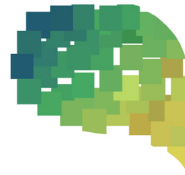


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THE
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FOUNDATION'S

informal
city dialogues

SLUM LAB

Manila's Quest to Build a Better Informal Sector



Story and Photos by *Kate Hodal*



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From the second story of his lemon-yellow home in north Manila, Alberto Legarda Evangelista, 71, surveys the leafy neighborhood he has lived in for the past decade. Below the open-air veranda where he sleeps through the humid nights, a young mother is singing a quiet lullaby to her twins. Nearby, the shouts of teenage boys playing a game of basketball float over the chuckles of their parents, who are whiling away the midday heat with playing cards and sodas.

All of this would be a postcard of suburban idyll were it not for the fact that Evangelista lives in Manila's largest public cemetery, *Cementerio del Norte*, along with some 1,000 other families. Century-old tombs have been converted into stalls selling sachets of shampoo and instant noodles, flowered pathways into public washing stations, grassy knolls into doghouses. Car batteries power radios, karaoke machines and television sets; clotheslines are strung between crosses. The "home" Evangelista lives in is actually a mausoleum housing eight graves. He

by resettling inhabitants, often forcibly and in distant provinces far from employment opportunities, in sporadic efforts to quickly beautify the capital. But under a five-year, \$1.2 billion USD *mandamos* (mandate) from the Philippines' Supreme Court to clean up the heavily polluted waterways that feed into Manila Bay, the city is now relocating 104,000 families from the city's many estuaries, tributaries, canals and rivers – and priorities have obviously changed. Instead of resettling these 500,000-plus inhabitants outside of Metro Manila, the government's primary focus is on moving them into on-site and in-city developments, a major departure from previous policy.

Other governments, like South Africa's, have also recognized the benefits of on-site slum development, where a recent \$3 billion investment to help 400,000 slum families by 2014 shows that policy has shifted from out-of-city resettlements to providing in-situ services and tenure security. But what's happening in Manila

Metro Manila has become a living laboratory of slum solutions.

considers himself lucky -- the breezy second story where the deceased's family pays their annual respects doubles as his bedroom. "Look at my view," he says, pointing his cigarette out towards the field of tombstones. He tells me this the strongest, safest home he's ever had.

Evangelista earns his keep watching over some 20-odd graves in the cemetery. But his monthly earnings are so negligible that he would never be able to rent a standard apartment in the city, a conundrum affecting an estimated 43 percent of Metro Manila's 13 million residents, according to 2011 [Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#) figures. As land within this bulging metropolis becomes increasingly scarce and expensive, housing must be found, built or cobbled together anywhere there's space – and that often means under bridges, along highways, in alleys, perched atop flood channels, or even among the dead.

For years, the local government has chosen to deal with slum-dwellers either by pretending they don't exist – famously building a fence last May to hide a sprawling slum ahead of a visiting ADB delegation – or

is, in many ways, much larger than that. A barrage of initiatives geared toward changing the city's relationship with its informal settlements reach far and wide – indeed, the city has become a living laboratory of slum solutions. Historically neglectful of (and often outright hostile towards) its informal settlers, Manila is now beginning to take innovative leaps of faith toward working through its housing mess. As 70 percent of the Philippines' population is expected to be living in cities and towns within the next decade, the city, already bursting at the seams, can hear the clock ticking.

Possible solutions include NGO-led medium-rise resettlements on donated and foreclosed lands, community-managed mortgage schemes allowing for in-situ development, and private sector-funded relocation endeavors on entrepreneurial farms. All of these efforts spring from a blend of formal and informal – the government has a stake in each of them, signaling a sea change in its willingness to try new ideas. As the CEO of [Habitat for Humanity](#) Philippines Charlie Ayco puts it: "The government has learned it doesn't want to repeat the



Communities like this one are set to be demolished and their residents relocated under the new *mandamos*.

bad experience of relocating people in far-off places where they can't earn any livelihood."

A PLACE IN THE CITY

In Metro Manila, where 16 cities and one town stretch over a giant flood plain, informal settlements squeeze into the tiniest of unused spaces. Cramped in between high-rise office buildings in the central business district of Makati, strung along the many freeways that bisect the capital, and hanging precariously from bridges, some of them boast improbable names like Paradise City and Sunshineville. They're so ingrained in the urban fabric that an entire 1990s primetime sitcom was based on them: *Home Along Da Riles* (*Home Along the Railway Tracks*) centered around an impoverished family whose shanty shook every time a train roared past. Hugely popular, the show ran for over a decade and spawned a feature film.

