Climate Gentrification, Similar yet Different: Comparing New Orleans and Tacloban City

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1. Introduction – Climate Threats and Spatial Injustice as a Global Phenomenon

Under growing global climate threats intertwined with gentrification, spatial injustice in cities has intensified, producing new forms of discrimination and inequality for marginalized populations worldwide (Best et al., 2023). These communities are already forced to endure multiple hardships, including both gentrification and heightened exposure to climate risks (University of Michigan, 2024). On the one hand, capitalism and free markets as key drivers of urban development have contributed to the concentration of high-income communities around high-quality amenities, infrastructure, and housing, typically located in central urban areas (Bloomberg, 2018b; World Bank, 2012). As low-income populations inhabit neighborhoods that later attract urban renewal initiatives or new investment, higher-income groups often displace existing residents, subjecting them to traumatic processes of displacement and “unhoming” through both physical and emotional loss of their neighborhoods (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020).

On the other hand, climate risks disproportionately affect low-income communities. These populations are not only more exposed to environmental hazards but are also constrained by limited economic resources that slow recovery processes, leaving them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (O’Brien, 2025). When gentrification and climate risk intersect, the result is climate gentrification. Climate gentrification is an emerging theoretical framework that posits that climate change reshapes property markets based on geographic exposure to risk and the engineered resilience of human settlements (Bloomberg, 2018a; Keenan et al., 2018). In effect, this new form of gentrification further constrains the spatial options available to people of lower socioeconomic status.

While both gentrification and climate change are global phenomena, climate gentrification is unfolding through distinct mechanisms across the Global North and the Global South (Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2022; See et al., 2025b). Scholars have pointed out that the diffusionist model of gentrification theory cannot be applied in the same way to both contexts due to its property-centrism, which obscures distinct and contextualized conditions such as state-led versus market-driven processes, land tenure systems, and state capacity (Ghertner, 2015; See et al., 2025a; See et al., 2025b). For example, Ghertner (2015) underscores the importance of recognizing local tenure diversity in the Global South, where public, customary, and informal land uses coexist. Traditional gentrification theory is largely based on the Western tenure landscape, where land is predominantly privatized, and therefore does not fully capture how state-led gentrification operates alongside diverse land tenure arrangements. As a result, the default assumptions embedded in conventional gentrification models limit their applicability across different regional contexts. In alignment with this perspective, See et al. (2025b) argue that the emerging theory of climate gentrification should be grounded in a reconceptualized understanding of gentrification that reflects Southern land, power, and political landscapes, rather than treating environmental and market drivers as the sole explanatory forces.

Building on these theoretical distinctions, this study advances the hypothesis that **while climate change as a global threat accelerates gentrification and produces broadly similar displacement outcomes across regions, the mechanisms through which climate gentrification operates differ systematically.** Specifically, climate gentrification in the Global North tends to be driven primarily by market processes, whereas in the Global South it is more often shaped by state spatial governance, reflecting differences in state capacity, land tenure arrangements, and property formalization regimes.

Although studies on climate gentrification remain limited, particularly comparative analyses examining differences between the Global North and South, this study explores multiple theoretical perspectives to contextualize gentrification within regional settings. It examines case studies from both regions to better understand how climate gentrification has unfolded following major natural disasters: Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, United States, and Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City, Philippines.

In the Global North case, Hurricane Katrina was one of the most extreme and deadly hurricanes to hit the United States, damaging over 70 percent of occupied housing (approximately 200,000 units) and displacing an estimated 80–90 percent of city residents. Only 57 percent of the city's Black population has returned. Numerous studies have examined the aftermath of the hurricane, focusing on neighborhood recovery processes and market involvement, which contributed to patterns of gentrification and displacement affecting specific demographic groups (Bloomberg, 2019; Aune et al., 2020).

In the Global South case, Tacloban City focuses on government-led territorial control and planned resettlement initiatives implemented as climate adaptation measures following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. This state-led intervention displaced low-income and informal settlers, while facilitating the retention or entry of higher-income residents and private-sector actors in coastal areas.

By situating these cases within their respective regional contexts, this study analyzes the processes of climate gentrification, state and market actors, and the differential outcomes experienced by populations across socioeconomic groups. In conclusion, the essay presents key insights comparing distinct mechanisms and outcomes of climate gentrification in the Global North and South.

2. Theoretical frameworks

Global North: Traditional Gentrification and Spatial Justice

Life is not fair, especially for historically vulnerable populations in cities. Cities have primarily been shaped by those in power and market forces under neoliberalism. As Harvey (2003) describes, under capitalism and free markets, cities become increasingly fragmented as socioeconomic inequality and class division widen. Whether through political decisions such as redlining maps or capitalist forms of governance that lead to gentrification and fortified cities, there is abundant evidence that socioeconomic inequalities are widespread, systematic, and deeply entrenched in urban contexts, making living conditions even harder for low-income populations. Communities experiencing lower income levels and class segregation are more likely to suffer from inequalities associated with poverty and poor neighborhood conditions, such as limited access to quality education, employment opportunities, health care, infrastructure, and amenities (Urban Institute, 2021). Cities thus become spaces where these socioeconomic disparities and inequalities are physically revealed and are spatially segmented (Harvey, 2003; Fainstein, S., 2014).

