

Asserting the Right to New Cities: Farmers' (re)claiming of Space in New Clark City *Menuntut Hak Atas Kota Baru: Klaim (Kembali) Lahan oleh Petani di New Clark City*

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ABSTRACT: New cities, often designed as development strategies, cause dispossession, displacement, and disruption of everyday lives of local communities. To further explore the effects of new cities and urban development in the Global South, this study explored the realities of farmers whose homes and livelihoods are affected by the construction of New Clark City in the Philippines. Employing the concept of the right to the city by Henri Lefebvre, this study delved into the farmers' agency in reclaiming space in the city being built on their rice fields. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observation, the study elucidated the strategies employed by farmers to assert their right to New Clark City. Highlighting that (re)claiming of space by the farmers is motivated by their need to make a living and provide for their families, the study built on the understanding of the right to the city as the right of the inhabitants to shape their environment and manage their resources. Although the right to the city heavily depends upon the collective power to reshape the process of urbanization, the article argues that it can also be asserted through individual and unorganized actions.

ABSTRAK: Kota-kota baru, yang seringkali dirancang sebagai strategi pembangunan, menyebabkan perampasan, pengusuran, dan gangguan terhadap kehidupan sehari-hari masyarakat lokal. Untuk mengeksplorasi lebih jauh dampak dari kota-kota baru dan pembangunan perkotaan di Global South, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi realitas petani yang tempat tinggal dan mata pencahariannya terdampak oleh pembangunan New Clark City di Filipina. Dengan menggunakan konsep hak atas kota dari Henri Lefebvre, penelitian ini menggali agensi petani dalam merebut kembali ruang di kota yang dibangun di atas lahan persawahan mereka. Melalui metode penelitian kualitatif, termasuk wawancara dan observasi partisipan, studi ini menjelaskan strategi yang digunakan oleh para petani untuk menuntut hak mereka atas New Clark City. Menyoroti bahwa klaim (kembali) ruang oleh para petani dimotivasi oleh kebutuhan mereka untuk mencari nafkah dan menafkahi keluarga mereka. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada pemahaman bahwa hak atas kota adalah hak penduduk untuk membentuk lingkungan dan mengelola sumber daya mereka. Meskipun hak atas kota sangat bergantung pada kekuatan kolektif untuk membentuk kembali proses urbanisasi, artikel ini berargumen bahwa hak atas kota juga dapat ditegaskan melalui aksi-aksi individual dan tidak terorganisir.

Keywords:

New Clark City,
right to the city,
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Kata Kunci:

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1 Introduction

The world is becoming a ‘world of cities’.¹ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations (UNOHCHR)² reported that by 2030, more than half of the world’s population will live in urban areas. Contributing to this trend is the new cities being built in different countries, often managed and/or supported by their respective governments as a development strategy.³ These new cities are designed for various purposes such as establishing new business districts for economic growth, decongesting city centers, and even relocating state capitals. The rise of new cities may be regarded by many as a sign of progress and development, especially as these cities are usually projected and promoted as smart, sustainable, entrepreneurial, and global ones. However, cities also have a tendency to exploit and marginalize.⁴ One commonality among new cities especially those in the “Third World” is that their development is influenced by historical forms of colonialism.⁵ This is seen on how new cities are often constructed in sites that have existing villages, farms, religious structures, and indigenous settlements and reservations,⁶ thereby causing issues such as violence, forced displacement, exclusion, and social marginalization and segregation, as sufficiently observed in Southeast Asia.⁷ Given this nature of new cities, it is crucial to explore if and how these so-called “development strategies” can be inclusive and truly beneficial for all.