While a billion people worldwide now live in slums, Manila's situation is unusual: Many of its settlements are built on waterways, a sort of cardboard-

and-corrugated-iron version of Venice. Highly prone to flooding during typhoons, these waterways are so clogged and polluted that floodwaters often have nowhere to go but up. (One analysis partially blamed 2009 Typhoon Ketsana's two-meter-high swells on a lack of sufficient drainage). The new mandate, while resettling slum-dwellers in their own permanent homes, is also intended to accommodate new flood-mitigation plans, considered critical to the city's safety.

One recent afternoon, I traveled from downtown Manila to the Tullahan River in Malabon district, where a collection of haphazard shanties built from cinderblock, wood and corrugated iron crowd the riverbanks. Sandwiched among a number of factories spewing their effluent into the gray water is New Erna, just one slum among hundreds marked to be cleared by 2015. There, I meet community leader Theresa Duazo, a plump 40-something woman with a bright smile. Inside the dark, three-meter-wide, two-story home she's lived in for the past 30 years, Theresa holds her hand up to

her collarbone to show me just how high the floodwaters reached during Typhoon Nesat. “The water was black and it smelled disgusting,” she says. “We slept crowded together upstairs, and every hour my husband would take the bucket and sweep out the water, but it just kept coming in.”

Duazo’s 19-year-old son Zyren points to small cracks in the kitchen cinderblock to show me where the

accommodate 900 families. (Malabon district, where New Erna is located, is home to 18 riverways and 4,200 families affected by the new mandate, according to the [Foundation for Development Alternatives](#), an NGO working with Habitat to resettle people).

The plan is simple enough: The national government provides the financing for the move, the local government provides the land and the private sector



A couple with their home and shop in a mausoleum in *Cementerio del Norte*, where they’ve lived for 30 years.

water entered. “There was nowhere for me to sleep during the last flood, because upstairs we already had the dogs and my family, so I stayed on the roof in the rain,” Zyren says, shaking his head.

Under the *mandamos*, the Duazos, along with the majority of New Erna’s other 100-odd families, will be moved to a new medium-rise building (MRB) just a 20-minute jeepney drive away. The project is a pilot led by the Philippines’ branch of Habitat for Humanity, involving six multi-story buildings that can

and/or NGOs provide the construction. Once moved, families are expected to pay back the government for their new housing using a six-percent, 25-year loan. But the challenge involved in creating an MRB on a socialized housing package – limited to just 400,000 pesos (\$10,000 USD) per unit – is considerable, says Habitat’s Charlie Ayco. “We’re trying to create a template here, because the gray area is, how are we going to bring down the cost of construction [for these new properties]?” he says from his corner office in the Ayala district of downtown Makati.

“If we can bring it down from the current 700,000 to 400,000 pesos per unit, then we can share that template with other players.”

The government expects (rather ambitiously) to move some 50,000 families by the end of May, when the rainy season begins. Ayco says this is impossible, as the land to move them onto still hasn't been sourced. “Many local governments don't have the land [for the project], so hardly any of the annual 10 billion peso funding was used in the first year (2011),” he explains. “Now we know that if the local governments cannot provide the land, then we have to help them find it.”

Habitat is fortunate that charitable individuals sometimes donate land for projects, as happened with this pilot in Malabon. But there's another untapped resource that the NGO is now focusing on – foreclosed properties. “The bank would like to sell these properties, but whenever they want to advertise them, the potential

Cecilia Alba of the government's umbrella Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), which oversees the country's housing needs. A petite economist who used to work in the president's office, Alba cites in-city employment as a benefit to keeping people within the capital itself. “But we have not totally scrapped the off-city option... We also need to look at the affordability of those families.”

Affordability is a very real issue when families are expected to pay back the construction costs of their resettlement. Alba notes that a typical 40-square-meter row house costs about 240,000 pesos (\$6,000 USD) and includes land, whereas an MRB runs to 550,000 pesos (\$13,750 USD) and does not include land. But these estimates haven't stopped the government from rolling out its own MRB pilot, Ernestville, a two-story, 12-structure site in Quezon City that will re-house some 200 families. An additional three more projects are in the

“In Asia, there's no other space to go but up... We say that the only earth that's left is that left under your nails”

buyer goes and sees that there are informal settlers occupying the land,” Ayco says. “The only way they can sell it is by driving out the settlers, which they don't know how to do, or negotiating with them, which they are not equipped to do.”

