

Hope, home and insecurity: Gendered labours of resilience among the urban poor of Metro Cebu, the Philippines

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Abstract

This article traces the labours of hope embedded in the everyday social reproductive practices of urban poor homeowner association members in Metro Cebu, the Philippines. It explores how aspirations for housing and land tenure security and the (failed) promises of opportunity bound in the urban materialise in the narratives and activities of women and men living in informal settlements. I argue that the sociality of hope, which propels and sustains homeowner associations, produces gendered labours of resilience amidst everyday circumstances of poverty, uncertainty, risk and displacement. As I reveal, these care-based practices constitute expressions of hope that are driven by moral codes associated with the family, industriousness and service to others. These findings reinforce the utility of hope as an analytical lens in geographical studies; one which broadens conceptualisations of labour beyond economic production to include, in this case, the emotional embodiments and reproductive activities that underpin people's everyday resilience.

Keywords

Hope, resilience, social reproduction, gender, labour, Philippines

Introduction

This is my dream house. When I was . . . shopping . . . I saw this picture and I thought [i]t is nice. Maybe it is my ambition, because I think if you have no ambition in your life you will just remain so very poor. It is good to have ambition so I bought [the picture, and] . . . at that time,

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I was thinking [wishing] . . . that I would be able to have that house for myself. My thoughts were already travelling to the future, and I was happy, even in if only in my dreams . . .

Sally is 35 years old, has eight children and lives in a landslide-prone, government-owned resettlement area in the hills along the periphery of Cebu City. She and her family were relocated here in 2005 following their eviction from a publicly owned lot in the downtown port area, which had been earmarked by the state for development. A city bordered by mountains along its northwest periphery and the sea to its east, associated land shortages coupled with a proliferating and increasingly competitive market for commercial and property development, has made land tenure insecurity one of the most pressing issues affecting the urban poor of Metro Cebu. Like many other informal settlers, Sally is a member of her local homeowner association, a decision motivated by her aspirations relayed in the above quote of a more secure future for her and her family. This article explores the emotional and physical labours of urban poor homeowner association members, focusing on expressions of hope in the narratives and practices of respondents. Specifically, I reflect on how hope is articulated and performed by individuals and via the collective, analysing the work of this affective register in building and sustaining people's agency and emotional endurance amidst contexts of changing but persistent conditions of risk and insecurity. I also consider the role of homeowner associations in mobilising and maintaining feelings of hopefulness among urban poor informal settlers and the utility of these practices in local resilience-building. I argue that the emotional and material production of resilience is both bound within, and driven by, hopeful labours, which are premised around aspirations of housing and land tenure security first and foremost, and sustained through social cohesion, feelings of belonging, and cultural values of family orientation, faith and public service.

My analysis draws on seven months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2016 and 2017 in five informal settlements, all of which were considered danger zones owing to their vulnerability and exposure to various types of environmental and anthropogenic hazards. Seeking to understand how individuals living in these communities perceive, experience and respond to risk and insecurity, I engaged as a participant observer in household activities and community meetings and conducted focus group discussions (10 in total with 61 individuals, 60% of whom were female) and in-depth interviews (44 in total, 66% female participants) with local residents. Given the difficulty of capturing the complexities of people's emotional and material realities using traditional research methods (Dodman, 2003; Young and Barrett, 2001), more than half of the interviews incorporated an auto-photographic activity which encouraged respondent-led dialogue and life story-telling, offering me invaluable insights into the intimate relationships, challenges and tenacity that make up their day-to-day.

My entry into these neighbourhoods was facilitated by FORGE, a local non-governmental organisation working to create more 'just and resilient communities' in Cebu by enabling 'poor and marginalised communities in identifying and addressing personal, family, community and social issues and risks through community organising and social outreach' (FORGE, 2020: no page). Much of FORGE's work is conducted vis-a-vis local homeowner associations, whose membership typically numbers between 20 and a few hundred households, bound by their geographic proximity and status as structure owners (despite not owning the land). Across the archipelago, homeowner associations serve as important political platforms through which the urban poor can collectively contest policies and practices that adversely or unfairly affect them and lobby the state or private land-owners for resources. This includes requests for infrastructural investments and site development, as well as efforts to secure financial compensation and relocation support in the

context of forced or ‘negotiated’ evictions. These organisations are also proving pivotal to the community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) and resilience-building interventions of local governments, who target these established networks through knowledge dissemination and governance programmes while also inadvertently benefiting from the labour and initiative of association members working to address socio-environmental issues in their communities.

As I have discussed at length elsewhere (see Ramalho, 2019a), participation in urban poor homeowner association activities is notably feminised, in numbers if not always authority; a pattern that I suggest is informed by gendered embodiments of risk and insecurity. These subjectivities, which extend from gendered norms, identities, mobilities and associated divisions of labour, influence how women and men speak about and internalise everyday and exceptional encounters with risk (Ramalho, 2019a). Building on these themes of labour and participation, this article considers the emotional geographies of resilience-building among urban poor informal settlers, with a focus on how hope is expressed and enacted individually and through the association. I begin with a brief discussion of the gendered political economy of resilience-building discourse and programming, highlighting its parallels with neoliberal principles and modes of governance. Following this, I consider the hope–resilience nexus and make a case for the theoretical and applied value of exploring this relationship through a focus on social reproduction. The subsequent empirical sections trace the emotional aspects of homeowner association membership and participation. Paying attention to the gendered nuances in respondents’ narratives and practices, my analysis reveals the influence of socio-cultural values associated with family, faith and service to others on how hope and resilience are articulated and performed.