In this study, I specifically looked into the case of New Clark City or NCC in the Philippines. Developed under a public-private partnership (PPP) program, NCC is designed to be “the first smart, environmentally sustainable, and climate-resilient city in the Philippines”.⁸ The city covers a total land area of 9,450 hectares, and its location is highly strategic because of the availability of major infrastructure such as the Clark International Airport and major tollways that connect the city to Metro Manila, other regions of Luzon, and to other countries. Previously referred to as Clark Green City or CGC, its conceptual masterplan envisioned a “city in a farm” that aimed to “create a destination where nature, lifestyle, business, education, and industry converge into a global city, based on principles of sustainability that aim to protect and enhance the delicate balance between nature and built environment.”⁹ However, the map of the planned city notably covers lands that are home to indigenous people called Aetas and are a source of livelihoods for farmers. In a countermapping project conducted by Countermapping Network PH¹⁰, communities living within the NCC grounds created an alternative map showing “a rich landscape comprised of productive lands and thriving communities that have lived in the area for centuries”.¹¹ This identifies the land being developed into NCC as a contested space, with farmers and Aetas heavily disadvantaged by the state-led construction of NCC. The case of NCC is a clear example of what David Harvey termed as “creative destruction” driven by capital accumulation that causes further suffering to the poor, the underprivileged, and the already marginalized from political power.¹² My primary goal for this study was to document how the farmers (re)claim their space in NCC after their experiences of losing their lands and livelihood. Borrowing Henri Lefebvre’s “right to the city” that is also explored by Harvey, I look into the ways that farmers engage with NCC at present, and analyze their actions and practices as means to assert their right to this new city that is being built on their farmlands.

- 1 Jennifer Robinson. “Cities in a world of cities: The comparative gesture.” *International journal of urban and regional research* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1-23.
- 2 United Nations. “Urbanization and Human Rights.” 2016. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/land/urbanization-and-human-rights>.
- 3 Sarah Moser. “New cities: Engineering social exclusions.” *One Earth* 2, no. 2 (2020): 125-127.
- 4 Agustin Rodriguez. “The city and the dynamism of invention and exploitation” in *Making sense of the city*, ed. Remmon Barbaza (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019). 193-212.
- 5 Anthony King. ““Colonialism and Urban Development”: Essay written for *Cities of the Global South Reader* (2015).” In *Cities of the global south reader*, pp. 29-39. Routledge, 2014.
- 6 Sarah Moser and Laurence Côté-Roy. “New cities: Power, profit, and prestige.” *Geography Compass* 15, no. 1 (2021): e12549.
- 7 Gavin Shatkin, *Cities for profit: The real estate turn in Asia’s urban politics*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017); Rita Padawangi, *Urban development in Southeast Asia* (Elements in Politics and Society in Southeast Asia). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022);, Shoko Sakuma, Marina Kouvolou-Kouri, Giovanna Astolfo Catalina Ortiz and Elizabeth Rhoads. “Trajectories of spatial violence in Southeast Asian cities.” (2021).
- 8 Asian Development Bank. “How Public-Private Partnership Is Building A New Smart City in the Philippines.” *Asian Development Bank*, December 12, 2019. <https://www.adb.org/news/videos/how-public-private-partnership-building-new-smart-city-philippines>
- 9 Arnel Casanova. “Clark Green City: Presentation to the Philippine Investment Conference, Tokyo, Japan.” *ASEAN-Japan Centre*, 2015. <https://www.asean.or.jp/ja/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/3-Presentation-2-BCDA-06042015.pdf>
- 10 Counter-mapping Network PH. “New Clark City Situationer.” (2020).
- 11 Andre Ortega. “Counter-mapping for urban social justice: Notes from the urban periphery in the Philippines.” *Center for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighborhoods*, 2020. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/counter-mapping-for-urban-social-justice-notes-from-the-urban-periphery-the-philippines/>
- 12 David Harvey. *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. (London: Verso, 2012).

