that ISFs are unable to follow and fulfill. Such were the circumstances that pushed KADAMAY to occupy the government-built housing units in Bulacan.

KADAMAY is an urban poor group that advocates for adequate and affordable housing, access to basic utilities and social services, job security and a living wage. Their repertoire of resistance includes dialogues, lobbying, demonstrations, barricading areas to be demolished, and recently, the occupation of socialized housing. The move to occupy is far different from the old approaches of resistance of the Philippine urban poor, which were largely triggered by reactions to government policies (Karaos, 1993). As a KADAMAY leader assessed (Leader 7, 2018), Occupy Bulacan put the urban poor on the offensive, as opposed to always being on the defensive when resisting demolitions or relocations. Occupy Bulacan also brought back the boldness and principle of collective action that were reminiscent of the urban poor movement's "golden years" in the 1970s.

The urban poor group sees the occupation as claiming their right to housing, but even when a statute was released in their favour, criticisms, prejudices and repressions still hounded them. It is therefore pertinent to inquire why these adverse reactions persist and why, as of early 2020, the papers that secure the tenure of the occupiers have yet to be served. Conversely, the reasons behind KADAMAY's adherence to its position, despite the malicious attacks against them, should be identified and probed as well. In between these two opposing sides, there is also

a need to explore the significance and relation of occupation as a tactic and strategy of resistance of the urban poor movement, given that it was the means to claim a tangible gain but also triggered a renewed reproach against them. Discerning these conflicting results will give us an understanding on how the struggle for housing rights is perceived and enacted both by the claimants and the hegemonic class.

Several concepts will be used to examine Occupy Bulacan. I consider Occupy Bulacan as part of what Henri Lefebvre termed a “*counter-project*” in accordance with his call for the “*right to the city*” (1974/1991). Counter-projects are mass initiatives to thwart the plans and programs of those in power in executing their financial and political interests. Counter-spaces are created in the process of executing a counter-project – in this case, the occupied housing and villages. Explicating the right to the city will take us to the two rights it encompasses, the right to appropriation and right to participation. The right to appropriation is juxtaposed with the right to property/property right to probe the legitimacy of the claim of the occupiers and the reaction of other social actors, e.g. government officials, mass media practitioners, etc. Right to participation, on the other hand, corresponds to activating a counter-project and a rationalization of creating commons. In the case of Occupy Bulacan, the Philippine urban poor movement used occupation as a place-based or territorially-based strategy of resistance to kick-off the counter-project.

1.2 Research Questions and Argument

This thesis focuses on the legitimacy of the Occupy Bulacan housing take-over as perceived by the different social actors, and its significance in the context of the Philippine urban poor movement. Responding to these inquiries, the research aims to a) identify the significance and impact of Occupy Bulacan to the Philippine urban poor movement; b) establish the demographic, socio-economic and pre-Occupy housing tenure profile of the occupiers; and c) identify the contested discourses around the occupation movement between and among the social actors - “occupiers”, organization leaders, government agencies responsible for public housing, local government leaders, and media/online commentators.

The following research questions guide the thesis to fulfill its objectives:

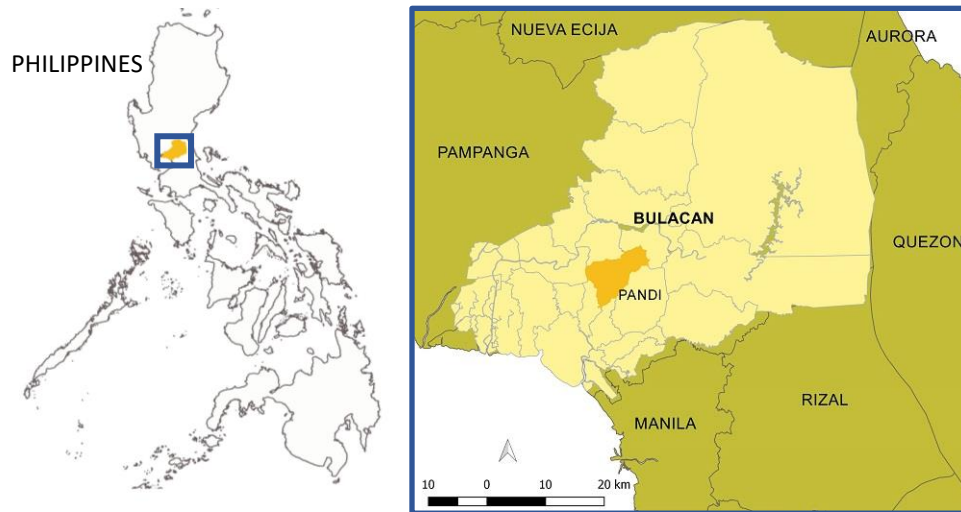
- (a) What does Occupy Bulacan signify in the wider context of the Philippine urban poor movement? How is it related to Philippine social movements, the global Occupy movement, and housing justice movements?
- (b) What were the demographics and socio-economic profile of housing occupiers and what were their forms of housing tenure prior to the housing takeover? What were their tactics and strategies of the occupation?
- (c) What are the different standpoints of the social actors (“occupiers”, organization leaders, government agencies, media/online commentators or netizens) on the legitimacy of the housing takeover and how do they rationalize their positions?

My thesis postulates that Occupy Bulacan is a social movement’s counter-project that employed occupation as a place-based strategy in taking back rights and wielding power. If before it was the colonial powers of the global North who occupied lands for their imperial projects, it is now the social movements occupying buildings and housing as a counter-project in building an alternative lifeworld. Occupy Bulacan, as a counter-project from the global South, embodied the right to the city framework by restoring the dominance of use value by reclaiming public housing, laying groundwork for possible commoning, and positioning the people’s movement in the forefront of completing the urban through their organized and collective action. It was a highly contested move because it disrupted the neoliberal market logic of housing, diluted the exchange value of a property by taking back space, challenged the state’s processes and mechanisms in appropriating property, and activated the radical citizenry. Its narrative contributes to the history of housing struggles worldwide and stands in solidarity with those who are creating their own counter-projects.

1.3 Methodology

It was summer of 2018 when I traveled to the Philippines for fieldwork. From late May until the end of August I shuttled between Manila and Bulacan, carrying out pre-fieldwork reconnaissance, library research and actual interviews. The occupied houses were in the Bulacan town of Pandi, 35 kilometer road distance from the city centre of Manila (see *Figure 1-1*). My travel time from Manila to Pandi was never less than three hours as it took me three modes of

transportation (a metro train, a bus, a paratransit tricycle) and an hour of being stuck in heavy traffic. I usually stayed three to four days in each housing site in Pandi while doing interviews and would then go back to Manila.



*Figure 1-1. Location map of Pandi, Bulacan, Philippines
Cartography: Hazel M. Dizon*

This research was formulated considering the circumstances of the occupiers and I consulted them to ensure that the research objectives were relevant to their quest for housing rights. During the fieldwork, I coordinated with KADAMAY, the urban poor organization that led the occupation. However, this does not mean that the whole research process was integrated with KADAMAY. Since the occupation has become a public concern, social actors other than KADAMAY members and leaders, were sought to elicit their views on the legitimacy of the occupation. I designed and accomplished this side of the study independently to ensure rigour in the research.

To address the research questions, interviews from various social actors, collation of socio-economic profiles of KADAMAY members, and collection of relevant local literature were gathered during fieldwork and processed afterwards. The research design is organized into four components. The first component was the pre-fieldwork stage where reconnaissance and various arrangements were made to systematically facilitate activities and schedules. I contacted the various social actors including government officials through letters and phone calls. I also met KADAMAY representatives and academics on various occasions to be updated about recent

developments on Occupy Bulacan and other urban poor issues. Planning of the actual fieldwork in terms of tentative dates and key people I should coordinate with in each site were discussed with KADAMAY representatives. Multiple site visits were also carried out during this phase to familiarize and introduce myself to the community.

Attending an activity where some key informants were present and approaching them was more effective in securing appointments than contacting them through phone or letters. There were two activities I pursued which proved to be productive. The first one was tracking a huge rally where KADAMAY and other social movement organizations were present. Not only did I have the chance to observe one of the activities KADAMAY regularly participates in, but I was also able to meet a social movement leader, a sociology professor, and a journalist. They all became my research participants. The second event I attended was a conference by the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). I participated in the sessions and met people from the academe and non-government organizations. In particular, I met academics whose research was related to what I was doing and who gave me updates on the Philippine urban studies scene and directed me to recent and relevant local scholarly literatures.

The second component was a descriptive analysis of the membership profile of KADAMAY to establish the demographic characteristics, socio-economic circumstances and forms of housing tenure of the members prior to the occupation. KADAMAY had 9,118 socio-economic forms (SEFs) of their members in Bulacan prior to the occupation (as of December 2016). From these profiles there was a need to extract those who were the current residents of the occupied houses and encode the profiles into a database. Together with urban geographer Andre Ortega, I facilitated a workshop with encoders, staff, and student volunteers of KADAMAY to systematize the collation of data.

At the time of my fieldwork, KADAMAY had an ongoing census of the residents but due to limited resources it was progressing slowly. Out of the 5,300 resident-member names, only 3,621 were handed over. Finally, 960 (18.1%) of these names matched the SEFs. Though it was enough as a sample size, it was below the expected turn-out. The following factors limited the expected results: 1) the collated SEFs do not cover all members who participated during the occupation; 2) the census list of current residents was incomplete; 3) there was difficulty in

matching the names of those in the census list and in the SEFs due to misspelled names, illegible handwriting, and erroneous input of surnames and middle names.

My copy of the database had been stripped of identifiers and anonymized to protect the identities and privacy of the occupiers. Numbers were substituted instead of names.

The third component of my research design was composed of semi-structured interviews with the various social actors on the history of the occupation, their involvement and their perspectives on it. Some of the actors involved with social movements, in one way or another, were asked about the impact of Occupy Bulacan on civil society. First to be interviewed were 14 social actors outside KADAMAY. These included government officers and officials, media practitioners, a social movement leader, an academic, and the neighbours of occupiers. Some of them have requested anonymity. Afterwards, 45 interviews with occupiers, KADAMAY local leaders and national secretariat members were carried out. All members and local leaders are anonymized. Coding of themes extracted from the interviews was performed with the assistance of RQDA, an open source qualitative analysis software.

The selection process for research participants varied. For the social actors outside KADAMAY, these were selected based on their organization's relevance to the occupation, both in government and non-government. I sent letters and made numerous follow-up calls and visits to local government officials in Bulacan and housing and urban development offices requesting interviews, but not all of them responded positively. Half of them ignored my letters, gave vague answers during visits ("He is busy right now. We'll call you when his schedule clears up.") or forwarded me to other departments. Only the National Housing Authority (NHA) and its offices granted interviews.

Interviews with journalists who covered the occupation were also difficult to secure. I sensed a pattern being formed when arranging interviews with them – positive response at first contact, evasion on the follow-up, and no response on the third call. My messages and calls were evaded or, if answered, they referred me to their editors. One newspaper journalist, who had consistently covered Occupy Bulacan and its aftermath, initially agreed to an interview. However, when I followed up for the date and place of our supposed meeting, she said that she needed to ask permission first from her editor. The third time I phoned her my call was not picked up.

The reluctance of journalists to be involved in any issues critical of the government might be the “chilling effect” at work. President Duterte’s authoritarian approach to his populist projects, such as the elimination of illegal drugs and resolving the security crisis in Mindanao, has earned the scrutiny of journalists and civil society groups. The projects resulted in extra-judicial killings, which journalists have exposed and which human rights groups have condemned. Journalists seem to have been cautious for fear of government retribution as experienced by their colleagues. A few months before my fieldwork, the operating license of one of the leading news outlets in the country, which was critical of the administration, was revoked. A month after the cancelation of the license, one of their reporters was banned from covering presidential events because the President got “pissed off” with her (Rappler.com, 2018). According to Maria Ressa, executive editor of the banned news outlet, the curtailing of press freedom has created a chilling effect on journalists who question the activities and policies of the President (Rauhala, 2018). A year later, Ressa would be arrested twice for what she claimed were trumped up charges (Ellis-Petersen, 2019).

Research participants from occupation sites were selected based on their availability and their participation during the original occupation. The occupation covered six housing sites and during my visits I was always accompanied by a local resident to introduce me to research participants. I could never have done the interviews without them because occupiers were extremely careful about whom they dealt with. There had been reported incidents of unknown visitors doing surveillance in the occupied villages. Each site had a few leaders and I interviewed whoever was available during my visits. In the case of interview with members, I was oftentimes introduced to the most articulate ones. Even though they always accompanied me, the local guides gave me and the participants privacy during interviews. After the introductions they would leave me and they would have small chats with other residents in the neighbourhood until I looked for them and we resumed looking for other participants. There were also times when I wandered alone and looked for anyone who was willing to be interviewed, but this was only in areas where I was familiar and residents had already seen me before with my local guides, or else they would not grant me an interview.

The fourth and last component was the gathering of secondary data. A survey of news and editorial pieces and related literature was conducted to find out how the media portrayed the occupation and the occupiers. Meanwhile, citizens’ perceptions were culled from opinion-

editorial notes, comment sections of online newspapers, and from social media posts. These secondary data are not exhaustive but only a sample to gauge the public's sentiment on the occupation.

1.4 Map of Chapters

The chapters in this thesis are mapped in the following ways to address the research questions of the study:

Chapter 2 – Conceptualizing Occupy Bulacan – lays down the theoretical concepts that are deployed in analyzing the data findings. Henri Lefebvre's right to the city serves as the main framework where the discourses of counter-project, property, citizenship, occupation, and commoning are anchored. Related literatures on housing, housing takeovers, and social movements are integrated into this chapter to support the concepts.

Chapter 3 – The Philippine Urban Poor Movement – partially responds to research question (a), which inquires into the significance of Occupy Bulacan in the wider context of Philippine social movements. The history of the Philippine urban poor movement is narrated, from its bold beginnings up to the formation of present urban poor groups like KADAMAY. This narrative aims to understand the decades-long struggle of the urban poor, their demands, and their ways of resisting and claiming, which eventually led to Occupy Bulacan.

Chapter 4 – Occupy Bulacan: The Occupiers and the Housing Takeover – corresponds to research question (b) as it lays out a descriptive analysis of the occupiers' socio-economic profiles and an account of the housing takeover. The occupiers' profile also serves as a basis for evaluating their claim as eligible beneficiaries founded on the criteria set by the government. The narrative details the events before, during, and after the occupation. The events leading to and during the occupation include the strategies of KADAMAY in successfully claiming the houses, while the aftermath demonstrates the possibilities and hindrances for commoning in the occupied sites.

Chapter 5 – Social Actors on the Legitimacy of the Occupation – presents the response for research question ©, which interrogates the different standpoints of social actors on the legitimacy of the occupation. This chapter is based on the interviews with KADAMAY members

and leaders, government officials and officers, media practitioners, and personalities related to social movements. Their interviews brought out their views and convictions on the legitimacy of the occupation. Their statements show their understanding and position on the concept of right to housing and right to property.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion – deliberates on the findings of the research. This section returns to the theoretical arguments forwarded in this thesis, charted against the historical context of the urban poor movement, the journey of the occupiers in claiming housing rights, and the different viewpoints of social actors of the occupation. The implications of Occupy Bulacan for the urban poor movement and broader social movements in the Philippines wrap up this chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Occupy Bulacan

In analyzing Occupy Bulacan, I will reflect upon Henri Lefebvre's concepts of the urban. The concepts are not directly applied as Occupy Bulacan occurred in a different place and context from Lefebvre's milieu. The legacy of the Paris Commune and the social, political and economic conditions of Paris itself from the 1950s to 1970s, strongly influenced Lefebvre's writings on the urban. In particular, the civil unrest of May 1968 in France was a fertile ground for Lefebvre in thinking through what the urban is, and should be. Students, workers, and immigrants carried out demonstrations, general strikes, and occupations of factories and universities to protest against American imperialism and demand civil and workers' rights. One of the world's largest economies and its government were put on hold for almost two weeks. Meanwhile, Occupy Bulacan, which occurred in a global South country demanded housing for the urban poor in a very specific locale. The May 1968 revolt had the potential to change the urban from a larger scale, while Occupy Bulacan has the possibilities of creating a renewed urban life starting from a smaller scale.

I situate occupation as part of Henri Lefebvre's *right to the city* and as a *counter-project*. Right to the city, or right to urban life, can be achieved according to Lefebvre through a counter-project that aims to create a counter-space or an alternative lifeworld, such as *autogestion* or the *commons*. Both require the seizure of space by people who clamour for an equitable society that responds to the needs of the majority. By occupying space, not only is a resource reclaimed but, most importantly, the power of the people is exercised, challenging hegemony. The control of space determines who holds the power and how it transforms society. Occupation is a place-based strategy for grabbing and wielding power.

To demonstrate how occupation of space responds to the right to the city and in creating a counter-project, I first explore the various meanings of occupation before identifying its empirical manifestations in the field of urban studies. Second, the right to the city along with its two principal rights are explicated. The two rights are discussed with their respective conflicting hegemonic concepts. The right to appropriation is contrasted against the right to property, while the right to participation is explicated along with the concepts of elite democracy and citizenship. Lastly, there is a return to the concept of occupation as part of the praxis of right to the city via counter-projects and its legitimacy in the context of a neo-colonial state. This subsection also

tackles the how, who, where, and when of counter-projects. To support the aforementioned concepts, related literature on housing takeovers, social movements, and the Occupy movement are integrated into this chapter.

2.1 Occupations, Occupy, *Occupatio*

The word *occupation* has negative connotations in the conventional accounts of world history. It is usually applied to control exercised by a hostile group over a territory following a military invasion. It is different from *colonialism* not only because the latter requires a transfer of settler population to the new territory while economically exploiting the territory, but also because the inhabitants need not swear allegiance to the occupying power under occupation (Hague Convention of 1899, 1907; Kohn & Reddy, 2017). Occupations tend to be short-term since either the inhabitants eventually defeat the invader, or another foreign power snatches the territory from the initial invader. If the initial conqueror prevails, occupation could lead to colonization. Needless to say, the forceful, and oftentimes violent, seizure of territory creates a hostile and unpleasant image of occupation.

In the past decade, occupation has undergone a revival due to the Arab Spring, 15-M movement, and the Occupy movement. From Tahrir Square, to Puerta del Sol, to Zucotti Park of Occupy Wall Street, and other instances of the Occupy movement, occupation has become a tactic of resistance where people occupy squares and plazas to protest spiraling economic crisis, inequality and political repression. This time, the “invaders” were the ruled instead of the rulers and they were unarmed. As the English and Art History scholar W. J. T. Mitchell (2012, p. 12) has noted, there has been an “uncanny reversal” from occupation’s primary meaning of military invasion and colonialism. Symbolically, these movements can be considered to be re-claiming the losses from inequality and oppression that are legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism. A counter-occupation is taking place.

Mitchell (2012) elucidated that occupation is not only a visual and physical presence in space but also a discursive and rhetorical device, making the Occupy movement a dramatic performance. According to him, occupation is linked to the rhetoric of *occupatio*, “the tactic of anticipating an adversary’s arguments by preempting them, taking the initiative in a space where one knows in advance that there will be resistance and counterarguments” (Mitchell, 2012, p. 10). And when taken in the context of the rhetoric of public space, *occupatio* means the seizure

of a vacant space that is not owned by anyone (i.e. not private property), and demands “presence” and an insistence on being heard and allowed to gather in public space to make assertions. However, as Mitchell continues, the demand of *occupatio* is made knowing that the state and the authorities already pre-occupy the public space, which though projected as a democratic space where everyone is invited, is always under the threat of violent eviction. Thus, *occupatio* doesn't just intend to take control of an empty space in an argument but also to provoke and frame a response in advance (Mitchell, 2012).

In summary, occupation is conventionally known as: an exercise of power over a territory; a repertoire of contention for social movements; a demand for a response as exhibited by the trope of *occupatio*. Occupation, thus, has become not only as a physical takeover of a space but, as Vasudevan (2014) states,

...a political process that materializes the social order which it seeks to enact. It is, after all, the countless acts of solidarity and belonging that in the end become the space of support – the shifting infrastructure – through which a common space for political transformation is constantly made and remade...[it] involves different ways of extending bodies, objects and practices into space in order to create new alternative lifeworlds. (p. 323)

Vasudevan sees occupation as “*world-making*” or “*worlding*”, while Pickerill and Chatterton (2006, p. 730) see it as part of creating *autonomous geographies* or “spaces where people desire to constitute noncapitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation”. These concepts are not too different from the concepts of *commoning* and *commons*. While worlding is reworking the world into a far better one, Harvey refers to commoning as the necessary “establishment of a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially or fully open to all” (2012, p. 73). Harvey emphasizes that the principle behind commoning is the social group’s handling of the commons that is both collective and non-commodified, and recognizing that this principle is tantamount to resisting capitalist power.

2.2 Occupations, Squatting, and Housing

The collective resistance to capitalist power was seen through the Arab Spring and the global staging of the Occupy movement in 2011, which in turn gave birth to other forms of resistance. Not only did demonstrators take over and camp in squares and plazas, but in larger

gatherings these camps held meetings, workshops and even public kitchens in support of their everyday needs. As the Occupy movement gained strength, particularly in the United States, houses were occupied in addition to public spaces. Due to the housing crisis resulting from the subprime mortgage and global financial crises in 2008, activists occupied foreclosed properties and helped move in homeless people or prevented their eviction. This subset of the Occupy movement became Occupy Our Homes and expanded into local counterparts such as Occupy Our Homes Minnesota and Occupy Our Homes Atlanta (Manilov, 2013). Houses were reclaimed in New York, Chicago, California, Minnesota, Atlanta and elsewhere (Martin, 2011; Occupy Our Homes, 2012).

Occupying vacant and abandoned buildings for housing or community use is not new. Since the 1960s, North America and Europe had their share of empty building occupations. Between the 1960s and the early 1980s, thousands of housing squats emerged in the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany and Italy (Morales & Faulkner, 2016; Piazza, 2016; Vasudevan, 2017). The largest among these was in Italy, where 20,000 apartments had been squatted by 1975 (Cherki & Wieviorka, 2007). The occupations were not limited to housing only. Due to post-Fordism's flexible accumulation, there was a decrease in political spaces where organized groups could congregate. Thus, Italian grassroots organizations and collectives also transformed unused buildings, industrial structures, schools, movie theatres, and deconsecrated churches into self-managed social centres. Establishment of community centres in this manner also occurred in other countries across Europe (Mudu, 2013; Piazza, 2016).

Occupation of empty buildings was revived during the anti-austerity protests known as the 15-M Movement, which flooded the streets of Spain in May 2011, even before the start of the Occupy Movement on Wall Street. Squatting occurred not only in public squares but in deserted buildings as well. In Madrid alone, 17 identified buildings were converted mostly into social centres, while some were used for housing (Martinez & Garcia, 2015). Most of these occupations involved foreclosed, abandoned, or soon-to-be-demolished properties. Italy was the exception as its largest squatting campaign covered both private and public housing (Cherki & Wieviorka, 2007; Laganà, Pianta, & Segre, 1982).

There were also documented housing occupations outside of the global North.³ In 1979, during the first months after the Iranian Revolution, 4,500 villas were reported to have been occupied in three communities of Tehran alone (Bayat, 1997). Other villages also had their share of occupations, not only of villas but also of empty apartment blocks, luxury homes, and deserted hotels. Housing takeovers in South America emerged during the first decade of the 21st century (Lima & Pallamin, 2010). In the first few years of the 2000s, 17 private buildings in Brazil were taken over by 1,300 families. In 2007, 850 families gradually filled-out Torre David, an unfinished skyscraper in Venezuela (Caldieron, 2013).

It should be noted that there are remarkable differences in housing occupations across various regions. As far as Anglophone literature is concerned, not much is written on housing occupations in the global South as compared to the global North, and public housing takeovers are even rarer. Land occupation and building a makeshift home on it is more prevalent in the South (Basu, 1988). Regardless of the location, invading a property other than one's own is considered illegal and is popularly termed as *squatting*. In the Philippines, academics and human rights advocates avoid using the term *squatting*, as it is charged with stigma. The word "squatters" has become synonymous with people and places that are involved in antisocial behaviors and activities. Instead, *informal settlements*, *informal settlers*, and *urban poor* are the more politically-correct phrases. Thus, in this study I am using *occupation* rather than *squatting*. Meanwhile, across Europe the term *squatting* is being popularized and promoted by social movements, which treat the squatting of empty buildings as a valid solution to the housing crisis and homelessness, and a commons that is a comprehensive alternative to capitalism (Squatting Europe Collective, 2013, 2014). Europe's squatter movement's vibrancy is also exhibited through its publications, organizations, and iconic symbol (see *Figure 2-1*).

Occupation of public housing is not a common activity in the Philippines. In fact, Occupy Bulacan was the first movement of its kind – and probably the largest in the global South. Thus, there is not much academic literature on occupation in the Philippine context other than analyses of how it was covered by the media (Cleofe & Verdeflor, 2018; Cuisia, 2018). What is abundant, however, is literature on informal settlement and its root causes in the context of neoliberal housing policies and urban planning (Ortega, 2016; Shatkin, 2004). Meanwhile, academic

³ The examples noted here are limited to available Anglophone literature and the possibility of public housing occupations not documented in English or not documented at all cannot be disregarded.



Figure 2-1. The squat symbol widely used in Europe.
Reprinted from <https://en.squat.net/2015/09/01/bristol-direct-action-against-estate-agents/>

literature on housing usually focuses on the different financial schemes accessible to low-income families (Alonzo, 1994; Archer, 2012; Berner, 2000; Llanto, 2007; Porio, et. al., 2004) and on housing rehabilitation during disaster recovery (Carcellar, Co, & Hipolito, 2011; Carrasco, Ochiai, & Okazaki, 2017).

2.3 Right to the City

Being a seizure of space and a political process makes occupation both a tactic and a strategy of colonization and resistance. For Nepstad and Vinthagen (2012), tactics and strategy are defined as the following:

... tactics as the means and plan to win a single campaign (one battle) and strategy as the plan of how to win the struggle (the war). Thus, tactics involve the small-scale repertoire and subgoals of the movement, strategy is about how a movement reaches its goals. (p. 282)

Implicitly, tactics are short-term plans, while strategies are long-term ones. Accordingly, the seizure of space is the tactic, while the political process is the strategy. This worked well with colonizers in wielding their powers during the Age of Exploration. They initially captured the land, successfully subjugated the inhabitants afterwards, exploited their resources, and invoked the *divine right* to justify their actions. Conversely, the tactic and strategy of occupation could also benefit social movements today. But what kind of reason will social movements summon to legitimize their own brand of occupation? Here I turned towards Henri Lefebvre's *right to the city* and his proposal for a *counter-project*.

The *right to the city* has now become popular to the point of being co-opted by the mainstream media and organizations. It has been popularized to the wider public without

elucidating its components of *right to appropriation* and *right to participation*, and without understanding how Lefebvre envisioned achieving these. It has become a catchphrase removed from any understanding of what is required for it to materialize. It was described as “a fuzzy concept” in a policy brief of an international think tank, which advocates the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs) (De Paula, 2016). International non-government organizations (NGOs) and advocacy institutions have used it as a theme in their campaign posters and conferences on urban planning and development and as the title of their publications and pamphlets. It has inspired agendas and charters for participatory urban governance that are used as master plans for municipalities and advocated by international advocacy groups such as UN-Habitat. While these might be helpful guidelines, they depoliticized the Lefebvrian right to the city, deemphasized the struggle of class and power, and watered down the radical demands for an urban life (Mayer, 2009).

Right to the city is Lefebvre’s call for an alternative world that is beyond the state, capitalism, and consumer society (Purcell, 2002, 2014). This right is apart from the natural rights to life, liberty, and property; it is a right to a “transformed and renewed *right to urban life*” (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 158). It is a less alienated life, meaningful, more cognizant of the cycles and rhythms of life, and open to conflicting and dialectical encounters; where there is primacy of use value; and it must be operating under the hegemony of the working class (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 179). This is a radical change because it necessitates a restructuring of power relations – a control shift from capital and the state to the proletariat. Lefebvre’s call for right to the city is a cry for revolutionary change in human society.

Lefebvre (2003) hypothesized that this alternative world is a new society, resulting from a process of impending complete urbanization. For him the urban has not yet been realized but will be in the future. He sees the urban as a process, beyond its descriptive and technical form. The process, which is both spatial and temporal, can be illustrated using an axis (see *Figure 2-2*). It starts from the complete absence of urbanization or “pure nature” and progresses to political, mercantile, and industrial cities, until it reaches the critical zone. Between the mercantile and industrial, the image of a city had been drawn as commerce and urban life had been prioritized over the peasantry, marking the shift from agrarian to urban. In between the industrial city and the critical phase, an implosion-explosion ensues. Implosion refers to the massive concentration of people, activities, goods, wealth, ideas, etc. and explosion is the capitalist spatialization of

peripheries, suburbs, satellite cities, residential resorts, etc. This phase creates immense exploitation and dispossession, and capital accumulation and exchange are supreme.

Lefebvre does not have an answer as to what happens during the critical phase. He, however, made one assumption – a transition or reversal of direction takes place.

What occurs during the critical phase? ... there are several assumptions we can make now. Lacking any proof to the contrary, we can postulate that a second transition occurs, a second reversal of direction and situation. Industrialization, the dominant power and limiting factor, becomes a dominated reality during periods of profound crisis. This results in tremendous confusion, during which the past and the possible, the best and the worst, become intertwined. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 16)

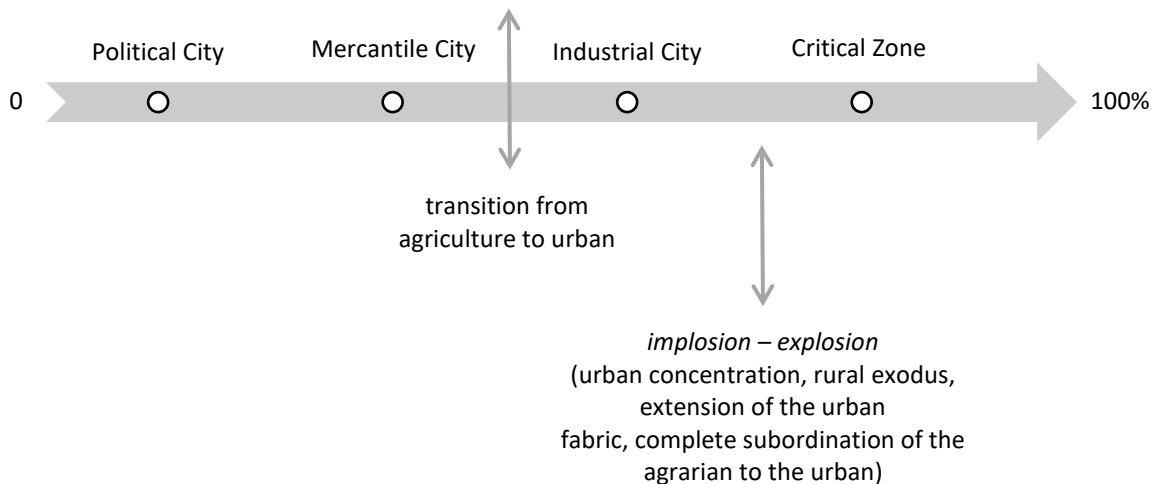


Figure 2-2. Process towards the complete urban.
Adapted from Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p. 15.

I presuppose that the past and the worst denotes the negative feedbacks of industrialization (e.g. environmental, economic, and social problems), specifically, during the substage of implosion-explosion. The possible and the best refer to the attempt to complete the urban (such as resistance to the negative impacts of industrialization, attempts to creating new lifeworlds). Lefebvre suggests disabling obstacles that make the completion impossible.

Lefebvre’s axis of process towards the urban is heavily patterned after the global North. Other societies, such as those from the global South, might have a different progression. Some might be experiencing all types of society or city simultaneously and some might be

experiencing occurrences similar to the negative impacts of industrialization without going through industrialization. For instance, the Philippines cannot be categorized as a country that has completely been industrialized because it does not operate its own heavy industries, which serve as the backbone of an advanced economy. What it does have are light industries and outsourcing manufacturing for heavy industries. And, yet, the Philippines is experiencing pollution, homelessness, unemployment, low wages, etc., problems that are identically experienced in industrialized cities. I assert, though, that the completion of the urban does not necessitate undergoing an industrialization that generates negative impacts. The Philippines, thus, can complete the urban without undergoing an industrialization that generates negative impacts if it could recognize and disable the “obstacles” sooner rather than later.

In *La Production de l'espace* (The Production of Space), which is a later work, Lefebvre (1991) fielded an answer on how to complete the urban. Guided by the principle of right to the city, he proposed counter-projects to open up or transform spaces that embody the urban. Counter-projects are bottom-up plans that foil the plans and programs of those in power. In the city, most projects are formulated to create more wealth by organizing space, regardless of their impact on people's lives. Thus, to counter this, use value should rule and quality must be created over quantity. Such a creation could lead to the promotion of *counter-spaces* as alternatives to homogenized and commodified spaces, and in which new practices of shared living could be developed (Vasudevan, 2014).

To show that ‘right to the city’ and ‘counter-project’ concepts give further theoretical grounds for the validity of occupation and Occupy Bulacan, the following sections will explicate the two principal rights that comprise the right to the city – the right to appropriation and the right to participation – while showing how they come into conflict with hegemony's own projects. The conflicts give rise to the solution of occupation as a counter-project. The right to appropriation when juxtaposed against right to property and property rights gives support to the justness of the distribution of the houses to the occupiers. The right to participation, on the other hand, when set against the concepts of democracy and citizenship, underpins the performance of an occupation for collective benefit.

2.4 Right to Appropriation Against Right to (Private) Property

The right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city. (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 174.)

Right to appropriation is a claim to something that has been set aside for specific or exclusive use. That sounds not much different from the right to property. But Lefebvre strongly emphasized that right to appropriation is different from the right to property. Property here refers to private property and it is necessary to qualify this since property is not limited to private property but could also be common, personal, state, or public property (Blomley, 2004). Property's parameters are defined by legal theorist Joseph William Singer:

Property is about rights over things and the people who have those rights are called owners. What powers do owners have over the things they own? Owners are free to use the property as they wish. They have the right to exclude others from it or grant them access to it. They have the power to transfer title—to pass the powers of ownership to someone else. They also are immune from having the property taken away from them without their consent, or they must be adequately compensated if the property is taken by the state for public purposes. We typically presume that the owner has, not just one or two powers, but all these powers— a full bundle—over the property. (Singer, 2000, pp. 2-3)

This bundle of powers are the property rights that are legitimized and protected by the state through its apparatus of judicial institutions and even the armed forces. The owner has property rights that allow him to do whatever he desires with his possessions including, most potently, the right to exclude others in utilizing the said property. These property rights have been extended from individuals to corporations, which have used urban space for capital accumulation (Harvey, 1978) and have kept inhabitants from the city. Property rights expropriate urban space from the inhabitants and arrogate it to the property owners (Lefebvre, 1968/2000; Purcell, 2014). Property owners assign urban space with an exchange value and buy out the rights of the inhabitants, who are the real owners of the city.