By analysing resilience through the lens of the emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of everyday life that enable people to survive and persevere under difficult circumstances, this article contributes to a rich body of feminist scholarship that stretches the boundaries and valuation of ‘labour’ and ‘productivity’ beyond their traditionally narrow economic confines (see Alessandrini, 2012; Federici, 2004; Katz, 2001). It does this by making visible the centrality of social reproduction and gendered practices of care to the resilience of marginalised groups (Brickell, 2020; Ramalho, 2020), tracing the moral and material terrains that produce and sustain feelings of hopefulness. This hope, I argue, operates as an affective force that enables people to cope with their present circumstances of uncertainty and compels emotional and physical labours which contribute to individual and collective resilience. In so doing, this article offers an alternative to the masculinist and objectivist standpoints that dominate theorisations and practices of urban resilience, creating space instead for a political understanding of these processes and their transformative potential, which is grounded in people’s everyday experiences.

Labouring bodies of urban resilience-building

In the Philippines as elsewhere, aspirations of resilience are increasingly influencing how cities are being imagined, developed and governed (Acuti and Bellucci, 2020; Pearson et al., 2014; Ramalho, 2019b). Having long featured within discussions about climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR), the 2005–2015 Hyogo Framework for Action being a notable example, the past decade has seen numerous actors and disciplines adopt the principle of resilience within their calls for a more sustainable future. Perhaps a reflection of the term’s growing global significance and multidisciplinary appeal, the 2030 Development Agenda explicitly acknowledges that strengthening resilience is fundamental to achieving and sustaining development outcomes (Bahadur et al., 2015: 2). Broadly understood to encompass

the capacity of an individual, community or system to anticipate, absorb, adapt and recover from chronic and acute shocks or stresses (Bahadur et al., 2015; Folke, 2016), a consensus on what resilience means in practice for different stakeholders, how it is best achieved and who is, and should be, responsible for it has yet to be reached (Cutter, 2016; Meerow and Newell, 2016).

Centralised efforts to realise urban resilience are often operationalised through large infrastructure projects informed by techno-scientific understandings of risk that focus on hazards and risk mitigation. In Cebu, narratives accompanying these mega development projects often rest on and reinforce the stigmatisation and displacement of informal settlers from the city, framing the poor as obstacles to resilient, sustainable and progressive urban presents and futures while neglecting the structures of inequality underpinning their vulnerability (Ramalho, 2019b). The political dimensions of resilience-building are further obscured by assertions that ‘communities can and should self-organise to deal with uncertainty’ (Welsh, 2014: 20); a stance which locates much of the responsibility for action and adaptation within marginalised communities and justifies state disengagement through claims of expanded agency and empowerment (Grove, 2014; Ramalho, 2019a). This has prompted many critics of resilience to highlight its likeness to neoliberal ethics of governmentality (Davoudi, 2016; Joseph, 2018; Walker and Cooper, 2011; Welsh, 2014), alerting us to the potential co-optation of resilience paradigms to advance agendas that reinforce capitalist values and the power of the status quo.

Reflecting on his experience with Jamaica’s national disaster management agency, Grove (2014: 240) concludes ‘that resilience operates through an affective economy of fear, hope, and confidence that enacts an immunitary biopolitics’ whose objective is ‘to construct an artificial and depoliticised form of adaptive capacity that does not threaten neoliberal order’. He describes how participatory techniques were used by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODEPEM) to engineer ‘[p]articipants’ feelings of fear, uncertainty, hope, trust, and gratitude . . . in order to increase peoples’ motivation to participate in ODEPEM’s activities . . . and thus *become* (emphasis in original) active agents in their own survival’ (2014: 249). Walker and Cooper (2011: 144) similarly assert that the extent to which resilience has been successful in ‘colonising multiple arenas of governance is due to its intuitive ideological fit with a neoliberal philosophy’; a narrative wherein crises are naturalised (Evans, 2011: 224) and hegemonic beliefs aligned with global capitalism are reinforced (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012: 266). Contending that both disasters and adaptive capacities are produced by the structures and currents of global capitalism, MacKinnon and Derickson (2012: 254–5) thus caution against blindly endorsing a language that conceals these forces, privileges existing socio-spatial relations and misdirects responsibility onto local actors under the auspices of community action.

Furthermore, in failing to consider hierarchies of power and inequality as they affect different groups and individuals likely to be implicated in these processes (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012; Matin et al., 2018; Ziervogel et al., 2017), the costs and contributions of those who bear the burdens for ‘building back better’ are rendered invisible; labours that I among others have argued are gendered and notably feminised (Bradshaw, 2013; Enarson, 2006; Ramalho, 2019a; Tanyag, 2018). These labours of social reproduction extend far beyond the spaces and activities of emergency preparedness and disaster response normatively associated with community-based resilience. Rather, as I demonstrate below, they are embodied in everyday practices of survival, support, adaptation and perseverance (Ramalho, 2020) which are intimately tied to affective and moral structures (Anderson,

2010; Brickell, 2020; Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Grothmann and Patt, 2005; Grove, 2014), reinforcing the importance of moving beyond 'objective', technocratic, material preoccupations to also consider the subjective, psychological and social dynamics that create or constrain resilience.