The concept of the right to the city has been sufficiently explored in the past decades by academics, radical urbanists, grassroots activists, and various political organizations. Such amount of attention resulted into the notion of the right to the city becoming a “conceptual vortex”¹³ where different urban political projects and movements were framed using this concept introduced by Lefebvre in the 1960s. In other words, the right to the city has been used in myriad of ways and fit into different contexts because it is a concept that is “strategically fuzzy” and “flexible.”¹⁴ In this study, I went back to the roots of the right to the city, in which Lefebvre argues that the people should have the ability to shape the city that they inhabit.¹⁵ In essence asserting the right to the city entails inhabitants taking urban space as their own and appropriating these spaces according to their needs.¹⁶ This understanding of the right to the city can be seen in how urban gardens in New York and Los Angeles enable the neighborhoods’ inhabitants to exercise their right to autogestion or self-management by being able to cultivate their own food. Furthermore, this notion of the right to the city can also be recognized in Brazil’s policy that calls for democratic management of cities and public spaces to promote the well-being of residents.¹⁷

Recognizing that our cities are heavily shaped by policies that favor and benefit the powerful and the wealthy, the right to the city also inevitably entails the right to create counterhegemonic spaces such as informal settlements¹⁸ that allow inhabitants to exercise self-management. At its core, the right to the city encapsulates the idea that urban spaces should be accessible, inclusive, and shaped by the collective desires and needs of its inhabitants rather than by market forces or bureaucratic elites. This same understanding of the right to the city is used to frame the present study on New Clark City. However, instead of analyzing organized movements and political projects, this study focuses on individual actions of people on the ground who are marginalized by the creation of NCC. In this paper, I argue that although the right to the city heavily depends upon the collective power to reshape the process of urbanization, it can also be asserted through individual and unorganized actions, such as unarticulated everyday forms of resistance¹⁹. In the context of farmers of Capas, asserting their right to the city is in the form of the continuance and persistence of their everyday farming practices and pursuing alternative entrepreneurial ventures to benefit from the city amidst its ongoing development, and hopefully in the future. By shedding light into these individual actions and aspirations of farmers, this paper aimed to urge the authorities behind NCC to construct and produce a city that is inclusive and truly beneficial for all, taking into consideration the needs and well-being of populations impacted by this project.

2 Method

The research employed a qualitative approach. Participant observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted from September 2022 to April 2023 in the town of Capas, more specifically within NCC and an adjacent small neighborhood, which will be called Barrio Uno in this paper. Collected data in the form of narratives and everyday practices were interpreted through thematic analysis, guided by the following questions:

1. How has New Clark City affected or impacted the everyday life of farmers in Capas?
2. How do the farmers engage with NCC? What motivates the farmers to engage with NCC in such ways?
3. To what extent do these actions and practices allow farmers to claim their space in NCC and/or assert their “right to the city”?

Participant observations were conducted while farmers were planting and harvesting their rice crops inside NCC. For the interviews, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were utilized. Research participants were adult farmers who have been residents of Capas for no less than 20 years, and whose families own, or used to own, a parcel of land within the area being developed into NCC. All participants were informed of the objective and purpose of the research using an informed consent guide written in Filipino. They were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study for reasons such as discomfort, time conflict, and others. Consent was obtained from the participants verbally, instead of asking them to sign an informed consent form, in consideration of those

13 Mehmet Bariş Kuymulu, “The vortex of rights: ‘right to the city’ at a crossroads,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 923-940.

14 Kafui A. Attoh, “What kind of right is the right to the city?,” *Progress in human geography* 35, no. 5 (2011): 669-685.

15 Henri Lefebvre. *Writings on cities*. Translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996).

16 Mark Purcell. “Possible worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city.” *Journal of urban affairs* 36, no. 1 (2014): 141-154.

17 Abigail Friendly, “The right to the city: theory and practice in Brazil,” *Planning theory & practice* 14, no. 2 (2013): 158-179.

18 Mona Fawaz, “Neoliberal urbanity and the right to the city: A view from Beirut’s periphery,” *Development and Change* 40, no. 5 (2009): 827-852.

19 James C. Scott, “Resistance without protest and without organization: Peasant opposition to the Islamic zakat and the Christian tithe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no. 3 (July 1987): 417-452.

who had difficulty reading and/or writing. Additionally, this was a deliberate choice since signing documents may leave the participants uncomfortable and feeling vulnerable.²⁰ Permission to record interviews were acquired verbally as well. Lastly, participants were given pseudonyms for their protection and security.