The valorization of urban land has signalled the commodification of urban space. While Lefebvre (1968/2000) believed that the production of space - in particular, urban space - should be participated in by everyone, those in power have abstracted space by assigning it an exchange value. The conflict between the right to appropriation and right to (private) property, then, arises

from the tension between use value and exchange value. Though space is a basic human need that should be available for all, it has become an exclusive resource under capitalism through abstraction. While value (as socially necessary labour time) cannot be seen, it has been made “real” in social, economic, political, and cultural practice (Lefebvre, 1991; Stanek, 2008). This concrete abstraction allows the existence of a commodity. In the case of space, its use value has been layered with exchange value that is represented by a monetary equivalent.

In one of his writings, Harvey (2014) explicated the contradiction between use value and exchange value. According to him all commodities in a capitalist society have both values, and their conflict with each other may result in a crisis. He then illustrated this by using a ‘house’ and ‘housing’ as examples. As a use value, a house has a myriad of functions. It is a practical need as a shelter from the elements, a site of biological reproduction, and a refuge from the pressures of one’s lifeworld. It can be used as a workplace, an office or a workshop. It can also be a symbol of social belonging to a particular group, of architectural significance, or a tourist landmark.

For exchange value, Harvey traced its increasing domination over use value. In time long past, money was not needed in building houses as the land was free and people used their own labour and the natural resources around them in constructing their dwellings. If additional labour was needed, they employed their neighbours or family’s help, which they reciprocated when their labour was needed to build houses or as extra hands in the fields. Mutualism and cooperation predominated in those days. In capitalism, circumstances changed as money was needed not only to buy land and construction materials but also to pay the architect, contractor, and builders. In places where capitalism is much advanced, a house is built speculatively and marketed as a commodity until somebody buys it. Aside from production cost and land price, the house’s exchange value is set with the addition of the mark-up for the interest on any loans involved. Exchange value has outweighed use value in the pursuit of profit and capital accumulation.

The US housing crisis in 2007 is a definitive case of a catastrophe resulting from the contradiction between exchange and use values. A lot of people were encouraged to buy houses as housing loans became more accessible through subprime mortgage. While some bought houses to be homeowners, others bought multiple houses speculating on the profit from reselling since property values were rising. However, when house prices plummeted, people realized that

their houses were not worth what they were paying for them and stopped their mortgage payments. At the same time, interest rates went up and subprime borrowers could not pay anymore. Houses were foreclosed, rendering people homeless. Exchange value had totally hijacked the use value of housing.

Use value should therefore rule over exchange value if right to appropriation must trump right to private property and prevent people from being homeless. Property partly produces, regulates, and legitimizes homelessness (Blomley, 2009) and it should be abolished or sidelined to reverse the process. At the end of his book *Le droit à la ville* (Right to the City), Lefebvre wrote down his theses and twice emphasized that use value and not exchange value should dominate to create the renewed urban life.

It [the proletariat] therefore has the capacity to produce a new humanism... of urban man for whom and by whom the city and his own daily life in it become oeuvre, appropriation, *use value (and not exchange value)* [emphasis added], by using all the means of science, art, technology and the domination over material nature. (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 180)

The proclamation and realization of urban life as the *rule of use (of exchange and encounter disengaged from exchange value)* [emphasis added] insist on the mastery of the economic (of exchange value, the market, and commodities) and consequently is inscribed within the perspectives of the revolution under the hegemony of the working class. (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 179)

2.5 Right to Participation, Democracy, Citizenship

Only the proletariat can invest its social and political activity in the realization of urban society. (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, p. 180)

Lefebvre's assertion of the right to participation is a demand to restructure existing social relations towards the production of the urban. Power should shift to the inhabitants and away from capital and the state. The city is created neither by the soaring skyscrapers nor the amount of capital it brings in; it is created by the surplus value squeezed from the labour of a dense mass of diverse people. It is only then appropriate that the inhabitants should be in charge of the governance of and decision-making in the city and for them to recover the surplus value.

The early to mid-20th century saw the rapid rise in numbers of nation-states, breaking off from empires and colonialism (Rotberg, 2007). By the end of the Cold War, liberal democracy

has become the foremost form of government in the globe, edging out totalitarianism (Abramowitz, 2018; Turan, 2011). Liberal democracy has permitted citizens to enjoy human rights, in principle, and protects private property. However, its allowance for participation is fundamentally limited. It is mostly restricted to the right to vote. Other than voting, the citizens' participation in the city is manifested in terms of the obligation to pay taxes and follow waste management guidelines, traffic rules, city ordinances, and other state-sanctioned laws that are made by the elected politicians.

The asymmetrical hold of power is more pronounced in former colonial states wherein much of the political control was transferred to the local feudal elite. In the Philippine context, Benedict Anderson (1988) coined this as *cacique* democracy. Family elites, whose roots go way back during the Spanish occupation and whose wealth mainly came from agricultural estates before branching to commerce, not only have a grasp on economic power but also political power as they hold government positions and elected offices. But in recent decades crony capitalists and manufacturing-oriented Chinese tycoons residing in the country, or the so-called taipans, have joined landed elites (Cardenas, 2014) in grabbing political-economic power. Power has now expanded to an elite cluster whose business interests do not only lie in agricultural lands but also in real estate, the retail industry, and other commercial trade, making the city their hub. The creation and the direction of the city whether in terms of visioning, planning, or physical structuring is taken over by elected and appointed government officials and members of the business community. If representations from civil society are enjoined, they hail from families known for their wealth and influence. Inviting delegates from outside these groups is rare.

Hence, elite democracy fortifies the hold of the ruled on private property. Property and the routines of the property market are sustained by property laws, which the state legislates and has legitimacy over. The state is given political legitimacy to manage spaces by establishing property laws and rights and policies that will assist the real estate sector in selling off spaces or protect owners of private properties. This accords the state much power to set forth what is legitimate and illegitimate and its power is reproduced when such classifications are reconstructed (Roy, 2005). The state is also privileged to have a "state of exception", wherein the state can make exclusions on what it has declared legitimate and illegitimate (Agamben, 1998). As a corollary to this, the state determines if properties are private, public, or state properties.

The alliance of the state and the business elite makes it impossible for inhabitants to access the city and transform and renew urban life. To reverse this, the inhabitants need to activate other forms of citizenship and democracy. In the words of Lefebvre (2009, p. 135), democracy is “never a ‘condition’ but a struggle”. The inhabitants need to cease giving their consent to the unholy alliance and mobilize themselves to restructure power relations. Citizenship does not end in voting and abiding laws but is a continuous and active exercise of participation in producing the urban. In some instances, when all legal mechanisms have been exhausted and rights are still deprived, people take extralegal actions. This is a tricky spot, wherein the action is neither entirely illegal nor legal but aims to fix things right.

The participation of a large mass of inhabitants, who assert they represent real democracy as opposed to liberal or elite democracy, justifies their claim for the legitimacy of extralegal actions. Taking matters in their own hands, collectively, to confront an established system of inequality performs what Holston (2009) calls *insurgent citizenship*, which is an alternative form of democracy that can overcome the limitations of conventional national citizenships. He pointed out that citizenship can disempower citizens. When there is imbalance in citizen power, those who are privileged are immune from accountabilities while others are rendered powerless. This resonates with Harvey’s (2012) assertion that the slogans of freedom and liberty being protected by private property rights and the liberal market translate to the freedom to exploit and dispossess the inhabitants. Thus, a genuine rule by the people that will “generate new kinds of citizens, new sources of law, and new participation in the decisions that bind” (Holston & Appadurai, 1996) requires a different kind of democracy.

It is imperative for insurgent citizens to collectively form a social movement that carries their demands to be able to create Lefebvre’s vision of the urban. Sociologists Charles Tilly and Lesley Wood (2015) define a social movements as a sustained campaign of claim-making rooted in organizations, networks, and solidarities using repeated performances of political actions while displaying public representation of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitments. These political actions are composed of a *repertoire of contention* and a *repertoire of strategies*. Tilly defines repertoire of contentions as a set of ‘open, collective, discontinuous contention’ accomplished in the public arena (Tilly, 1995; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Federico Rossi (2017) supplemented repertoire of contention with repertoire of strategies, which are non-teleological strategic actions and may neither always be contentious nor done in public.

Urban scholar Faranak Miraftab's *invited* and *invented* spaces of citizenship take these repertoires of resistance further, in ways that I see as resonating with Holston's insurgent citizenship:

'Invited' spaces are defined as occupied by those grassroots actions and their allied non-governmental organizations that are legitimized by donors and government interventions. 'Invented' spaces are defined as occupied by those collective actions by the poor that directly confront the authorities and challenge the status quo... Their distinction lies in the fact that actions taken by the poor within the *invited* spaces of citizenship, however innovative, aim to *cope* with systems of hardship and are sanctioned by donors and government interventions; within the *invented* spaces, grassroots actions are characterized by defiance that *resists* the status quo. (Miraftab, 2006, p.195)

The invited spaces are the avenues allowed or created above or by elite liberal democracy to exercise citizenship. The invented spaces are the spaces created from below by the radical citizen. Miraftab claims that these spaces can be more responsive to the urgent needs and realities of the poor, and therefore more effective in turning recognition of rights into redistribution. It should be emphasized that these spaces are mutually constituted and are in an interacting relationship. However, institutions of power treat them as binary, and tend to criminalize the latter by ascribing the former as the only proper space for democratic participation (Miraftab, 2006).

2.6 Legitimacy of Counter-projects in a Neocolonial Society

Lefebvre introduced the right to the city and the concept of counter-projects in separate writings, but they are closely related (Lefebvre, 1968/2000, 1970/1991). I suggest that counter-projects, which are the counter-plans of the grassroots to foil the strategies and programs imposed by the state and the elite, are the action plans of the right to the city. Counter-projects can create counter-spaces or independent territories (or autonomous geographies) and when reproduced across space can weaken the state and eventually shift hegemony to the inhabitants. These have already been practiced everywhere but need to be replicated and scaled up if a renewed and transformed urban life is to be achieved and completed.

I consider *the commons/commoning* and *autogestion* as counter-projects. The term *commons* was not widely used until Garret Hardin's *The Tragedy of the Commons* was published

in 1968. This was also the year Henri Lefebvre's *Le droit à la ville* (Right to the City) made it to the press. An interesting coincidence for two pieces that hold opposing contentions: the latter calling for the appropriation of private space, and the former upholding the efficiency of private property rights in managing natural resources.

In its initial usage, the concept of the commons pertained to natural resources, but it now extends to cultural (languages, musical heritage), intellectual (knowledges, information, images), social (education, health) and urban (streets, parks, squares, community gardens) commons (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012). But for Harvey the commons is not a thing or an asset, but “an unstable and malleable social relation” between a social group and the aspects of its social and/or physical environment that are central to its life and livelihood (2012, p. 73). Consequently, *commoning* is a social practice, whose main principle is that the commons shall be both collective and non-commodified. The more popular and contentious issues of the commons at present are housing cooperatives (Huron, 2018) and the fight against the enclosure of urban commons (Blomley, 2004), both of which serve as resistance to private property and represent a practice of participation. In essence, commoning is a social practice of the right to the city.

Autogestion or *self-management* has no straightforward definition but Lefebvre states,

[e]ach time a social group (generally the productive workers) refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestion* is occurring... *Autogestion* must continually be enacted. (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 135)

Purcell (2014, p. 147), meanwhile, parses *autogestion* as a “radical attack on the foundations of the capitalist social relations in which the bourgeoisie controls, through private ownership, the means of production.” The more widely known *autogestion* examples include the recuperation of over 200 factories in Argentina since 2000 and in Italy in the 1960s (Bifo, 2007; Lowry, 2008; Sitrin, 2011). Other than businesses and workspaces, *autogestion* extends to all spheres of social life such as the state, the family and education (Lefebvre, 2009; Vasudevan, 2014). But the state and the ruling class will not stay still and see their wealth and power decline, and *autogestion* is never without failures and setbacks. Harvey (2012, pp. 122–123) warned that an isolated entity under *autogestion* will barely survive if it still surrounded by “a hostile financial environment

and credit system and the predatory practices of merchant capital.” Hence, a counter-project is a never-ending class struggle and it needs to proliferate to overpower the state and capital.

Both commoning and *autogestion* share one common spatial practice and that is the occupation of space for collective use. Capturing space and staying in place *en masse* serve to launch these counter-projects. The seized space, whether it is a factory, a building, a university, or a plaza is a counter-space, where exchange value has been reduced if not dissolved, and which is now being lived, shared, and managed by the inhabitants themselves. The act is both practical and symbolic, having acquired a space that serves one’s needs, claimed back rights, and resisted the workings of property by taking over. Bodies are used as defences in anticipation of the hostile reaction of the state. The political process of occupation and the rhetoric of *occupatio* are both in motion.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, occupation has a negative undertone for those who are in power or those who currently inhabit the space. Its legitimacy is highly contested as it could be seen as an act of rebellion rather than an act of social and redistributive justice. But occupation, being a place-based tactic of grabbing power, is context-specific in validating its legitimacy.

In the contemporary neocolonial Philippines, the contradiction of occupation or commoning stems from the friction between a government, which espouses liberal democracy and neoliberal economy, and those who are urging for true democracy and an economy that is responsive to the needs of the masses. The Philippines’ liberal democracy was merely a transplantation of the political institutions and ideas of its American colonial master (Constantino, 1970). This has stifled any political institutions that could have led to indigenous democratic institutions and ideas. To cement the transplantation, the local elite carried out liberal democracy by holding elections, composing laws that are in harmony with foreign treaties and agreements, and drawing up procedures and regulations to implement these laws. In terms of the economy, the Philippines has maintained the role of a peripheral country, developing labour-intensive production to provide commodities sold in the world market. The economy has been open to free trade with the United States and then later to the whole world via neoliberalization. Local elite companies with their foreign trade relations continued to grow while small fledgling companies attempting to implement industrialization were forced to fold due to foreign competition. Land ownership has been concentrated in the hands of a few, evading land

distribution programs through conversion from agricultural to commercial and leisure uses (Dizon, 2015; Kelly, 1998). And while it is enshrined in the Philippine Bill of Rights that “No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law”, the elite is always favoured against the common people when confronted with contested claims. Political patronage is a strong feature in Philippine politics (Hutchcroft, 1994). The neocolonial political and economic structures have served and benefitted the elite well and left most of the population still waiting for development to trickle down.

When looking for alternatives to elite liberal democracy and neoliberal economy that correspond with the rights to participation and appropriation, respectively, it is pertinent to use one of Lefebvre’s theses on the city as a guidepost. Specifically, he alluded to who should perform the counter-project and how it should be performed. The gauge of a legitimate counter-project or an alternative for a neoliberal economy in pursuit of the transformed urban life is when the rule of use and its command over the economy is applied with respect to the ways and means of nature. This echoes Gibson-Graham et al.’s (2013) identified ethical actions toward taking back the economy, which are in the following terms:

- *surviving together* well and equitably;
- *distributing surplus* to enrich social and environmental health;
- *encountering others* in ways that support their well-being as well as ours;
- *consuming sustainably*;
- *caring for*—maintaining, replenishing, and growing— our natural and cultural commons; and
- *investing our wealth in future generations* so that they can live well.

(Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. xviii)

These ethical considerations are centred on community living, sharing and using resources equitably and sustainably, and on keeping in mind that future generations also need the earth’s resources to live. This can only be possible if people themselves will take charge of shaping the economy instead of leaving it to governments and corporations. Thus, the call for people to “take back the economy”.

While Gibson-Graham et al. established ethical actions in taking back the economy, which correspond to claiming the right to appropriation, I suggest the required actions for claiming the people's right to participation are the following:

- Educating and exchanging knowledge and experience on societal issues and concerns comprehensively;
- Consulting amongst the members of the affected sector and other interest-groups;
- Encountering and organizing communities towards democratic participation and realizing the ethical actions towards the renewed urban live;
- Taking actions *en masse* to reclaim rights with the support of a broad mass movement.

These political actions are necessary to fully understand why taking back the economy or property is necessary in achieving an alternative lifeworld. These ensure that everyone is engaged and conscious of what a counter-project entails, its possibilities, and challenges. Going towards the same direction, having the same mind that has been built through consensus, and, yet being open to other possibilities – these are necessary to make commoning or *autogestion* a success. Solid understanding and unity are needed to counter any reprisal from the powers that be.

As for who should perform the ethical and political actions of a counter-project, I argue that a counter-project or an act towards a counter-project, such as occupation, can only be legitimate if it is performed by a marginal sector that has the backing of a broad mass movement or is performed by the mass movement itself. The support of a mass movement is important in two ways. First, an action is legitimate if it is supported by the different social sectors, who are also seeking social justice or advocating a transformed and renewed urban life. Second, being a broad mass movement is to have massive support for sectoral causes. As mentioned, counter-projects have a propensity to fail because the rulers will retaliate, and counter-projects are still operating under the dominant capitalist economy. The only way to maintain the counter-projects is to form a broad mass movement that will create more counter-projects. The movement enjoins all marginalized social classes and interest groups but there is emphasis on organizing and mobilizing the proletariat and the precariat. They have the most stake in claiming back the city and they have the critical mass that is needed to shock and awe, if not overwhelm, the rulers.

Lefebvre emphasized that the transformation and renewal of urban life should be under the hegemony of the working class. In the Philippine context, this should be expanded. The working class does not consist only of people working in factories, but also those in the service sector, those who are doing manual labour, the low wage earners, and the unemployed. Even professionals of the middle class are part of the working class. Having an economy wherein agriculture is one of the pillars of its economy, farmers and agricultural workers are a big percentage of the masses. Thus, the masses include the poor peasants, the working class, and their families. However, in the urban context, the presence of the workers in the manufacturing sector, the informal sector, low-wage earners, and the *lumpen-proletariat*, dominates.

The low wage earners, the informal sector, and the *lumpen-proletariat*, collectively the urban poor, are central in the establishment of a new form of citizenship and genuine democracy not only because of the numbers they represent but also because of their knowledge and skills. Having temporary and insecure employment, the precariat members are characterized by their creativity and resourcefulness in making ends meet. Their ingenuity will be useful in conceptualizing tactics for counter-projects. History has also witnessed the important role they played in urban rebellions and revolts (Harvey, 2012). Then, there are the *lumpen-proletariats*, who dwell in anti-social activities, and from whom the vilified stereotype of the urban poor is patterned. Named as a “dangerous class”, without a clear class consciousness and acting only on self-interest (Marx & Engels, 1848/2006), they can easily be bought off by enemies but when enlightened concerning the roots of their “forced idleness” they can be allies (Bussard, 1987; Guerrero, 1970; Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 18). Moreover, it is better to include them in the struggle for the new urban than for them to be used by the enemy, which could lead to violent confrontations and divisions among the urban poor.

Organizing, then, should not be limited to factories but must expand to communities and neighbourhoods. Due to the suppression of unions, some workers have no venues to organize themselves or participate in social activities except in their neighbourhoods. Precariats are not only found in the factories but in the streets as ambulant vendors, and in the communities as neighbourhood service providers. Communities are good places to start *autogestion* and are a source of support for workers. After the December 2001 crisis in Argentina, factories were not only recuperated but communities also organized kitchens, day care, small enterprises, political discussions, cultural activities, etc. (Sitrin, 2011). It was the community that joined the workers

in preventing the former owners in taking back the machinery from the recuperated factories (Harvey, 2012).

Counter-projects have existed throughout history, the Paris Commune and socialist revolutions being the more widely known examples. There is no regularity in their occurrence, but they tend to flourish when capitalism enters a downturn in its inherent cycle of crises. Not all projects have been maintained, but certainly their spatial manifestation, specifically housing occupations, has been recently spreading, from Europe since the 1960s, South America in the early 2000s, and recently in North America and Asia. Most likely there are also smaller initiatives in other parts of the world. Counter-projects should proliferate to open-up counter-spaces until the urban life is realized and completed.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The concept of occupation as a colonial power's exercise of power over a territory has been turned around to become part of the repertoire of resistance for social movements. This duality fixes occupation as a political process that could transform a current social order into another alternative lifeworld. Occupation in the past 50 years has led to recuperation of factories in the 1960s in Italy; the squatting of houses and buildings from 1960s to 1980s in Europe; factory takeovers in the 2000s in South America; and occupations of plazas and squares over the last decade in Asia, Europe, and North America. In creating a post-capitalistic lifeworld, occupation could lead to autonomous geographies, commoning, and *autogestion*.

But as colonial occupation uses divine right to justify its usurpation of the lives of indigenous peoples, grassroots occupation also needs its own doctrine to legitimize its attack on the capitalist system. To this, the right to the city and its praxis of counter-projects are summoned. The right to the city is a right to a transformed and renewed urban life through restructured power relations, where the inhabitants dominate, and through the rule of use value rather than exchange value. This vision is guided by the right to the city's two principal rights – the right to appropriation and right to participation. The right to appropriation gives the inhabitants access to the production of the urban by prioritizing use value over exchange value and by recovering surplus value that has been squeezed from their labour. The right to participation is a demand for genuine democracy, where inhabitants participate in the creation of

the urban. It is also a call for a more radical citizenship that is beyond the obligation to pay taxes and follow laws.

The legitimacy of counter-projects, which are the translations of right to appropriation and right to participation, are place- and context-specific. The Philippines represents a country that was colonized for 400 years, remained a neocolony of the United States, and maintains its role as a peripheral country in the international division of labour. Its resources have been exploited and distributed throughout the world, creating surplus for foreign capitalists but depriving its citizens of their basic needs. To reverse this, a counter-project of taking back the economy should be pursued. Legitimate actions ensure living equitably and sustainably, not only naturally but also culturally. In contrast to elite liberal democracy, grassroots sectors of poor peasants, workers, indigenous peoples, youth, women, LGBTQ+, and allied groups should band together and perform democracy through actions resulting from informed decisions in an organized manner.

The grassroots and the mass movements have a pivotal role in activating the right to the city. As counter-projects aim to thwart the plans and programs imposed by dominant powers, the latter will not allow the erosion of their power and the free market economy. In this case, the inhabitants need to organize a broad urban social movement, which consists of various social classes and interest groups but with an emphasis on the participation of the urban poor as they have the most at stake and because of their critical mass. A broad mass movement will consequently lead to the creation of counter-projects, which when generated in multiples across space can shift power from the state to the inhabitants and produce an alternative collective living.

The next chapter narrates how the Philippine urban poor movement, supported by a mass movement, performed their right to the city in the 1970s. In understanding the context of their struggle, it is imperative to know, on the one hand, the origins of the country's urban poor, their bid for land and housing, and the creation of a broad mass movement. On the other hand, the movement was a product of the economic and political conditions at that time. The existence and activities of the urban poor movement in the 1970s serve as the foundation for the present Philippine urban poor movement and their counter-project in the form of Occupy Bulacan.

Chapter 3: The Philippine Urban Poor Movement

The extent of Occupy Bulacan's significance can only be grasped by looking into the urban poor movement in the Philippines and their struggle for the right to the city. The movement gained traction against the backdrop of postcolonial legacies of elite liberal democracy, rent-seeking capitalism, and an increasingly neoliberal economy in a global South country. These conditions master planned an urban space where large-scale infrastructure projects were prioritized over its inhabitants. Accordingly, this chapter partially responds to research question (a), which inquires about the significance of Occupy Bulacan in the wider context of the urban poor movement and its relations to other Philippine social movements.

The history of the Philippine urban poor movement in the last 50 years is narrated with the aim of understanding why a radical action such as Occupy Bulacan took place. It gives a picture of how the urban poor have acted on their rights to participation and appropriation for the last half a century through various social movement strategies before resorting to occupation. To give a rationale for the creation and continuing existence of the urban poor movement, their account of struggle is accompanied with their housing and land tenure status and their economic conditions in different points of history. There is an emphasis and detailed history of the first genuine urban poor organization, not to give focus on the organization itself but to show how the present movement has been shaped by 1) the decades-long struggle of the urban poor, 2) the progress, framework and direction of the state on housing and urban development, and 3) the dynamics between the state, the urban poor movement, and civil society. Recounting the past also illustrates how earlier ideological frameworks and modes of engagement have moulded KADAMAY's brand of activism, and how it has been situated in the present civil society ecosystem.

3.1 The beginnings of the Philippine urban poor movement

The formation of a significant urban poor sector in the Philippines can be traced back to the early decades of the 1900s when landless peasants began to migrate to urban areas during the American colonization of the country (Arellano, 2014). These peasants lost their land when the American government initiated cadastral surveys in 1913 and required properties to be legally

titled under the Torrens system. Lawmakers, national leaders, and rural elites took advantage of this new system to further consolidate their land holdings (McLellan, 1969; Shatkin, 2016). Titles were ‘fixed’ in the assessor’s office and court cases were won against peasant landowners who were unaware of the law and who lacked political connections (Kerkvliet, 1977).

After the Second World War, there was an influx of rural migrants to Manila. War refugees settled in its districts, building their houses around the public lands of Intramuros and Tondo Foreshore (see *Figure 3-1* for location map). Job scarcity, low productivity, and land dispossession in rural areas had also driven hundreds of families to the country’s capital (Honculada, 1985). This phenomenon intensified as migrants continued to arrive in pursuit of rising post-war opportunities in the national capital. Factories opened and commerce and services picked up. A recruitment program for the offices of the neocolonial government was implemented. But not all rural migrants could be absorbed by Manila’s formal job market. The unwaged survived by vending, scavenging, stevedoring and living in informal settlements. Official population estimates of informal settlers in Manila and its suburbs put the number at 46,000 in 1946, 98,000 in 1956, and 283,000 in 1963 (Philrights, 2014). These seem to be conservative numbers as it was reported in 1968 by a Special Committee created under the Office of the President that there were 183,758 families or 1,102,554 persons living in informal settlements (as cited in Laquian, 1969).

Tondo, a district in Manila, was said to accommodate the largest squatter colony in Southeast Asia after World War II (Honculada, 1985; Shatkin, 2016). It would also be the origin and hotbed of the urban poor movement later in the 1970s. Tondo’s strategic location made it a migrant’s first choice of settlement. The Port of Manila and the Philippine National Railway’s (PNR) Central Terminal were within its vicinity. The Port of Manila was the primary international seaport, where stevedores and labourers were employed. The PNR’s Central Terminal served as the gateway to the capital to those coming from the north and south. The trains and railroad of the PNR were the transportation backbone of Luzon from the 1950s to the early 1970s. Small vendors and porters earned their keep in the district’s commercial hub, Divisoria. Thousands of factories and little shops in the area and in nearby Sta. Cruz and Quiapo downtown sections also provided livelihood for those living in Tondo (Laquian, 1969).

Claims for decent housing in Manila were initiated by workers as part of their call for better working conditions and efforts to end exploitation during the 1930s to the 1950s (Arellano, 2014). As a response, the government began constructing the tenement housing in Tondo and the '*Barrio Obrero*' (Workers' Village) in Quezon City (Alcazaren, 2002; Simbulan, 1998). However, these housing projects were not enough to accommodate all informal settlers and their growing clamor for proper shelter, resulting in the formation of the Federation of Tondo Foreshoreland Tenants Association. The federation successfully lobbied for Republic Act (RA) 1597, which instructs the selling of the Tondo Foreshore Land to informal settlers. But the group broke up in 1959, without ever seeing the implementation of the Act.

The country saw its first massive demolition of slum dwellers around Intramuros and Tondo in 1963 (see *Figure 3-1* for location map). The following year, another demolition hit North Harbor and slum dwellers were sent to distant relocation sites in Bulacan, Cavite, and Laguna. No organized group from the squatters opposed the demolitions until 1969 when the Council of Tondo Foreshore Community Organization (CTFTO) was formed. The CTFTO resisted demolition attempts and pressed for the implementation of RA 1597, but its leaders were allegedly bought off and so the group disbanded (Honculada, 1985).

3.2 “People’s Power” Forging through the Marcos Regime and Martial Law

The Marcos regime (1965-1986) was a time of turmoil in Philippine history – a perfect breeding ground for a more organized and daring social movement. During the first term of President Ferdinand Marcos, the country was suffering from devaluation of the Philippine peso resulting in inflation, decline of real wages, swelling of foreign debt, and unemployment and food shortages due to stagnation of agriculture and industry (Bello, Kinley, & Elinson, 1982; Daroy, 1988; Encarnacion Tadem, 2015; Guerrero, 1970). To recover the ailing economy, and under the influence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), economic policies were centered on liberalizing trade as exhibited by the export-oriented strategy and encouragement of foreign investments (Montes, 1991; Quasha, 1980). Three significant statutes represented this economic turn: the Investment Incentives Act of 1967, the Foreign Business Regulation Act of 1968, and the Export Incentives Act of 1970. These decrees extended tax incentives and repatriation of profits to foreign investors, and the establishment of export processing zones provided the spaces where these could freely be enacted. For Marcos and his technocrats these policies were deemed

to help the Philippine economy to move forward, especially with the anticipated 1974 conclusion of the Laurel-Langley Agreement, the parity rights treaty between Philippines and the US. They also framed these as protecting domestic industries while attracting foreign capital. Conversely, critics found the policies exposing vulnerable domestic industries to the exploitative global capitalist economy and as a continuation of colonial relations with US imperialism (Bello et al., 1982; Encarnacion Tadem, 2015; Guerrero, 1970; Kelly, 1997; Sicat, 2011).

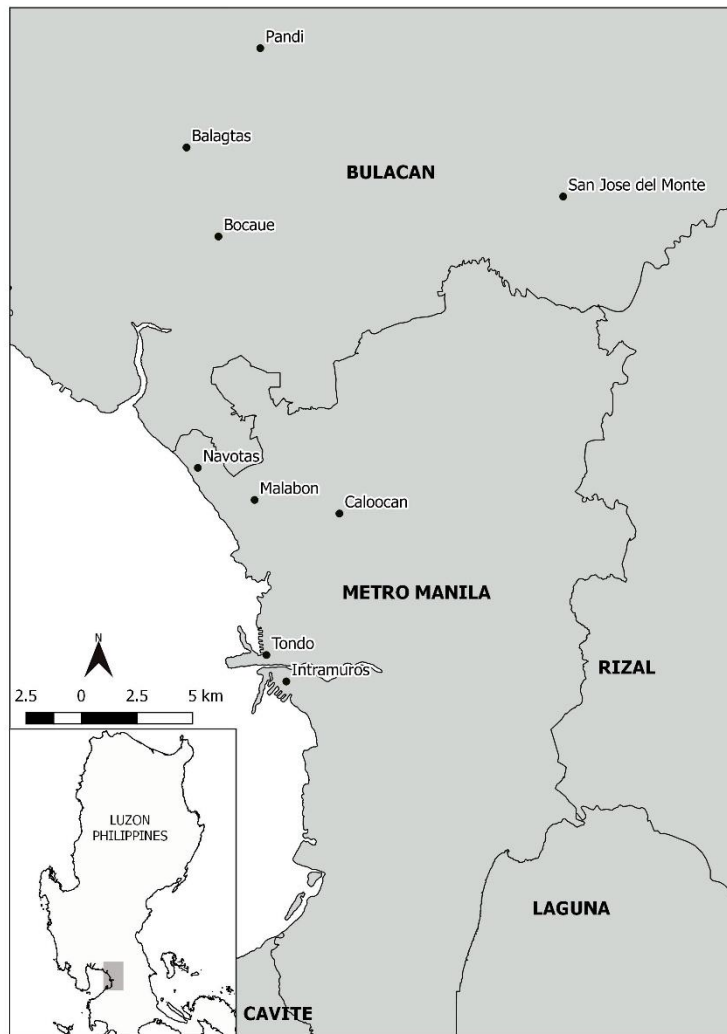


Figure 3-1. Location map of significant places in Manila and Bulacan during the 2017 Occupy Bulacan and the urban poor struggle for land and housing tenure in the 1970s.

Cartography: Hazel M. Dizon

Foreign political relations of the Marcos Regime also did not sit well with the people. Marcos was widely criticized when he sent thousands of Filipino soldiers to participate in the on-going war of the United States against Vietnam. The US military bases and Philippine open skies

and waters were also used during the US-Vietnam war (Gregor, 1984). In addition to the already heavy sentiments of the Filipinos against the US military bases were reports of US military personnel committing murder, rape, and other abuses against the Filipinos. Nonetheless, Marcos continued to support the US and upheld its extraterritorial rights (Guerrero, 1970).

Fascism and state violence marked the first presidential term of Marcos. There were mass arrests, massacres, kidnappings, assassinations, and extortions. Massacres such as the Culatingan massacre, Jabidah massacre, Lapiang Malaya massacre, and Tarlac massacre were instances of atrocities perpetrated by special military forces against marginalized sectors and critics of the regime, and as tools to achieve greater consolidation of power by using these as pretexts for the declaration of Martial Law (Daroy, 1988). Using government resources and facilities, the military forces, paramilitary, and warlord gangs were allegedly employed to keep the Marcos and his cronies in power (Guerrero, 1970).

Against this milieu, demonstrations were carried out to protest the regime's anti-national policies and anti-democratic activities, but true to the state's fascist character, these were met with police brutality. The early months of 1970 saw massive and intense protests becoming daily events. On 26 January 1970, while President Ferdinand Marcos was delivering his State of the Nation Address in the Philippine Congress, 50,000 demonstrators were outside, expressing their discontent with his administration. As Marcos was about to leave, demonstrators booed and threw placards at him. After he left, the police brutally attacked the demonstrators with truncheons and gunfire. Three hundred youth protestors were injured. On 30 January, demonstrators condemning state brutality converged at Malacañang but ended the protest in violence again, leaving four students murdered and 162 wounded. These political demonstrations would continue until March and would be known as the "First Quarter Storm" (FQS).⁴

The FQS galvanized the development of Philippine social movements, including the urban poor movement. The FQS caught the attention and imagination of the people. Slogans such as "*Makibaka! Huwag matakot!*" (Fight! Don't be afraid!) resonated with the Filipino people who had long been oppressed and repressed under colonial and neocolonial rule. A lot of students and youth joined radical youth organizations such as *Kabataang Makabayan* (Patriotic Youth) and *Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan* (Union of Democratic Youth). As Honculada

⁴ Jose F. Dalisay's *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage* (1982) has rich accounts of the FQS.

articulated, since the mid-1960s, the radical youth had consistently criticized the “unholy trinity of evils: imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism” that had plagued Philippine society (1985, p. 15). A whole generation of politicized youth went to communities, schools, and factories, and intensified the level of propaganda, agitation, and organizational work in building sectoral formations. This movement had the right framework to attract not only the youth but also people from all walks of life and by the thousands –women, peasants, labourers, vendors, stevedores, and the urban poor. This movement would later be known as the “national democratic movement” (Caouette, 2013; Rocamora, 1994).

The national democratic movement (ND movement, henceforth) encompassed a broad range of progressive organizations, which opposed American imperialism, feudalism and authoritarianism, and aimed for national liberation and democracy (Shatkin, 2016; Sison, 2014). When Martial Law was declared on 21 September 1972, activists and oppositionists were arrested; radio and television stations and newspaper offices were either shut down or seized and controlled by the regime. Organizations critical of the government were raided and some were forced to go underground. The following year the ND movement was organizationally formalized to the National Democratic Front (NDF), uniting all the underground organizations coming from the peasants, women, youth, labour unions, teachers, artists, health workers, and even from the church sector (Caouette, 2013; Rocamora, 1994). After Martial Law and until now, the ND movement continues to be part of civil society. Various civil society organizations still call for national liberation and democracy, demanding a stop to unwanted foreign interventions and an end to feudal relations of production.