Notwithstanding the exploitation of gendered and racialised labouring bodies and the legitimisation of state withdrawal enabled through resilience discourse and programming, as highlighted by Zeiderman (2016: 14), resilience can also be 'used to confront neoliberalism and the paradigm of market order on which it rests', as techniques of governance are reconfigured, resisted and mobilised from below to counter dominant narratives and structures. Such perspectives recognise the multiple forms that agency takes, including overt public displays of political resistance to one's marginalisation, as well as the mundane practices of survival, sociality and future making (Brickell, 2020; Ramalho, 2020; Shaw, 2020) that interrupt efforts to dehumanise and subjugate certain populations. In the interest of bridging these polarising conceptual debates and providing a definition that is explicitly grounded in the advancement of socially just outcomes, Matin et al. (2018: 198) propose the concept of 'equitable resilience', which they define as 'a form of human-environmental resilience which takes into account issues of social vulnerability and differentiated access to power, knowledge, and resources. It starts from people's own perception of their position within their human environmental system, and accounts for their realities, and of their need for a change of circumstance' (see also Cutter, 2016). This extended definition provides a useful lens for examining the gendered dynamics and broader labours that constitute or contribute to individual and collective resilience, as it acknowledges the importance of understanding the subjectivities and 'power relations that have profound implications for generating or undermining resilience, as well as the persistence and distribution of resilience in different social groups' (Matin et al., 2018: 200, 202).

Rethinking the concept of labour through hope also helps to stretch the conceptual boundaries of resilience, and of labour more generally (Pettit and Lenhard, 2020), recognising immaterial and affective practices within the realm of value-generating 'work' (Alessandrini, 2012; Federici, 2004) and therein challenging patriarchal representations of labour and related dichotomies that render unpaid (and notably female) work invisible (Duffy, 2016). As I demonstrate below, hope may serve as an affective force, where the possibility of future reward compels people to undertake particular labours in the present; what Kuehn and Corrigan (2013) refer to as 'hope labour' (see also Taylor-Collins, 2019) and Duffy (2016: 443) has termed 'aspirational labour', the latter encompassing 'highly gendered, forward-looking ... activities that hold the promise of social and economic capital'. However hope can also be a form of labour in itself, functioning 'as a strategy for coping with the uncertainty of everyday life', as a form of agency (Cook and Cuervo, 2019: 1106 citing Alacovska, 2019). Engaging with hope as an analytical lens draws attention to the range of emotional and physical labours that women and men engage in to cope with their circumstances of precarity and uncertainty, and the centrality of the home to 'practices of survivability' (Brickell, 2020: 7, citing Lees et al., 2018). It offers an entry point for critically unpacking these complex entanglements of governmentality-resistance, vulnerability-agency embedded in resilience-building processes, unseating the binaries that oversimplify messy realities and which render certain spaces and bodies invisible. This extends to the framing of disasters and crises within the realm of the exceptional, when the reality for many of those who are most vulnerable is one of everyday insecurity (Ramalho, 2020), cemented through unequal economic processes and entrenched structural violence; what Anderson et al. (2020) call 'slow emergencies'.

Hope and social reproduction

In climate change and disaster studies, numerous scholars have sought to better understand what makes people resilient, often with a focus on perceptions of risk and associated adaptive capacities (see Gallopín, 2006; Grothmann and Patt, 2005; Smit and Wandel, 2006). Typically approached from a hazards or vulnerability paradigm, the degree to which these studies shed light on the multiple subjective embodiments of risk and resilience, not to mention the broader socio-spatial politics influencing one's affective, material and temporal condition, is limited. The rubric of hope can help advance our understanding of these complex dynamics and the various spaces, subjectivities and practices through which resilience operates, as well as how these processes interact with, and are co-constituted by situated political economies and structures of power. During times of crisis, protracted uncertainty or 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009: 97), hope for the future is often fundamental to people's wellbeing and ability to cope with and navigate life's adversities, to their resilience. For Zournazi (2002: 14–15) '[h]ope can be what sustains life in the face of despair, yet it is not simply the desire for things to come, or the betterment of life. It is the drive or energy that embeds us in the world'. As alluded to above in Grove's account of a participatory DRR initiative in Jamaica, hope is also something that is mobilised and distributed by the state, projected to society through capitalist narratives of trickledown economics and promises of 'upward social mobility' (Hage, 2003: 13); an ideal that many are never able to realise because of their socioeconomic standing and broader structural exclusions that leave them in a state of entrapment (Hage, 2003: 20).

In their rich ethnographic study on hope and resilience among young men and women in Afghanistan, Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010: 71) contend that 'Hope arises from a sense of moral and social order embodied in the expression of key cultural values: faith, family unity, service, effort, morals, and honour. These values form the bedrock of resilience, drive social aspirations, and underpin self-respect and dignity'. They identified an intimate relationship between culture and resilience, wherein cultural values operate by 'creating meaning and imparting a moral and social order . . . generating hope to overcome social suffering and everyday violence' (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010: 81). Borrowing Hage's (2003: 20) notion of entrapment, they also note that 'in the absence of a functioning economy and equitable access to basic resources, efforts to promote cultural values can entrap those in a position of vulnerability and powerlessness, while efforts to promote child education arguably raise hope and expectations to the point of illusion and assured frustration', prompting reflection on the ethics of hope from a health and wellbeing perspective.

As is evident across the testimonies of their research respondents, the extra-domestic social reproductive sphere is a key site in which cultural codes and practices are established and performed, grounding people's experiences of resilience and entrapment. Cindy Katz (2001: 711) defines social reproduction as the 'fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life', including the social and material labours of care that sustain people's wellbeing and existence, and 'through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed' (2001: 710). This extends to 'the reproduction of work knowledge and skills, the practices that maintain and reinforce class and other categories of difference, and the learning that inculcates . . . cultural forms and practices that . . . reinforce and naturalize the dominant social relations of production and reproduction' (Katz, 2001: 712). In line with the objectives of this Special Issue of trying to broaden understandings of labour (Pettit and Lenhard, 2020), this definition serves as a useful frame for rethinking the boundaries of work and labour (see Shaw, 2020) from the standpoint of people's everyday geographies and embodiments (Ramalho, 2020), in a way that engages with both the material and the

corporeal in appraisals of situated resilience and the ‘micropolitics of hope’ (Anderson, 2017; Harvey and Krohn-Hansen, 2018). In the empirical analysis that follows, I explore how hope is embodied in the narratives and activities of urban poor informal settlers, and how these labours of social reproduction are tied to their individual and collective resilience.