3 Findings and discussion

3.1 Colonialism in the past and at present

The construction of NCC in Capas can be traced back to the colonial history of the Philippines. During the American colonization of the Philippines (1898-1946), the US government established military bases in Philippine territory.²¹ These military bases occupied lands that were originally inhabited by native populations such as Aetas.²² Although the Philippines gained independence from US in 1946, the presence of the US military never left the country. In 1947, the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) was approved which “allowed the continued existence of 23 American bases in the Philippines for the next 99 years.”²³ This meant that vast tracts of land in Central Luzon, such as the areas of Fort Stotsenburg and Camp O’Donnell, were classified as military reservations. This also meant that peasant families who settled on these lands at the time were “technically squatters and could be displaced anytime.”²⁴ In 1992, the MBA was terminated. In the same year however, Republic Act 7227 also known as the Bases Conversion and Development Act was instituted. Under this law, these former military bases are to be converted into alternative productive uses. Bases Conversion and Development Authority or BCDA is mandated by the state to initiate and manage these operations. Over the years, BCDA has built a number of booming economic centers on former military bases in the Philippines, such as the Bonifacio Global City in Fort Bonifacio and Newport City in Villamor Air Base, both located in Metro Manila. In the past decade, BCDA’s major project has been the New Clark City or NCC being built on the portions of Clark Special Economic Zone and Camp O’Donnell in the provinces of Pampanga and Tarlac in Central Luzon.

The plan for NCC was first introduced in 2012. Despite being opposed by several groups that represent Aetas and farming communities such as the Kilusang Nagtatanggol sa Inang Kalikasan (KNIK), Alyansa ng Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon (AMGL), Bagong Alyansa Makabayan (Bayan-Central Luzon), and Anakpawis Partylist Central Luzon Chapter,²⁵ the project pushed through with BCDA exercising its corporate power to acquire, own, hold, administer, and lease real and personal properties, including agricultural lands and property lands. As publicized by BCDA, the “financial assistance package” for all people affected by the project, including indigenous peoples and farmers is 300,000 pesos per hectare or 30 pesos per square meter.²⁶ Farmers did not agree with this price, let alone intended to sell off their land to BCDA. All of my informants shared that they tried their best to resist the presence of BCDA in their farmlands and expressed their disapproval of the project. For example, Apung Lina, aged 56, shared how in 2015, their land was in the process of acquisition by BCDA because a huge portion of it would be affected by the construction of roads. Her husband Apung Boy, however, did not give up their land without a fight. In fact, Apung Boy is remembered by everyone in their neighborhood for pointing his *itak* (bolo knife) at the BCDA officers. He openly opposed the project by saying that blood will be shed because farmers like him intend to fight for their land. This somehow bought them some time to keep farming. According to Apung Lina, they continued to plant crops and vegetables despite uniformed personnel roaming in the vicinity. The farmers’ resistance, however, was no match for bulldozers and steamrollers. One morning, Apung Lina and Apung Boy were informed by their family and fellow farmers that a portion of their rice crops were covered with mud and sand caused by the heavy equipment brought by BCDA. Apung Lina described this experience as infuriating because this happened just a few days before they could harvest their *palay* (rice crops). For Apung Lina, this shows how BCDA did not take into consideration the effects of their actions to farmers’ lives. This same story of how BCDA disrespected the farmers, and their crops, were also told by the other farmers.

20 Nelson Turgo, “Bugabug ang Dagat’: The Local Life of a Fishing Community in the Philippines” (PhD diss., School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, 2010).

21 Leonard Davis. *Revolutionary struggle in the Philippines*. Springer, 1989.

22 Jose Cunanan, “The Impact of the United States Military Bases on the Aetas (Negritos): Victims or Beneficiaries?” (1982).

23 Richard Ryan C. Villegas. “The Advent, Evolution Termination of the 1947 Military Bases Agreement and Its Influences to Philippine Military Foreign Policy.” *The Research Probe* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1-28.