The influence of the ND movement in the formation of the urban poor movement is exemplified by the ZOTO-PECCO experience (Honculada, 1985). Among the community-based organizations that began to proliferate in the 1970s, ZOTO was the largest and best known. Zone One Tondo Organization⁵ or ZOTO was established by the remaining leaders of the defunct CTFTO on 19 October 1970. It was initially formed to confront the threat of eviction of 4,500 residents in Tondo Foreshore due to a modernization plan for an industrial port (Van Naerssen,

⁵ Initially the organization was named Zone One Tondo Temporary Organization or ZOTTO. “Temporary” was dropped during its first convention in 1971. ZOTO was also the first one to use the term “people’s power” before it got popular during the People Power of 1986, when Marcos was deposed as president. It was used in ZOTO’s fourth annual convention’s program entitled, “ZOTO is People’s Power” in 12 May, 1974.

2003; World Bank, 1977). It started with 64 leaders and 20 organizations from seven communities. Its approach was to implement self-help programs for its members while at the same time putting political pressure on government agencies and authorities to enact pro-poor policies (Van Naerssen, 2011). ZOTO gained broad support from various sectors, including social workers and church groups, and was guided by the philosophies and methodologies of Saul Alinsky and Paolo Freire on community organizing, and Karl Marx on structural analysis (COM, n.d.; Racelis, 2000). These frameworks were derived from the influence of the progressive church sector and activists from the ND movement (Caouette, 2013; Honculada, 1985).⁶ ZOTO was able to generate support from the church sector through PECCO or Philippine Ecumenical Committee for Community Organization. Steered by liberation theology and formed by national democrats, PECCO had a two-year community organizing program with ZOTO (Caouette, 2013; Castro, 1976). The program was headed by the Presbyterian minister and Alinsky trainee Herbert White, and ran from 1970-1972. Stimulated by the FQS, student and youth activists helped in community organizing, making ZOTO the pioneer of true organization of informal settlers, widening its reach from the initial 20 to 113 organizations at its peak (Karaos, 1993). The convergence of the urban poor community, radical movement, progressive church leaders, and community organizing produced the “golden years” (1970-1976) of the urban poor movement (Honculada, 1985).

ZOTO created an impact in its first two years (1970-1972) based on its capacity to deliver tangible benefits, mobilize thousands for mass actions, and confront powerful entities.⁷ It was able to respond more effectively than the government in the face of a calamity triggered by Typhoon Yoling in 1970. It promptly distributed relief goods and negotiated \$10,000 worth of galvanized iron sheets for the homes of 2,000 families. This earned ZOTO the right to deal directly with relief agencies of disaster aid. During the 1970 papal visit, ZOTO’s leader Trinidad Herrera, was able to recount to Pope Paul VI in front of 8,000 urban poor the empty promises every administration had given them, and asked him to bless them in their struggle for land.

⁶ Not all supporters of ZOTO came from the national democratic movement. Most likely there were some who came with a more social democratic position. However, the national democrats were more influential due to its large network. Moreover, delineation between the two lines was not of importance during that time as uniting against the Marcos Regime was more urgent.

⁷ ZOTO’s history was culled from the writings of Castro (1976), Honculada (1985), Simbulan (1998), and Van Naarsen (2011).

ZOTO organized 2,000 people in front of the Congress to lobby for the implementation of RA 1597. It led a three-day picket and a 3,000-strong march against the dubious leasing of Tondo land to the Cement Association of the Philippines (CAP), which would displace communities.⁸ The lease was withdrawn. They confronted the German embassy and bank that would finance the development of an international port at the expense of the urban poor. The German government obliged the Philippine government to provide relocation for those who would be affected. This assertion for proper resettlement and land tenure amidst eviction due to infrastructural development was a long and arduous battle for ZOTO, but it was also the fight that earned its place in the history of the urban poor movement.

ZOTO's accomplishments were a result of its organizational skills, developing its membership to be socially aware and to act collectively. The members had organized themselves through committee work and sharpened their thinking with seminars on issues and problems. Representative democracy was practiced when they had their convention, attended by 725 delegates representing 53 organizations and 20,000 members. They managed to widen their reach by having a support group (*Mga Kaibigan ng ZOTO* – Friends of ZOTO).

The growing association with the youth movement, and consequently with the ND movement, enhanced the cogency of ZOTO (Honculada, 1985). Innovative forms of organizing and mobilization stemmed out of this interaction. Teach-ins and street plays became popular platforms of consciousness-raising. And while demonstrations and confrontations with those in power were part of ZOTO's reliable repertoire of contention, it also had the propensity to execute a covert tactic that proved to be effective. A phone blockade called "Operation Hello" was carried out with the help of student mass organizations during ZOTO's campaign against the lease of Tondo land to CAP. CAP's telephone lines were tied up for a whole week, paralyzing its operations and eventually withdrawing its plan to rent the land.

The victories of ZOTO were threatened as President Marcos's vision of modernizing Metro Manila gained traction during Martial Law. While the funding of the expansion of Manila's international port was already confirmed early on by German bi-lateral support, specifically from KfW, the reclamation and construction of the Navotas Fish Port and Fish

⁸ Exact dates of the three-day picket are not available in the literature covered. But the mass action happened before Martial Law was announced in 1972, as mentioned in the writings of Magavern, Thomas, & Stuart (1975).

Market had clinched an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan (Philippine Fisheries Development Authority, 2016; World Bank, 1977, 1986). The materialization of these projects would require the eviction of 7,000 families. The projects were progressing slowly though as urban poor groups, such as ZOTO, were resisting evictions. As mentioned, ZOTO had already successfully negotiated relocation with the representatives of the German government. But when Martial Law was declared, squatter clearance was ordered, with Tondo high on the priority list. Demolitions were carried out in the name of the Manila Urban Development Project, of which the Tondo Foreshore Development Project was a major component and without the promised relocation.

Martial Law was a defining moment for the urban poor in terms of the state's plan for them and of their capacity as a movement to respond to this plan. The struggle for land tenure between the urban poor movement and the state during Martial Law can be likened to a tug of war, but with one side throwing curveballs against the other. The other side sidesteps these to avoid stumbling while pulling the rope harder. Amidst the hardships, the urban poor had substantive gains such as uniting urban poor formations, acquiring an on-site and in-city deal over an off-city relocation, being involved in participatory urban planning, mobilizing networks abroad and getting noticed by international media. It must be underscored that these were firsts in the history of the Philippine urban poor movement.

Right after Martial Law was declared in 1972, communities were raided, urban poor leaders were arrested, and large gatherings were curtailed. But the urban poor movement persisted. While other organizations ceased to convene their members, ZOTO stood its ground and continued having its meetings and general assemblies. When the Marcos administration consolidated communities by having control over *barangay* captains (village heads), urban poor organizations banded and formed a coalition as a countermove. ZOTO and other groups from adjacent areas, such as Navotas, Malabon, and Tondo, formed *Ugnayan ng mga Samahan ng Mamamayan ng Buong Tondo Foreshoreland* (Federation of People's Organizations of Tondo Foreshoreland) or *Ugnayan*.⁹ As demolitions began to be rampant all over Metro Manila, amalgamations of urban poor federations resulted in new formations such as *Ugnayan ng*

⁹ It is also roughly translated to 'linkages.'

Maralitang Tagalungsod (UMT – Alliance of the Urban Poor), which consisted of eight federations and 50 organizations from 10 cities in the region.

As the development of the international port loomed and demolitions were knocking down shanties, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* requested Navotas as a resettlement area for those who could not be accommodated in the Tondo Slum Upgrading Project. They wanted to avoid being thrown far away from Manila, as previous informal settlers experienced. On 12 February 1973, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* marched to Malacañang Palace¹⁰ (Malacañang, henceforth) to negotiate this with the President. Instead of being accommodated, the crowd of 1,000 were asked to leave the gates of the palace and leaders were held until night for questioning. They requested Bishop Mariano Gaviola, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, to intervene and two days after, Malacañang sent a memorandum allotting land in Navotas as a relocation site. But curveballs would be thrown in their way. On 6 May 1973, Presidential Decree (PD)¹¹ 814 was signed, stipulating a 50-year lease on land with an option to purchase at market value – a far different arrangement from RA 1597's fixed price of five pesos per square meter. They were also told of being resettled elsewhere because the Navotas site was not ready. In response, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* once again marched to Malacañang and this time succeeded. Called *Alay Lakad*, a "peoples' pilgrimage in search of the promised land," 5,000 urban poor trooped to the Palace and their leaders were able to meet and negotiate with Marcos (Castro, 1976, p. 272). The president agreed that there would be no evictions until the relocation site at Navotas was ready and the informal settlers would participate in the planning. Simultaneously, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* also held multiple dialogues with the World Bank, which was financing the Manila Urban Development Project. Finally, a tripartite agreement with the World Bank and Tondo Foreshore Development Authority (TFDA) had been reached to focus on slum upgrading and on-site development instead of resorting to relocation to distant areas. Dagat-dagatan, Navotas, which was four kilometers away from Tondo, was designated as the relocation site with 40 hectares of residential community (Honculada, 1985; World Bank, 1977). *ZOTO/Ugnayan* had successfully negotiated slum upgrading and the first-ever in-city resettlement in the country.

¹⁰ Malacanang Palace is the Philippine president's official residence and primary office.

¹¹ President Marcos introduced Presidential Decrees with the proclamation of Martial Law. They were statues served to arrogate unto the president the legislative powers of the Congress (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d.).

It was also agreed that *ZOTO/Ugnayan* would be included in the decision-making process of the resettlement plan. Anticipating their involvement, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* carried out socio-economic surveys among 2,500 households and had technical seminars with urban planners. But all these efforts were disrupted when an international competition was held to draw up a plan for the resettlement without consulting *ZOTO/Ugnayan* or the affected families. A New Zealand architect, who had never been to Manila, won the competition.

The non-consultation of *ZOTO/Ugnayan* in the construction of the Dagat-dagatan resettlement triggered a protest that ended up gaining international attention. Prior to this, anti-poor policies had been thrown to the urban poor such as PD 184 and PD 772, which criminalized squatting. Urban-renewal projects and international events were also lined-up to improve the image of Manila. Under the direction of First Lady Imelda Marcos, “cleaning” and “beautifying” the Metro started with large-scale evictions of informal settlers – 100,000 in preparation for the 1974 Miss Universe Pageant, 60,000 to give way to the 1975 International Monetary Fund-World Bank annual meeting. Repression of activists was apparent as five urban poor leaders invited by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to attend the 1976 UN Habitat Conference in Vancouver were denied permits to leave the country. As a reaction to all of these, a massive protest and prayer vigil in front of Manila Cathedral ensued. The demonstration ended with thousands of protesters being arrested and hauled to a military camp (Payer, 1982; Scott, 2016; Wurfel, 1977). International news wire United Press International took notice and reported, “Police arrested 2,000 slum dwellers and religious leaders who held a demonstration today timed to coincide with the United Nations conference on human settlements” (cited in Scott, 2016).

In solidarity, a network of supporters held a protest in front of the venue of the UN Habitat Conference the day Imelda Marcos was scheduled to arrive and give a speech. The network was composed of the Filipino coalition against martial law in Vancouver, the WCC, and the Self-Help and Low Cost Housing Symposium at Habitat Forum. A “People’s Decree”, drafted by *Ugnayan*, was read during the protest. The decree, countering Presidential Decree 184, rejected the lease-purchase arrangement and instead advocated for a land cooperative managed by the community. It was an innovative concept of land being socialized as opposed to private ownership, which the state espoused. This line of thinking and breadth of network showed the urban poor’s evolution from being part of community-based organizations to urban

social movements and from being bounded by sector-specific to integrating national issues (Van Naerssen, 2011).

ZOTO/Ugnayan had significant breakthroughs, but the military state's grand design of urban land development prevented them from completely achieving land and housing tenure. While *ZOTO/Ugnayan* were able to negotiate slum upgrading and in-city relocation, the state disrupted their role in the planning process. The deviation of PD 814 from RA 1597, making land value pegged at market value instead of a fixed price, also made it impossible for the urban poor to acquire their own house and land. In 1979 a West German government mission reported that 60-70% of the families cannot afford the payments (Van Naerssen, 2011). By 1986, only 56% of the payments had been collected as reported by its funding agency, the World Bank (1986). The World Bank's insistence on cost recovery had structured the lease and payment terms that the government could allow the urban poor. Ultimately, the reliance of the state on external funders had delimited the concessions the squatters could extract from the government (Karaos, 1993). The regime also crafted the Urban Land Reform Law, which rationalized existing land use patterns and ownership of urban lands – conditions conducive to the eviction of residents without land titles. Squatting was criminalized through PD 772. Around 400,000 informal settlers were evicted from 1973 to 1980 (Shatkin, 2016). The creation of the National Housing Authority (NHA), the Ministry of Human Settlement, and other house financing institutions signalled the start of low-cost housing (Karaos, 1993). Ultimately, the state subscribed to a market-based urban and housing development framework, thus diminishing the chance of the urban poor to secure land and housing tenure.

3.3 Coalitions, Division and Decline

Though the urban poor movement had risen above challenge after challenge, its momentum started to decline in the late 1970s. The systematic military repression coupled with the urban development strategy of the state created divisions among urban poor groups. As repression grew palpable some leaders left their organizations, and some became more cooperative with the state. Disagreements on how to challenge the state also manifested. Still, there were leaders such as *ZOTO's* Trinidad Herrera who, after experiencing being arrested and heavily tortured, went back to her organization. The state's different programs for different areas, and the vagueness and variety of housing programs and policies also successfully segmented the

urban poor. Some leaders were confused by the various programs of the government and with fear already sown from repression, they were easily coopted by the state. Others chose to focus on specific issues of housing and resettlement without relating these to the existing socio-economic and political structures (Arellano, 2014; Simbulan, 1998).

The decline in momentum did not mean eradication, but rather a more plural urban poor movement, whose outcomes were not as visibly impactful as before. Because of state repression, urban poor organizations or organizations working towards land and housing tenure had adapted different organizing strategies and/or repertoires of contention, which were less confrontational. Some organizations chose to focus on community-specific issues and self-help projects, shunning broader political goals. Meanwhile, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* and other urban poor organizations, continued to be part of both urban poor and broad coalitions. They understood that their demands would never be realized until the authoritarian regime and its urban development framework had been toppled (Rüland, 1984; Van Naerssen, 2011). Thus, from the early 1980s to the ouster of the Marcos regime in 1986, *ZOTO/Ugnayan* and other urban poor formations would go beyond the arena of housing and land struggle and be part of coalitions against the dictatorship.

In sum, authoritarian rule, systematic military repression, and the state's strategy of urban development resulted in divergent reactions from the urban poor movement. On the one hand, the movement became more politicized. It expanded, engaging and influencing a wider audience as it linked community-specific issues to broad political issues. On the other hand, fear, confusion, and conflict began to infiltrate the movement, creating an ideological split that would influence their claim-making strategies up to the present. There were those who continued to oppose the military state's authoritarian rule and urban development framework, while others chose to maintain the squatter's autonomy and their struggle for land and housing tenure. The urban poor movement was drawn to various coalitions of different ideological persuasions, including the national democrats, social democrats, democratic socialists, and socialists, though they would be drawn to multi-ideological alliances against the Marcos Regime after 1983

(Karaos, 1993).¹² These divisions were carried over even after the change of government in 1986.

3.4 Post-1986 People Power: Democratic Space, Ideological Formations, and Civil Society Organizations

After breaking away from an authoritarian government the new political climate and democratic space altered the civil society landscape. The new political climate pushed activists to rethink their ideological positions. This was prominent within the ND movement as it experienced paradigm shifts and splits. While members of the movement had the same analysis of societal problems, their diverse frameworks defined their differing visions and responses to issues (Constantino-David, 1998). Social democrats, democratic socialists, popular democrats, and socialists have become more visible alongside national democrats in the civil society landscape.

The national democrats argued that there is a need to confront US imperialism and the socioeconomic and political domination of the elite, both perceived to be the root causes of poverty and social injustices in the country. The broad number and variety of groups that adhere to national democracy reflect their wide repertoire of contention, which spans from grassroots organizing, popular demonstrations, parliamentary struggle, to radical approaches. After the change in government in 1986, while some continued to be part of the ND movement, either covertly or in the open mass movement, there were some who chose different paths. Those who are in the open mass movement include the women's organization Gabriela and the labour group *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU, May First Movement), the peasant led *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas* (KMP, Peasant Movement of the Philippines). *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN, New Patriotic Alliance) serves as the alliance of national democratic organizations from 1985 to the present.

¹² Prominent urban poor coalitions included the national democrat-affiliated *Ugnayan ng Maralitang Tagalungsod* (UMT), which ZOTO was part of; the social democratic TAMASA and KASAPI; and the non-aligned SAMA-SAMA of Commonwealth. BAYAN and BANDILA were some of the more known alliances, which organized popular demonstrations during the latter years of the oust-Marcos campaign (Karaos, 1993).

Initially social democrats in the country were anti-communist, coming from the upper-middle class, and educated at elite Catholic universities, especially the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University. During the Martial Rule, their analysis of the problems of Philippine society began to be similar to the national democrats'. They were also influenced by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM) ideas but with Catholic social teachings. For them, once the authoritarian rule was overthrown their objectives could be realized through acquisition of government positions. When the Marcoses were successfully deposed, the social democrats veered away from the MLM line and entered government office both through electoral campaigns and as appointees. They also actively participated in lobbying. One of the social democratic organizations formed was *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (Pandayan, Forging a Socialist Philippines).¹³

There were also the popular democrats, who at first identified themselves as national democrats wanting to integrate “direct democracy” or the “independent political activity of popular organizations and non-government organizations into the national democratic perspective” (Rocamora, 1994). But because of ideological differences with the national democrats, they later gained autonomy and now promote political reforms and pluralist politics within democratic movements (Institute for Popular Democracy, n.d.).

By the mid-1990s, the national democrats still composed the bulk of the organized Left when compared to the other ideological forces. However, in 1998 Akbayan Citizen's Action Party (Akbayan) was formally launched as a joint party-building project of these ideological forces (Akbayan, n.d.). Akbayan carries a democratic socialist line though created by the assemblage of popular democrats from the Movement for Popular Democracy, the social democrats from Pandayan, the independent socialists from *Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (BISIG, Collective for the Promotion of Socialist Thought and Practice), and *Siglo ng Paglaya* (Siglaya, Century of Liberation), another national democrat break-away bloc (Juliano, 2015).

¹³ References for this section, and for a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological divisions and their histories, see (Boudreau, 1996; Caouette, 2004, 2013; Constantino-David, 1998; Racelis, 2000; Rocamora, 1994; Silliman & Noble, 1998)

The different ideological forces also permeated the different civil society formations after 1986. The newly established political order provided much democratic space that allowed pluralist ideas to propagate, and consequently, the proliferation of various development non-government organizations (NGOs), people's organizations (POs), and coalitions (Caroll, 1998). On the one side, this plurality broadened the arena of struggle for civil society. Demands that were once shouted in the streets were now being lobbied in the halls of Congress. With their resources, NGOs helped POs with capacity building and in funding and managing community programs and soft infrastructures. Networks and coalitions were formed to coordinate activities, strengthen advocacies, and share best practices. Civil society groups were accorded concessions due to their role in deposing the dictator and installing a new government. Leaders of development NGOs and POs were absorbed by the new government by being part of the Constitutional Commission or were appointed as officials of different government agencies. One of the gains of the urban poor movement from these concessions was the creation of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor (PCUP).

On the other side, the creation of coalitions and proliferation of NGOs made little impact despite their numbers and resources. As mentioned in a paper presented during the Philippine-Canadian NGO Consultation in June 1988:

[D]isillusionment is building because despite their increased visibility and substantial resources, NGOs are not succeeding in effecting fundamental change. The traditional small-scale and scattered approach characteristic of NGOs is not adding up to significant and sustainable change.¹⁴ (Boudreau, 1996, p. 79)

Moreover, organizational maladies of opportunism, economism, and corruption had penetrated NGOs (Arellano, 2014; Caouette, 2013) – more popularly known as “NGOism.”¹⁵ Due to international recognition of People Power (the non-violent uprising that ousted the Marcos dictatorship and restored democracy), funding agencies flooded the Philippines in the hopes of

¹⁴ Tim Brodhead, Executive Director of Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), presented the paper during a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)-sponsored consultation.

¹⁵ In post-Apartheid South Africa, Xaba defines “NGOism” as “strategies of NGOs to perpetuate the continued need for their services” (2015, p. 317). NGOism has a tendency to bloat numbers in project proposals and reports. Numbers of people in need and areas served are exaggerated to ensure donor funding and project continuity. In the case of the Philippines, this condition resulted to donor fatigue (Boudreau, 1996).

helping the country get back on its feet. The ample financial resources which accompanied programs and projects resulted in opportunism among some NGOs and their staff. Project deliverables, which were often soft infrastructures, became the focus instead of community organizing as these were accompanied by large budgets. POs and their members were lured to the pitfalls of economism when they refused to move without remuneration or tangible benefit for the community. The term “professionalization of NGO work” was a double entendre. While NGOs systematized and professionalized development work, it also became an income generating industry (Constantino-David, 1998). There was a notion during the 1990s that choosing to work in an NGO meant working for a high salary and not because of development work. In some cases, large amounts of funding corrupted the NGO or its officers.

Networks and coalitions, which were given space by the new government to partake in formulating and lobbying for bills, were near the doorstep of reformism and cooptation. The urban poor movement was no exception to this. A task force was formed, composed of leaders of NGOs, in lobbying for provisions in the urban land reform bill. The bill was successfully passed but not without sacrificing the progressive provisions in the interest of getting the most out of it, considering that the main proponent was the Chamber of Real Estate Builder’s Associations (Caroll, 1998). The law was named Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA) of 1992, which, though it decriminalized squatting and assured informal settlers of relocation, also legalized demolitions. It has provisions on socialized housing but strengthened the role of the private sector (Ellao, 2011). In sum, instead of protecting the urban poor from the operations of the market forces, the new government just gave the means and ways for the poor to cope, but nevertheless abandoned them to the machinations of the market (Caroll, 1998).

It was not only NGOs or POs that were coopted but also leaders of development NGOs who were absorbed by the new government and held positions in the bureaucracy (Caroll, 1998). The dangers of reformism and cooptation were to be anticipated as the new government exhibits elite democracy. Though there had been restructuring – a new constitution, legislature, and national departments – the social structure remained unchanged (Boudreau, 1996). A few government positions were allotted to progressives of upper-middle-class backgrounds, who helped in installing the new administration, but the top positions were occupied by traditional politicians who were displaced when Marcos was in power. This was reinforced when figures from the old political establishment won the 1987 Congressional elections. The newly

established Philippine government was still dominated by elite political families with business connections. The president, Corazon Aquino, was a landlord herself, whose family owned a vast hacienda (Anderson, 1988). With the old political structure still in place, reformism and cooptation were always around the corner ready to pounce on the few progressives who were tokens of concessions.

In summary, civil society groups after Marcos were dynamic, diverse, and had successes and disappointments as they waded into the waters of elite democracy. They were dynamic and diverse as they were composed of a plethora of organizations – NGOs, POs, coalitions – coming from the different ideological formations of national democrats, popular democrats, social democrats, and socialists. They had breakthroughs in creating networks, policy reforms, building capacities of POs and NGO workers, and supporting community projects (Caroll, 1998; Racelis, 2000). However, some fell through the cracks of opportunism, economism, corruption, cooptation and reformism in carrying out their activities. Most of the laws set up by the new government would later be realized to contain anti-poor and pro-elite provisions, such as in the cases of UDHA for the urban poor and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program for the peasant sector. In this socio-political environment KADAMAY would find itself being formed.

3.5 KADAMAY and the Resurgence of the Urban Poor Movement

Right after February 1986, the national democrats had been busy creating and involving themselves in coalitions to push the urban poor's agenda to the doorstep of Malacañang. ZOTO, UMT, and other urban poor groups formed *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng mga Maralitang Tagalungsod* (KPML, Congress of Unity of the Urban Poor) and formulated the "People's Proposal". The proposal demanded the halt of demolitions and repayments of relocation sites' cost of development, and the creation of an agency that would provide the urban poor access to policy-making. KPML then united with *Lakas ng Maralita ng Lunsod* (Strength of Urban Poor), creating the broadest alliance of urban poor groups, the National Congress of Urban Poor Organizations (NACUPO). NACUPO presented the People's Proposal to Malacañang and successfully earned the creation of PCUP (Simbulan, 1998). However, beset by internal rivalries, NACUPO did not last long and the national democrats lost KPML as it was pulled into the socialists' orbit.

In the absence of a national democratic urban poor alliance, different progressive mass organizations carried on the organizing of urban poor communities. These include the women's group *Samahan ng Maralitang Kababaihang Nagkakaisa* (SAMAKANA, Association of United Urban Poor Women), the drivers' *Pinagkaisang Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Operator Nationwide* (PISTON, United Association of Drivers and Operators Nationwide), and youth's *Anakbayan*. In 1998 these organizations formally established KADAMAY with labour group KMU as the lead convenor.

KADAMAY's organizational structure is vertical and horizontal at the same time. It has a National Congress, which is the highest decision-making body of its guidelines, programme, and plans that meets every three years. It is comprised of delegates from community-based member-organizations, chapters of mass organizations, chapters of various level-formations (provincial, municipal, barangay), and national formations that are members of KADAMAY (e.g. *Anakbayan*, *SAMAKANA*, etc.). In between sessions of the National Congress, an elected National Council serves as the highest decision-making body in accordance to the approved guidelines, programme, and plans of the National Congress and meets once a year. It is comprised of a national chairperson, executive vice-chairperson, vice-chairperson of different geographic regions, secretary-general, vice-secretary general, treasurer, auditor, national coordinators for women and youth, and representatives for regional and national organizations. The chairperson acts as the spokesperson for the organization and facilitates the organization's meetings and assemblies. The secretary-general, meanwhile, manages the day-to-day activities of the organization and closely coordinates with member-organizations and chapters with the help of its volunteer-organizers (KADAMAY, 2012). KADAMAY has a national office that serves as its campaign centre.

The formation of KADAMAY was a confluence of circumstances. First, there was an urgent need for the urban poor to respond to the economic policies that severely impacted them. In 1998, the state's campaign for neoliberal globalization was in full swing. The Ramos Administration (1992-1998) set globalization as its primary development strategy (Kelly, 2000). It liberalized trade, privatized state enterprises and social services, and deregulated the economy. These were already implemented during the Marcos years as structural adjustment programs, but

the Ramos Administration legitimized them by translating them into laws, e.g. Oil Deregulation Law of 1998, Water Crisis Act of 1995, Mining Act of 1992, Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA) of 1992, etc. The UDHA signalled the public-private partnership of the housing sector and initiated urban development through gentrification. From 1993 to 1994, under the Ramos administration, there were 80 demolitions that rendered 80,000 people homeless (Van Naerssen, 2003). The urban poor also bore the brunt of the difficulties that resulted from the privatization of basic utilities, health care, and education.

Second, employment had become precarious resulting in an increasing informal sector population. KADAMAY's theoretical underpinnings recognize that the urban poor sector is part of the working-class as proletarians, semi-proletarians (those involved in the informal economy), and precariats (those in precarious employment) and it has a significant role in changing the socio-economic and political structures of society (Arellano, 2014). It is reaching spaces beyond the scope of labour organizations. Since the 1990s the rate of unionization in the country has been in decline (Aganon, Serrano, & Certeza, 2009; International Labour Organization, n.d.). Companies employ union avoidance tactics. Economic policies adopted by the government resulted in export processing enclaves, transnational labour, globalization, and precarious employment – all contributing to dispersing workers, making union organizing impossible. Jobless or in-between jobs, workers are now found in communities as residents and/or as part of the informal economy. It is in these communities that KADAMAY organizes. Its members are informal settlers, relocated victims of demolitions, and those in the informal economy such as drivers and vendors. Starting with a few thousand people, the group's membership has now expanded to 200,000 from different community-based organizations all over the country.

Third, there was a need to consolidate the efforts of all progressive urban poor groups to effectively carry out their campaigns. Since the late 1980s, urban poor leaders were preoccupied with lobbying reforms, while the urban poor struggles became localized, scattered and spontaneous. The founding congress of KADAMAY was an opportune time to assess the urban poor's socio-economic and political situation, evaluate the gains and losses of the urban poor movement from its decades-long struggle and strategize on how it would go forward (Arellano, 2014).

KADAMAY's analyses and stance have always been anchored on globalization and neoliberalism, and their entrenchment in inequitable social structures. As stated in one of their publications:

Nananatili ang pagnenegosyo sa mga batayang serbisyo sa loob ng resettlement sites, kabilang ang patubig, pailaw at ang bahay mismo. Hanggang nanatili ang neoliberal na patakaran ng pribatisasyon, patuloy na nagsisilbi ang gobyerno sa interes ng mga dayuhan at malalaking lokal na negosyante, habang tinatalikuran nito ang responsibilidad na tiyakin sa serbisyong panlipunan para sa mamamayan. (KADAMAY, 2016, p. 1.)

[Basic services in resettlement sites, including water, electricity, and shelter, continue to be treated as business. Until the neoliberal policy of privatization remains, the state continues to serve foreign interests and the big comprador bourgeoisie while abandoning its responsibility of delivering social services to its citizens.]

Fittingly, KADAMAY's campaigns have been focused on resisting demolitions, asserting tenurial housing security, and improving basic utilities and services in relocation sites. It has also resisted demolition of public markets that are slated to be privatized and campaigned against oil price hikes. KADAMAY has led these campaigns not only because its membership includes drivers and vendors but also because these are issues that directly affect the daily survival of the urban poor. It also confronts issues that discriminate against the urban poor. In 2016, KADAMAY joined human rights groups in condemning the extra-judicial killings of urban poor youth victimized by the state's war on drugs (Rappler.com, 2016). The urban poor become easy targets for police and vigilantes in fulfilling and justifying the state's drug war campaign.

But perhaps KADAMAY's most publicized campaigns other than Occupy Bulacan are the "Save San Roque" and the "*Bangkang Papel*" (Paper Boat). "*Bangkang Papel*" was a symbolic ceremony asking for justice for the victims of the 2000 Payatas Tragedy (Andaqui, 2003; Teves, 2009). Three boys wrote their wishes and dreams on pieces of paper, fold them into paper boats, and let them float down the Pasig River towards Malacañang Palace. The boys were survivors of the "trash-slide" tragedy where a huge section of a garbage mountain collapsed due to several days of rain, burying 217 scavengers and residents living in the vicinity. The ceremony was covered by the media and caught the attention of then President Gloria Arroyo. The president invited the boys during her State of the Nation Address and they were given scholarships. Though it was not the expected result, as the kids ended up being used as poster

boys for the Administration, the appalling level of poverty that pushed people to scavenge trash for cash and to live in the dumpsite was exposed to the public.

“Save San Roque” is a decade long struggle of ISFs from being evicted due to the development of Quezon City Central Business District (QCCBD). The planned QCCBD was expected to displace 15,000 informal settler families (ISFs), 9,500 of whom were in San Roque. The on-going resistance has made it difficult for the Quezon City Government, the National Housing Authority, and private developer Ayala Land, Inc. to hasten and finish the plan. Because of the large area (29.1 ha.) and strong resistance from the residents, demolitions have been staged in phases. Since 2010, there have already been at least four demolitions, which were met with barricades often ending in police brutality and ISFs being displaced (Ortega, 2016; Raymundo, 2018; Suarez, 2010). As of December 2019, the last section of the ISF area is anticipating demolition.

The struggle of the urban poor continues and is demonstrated by the presence of current urban poor organizations and coalitions. Apart from the national democratic KADAMAY, other relatively visible urban poor alliances in the country at present are KPML, which is affiliated to the self-avowed socialist *Partido ng Lakas ng Masa* (PLM, Strength of the Masses Party); Urban Poor Alliance (UP-ALL, c. 2005), which has close ties with social democrats; and *Kilusang Panlipunang Proteksyon para sa Maralita* (Kilos-Maralita, Movement for Social Protection of the Poor, c. 2009), which runs with support from popular democrats (Kilos-Maralita, 2009; Partido ng Lakas ng Masa, n.d.). All of these alliances are resisting evictions without relocation and advocating decent housing, in-city resettlement, and access to employment and social services. The difference lies on their mode of engagements. KADAMAY, Kilos-Maralita, and KPML carry out mass demonstrations; KADAMAY, UP-All and Kilos-Maralita organize dialogues, policy advocacy and lobbying; UP-All and Kilos-Maralita promote “People’s Plan”, a participatory housing development sponsored through the various government financing schemes; KADAMAY, with its quest for a comprehensive Urban Poor Agenda, barricades areas to be demolished, explores the People’s Plan but asserts that financing should not be profit-oriented, and recently, occupies idled public housing (Interaksyon, 2018; Karaos & Porio, 2015; Oldewarris, 2018).

The similarities and differences could be attributed to their shared history of urban poor struggle. At one point they looked through or were influenced with the same ideological optic. But due to the change in government in 1986, some have revised their outlook and chose other strategies of acquiring housing. Only KADAMAY chose to continue the uncompromising stance in achieving the urban poor agenda. Adding occupation in their tactics of resistance, KADAMAY brought back the daring and innovative organized urban poor and the principle of collective action that were reminiscent of the urban poor movement's "golden years" from 50 years ago.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the story of the urban poor movement in their claim to rights to housing and land tenure. In the process of recounting the history of the urban poor multiple narratives were told – their origins, their struggles and victories during and after the Martial Law period, their relationship with the state, the state's framework and direction of its housing and urban development plan, the internal struggle in the urban poor movement and its alignment with political organizations and ideological persuasions. With all these dynamics in the past and enduring in the present, the housing takeover in Bulacan should be viewed not as an abrupt singular event, but as a historical point in the urban poor's continuous struggle for their right to housing.

Chapter 4: Occupy Bulacan: The Occupiers and the Housing Takeover

This chapter has two parts: a survey of the profile of the occupiers and the narrative of the occupation itself. These components respond to research question (b), which queries the demography, socio-economic profile, housing tenure of the occupiers prior to the housing takeover, and their tactic and strategies of the occupation. The presentation of demographic data aims to validate the eligibility of the occupiers as socialized housing beneficiaries based on the government housing agency's criteria. The second part covers the account of Occupy Bulacan according to the occupiers. It includes the description and dynamics on the actual day of the occupation, as well as the events and activities that preceded it and a short mention of its aftermath. The participation and role of the occupiers in asserting their rights to housing are given emphasis, as well as their repertoire of contention and strategies as a social movement. This second part is a continuation of the Filipino urban poor's narrative in their struggle for a 'transformed and renewed urban life' that started in the 1970s, as chronicled in Chapter 3, and thus, corresponds to research question (a) on the significance of the occupation for the wider context of Philippine urban poor social movements. Consequently, then, this chapter substantiates the argument that the occupation was a practice of the right to participation through radical citizenship and grassroots democracy.

4.1 The Occupiers: Socio-economic profile and housing tenure prior to the occupation

The data gathered here comes from a sample population of 960 occupiers, collated from KADAMAY members' Socio-Economic Forms (SEF). Each is a representative of a household from the 5300 occupied houses. KADAMAY members accomplished the SEF before the occupation. Copies of these were submitted to different government housing agencies and institutions in lieu of the required application form for socialized housing.