Dreaming of home

One of the most prominent articulations of hope in my research emerged in conversations with respondents about why they decided to join and/or form a homeowner association. Across the board, this decision was tied to respondents’ aspirations of housing and land tenure security; an action taken in anticipation of what they perceived to be an existing or future threat of demolition and eviction. Nilda (50) who became a member of her local association five years ago said she joined ‘... so that in the future we [our family] would be able to avail of housing programmes [administered via the association]... If the owner ever decides for us to have a relocation, then our family will be included as one of the beneficiaries which is very important’. Nilda’s motives echo those of most respondents, for whom membership in the association was believed to offer some level of assurance that should they ever be evicted, they would not be left landless. Single mother of two, Jean (early 40s) told me: ‘We are anxious about demolition... because this is private property so we never know when the demolition is going to come... But for now... because of [the association]... we have nothing to fear... If there is a demolition, we know where we are going to go [will be relocated] after that’. As reflected in these narratives, respondents’ desires for a better future are also inextricably connected with their fear and anxiety about their current circumstances of insecurity, hope in this instance constituting a form of agency (Alacovska, 2019); a strategy or ‘psychosocial resource’ that enables them to cope with their immediate realities (Cook and Cuervo, 2019: 1104).

Expanding on this perception of protection and security acquired through membership, Marifel (39), the president and co-founder of her local association explained:

We felt that if we had an organisation and we were organised, then... we are united... we are many. And if we are a mass of people, then the landowner won’t just be able to ignore us, he will have to talk with us and negotiate with us. And the City Hall would also listen to us so that we can lobby for our issue.

Hope is present in Marifel’s call for visibility, voice and legitimacy, the decision to form a homeowner association representing hope for their community to be heard and have their claims considered. In this case, the community was lobbying for their right to a relocation site and financial compensation from the private landowner seeking to evict them from their coastal settlement, which in recent years had become highly coveted following the construction of the luxurious commercial and residential SM Seaside complex. Hope is also embedded in the perceived power of collective action articulated in Marifel’s statement ‘*kong united mi, daghang mi*’ (if we are united, we are many), a belief (or hope) that coming together as a group would add impetus for the government and landowner to hear them out and offer a reasonable response.

Related to the pursuit of land tenure security touched on above, the importance of ‘home’ in an ideological and material sense as something that is safe (structurally) and secure in that it cannot be taken away from them, was frequently expressed by both male and female respondents as a factor influencing their decision to join the association. One homeowner association member, Annabelle (early 50s) for example, ‘joined... so that maybe there is a

possibility that I could be a lot owner myself'. When I asked her how membership in the association might facilitate this, she explained: 'I think the association will be able to help us because if the time comes that the government is wanting to sell the lot, then if you are a member, you will be considered part of those who will [be eligible to] buy [it]'. Her neighbour, 27-year-old Glenn, who was born in the area, expressed similar motives: 'the first reason for me joining . . . is because I really want to own a house of my own . . . [Being a member] promises us that once there is a negotiation for selling the land, we hope that one day we will be able to own the land by paying for it'. When read alongside the narratives cited above, Glenn and Annabelle's statements reinforce the strategic temporal dimension underpinning the decision to join a homeowner association. Here, hope and aspirations for a better future appear as central motives; the hope of one day owning their own plot of land, or as one female respondent put it, 'to live in . . . a house that we can really call ours, that we don't have to move from one place to another and a lot that is really ours'.

As touched on in the Introduction, ambitions relating to secure housing prompted mother of eight Sally (35) to volunteer as an officer in her local association when they were threatened with eviction:

For me my main priority is to own my own house and that is the reason why I . . . [was active in the association]. Because I knew that then I would have an opportunity to own my own lot and house . . . I really want[ed] to have this house because I feel that if I already have this house, my children will be secured, knowing that we already have a place to stay of our own . . . A house is very important, especially if you have a family, because if you have a family you need to be together and for you to be able to do that, you need to have a house.

In a conversation with Manuel (43) who had also taken a photograph of his house, he explained: 'For me a family should have a house, because a house will provide you with a place to sleep, to eat, and to do all the things that a family needs to do. If you do not have a house, your own house, then for me, your family will not be complete'. Sally and Manuel's narratives speak to Eggerman and Panter-Brick's (2010) findings from Afghanistan on the relationship between hope and culture. Among informal settler respondents in Metro Cebu, housing and land tenure aspirations are not only driven by feelings of insecurity and survival, but also by cultural values associated with family and kinship. Family-centeredness is widely regarded as one of, if not the most significant of Philippine values (Jocano, 1998; Quisumbing, 1994), with Suazo (n.d.: 8) identifying 'security of the family' as a fundamental feature of this cultural marker. The centrality of family within Philippine culture owes much to the archipelago's Malay roots and Hispanic-Catholic colonisation, both of which identify the family as a critical unit of social organisation and as 'the primary kernel around which wider social networks tend to gather' (Hodder, 2000: 96). As depicted in the statements above, a house is the space within which homemaking practices associated with maintaining and securing kinship and social bonding are made possible and enacted. In addition to providing respondents with a sense of stability, land tenure and housing security also enables them to express this aspect of their Filipino identity and establish dignity through their ability to protect and provide for their family.