24 Eduardo C. Tadem. “Reconstructing peasant lives in Central Luzon: The view from below.” *Social Science Diliman* (2007).

25 Divine Marie Endriga, “Indigenous peoples oppose ‘Clark Green City’,” *Manila Today*, September 24, 2014, <https://manilatoday.net/indigenous-peoples-oppose-clark-green-city/>; John Kevin Pilapil, “Aetas, farmers oppose Clark Green City project,” *SunStar Philippines*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/317197/Aetas-farmers-oppose-Clark-Green-City-project>.

26 BCDA (Bases Conversion and Development Authority). “Statement re: Seven-day notice to evacuate.” *BCDA*, 2019. <https://bcda.gov.ph/news/statement-re-seven-day-notice-evacuate>

Farmers tried to collectively negotiate with BCDA and local authorities to not acquire their farmlands that they used mainly for their livelihood. In response, authorities insisted that these lands were owned by the state, therefore they did not have a choice but to give up their land following the terms of the government. Based on Apung Lina's recollection, which was echoed by many farmers, BCDA officers used intimidation during the start of the project. Farmers would describe these officers as "*mabagsik*" (fierce), which inarguably allowed them to get their work done. Because of their strategy that used intimidation, many farmers eventually sold their lands to BCDA and received the so-called financial assistance package provided by the government. Partly, farmers were also terrified of the idea of losing their land without receiving any amount if they kept on refusing BCDA's offer.

Today, roads, buildings, and a number of facilities are already constructed inside NCC. Although the completion of the project is still underway, some areas of NCC have been used for different purposes such as hosting the 2019 Southeast Asian Games and providing a quarantine facility for Filipino repatriates during the Covid-19 pandemic. More recently, different events such as festivals and concerts are held in NCC. With these developments and changes in the environment, farmers have been vocal of how they truly feel about NCC. Majority of the informants are not happy about this state-led project because according to them, it only makes their living situation worse. They note that without their land, they also lost their livelihood and their ability to produce their own food for subsistence. This becomes a heavier burden as food prices in the country become higher. Moreover, informants do not fail to acknowledge the promises of NCC for the future such as job opportunities. They recognize that the new city can boost the development and progress of the town of Capas, even of the entire province of Tarlac. However, many farmers deem that these promises of job and employment opportunities and better living conditions are not for them, citing different factors such as their age, current health conditions, and more importantly, their educational attainment. Many expressed how they feel neglected because they believe that NCC will only benefit those who are privileged enough to attain college degrees. In relation to this, they worry that without their lands, it will be much more difficult for them to send their children and grandchildren to school, causing intergenerational disparities between existing residence and newcomers. Aside from the aforementioned, another reason for the farmers to negatively regard NCC is because of the threat of losing their homes, especially those residing in Barrio Uno. According to Apung Lina, they were told before that their houses and entire neighborhood would be affected by the construction of new roads that lead to NCC. When this happens, relocation or worse, displacement, is imminent. This reflects the reality that after losing their main source of living, many residents of Barrio Uno continue to live in uncertainty at present and with constant worries for their future. As a form of response to these immediate and imminent effects of the new city, farmers perform actions to claim and reclaim their space in NCC.

3.2 (Re)claiming space in the 'city in a farm'

Many farmers claim their space in NCC by continuing their farming practices despite the changing environment. Some farmers whose lands were not yet paid for by the government continue planting and cultivating their parcels of land as a way of claiming ownership. According to Apung Mila, 68 years old, if she leaves her land unattended, it is as if she gives BCDA the permission to acquire her property. This also prompted her to encourage other farmers and landowners in their area to keep planting. She explained,

Kasi ang BCDA, kapag alam nilang 'yung lupa mo napapabayaang mo, kukunin nila. Kaya dapat tinataniman mo. Sabi ko nga gawa na kayong kubo, kahit ano lang itanim niyo. Kahit ano lang yan, at least nandun kayo sa area niyo. Para hindi kunin.