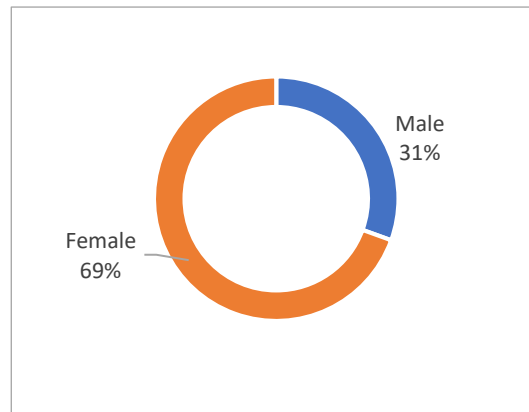


Figure 4-1. Percentage of occupiers' civil status of (n=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

Most of the surveyed members were women, in their 30s, and were married. Of the 960, women represent 69% of the sample population (see *Figure 4-1*). This reflects the membership of KADAMAY. Most participants during the occupation were women, and so are most of the leaders and members I interviewed. Though most occupiers were in their 30s, the rest came from all age groups. The youngest member is 18 years old and the oldest is 86. Those in their 30s had the greatest number of participants (28%), with those in their 20s (24%) and 40s (24%) trailing right behind (*Figure 4-2*). Seventy-five percent (75%) were married, 41% legally and 34% through common-law (*Figure 4-3*). Aside from the single (5%) as civil status KADAMAY also included separated (9%), widowed (5%), and single parents (1%) as choices.

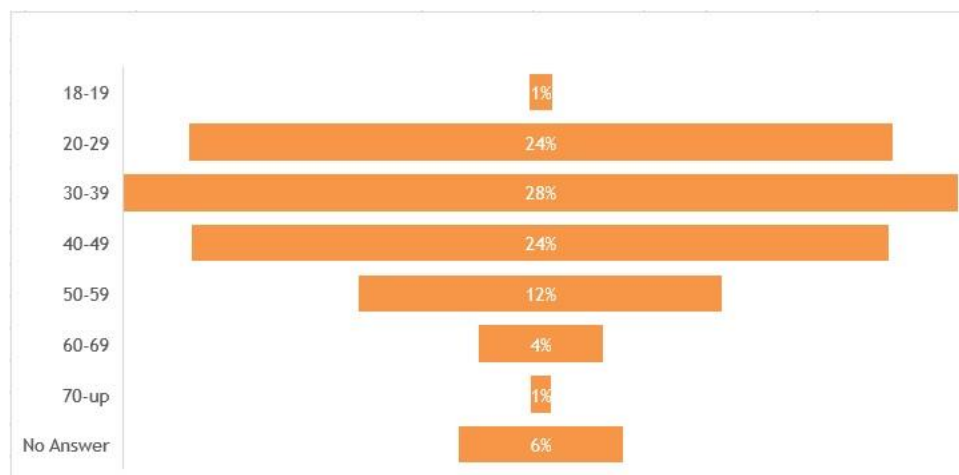
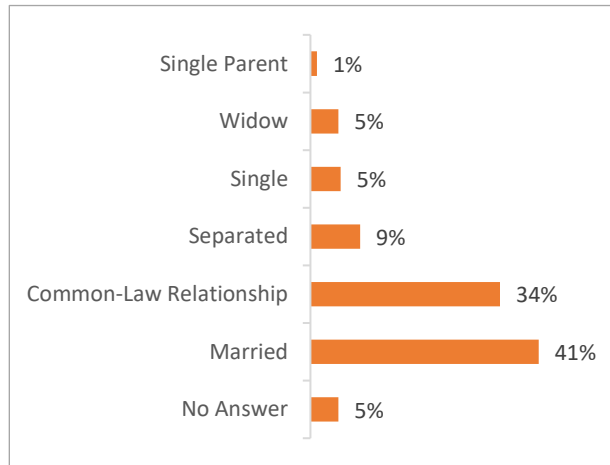


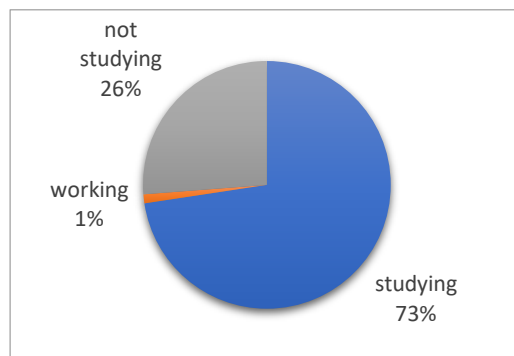
Figure 4-2. Percentage of surveyed occupiers' age brackets (n=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

The average household size was 4.4, which corresponds to the country’s latest census (PSA, 2016). More than three quarters or 86% of the surveyed members had children and 22% had their relatives living with them. The average number of relatives living with a family was 1.6; while families with kids had 2.6 as the average number of offspring. Almost half (48%) of the occupiers’ children were of school-age (those below Philippine higher education). Of these, 73% were studying, 1% were already working, and 26% were out of school (*Figure 4-4*).



*Figure 4-3. Percentage of occupiers' civil status (n=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.*

Most of the members had informal jobs (39%) such as vendor, domestic helper, laundrywoman, paratransit driver, day labourer, etc (*Figure 4-5*). Contract workers come second with 24%, while those with stable jobs are 6% of the sample population. Most of them were factory workers and working in the service sector. Seven percent (7%) did have jobs but did not mention if these were contractual or permanent. Two out of the 960 members were in the agricultural sector. A tenth of the occupiers were unemployed. Thirteen percent (13%) chose not to mention if they had any employment.



*Figure 4-4. Percentage of school-age children's educational status, 6-18 y.o. (n=1026).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.*

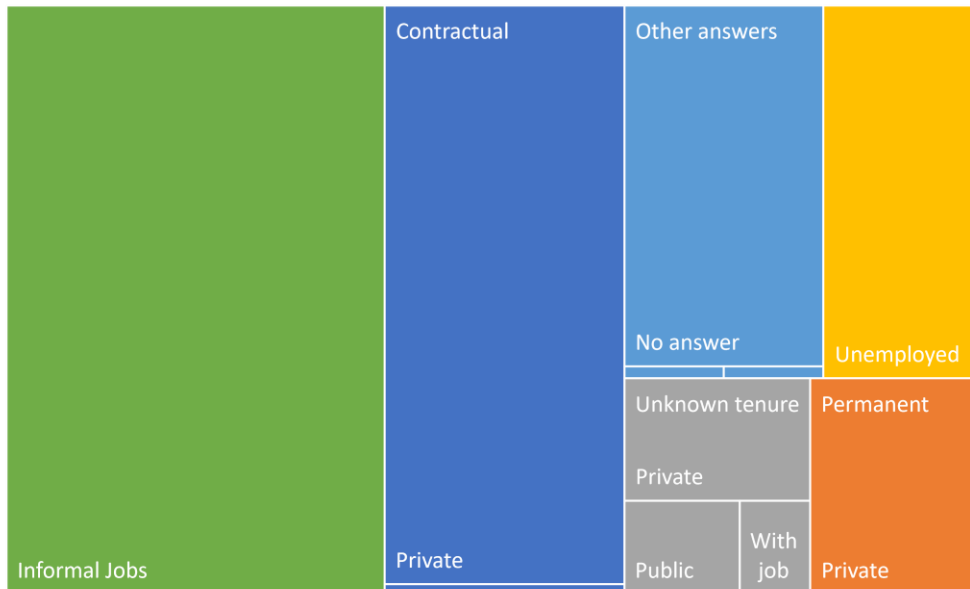


Figure 4-5. Employment of occupiers.
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

The survey reinforces previous established fact that the Filipino urban poor are migrants coming from peripheral areas. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the occupiers were born in provinces outside of Metro Manila (12%) or Bulacan (1%) (Figure 4-6). In the past five years, 41% of the occupiers were living in Bulacan, 21% in Metro Manila and 38% in other provinces (Figure 4-7). It can be surmised that 49% emigrated from another province more than five years ago and settled either in Metro Manila or Bulacan. According to KADAMAY leaders, almost all the occupiers came from Metro Manila and Bulacan, thus, an estimated 38% of the occupiers just

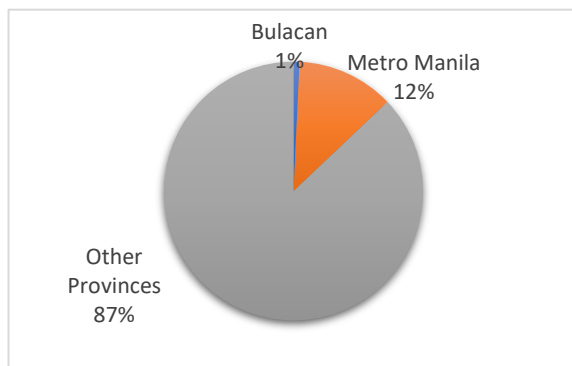


Figure 4-6. Percentage of occupiers' birthplace (N=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

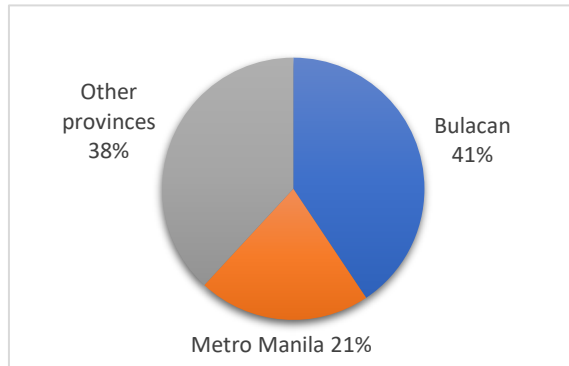


Figure 4-7. Percentage of occupiers' residence in the past five (5) years prior to the housing takeover (n=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

recently moved in to Metro Manila and Bulacan within the last five years. This fast rate of migration necessitates fast rate of public housing construction, otherwise informal settlements will unsurprisingly proliferate.

The occupiers' former types of housing tenure were very diverse, reflecting their struggle to make ends meet. More than half of the occupiers were former renters (53%) and a quarter were sharers (29%). The remaining quarter was divided among caretakers (1%), informal settlers (9%), homeowners (1%), and those who did not indicate what type of housing tenure they had (6%) (*Figure 4-8*). It is worth mentioning that one occupier classified his housing tenure as sharer/renter. He and his family of five were renting with another family they shared a house with.

KADAMAY uses the term *sukob* or *sharers* to categorize housing tenure for extended families living with relatives, which is common in Filipino culture. This practice crops up when children in the family become adults, have a family of their own, and decide to stay with their parents temporarily to save money for their future homes. However, in recent decades, the younger generation has increasingly found it difficult to build their own homes. Oftentimes this temporary arrangement turns into a permanent one. The extended family setup also occurs when people from the rural areas migrate to find jobs and temporarily live with their urban-based relatives. In most cases, those who migrate are single. But in instances where they get married later, they tend to overextend their stay at the relative's place. Sometimes, room extensions are built for their own families. Informal settlements expand this way.

Occupier 23's family experienced living as a *sukob* before the housing takeover. Both he and his wife came from peripheral areas. Life was hard since they did not have permanent jobs. They have transferred from one place to another. At first, they migrated to Manila, then to Valenzuela, then moved to Bulacan. They tried sharing houses with his siblings but that did not last long. His family felt uneasy staying with them whenever he was running low in funds and could not give his family's share of household expenses. During those times no disagreements erupted between him and his siblings, but tension was palpable in the house until his family relocated again, this time to a friend's house.

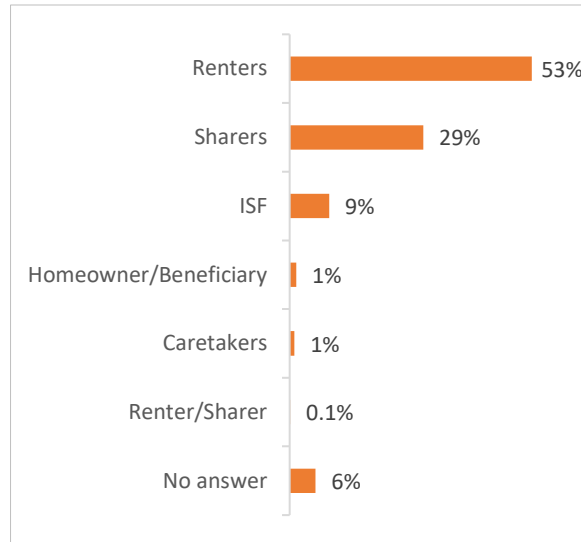


Figure 4-8. Percentage of occupiers' type of housing tenure (n=960).
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

Occupier 26's family was also living in shared accommodation. Her grown-up children and their families live with her. However, unlike Occupier 23 who managed to veer away from domestic squabbles, in-fighting was frequent among her children. Her grandchildren were also always bickering. She attributed this to their small house, which literally had no space for family members to retreat from each other.

The diversity of the housing tenure types not only covers the modes of acquiring houses but also the land classification where the occupiers' former houses stood. The renters and sharers' houses were built on private, public, and contested lands, and in dangerous zones (e.g. canals, waterways, riverbanks, and creeks). Except for private land, houses built on these are considered informal settlements. Therefore, informal settler families (ISF) composed 17% of the occupiers instead of the abovementioned 9% (Figure 4-9). Such conditions bring nuance to

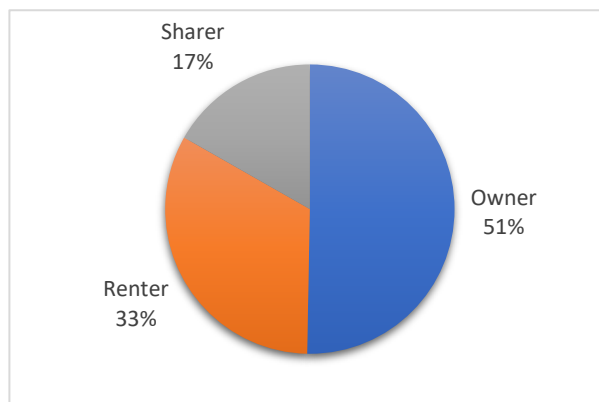


Figure 4-9. Percentage of housing tenure of occupiers who were informal settlers prior to the housing takeover (n=167)
Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

informal settlements. Renters living in informal settlements do not consider themselves squatters because they pay monthly rent. Moreover, the figure could have been higher if the other 70% of combined renters and sharers indicated which land classification their houses were within.

Not all occupiers had the basic utilities of electricity and water available in their former dwellings. And if they did, these were accessed in ways other than through direct and legal connection, which were more expensive. At least 10.2% had no electric power and 18.2% had no direct water supply. For those who had electricity, it was accessed either through legal connection (35.9%), submeter (28.6%) or shared connection (1.6%) (Figure 4-10). A percent of the occupiers lit their nights with kerosene lamp or through illegal connections (i.e. electrical jumpers). Water was sourced through legal connection (27.5%), submeter (18%), and community water pump (5.2%). Five percent (5%) had water through various sources such as shared pipe connections, fetching water from neighbours, peddlers, deep well, and jet water pump (Figure 4-11). A substantial number did not indicate their sources of electricity (15.5%) and water (17.8%).

Occupiers lived in abject poverty when their income is evaluated against their housing expenses. Based on their socio-economic profiles, their average monthly income was PHP7,570 (~USD149),¹⁶ which was way below the legislated minimum wage pegged at PHP10,082

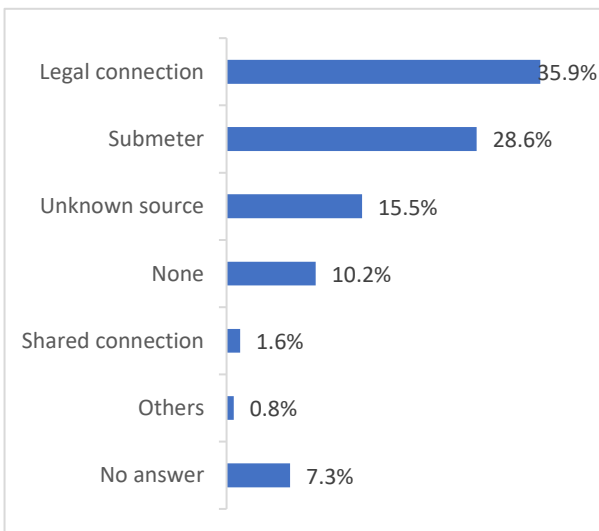


Figure 4-10. Percentage of occupiers' sources of electricity prior to the occupation.

Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

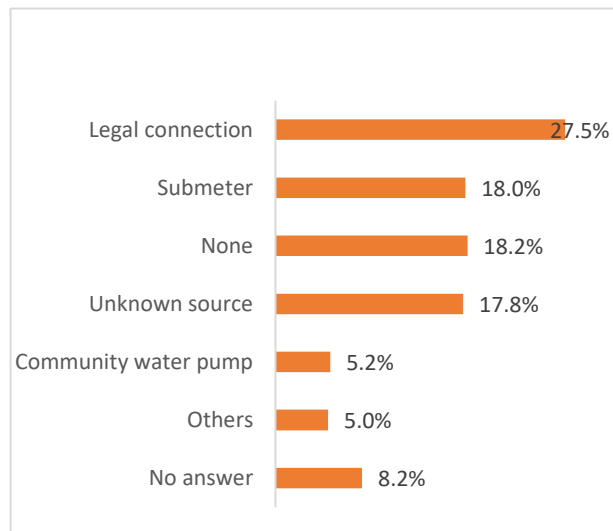


Figure 4-11. Percentage of occupiers' source of water prior to the occupation (n=960).

Source: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Survey, 2016.

¹⁶ USD1=PHP50.72, as of January 2, 2020

(~USD199) during the time of the takeover. This was reduced to PHP5,047 (~USD100) upon deducting their average monthly expenses on house rent (PHP1,540 or ~USD30), electricity (PHP659 or ~USD13), and water (PHP324 or ~USD6). For a family of five (taking into consideration that the average household size was 4.4) each family member was left with PHP33.65 (~USD 0.67) per day. This amount was half of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals international poverty threshold pegged at USD1.25 and a third of World Bank's set at USD1.90 (United Nations General Assembly, 2017; World Bank, 2015).

Poverty assaulted the occupiers in many ways as experienced through their housing conditions. Occupier 33 experienced being thrown out from the room they were renting. Their landlord gave them a deadline to leave the place and stop the accumulation of their rental debt. However, even before the set date, they were locked out of their place. This was while her grandchild was burning with fever. Occupier 13 and her family had also experienced housing precarity many times and in different ways since 1993. From the rural area they migrated to Metro Manila and from then on have transferred from city to city in the Metro area. There was a year where they relocated 10 times. They have also endured their house on fire. Prior to the occupation they became homeless, when her landlord decided to sell his property. They paid P1,500 monthly for their place, a shack extended from their landlord's house. When the house was sold, they could not find a place they could afford. Fortunately, as Occupier 13 commented, "God took pity on us," when a relative informed them of KADAMAY helping the homeless to find housing.

These were the socio-economic conditions of KADAMAY members that pushed them to seize empty public houses. But the takeover of the houses was not done overnight and though desperate, the occupiers, as part of the urban poor movement, undergo a collective and democratic process before, during, and after the occupation.

4.2 Pre-Occupation: AOM as a Process Towards Accessing Socialized Housing

As a province located immediate north of Metro Manila, Bulacan has become a prime peri-urban location for resettlement sites. It hosts the largest number of resettlement sites in the country (NHA data in Ballesteros & Egana, 2016). Its agricultural lands have been converted to residential use; Pandi being one of these towns (see *Figure 4-12* for a location map of Bulacan

and its relocation sites). Thus, KADAMAY’s initial campaign within Bulacan was not geared toward occupying empty houses, but toward addressing the needs of ISFs resettled from danger zones or government or public-private infrastructure project sites, or *relocatees* as they are called. It was during this time that KADAMAY came up with the plan to draw up a Relocatees Agenda that they could forward to the President and to concerned government housing agencies.

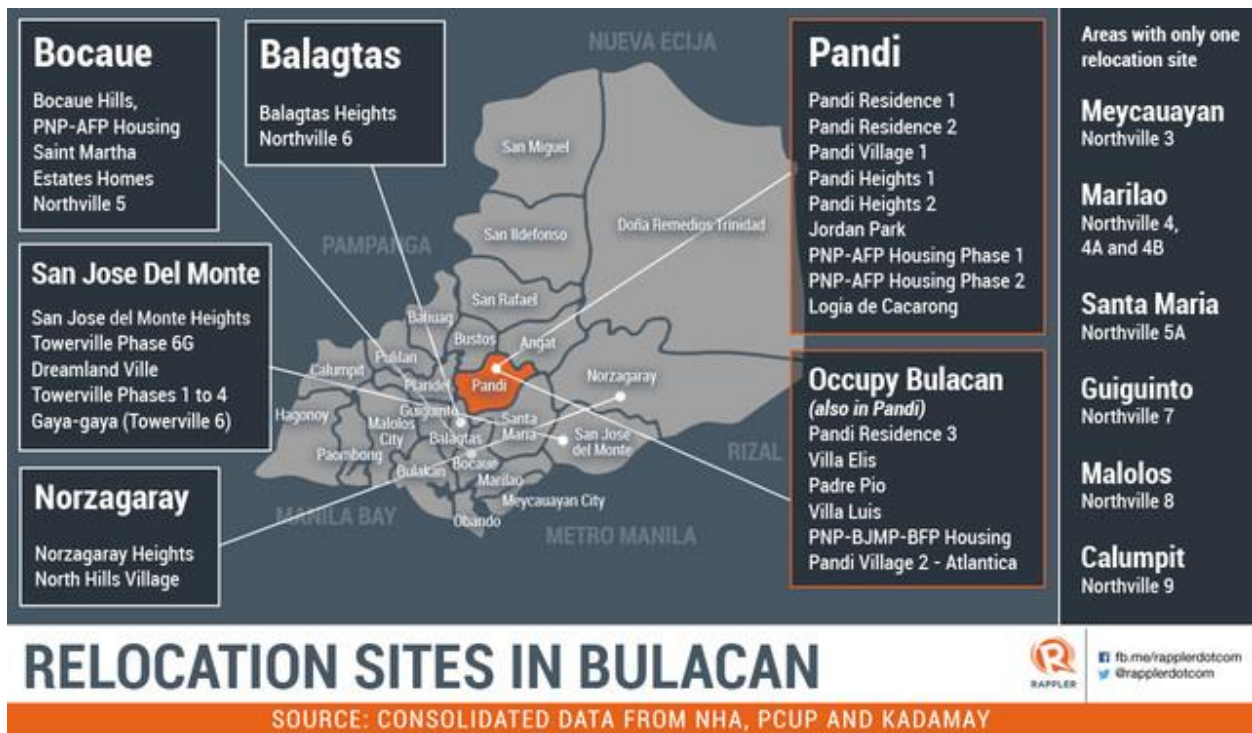


Figure 4-12. Relocation sites in Bulacan.

Reprinted from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/166293-kadamay-housing-issue-briefer>

As a mass organization, which has been around for almost 20 years, KADAMAY has already established its organizing strategy of AOM – arouse, organize, and mobilize. *Arouse* entails consciousness stirring and raising, *organize* involves unifying people towards a goal, and *mobilize* involves taking concrete action to achieve that goal. These components of the AOM strategy were alternately employed during the housing campaign. To launch the campaign, KADAMAY aroused the interest of its target audience through leafleteering, *Radyo Komunidad* (Community Radio), and *Konsultahang Bayan* (Community Consultations). Through the *Konsultahang Bayan*, a social investigation was carried out to identify the needs and capacities

of the relocatees, and to pinpoint possible solutions and resources to address these needs. Alongside this, the group ramped up its recruitment efforts to gather the critical mass needed to champion the agenda.

KADAMAY organizers held at least ten Community Consultations from August to October 2016. Invitations for the consultations were sent out through leafleteering and Community Radio. The consultations were held in nine villages in the towns of Balagtas, Bocaue, and Pandi in Bulacan (see *Figure 3-1* for location map). Initial participants were relocatees, but they were later joined by sharers, renters, caretakers, and homeless, or people who were housing insecure. Senior citizens and Homeowners Association (HOA) officials from seven relocation sites (Villa Elise, Pandi Residence 2, Pandi Residence 3, Pandi Village, Logia de Cacarong, Pandi Heights, and Saint Martha Homes) had separate community consultations to focus on their particular housing concerns.

Relocatees forwarded various concerns during the consultations. Their housing units were substandard and cramped. The average floor area was merely 22 square meters. Wall cracks were evident in some of the units. Relocation sites lack financial opportunities. There were no available jobs near the resettlement sites. Most of them must commute to Manila for work, thus spending a huge chunk of their wages on transportation fares alone. The relocatees did not receive the promised transition allowance of P18,000. As part of the resettlement program, ISFs are entitled compensation when displaced due to government infrastructure projects.

On 30 August 2016, while community consultations were ongoing, Vice President Leni Robredo paid a visit to Saint Martha Homes, a relocation site in Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan. During that time, Robredo was also the chairman of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), which coordinates the relocations sites, and initiates and facilitates government policies, plans and programs for the housing sector. Unbeknownst then to KADAMAY, its members, and the community, this visit would change the direction of the campaign.

Hundreds of relocatees, including members of KADAMAY, greeted Robredo with banners bearing their concerns. Owing to their large number, Robredo was forced to acknowledge their presence. She invited the leaders of KADAMAY and HOA officials for dialogue before her scheduled speech. During that short meeting, the leaders relayed the

conditions in the community and presented the following demands, which were the basis of the 8-Point Relocatees Agenda that would later be submitted to different concerned government agencies and to the President:

- Removal of the minimum fee for water supply and the reconnection fee for discontinued water service due to non-payment
- Provision of direct connection and continuous (24/7) supply of water and electricity;
- Availability of safe drinking water
- Creation of factories and jobs
- Setting the daily minimum wage at P750
- Regularization of contractual employees
- Access to social services for senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and solo parents
- Distribution of idle socialized houses to renters, sharers, and caretakers

'Susubukan natin ang ating magagawa' ('we will try our best'). This was the response of Robredo during the short dialogue (KADAMAY, 2016). Afterwards, in her public speech, she recognized the abject conditions of the relocatees, but failed to mention possible solutions—such as the construction of factories for employment, and the further distribution of housing units to the homeless. However, a part of her speech captured the audience's attention. She acknowledged that only 800 units were occupied among the 4,000 units in Bocaue Hills, one of the housing projects for the military and police that she recently inspected (Pasion, 2016). This was the information that KADAMAY members would hold on to in the coming months.

Following the Vice President's exposé, KADAMAY started to feel a shift in its campaign. Though unexpected, KADAMAY had to recognize the unfolding conditions and be flexible. The group and its members began to realize that there was an urgent need to address the plight not just of the relocatees but of the homeless as well. At that time, there was a significant number of renters, sharers, and caretakers—collectively known as 'homeless' due to their unsecured housing tenure—living in and around the relocation sites. Moreover, during the September 2016 consultation, one participant suggested occupying the unutilized houses. The proposal was not formally agreed upon, but it was not dismissed either.

For KADAMAY organizers, this was a crucial point in the ongoing campaign. Taking over houses would not be an easy undertaking. Thus, realities and possible repercussions needed to be weighed. The leaders and organizers knew the following facts: one, there were people who were needing houses but did not have the means; two, there were empty government-built houses that had been unutilized for years; three, the government subscribes to market-based housing; and four, the state has historically used force in dispersing the urban poor during mass actions. The latter was a serious consequence that could not be overlooked. However, they could not disregard a proposal that came from the people themselves. As one KADAMAY organizer expressed, the idea to occupy was, in the truest sense, borne out of a mass movement. It was the readiness of the urban poor that would determine the possibility and outcome of an occupation. As stated by a KADAMAY leader, “the readiness of the people (depends on) their knowledge of their right to housing. If they do not have a clear grasp of this right, they would think twice (on carrying out the occupation).”

The community consultations culminated on 6 November 2016 through an Urban Poor Summit attended by 6,400 participants. The summit created the ‘Bulacan Urban Poor Agenda’, which strengthened KADAMAY’s 8-Point Relocatees Agenda. While the 8-Point Agenda identified housing concerns, it also included the demand for genuine land reform, national industrialization, peace talks to end the five-decade civil conflict between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), and the signing and implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social Economic Reforms (CASER). KADAMAY considered the first two as the panaceas to the root causes of homelessness, while the latter two were strategic reforms that could lead to housing the urban poor. The CASER was one of the agendas being tabled by the NDFP during peace talks and specific clauses on adequate and affordable housing were incorporated.

In terms of recruitment, KADAMAY’s membership in Bulacan ballooned to 10,000 in a span of five months. From August to mid-September 2016, over 2,000 residents attended the community consultations. These resulted in mass recruitment and membership, and led to more consultations in other villages. The homeless were especially proactive in recruiting members. News of KADAMAY helping people apply for housing reached various cities in Metro Manila, including Caloocan and Navotas. Hopefuls went to Bulacan to attend the consultations. Organizations were also formed, such as Task Force Relocatees (TFR), which was composed of

HOA officials, and the Saint Martha Relocates Alliance (SMRA). Both became venues for voicing out relocation concerns in their localities.

Notably, most of the members and leaders of KADAMAY were women. This stemmed from the fact that the housing needs KADAMAY identified were most felt by women. They were the ones left at home to suffer through poor accommodation, insufficient utilities, and the difficulty of making ends meet with their husbands' wages. Interviewed members would recall that the ones who recruited them as members were women. At the onset, KADAMAY organizers from the national office and local chapters in Bulacan were the ones who painstakingly started the campaign. As the membership grew, local leaders were organically identified. Most of them were women who had been community leaders before, NGO volunteers, or community service workers such as local health workers or persons with disability officer provisionally employed by the local government.

With its 10,000-strong membership, KADAMAY needed to establish an organizational structure that would facilitate the efficient coordination of activities and boost members' participation. Chapters were formed by clustering members based on their proximity with other members. For easier coordination, those who lived near each other became part of one chapter. Usually, chapters are composed of 15-50 members, but with thousands of members in Bulacan, each chapter ended up having up to 100 members. KADAMAY-Bulacan was also able to form municipal chapters consisting of several village chapters.

Each chapter has five basic committees: education, health, security, youth, and workers¹⁷. The education committee's primary task is to make sure that members undergo PADEPA (*Pambansa-Demokratikong Paaralan*, National Democratic School) courses. They oversee the learning program of each member. The health committee supervises members' para-medical training. The security committee provides the marshals and traffic enforcers during mass actions, such as rallies and pickets, to ensure members' safety. Prior to the occupation, the security team did the reconnaissance work on the unoccupied houses. The youth, women, and workers committees were formed to address issues specific to their sector.

¹⁷ Other committees were set-up as the campaign took shape such as Food Committees and a Paralegal Team.

For KADAMAY, education is necessary not only to awaken the consciousness but also to recognize the context and root cause of homelessness, which could help members in charting their own actions. KADAMAY's prescribed courses under PADEPA include the 8-Point Agenda, the KADAMAY Constitution, *Lagutin ang Tanikala ng Kahirapan* (Break the Chains of Poverty), intensive discussions on Philippine history, situation analyses of the peasant, women, and youth sectors; and courses on activism and neoliberalism. Chapters arranged lectures on these courses from August 2016 to January 2017. Educational discussions are typically carried out in small groups, but due to the massive membership, KADAMAY held Educational Festivals during the month of February 2017 in Bocaue and Pandi, Bulacan. The festivals were one-day events of simultaneous PADEPA lectures.

Dialogues coupled with demonstrations served as the mobilization type for the Relocateses Agenda and Housing Justice Campaign. While KADAMAY leaders would be in dialogue with a housing agency or government official, the members would hold a picket and a program outside the venue. During Robredo's visit at Saint Martha Homes, she held a dialogue with KADAMAY leaders while the rest of 400 members picketed outside. This was also the case with the other dialogues with the NHA, HUDCC, and the Office of the President.

KADAMAY was proactive in seeking dialogues with housing agencies and government officials. On 5 September 2016, KADAMAY held a dialogue with the NHA General Manager and it was also attended by Anakpawis Partylist and the HUDCC Director. This produced a manifesto of unity signed by the aforementioned parties that cited their commitment to end commercialized housing and provide decent housing and relocation for the urban poor. A follow-up dialogue with NHA ensued on 21 October 2016 where the latter agreed to act on the demands of KADAMAY. On 2 December 2016, a dialogue with HUDCC resulted in an agreement to distribute unutilized government housing units. On 5-6 December 2016, KADAMAY carried out a two-day march called '*Lakbayan ng mga Maralita*' (Urban Poor March). KADAMAY requested Malacañang (the Office of the President) beforehand for a dialogue with President Rodrigo Duterte to discuss the Bulacan Urban Poor Agenda. On the day itself, 2,710 people marched from Bulacan to Malacañang, but were not accommodated. On 20 January 2017, KADAMAY attempted to seek an audience with Malacañang again. A Malacañang representative engaged them, assuring that the demands would be addressed 'as soon as possible'. During every dialogue, KADAMAY submitted letters of request to distribute houses to

the homeless and the socio-economic profiles of each of the 10,000 members to prove that they were qualified beneficiaries (see Chapter 5 for the explanation of the eligibility criteria for public housing). These served as their applications for socialized housing units. Finally, on 8 February 2017, the NHA initiated a Housing Summit and KADAMAY was invited to participate, along with other groups. The president attended the gathering. However, KADAMAY was disappointed that their demands were not even mentioned during the summit. The president promised to distribute free housing, but only to victims of calamity.

Aside from the dialogues and pickets for their Relocatees and Homeless Campaigns, KADAMAY members also participated in rallies organized by groups in their network prior to the actual housing takeover. Some mass actions were responses to issues that affect them, such as the labour protest on precarious employment. To show their solidarity, KADAMAY joined peasant and indigenous people-led marches. They also showed their strength in numbers when 5,000 of them joined other sectors in commemorating the EDSA People Power Revolution (EDSA). The mass action called on the government to give life to the spirit of EDSA by ending its war on drugs that gave rise to extra-judicial killings; resuming peace talks, and terminating its neoliberal policies.

4.3 During Occupation: Successful Appropriation of Housing to the Urban Poor

The occupation was a new tactic in KADAMAY's repertoire of contention. It was the height of organizing during this phase as chapter leaders and members played out their roles during the takeover. KADAMAY sent out media invitations and press releases to make the public aware of the occupation and the reasons behind it. Members had anticipated the takeover ever since the occupation of idle houses was suggested in one of the community consultations. KADAMAY leaders did their best to remind members that first, they had to undergo dialogues and properly submit applications for housing. These legal processes, however, generated no concrete response or action from the government.

Whenever members would ask their leaders when the occupation would happen, KADAMAY organizers would refuse to establish a date and instead remind them to be prepared. The leaders could not give a definitive answer as they were initially not united in taking over the

houses. Some of the leaders thought the members were more than ready, while others were more cautious.

KADAMAY, as an alliance, has an organizational structure that includes member organizations and chapters. A national office, known as KADAMAY-National, coordinates the member organizations and chapters and serves as the media campaign centre. Member organizations have their own leadership and employ their own procedures in organizing and decision-making but are still aligned with the principles of KADAMAY. New chapters are organized with the help of the national or regional offices of KADAMAY until they are formed into a municipal chapter. At the municipal level, chapters undertake organizing and decision-making independently, but they still coordinate and consult with the national office as needed. Hence, while KADAMAY is structured, its chapters exercise a certain degree of autonomy.