Respondents' articulations of hope are intimately tied to the homeowner association. The association gives them a reason to believe that a better future is possible. It serves as a tangible body through which the intangible can be channelled, performed and given life; as an affective space of hope. The real and imagined potential of the homeowner association to help them realise their individual and collective hopes for the future therein becomes

a catalyst for the political advocacy and lobbying efforts performed through these organisations. In other words, hope serves both an individual and political purpose. It emerges as a shared narrative of future possibility and agency under circumstances of insecurity that might otherwise leave them feeling disillusioned and disempowered. As Gherter (2011: 281–82) contends in relation to his ethnographic research in Delhi:

In attempting to carve out a space for the expression of their individual and collective desires – be it by centering the slum as a space of hope or by celebrating their potential to become property owners – these residents too engage in worlding practices . . . [and are] integral vectors in Delhi’s worlding efforts, their aspirations central to both the material and symbolic transformation of the cityscape.

Accordingly, the hopefulness embedded in the community organising efforts of informal settlers in Metro Cebu constitutes a form of emotional labour that encourages the urban poor to make claims on their rights ‘to appear, to dwell, and to be recognized, in the world’ (Shaw, 2020: 14), with palpable implications. Collectively, these affective and material processes contribute to a reworking of the urban. As I discuss below, at the scale of both the household and the association, these hopeful pursuits are further grounded in social reproductive practices, which I argue enhance the resilience of informal settlers.

Aspirations of security and social mobility

Respondents’ yearnings for housing and land tenure security are intimately tied to their desires for social mobility. These aspirations are embodied in various activities that take place within the household. Several respondents described taking on multiple jobs known colloquially as ‘sidelines’ to generate additional income to help cover their basic costs, and if circumstances allowed, for savings could be put towards repairing or extending their house. Father of two and homeowner association member Nelson (35), who was always thinking up ways of making money with his motorcycle so that he could upgrade his house said:

I hope one day to own my lot. That is what I have been praying for, that I will be able to pay for it and own the land . . . I really cannot give them [my children] any wealth after I am gone, but for my two children I wish that this house, they can still live here, and . . . [that] the government will allow us to stay here for a long time.

Similarly Genita (59), the president of her local association told me: ‘For myself, what I am really hoping is that I will be able to repair my roof . . . [and] for my family, I would really like for us to own our own lot, because I am worrying that if I am gone, if I pass away, my children will not be secured with a house’. Although home clearly matters to both women and men, the centrality of domestic spaces to the reproductive and productive activities of Philippine women more than men, and to female identity more broadly (see Chant, 2014; Chant and McIlwaine, 1995), would suggest that the meaning of home to women, and their affective ties to this environment, is likely different to men’s (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2008; Massey, 1994). As I have argued elsewhere (Ramalho, 2019a), these nuanced relationships to home contribute to women’s greater propensity to participate in homeowner association and related risk-management activities; a point that I return to below.

Hopes relating to housing and land tenure security also underscored many of the respondent testimonies linking exposure to hazards with housing quality and location. Following our discussion about her dream house referenced earlier, Sally told me:

At the moment we cannot use the back of our house because of the rain. Where our house is [located], the land is actually uneven [on a slope] so . . . the rain just comes in and we are not be able to sleep well in that part of the house. But our plan is that when we already have the money to repair our house, the floor will be cemented so that it will be even.

Motivated by this aspiration and the need to provide for her children, Sally had recently taken out a loan to set up a *carinderia* (small home-based eatery) from the front of her house. Though busy with customers, she was already struggling with the loan repayments as many of her customers ate from the *carinderia* on credit. Her fellow association member, Jaime (57), who like Sally was relocated to the government-owned resettlement site in 2005, expressed his desire to repair his house so that he would be dry when it rained:

My roof has holes and my foundations already were eaten by termites, so I keep adding wood to prop it up . . . It is really my dream for my house to be repaired because if it rains, it is very difficult . . . to find a place in my house where you will not be wet.

His house, like those of many of his neighbours, was built from the materials he had been able to salvage from his previous lot.

For Jaime and others in the area, dreams of home improvement fuelled their ongoing participation in their association, bolstered by their memory of a housing and livelihood initiative administered by an international NGO to members in the past, that if repeated might enable them to afford new materials. Beneficiaries of this housing programme had been identified based on their attendance and participation in the homeowner association, as Artemio (70), one of the recipients, recollected: ‘We were told . . . that we would be given 15 houses . . . and those with perfect attendance [in the association] are to be given a house . . . It took almost two months to build this house’. Struggling to make ends meet, and often eating only one meal of rice per day, Jaime’s ongoing commitment to the association, regular attendance at meetings and activities, and efforts to pay the monthly membership fee can thus be read as labours that are motivated and sustained by hope. Sharing similarities with Butler’s (2004: 22) reflections on the politicising effects of grief, here, hope operates as a political force that compels informal settlers to organise collectively and engage in the various initiatives of their local homeowner association.

Alongside housing, education was also seen as a gateway to social mobility, with many attributing their difficulties and circumstances of poverty to their lack of educational qualifications, as relayed by mother of four Lorna (35): ‘my dreams is for my children to complete their schooling . . . so that they will not be like us going through difficulties’. These hopes for upward socio-economic mobility were hedged on younger generations, often with great sacrifice to older household members. Homeowner association officer and mother of seven Bebe (33), who has a high school degree and had recently won a writing contest in the barangay, told me:

We are poor so I cannot give my children money or material things for them to use in the future, but I really . . . want them to finish school and I will do anything in my power, with all of my efforts, I will strive, I will struggle, just to make sure that they can continue and finish

schooling... Because since we are poor, we don't have any wealth that we can pass onto them... after we are gone, so the only wealth that we can give them is the gift of education.