This is where Habitat comes in, consulting with the settlers to buy the land from the bank itself. The NGO has now dedicated a whole team to this “new market” because, says Ayco, “It's huge. And normally these banks don't want to talk to the local governments because they want to deal with the private sector instead.”

Similarly large-scale resettlements have generally focused on one-story row houses. But in-city relocations have had another effect: With land at such a premium, medium-rise buildings are now seen as a way of maximizing family-to-land ratios. The higher-density structures are more environmentally friendly because they reduce both commuting and urban sprawl, according to the ADB, and the government has slowly but surely warmed to the idea.

“Our priority now is on-site relocation,” says

pipeline, with an estimated delivery time of one year, says Eduardo Manicio, vice president of the HUDCC's social-housing loan agency.

Similar MRB projects, which critics often refer to despairingly as “tenement housing,” have been tried in the past, often ending up neglected, blighted and under-maintained. Alba concedes that this is a real issue, noting that the HUDCC's chairman Jojo Binay – who doubles as the country's vice-president – has mandated that these MRB's turn out differently. “Don't just build these units,’ he said, ‘but make sure there is a mechanism for maintaining them.”

While many agree that land is scarce in Metro Manila, not everyone believes that MRBs portend a sustainable future. Father Norberto Carcellar, director of the [Philippine Action for Community-Led Shelter Initiatives](#), says such projects may just end up getting shelved. “In Asia, there's no other space to go but up,” he explains from his base at the leafy St. Vincent's Seminary in Quezon City, where posters of Jesus hang beside World Bank figures on urban development. “We say that the



Rosalie Barite in the two-room house she shares with her family at GK Enchanted Farm.

only earth that's left is that left under your nails."

"But the problem with MRBs is that they're just like pigeonholes," he continues, "and the cost of services is very high in terms of water, solid waste and, of course, power. We've already seen projects like these before ... and now they're being demolished."

The Duazos know that life will be very different once they move into their MRB unit. Money will be tight, with much of it going to paying off the government loan. And living in an apartment building will be a strange new phenomenon. But unlike many slum-dwellers who fight the government when they're moved out (residents of Laperal started a riot when officials began demolishing their slum in 2011), New Erna's residents believe the future is promising. "Of course I'm sad – I've lived here since I was a girl," says Theresa. "But we won't have to deal with the floods anymore, and that will be a relief."

BUYING IN AND STAYING PUT

Not far from Manila's port and the old Spanish

citadel known as Intramuros, there sprawls a 56-hectare slum home to dockworkers, tricycle drivers and a large contingent of naked children. A reclaimed swampland, the neighborhood of Baseco has ballooned from 200 families in the mid-1980s to around 12,000 today, making it one of the largest slums in Metro Manila. It is also a quintessential example of people power in Manila's history of informal settlements – indeed, it is a landmark example of on-site slum development.

The story goes back to 2001, when the ADB planned to develop the neighboring Pasig River. Faced with the eviction of some 1,200 Baseco residents and their forced relocation sites outside the capital, the community stood their ground. "We wanted to pay for the land because, according to the law, if there's government land that hasn't been used for 10 years, then the people living there can buy it," says Jeorgie Tenolete, a long-time resident and community organizer.

We meet one humid morning at the office of Tenolete's NGO, *Kabalikat sa Kaunlaran* (Your Partner in

Progress), a community-empowerment organization that has worked in Baseco for decades. “When I first moved to Baseco in 1986, there was no electricity, no water, no roads, no schools and no market,” says Tenolete, a young-looking 42 year old in a striped shirt and flip flops. He finds a 2001 map to show how drastically the area has developed. “Look at this here – see how that was under water? Sometimes we’d use a boat to get around – all this was a swamp.” He points to the next map, drawn up four years later. “Look at these rows of houses here,” he says, still astonished. “Every day we get families coming in, so people keep building.”