In the case of the Bulacan occupation, not all leaders – both at the national and local fronts – initially agreed on the move. The membership was so huge and new that it was hard to gauge their readiness in carrying out a radical mass action. Thus, in order to be prepared, KADAMAY rolled out consolidation efforts.

The group increased its efforts to improve the chapters' committees by making them more systemic and ensuring that more members were attending the PADEPA courses, which were supposed to deepen their understanding of their plight. Dialogues were set to exhaust all legal avenues and mass protests were held to inform the public of the homeless' concerns. These activities were also opportunities for the members to process and reflect on their condition and seek out alternative solutions.

Finally, the leadership of KADAMAY set 8 March 2017, in commemoration of International Women's Day, as the day of action. It was to be a day that would, once and for all, allow the homeless to register their demands for housing. Assembly points were designated at *Mapulang Lupa* and Villa Elise in Pandi and in San Jose del Monte, where socialized housing projects in Bulacan were located.

There was no direct and clear instruction for occupying the houses. It seemed that the chapter leaders had different instructions for their members. Some were told that they would only march around the houses. Others were briefed to bring wood, nails, hammers, pails, and

cleaning materials – for repair and cleaning purposes, and also to barricade surroundings should the need arise.

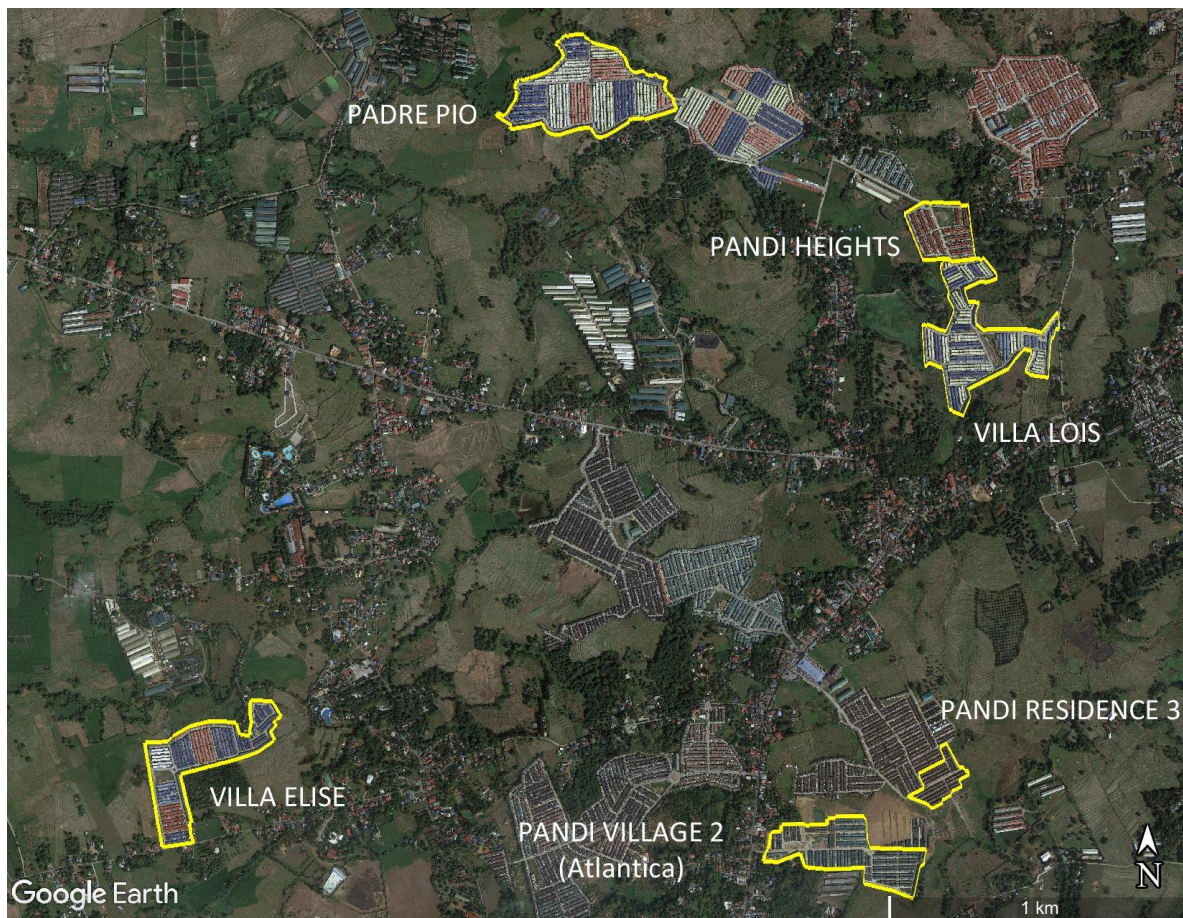


Figure 4-13. KADAMAY occupied sites in Pandi, Bulacan.

By four o'clock in the morning, an estimated 10,000 people had assembled in *Mapulang Lupa*. Some were accompanied by family members. Women had their kids in tow, and grandmothers participated too. Some brought wood and cleaning materials, and a few even brought their home appliances—hopeful and desperate to finally secure a house. The contingent from *Mapulang Lupa* marched to the first resettlement site, Atlantica.¹⁸ The police came and harassed the members. And so, they marched on to other sites: Villa Lois, Pandi Heights, and Padre Pio (see *Figure 1-2*). Members were in disbelief when they saw row upon row of empty houses, covered with vines and tall grasses. They clamored to occupy the houses upon seeing

¹⁸ The site is more known as *Atlantica* but its official name is Pandi Village 2.

them idle and abandoned. The leaders then met for an impromptu meeting before announcing that members could occupy the units. A raffle system was set up to allocate houses per chapter. The group at Villa Elise was also successful in occupying houses. Around 300 KADAMAY members held off the police from morning until later in the day, when the police eventually left. Unfortunately, the police prevented the San Jose del Monte contingent from occupying houses.

Members who failed to secure housing on the first attempt were undeterred. They regrouped and staged two more occupations. The following day, KADAMAY chapter leaders contacted more homeless members and asked them to go back if they still wanted to occupy houses. On the night of 9 March 2017, members marched from Padre Pio to Pandi Residence 3 and successfully built barricades around the relocation site. The police came and threw stones and fired shots into the air. They also rammed a backhoe on the occupiers. But the occupiers stood their ground. It was only on the third day, when things calmed down, that they were able to settle into the houses. On 11 March 2017, members finally succeeded in occupying Atlantica, the first site they had tried to occupy on 8 March. At the end of the takeover, KADAMAY reported the victorious occupation of 5,300 socialized housing units in six housing villages in Pandi, Bulacan (see *Figure 1-2*).

4.4 Post-Occupation: Alternative Lifeworld Amidst Criticisms and Challenges

News of the occupation surprised the country. Though it was hard to gauge the general public's stand on the takeover, those who had access to mainstream media mostly expressed disapproval of the action. KADAMAY members were called 'thieves', 'lazy', and 'freeloaders', by online commentators. Government officials called them 'anarchists.' Online mainstream media reported the occupation as 'breaking news' without providing context (Cuisia, 2018). KADAMAY won the houses but was losing the media battle.

Nonetheless, KADAMAY persisted in explaining the legitimacy of the takeover. News and social media were engaged. They solicited support from the public and allied networks. *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN, New Patriotic Alliance), the umbrella group of national democratic organizations, hailed KADAMAY for claiming their housing rights. Progressive partylists from Congress such as the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, *Anakpawis*, *Bayan Muna*, Gabriela Women's Party, and *Kabataan*, collectively called the *Makabayan*

(Patriotic) bloc, called for the distribution of houses to the occupiers. The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) and Presidential Commission on the Urban Poor (PCUP) also supported KADAMAY in their bid for public mass housing (Pasion, 2017a). A support caravan from different sectors – women, peasants, workers, youth, and students – visited the occupiers.

KADAMAY also sought food support. Though the members had been successful in occupying the houses, there was still the threat of eviction by the NHA. Police patrolled the area and tension was still high. Thus, the members had to guard and barricade the sites. Most of them were not able to go to work, leading to the loss of daily wages. The church sector organized a Mercy Mission, which brought food supplies to Pandi. KADAMAY sought the assistance of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), who responded with family food packages.

The initial outrage simmered down as in-depth reports on the idle socialized housing came out. Media outlets and academic writings exposed the cause of empty houses and the non-action of government housing agencies in their distribution (Arcilla, 2018). Most of the houses had been sitting in deterioration for almost five years while walk-in applications were waiting to be processed. The houses were so small (22 to 30 square meters) that a family of four could hardly fit in. The houses occupied by KADAMAY had no electricity or water supply, and some did not even have doors and windows. Socialized housing for the uniformed officers had an occupancy rate of 13% as they were small and far from their assignments (Pasion, 2016). Cases in point were the two housing projects KADAMAY occupied: Villa Lois, which was a housing project for the Philippine National Police (PNP), and Pandi Heights for the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology.

The concerted efforts of KADAMAY and its allies finally had a break-through after a negotiation with NHA. On 27 March 2017, NHA was supposed to force out the occupiers after a week of being given notice of eviction. The NHA, leaders from KADAMAY and BAYAN, lawmakers from the *Makabayan* bloc, and representatives from PNP and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) agreed to call off the eviction and instead to work on feasible solutions. A joint profiling of all occupiers will be carried out to determine their eligibility to the housing program. Meanwhile, PNP and AFP beneficiaries have the choice to hold on to their housing units or opt for bigger ones (Umil, 2017).

President Duterte, who was barely ten months into his presidency then and who won because of his popularity with the masses, initially called the occupiers ‘anarchists’ and threatened to evict them. However, a week after the multilateral negotiation, he announced to the police and military housing beneficiaries that he would “grant” the houses to the occupiers because “they are poor” and instead would give uniformed officers ‘better houses, more expensive, more comfortable and more spacious’ (Reyes-Estrope, Enano, & Salaverria, 2017).¹⁹ Granting the occupiers houses did not mean free housing. Housing beneficiaries still have to pay monthly amortizations.

The exposé on unutilized socialized housing induced the Senate to carry out an inquiry on the alleged negligence of NHA in its housing projects and the use of funds for socialized housing (Dela Cruz, 2017). On 9 May 2018, more than a year after the occupation, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the president finally signed Joint Resolution No. 2, authorizing the NHA to distribute to qualified beneficiaries the unawarded, surrendered, and canceled housing units apportioned to the military and police. But after all these developments, KADAMAY, as of this writing (December 2019), is still waiting for the NHA to finally provide them with entry passes, which would signify legitimate rights to the occupied houses.

Meanwhile, the occupiers have been building lives in their new communities and leading a more collective life. They have been deprived of social and basic services because they were not yet recognized as “legal” residents of the town. Through mutual help and amicable relationship with neighbours they were able to provide themselves with electricity, water, and services for garbage collection. Since they had no papers to show that they were legal residents of the houses, they could not apply for the said utilities. Some of the housing villages obtained generators and water pump either donated by solidarity groups or from their pooled money. Other occupiers were able to ask their neighbours to tap into their water or electricity supply in exchange for a fee. They were able to subscribe to a private service for garbage collection. They had established a free first-aid clinic, with medicines and a few medical supplies funded by members who each donated one peso. One of their members who was a registered nurse headed

¹⁹ According to an interview with NHA Spokesperson Elsie Trinidad (personal communication, July 27, 2017), the NHA was poised to evict KADAMAY members before the negotiation but the President gave a directive to the NHA General Manager to let the occupiers have the AFP/PNP housing units and for the uniformed personnel have bigger houses.

the clinic. They also had a sundry cooperative store and a day care. These were services that the local government should have provided or facilitated. Instead, the occupiers, through collective action, became self-reliant.

Typically, in a relocation site, a lot of neighbourhood scuffles occur since different sets of people from different areas are forced to live in one community. Pandi occupiers were not immune to quarrels, but these were being resolved quickly. Block leaders²⁰ mediate misunderstandings between neighbours. Each housing village has set community rules to maintain peace and order. There was the perennial “maintain clean surroundings”, but the sign “forming of gangs is prohibited in this place” was strongly written on walls, as if warding off the stigma that often befalls the urban poor. A junior football team had also been formed and even had the chance of competing and winning outside Bulacan.

Like other resettlement sites, there were no decent jobs nearby. Occupiers had been trying to find solutions collectively. Some residents had started their own vegetable gardens, while one village was planning on having a community garden. Whenever there was news of jobs becoming available, it was disseminated. A group of occupiers were almost dismissed from their factory jobs because they were discovered to be occupiers. KADAMAY members held a dialogue with the management to retain the workers. They also negotiated with barangay captains who refused to issue residential clearances, which were required when applying for jobs in the locale.

After they received support from allied sectors, the spirit of solidarity continued to live with the occupiers. They joined sectoral mobilizations such as Labour Day in support of the workers and professionals. When workers of NutriAsia, a factory in a nearby town, held a strike, the occupiers joined them on the picket line. They also marched on issues that did not directly affect them such as protesting looming authoritarian rule. Their continuing conscientization has educated them that their housing concern was tied up with other issues and solidarity with other groups was needed. As a couple of occupiers articulated:

*Siguro kasi hindi naman siguro habang buhay ay kailangan nating magrali;
depende sa mga kahilingan kasi entry pass pa lang naman yun, eh. Paano yung
amortisasyon, di ba? Yung tubig, yung ilaw dapat maibigay, [at] trabaho. May*

²⁰ After the occupation, organization structure had been modified based on their village layout, transforming chapters into blocks.

pabahay nga tayo wala naman trabaho, sahod, yan yun mga dapat. (Leader 1, 2018)

[Perhaps we don't have to join rallies all our lives; it depend on what our demands would be. For now, we are only asking for the entry pass. How about the amortization? We should also be connected to water and electricity supply lines, and jobs. We may have houses, but jobs and wages are essential.]

Nakakapagod [magrali] pero masaya kasi sama-sama. Saka masaya kasi nakikita mo yung tao na, iisa lang pala ang gusto. (Occupier 20, 2018)

[Rallies] are tiring but fulfilling because we are all in these together. It is a joy to see that we have the same hopes.

Despite their efforts of building a sustainable community, criticisms on the occupation still abound. Threats of eviction will always loom over the heads of the occupiers without the provision of entry passes. According to KADAMAY, there have been malicious and underhanded maneuvers to discredit them. Talks had been going around that KADAMAY, as an organization, was selling the housing units. It turned out that some occupiers, in their individual capacity and without the knowledge of KADAMAY, did sell some units. According to KADAMAY, problems such as these were expected to come up in relocation sites, particularly when residents were faced with dire needs. KADAMAY appealed to the media to be objective and responsible in their reporting and let it deal with such situations as an organization (CNN Philippines, 2018; Interaksyon, 2017b).

KADAMAY reported that they have also been experiencing political repression and harassment. Police and military have been roving around the villages, bribing and threatening the occupiers with the intention of turning them against KADAMAY (KADAMAY, 2019). In the recent 2019 election, one of the KADAMAY members was nabbed by plainclothes policemen while putting up campaign posters for their partylist group ally, *Bayan Muna*. Three days later, he was surfaced in a police station in another province and was accused of illegal possession of fire arms and explosives, which were non-bailable offences. KADAMAY insisted that these were trumped-up charges (Ellao, 2019a, 2019b).

KADAMAY's struggle for housing does not end in occupying the houses. They acknowledge that a lot still needs to be done on many fronts: proof of home ownership, the

occupiers' community life, public education on the takeover and its aftermath, and the continuous and arduous assertion for housing justice. Democracy is indeed a never-ending struggle.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the occupiers' socio-economic profile and context in the aim of understanding their motives in occupying houses. Most of the occupiers came from the informal sector with an average monthly income that was below minimum wage. Their low income led them to live in diverse housing tenure types. They rent, share accommodations, or house-sit for relatives. A fifth of the dwellings they lived in were in informal settlements incurring them expensive sources of water and electricity because these were accessed through other than legal and direct connections. Coping meant not sending children to school or some of the older children dropped out of school and started working. The possibility of having a permanent dwelling without the apprehension of being thrown out due to unpaid rents, of house being demolished, of being able to re-appropriate finances to their children's nutritional or school needs were all attractive reason to occupy the idled houses.

Summarizing the occupiers' socio-economic and housing tenure profile was an arduous task to complete. Categories branched to a lot of secondary levels. Oftentimes the occupiers' answers did not belong to any category, compelling me to create new categories or try to go over other variables for validation to be able to classify them under existing categories. In the end, there was the realization that it was hard to force entries to a few categories because of the multiple ways that the urban poor survives – by improvising, by making things work with what little they had, by creating new ways of living. When information is condensed, these nuances and subcategories tended to be concealed by larger facts.

The chapter also narrated the process of the occupiers in acquiring the houses, activating their right to participation through KADAMAY's strategy of AOM – arouse, organize, and mobilize. s Information dissemination and in-depth discussions on the plight of the urban poor conscientized KADAMAY members. The much-needed critical mass to sustain the campaign was assembled through organizing, from recruitment of members to chapter-building. Mobilizations were carried out in-between the components of arousing and organizing. These

included public meetings, dialogues with government officials, and demonstrations. These activities of AOM consolidated and strengthened KADAMAY's membership leading to the collective action of occupying idled houses.

The next chapter contains perspectives on the occupation from different social actors – government officials and officers, media personnel, the public, and the occupiers themselves. Their different standpoints lend insight into the never-ending contention on the legitimacy of the occupation.

Chapter 5: Social Actors on the Legitimacy of the Occupation

Ali Matok

FORCE EJECTMENT IF THEY REFUSED HANDCUFF THEM & IF THEY RESIST SHOOT!!!

Jenny Quibuyen

Itong mga to talagang self entitled, kala mo may utang na loob ang gobyerno sa kanila, sila na nga tong hindi nagbabayad ng tax at mga walang trabaho sila pa tong reklamador at anak ng anak! Hoy umayos kayo!! Kayo ang pahirap sa bansa natin!!

[This people are self-entitled, they think the government owes them, they don't pay taxes and remain jobless and yet they incessantly complain and continue to spawn children! Hey clean up your act! You are the ones pulling our country to poverty!!]

Maria ↪ Jenny Quibuyen

Weh? Di sila nagbabayad ng tax? Lahat kaya ng aksyon mo sa bansang ito, may tax! Bumili ng kendi, may tax. Bumili ng bigas, may tax. Magpa-gas ng tricycle, may tax! Taxpayers din ang mga maralita beshie, di mo feel kasi siguro you are privileged (or burdened?) to pay income tax na di mo rin naman napapakinabangan haha! #MINDBLOWN

[Really? They don't pay taxes? Every move you make in this country incurs tax! Buy a candy, you pay tax. Buy rice, you pay tax. Fuel your tricycle with gas, you pay tax! The poor are taxpayers too my friend, maybe you don't realize that because you are privileged (or burdened?) to pay the income tax, which you don't benefit from haha! #MINDBLOWN]

Jenny Quibuyen ↪ Maria

May batas tayo at di nila pedeng gawin ang gusto nila dahil ang rason nila eh wala silang bahay. Marami din dyan ang walang bahay pero di sila nag ookupa ng di kanila. The law applies to all, mapamahirap ka pa or mapa mayaman.

[We have laws and they cannot do whatever they want just because they claim of not having homes. A lot of people out there don't have houses, but they don't occupy what isn't theirs. The law applies to all, whether you are poor or rich.]

- Online comments from Inquirer.Net's article "Settlers defy order to leave houses" (Reyes-Estrope, 2017)

The above exchange of online comments reflects the public's polarized opinion of the occupation. Occupy Bulacan was in the news for a month, garnering reactions from everyone but most vehemently from government elected officials and online commentators. Criticisms range from pejorative remarks, being delinquent citizens (trespassing the law such as stealing the houses, not paying taxes) to red-tagging, with profanities in between. The statement, "*You are the ones pulling our country to poverty!!*" comes from the judgment that the urban poor are *latak ng lipunan* (dregs of the earth). Rejoinders attempted to rationalize and give out facts but were no match for the vitriol of the critics. Sympathies and words of solidarity for the homeless were drowned out by loud and explicit denunciations. Though in-depth news reports and investigations into the plight of the homeless would follow later, the initial prejudiced judgement strewn all over the internet (and in radio programs) had already influenced the public, compounding the vilified image of the urban poor. This was despite the known controversy of internet trolls churning out fake news and malicious comments to promote and build up political narratives in favour of the administration.

This chapter aims to go beyond headlines, political soundbites, and cyber-army posts and instead delves further to address research question (c), which interrogates the different standpoints of social actors on the legitimacy of the occupation. Querying the legitimacy of the occupation implies looking into social actors' reaction to the occupation, their views on its fairness or illegality, and their understanding of property and housing rights. Responses based on these are solicited to correspond to the theoretical framework's segment on right to appropriation and, perhaps, on commoning. Social actors interviewed were either directly or indirectly involved in the occupation. These include government housing officers, local government officials, journalists, neighbours of the occupiers, and the occupiers themselves. The interviewed occupiers represented their different roles in the organization such as national and local leaders, information dissemination officer, organizers, and members.

This chapter addresses, first, the government officials and government housing officers' reactive response towards the occupation and their reasons behind those responses. The justification for their actions reveals the principles, structure, and system of the government housing program for the urban poor. For the media, their patterns, biases, and discourses of online media documents are first laid out. Following these, media personnel explained the reasons behind their biases. The production of news is also looped in to see who contributes to those biases and how they are formed. Third, public reaction through online comments are validated against the views of the occupiers' neighbours, who witnessed the occupation and have personal interaction with them. Lastly, the occupiers justify the occupation. This subsection continues their narrative of being part of the urban poor movement, as recounted in Chapter 3, and of their socio-economic conditions and accounts of the occupation in Chapter 4.

5.1 Government Officials and Government Housing Officers

It took five days after the occupation before government officials could react to what happened on 8 March 2017. Evidently, they were surprised and did not take the news well. When the shock seemed to have dissipated, their attitude towards the occupation was tempered and used it as a political opportunity. No less than the president of the country himself initially threatened to forcefully evict the occupiers. On 13 March 2017, five days after the housing takeover and during a press conference, President Duterte was asked if the news of the occupation had reached him. His answer was addressed towards the occupiers,

If you want to ignore the law, you cannot do that. I will force the issue with eviction... *Kasi labas niyan parang inutil na rin ang gobyerno. Huwag mong gawain sa akin 'yan.* [Because it would look like the government is inutile. Don't do that to me.] (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2017b)

Three weeks after (4 April 2017), he gave a speech during the 120th Founding Anniversary of the Philippine Army. He told the soldiers, who are government housing beneficiaries themselves:

Meron lang po akong pakiusap. This ruckus in Bulacan, *eh parang inagaw ng mga kapwa nating Pilipino ...* I will ask you, soldiers and the policemen, *bitawan na lang ninyo 'yan, ibigay na lang natin sa kanila, tatal, mahirap sila... bigyan ko kayo nang mas maganda, mas konting mahal, mas komportable at mas malaki... Ako na mismo, inyong Presidente, nakikiusap sa inyo.* Let us not wage a fight against our own people. *Tatal, mahirap lang 'yan sila, intindihin na lang*

ninyo... Tapos ang pulis, kayo may baril and, you know, something could go awfully wrong.

Yung mga Kadamay, nandiyan, huwag ninyong galawin ang mga sundalo pati pulis. Kasi 'pag hindi, tuluyan paalisin ko kayong lahat. Do not create trouble, avoid chaos. (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2017a)

[I have a request to make. This ruckus in Bulacan, it seems (the houses were) seized by our own countrymen... I will ask you, soldiers and the policemen, just let them go, let's leave those to them since they are poor... I'll give you much better, more expensive, more comfortable, and bigger... I, myself, as your President, kindly appeal to you. Let us not wage fight against our own people. Since they are poor, just understand them. You and the police have guns and, you know, something could go awfully wrong.

You, KADAMAY, do not antagonize the soldiers and police. Because if you do, I'll evict you. Do not create trouble, avoid chaos.]

The reversal of President Duterte's pronouncement, from threatening KADAMAY occupiers with eviction to allowing them to "stay" (i.e. buy) in the houses, was another event highlight in the housing takeover saga. A senator criticized Duterte for looking weak in giving-in to the occupiers (Ager, 2017), whereas the President's supporters perceived this as his benevolence towards the poor. The President is known for being unpredictable, often overturning his initial statements, which are usually punctuated with catchy soundbites and a tone of finality. Cases in point were his pre-election announcement of "*Hindi ako tatakbo pagkapresidente*" [I am not running for president] and his "time to say goodbye" to US-relations back in 2016 (Caduaya, 2016; Corrales, 2017).

The president often justifies his sudden decisions with rhetoric, which never seems enough to reveal the real motivations. One could only speculate based on his offered premise and the existing socio-political climate. For one, his speech was consistent with his paternalist populist posture, which made him win the presidency. Giving away the houses because the occupiers were indigent fellow countrymen appealed to pro-poor and nationalist tendencies. Requesting the uniformed personnel to be more tolerant and give way to the occupiers was similar to a parent asking the good child to be more understanding of his disobedient sibling. In return, *Tatay Digong* (a term of endearment on Duterte as father of the Republic) promised to reward the good child and threatened to use the rod on the other if the misbehaviour continues.

The announcement of leaving the houses to the occupiers and instead building more comfortable homes for the police and soldiers was ultimately a well-played political opportunity for the President. He not only affirmed his popularity with the poor, but also earned much-needed points from the uniformed personnel. While he was already friends with the Chief of Police, he was tirelessly visiting military camps in his first few months, wooing them with equipment and higher salaries (Gloria, 2017). A president needs the backing of the military, who had historically withdrawn their loyalty to two regimes and plotted mutinies against two presidents.

Finally, Duterte was in his first months of the presidency at the time of the occupation. He was in his honeymoon phase with various fronts, rallying for support, including from progressive movements. Activists were invited to be part of his Cabinet and they, most likely, discussed the occupation with him (Barahan, 2017). Peace talks between the government and leftist groups were also going on during that time and any human rights violation could derail it. As he alluded in his speech, a confrontation between the armed personnel and occupiers while forcing the latter to be evicted could only result in violence.

A year and a half after the occupation, I carried out interviews with government housing officers and government officials primarily to gather their perspectives on the legitimacy of the occupation. They came from the different levels of government – national, district (provincial), and local (LGU). Both the national and provincial officers were from the NHA, which is the government agency responsible for the production and financing of public housing and for the coordination between LGUs for relocation and resettlement projects. I requested an interview with the General Manager of the national office but was ushered to the office spokesperson. The Local Official of Bulacan agreed to be interviewed for the provincial level. My request for an interview with the mayor of Pandi was subtly declined, and I was instead redirected to the Local Housing Office (LHO), which implements the housing program of the local government and coordinates with NHA on resettlement projects. A former barangay captain (village chief) of one of the villages where the occupied housing sites were located, and who was the incumbent during the time of the occupation, agreed to an interview.

The national and local NHA offices had different reactions on the occupation. Unable to control the takeover of, and the exposé on, the idled housing units, the national office felt it was

caught in cross fire between KADAMAY and the LGU (which NHA believed should have been responsible for securing the houses against the occupiers) and was pressured to take charge of the situation. It immediately went legal in challenging the takeover, claiming that the occupiers bypassed the application process and serving them eviction notices. It also established safeguards to prevent subsequent attempts by releasing a memorandum circular on strengthening resettlement process and coordinating local governments to ensure that vigilance and security were exercised around housing projects. The LGU, on the other hand, was more concerned with the influx of newcomers in their town than the occupation itself. Interviewed local authorities gave a sense of disapproval of the occupation and were dismayed by how it was handled by the national government. To begin with, the locals were not keen on having resettlement sites in their area. Relocates coming from different places were perceived to bring disturbance in their quiet town. The occupation aggravated this atmosphere (Perez, 2017). While the national agencies were busy setting up legal structures to prevent any subsequent occupations, the local authorities were concerned with the impact of relocates in their town.

The housing agencies based the (il)legality of the occupation on the eligibility criteria for beneficiaries and the application process for housing. All housing agencies strongly adhere to a set of eligibility criteria for low-income housing. The following are the criteria as stipulated in the UDHA of 1992: (a) must be a Filipino citizen; (b) must be an underprivileged and homeless citizen, as defined in Section 3 of UDHA; (c) must not own any real property whether in the urban or rural areas; and (d) must not be a professional squatter²¹ or a member of squatting syndicates. The Act defines (b) underprivileged and homeless as:

individuals or families residing in urban and urbanizable [areas that have potential to be urban areas in five years] areas whose income or combined household income falls within the poverty threshold as defined by the National Economic and Development Authority and who do not own housing facilities. This shall include those who live in makeshift dwelling units and do not enjoy security of tenure. (The Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992, § 3[t])

²¹ The UDHA of 1992, Art. 1 Sec. 3(m) defines ‘professional squatters’ as, “individuals or groups who occupy lands without the express consent of the landowner and who have sufficient income for legitimate housing. The term shall also apply to persons who have previously been awarded homelots or housing units by the Government but who sold, leased or transferred the same to settle illegally in the same place or in another urban area, and non-bona fide occupants and intruders of lands reserved for socialized housing. The term shall not apply to individuals or groups who simply rent land and housing from professional squatters or squatting syndicates.”

Setting all other three criteria aside – Filipino citizen, not owning any real property, not a professional squatter – the occupiers need only to prove that they were “underprivileged and homeless citizens.” The UDHA defines such as individuals or families “whose combined income falls within poverty threshold”, “who does not own housing facilities,” and “do not enjoy security of tenure.” At the time of occupation in 2017, NHA’s poverty threshold for a family of five was PhP9,064 (NHA Resettlement and Development Services Department, 2018). It was an outdated measurement, which should had been higher. But if this were the basis and classifying sharers, renters, caretakers, and those living in informal settlements as “not owning housing facilities” or “do not enjoy security of tenure”, an estimate of at least 96% of the surveyed occupiers would have been eligible for socialized housing. The other 4% were homeowners, renters living above the poverty threshold, and those beyond the maximum age of eligibility, which is 70 years old.

According to the NHA spokesperson, every housing project can have additional criteria, which should be specified in its Code of Policies. For example, the NHA Bulacan District Office managed resettlement housing projects require housing beneficiaries to be not more than 70 years old, otherwise their rights should be waived in favour of their next of kin. This is related to the maximum allowed housing repayment period, which is 20 years. For Pandi LHO, the beneficiary’s age limit is 60 years old and should be a town resident. Being a sharer or a renter is not reason enough to qualify for housing according to the LHO Officer-in-Charge (OIC).

In terms of the application process, low-income families can acquire socialized housing either through NHA or through the LHO. In the municipality of Pandi, a completed personal data sheet and an interview with the LHO Officer determine the eligibility of the housing applicants. If applicants fulfill the requirements and if they have never been beneficiaries of any government housing program upon checking with the NHA database, and provided that there are housing units available, the LHO will then contact them and will be asked to submit resettlement documentary requirements. These include a notarized NHA sworn application to purchase lot/unit (SAPL), birth certificate of each family member, marriage contract or affidavit of cohabitation, affidavit of source of income, barangay clearance, community tax certificate, and family picture. The SAPL certifies that applicant does not own any real property and is not a professional squatter or a member of any squatting syndicates. This certification corresponds to

eligibility criteria (c) and (d). The birth certificate is the proof for being a Filipino citizen, which is criterion (a).

However, there is only a small possibility of being awarded through the LGU because of the limited number of available housing units. Socialized housing projects located in Pandi are mostly managed by the NHA because they are meant for informal settlers from sending LGUs (mostly from Metro Manila) and for uniformed personnel. Constructing the housing units in Pandi makes it the receiving LGU and one of its benefits is having the discretion of distributing 10% of the houses.

Because of the small number of available units, strategies on how to navigate the system, both from the evaluating office and the applicant, were being conceived. Neighbour 1 volunteered to be an election watcher of the previous mayor in the hopes of securing housing if the mayor is elected. Meanwhile, the LHO OIC determines the most in need by the number of times applicants visit the office for follow-up. While I was waiting in the town hall to interview officials, a housing claimant was making inquiries on her application. She was informally interviewed. She was asked the date of her application, her residential address, and date of her last follow-up. Apparently, she forwarded her application three years prior and her last follow up was a year ago. She was then lightly reprimanded on her late follow-up as the available housing units had already ran out. In the end, she was told to follow-up again and hope that another unit becomes available. I was there to hear the subtle sermon of the municipal officer, the disappointing result, and the spiel of false hope. I imagined that this happens every time an applicant follows-up. The multiple visits and inquiries to the town hall are collectively tantamount to begging. Not only do indigent applicants need to spend commuting expenses or miss a day's wage, but it also strips them of their dignity, which the aforementioned Constitution's Article XIII (Social Justice and Human Rights), Section 1 committed to uphold. Later, another person came in handing the municipal officer a personal note from the mayor. It seems that a housing unit was being requested to be reserved. For all I knew it might be a valid request, but the disappointing news that the applicant received a while ago was, in my mind, on rewind.

If the chance of accessing housing through the LGU chance is slim, it is practically impossible through NHA. According to the Bulacan Local Official, one cannot directly apply or

be a walk-in applicant. It is the sending LGU and the NHA National Office that determine the beneficiaries. Most of the beneficiaries are ISFs who are resettled not only to clear them away from danger zones but more so from government or public-private infrastructure earmarked project sites. Informal settlements, which are scheduled to be demolished, undergo a resettlement process. The NHA carries out household profiling where the first step is “tagging” affected houses. Tagged households will then be part of a census and socio-economic survey. Their eligibility for socialized housing will be validated afterwards. They will also be verified if they have not been previous beneficiaries. If qualified, they will be asked to apply for NHA housing and submit the resettlement documentary requirements similar to that of the LGU.

Ideally, the eligibility criteria for housing beneficiaries is a mechanism to facilitate right to housing under the principle of social justice. The eligibility criteria are aligned with the Philippine Constitution’s provision on housing, which is in Section 9 of Article XIII. Specifically, the State commits to make decent housing available at an affordable cost to “underprivileged and homeless citizens.” And Article XIII is, in fact, entitled “Social Justice and Human Rights”, with the following as its introductory section:

The Congress shall give highest priority to the enactment of measures that protect and enhance the right of all the people to human dignity, reduce social, economic, and political inequalities, and remove cultural inequities by equitably diffusing wealth and political power for the common good.

To this end, the State shall regulate the acquisition, ownership, use, and disposition of property and its increments. (Philippine Const. art. XIII, § 1.)

The state, however, utilizes a filtering system, not only to identify the most in need of shelter in adherence to social justice, but also because it has been allocating only a sliver of its resources to housing (see *Figure 5-1*). From 2008 to 2019, the highest appropriation of housing in the national budget was 1.66%, and an all-time low of 0.08% in the current year 2019 (see *Table 5-1*). With an estimated 7.7 million of the urban population living in informal settlements, the state’s backlog of 5.7 million units in 2016 is expected to increase to 6.8 million in 2022 (HUDCC, 2016; ICF International, 2014; National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), 2018; Remo & Sauler, 2016). The meager resources allotted to public housing results to unethical practices as exemplified above and strips the poor of their dignity, ironically violating Article XIII of the Constitution.