As in other global contexts, the idea of education as a pathway to security and upward socio-economic mobility is central to capitalist dogmas which are perpetuated by the Philippine state and closely associated with middle-class ideals and belonging (De Angelis, 2010; Pettit, 2017). Reiterating this idea, Sally said: 'my kids, I always tell them that you should study hard, and get good grades, because that will be your opportunity to get a better job'. Her earlier comment insinuating a link between ambitiousness and socio-economic standing, 'I think if you have no ambition in your life you will just remain so very poor', also reflects this underlying meritocratic moral code that suggests if you work hard work and 'have ambition' you will be able to pull yourself out of poverty (see Savage, 2015).

However in the Philippines, where neoliberal development has produced a surplus of educated labour and limited public and private sector jobs, work in business process outsourcing and export processing zones that might have offered a pathway for social mobility is highly coveted, relegating those with less socio-economic and political capital to the low paying service industry or work in the informal economy. High school graduate Glenn (27), who also completed a vocational course in computer hardware, found himself moving from one *endo*¹ job to another and perpetually searching for more stable employment. Even in his current position as a pharmacy assistant, which he viewed as somewhat more secure, the difficulties of covering daily expenses remained: 'Here... if the owner is impressed with you, you can request to continue working for them and you will still have your job... [However] it is still difficult for us financially... I am not even paid minimum wage'. Given the circumstances of poverty that most households are living in, income generating activities including taking on 'sidelines' are driven by need more than choice. Yet for many, they also constitute labours of hope in as much as they are sustained by the belief that investing in their children's education and/or home improvements will contribute to the security and wellbeing their family. In saying that, the realities of entrapment in precarious housing and livelihoods recounted by Glenn and other respondents reaffirm the many challenges they face in realising these aspirations.

Having faith

Amidst persistent realities of poverty, risk and uncertainty, faith provided an important source of emotional support that helped ease respondents' worries and maintain a sense of hope for the future during times of difficulty. The significance of religiosity to emotional wellbeing was often articulated in conversations about their fears and dreams for the future, as depicted by homeowner association member Christina (45):

Right now I am really hoping and I always pray that we will be able to find a place and have a house of our own. I am always asking for the Lord's help for us to find a relocation site so that we will not [be] worrying for our kids, not worrying for our safety... [M]y dream is to have an easier life. Where I am not always worrying about things. That is my dream. Just always have faith in the Lord... if you have faith in him, he will not abandon you, he'll help you.

Many turned to God in times of desperation. Reflecting on a period of particular hardship in his past, one male respondent relayed 'I was a *shabu* [methamphetamine] addict before, but after getting into prison, I started praying hard, and then eventually after they released me I stopped [using]'. Association officer and mother of four Cheryl (38) also found strength

in God to help her manage the anxieties of everyday life: ‘My husband is . . . always thinking like oh we still need to pay the electric bill, and so I just say to him oh don’t worry too much. We will find a way to pay it . . . I just keep on telling him, we will pray, maybe God will help us’. These testimonies reveal the significance of religion to emotional resilience, with rituals of faith serving ‘as a bedrock for the renewal and strengthening of hope when hope might otherwise be lost’ (Stockdale, 2017: 11). These affective labours can also be read as ‘an abeyance of agency’ (Miyazaki, 2004, cited in Pettit, 2017: 231), wherein feelings of powerlessness around current or future events ‘are placed in the hands of God’ (Pettit, 2017: 231).

Cheryl’s spirituality also influenced her participation in voluntary activities:

Even though I am not an officer assigned to the church I always help because I really feel like I want to serve God. I always pray. Because if it wasn’t for God, my eldest child would have died a long time ago. When my husband was away . . . we were separated as well. It was really only me responsible for my child. It was Jesus that I turned to . . . I think the Lord helps me, so I need to be always in action since he is helping me.

Her insinuation of a moral economy nested in piousness and adherence to Christian values in exchange for existing and future blessings was a recurrent theme across several respondent testimonies, including Bebe: ‘Every Sunday I will go to church . . . Because I think if you really have faith in God, more blessings will come to you and your family, but if you stop having that spirituality, then eventually those blessings will no longer be available or given to you’. A similar perspective was voiced by homeowner association president Tata (42):

This is a picture of the Mama Mary, the Santo Niño and the divine . . . taken at my altar in my house. Every morning, I pray to them . . . I believe that if you keep on helping other people, it’s not that your blessings will come from them or that you will get something from them in return, but the Lord will give to you in other ways.

These accounts of female servitude echo the frequently projected global gender myth of women being ‘naturally’ altruistic, though as Brickell and Chant (2010) importantly highlight, women are socialised into these behaviours.

As illustrated in respondents’ narratives, feminised codes of conduct in the Philippines are embedded in religious idolisations, a point reiterated by association officer and mother of four Daya (38):

That is Mama Mary in the picture. All of the problems in the home and in the community, I try to be responsible for them. I feel responsible for them. And that is the same with Mama Mary. I carry all of the problems of the people and people go to me with their problems and so I try to help them. So that is why I chose to take this picture of Mama Mary . . . Because she is of course a mother, so it is like she is a mother of the community. Whatever problems the community has, she is ready to help always. I think mothers here in our community are like Mama Mary, helping each other out . . . These people who are saints in our religion, they serve as models for how we should live our lives.