("What BCDA does is when they see that you do not tend to your land, they will claim it. That's why you should keep planting. I told them [other landowners] to put up huts, and plant whatever they can. You can plant whatever you like, what's important is you are in your area, so that they will not claim your land.")

Moreover, farmers who already lost their lands enter land tenancy agreements with landowners whose properties inside NCC are not yet acquired by BCDA. For example, Kuya Eric, 30 years old and son of Apung Lina and Apung Boy, rents a piece of land within NCC where he can plant rice at least twice a year, and different vegetables throughout the year. During my conversation with Kuya Eric, he explained that after losing their family's land, he could not afford to dwell on their loss because he needed to provide for his family's needs. As someone who only finished primary education, he admitted that he could only work in the farm. Thus, he chose to be a tenant farmer who pays the landowner a certain number of sacks of *palay* (unhusked rice) every harvest. For Kuya Eric, aside from the need to earn a living, showing up inside NCC to continue farming is his way to tell

BCDA and the authorities to provide a space for the farmers in NCC. From his perspective, the completion of NCC is bound to happen. What he wants is to have a space in the new city where farmers like him can continue cultivating plants and crops for their own food and for their livelihood.

Furthermore, farmers also reappropriate spaces of the city for their own use through their farming practices. One specific example is *pagbibilad* in which farmers spread their newly harvested unhusked rice on the ground to be dried using the heat of the sun. Normally, farmers in the Philippines do this in wide open spaces such as basketball courts, or more often, along the roads, except national highways.²⁷ *Pagbibilad* on the roads inside NCC is prohibited by the authorities for safety reasons. At present, NCC is being used and marketed as a venue for different sport-related events. It must be noted that one of the major concerns relating to NCC, particularly in the facilities built for the SEA Games, is the possibility of being another “white elephant,” similar to the buildings erected in some countries that hosted the Olympics in the past. It is not surprising that given this public sentiment, BCDA makes an effort to prove critics wrong and ensure that these sports facilities will not go to waste. Since October 2022, sports events have been held inside NCC. This includes football matches, regional swimming competitions, duathlon, and triathlon. With the long and wide roads of NCC, it is also being used as the venue for motorcycle racing and drag racing. Aside from these events, NCC is also being perceived as a destination for cyclists and motorcycle riders coming from nearby towns and provinces. Given these outdoor activities used to promote NCC as a destination for sports, the act of *pagbibilad* is prohibited. Kuya Eric shares how they learned that *pagbibilad* is prohibited inside NCC and how they responded:

Ang sabi sa amin dati, maalikabok daw, baka mapuwing yung mga nagbibisikleta. Sabi namin, bakit kami pa yung pagbabawal, eh yung ginagawa namin mapapakinabangan ng lahat, kumakain kayo ng kanin, kahit yung mga nagbibisikleta kumakain ng kanin. Eh ano ba pakinabang natin sa mga pumupunta dito na naka-bike? Kaya nagbilad kami. Hindi naman namin sinakop yung buong daan. Tapos may guard na nagsumbong, tumawag doon kay Ma'am Tess. Pinakausap ako, eh magkakilala kami non. Sabi ko kaagad, “di ‘ba pangako niyo dati sa mga tao, pag-angat ng produkto nila, pwede na ibilad sa daan? Ngayon bawal na?” Hindi siya nakakibo. Pinatay yung phone niya. Pagtapos non, dito na kami nagbibilad para kahit paano di naman masyado dinadaan. Nung una, nilalapitan din kami ng guard pero katagalan hinahayaan na lang kami.

(“We were told before that it is dusty, that it may get into the eyes of bicycle riders. We asked why we are the ones to be prohibited, what we do benefits everyone, all of us eat rice, even those bicycle riders. What do we get from those who go here in their bicycles? So we pushed through in drying our palay. We did not occupy the entire road. Then a security guard reported us to Ma'am Tess through phone. The guard then let me talk to her. Ma'am Tess and I already know each other. I immediately told her, “Didn't you promise to the farmers that when we bring out our harvest from the fields, we can immediately dry them on the roads? How come it is prohibited now?” She was not able to respond. She dropped the call. After that incident, we decided to dry our palay in this area where less people pass by. At first, guards would approach us but eventually, they just let us be.”)