Baseco learned quickly to depend on a strong network of community organizations to supply everything the government couldn’t, from microfinance loans to toilets and drinking water. It was Kabalikat that negotiated with the government to purchase the land under what would become a milestone 2002 presidential

The large mix of titled vs. non-titled residents means change here moves glacially, and depends frequently on the strength and capacity of the community organizations. In fact, says Tenolete, many of the more significant positive changes that have occurred here – the building of a high school and elementary school, the addition of health-care centers and the paving of some roads – can largely be attributed to Baseco’s chairman, Kristo Hispano, who in turn works with Manila’s Mayor Alfredo Lim to institute development. It is Hispano who regularly invites politicians into Baseco for tours, pointing out the unpaved roads, the crumbling edifices, the lack of medicines in the local pharmacy. “He says, ‘This needs to change,’ and it changes,” says Tenolete.

Just a short walk from Kabalikat’s headquarters – past a wall splashed with the words “KRISTO THE ACTION MAN” – sits Hispano’s open-air “office”: two plastic chairs, a plastic table and a tarpaulin outside the

Insecure tenure means residents live under the constant threat of eviction and demolition, preventing them from wanting, or being able, to invest time and money in their housing.

proclamation from then-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Families were given 32 square meters and 15,000 pesos (\$360 USD) with which to build their own titled, single-story row houses, many of which now tower (illegally) to three or four floors, some boasting flower-covered verandas and satellite dishes.

Such a scheme has been successful in other countries as well. In Peru, vacant, government-owned urban spaces were turned into formal land deeds under the “Organismo de Formalización de la Propiedad Informal.” But in Baseco, of the 12,000 families estimated to live here, only one-third are legal and hold government-issued land deeds. The other 8,000 are squatters – Baseco is often the first place new immigrants to Manila come to find work. Their insecure tenure, however, means that they live under the constant threat of eviction and demolition, preventing them from wanting, or being able, to invest time and money in their housing.

main multi-purpose hall where the baby-faced 33-year-old *barangay* (neighborhood) chairman is holding his daily meet-and-greet. “Our main problem is that the *barangay* funds are just not enough,” Hispano confides. “The funds come from the national government but they’re based on population and income generation. And since there’s almost no income generation here, we don’t get much funding...Without the NGOs,” he adds, “life here would be really hard.”

Despite this, for some people, the devil you know is sometimes preferable to any change, no matter how “innovative.” Napico, an hour’s drive from Baseco, provides a reminder that one person’s solution is another’s unwelcome interference.

Napico is another informal settlement, yet this one has been developed in-situ using a community-mortgage program (CMP). The 42-hectare settlement of roughly 5,000 families was initially founded by revolutionaries

from the “People Power” movement of 1986 that ousted the Marcos dictatorship. Today those former revolutionaries have gone from squatting to collectively owning their land through a CMP scheme that works like this: Organized neighborhood associations negotiate with the government directly to buy the land they squat on, generally for a loan of 165,000 pesos (\$4,000 USD). The funds go towards land acquisition and site development, and are payable at six percent interest over 25 years.

Roseller Fortich, a smiling former revolutionary who was one of Napico’s first settlers and now heads one of its 15 homeowners’ associations, tells me that owning his own house is a huge departure from the “free life” he used to have before. “The benefit of CMP means that we can call our houses our own and not worry about demolition or eviction,” he says.

The CMP program has benefited some 250,000 slum-dwellers all across the Philippines since 1989, according to the government’s housing loan office. But here in Napico, not everyone wants in on the deal. Squatting, for all its hardship and unpredictability, is free, and many in Napico don’t want to exchange their rent-free, debt-free lives for a land deed. The result has been a legal situation whereby the community purchased all 42 hectares of land, but not every family was willing to pay for their share of it.

Fortich shakes his head as he outlines what’s happened since. “We’ve had no choice but to sue those families – they want the free land, but they’re not willing to buy it,” he says as we tour the sunny neighborhood, pausing briefly in front of a shanty near Fortich’s home. “It’s tricky because some of them still live here” – he motions to the shack behind him – “and we’re fighting them in court. We want to take their land and turn it into community-purpose buildings.”

The community has already won one court case using pro-bono legal help from a local Napico resident – it demolished the shanty in question to make way for a new multi-purpose hall. And while it might seem odd that a community that once squatted together would suddenly turn its back on those who preferred to continue squatting, Fortich says the economics demand it. “None of us can get our own individual land titles until everyone pays back their share of the loan,” he says. “That is the fallacy of the CMP.” It’s also a reality check: Large-scale change won’t come to Manila easily. Even guided by the best of intentions, some communities will be strained and

even fractured as the city attempts to break with its past.