Although religion also featured in the testimonies of some male respondents, bar two individuals, their narratives omitted any reference to faith informing their moral conduct, suggesting religion to be a more prominent behavioural influence among women. These observations reinforce well-documented inter-disciplinary findings of a relationship between religiosity and social roles including age, gender and social status, with

‘women . . . everywhere’ being ‘more committed to religion’ (Beit-Hallahmi, 2004: 117–118). According to Stockdale (2017: 159–60) faith is distinct from hope in that ‘faith is more deeply intertwined with our identities, contributing powerfully to how we experience and interpret the world around us, how we understand our places in the world, and the meaning of our lives’, and ‘typically, though not necessarily or always, resilient to evidence about that in which one has faith’. She argues that in the absence of hope, faith sustains individual resilience and brings groups together in ‘moral-political solidarity: that is, solidarity based in a shared moral vision carried out through political action’. Indeed, as I reveal below, these gendered cultural dictates and the aforementioned aspirations of housing and land tenure security operate in tandem and translate into collective gendered labours beyond the household that are critical to the resilience of informal settlers.

Resilience through *bayanihan*

As depicted above, women and men express aspirations for economic and land tenure security, and both in this sense engage in a labour of hope, which is sustained and performed through various practices, from taking on ‘sidelines’ through to saving money for home improvements or investing in their children’s education. Hope also underpins respondents’ decision to join their local homeowner association, the efforts of individuals to save money for monthly membership fees and participate in meetings and seminars equally constituting labours of hope that channel their aspirations through the association. This same principle extends to the duties of individual officers and the collective initiatives of homeowner association members, labours of hope that I argue are gendered and fundamental to local resilience. In order to be legally recognised, homeowner associations must elect officers who lead on the day-to-day running of the association and implementation of initiatives. In informal settlements, these activities tend to focus on land tenure and site development, lobbying the state and private landowners for investments in public infrastructure as well as access to relocation support and financial compensation in cases of forced or ‘negotiated’ evictions. Homeowner associations are also pivotal to CBDRM, with many establishing emergency response teams and targeted by the barangay in knowledge dissemination and risk governance programmes. In all but one of the associations that participated in this research, these 11–12 officers were almost entirely women. Although officers ‘volunteer’ to offer their time and energy, it is important to recognise the ways in which these labours of hope rely on and reproduce socially ascribed gender norms and feminised practices care (Ramalho, 2019a; see also Tanyag, 2018).

A clear example of this is *bayanihan* (*tinabangay* in Cebuano); a Tagalog term denoting the value of collective action during times of need. In the aftermath of disasters, the concept of *bayanihan* is often mobilised by media, the state and civil society to encourage people to come together and volunteer their labour and resources to facilitate a quick recovery. In urban poor homeowner associations, *bayanihan* is a mandated monthly activity, usually focused on garbage clearing, but also extending to infrastructural maintenance including the construction and upkeep of communal roads, toilets and buildings. Members are required to send one representative per household to help on the day, with those unable to attend expected to contribute a small amount of money towards materials or snacks. For many respondents, *bayanihan* was an important way of cultivating and maintaining local resilience. Association officer Artemio explained: ‘When you come together and help one another, they call that *bayanihan* . . . It is important because we are poor. We cannot pay carpenters, so we work by *bayanihan* only. We also have *bayanihan* cleaning of the drains every month’. Another respondent, Bernadita (45) said: ‘*Tinabangay* is important so that we

can solve problems'. Active member and emergency response team volunteer Jeffery (34), also saw *bayanihan* as critical 'because if we don't help each other out, then we can't do anything with our situation [as urban poor]. Nothing can be done or improved'.

As relayed by association president Marifel, *bayanihan* in informal settlements is also motivated by feelings of hope:

This photo shows an area that is connected to the river . . . I took this photo because this part of the river shows you if there is no garbage, this is what it would look like. For me, this is a better situation that I would like . . . [for] all the areas of the river . . . This [other] picture shows again the river and you can see the garbage being carried by the river . . . since people kept putting their garbage by the side . . . What I have been thinking seeing this situation, is that there will come a time where if the government will not do anything to help us . . . then the river will be entirely covered with garbage.

Marifel lives in one of the most populous and congested coastal settlements of Cebu City, an area notorious for its solid waste challenges, where residents, rather than inadequate public infrastructure and service provision, often shoulder the blame. The hopefulness underpinning her and other respondents' participation in *bayanihan* was reaffirmed by Artemio who said: 'we believe that someday this will become a nice place to live'.

Also apparent in Marifel's statement are her feelings of frustration with the lack of state action. She recounted her longstanding efforts to engage the barangay in helping to address this issue:

This . . . river . . . should not have stagnant water like that . . . [I]f ever there is a strong rain, that river might overflow and cause a flood. If the river overflows, the residents will be badly affected, and another danger of this situation is that there are already baby mosquitos, and again this can make the residents sick. So I asked the councillors to organise a community clean-up drive for that area . . . where all residents . . . help the councillors to clean the entire area. But . . . even though I have requested this three times, nothing has happened yet. The first time that I went there they told me next week and nothing happened, so I went back again for a second time and they said next week. Now I have gone back again to ask for it, and they said again maybe next week so I am hoping that it will happen next week.