Farmers clearly are not happy about BCDA prohibiting their *pagbibilad* on the roads of NCC. This is apparent on how they question why BCDA prioritizes bicycle users, whom farmers regard as mere visitors, instead of them who have been using this land for years for productive purposes. Moreover, their frustration is also apparent on how they defy and go against the rules and policies implemented by BCDA, especially those that do not align with their practices and their desired use of space. Despite the prohibitions and the presence of security guards, farmers insisted to do their *pagbibilad* that eventually resulted to them being tolerated by the authorities. Although only temporary, this shows how farmers are able to reappropriate space, specifically moderated and produced by BCDA, for their livelihood.

3.3 Carving out ways to benefit from the new city

Farmers also claim their space in NCC through ways other than farming practices. Some farmers and previous landowners residing in Barrio Uno set up their own home-based businesses which can be regarded as their strategies to benefit from NCC. These business ventures include convenience stores, eateries, and apartments which cater to those who work inside NCC. For example, Apung Nora, aged 71, whose land was already paid for by BCDA, put up a small convenience store in front of her house. She also had a small house built beside

27 Department of Public Works and Highways, “Department Order No. 3085,” accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.dpwh.gov.ph/dpwh/issuances/departament-order/3085>.

her own which she intended to rent out for extra income. According to Apung Nora, many construction workers, security personnel, and service staff, especially during the SEA Games in 2019, rented out rooms in the vicinity of NCC. Since then, apartments and rooms for rent have sprung up in the neighborhood of Barrio Uno. With an understanding that NCC is here to stay, residents of Barrio Uno particularly those who have the financial capability, including few affected farmers, deem these home-based businesses as an opportunity to partake in the economic benefits promised by NCC.

Moreover, a number of farmers can also be found working inside NCC not to cultivate plants, but as hired workers in the field of construction and housekeeping. For many of them, now that the use of land for farming is limited, taking jobs in NCC is their way to earn money and provide for their families. Grabbing these short-term job opportunities is a matter of necessity for these farmers, in the same way that some farmers still choose to plant and cultivate crops. Aside from daily subsistence, they work tirelessly to be able to send their children to school, which can also be seen as a way of claiming space in the city in the long run. Based on how they speak about their future in Capas, farmers believe that the most certain way that their families can benefit from NCC is through their children whom they hope to earn college degrees. Notably, they encourage their children to persevere in their studies so they can soon work in NCC as professionals. For example, Ate Rachel shared:

Kaya nga sinasabi ko sa mga anak ko, "Oh, di na kayo lalayo. Malapit na yung trabaho niyo. Kailangan matapos kayo mag-aral. Diyan na kayo magtrabaho. Malay mo, Kurt, diyan makapasok ka diyan, engineer. Kasi si tatay niyo, dahil wala tayong lupain, di na siya nagbubukid, kayo nalang yung aasahan namin."

("That's why I tell my children, 'Oh, you don't have to go far away. Your workplace can be just near our home. You have to finish your studies. Get a job in NCC. Kurt, maybe you can be hired as an engineer there. Since we do not have our land anymore, your father can no longer farm. So we will rely on you, our children.'")

It must be noted however that this recognition of the benefits brought by NCC is still with ambivalence. For instance, Ate Rachel, wife of Kuya Eric, admitted that she still could not see herself working in NCC, saying that it still hurts her to think that they used to farm these lands. Nevertheless, she admitted that she does not fully close her doors to the possibility of working in NCC. According to her, if the need arises, especially given the uncertainty of working in the fields, she will take a job in NCC to make ends meet and be able to send her three children to school.