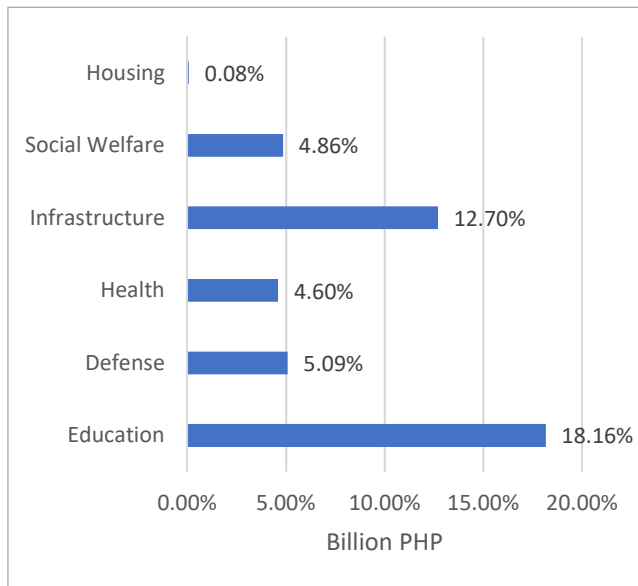


Figure 5-1. Percentages of the 2019 National Budget for housing, other social services and national security.
 Source: Department of Budget and Management, 2019, and <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1150196/hudcc-rues-declining-all-time-low-housing-sector-budget>

YEAR	NATIONAL BUDGET in Billion PHP	APPROPRIATIONS FOR HOUSING in Billion PHP	%
2008	1,227	4.964	0.4
2009	1,170	5.293	0.45
2010	1,304	5.391	0.41
2011	1,645	21.106	1.28
2012	1,816	11.491	0.63
2013	2,006	32.12	1.6
2014	2,265	37.668	1.66
2015	2,606	23.2	0.89
2016	3,002	33.38	1.11
2017	3,352	15.311	0.45
2018	3,767	5.9	0.15
2019	3,662	3.2	0.08

Table 5-1. Appropriated Budget for Housing, 2008-2019. Adapted from Department of Budget and Management (DBM), 2018, 2019; HUDCC cited in <https://www.rappler.com/nation/183397-housing-2018-proposed-budget-lowest-10-years>

All the interviewed government authorities, except for one, acknowledged that everyone has a right to housing, but public housing was limited to certain groups. The NHA spokesperson maintained that the understanding of right to housing should be based on the Constitution.

The right of housing *syempre* we should not depart on what is written on the constitution *kaya kami* we construct houses because we recognize the right to housing and individual or a family to be provide *na* it is not absolute *na* everybody has a housing right even *sa sinabi ko na* walang housing right. *Walang* housing right *kasi* what we are arresting is the homelessness, the right to have adequate shelter. *Yung nasa* constitution *nalang ang gamitin natin*. (E. Trinidad, personal communication, July 30, 2018)

[Right to housing should not depart from what is written in the constitution. We construct houses because we recognize right to housing is providing an individual or a family [shelter]. [That being said,] it is not absolute that everybody has a housing right because what we are arresting is homelessness, the right to have an adequate shelter. Let us follow what is written in the constitution.]

Indeed, the eligibility criteria for socialized housing are aligned with the Philippine Constitution’s principle on housing which is as follows:

The State shall, by law, and for the common good, undertake, in cooperation with the private sector, a continuing program of urban land reform and housing which will make available at affordable cost decent housing and basic services to underprivileged and homeless citizens in urban centers and resettlements areas. (Philippine Const. art. XIII, § 9.)

This principle has delimited the understanding of right to housing as exhibited by the additional eligibility criteria and the rationale of right to housing the government officers has acquired. The LHO OIC's unofficial criteria for beneficiary selection, which is based on the persistence of the applicant, parallels her understanding of "right to housing". According to her, everyone has a right to housing, but public housing should only be allotted to those who absolutely need it. This is akin to what the NHA local official believes, that the government has no obligation to provide housing to anyone just because they are poor. As he elaborated:

Pero yung sabihin mong ano obligasyon dahil ikaw ay Pilipino meron kang housing rights from the national government parang hindi ata malinaw yun, ano. For me hindi obligasyon ng national government na bigyan ka ng housing dahil ikaw ay, sabihin mong mahirap ka, di ba. Kasi yung level mo kasi sa buhay mo nasa sa iyo yun eh kung gusto mong maging mahirap; na kung magsisikap ka there's no need asking for housing right from the national government, di ba. Kaya nga ang ginagawa is ini-educate yung mga relocatees. Basically, we put up facilities para yung concept ng rights na ganun hindi mo dapat maging burden, hindi ka dapat maging burden ng national government. Kaya nga tayo natatayo ng mga eskwelahan, educate ang anak mo. Para by the time na ano ... pag-graduate nya, magkaroon sya ng trabaho so meron syang matter of choice san sya puedeng bumili ng housing. Kasi nga NHA is only providing housing for less 30% ng mga nakatira at specifically meron syang specific target na kine-cater sya. (NHA Local Official, 2018)

[To say that the national government has a duty of fulfilling your housing rights just because you are a Filipino is inaccurate. For me, the national government has no obligation to provide housing just because you are, let's say, poor. It is up to you if you want to be poor; but if you work hard, there's no need in asking the national government for housing right, isn't? That's why we educate our relocatees. Basically, we put up facilities so that those concepts of rights should not be a burden [to the national government]; you should not be a burden to the national government. That's the reason we build schools, to educate your child. So, by the time ... he graduates, he would have work and it would be a matter of choice which [type of] housing he would acquire. Because NHA is only providing housing for [those who are from the bottom] less than 30% of the population and it caters to a specific target.]

The housing officers emphasized that units for public housing are considered “government property” and not “public property.” Thus, the government has the sole discretion of their distribution. The officers explained that public properties are either owned by the national or the local government. Case in point are the public lands, which can be classified into two. One is, the lands that cannot be given titles such as creeks and coasts, but the government do manage them. The second comprises the lands where infrastructures such as airports and ports stand and which the government owns and are not accessible by anyone who pleases. Following the same logic, the socialized housing units are government properties. The NHA owns the houses until the beneficiaries have fully paid the amortization. It is only then will the legal titles be transferred to the latter. The NHA Bulacan local official underscored that the title indicates who owns the property.

Among the government authorities, it was the uniformed personnel (AFP/PNP) who did not throw any comment against the occupiers, considering that they were the ones most affected, as beneficiaries of some of the housing units. They did not react (at least publicly) even it was their vacant houses, which were occupied. When the Senate investigated the occupation and the idled housing units, the AFP/PNP claimed they were never consulted on the design and refused to move into the homes due to their remote location and small size. The lawmakers questioned NHA for its continuous construction of the houses when uniformed personnel clearly rejected them. The NHA General Manager admitted that there were failures in the project and the houses were, “a manifestation of non-conformity, non-adherence to standards and probably the welfare of our qualified beneficiaries” (ABS-CBN News, 2017). However, he also clarified that thousands of houses had already been awarded to uniformed personnel or were being amortized (Interaksyon, 2017a). This corroborates my interview with the NHA spokesperson, where she stressed that a consultation did transpire between their office and the AFP/PNP and the latter had prior knowledge of the housing project design.

The idleness of these houses, their continuous construction even after the beneficiaries refused them, and the confusing and conflicting statements from concerned offices demand some explanation. The houses allotted for the ISFs had also been empty for a significant long time even though the NHA claimed that these had been earmarked for ISFs scheduled to be resettled. This is perplexing as the houses had been vacant for years while ISFs were visibly scattered in the urban areas of the country.

5.2 Media Practitioners

The takeover landed in the newspapers without any special attention from the media until the authorities reacted to it. It did not find its way on the front cover of major dailies. A couple of online new outlets published it as straight news. The lack of media exposure could be attributed to the delayed media advisory sent a few hours before the occupation, or due to event site being remotely located from the urban centre, or because activists were perceived as nuisance (as one interviewed journalist opined) and, thus, not headline-worthy. However, for the following days and for almost two months, Occupy Bulacan became a staple content of newspapers and other mass media platforms of radio, television, and online (see *Figure 5-2*).

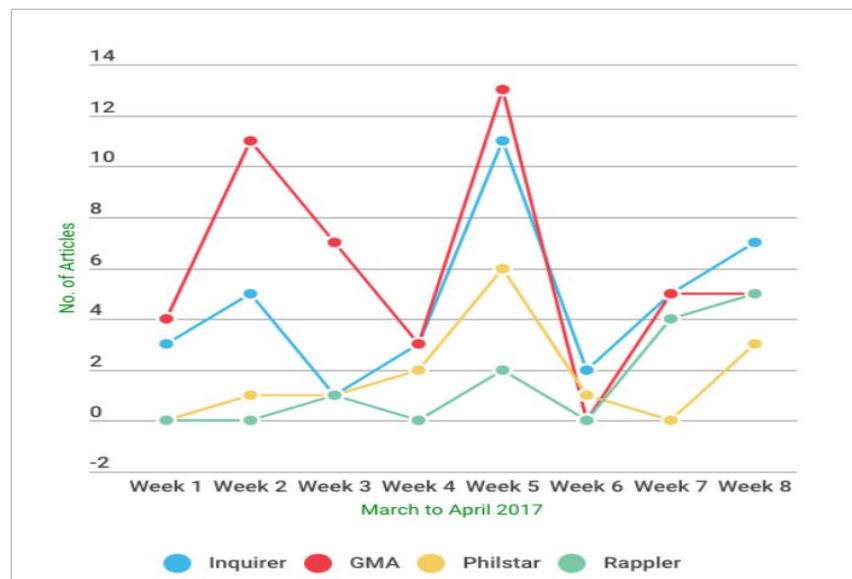


Figure 5-2. Frequency of Occupy Bulacan articles from four online news networks. Reprinted from Cuisia, 2018, p. 42.

News reporting is supposed to be balanced and objective, but journalists also fall into media biases. Media biases have subtypes such as tonality bias, which denotes whether an article has a positive, negative, or a neutral slant, and visibility bias, which refers to the amount of space and exposure given to a party or voice (Eberl, Boomgaarden, & Wagner, 2017). In the case of the occupation, I augmented Cleofe & Verdeflor (2018)'s month-long tally, from three news outlets with 52 online articles to six news organizations with 74 articles, to determine tonality bias. The tally showed that the slant of media articles from major online news outlets changed from neutral to negative as reactions to the occupation intensified (see *Figure 5-3*). For the first

two weeks of the occupation, most of the online articles were neutral. Write-ups contained description of events and statements from both sides, the occupiers and government authorities. From the third occupation. This was the time when KADAMAY disregarded NHA’s notice of eviction and when the President allowed occupiers to “stay” to which senators called an “invitation to anarchy” (Avendaño, Balana, & Tubeza, 2017).

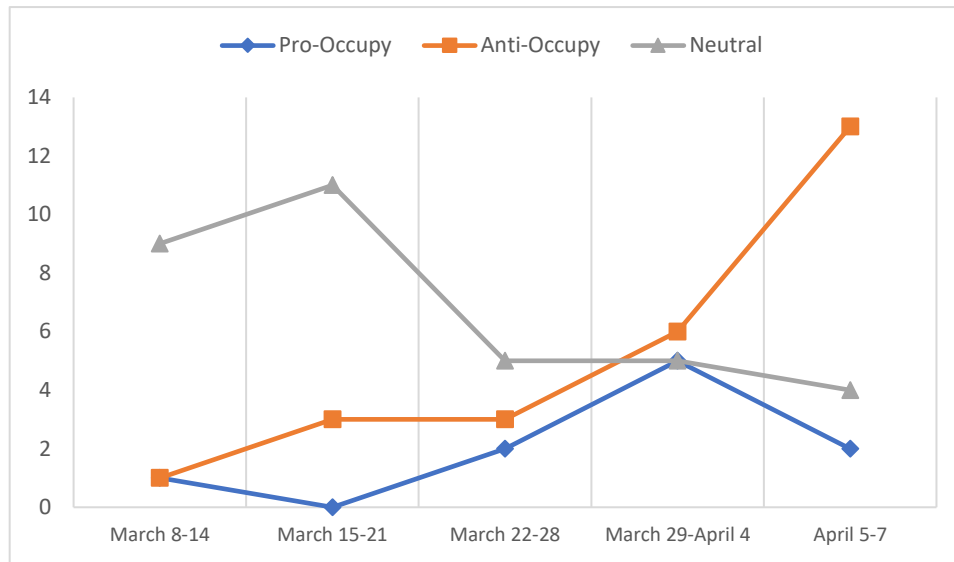


Figure 5-3. Slant of online news articles over a month after the occupation.

The visibility bias of online media articles on the occupation was skewed towards state actors. In Cuisia's (2018) critical discourse analysis of a two-month online media coverage of the occupation, only 44% of the 111 articles from four media outlets had the urban poor voice as source. This was a small percentage considering the urban poor was the centre of the discourse. On the other hand, state sources were present in every article except for one. The dominance of state sources being the primary informant indicates their perceived credibility. Evidently, NHA was the most relied source, as it was the primary government agency on housing, followed by the politicians who gave their remarks and judgement of the occupation.

Cuisia (2018) also analyzed the media coverage based on the protest paradigm. This is a framework often deployed to understand the pattern of framing news media use to delegitimize protest groups, along with their concerns and actions (Weaver & Scacco, 2013). The study reveals that the surveyed online media outlets wrote stories of the occupation in a critical frame.

Interestingly though, while the occupiers were represented as disruptive, the occupation was seen as a “nuisance” and “necessary” almost in equal measure (see *Figures 5-4 and 5-5*). A little more than half of the media articles also considered, instead of rejected, the criticisms KADAMAY had on housing issues that led them to occupy the units.

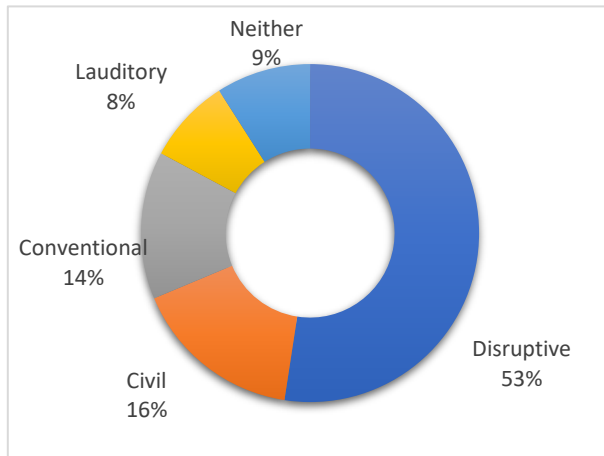


Figure 5-4. Media representation of the occupation. Adapted from Cuisia, 2018, p. 69.

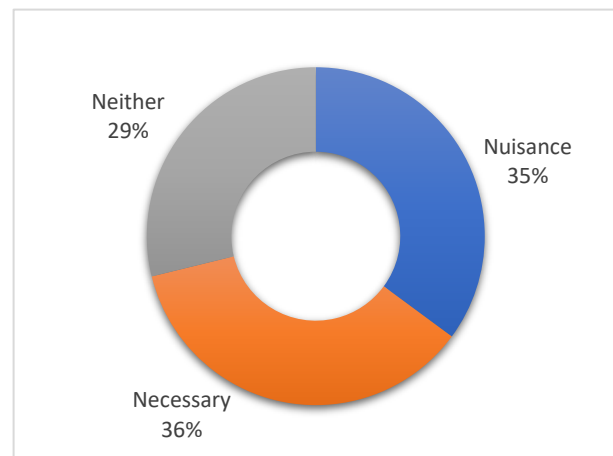


Figure 5-5. Media representation of the occupiers. Adapted from Cuisia, 2018, p. 74.

Emergent discourses from online media articles during the first month of the occupation shifted based on the responses of the government, but consistently revolved around the illegality of the occupation (see *Table 5-2*). The first articles were descriptive and included statements from KADAMAY. Words often used to indicate KADAMAY’s action were “occupy” and “takeover”. The discourse of illegality, as well as of anarchy, started to appear when the President threatened the occupiers of eviction. From then on, the word “illegal” had been added to the media’s lexicon and was noticeably used frequently when the occupiers ignored NHA’s notice of eviction. News articles deployed “illegal occupation”, “illegally occupied”, and “illegal takeover”. Articles that were negatively biased towards the occupiers and the occupation used the words “invasion” and “invaders”, while those with positive slant occasionally used “forcibly occupied” and “forcible occupation”.

The discourse of anarchy was revived when the President allowed the occupiers to “stay” in the houses. This still falls under the broader narrative of illegality since the purported anarchist tendency of the occupiers was derived from their supposed total disregard of law and order. After being associated with anarchy, various malicious labels such as “communist”, “land grabber”,

and “thieves” had been liberally tagged to the occupiers and to which the media had picked up and featured in the news (see *Titles 3, 5-6*).

Table 5-2. Excerpts and titles from online media articles demonstrating the shift of discourse based on the responses of the government. (Emphasis added.)

8 March 2017 – Day of occupation
<p><i>Excerpt 1. Inquirer.net, 8 March 2017</i></p> <p>Thousands of urban poor women led a movement to occupy vacant and idle housing units in several resettlement zones all over Bulacan early Wednesday in time for International Working Women’s Month.</p> <p><i>Excerpt 2. GMA News Online, 9 March 2017</i></p> <p>Members of an alliance of urban poor workers on Wednesday moved to occupy an idle government housing project in Bulacan, but later withdrew after finding out that the houses were not ready for occupancy.</p> <p><i>Excerpt 3. Inquirer.net, 10 March 2017</i></p> <p>Urban poor Filipinos have taken over around 5,280 houses in resettlement zones in Bulacan, militant group for urban poor Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) said on Friday.</p> <p><i>Title 1. Inquirer.net, 10 March 2017</i></p> <p><i>‘Gov’t failure prompted occupation of Bulacan housing projects’</i></p>
13 March 2017 – Pres. Duterte threatened to evict the occupiers and called the occupation illegal and an anarchy
<p><i>Excerpt 4. Manila Times, 13 March 2017</i></p> <p>Pandi was a quiet town until ‘Kadamay invasion’ (Title)</p> <p><i>Excerpt 5. Inquirer.net, 14 March 2017</i></p> <p>Eviction notices have not yet been issued to families who illegally occupied housing units in government housing projects in Bulacan last week.</p>

15 March 2017 – NHA served the notice of eviction, which the occupiers ignored

Excerpt 6. Manila Bulletin, 17 March 2017

A problem of homelessness and **anarchy** in Bulacan (Title)

In the meantime, the problem in Bulacan has to be acted upon. What the homeless folk did, taking over vacant houses in several resettlement sites, was indeed **anarchy**.

Excerpt 7. Manila Times, 17 March 2017

Will Pandi be the same again after the Kadamay **invasion**?

The town and its barangays (villages) used to be peaceful until Kadamay members **invaded** the housing projects of the National Housing Authority.

Excerpt 8. Manila Bulletin, 20 March 2017

‘Organized **anarchy**’ can be addressed by UDHA (Title)

Many informal settlers still entertain the notion that they can own the land after squatting on it for years. Such has no basis in law. Were the families in Bulacan also driven by the notion that they would eventually own the idle housing units they **illegally occupied**?

Excerpt 9. Inquirer.net, 20 March 2017

Invasion day: On March 8, thousands of people occupied more than 5,000 houses at the Padre Pio settlement, a housing project for jail and penology employees and firemen in Barangay Cacarong Matanda in Pandi.

Excerpt 10. Manila Times, 21 March 2017

Kadamay Bulacan ‘**invaders**’ remain defiant (Title)

Majority of the Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) “**invaders**” **illegally occupying** housing units in six resettlement sites of the National Housing Authority (NHA) in Pandi, Bulacan, have refused to leave in spite of eviction notices posted late on Monday afternoon on the units.

Excerpt 11. Philippine Star, 22 March 2017

Kadamay ‘*pasaway*’ [**Nuisance**] (Title)

Rather than letting these houses slowly rot away, the Kadamay leaders took over these housing units even if they did not pay a single cent to put them up. This is their version

of social justice they are invoking for **their illegal, if not criminal acts. Being poor is no license to commit criminal acts.**

Excerpt 12. Philippine Star, 27 March 2017

Political will vs. mob rule (Title)

Today is the deadline set in the eviction orders issued by the National Housing Authority (NHA) against the members of the militant urban poor group that shepherded its followers **to illegally occupy** vacant units in the government housing project in Bulacan. Last March 8, members of the Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) have taken over and since then **illegally occupied** thousands of vacant housing units in seven government housing sites in Pandi and several other towns in Bulacan.

27 March 2017 – Negotiations between NHA, KADAMAY, Partylist lawmakers agreed to stop eviction

Title 2. Inquirer.net, 28 March 2017

Takeover shows mass housing woes

Excerpt 13. Inquirer.net, 28 March 2017

The National Housing Authority (NHA) on Monday lifted the eviction orders against families who **forcibly occupied** 5,000 houses in low-cost housing sites in Pandi town and San Jose del Monte City, after the militant urban poor group Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) agreed to apply for the houses they took over.

Excerpt 14. Manila Times, 29 March 2017

If the government appears helpless against a thousand, or maybe even less, members of the Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap, it is because it tolerates the **anarchy** that the group has perpetrated and continues to **perpetrate against the legitimate** residents of housing projects undertaken by the National Housing Authority (NHA) in Pandi and other towns in Bulacan. Has the NHA been frightened into submission by Kadamay, the acronym adopted by the group? If not, why did it allow these **invaders** to lord it over the community of relocated informal settlers who call Pandi 3 their new home?

4 April 2017 – Pres. Duterte announced he would let the occupiers have the houses

5 April 2017 – Senators said that the President’s decision was an invitation to anarchy

Title 3. Inquirer.net, 5 April 2017

2 senators say giving housing units to Kadamay may cause **anarchy**

Title 4. Rappler, 7 April 2017

Occupy Bulacan: How the urban homeless won shelter

Title 5. Inquirer.net, 7 April 2017

Kadamay a **communist front**—Trillanes

Title 6. Inquirer.net, 25 April 2017

‘Land grabber’ tag hurts Kadamay members

Title 7. Inquirer.net, 26 April 2017

Kadamay members hurt by **‘thieves’** label

Discourses on the housing crisis and plight of the urban poor were featured every now and then. A few articles featured these to put context to the occupation (see *Titles 1-2*). Whenever the government had a big reaction, such as the issuance of eviction or the President’s pronouncements, a more balanced report or an exposé on the roots of the housing crisis comes up (see *Title 4*). When the Congress and the Senate held a joint investigation to probe the reason behind the idled houses and the takeover, some media organizations followed suit and the country’s housing and urban poor situations were presented in investigative news.

However, despite the attempts to explain the roots of occupation, the anti-Occupy Bulacan sentiment had already influenced the public as exhibited by harsh online comments and graphic survey of readers’ reactions (see *Figure 5-6*). The public had adopted the words the media used (or vice versa) to characterize the occupiers, such as “illegal”, “invaders”, “thieves”, “*pasaway*” (nuisance), “anarchy”, “communists”. Fake news websites, which became visibly rampant since the onset of the incumbent administration (Esmaguél, 2017; GMA News Special

Assignments Team, 2017), exacerbated the hostility against the occupiers. All these various media outputs had synergistically amplified the adversarial bias against Occupy Bulacan.



Figure 5-6. Readership's reaction to an Occupy Bulacan issue briefer.

Reprinted from

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/166293-kadamay-housing-issue-briefer>

While journalists claimed that they covered Occupy Bulacan with unbiased reporting, they had their own prejudices. Interviewed journalists were aware that everyone has a right to housing. Some of them were even sympathetic to the occupiers knowing the facts of poverty and housing crisis in the country. But most of them were critical of the occupation. Journalist 1, a broadcast journalist for seven years and has covered Occupy Bulacan-related stories, argued that a house should be worked and paid for, and legal processes should be upheld:

Kami [mga mamamahayag], naiinis kami. Ang usapan nga, “ikaw, mag-member ka na lang kaya ng KADAMAY para may bahay ka na.” Pero joke lang naman yun. Pero nakikita mo dun na parang dun sa biruan na parang ang dali-dali pala para sa mga ito to demand. And the president gave in, di ba?

You know how hard it is to pay for a house, di ba? And then, all these people parang sinasabi nila na sa amin na lang ito ... nabubulok na 'tong mga bahay na 'to. We'll just take it for ourselves. Parang ano ba 'yon?

I don't necessarily agree with their cause ... Does that mean that they can just go there and *parang* abandon the process, *di ba?* So, where's the legal aspect of it all. (Journalist 1, 2018)

[We [fellow journalists] were annoyed [at what happened]. We were jesting at each other, "If you want to have a house just join KADAMAY!" ... You'll gather from our joke that we were surprised on how easy it was to for them to demand for houses that even the president gave in.

You know how hard it is to pay for a house, right? And then, all these people were saying they'll just take the houses since they were wasting away anyhow.

I don't necessarily agree with their cause... Does that mean that they can just go there and abandon the process? So, where's the legal aspect of it all?]

Despite their biases, interviewed journalists maintained that they are professionals when doing their job. They must balance things out when being assigned a story. As Journalist 1 shared, he must look at the opposing sides to be able to make an informed opinion that he could share to the audience. It is also important to appear neutral so that sources would feel comfortable in telling their side of the story.

Veteran journalist Inday Espina-Varona astutely pointed out that objectivity does not mean neutrality and that the media reflects society. Journalists do recognize that everyone has a right to housing but not all of them can be expected to sympathize with the occupiers because they were brought up in a society where the aspirational models are the elite. As she further demonstrates:

Merong push and pull, *noh... sa psyche ng Filipino*. In one hand, we're very weak to jump and help in cases of individual injustice. *Kaya very, ang dami niyan, nagva-viral yan. Si Lolo sa daan, mahirap, tayo di ba, eh ganon. Iiyak tayo, ganon tayo*. Because people know that sometimes, the only hope they have in a very rough spot is the kindness of others... We hate injustice in the abstracts. *Ayaw nating inaapi kaya tuwang-tuwa tayo sa underdogs sa sinehan, telenovela, in everything, ... And yet, ang models ng maraming Pilipino, for upward mobility is whether we like it or not, is yung models na kinalakihan, which means, the haciendero, the local politicians. Eh nai-imbibe natin, the ruthlessness, the coldness, the penchant for... kung, nagsi-seep down yung, kung mahirap ka tamad ka*. Because they, probably, a lot of us heard that many times. So, *kahit papano, every resentment, dala-dala*. So, *medyo nahahati ang psyche. Uhm, ang aspirational model niya ay feudal*. So, we can be cruel to those who are a step below us in the class... in the ladder. And really, that's not unique to the Filipinos.

That's very human. So, okay... so, *ang* journalist, *ganun din yan* like anybody else. (I. Espina-Varona, personal communication, July 25, 2018)

[There's a push-and-pull in the Filipino psyche. In the one hand, we're very weak to jump and help in cases of individual injustice. There's a lot of that going viral. We cry when we see a poor old man languishing in the streets... Because people know that sometimes, the only hope they have [when] in a very rough spot is the kindness of others... We hate injustice in the abstracts. We don't like to see people being abused that's why we applaud the underdogs in the movies, in soap operas... And yet, the models of many Filipinos for upward mobility are the ones we think highly of when we were growing up ... the *haciendero*, the local politicians. So, we also imbibe the ruthlessness, the coldness, the penchant for ... this seeps down that if you are poor, then you must have been lazy... A lot of us heard that many times. Somehow, resentment is imbibed. Thus, the psyche is in contradiction. The aspirational model is feudal... We can be cruel to those who are a step below us in the class ladder. And really, that's not unique to the Filipinos. That's very human. So, the journalist is similar to that like anybody else.]

As much as they try to balance things out journalists cannot escape their biases. According to Journalist 1, even the mere choice of words reflects partiality. Strong words are used to convey the gravity of a situation that a journalist deems to have gone beyond reason. There is no intention of provoking the audience but only to translate into words what they see as journalists that the camera cannot capture.

How news is framed does not rest alone on a reporter, but on a group of people and on the institutionalized process of making news. In broadcasting, the newsroom is where stories are developed. The newsroom has two groups, the news gathering group that is composed of the editors and reporters, and the news production group that handles the tv programs and is composed of the story editor, producer, and executive producer. The two groups gather in the morning to identify stories that have potential to be aired out later as news. The reporter goes out and gathers information, which are later sent out to the editor. The editor acts as the gatekeeper and does the fact-checking of the gathered information. After confirming the veracity of the news, the editor forwards it to the news production group. The story editor rewrites and compresses it to the standard running time of one and a half minutes, rephrasing sentences and choosing sound bites from interviews. After the news has been compressed it is passed on to the producer, who has the last say before it is returned to the reporter to voice the news and to the segment producer who assembles the entire video package.

In a newspaper, the reporter works with the editor-in-chief, managing editor, and section editors. The editor-in-chief sets the tone and editorial direction of the paper and makes sure that everyone is in sync with the paper's policies. The managing editor handles reporters' assignments. He can supervise directly the reporters or through the section editors. The managing editor and editor-in-chief look at the final proof before a news article is published. Editorials are rotated among editors. According to Journalist 2, an editor of a broadsheet daily, editors have the freedom to write the editorial piece because they are experienced enough to know the issue at hand and familiar enough with the stance of the newspaper and its owner. Nevertheless, another person who handles the editorial paper clears the topics for the editorial.

News articles are also purposely written in a way that grabs the attention of the readers. The selection of stories is based on their news value or "juice", as one journalist calls it. There are stories that are more newsworthy than others and usually the reader's attention is drawn to stories that contains conflict. As Journalist 2 expressed:

[Something] interesting. Something that is new. Something that might be shocking. Something that might be negative. Something that have conflict. Yung conflict *kasama sa* news value yun. *Kapag may nag-aaway* automatic *yun*, [Conflict is part of news value. When there are parties in dispute, that is automatically [covered]]. (Journalist 2, 2018)

While the interviewed journalists do not usually pay attention to online comments and posts due to the proliferation of fake websites and cyber trolls, they are forced to write stories about these if they become viral. Media coverage is necessary if a popular influencer made a remark that commanded a lot of attention and if there is clamor from readers to learn more about it. The journalists make it a point, though, to have value added to the post the influencer or online commentator shared. Journalists seek the official sources and verify the information mentioned in the social media post.

The state has a strong influence on what news is being produced. It can either push or ban journalists from covering an event. Government offices and agencies send out media advisories to invite journalists to cover their events. There are instances where state agents invite reporters and give them free rides to the site to make sure there is media coverage. Journalist 2 shared a case when police officers invited and brought reporters from Manila to Pandi to cover a story on an occupier who allegedly performed a criminal act. The state also has a history of barring

journalists from attending press events. In February 2018, Pia Ranada, a reporter from one of the major online news networks, was prohibited from attending all President Duterte's events. There was no sufficient reason specified as to why she was refused entry to the Malacañang Palace, but everyone deduced that it was because of her critical reporting of state events and activities.

Pia Ranada's experience and other acts against press freedom have had a chilling effect with other journalists (Macasero, 2018), distancing themselves away from controversial issues. In the course of my fieldwork, journalists who had covered Occupy Bulacan subtly refused to participate in the research. Often, they would claim that they were not the principal reporters assigned to Occupy Bulacan and would drop the names who were. Twice, I was told that they had to ask permission first with their editors before they accept my interview. But my follow-up phone calls were never picked-up and my direct messages were ignored.

The slant of news is often attributed to the reporter or said to be influenced by the state, but media ownership also impacts media bias. Media owners are either business conglomerates and/or people with close ties to those in power. Business conglomerates own media outlets and given the prevailing mode of rent capitalism in the country they are in need of good relations with the state (see *Table 5.2*). Since they operate multiple business interests, media plays a strategic role in spreading or gaining influence. For instance, investigative reports on urban gentrification encouraging demolitions are sensitive topics as media owners have real estate development investments. Media owners holding public utility contracts with the state or those with legislative franchise are also wary of upsetting a head of state, especially one with an authoritarian streak. Just recently (2019), the President threatened to block ABS-CBN's franchise renewal because the latter allegedly refused to air his campaign advertisements during the 2016 presidential campaign. The announcement caused ABS-CBN stocks to drop (Piad, 2019).

Media owners position themselves close to those in power or those in power position their allies to control media. The country's most popular broadsheet, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, which has been running critical coverage of the administration's human rights violations, was set to be bought out by Ramon Ang, President Duterte's election financier. When the news came out, *Inquirer* employees were worried about maintaining their independence (Pasion, 2017c). Felipe Salvosa II resigned as managing editor of *The Manila Times* after he protested the

Table 5-3. Media ownership and their business or political affiliation

Source: Vera Files and Reporters Without Borders, 2019 (<https://philippines.mom-rsf.org/en/>)

Media Company/Outlet	Medium	Owner/Significant Shareholder	Significant Business or Political Affiliation
ABS-CBN Corp.	TV Radio Online Print	Lopez Family	Legislated Franchise Real Estate Mining Public utilities & infrastructures: water, telecommunications, transportation
GMA 7 Network	TV Radio Online	Duavit, Gozon, Jimenez Families	Legislated Franchise
Inquirer Group of Companies	Print Online Radio	Rufino-Prieto Family	Real Estate
Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation	Print	Yap Family	Real Estate
Manila Times	Print Online	Dante Ang	Pres. Duterte's special envoy for international public relations
Philippine Star/ Interaksyon	Print Online	Manuel V. Pangilinan	Real Estate Public utilities & infrastructures: telecommunications, water, electricity, transportation
Rappler	Online	Dolphin Fire, owned by Menlo Capital Corp, where Lucio Tan is a major shareholder	Real Estate Public utility: transportation (flag carrier)

unilateral decision to publish an article by the newspaper's owner, Dante Ang, that identified media outlets purportedly involved in a destabilization plot against the President. Ang was reportedly so angered that he asked Salvosa to leave the newspaper (Rappler.com, 2019). Dante

Ang is also a Duterte-appointed special envoy for international public relations. The Manila Times was one of the newspapers consistently critical of the housing takeover (see *Table 5-2*). This negates what Journalist 2 mentioned before, that editorial staff were veteran enough to know a newspaper's stance on critical issues, thus there is no need for the publisher to intervene. Evidently, it is a different matter if the author is the newspaper owner himself.

Lastly, having business elites as proprietors makes mainstream media a profit-oriented industry. Media outlets are careful not to earn the ire of the Administration so as not to get their license or franchise revoked, causing stocks to drop. They would not in a way jeopardize the business. Instead, they churn out materials that, as Espina-Varona (personal communication, July 25, 2018) puts it “*tumutumbok sa kabaliwan*” [captivate the obsession] of the audience, that reinforce their aspirations. Or, to put it succinctly, stories that would sell. Thus, mainstream media has the tendency to amplify the audience's opinion instead of looking for counter-narratives. Even when they are aware that cyber trolls exist, they choose to chase trends that have become viral. Media companies are also trimming down the number of their staff, limiting news to soundbites instead of investigating the points of contention of various parties involved (I. Espina-Varona, personal communication, July 25, 2018). The reduction of media personnel has been a significant trend in the past decade, not only in the Philippines but worldwide. The media industry has been cutting cost because they are publicly listed, and they want their investors happy.

5.3 The Public: Netizens and Neighbours

Online commentators or netizens have a full spectrum of opinions of the occupation. The earliest commented online news on Occupy Bulacan, entitled “Leave or be evicted, Bulacan settlers told” (Reyes-Estrope, 2017), garnered 64 reaction posts, divided between those who were critical of the occupiers and of the government. The critical remarks suggestive that the government was to blame for the occupation were the closest the occupiers could have for support from the netizens. The comments were about the negligence of the NHA in managing the housing program, the skewed priorities of the government and its inability to address poverty and unemployment, and the corruption of government officials.