Nevertheless, Fortich adds, the CMP is a win-win for Napico. “The CMP adds value to our property and has given people the chance to rent out the house,” he says, “or move abroad, or into the countryside.”

BACK TO THE LAND

The countryside is where advocates for the urban poor generally fight against being sent, so it’s surprising that one of Manila’s most eye-catching slum solutions is taking place there. So far unable to stem the tide of migrants coming into Manila from outside provinces, NGOs, government authorities and even the private sector are now wondering whether it’s possible to reverse it. The most radical of such approaches pivots on the premise that space in Metro Manila is a finite resource and that, one way or another, some Manilans are going to have to go back to the land.

In the past, slum-dwellers have been shipped out to the countryside with no prospect of work. The new entrepreneurial agriculture schemes instead put a clear focus on economic development. And they do it in a way that attempts to work with a rural setting, rather than ignore it. Interested in how such a pilot might work on a larger scale, I joined a caravan of academics to tour [Enchanted Farm](#), a self-contained experimental settlement for former slum-dwellers and the most buzzed-about effort around Filipino settlement solutions today.

Accompanying me was Haydee Malubay, a PhD candidate at the University of the Philippines’ School of Urban and Regional Planning; her daughter, a university student in landscape design; and architect and self-declared “ecopreneur” Mark Roeland De Castro.

Enchanted Farm is built on a former sand quarry in Balucan, a province roughly two hours’ drive from Manila’s central business district, and can really only be described as a 14-hectare hippie commune without the hippies. It’s a prototype for slum resettlement that changes not only the residents’ location, but the very economics of their informal economy.

The brainchild of Gawad Kalinga (GK), a faith-based community-development organization that works in slum-upgrading initiatives all over the Philippines, the farm sees 50 families from various informal settlements entering into a new type of paradigm – one whereby social entrepreneurship and farming go hand in hand.



Napico's Roseller Fortich in front of the shanty he's lived in for 27 years.

Harvests are shared. Workshops on business development are shared. Even the two hectares of land donated to the families to build their 50 homes was shared. (Top financiers for the \$702,000 USD project included Hyundai and Shell). In fact, in the truest sense of communal living, those who currently call Balucan home had to submit applications and attend “value” sessions to see if they qualified. “No drinking, no beating, and, of course, honesty and integrity are essential,” explains Joni Gail Morales, GK’s attractive, fast-talking farm coordinator.

“Like a commune, we are actually trying to shift mindsets, to create a culture where the community comes from different areas but then behaves and thinks as one family,” she explains. “It’s the whole culture we want to correct, the ‘begging culture.’ If you want to get out of your poverty, you have to work hard for it.”

The project has attracted a wide array of interested parties, from university students and organic foodies to businessmen and city planners. Architect Castro, who is helping to build and develop an on-site community “Life Bank” – a localized version of the Grameen Bank that

started in Bangladesh and has since spread worldwide – talks excitedly about the farm’s opportunities.

“The idea is that the farm will become a sort of Silicon Valley of social entrepreneurship and agriculture,” he says, at times sounding a bit overly optimistic about the scheme. “Nobody else wanted this land – they believed it was haunted because it was a quarry and dumping ground [for dead bodies]. But what’s most important is how GK was able to transform something dark into a productive space, the idea being that if you can do it here – in a place that’s inaccessible, a former sand quarry – then you can do it anywhere in the Philippines.”

If successful, Enchanted Farm (its name is a play on its “haunted” past) will be the first of 24 similar sites across the nation in a GK-led effort to eradicate poverty for 5 million families by 2024. But even here it’s easy to see its challenges. Accessible only via a series of freeways, and then a number of smaller lanes where little alleys housing brightly painted homes bask in the sunshine, it is far removed from markets, culture and transportation (unless you have your own personal vehicle). Morales concedes that some of the men who came to Enchanted



Boys in the Agricool program planting at GK Enchanted Farm.

Farm have abandoned farming in favor of finding work in Manila, thereby trouncing the notion of the farm as a fully self-sustainable, economic utopia.

But it takes time to turn former urbanites into farmers, stresses Morales, who points to the success of the business side of the farm: The 20-odd start-ups that pair farm families with local entrepreneurs to create marketable ideas. The most successful product to date has been [Bayani Brew](#), an iced tea made from farm-grown sweet potato and lemongrass. The recipe was created by former slum-dweller-turned-farm-resident Tita Linda, and now brings in around 450,000 pesos (\$10,900 USD) in annual sales. (Start-up profits are shared equally among all farm residents, fulfilling the communal ideal but not necessarily stoking competitive enterprise).