Both Marifel's account and the earlier testimonies of Artemio, Bernadita and Jeffery insinuate perceptions of state neglect, and an understanding among residents that if they do not organise themselves and take the initiative to improve things in their areas, no one will. In this sense, while the labours of hope of association members contribute to building local resilience, they simultaneously reproduce and validate neoliberal logics of self-reliance and responsabilisation that enable the state to govern from distance (Davoudi, 2016; Joseph, 2018). This echoes Kuehn and Corrigan's (2013: 9) analysis of 'hope labour' as a 'temporal relationship between present and future work . . . that shifts costs and risks onto the individual . . . [and] is naturalized and normalized through neoliberal ideologies' and meritocratic framings that prefigure notions of deserving citizens.

Marifel's experience of making regular visits to City Hall to follow-up on outstanding projects and site development requests was unanimous across all five communities, as relayed to me by Genita: 'Normally I have to go to City Hall at least once a week'. Genita and other officers told me that they would often be made to wait for hours before being seen, only to be told to come back again the following week. In the case of a road tarmacking project in a state-owned resettlement site on the outskirts of Cebu City, this

lobbying process continued for more than five years before the government eventually began implementation. These emotionally taxing, time intensive and expensive labours of hope are almost always (though not exclusively) undertaken by women, who as mentioned make up the majority of officers, with participation in monthly *bayanihan* also notably feminised (see Ramalho, 2019a) for reasons that one respondent, Carol (42), attributes to the gendered moral codes described above:

The reason why women participate more... is because they are more patient [than men]. I can't imagine that my husband would fall in line for a whole day like we have to do when we go to City Hall or any other government offices. Women are more into serving the association than men.

Furthermore, as Casolo and Doshi (2013: 806) remark:

Because social and biological reproductive labour and associated reproductions of cultural meanings are markedly gendered, struggles over land dispossession often have a highly gendered character... This is because land and property relations are implicated in both the reproduction of the relations of production and capital accumulation and the biological and cultural aspects of the social reproduction of subaltern groups.

Indeed, the agency depicted in the advocacy efforts and everyday duties of association officers to secure their tenure and site development claims, through to *bayanihan* initiatives, all constitute hopeful labours of social reproduction, or what Till (2012, cited by Shaw, 2020: 13) describes as 'place-based caring'.

'Place-based caring includes neighbourhood gatherings, community potlucks and organizing political protests. We can also add repainting old houses, picking up trash in streets, installing renewable energy supplies, reclaiming abandoned lots, weeding public parks, volunteering at community centres, or growing urban gardens'; practices nested in socially reproduction that shape 'our understanding of political being-in-the world', but which Shaw warns, 'can [be], and is, easily coopted by... terms like resilience' (Shaw, 2020: 13). Nonetheless, these emotional and physical labours also contribute to a reworking of the urban, in this context, via the homeowner associations that serve as important political platforms through which informal settlers are able to demand, if not claim, their rights to the city, and work together to address issues in their communities, with important implications for their material realities and capacities to imagine an alternative future.

Conclusion

In this article, I have considered the significance of hope within the resilience-building practices of urban poor informal settlers. In line with the theme of this Special Issue, I have sought to broaden conceptualisations of 'labour' by drawing attention to the range of emotional and physical practices that women and men engage in to cope with and resist their circumstances of precarity and uncertainty. As part of this, I have used the analytic of hope to bring feminist geographic scholarship on social reproduction into conversation with critical literature interrogating ideas and approaches of resilience-building. I have argued that the emotional and material production of resilience is both bound within, and driven by, hopeful labours, demonstrating how hope operates as an affective force to compel individual and collective engagement in resilience-building practices within individual households and collectively via the association. Hope manifesting as aspirations of social

mobility are central to the everyday practices of social reproduction that sustain individuals through times of hardship and motivate them to organise politically; labours which are themselves intimately tied to their dreams of housing and land tenure security and the desire to live up to cultural moral codes which, as I have shown, are gendered.

The mobilisation of hope is inherent to the establishment and day-to-day operation of homeowner associations, these hopeful imaginaries emerging as a shared narrative rooted in aspirations for the future which interact with socio-cultural values associated with family, faith and service to others to encourage participation in lobbying and *bayanihan* initiatives, which I argue have psychological and material implications for the resilience of individuals and communities. As Stockdale (2017: 11) contends, through this ‘moral-political solidarity—that is, solidarity based in a shared moral vision carried out through political action . . . a kind of collective hope emerges’ that unites people through collective action to ‘restore and strengthen hope for the future when hope might otherwise be lost’. Homeowner associations provide its members with a tangible space through which to channel their desires for a better future. Indeed, it could be argued that these associations trade in hope. The two are inextricably linked in the sense that one could not thrive without the other, the real and imagined potential of the homeowner association to help residents realise their individual and collective aspirations operating as an affective force that gives them a sense of agency which helps them cope with their circumstances of insecurity and compels them to take action.

My analysis of these affective and material dimensions of resilience-building highlight the centrality of the extra-domestic realm and the mundane, predominantly feminised gendered practices of care to the resilience of marginalised groups. These findings are significant in that they challenge conventional thinking about resilience that frames these processes as apolitical and necessarily empowering for local communities, neglecting to consider the emotional and material embodiments of these social reproductive labours on those who bear the burdens of these responsibilities. They also reinforce the importance and value of considering the affective realm in political economy and ecology appraisals as a means of extending the scope of analysis beyond dominant spectres of accumulation and economic exchange, towards a focus on wellbeing and the less visible rituals of care and collective action; perspectives that are vital to imagining and creating more inclusive and socially just urban futures.

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Note

1. Endo is the colloquial shorthand term for ‘end of contract’, referring to the widespread practice of companies employing workers on temporary contracts that last just under the six-month cut-off period at which point employees are legally recognised as regular workers and entitled to associated benefits.

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