However, comments that were seemingly supportive to the occupation were lost in a sea of downright derogatory remarks towards the occupiers. They were pelleted with “son-of-a-

bitch”, were called “professional squatters”, “thieves”, “lazy”, “criminals”, “communists”, “plague”, and “*patay-gutom*” (in this context, someone who is dirt poor and ignorant), who did nothing but made babies. They need to be “arrested”, “jailed”, “poisoned”, and “annihilated”. The act of occupation was labelled “illegal” and “an anarchy”. The comments from online newspapers were difficult to validate or even infer the demographics of their sources. The profile names were clearly pseudonyms (e.g. “CALIGULA the younger”, “ryq24”, “sdfh”, etc.) and their accounts were set as private.

Reactions gathered through personal interviews with neighbours, most of whom were resettlement beneficiaries, were much less heated. Most of them did not have any inkling of what just ensued and were naturally surprised when the occupation took place. They initially feared the occupiers. The massive number of occupiers overwhelmed them and they felt afraid that the occupiers would harm them and forcibly take their houses away from them.

The interviewed neighbours were also upset because, unlike them, the occupiers did not go through the official application process for housing. They felt that the occupiers had it easy while themselves waited several years before their application was approved. Neighbour 1 even volunteered to work for the former mayor as “election watcher” hoping that her application for housing would be approved once the mayor wins. Neighbour 3, an official beneficiary, recalled how hard it was to apply for housing. His family were living before in an informal settlement in Navotas. They were relocated to Pandi because their former place was flood-prone and, thus, was considered a danger zone. While his family was given a unit, his neighbour and best friend’s application was denied due to a failed interview. Up to this day his friend regrets his misfortune, and Neighbour 3 could not get over his disbelief and disappointment that his childhood friend, who had the same living situation as him, failed to secure housing.

But knowing poverty and having experienced the arduous process of housing application Neighbour 3, who was also a Homeowners Association (HOA) officer, understood the plight of the occupiers and why they occupied the houses. As he argued:

Sa katotohanan lang, bunga ng kahirapan, tayo pa yung Pilipino ang parang pinagkakaitan ng mga bahay, lupa. Di ba dapat unahin yan? Pangalawa, parang hindi nabibigyang pansin pag mahirap ka, di ba? Parang andun lagi yung parang panghuhusga. “Kasi mga propesyonal squatter yan,” “Kasi bebenta lang naman nila yan,” “Kasi may mga bahay naman talaga sa probinsya yan, may lupa yan.” Yung mga ganun pero kung titingnan yung kalagayan ng kahirapan. Bakit

nakikipagsiksikan sa Maynila dahil hindi naman sasapat... Dapat tingnan nila yun, may karapatan 'to na magkaron. Yung mga ganung bagay na parang dun napagkakaitan ang isang Pilipinong mahirap. Kaya ang nangyayari, marami sa katulad nating mahihirap na hindi nabigyan ng pabahay... Hindi ko sinasabing tama yung ginawa nilang yun at hindi ko rin pwedeng sabihing mali. Bakit? Yun yung sinasabi ko kanina na yung mga tao diyan, hindi nabigyan ng pagkakataon na dapat bigyan. Kumapit na lang diyan. (Neighbour 3, 2018)

[Truth be told, due to poverty, we [poor], Filipinos, are deprived of shelter and of land. Aren't those the essentials? Second, they are never given attention because they are poor, right? They are always prejudged: "Because they are professional squatters," "Because they will just sell [the houses]," "Because they actually have houses in the province, they have land." But if you are going to scrutinize the conditions of poverty, the reason why they continue to cram Manila is because there is inadequacy... They should realize that these people have rights. Poor Filipinos are deprived of these. Thus, there are a lot of poor people who are not given housing. I am not saying what they [occupiers] did was right, and I cannot also say it was wrong. Why? That is what I was pointing out a while ago; they were not given opportunity to be given housing. So, they just took the risk.]

According to him, the relocatees have eventually accepted the KADAMAY members, knowing that the latter had no interest in grabbing their houses from them. Their perception of the occupiers as harbingers of harm and chaos changed as they experienced good relations with them and witnessed their disciplined way of living. The occupiers coordinate and cooperate with them to maintain peace and order in the village. In another village, a relocatee admitted that she appreciated the occupiers' efforts of cleaning public spaces every Sunday, maintaining their surroundings free of trash and overgrown grass.

Despite being accepted, there are other beneficiaries who are reluctant to welcome the occupiers because of the manner the houses have been claimed. The beneficiaries were also hesitant to admit that the occupation had a positive consequence on them. They refused to recognize that after the occupation took place the LHO hastened the processing of their housing applications. They were finally provided with electricity after KADAMAY exposed the lack of water and power supply in the socialized housing units in Pandi. The relocatees instead rationalized that electricity supply would have been provided in any case once a certain block of the village has been occupied. They failed to recognize that the reason why the block had been fully occupied was because of the occupiers.

The adverse-reaction-turned-reluctant-acceptance of the relocatees towards the occupiers due to incidental benefits is also reflected in the governance level of the *barangay* (village – the smallest political unit in the country). When the occupiers were new, state institutions denied them services. A local school denied children enrolment upon learning they were occupiers. KADAMAY leaders were compelled to visit the school and negotiated the children’s enlistment. The barangay captain (village chief) initially refused to provide the occupiers indigent assistance and barangay clearance, the latter being an employment requirement. Eventually, they were granted barangay clearance and, occasionally, health assistance. During the interview, the Village Chief admitted that he felt compelled to give in for humanitarian reasons.

5.4 KADAMAY Officers, Members, and Leaders

Five main assertions on the validity of Occupy Bulacan were gleaned from the interviews with KADAMAY members and leaders. These are: (1) the invocation of their right to housing as poor citizens, (2) the inaccessibility of housing either through government financing or programs, (3) the use value of public housing units that were empty, idled, and wasting away, (4) the legitimacy of the application process they pursued, and (5) the exercise of democracy by a mass movement.

Interviewed KADAMAY members were unwavering in their belief that the occupation was an exercise of their right to housing as poor people, even though a few admitted that it was not in line with the NHA-prescribed process. For them, their being poor alone qualifies them to be beneficiaries of socialized housing. Their life experiences derived from their social condition had fortified this assertion. Poverty has prevented them to acquire decent housing. Their encounters of losing shelter or the mere remembrance of feeling the anxiety over an imminent eviction whenever they failed to pay rent had pushed them to forcibly occupy idled houses.

The tenure and quality of the occupiers’ previous housing were highly dependent on their income. Their meager earnings could only afford rentals situated in informal settlements, along coasts or other low-lying areas that were flood-prone. And even with these undesirable locations, where rent was cheap as compared to formal housing, payment obligations were still burdensome. Some of the research participants lamented their inability to pay rent after spending all their earnings with the family’s food needs and utilities such as water and electricity.

Occupier 33 experienced being locked out from their room for failing to pay the monthly rent, while her grandchild was burning with fever. Given this situation, the rent system has become a hazard to their right to housing. As one occupier uttered, “*Ang pagkakaintidi ko doon kasi dapat lahat naman tayo dapat may karapatan. Ibig sabihin dapat lahat tayo hindi dapat nangungupahan.*” [The way I understand it, we all have [housing] rights. That means, no one should be renting]” (Occupier 12, 2018).

Some occupiers with regular jobs had attempted having their own dwelling but failed. As regular employees, they had access to the state’s shelter financing program administered through the Home Development Mutual Fund, known as the Pag-Ibig Fund. However, their small salaries trapped them in a debt cycle that ultimately prevented them from affording decent housing. Such was the case of Occupier 12, when he inquired for housing loan at the Pag-Ibig Fund to provide housing for his young family of three. Working as a fast food crew, his gross salary of PhP9,533 a month was reduced to PhP5,718 after mandatory deductions and loans. He was told he was unqualified to apply because he did not have the capacity to pay back the housing loan as calculated from his income. His small salary incurred him loans to make ends meet. These loans were paid through salary deductions reducing his take-home pay, consequently preventing him to be eligible for housing loan. Even if he were, his family would never survive after paying a monthly amortization of PhP3,000 for a 22-square meter house.

Prior to the occupation, some KADAMAY members had also experienced applying for socialized housing through their LGUs but without success. There were stories of not completing the requirements, of years of going back-and-forth for follow-ups, of giving up due to lack of fare money for the follow-throughs, and of being declined because there were no more units available. Their stories were constituted of one or more of these accounts. KADAMAY members felt they tried their best in seeking housing assistance from the government but were disappointed.

The panorama of thousands of empty and wasted houses combined with the frustration of their inability to acquire housing, either through the system or through the market, cemented their conviction for the occupation as being just. As Occupier 12 argued:

Sumama ako sa occupation, tama, kasi kagaya ko na nag-a-apply ng housing loan tapos hindi naman na-approve, tapos, makikita ko lang din naman yung sitwasyon ng pabahay tiwangwang lang, di ba? Sa isip ko tama lang kasi saying lang din

naman yung binayad nating taxes... Hindi lang naman ako yung nakinabang, madami naman nakinabang. Kung hahayaan lang naman natin, 111awain lang din naman. (Occupier 12, 2018)

[It was just right that I joined the occupation. For someone like me whose housing loan application was denied and then suddenly discovered the existence of idle houses, isn't that a waste [not to use them]? In my opinion, what we did was right, so that the taxes we are paying wouldn't go to waste... It was not just me, but a lot have benefitted, too. If we leave them vacant, they would just waste away.]

The houses' state of disrepair was described as:

Puro talaga mataas ang damo, gumagapang sa amin. Saka, wala naman talaga ito mga pinto. Pinag-ano-ano na lang, tignan mo. Mga walang bintana, saka mga bulok bulok na rin talaga yung iba, mga sira-sira na. Pagpasok nga ang laman ng CR mga tae ng baka, may mga tae ng baka. Kasi puro, labas pasok ang baka dito noon, eh. (Occupier 19, 2018; see also Figure 5-7)

[Tall grasses and vines were all over [the houses]. They had no doors. We were the ones who improvised. They had no windows. And you would really see that some [houses] were rotting away, dilapidated. When we got inside the house, there were cow dungs since cows were left to graze here before.]



Figure 5-7. Idled socialized housing units covered with vines and grasses.
Source: KADAMAY file photo

The occupiers also insisted on the use value of the houses in defence of the occupation. They claimed that occupying the houses was a better use of tax money than allowing the houses to deteriorate. It was better than being sold out by relocatees who do

not want to resettle outside Manila, or by being left vacant by uniformed personnel because the houses were too small to live in for their family. As an occupier argued:

Kami para sa amin tama na rin po yung ginawa namin na nagkaroon ng ano, na kumuha ng bahay kasi po sasayangin lang naman nila, tiwangwang lang naman, eh. Di ba mas maganda na po na titirhan kesa naman na nakatiwangwang, nabubulok lang po ditto, eh. Ano naman ang ginagawan nila, di po ba? Yung iba binibenta nila, yung mga na-award, relocate binibenta nila yun. Kesa naman po sa amin kasi nga po nangagaw nga kami ng bahay, inangkin po namin na parang amin, inayos po naming hindi po kagaya sa kanila na nakatiwangwang, binigay nga po sa kanila pero di nila titirhan, di po ba. (Occupier 1, 2018)

[We think that it was right to occupy the houses because they are being abandoned and are deteriorating. Would it not be better to reside in them than let them deteriorate and waste away? Would not the beneficiaries, who have been awarded housing, sell them anyway? We did seize the houses, but we considered them as ours. We repaired them, unlike them [the beneficiaries] who were given the houses but never lived in them.]

The occupiers considered the houses as government properties that were supposed to be disposed for the use of housing insecure indigents and for national emergencies (e.g. evacuation centres during calamities). They were aware that the NHA owned the houses, thus, becoming government properties. Being government properties, they also believed that these were built with taxpayer's money and were reserved for the underprivileged and homeless. Thus, by the virtues of being poor and housing insecure, the occupiers believed that they deserve those housing units. Other occupiers also reasoned that as taxpayers, through the goods and services they consume, they have rights over government properties and services such as socialized housing. In an interview podcast, Michael Beltran, KADAMAY Information Officer, shared the same conviction as the occupiers:

It is for the public if it's taxpayers' money that paid for these. The poor are taxpayers as well. It isn't true that the poor do not pay taxes. Every time they buy at a store, they are taxed... Housing projects were created for the benefit and the welfare of the poor, and it is the poor living in the area [of Bulacan] who asserted to live in these. So, to our mind, we did not steal anything. If there were someone living there, then we would not have occupied at all. (Alitaptap Collective, 2018).

In the same interview, Beltran also justified the occupation as the country's housing situation could be considered a "national emergency" needing immediate attention. With an

estimated 7.7 million of the urban population living in informal settlements and with a backlog of 5.7 million units, the country has a housing crisis (ICF International, 2014; Remo & Sauler, 2016). The use of the government-built houses is a stopgap solution KADAMAY prescribed to address the prevalent homelessness in the country. Beltran even envisioned the houses as emergency shelters, though this depends on the consensus and level of consciousness of the members. This set-up hints of commoning. In fact, a few of the occupied housing units have more than two families living together because one of the families was desperately in need of shelter. As he expounded:

Kaya mahalaga, pinagsisikapan naman lagi yung continuous political education sa mga tao eh. Tapos kasabay yung democratic participation din ng mga tao sa iba't ibang decision making, decisions or policy making na activities sa loob ng mga pabahay. Kagaya ng, halimbawa, nandiyan yung mas maliliit na problema eh. Pano kung si person A ay umalis ng tatlong buwan kasi may pupuntahan sa probinsya, pwede bang i-occupy yung bahay niya ng iba muna ... Pinapayagan naman sa isang extent basta coordinated siya doon sa loob ng mga chapters, local chapters, block chapters hanggang sa municipal level ... Pero ang point kasi dun ay yung, pamilya ba may mauuwian talaga sila, may masisilungan. (M. Beltran, personal communication, August 23, 2018)

[It is important that we put effort on the continuous political education of the masses. At the same time, democratic participation on decision-making or policies is carried out in the occupied housing sites. Even with small problems. What if [Family] A is going to the province for 3 months, can [Family] B occupy the house temporarily?... That kind of instances are allowed as long as they are coordinated within the chapters, local chapters, block chapters, up to the municipal chapter ... The point is, the [homeless] family has a house that they can take refuge in.]

Some of the research participants agreed that the mode of how they acquired the houses was unconventional; nevertheless, they believed that they went through an application process. And contrary to the criticism of acquiring the houses too easily, the occupiers professed it took them hard work and sacrifices. They had community consultations, recruited thousands of members, and had series of dialogues with various government offices and housing agencies while submitting their socio-economic profiles in lieu of the socio-economic survey of NHA. They organized and educated themselves of their situation. In order to accomplish all these, some had to skip a day of work, some had to halt vending their goods for days, and some forewent

opportunities such as working overseas. Sacrifices were made in the hopes of having their own house. For them, there were many ways to find work, but an opportunity to own a house was rare.

Difficult days and sacrifices continued after the occupation. They cleaned the houses and cleared the grasses with their bare hands. They guarded the houses for days after the occupation making sure they would not be evicted. They stayed in the houses while the rain spattered in through their improvised doors and windows; while the hot summer sun baked them under the corrugated metal roofs. With only the moon to light their nights, they guarded the houses. There were days when they felt hunger. Without money and without work, they depended on relatives or solidarity groups visiting them and bringing in meals. They shared whatever they had with fellow occupiers.

There were members who struggled to keep both their work and their houses. Occupier 16 shared that it was only her husband who joined the occupation because she was pregnant with their third child. Since March 8 her husband divided the day between guarding the house, visiting his family, and going to work. After his shift working in a store in Binondo, Manila, he travels 36 kilometres to Pandi to clear the house of tall grasses and spends the night there. Early the following morning he rides his motorcycle 28 kilometres to his family's place, a room they rent in Caloocan. He then takes a shower, eats breakfast, and travels eight kilometres to work back in Binondo. This happened everyday until May, two months after the occupation, when his family finally joined him.

The hard work and sacrifices of the occupiers demonstrate the perseverance of the urban poor movement to gain housing. Beltran claimed that the occupation was legitimate because their demand was legitimate and was led by a mass movement in an organized manner. It was a body of common people, who moves based on their circumstances and capabilities, and whose demands were grounded on social justice. The government did not acknowledge this, but it did not also file a suit against them. Instead, it allowed the occupiers to stay in, and pay, for the units. The mass movement has a power to compel the state. As Beltran expounded:

Wala din legal basis na pwedeng isampa ang gobyerno sa KADAMAY, eh. Kung meron, matagal na nilang ginawa yun eh. Hanggang ngayon, meron ba? Parang wala naman eh. At isa pa, para magsampa ka ng plausible na kaso, eh, wala naman silang ginawa pang ganung hakbang, di ba. Kaya kahit kami, parang, eh,

di sige, parang di naman strictly legal or illegal ang pinag-uusapan dun sa occupy, eh. Feeling ko nga yun yung isa sa mga best lessons na parang na-transcend niya yung dating nakabatay sa mga legal na movements... Parang, pinakamaganda kung yung legal mechanism o yung estado mismo yung nagbabow down sa mass movement. (M. Beltran, personal communication, August 23, 2018)

[[The government] has no legal basis to file charges against us. If they did have, they would have already acted on it. But until now there is no plausible case filed against us. So, for us, it was not a matter of being legal or illegal. I think one of the best lessons [of the occupation] is that it has transcended the law as basis of mass movement struggles. It is best if the legal mechanism or the state is the one bowing down to the mass movement.]

KADAMAY contends that this radical thought is not equivalent to “anarchy” as government officials like to brand the occupation. Beltran emphasized that the occupation was not an act of anarchy, which in this context was used with negative connotations of lawlessness and chaos. In his words:

Alam ko talaga may anarchists sa buong mundo na relatively organized, parang ganyan. Pero kasi, yung tunguhin naman, una hindi kami ganun dahil parang ang objective ng anarchist groups magtayo ng mga communes na hiwalay sa lipunan. Ang gusto nga ay maging ehemplo ‘to sa buong bansa hindi para magtayo din sila ng communes pero para magkaron ng mass actions pa...Para maging tuntungan para sa pagbabago ng housing framework hanggang ma-assert pa ng iba pang political changes sa lipunan. (M. Beltran, personal communication, August 23, 2018)

[As far as I know there are anarchists in the world who are relatively organized and whose objective is to build communes detached from society. But we don’t aspire for that. What we wanted is for the occupation to be an inspiration for more mass actions, which could eventually lead to transformation of the housing framework and assertion of other political changes in the society.]

Even after being settled in the houses, the occupiers continued to do their part as members of the mass movement, organizing themselves and living collectively. Apart from the ongoing campaign for the government to hand them over the papers that would legally recognize them as residents, they also started building their new communities. Because they were not recognized as residents of the area, they were deprived of social and basic services, and thus, learned to be self-reliant. They had established a free first-aid clinic, day care services, and a

sundry cooperative store. They found ways to provide themselves with electricity and water. Rules have been set up to ensure peace and order prevailed in the villages. Shifts of watchers were established to guard the entrances of the villages and keep out unwanted visitors. Disputes between occupiers, or even between spouses, were settled with the help of KADAMAY local officers.

All these community concerns and activities were in motion while maintaining the organization's main task of asserting housing rights and doing solidarity work with other sectoral movements. Organizational structure and committees in the six housing sites were retained and made sure they were functional. During the first year of the occupation, KADAMAY members were busy accepting visitors and invitations from other social movement organizations to share their story. Their presence during multi-sectoral mobilizations, such as Labour Day, provided high morale to the Philippine mass movement.

The occupation's legitimacy is not only derived from the exercise of democracy of a group of people, but is also validated by transforming the poor into an empowered and conscientious citizen. This is embodied in the words of a KADAMAY member:

Natutuwa, dahil dati simple lang akong mamamayan, at least yung paghihirap namin, yung pakikibaka namin, naging ano sa Pilipinas, na hindi pala namin kailangan manahimik na kailangan din palang lumabas sa tahanan namin, na hindi lang pala bilang isang babae. Hindi ka lang pala simpleng maybahay lang, na kailangan mo din palang makibaka, makipagsapalaran kasama ng ibang mamamayang Pilipino. Kailangan din pala nating makipaglaban sa mga maling gawain ng gobyerno. (Occupier 32, 2018)

I'm glad that I have transformed from an ordinary citizen, that our sacrifices, our struggles [are being recognized]; that we don't need to be silent, that we need to go out of our homes, that we are not just ordinary women. We are not just simple housewives. We also need to fight, to struggle with fellow Filipinos. We learned that we need to challenge the wrongdoings of the government.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the perspectives of various social actors of the housing occupation. Their reaction towards the occupation, their understanding on rights and property, and their sentiments on the legality of the takeover were sought and documented. The social actors were composed of government officials and authorities, media personnel, and the public,

specifically the neighbours of the occupiers and online commentators. Interviews with the occupiers were also carried out to respond to the research themes.

The government officials and housing officers based their understanding of property and rights on legal documents such as the Constitution and statutes. Consequently, their evaluation of the occupation was also based on legal grounds. Their appreciation of the Constitution and other laws sets the parameters on how “right to housing” is delivered to the citizens. These parameters are translated to eligibility criteria and application process. Going against these constitutes what “illegal” is. Application for socialized housing can be processed either by the national housing agency or the local government. However, actual acquisition is very limited because only ISFs whose settlements are pending for demolition and residents of the municipality are given priority.

The press did not cater the occupation with much media mileage during the day it occurred, but when the government and the public took notice, it became news for two months. Emergent discourses contained in the news shifted based on the responses of the government over time, but consistently revolved around the illegality of the occupation. The slant of media articles shifted from neutral to negative as criticism of the occupation from government officials and public heightened. Interviewed journalists admitted that they have their biases like any other ordinary person. Not all of them approved of the occupation; in fact, a lot of their colleagues were critical of it, but they asserted that despite this they maintained being professional when covering Occupy Bulacan-related events. How news is framed does not rest alone on one reporter, but on a group of media practitioners and on the process of producing news. The state also has the power to influence what story would make the news.

Online commentators or netizens’ sentiments on the occupation were divided, but most leaned heavily on the negative side. Disparaging remarks towards the occupiers drowned comments that were seemingly supportive of the occupation or critical of the state’s housing program. But reactions gathered through personal interviews with neighbours, most of whom were resettlement beneficiaries, were more restrained, even empathetic. They initially feared that occupiers would also forcibly take their houses away from them and were displeased that the occupiers did not go through the official application process for housing unlike them. But knowing what poverty was and having experienced the laborious process of housing application

they have eventually overcome their prejudice to become more tolerant of the occupiers. This was also reflected in barangay governance, wherein initially the occupiers were deprived of assistance, but one of the barangay captains eventually accommodated them on compassionate grounds.

KADAMAY members and leaders have six assertions on the validity of Occupy Bulacan. First, they assert their right to housing and right over the public housing units as underprivileged citizens. Second, they have tried to access government financing to own their own house, but failed because their income was not sufficient to repay the loan. They have also applied for housing through various government programs, but no progress came out of these. Third, the socialized housing units were better used than being vacant, idled, and wasted away. Living in them was a good use of taxpayers' money as they were taxpayers themselves. Fourth, the submission of the occupiers' socio-economic profiles and dialogues with government officials and housing agencies were procedures equivalent to the prescribed application process for public housing. Fifth, as a mass movement, they are an organized, informed, and principled group that could decide for and manage themselves into functioning communities. Lastly, the mass movement is potent enough, at the most, to transcend legal mechanisms, and, at the least, for the state to concede to its demands.

The next chapter examines the justifications of the social actors on the legitimacy of the housing takeover and contextualizes Occupy Bulacan as a product of an on-going struggle of the urban poor movement for their right to housing and land tenure based on the concepts of right to the city and counter-project.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis is to query the legitimacy and significance of Occupy Bulacan in the struggle for housing justice. The spirit behind this aim is to understand two opposing sides and (ambitiously) to be able to locate their roots. On the one hand, how people could occupy houses without permission and call it legitimate, and on the other, how the government and the public could berate homeless people seeking shelter, calling their act illegal. Guided by the research questions, the previous chapters have laid out the different narratives that contribute in elucidating where those contentions were coming from. Research question (a), which inquires on the significance of Occupy Bulacan in the context of various social movements, is primarily addressed by Chapter 3 by historicizing the Philippine urban poor movement. Other chapters also contributed, particularly Chapter 2 on the rise of the Occupy movement and the various housing justice movements in the world, and Chapter 4 on how the occupiers are contributing to the current social movements in country. Research question (b) is focused on the occupiers, specifically their socio-economic and housing tenure conditions, and their strategies and tactics of acquiring housing during the occupation, which are all documented and described in Chapter 4. Lastly, and corresponded by Chapter 5, research question (c) interrogates the different reactions and perspectives of social actors, directly or indirectly involved, on the occupation.

Reflecting on the Lefebvrian concepts of right to the city and counter-project has enriched the data gathered from the research questions. While I anticipated to highlight the occupation as a strategy of a social movement in response to the creation of a counter-project, the components of rights to the city – right to participation and right to appropriation – inevitably reveal the political-economy of socialized housing. Understanding this and ethically and collectively acting on it ultimately gives legitimacy to the occupation. Thus, this last chapter is devoted to the discussion of first, the state agenda behind the establishment of eligibility criteria and housing application process; second, activating the rights to participation and appropriation in response to the state agenda; third, the act of occupation exposes the crisis of socialized housing, a manifestation of prioritizing exchange value over use value; fourth, the roles and conflicts of propertied and property-deprived social actors; fifth, the collective creation of a

counter-project that is an alternative to the life and values created by capital and elite power. From these discussion points, the legitimacy and significance of the housing occupation in Philippine social movements are drawn and summarized, providing the conclusion to the study.

6.1 State Housing Policies Negates Urban Life

A beneficiary's legal claim to public housing is based on eligibility criteria and application process. However, the agenda behind the deployment of these mechanisms and their manifestations go against Lefebvre's concept of urban life. These mechanisms generated unethical actions and discord among social actors, instead of providing shelter and security to the homeless and the poor. The radical action of the occupiers in claiming back their right to housing was an attempt to get off the wrong track and to reorient towards the realization of urban life.

The government and the media hastily judged the housing occupation in Bulacan as illegal and the occupiers as robbers without even checking their eligibility. If they had, they would have discovered that the occupiers easily qualified for socialized housing and would have avoided spreading animosity against the occupiers. They fulfilled the eligibility criteria for housing beneficiaries. They were underprivileged and homeless citizens as 96% of the surveyed occupiers represented.

The occupiers were publicly persecuted not only because their eligibility was questioned but more so because of their unconventional manner of claiming the houses. However, prior to the occupation the occupiers had tried different state-prescribed routes towards socialized housing but failed. The application process is intended towards a narrow group of recipients, mostly dislocated ISFs from city centres. In fact, it can be perceived that the agenda behind the government resettlement program is not to house the poor but to free urban space of unwanted settlements and populations and replaced them with more profitable structures. The state and the private sector are buying out the urban poor, expropriating urban space and appropriating it to the new property owners (Lefebvre, 1968/2000; Purcell, 2014).

The state uses the eligibility criteria and application process not only as a filtering system to identify the most deserving beneficiaries, but also to manage the meager budget it has allocated for housing. This reflects the importance the state accords to housing services, as it slowly detaches itself from its responsibility of providing it. Not only does the small

appropriation limits the number of beneficiaries but also generates unnecessary bureaucracy and ugly consequences of infighting, discrimination, and patron-client relationships.

The eventual withdrawal of the state from providing housing services, the unethical actions and relations of social actors and their impacts, such as homelessness, may pertain to what Lefebvre (2003, p. 16) refers to as some of “the worst” during the critical phase towards the completion of the urban. These acts also negate Lefebvre’s vision of the urban life, where use value dominates over exchange value, where inhabitants are open to encounters and exchanges (both harmonious and otherwise), where life is less alienated and more meaningful, where inhabitants are more cognizant of life’s cycles and rhythms, and where hegemony lies in the hands of the ruled.

6.2 Legal and Legitimate Process of Housing Acquisition: Activating Right to Participation and Right to Appropriation

The government pronounced the housing occupation illegal but KADAMAY asserted it was a legitimate act of claiming housing rights. Critics of the occupation, both authorities and online commentators, likened the occupiers to ‘thieves,’ who grabbed the houses without undergoing the official procedures of housing application. Invoking bureaucratic procedures, laws, and the Constitution is the government’s first line of defence in handling a sensitive issue or a crisis. This was evident during my fieldwork. When I asked a government officer to define right to housing, she firmly emphasized that the definition should be within the bounds of the Constitution. When I was merely following up my interview appointment with NHA, an overzealous staff screened my questions and gave me her unsolicited legal viewpoint on the right to housing. On the other hand, KADAMAY members also claimed that access to housing was written in the Constitution, that they actually applied for housing, and that the occupation was a practice of democracy.

Calling the occupiers ‘thieves’ emanates from the nature of a house being a property. KADAMAY members did not consider themselves as such because they believed that the houses were public properties allotted for homeless like them. Government officers thought otherwise. They considered the houses as government properties that were not easily accessible just by anyone. By barring admission to the houses, government property is then another form of private

property. The exclusivity of private property to its owner is enshrined in law as a bundle of property rights. In this case, the state has property rights over the public housing, and these rights come into conflict with the right to appropriation of the occupiers. However, the state through its 'state of exception' can veto what it declares to be legal and illegal (Agamben, 1998). If the government decides to uphold the principles of the Constitution on social justice and housing the homeless, the houses should be appropriated to KADAMAY members. But if it insists on following the official application process, then the occupiers lose their right to housing.

For KADAMAY members the occupation was their last resort to provide shelter for their families. They did apply for housing but concerned government offices failed them. In lieu of the NHA or LHO application forms, the occupiers submitted their own socio-economic forms, which were more comprehensive and more telling of their housing conditions than the official form provides (see Appendices A-C). Dialogues with concerned government offices accompanied the submission of their applications. Nothing came from these efforts.

Forwarding socio-economic forms and holding dialogues, however, are not the only proofs that KADAMAY followed procedures before staging the occupation. The history of petitioning for housing goes beyond that. Prior to joining KADAMAY, some of the occupiers already tried applying for housing either to NHA or to LGUs. Some of them had applied as long as four years prior to the occupation and had experienced numerous follow-ups until they got exhausted, ran out of fare money, and gave up. One occupier failed to avail housing because she was not present when NHA was census-tagging residences eligible for resettlement. She left for her rural hometown during a family emergency and when she came back, it was already too late for an appeal. Every occupier had his/her own story of seeking housing and failing.

These failures are manifestations of a public housing program narrowly designed for a targeted group of beneficiaries. The only qualified applicants are (1) the soon-to-be demolished ISFs tagged by NHA and the sending LGU, and (2) ISFs of the local town/city. Walk-in applicants are not accommodated since it is the NHA and the sending LGU who determine the beneficiaries. Those with low-incomes whose temporary settlements are not under any threat of demolition have no chance of being part of NHA's beneficiary selection process. In the LGU process, one needs to be a local resident. The limited availability of housing in the LGU has also created an aberrant practice in the application process. The Pandi LHO OIC distinguished the

most-in-need by the number of times they visit her office for a follow-up. Desperation has become an unspoken requirement for socialized housing.

Where the legal acquisition of housing ends, the legitimate acquisition begins. The occupiers readily joined KADAMAY when they heard it was helping people secure housing. As one occupier said, “*wala namang mawawala*” [there’s nothing to lose] as they had nothing to begin with. Through KADAMAY, they learned how socialized housing program works, applied for housing collectively, and held dialogues with housing agencies. When legal processes failed them, knowing that thousands of houses were empty, they decided through consultation that there was no other option but to occupy. This was the bottom-up process they went through. The government considered it improper and illegal, but for the occupiers it was activating their right to participation as citizens or what Holston (2009) calls “insurgent citizenship.” This also fulfills one of the requirements towards the creation of an urban life as Lefebvre envisioned – for the marginalized class to reclaim their rights and to utilize resources based on their use.

The legitimacy of the takeover is based on the participation of a critical mass of homeless inhabitants who made an informed decision and acted on their right to housing. A critical mass was necessary during the occupation and this comprised the ‘collective’. The occupiers clearly outnumbered the armed police deployed in the areas of contention and their massive numbers gave them the courage to act. The formation of this formidable mass stemmed from KADAMAY’s organizing strategy of arouse-organize-mobilize (AOM), an alternative way of exercising democracy. Starting with effective arousing/agitation through leafleteering, community radio, and community consultations, consciousness was stirred and these served as the first batch of members who would recruit the succeeding batches. Afterward, the education discussions fostered critical thinking by providing the theoretical framework behind the effectiveness and necessity of collective action in claim-making.

Organizing provided the impetus for members to practice and internalize collective action. Through the community consultations, they learned how to systematically consolidate their common concerns and turn these into demands. Chapter-building and the committee system provided the avenues for learning to move as one under a collective leadership, which was composed of the executive committee and the committees, which members were all part of.

Mobilizations displayed the collective will and action of the occupiers and these were combination of repertoire of contention and repertoire of strategies (Rossi, 2017; Tilly, 1995; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). KADAMAY's demonstration, barricades, and the occupation were part of the repertoire of contention, while the dialogues were part of the repertoire of strategies. The combined strategies not only strengthened the unity of the members but also allowed them to internalize the legitimacy of their cause.

The occupation's legitimacy draws upon Lefebvre's right to the city, with its two principal rights – the right to appropriation and right to participation. As citizens of an elite liberal democracy, the occupiers applied for socialized housing and held dialogues, which were tantamount to applying for appropriation of space, and held demonstrations, which were exercises of right to expression. However, these liberal democratic expressions proved to be futile and showed that bureaucratic and legal processes were not enough in claiming housing rights. A radical and prefigurative action, such as the occupation, proved to be an effective alternative. The occupation was an exercise of right to appropriation, where the radical citizens accessed the housing sites, and decided to take over the space and recover the houses, which were byproducts of their surplus labour and their taxes. They activated their right to participation as radical citizens when they joined a social movement, educated, organized, and mobilized themselves, and finally, when they collectively produced space through occupation.

6.3 Conflict of use value and exchange value of idled houses results in crisis of socialized housing

The occupied houses were not only empty or idle but idled – left to waste away for five years, inhabited by flora and fauna instead of humans. Hence, the occupation took back property and restored the domination of its use value over exchange value. It also exposed the crisis of housing, the inefficiency of state housing services and its commodified and neoliberal character.

Since the occupied shelters were public housing built through tax, the occupiers believed that they have right over the houses being taxpayers themselves. The purpose of public housing has been served through their occupation. As a house that has both use value and exchange value, it is tax money that is exchanged to build public housing. The NHA and four other shelter agencies, all government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs), facilitate the

financialization of housing.²² They ensure that beneficiaries pay their monthly amortization, including interest, to guarantee revenue. It is rationalized that this becomes the capital for the next batch of socialized housing units (Pasion, 2017b).

Saving the houses from deterioration was another justification the occupiers had in legitimizing their act. They argued that they were the better occupants because they valued the houses unlike uniformed personnel who refuse to live in the houses or the ISF beneficiaries who sell the houses. The public often criticized the latter for putting the houses up for sale without the amortization being fully paid. In their defense, ISFs would reason that the houses were far from their work or they were in dire needs and selling or pawning the house was a fast solution.