3.4 Asserting the right to New Clark City

Asserting the right to the city is shaping one's environment according to one's needs and desires. It encompasses the right of inhabitants to participate in the decision-making that impacts their everyday spaces. This very right, as this research reveals, was not exercised by the farmers of Capas as they were not given a seat at the table during the planning of NCC, to the extent that they experienced intimidation from the authorities, dispossession, and anxieties brought by lack of livelihood security. It is apparent that a top-down approach was used in the creation of NCC. As a response, farmers devised ways to show resilience and resourcefulness to survive in the everyday, which this study also contends as their way of claiming their place in NCC, or asserting their right to the city. Through the continuance of their farming practices despite the authorities' disapproval and prohibition, they claim spaces inside NCC for their livelihood and subsistence. Moreover, by grabbing different opportunities through employment and entrepreneurial activities, they claim their space in the city by maximizing the benefits that urban development directly and indirectly brings to their neighborhood. These actions and responses allow them to shape their environment in accordance with their needs – access to food, livelihood, home, security, and education for their children.

Furthermore, the concept of the right to the city is also manifested through organized movements to resist, or to counter the hegemonic order.²⁸ There is an understanding that the right to the city relies on the power of the collective in achieving the alternative urban futures which benefit the inhabitants. In this study however, I contend that asserting right to the city is not always characterized by resistance or opposition. In the case of the farmers of Capas, they do not outright oppose the plans of NCC at present because of the understanding that NCC is here to stay. For the farmers, going against its plans or speaking against the authorities will only be a futile, or even dangerous, action. Nevertheless, this lack of organized resistance or movements among farmers does not

28 Mark Purcell, "To Inhabit Well: Counterhegemonic Movements and the Right to the City," *Urban Geography* 34, no. 4 (2013): 560-574.

mean that they are fully receptive of the plans that undeniably exclude them. Through their own ways of claiming space, they demand to be included and to not be left behind in the development of the city in their hometown. Although not as organized as collective movements, I contend that the farmers' way of asserting their right to the city are as clear and intentional. It is silent, but still visible.

This study, however, does not claim that the collective component of the right to the city should be disregarded. In fact, this study recognizes that individualized efforts in asserting the right to the city can only do so much. At present, the farmers' acts of planting crops and *pagbibilad* enable them to claim their place in the city that is under construction. This, however, may not successfully work all the time, and the space that they win for themselves may only be temporary. In other words, these unorganized efforts may be effective, but only in a limited extent. Therefore, this study highlights the need to have an organized movement for farmers to assert their right to the city more effectively. This organized movement is not to oppose the construction of NCC or to speak against the government, which my informants do not intend to do, but to make themselves more visible and audible for the authorities to recognize the farmers' aspirations to be part of this new city. This aspiration of the farmers to be part of the city is primarily rooted in their need to have a livelihood that will allow them to nurture their homes and their families, to survive in the everyday, and to have the ability to imagine a future.

4 Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of farmers during the construction of New Clark City in the town of Capas in Tarlac, Philippines. Their narratives put into light their experiences of loss of land and livelihood, their constant struggles brought by the development of a city within their neighborhood, and their aspirations for the future. Aside from these past experiences and aspirations, this study also explored how the farmers assert their right to New Clark City being built on their farmlands, through acts of (re)claiming spaces for their farming and other lucrative opportunities. Asserting the right to the city is motivated by their desire and need to be able to manage their resources and environment in order to live a life that allows them to imagine and realize a better future for their families. This study also highlights the importance of recognizing individual efforts and motivations in asserting the right to the city. For an organized movement to be more effective, it must be rooted from the motivations of the people on the ground.

Lastly, this study emphasizes that in designing a city, developers should not only pursue a masterplan that gets recognitions globally and internationally. Instead, it must primarily aim for the subjective well-being of localities and its people. For this to happen, a city must be inclusive from the point when it is conceived and planned, to when it is constructed, completed, and inhabited. Hopefully, the findings of this study can be taken into consideration as the construction of NCC in Capas continues, and as more new cities and urban megaprojects, whether we like it or not, get planned and developed in the future.

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