In many ways, it seems too good to be true. And not all residents are living the idyllic lifestyle the farm presents itself as providing. Resident Rosalie Barite, 37, is a petite woman who once lived in a Baseco shanty and

earned her money selling second-hand clothing for 15 pesos (40 cents) apiece. Now she spends her mornings selling the vegetables her husband grows, and her afternoons making chevre at a start-up gourmet cheese shop on the farm, Gourmet Keso. She shares her two-room house with her family of eight. Their daily income is 300 pesos (\$7.25 USD) per day – hardly enough to eat, she says, but just about manageable. “When we first arrived there was nothing here. We’d grow rice and vegetables – anything we could,” she says while cradling her young baby. “You have to work hard to be able to put food on the table.”

Families like the Barites are a prime target for GK’s ambitious projects, notably the Agricool program, which aims to rebrand agriculture as a worthwhile economic opportunity. The scheme targets the farm’s youth – putting boys in the fields, girls in basket-weaving courses – and doles out a monthly allowance to encourage kids to water and weed when they come back from school.

“What we’re doing here is shifting mindsets, concerns and priorities,” Morales explains. “We’re really trying to teach them to love farming, to create the next generation of Filipino farmers.”

It’s easy for NGOs to wax poetic about their projects – when Morales at one point says that the farm is about “growing people, not just growing businesses,” she sounds a bit like a banking advertisement. And it does beg the question: Is this really something that could work long-term? The HUDCC’s Alba seems to think so, as the government is also investing in a new pilot scheme to send slum-dwellers back onto farms. That program, called Balik Probinsya (Back to the Countryside), will be rolled out in two communities this year, and will represent a major departure for the Philippines’ government, Alba says. Refocusing economic opportunity from Metro Manila back onto the land, it could eventually recategorize the Philippines as a rice exporter rather than just a call-center capital.

“Unlike before, when we tried to resettle people from Metro Manila into off-city areas and there was no livelihood [for them there], with this concept what we’re trying to provide is land so they can farm with all the support [they need] from the Department of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, which will provide them with seedlings and the skills and facilities,” she explains.

Such pilots may be innovative, but they are still small-scale. They also push against the global trend of urbanization, and the belief that cities are the best poverty-alleviating mechanism the world currently has. Perhaps most importantly, they are based on the notion that Metro Manila is now a “game over” option for slum-dwellers, as there is no land left for them to live on. While

at the seminary, I ask Father Carcellar whether he thinks moving slum-dwellers out of the city and back onto the farm is really a step forward. He shakes his head and retorts pointedly, “Do you believe that? I don’t.”

“Urbanization is really an anthropological and sociological phenomenon – it’s not just about economics,” says Carcellar. “Backyard farming projects didn’t work out [in the past] even if the settlers were used to farming, because they came [to Manila] to have access to services. And that’s not going to change. We need to find ways to make the city work.”

Back at the cemetery, I watch Evangelista as he takes one last drag on his cigarette. Technically, he and the 1,000 other families that live among these tombs should have been evicted and relocated long ago. But many of them, like Evangelista, have ad-hoc “deeds” from the families of the dead allowing them to live here. In many ways, this itself is a kind of in-city resettlement, and of the most informal sort – a handshake agreement between key stakeholders to put to more productive use a piece of land that is being, shall we say, underutilized by its permanent residents.

“I often think, what would have happened if I had just finished school?” Evangelista says in a low voice as he navigates the steep ladder back downstairs into the main mausoleum. “I only made it to the third grade. Maybe I would have had a better job, been able to live somewhere else.” As he knocks on the solid mausoleum walls he says, to no one in particular, “This is the best house I’ve ever lived in.” For Evangelista, relocation is not on the table – in a deeply personal sense, he’s very much at home. “My family is buried in this cemetery,” he says quietly, “and I don’t plan on going anywhere else myself.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Bangkok-based photojournalist Kate Hodal is the Southeast Asia correspondent for the *Guardian*. Her work has also been featured in CCNGo, the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Monocle*, among others. From 2003 to 2004, Kate worked at UN-HABITAT's regional office in Rio de Janeiro on homegrown upgrading initiatives, working in favelas all across the city on informal-led best practices.