The occupation surfaced the thousands of idled houses, allotted for uniformed personnel (AFP/PNP) and ISFs, compelling the lawmakers and media to investigate. The AFP/PNP and NHA have conflicting responses during the investigation. The former denied having prior knowledge of the project design, while the latter claimed that a consultation transpired. Meanwhile, thousands of houses remained vacant while millions of ISFs remained homeless.

The long-time vacancy of the houses, their continuous construction, and the conflicting statements from the authorities demand explanation. First, socialized housing has been treated as a commodity where exchange value dominates over use value. Awarded houses and lots, though never utilized, are real property assets that can be liquidated when need arises. Everyone is cognizant of this, including the ISF beneficiaries and the uniformed personnel who continued to pay amortization for houses without the intention of moving in. After the exposé of small and substandard housing, the state housing agencies released a resolution increasing the area size of a socialized housing unit, but with a higher cost (HUDCC Resolution 1, series of 2018). The livability of a shelter has become dependent on how much one is willing to exchange. Adequacy of housing compromises its affordability, which is precisely what the Constitution aimed to avert in its statement, “The state shall... make available at affordable cost decent housing...”

Secondly, the continuous construction of sub-standard shelters in remote spaces – that are too small for the middle class, too expensive for ISFs, and too far away for both – demonstrates

²² Aside from NHA, the key shelter agencies that are GOCCs are Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF), Home Guaranty Corporation (HGC), National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation (NHMFC), and Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC).

the phenomenon of privatizing gains while socializing losses (Stiglitz, 2010). State housing has become an opportunity to facilitate profit for real estate developers while the state, through taxes, bears the costs. The partnership of the state and the private sector in undertaking low-cost housing programs being inscribed in the Constitution reflects the state's adherence in liberalizing and privatizing social services. And while summoning the private sector in doing its share of public service might look a picture of a functional nation, it must be given emphasis that this approach is framed under an oligarchic democracy and a capitalist rentier economy (Hutchcroft, 1994).

Thirdly, space is valorized and a three-fold accumulation by dispossession takes place. The prearranged resettlement areas suggest state and/or private development projects in the urban are inevitably poised to dislocate ISFs. The urban is kept as the prime zone of capital accumulation by taking over the space of the ISFs, while the marginal spaces are groomed as secondary circuits of capital by building housing projects that are sold to the very same displaced ISFs. This goes further when ISFs cannot bear anymore the cost of amortization, their contracts are cancelled, and houses are padlocked. The house is in perpetual cycle of being occupied and relinquished by a series of beneficiaries, and in-between the government and real estate developer profits from amortization interest payments. This continues until an entrepreneurial lower middle-class buyer finally swoops in.

The conflict between use value and exchange value results in the crisis of socialized housing where commodification and state institutionalized semi-privatization defeats its purpose. The homeless continue to be housing insecure but are also sucked dry of their remaining resources. Though being beneficiaries due to displacement, they are still expected to pay monthly amortization, or their contracts will be revoked, and they will return to the streets. For government personnel and low-income families, NHA ensures that they have the capacity to pay the amortization by requiring them to submit an affidavit of source of income, to sign the sworn application to purchase lot/unit (SAPL), and to be of working age. This is one of the reasons why some KADAMAY members joined the occupation. They tried accessing state housing loan but failed because their incomes were evaluated to be insufficient for loan repayments. Philippine socialized housing does not mean subsidized housing; instead it is a loan scheme.

6.4 The Propertied and the Deprived: Battling Class Hegemony

Henri Lefebvre stressed that the realization of urban life should be within the perspectives of a transformed society under the hegemony of the working class. Hence, the social actors and the institutions or groups they belong to play critical roles in the failure, challenges, and success of housing acquisition. It is the elite who wrote and interpreted the law and legal procedures that the occupation was appraised against. It is a mass movement composed of homeless proletariat, precariat, poor, and their multi-sectoral allies, who successfully occupied 5,300 government-built housing units. It is the propertied class, which includes media practitioners, who amplified reactions against the occupation. Their positions on the occupation are grounded in their class standpoint on property and commodity more than on the right to shelter.

The dominant class determines what is legal and what is not. It is the political elite who wrote the laws on and legal procedures of housing, from the Constitution, the UDHA, to the implementing rules and guidelines, which are then executed in a top-down fashion. After overthrowing the Marcos Regime in 1986, leaders of the civil society had the chance to be included in composing UDHA, but the main proponents were from the real estate industry. The UDHA decriminalized squatting and assured informal settlers of relocation while legalizing demolitions. It has provisions on socialized housing, but the private sector's interests were incorporated and have been secured. The poor are expected to accept whatever aid is thrown at them. Resettlement areas are already constructed in remote or peri-urban areas without consulting the preference of the affected ISFs. The government has the prerogative to define who is eligible as beneficiaries. Government housing officers can even set arbitrary application procedures. It is the state which has the authority to determine which is legal and the power to waive what is not.

At the opposite end of the social class spectrum were the homeless proletariat, precariat, and the poor banding together and forming an urban poor movement with a broad support from allies coming from women, youth, peasants, professionals, church workers, etc. Their abject conditions and their desperation for safe and decent housing were compelling enough reasons that pushed them to explore options that may be unimaginable to people coming from higher economic status. These are people with essentially nothing to their names other than the

willingness to undertake risks to improve their living conditions. As one of the chapter leaders said, forwarding her demand for socialized housing to the government was a gamble with nothing to lose.

As part of the urban poor who are in seasonal employment or the informal economy, they have imbibed particular characteristics and skills that made them daring and adaptive to various conditions to be able to survive. In the Filipino language, they are '*mapamaraan*' or '*madiskarte*', which roughly translates to 'having the ability to make do and make ways'. Depending on how people perceive the urban poor, this characteristic could have a positive or a negative spin. They are swindlers for those who discriminate against them, or they are streetwise and innovative, even entrepreneurial (as neoliberalism would like everyone to be) for those who are understanding. This characteristic became handy during their pursuit of housing. Even though financially strapped, they were still able to look for resources during their marches to Manila, survey the ins and outs of the relocation sites, recruit 10,000 members, and occupy 5,300 houses without using violence.

The ownership of property sets the difference between the elite and the urban poor, and this also influences social actors in their position on the occupation. The propertied disapproves the occupation while those without property support or, at the least, understand it. Neighbours, who were ISFs-turned-housing beneficiaries, have accepted the occupiers once they learned that the latter were poor and, just like them, needed housing security. However, propertied town officers and officials frowned upon the occupation. Michael Beltran of KADAMAY estimated that most of their detractors came from the middle-class and older generation. He also observed from Twitter feeds that while cyber trolls ganged up on KADAMAY, tweets from the youth were more receptive of the housing takeover. Presumably, the older generation from the middle class, having properties themselves, resented the urban poor's unconventional manner of attaining housing, while the younger generation have yet to acquire their own properties.

The premise that private property ownership and social class impact the position against the housing occupation quite applies as well to media bias. It must be stressed though that the media's depiction of the occupiers and the occupation does not rest on the reporter alone but on the whole media industry that is composed of people coming from middle to upper classes.

Aside from the reporters and newsroom crew, there are the editors who serve as gatekeepers, and the owners of the media enterprises whose main interest is financial gain.

Reporters, newsroom staff, and editors have middle-class aspirations. Being part of this social class, they strive towards economic stability, presuming that housing is acquired through years of hard work and not from windfalls or sudden occupations. Thus, even if they claim that they maintain professionalism when covering news they strongly disagree with, a slant still enters their reportage.

While journalists do not belong to classes A and B, they move around these circles as they pursue official sources in the fields of politics and business. In doing so, the outlook of these classes is rubbed off on the journalists. The media as the fourth-estate gives journalists the glamour of power as they engaged with the influential in doing their everyday beats (I. Espina-Varona, personal communication, July 25, 2018). The assimilation of attitude starts with neophyte reporters and firms up until they become senior staff or editors as gatekeepers. Thus, in the entire news production, from identifying to publishing or broadcasting stories, the hegemony of the elite endures. This can be perceived in the shift of discourse of occupation among news articles, which started as neutral to having negative slants when adverse reactions from lawmakers and the president intensified.

If cultural hegemony fails to deliver consent from the middle-class journalist, the elite uses the repressive route. This had been used during the Martial Law in the 1970s and until now. Recently, the media have been in a lot of skirmishes with the current Duterte Administration. Journalists who have been critical of the President and his government have been slapped with charges, barred from covering events, and insulted in public. Thirteen journalists have been murdered in work-related attacks under this Administration (Inquirer Research, 2019). In 2018, the Philippines was named the deadliest place for journalists in Southeast Asia (Bagayas, 2018). These attacks have a chilling effect with other journalists. Without enough money or power as the middle class, they have nothing to shield them but their claim for press freedom.

Media ownership also impacts media bias. Conglomerates own most of mainstream media, and to keep their business interests intact they need be strategic in their alliances with people in power. While they may not have been involved in the day-to-day workings of the press or newsroom, the gatekeepers are present to make sure that they are within the boundaries of

permissible. Conglomerates could be more powerful than the state in a capitalist rentier economy, but they would not want to get the ire of an authoritarian power and compromise not only their media companies, but other business interests, too. Ultimately, media owners are corporate elites that treat media as a profit-oriented industry.

6.5 A Mob or a Movement: Right to Participation and Creating Alternative Geographies

The 10,000 KADAMAY members claimed that they were part of a mass movement while their critics considered them a lawless mob. Occupying the houses without the permission of the state branded them as thieves sowing chaos, while KADAMAY asserted that this was a mass movement composed of homeless poor who acted on their right to housing. Belonging to both the urban poor and national democratic movements, KADAMAY asserts that they are part of a mass movement, which has a principle of claim-making based on the collective needs, goals, and capacities of ordinary people deprived of their basic human rights (M. Beltran, personal communication, August 23, 2018).

At the time of the takeover, KADAMAY was in the best position to reap the advances of the five-decade long struggle of the national democratic movement as a mass movement. Mass movement organizations of peasants, workers, women, youth, indigenous peoples, professionals, and others adhering to national democracy have broadened their repertoire of activism since their inceptions. Aside from participating in the parliament of the streets, they have also expanded to parliamentary struggle through the party-list system,²³ a good exemplar of invited space of democracy. Their tactical alliance to a city-mayor, who later became the president, yielded (temporarily at least) cabinet members and key positions in the bureaucracy installed from different sectors. Thus, even while a segment of the public was berating KADAMAY during the occupation, it also gained support from a broad mass movement.

But more than the support of other sectors and interest groups, KADAMAY members attributed the success of the occupation to their collective action, which was learned and

²³ The party-list system is a mechanism of representation of marginalized and underrepresented sectors (e.g. peasants, labour, youth, indigenous peoples, etc.) in the House of Representatives through a national election. It is a proportional representation where party-list representatives constitute 20% of all members of the House of Representatives, including those under the party-list. This system is conceived in the 1987 Philippine Constitution as a result of widening the democratic space after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship.

harnessed through its strategy of AOM. This strategy educated and organized the poor, activated the radical citizen who effectively move between invited and invented spaces of citizenship and which, eventually, enabled them to seize thousands of idled housing units. The AOM itself when it involves a large mass of people coming from the proletariat and precariat and is supported by their allies from different sectors of society, is true democracy in motion.

Since its inception, KADAMAY has been moving within the invited and invented spaces of citizenship as demonstrated by its repertoires of activism. But because of the social class it represents and its repertoire of contention (e.g. barricades during demolitions) does not fit in the invited spaces of democracies, the state has disregarded their demands. At the extreme, they are being frowned upon and taunted as “Leftists” (which is being equated to communists), and, at the least, are tolerated in the pretext that they are part of a “democratic” society. The occupation proved to intensify all those subjective reactions. Government officials and online commentators called the takeover “illegal”, but the occupiers stood firm in their conviction that it was legitimate. In the end, by going through an invented space of democracy, the berated poor have managed to score a tangible victory.

Hence, the mass movement has the capacity to overwhelm the state. The occupation, as an invented space of democracy, forced the state to recognize their right to housing, allowing them to live in the occupied houses. By exercising their right to participation, the occupiers have accessed their right to appropriation. By activating citizens’ rights in claiming housing, the homeless have successfully provided themselves with shelters. People power trumps state and elite power.

The potency of a mass movement continued to be demonstrated when the occupiers started to build communities that were responsive to their needs, caring towards each other, and empowered. All these were still carried out under the strategy of AOM. There was continued education on the importance of being a community while understanding and responding to the public’s reaction on the occupation. KADAMAY also continued with the formation of new committees according to their needs, mobilizations on asserting ‘legal’ ownership of the houses and provision of public utilities, and networking to other interest groups or sectors sympathetic to their cause. KADAMAY continued to be part of a mass movement that puts a premium on collective action while living harmoniously with each other. It has created an alternative

lifeworld that could be the beginnings of what Lefebvre envisioned of a true urban life and was achieved through the ethical actions towards right to participation and right to appropriation.

The government perceived KADAMAY as a lawless mob but their actions prior, during, and after the occupation were ethically sound. Their strategy of AOM embodies informed and organized action. They moved as one as they educated, consulted, and coordinated themselves. They set dialogues with concerned offices and performed the occupation without any violence. Most importantly, they were eligible beneficiaries.

Some segments of the public called KADAMAY ‘thieves’ but the occupation was a way to take back property. They utilized thousands of empty and deteriorating houses and conscientiously built their community. Vilified and isolated during the first months of the occupation, the occupiers relied on themselves. These were people who had nothing, and they hardly knew each other as they came from different areas, but they shared whatever they had. Through their common experience and appreciation of collective action, the occupiers became more caring towards one another. Furthermore, an amiable atmosphere enveloped the mass movement. Goodwill and solidarities flowed from allied sectors, who applauded the occupiers in their political action. They visited the occupiers, brought provisions, and built utilities to help occupiers cope in their new villages. A year later, it was the occupiers turn to show their support when they joined workers of a nearby factory on the picket line.

The occupation strengthened the Philippine mass movement in terms of morale, learnings, and numbers. The immersions of various sectors in the occupied sites during the first year of the occupation demonstrated the mass movement's high spirits and solidarity. It provided the mass movement inspiration and lessons on its power and its tactics. Filipino sociologist and professor Gerardo Lanuza opined,

“Occupy Bulacan is a manifestation and a testimony to the growing power and the courage, as well as the... radical initiative of those coming from the urban poor sector; to push for the rights in a more dramatic, beyond the usual parliamentary legal struggle... I'm not saying it's illegal. It's pushing for something beyond the usual, the expected traditional, way of protesting and pushing for social change.” (G. Lanuza, personal communication, July 23, 2018).

The occupation has also become a vehicle to organize and mobilize people. The occupiers have become active participants of sectoral mobilizations such as Labour Day and even mobilizations that were not directly affecting the urban poor such as the protest against Martial Law. This confirms that the occupiers' consciousness has progressed from the sectoral issue of housing to broader societal issues affecting their plight as urban poor. They have grasped that fundamental changes were needed to address their concerns. At the same time, participation in these mobilizations was a way of showing solidarity to other marginalized sectors. A broad mass movement is needed to sustain and continue taking back the economy and building the renewed urban life.

6.6 Summary and Conclusion: Legitimacy and Significance of Occupy Bulacan

Occupy Bulacan is a counter-project, whose legitimacy lies in taking back property without undergoing the legal motions of a liberal democratic governance and instead through the collective action of a social movement. It casts a hefty significance on the housing justice movement because it 1) exposed the crisis of a neoliberal state housing, 2) restored the domination of use value over exchange value of housing, 3) performed a counter-project that laid groundwork for a commons, 4) showed the constant class conflict over an alternative lifeworld, 5) demonstrated the potency of a mass movement in performing a counter-project towards urban life, and 6) reaffirmed that occupation is an effective place-based strategy in claiming back space and wielding power.

The insertion of neoliberalism in public housing created the crisis of socialized housing, characterized by the inefficiency of its services and commodification of housing itself. Being ruled by the oligarchy and having a rent-seeking capitalist economy, space is valorized, and housing services have become a profit-making endeavor where housing is accessible only to those who are willing to exchange for a higher value. The involvement of the private sector has reduced the role of the state as a provider of housing services into a mortgage broker. With the private sector's role getting significant, the state is slowly moving away from providing shelter to the underprivileged as demonstrated by its diminishing housing budget.

The meager allocation for housing has established a screening system that discriminates beneficiaries and generates additional levels of bureaucracy that politicize the housing

application process. These processes have compromised the urban poor's right to appropriation. The system has forced them to occupy the idled houses, leading to the second significance of the occupation – restoring the domination of use value of housing over its exchange value. This legitimizes the occupation as it fulfilled the prerequisite of Lefebvre's urban life.

The occupation was a counter-project towards a just urban life. It took ethical actions towards the right to participation of the urban poor. Starting from the way it gathered the poor for consultations on their housing needs, to educating them on their plight, to organizing them into a movement, up to occupying the housing and creating a community. The occupation became a portal to commoning as occupiers strived to create a community that was responsive to their needs, caring towards each other, and supportive to the cause of other marginalized sectors. A commons is supposed to be widely used by anyone and though the occupied houses were considered private properties, they were open to accommodate other KADAMAY members in dire need of shelter under the consensus of the membership. The occupation has taught the occupiers the importance of doing and sharing things together and this has continued as they meet challenges after the occupation. The lack of provisions, basic utilities, and jobs in their new locality were typical contributing factors to economic stress, which could have led to anti-social acts. However, the occupiers addressed these through continued education, collective action, and support from their allies. They needed to be self-reliant and thus, initiated a public well, electric cooperative, store cooperative, urban garden, day care, among others. Not only did they fulfil Gibson-Graham et. al.'s ethics for maintaining and growing a commons, but also for supporting the well-being of each other through collective entrepreneurial activities. Both strengthen the occupation's claim to legitimacy.

Occupy Bulacan was a counter-project, but like any other attempt on creating a more just urban life, it has been constantly challenged. The creation of a counter-space or a commons was evident in their first year after the occupation. During my initial visit to the occupied villages for preliminary research, which was a few months after the occupation, I felt the dynamism and positivity the occupiers had. The success of the takeover built the confidence of the occupiers and removed the pressure of housing insecurity, allowing them to create a collective life that is responsive to their needs. They had agreed rules for peace and order in their new communities; health committees on every village; and they had time for shared leisure and recreation. But this harmonious collective life was threatened by the recent developments in the housing villages. A

joint resolution had already been signed, and thus, the public thought the houses had already been legally distributed. In actual fact, the occupiers had not yet received their entry passes. During my field work, which was the second year after the occupation, the occupiers were still attempting to live a collective life but some of the fervent vibe was lost. Their time and effort had been divided between creating a commons and dealing with harassments, political repression, trumped-up charges, and other underhanded plots to discredit them and undermine the gains of the occupation. A counter-project is indeed a never-ending class struggle between the ruled and the rulers. A commons operating in a capitalist society will never be left alone by hegemonic powers.

Occupy Bulacan demonstrated the power of a mass movement in performing a counter-project towards an urban life. The urban poor, other marginalized and allied sectors, the strategy of AOM, and the repertoire of resistance all constitute the mass movement that made the occupation a success. The thousands of urban poor lend the critical mass needed to overwhelm the state authorities. Allied sectors and groups provided the support to sustain the occupation, battle legal mechanisms, and inform the public of its legitimacy. The occupiers primarily attributed their success to their collective action, which was learned and harnessed through the strategy of AOM. Through AOM and the mass movement, the ethical actions of right to participation were performed, making the occupation legitimate.

Occupy Bulacan is a continuation of the struggle of the Philippine urban poor movement for housing and land rights since the 1970s. It disrupted the country's postcolonial liberal democracy and neoliberal economy. The nation was taken by surprise but looking at the history of the movement and the urban poor, nothing was new other than the tactic of occupation. In the 1970s, the urban poor movement also did protests, barricades, and negotiations. They demanded resettlement when a state infrastructure project was about to dislocate them. It took more than five years before they were given housing, though not all their demands were met. Occupy Bulacan was organized in eight months, houses were seized, and negotiations on their legality are still ongoing as of December 2019. Nothing is being handed over to the urban poor without a struggle.

Occupy Bulacan is also a contribution to the on-going claim for housing rights and social justice worldwide. In the last decade, there has been also a surge of housing justice movements.

As urban areas are racing toward to be the next global city, gentrification and real estate speculation have been rendering people homeless. While it differs in terms of its means and ends, Occupy Bulacan echoes the Occupy movement's outrage against social and economic inequalities.

Finally, Occupy Bulacan reaffirmed that occupation is an effective place-based strategy in wielding power. Colonial powers had used it before under the guise of divine right. Nation-states continue to exploit it today for their economic interests and imperialist ambitions. But social movements, now and in the past, have revealed that occupation can also reverse hegemonic control. Through occupation, ordinary people can collectively claim back space in the guise of building an alternative lifeworld.

The occupation was a political and social practice of right to participation in creating a just urban future. It has become a testimony of how a mass movement struggle can transcend the law in advocating for social change. It was an exercise of radical citizenship mobilized on invented spaces of democracy, where the poor acted beyond what they were expected to, not waiting any longer for top-down rules and processes to decide on their claims. It was not a sporadic action by individuals or a loose group. It was a deliberated action by an urban poor movement, which was an organized section of society. It was a powerful place-based strategy that ordinary people can perform in claiming back space. Occupy Bulacan is one of the highlights in the never-ending struggle of the urban poor for their right to the city.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Local Housing Office Personal Data Sheet

(Requirement for Housing Application)

Republic of the Philippines
Municipality of Pandi
Local Housing Office

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

NO. OF CHILDREN: _____

NO. OF YEARS IN PANDI: _____

Name of Applicant *(*Maiden Name if FEMALE):* _____
(First Name) (Middle Name) (Last Name)

Complete Address: _____
(House No., Street, Barangay, Municipality, Province)

Educational Attainment: _____

Age : _____ Gender : _____ Civil Status : _____ Birthplace: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Skills: _____
(mm/dd/yyyy)

Occupation/Business: _____ Monthly Family Income: _____

Contact No: _____ Valid ID's: _____

Name of Spouse *(*Maiden Name if FEMALE):* _____
(First Name) (Middle Name) (Last Name)

Date of Birth: _____ Occupation: _____
(mm/dd/yyyy)

Birthplace: _____ Income: _____

FAMILY MEMBERS/DEPENDENTS:

Full Name (First Name, MI, Surname)	Relationship	Age	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Monthly Income (₱)

(✓) ___ House Owner ___ Renter ___ Sharer

Signature over Printed Name

Appendix B: National Housing Authority Sworn Application Form



Office of the President
National Housing Authority

NOT FOR SALE

Annex A1

SWORN APPLICATION FORM

Date of Application _____

The AMO Head, _____
Thru: The Project Manager _____

Subject: Lot/Unit No. _____ Block/Bldg. No. _____ Phase No. _____
Survey No. _____

(Name and Location of Project)

Sir/Madam:

In accordance with NHA rules and regulations which I and my family agree to comply with faithfully, I hereby apply: (Please check)

A1. TO **PURCHASE** **LEASE A RESIDENTIAL UNIT**
 Lot Only House & Lot MRH/Condominium Unit

A2. FOR TRANSFER OF A RESIDENTIAL UNIT
 Hereditary Succession Disposition to Compulsory heirs Disposition to Third Parties

B. APPLICANT'S IDENTITY: (For married female applicant/spouse, indicate mother's surname)

NAME: _____

Date of Birth _____ (Last) _____ (First) _____ (Middle) _____ (Mother's Surname)
 Place of Birth _____ Civil Status _____ Citizenship _____

Residence/Address _____

Contact Numbers: (Res.) _____ Office _____

TIN No. _____ GSIS/ SSS/ Pag-IBIG Policy No. _____

Name of Spouse: _____

Date of Birth: _____ (Last) _____ (First) _____ (Middle) _____ (Mother's Surname)
 Place of Birth: _____

C. APPLICANT'S FAMILY COMPOSITION:

NAME	RELATION TO APPLICANT	CIVIL STATUS	AGE	EMPLOYMENT/ SOURCE OF INCOME
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

D. APPLICANT'S TOTAL FAMILY INCOME PER MONTH: (Php _____)

E. FAMILY REAL PROPERTY HOLDINGS

I certify that my spouse and I:

- Do not own nor under contract to buy any real property in the Philippines.
- Have never availed of any form of government housing assistance, nor violated Section 14 of RA 7279.
- Are not professional squatters, nor members of a squatting syndicate.

I further certify that I am making this application for the sole purpose of acquiring a residential unit for my family and not as DUMMY or AGENT of any other party.

Any false statement given by me hereinabove shall be sufficient cause for the CANCELLATION of the award, the contract that may be executed by NHA in my favor and the title that may be issued to me as a result of this application, and the forfeiture of all payments that may have been made therefor without prejudice to any administrative, criminal or civil action that may be brought by the NHA against me in accordance with existing laws.

(Signature of Applicant)

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me in _____, Philippines; this _____ day of _____ 20____, **AFFIANT**, having exhibited to me his/her _____ I.D. No. _____.

NOTARY PUBLIC

Doc. No. _____
Page No. _____
Book No. _____
Series of 20 _____

Appendix C: KADAMAY Socio-Economic Form



SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION FORM KALIPUNAN NG DAMAYANG MAHIHIRAP

Isulat ang sagot sa blangko (____). Lagyan ng tsek (✓) ang kahon (☐).

1. Pangalan ng Ulo ng Pamilya (*Maaring babae, kabilang na ang mga balo/hiwalay/solo parents. Ilagay ang buong pangalan sa pagkadalaga*)

Pangalan _____ Apelyido _____ Apelyido ng Ina _____

Kasarian Lalake Babae
Edad ____ Petsa ng Kapanganakan _____ MM/DD/YY
Lugar ng Kapanganakan _____
Munisipyo/Syudad, Probinsya

2. Pangalan ng Asawa

Pangalan _____ Apelyido _____ Apelyido ng Ina _____

Kasarian Lalake Babae
Edad ____ Petsa ng Kapanganakan _____ MM/DD/YY
Lugar ng Kapanganakan _____
Munisipyo/Syudad, Probinsya

3. Estado Sibil

- Binata Dalaga
- May-Asawa
- Nagsasamang Di-Kasal
- Hiwalay Balo
- Iba pa (*Tukuyin*) _____

4. Relihiyon

- Romano Katoliko
- Evangelista
- Protestante
- Iglesia Ni Cristo
- IFI Islam
- Iba pa (*Tukuyin*) _____

5. Mga Anak na Nakadepende (kung meron)

Pangalan	Edad	Lugar ng Paaralan / Hanapbuhay (<i>Kung aplikable</i>)

7. Antas na inabot sa pag-aaral? _____

8. Uring pinagmulan ng angkan

- Manggagawa Magsasaka
- Peti-Burges (*Intelektwal/Propesyunal/Maliit na Negosyante*)
- Malaking Negosyante Panginoong Maylupa

9. Saan tumira sa huling limang taon?

10. May malapit na kamag-anak na nasa serbisyo sa gobyerno, pulis at militar?

- Wala Meron: Anong opisina? _____

11. Mga organisasyong kinapapalooban:

6. Mga Kamag-anak na Nakadepende (kung meron)

Pangalan	Edad	Relasyon / Lugar ng Paaralan / Hanapbuhay

12. Panirahan at yutilidad

Nakatira sa sariling lupa at bahay
Ilang taong nakatira? _____

Benepisyaryo ng Programang Pabahay

- Off-city relocation
- In-City relocation (MRB/tenement, iba)
- CMP

Ilang taon nang benepisyaryo? _____

Buwanang amortisasyon: Php _____

Komunidad na dating tinirhan: _____

Financial assistance na natanggap kung meron: Php _____

Nakatira sa hindi sariling lupa at bahay

- Pampublikong lupa
- Pribadong lupa
- Pinagtatalunang Lupa (*contested*)
- Delikadong lugar (*danger areas*)

Ilang taong nakatira? _____

Nangungupahan

Ilang taong nangungupahan? _____

Upa sa bahay: Php _____

Nakikitira

Ilang taong nakikitira? _____

Katiwala

Ilang taong katiwala? _____

13. Kabuhayan

Walang trabaho

Pribadong Kawani Pampublikong Kawani

Kontraktwal

Regular

Ilang taong nagtatrabaho? _____

Saan nagtatrabaho? Anong kumpanya/ahensya? _____

Malamanggagawa

Sari-sari store Bendor Drayber

Nangangalakal Labandera

Karpintero Iba pa (*Tukuyin*) _____

Ilang taon na sa hanapbuhay? _____

Saan naghahanapbuhay? _____

Magkano ang arawang kita? Php _____

Magkano ang buwanang kita? Php _____

Magkano ang karagdagang kita mula sa ibang naghahanapbuhay na kapamilya/kaanak? Php _____

Magkano ang buwanang gastos? Php _____

Suplay ng kuryente: Wala Meron

Kung meron: Direkta Submeter

Iba pang koneksyon (*Tukuyin*) _____

Rate: Php _____/kwh *Buwanang bayad: Php* _____

Suplay ng tubig: Wala Meron

Kung meron: Direkta Submeter

Iba pang koneksyon (*Tukuyin*) _____

Rate: Php _____/cu. meter *Buwanang bayad: Php* _____

Bilang patunay na totoo ang lahat ng impormasyon na nasa itaas, ako ay lumalagda:

Pangalan: _____ Pirma: _____ Petsa: _____

Appendix D: Sample Interview Questions

Interview questions for occupiers – village leaders

1. How did you become a member of KADAMAY?
2. How did you become a Village leader?
3. What is your role as a leader?
4. What is the organizational structure of KADAMAY?
5. What was the type of your housing tenure before the occupation?
6. How did you arrive on the decision that you would occupy the houses?
7. What were your preparations for the occupation?
8. Can you please narrate your experience during the occupation?
9. What is your reaction with the negative feedbacks from government officials and netizens?
10. How did the people around your village react to the occupation? How did you handle these?
11. What are your views on housing right and right to property?
12. What are the challenges as a leader, both past and present, that you have faced/are facing and their resolutions?
13. What is the current campaign of KADAMAY regarding Occupy Bulacan, if any? What is your future direction with the occupation?

Interview questions for occupiers – village members

1. How did you become a member of KADAMAY?
2. What is your role as a member?
3. What is the organizational structure of KADAMAY?
4. What was the type of your housing tenure before the occupation?
5. How did you arrive on the decision that you would occupy the houses?
6. What were your preparations for the occupation?
7. Can you please narrate your experience during the occupation?
8. What is your reaction to the negative feedbacks from government officials and netizens?
9. How did the people around your village react to the occupation? How did you handle these?
10. What are your views on housing right and right to property?
11. What are the challenges of your organization, both past and present, that you have faced/are facing and their resolutions?
12. What is the current campaign of KADAMAY regarding Occupy Bulacan, if any? What is your future direction with the occupation?

Interview questions for KADAMAY leaders/officers (both national and local)

1. How did you become a leader of KADAMAY?
2. What is your role as a leader?
3. What is the organizational structure of KADAMAY?
4. What is the relationship between national and local KADAMAY?

5. How did you arrive on the decision that you would occupy the houses?
6. What were your preparations for the occupation?
7. Can you please narrate your experience during the occupation?
8. What is your reaction with the negative feedbacks from government officials and netizens?
9. How did the people around your village react to the occupation? How did you handle these?
10. Did you have allies or other organizations that supported you during the occupation? How did they show their support?
11. What are your views on housing right and right to property?
12. What are the challenges as a leader, both past and present, that you have faced/are facing and their resolutions?
13. What is the current campaign of KADAMAY regarding Occupy Bulacan, if any? What is your future direction with the occupation?
14. How do you see the relations of Occupy Bulacan to the Philippine social movement? How about with the global Occupy movement?

Interview questions for government housing officers

1. What is your office responsible for? What does your job entails?
2. What is the status of socialized housing? Who are the most in need? How many are needed (backlog)?
3. What is the application process for housing?
4. Who are qualified for housing?
5. What are the requirements for a housing application?
6. What are the different financial options that applicants could avail when applying for housing?
7. What is your reaction to the occupation? What did your office do when the occupation took place?
8. Prior to the occupation, were there any negotiations between your office and KADAMAY? Did KADAMAY members applied for housing before the occupation?
9. What is the status now of those who occupied and the house they occupied? Are the houses awarded to them?
10. What do you think should be done with the occupiers?
11. Is there any assistance offered to the occupiers?
12. How should homelessness or shortage of housing be addressed?
13. What are your views on housing right and right to property?

Interview questions for local government official

1. What is your office responsible for? What does your job entails?
2. What is your reaction to the occupation?
3. What reactions have you heard from your constituent communities regarding the occupation?
4. What is your reaction with Pres. Duterte's decision on allowing the occupiers remain in the houses?
5. What did your office do when the occupation took place?

6. Have you communicated with the occupiers? What have you talked about?
7. Is there any assistance offered to the occupiers?
8. How should homelessness or shortage of housing be addressed by your municipality? Does the municipality have its housing program?
9. How many housing projects are located in your municipality/area of responsibility? Are they constructed by the local or national government?
10. In your view, what should be the role of the national and local government agencies in relocating informal settlers or homeless?
11. What assistance do you need for the national government in terms of housing the current occupiers? How about for future relocatees?
12. What is your view on housing right and right to property?

Interview questions for media practitioners

1. What is your first reaction to the occupation and perspective of the occupation?
2. How did you convey your view of the occupation with your media output?
3. Have you communicated with the occupiers? What have you talked about?
4. Have your views changed regarding the occupation after talking to them?
5. What reactions have you heard from your fellow journalists?
6. What is your reaction with Pres. Duterte's decision on allowing the occupiers remain in the houses?
7. What do you think is the role of media with controversial issues such as the occupation? How should media handle such issues?
8. What are your views on housing right and right to property?
9. As a person of media, what can you say about the netizens' comments on the occupy? Are you aware of them? Do you think they represent voices of the people or part of the "fake news" machinery?
10. Are there any censorship on the news on the Occupy or any pressure on how its news is going to be delivered?

Appendix F: Sample Verbal Consent Script

Good day! I am Hazel Dizon, a master's student of Geography at York University. I am here to interview you for my thesis entitled "Occupy Movement, Rights and Property, and Housing Take-over in the Philippines".

My research objectives are: to understand why KADAMAY needs to occupy government-built houses even without the approval of the government and to know and examine the different reactions of various social actors with the occupation. To achieve these objectives, I will interview different social actors, record and analyze their interviews. A written output and a presentation are the expected outputs of the study.

As one of the research participants, your interview will last between 1 and 1.5 hours. An inducement of \$5, in cash or in kind, will be given to you. I do not foresee any risk or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with me, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you decide to stop participating, you may withdraw without penalty, financial or otherwise, and you will still receive the promised inducement. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

The copy of your interview will be stored electronically in a password-protected file, hard drive and computer. It will be kept indefinitely as it might be a reference for future research use. Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

I might use the data collected in this research project in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review. Any secondary use of anonymized data will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at hmdizon@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Philip F. Kelly at pfkelly@yorku.ca. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Geography at gradgeog@yorku.ca.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to

the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

With consideration of the things mentioned, do you <<fill in participant name here>>, consent to participate in the study “Occupy Movement, Rights and Property, and Housing Take-overs in the Philippines” conducted by me, Hazel Dizon, this day of <<date of interview >>?

Have you understood the nature of this project and wish to participate?

Do you allow your interview be recorded by an audio device?

Have you understood that you are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this form and that you are giving your consent verbally?

Thank you.