One of the main drivers of this process is gentrification. In the traditional Global North framework, gentrification describes the displacement of lower-income groups by higher-income groups as state or market actors identify rent gaps and development opportunities, leading to rising property values and living costs. Elliott-Cooper et al. (2019) foreground displacement as a defining feature of gentrification in the West, building on Glass's (1964) original formulation of the concept in the UK context. Within this framework, gentrification is viewed as an inevitable consequence of uneven development, in which poorer populations are displaced by wealthier ones. From this perspective, cycles of capital investment are subject to economic fluctuations, "with accumulation by dispossession accelerating these processes, scaling up both displacement and investment" (Harvey, 2004; Glassman, 2006; Zhang & He, 2018). In particular, Marcuse's (1986) classic concept of gentrification-induced displacement conceptualizes displacement as a process in which low-income populations are priced out of increasingly expensive central cities and pushed into peripheral or suburban areas. However, as these authors point out, this framework, based solely on market mechanisms, cannot fully explain displacement driven by state-led gentrification and systemic violence outside the Global North, prompting efforts to reconceptualize both gentrification and displacement.

Global South: State-led Gentrification through Territorial Control

There have been attempts to understand gentrification in the Global South beyond the perspectives of the Global North (Western and Euro-American views). Ghertner (2015) questions the applicability of the traditional gentrification model, particularly in light of tenure diversity. Unlike in many Western contexts, tenure diversity is prevalent outside the Global North, where public, customary, and informal land uses often coexist. The capitalist view of gentrification tends to overlook the existence of non-private forms of tenure in the Global South, thereby obscuring what precedes market-induced gentrification and unaffordability in contexts where non-privatized land constitutes a significant obstacle to capital expansion—one that cannot be overcome without intentional, extra-economic intervention. This raises the question of who is driving gentrification. In such contexts, property formalization and tenure regularization emerge as dominant drivers of displacement, as state actors convert customary and public land into private property (Ghertner, 2015).

Building on this perspective, scholars suggest viewing gentrification in the Global South as a governmental tool for territorial control and as part of postcolonial aspirations to become a

“world-class city” (See et al, 2025a; See et al, 2025b, TED, 2014). Shmaryahu-Yeshurun (2022) points out that while increased state participation in gentrification in the Global North is often associated with a turn toward neoliberalism, in the Global South a neoliberal and authoritarian state actively stimulates the process through land privatization and resident displacement. Lees et al. (2016) similarly emphasize the need to reconceptualize land control and privatization processes that do not align with Western patterns of urban development.

In this sense, gentrification in the Global South is not driven solely by economic processes; rather, it often takes the form of state-led gentrification involving political and power mechanisms, characterized by the commodification and privatization of land and the large-scale displacement of low-income urban residents and informal settlers (Ghertner, 2015; Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2022; See et al., 2025).

Climate gentrification as an Emerging and Global Threat to the Urban Poor

Climate challenges further exacerbate spatial injustice in cities across regional contexts. In addition to long-standing inequalities, climate-related hazards such as extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution intensify the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized populations. Cities are becoming increasingly exposed to climate risks, with poor and vulnerable communities bearing the greatest burden due to inadequate urban planning and substandard living conditions (World Bank, 2023; U.S. Department of Agriculture). These populations are more likely to experience overcrowded housing, insufficient infrastructure and services, and adverse health conditions, all of which compound the impacts of climate change and make recovery more difficult (L, B., Judy., 2012).

While climate change has long been recognized as a global risk, recent reports from the World Economic Forum (2025) and the United Nations (2024) draw attention to the accelerating crisis of sea-level rise, which threatens the lives and livelihoods of more than one billion people worldwide. Beyond catastrophic events, climate risk has emerged as a new driver of gentrification, further shrinking the spatial possibilities available to the urban poor (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg, 2018; Bloomberg, 2024).

As climate change reshapes urban environments in both the Global North and the Global South, climate gentrification has gained prominence as a framework for understanding how property values increasingly reflect exposure to climate risk and resilience capacity. Emerging theories conceptualize climate change as an inducive factor that accelerates gentrification by attracting market investment. For example, empirical studies of Miami identify three mechanisms of climate gentrification: the Superior Investment Pathway, which links higher elevation to property value appreciation due to lower climate risk exposure; the Cost-Burden Pathway, which disproportionately burdens low-income households through rising insurance costs, property repairs, and property taxes associated with increased climate hazards; and the Resilient Investment Pathway, whereby investments in climate-resilient infrastructure increase the market value of enhanced properties (Keenan et al., 2018; Kim, 2025).

However, within broader political economy perspectives relevant to the Global South, See et al. (2025b) identify a key limitation of this empirical framework: it explains climate gentrification primarily as an interaction between environmental risk and market dynamics rooted in the context of Miami, United States. As such, it does not fully capture how climate gentrification operates in Southern contexts, where state power, land tenure diversity, and political agendas play a more central role in shaping displacement outcomes.

Analytical Framework: Hypothesis and Competing Explanations

Within this context, I argue that climate gentrification produces similar displacement outcomes across regions, but through different roles of climate change operating within distinct gentrification mechanisms that reflect varying state capacities and property formalization regimes. In this framework, market-driven processes tend to dominate in the Global North, while state spatial governance plays a more central role in the Global South.

Alternative hypotheses include: (1) climate gentrification is simply an accelerated form of traditional gentrification with no distinct mechanisms; (2) displacement outcomes differ substantially across regional contexts; or (3) the distinction between state-led and market-driven processes is artificial, with both operating simultaneously. This study focuses on the third alternative, as climate gentrification is best understood as emerging from hybrid patterns, albeit with different primary drivers across contexts.

Accordingly, displacement outcomes of climate gentrification are analyzed in relation to the primary mechanisms of climate gentrification (state-led versus market-driven), using a contextualized and comparative analytical approach.

This study examines different forms of climate gentrification through the case studies of Hurricane Katrina (2005) in New Orleans, United States, and Typhoon Haiyan (2013) in Tacloban City, Philippines, with nested cases to assess the proposed hypothesis and competing explanations.

Table 1. Analytical Framework of Climate Gentrification Mechanisms in the Global North and South Cases

Region	Primary Mechanism (Key explanatory factor)	
	Market-driven Climate Gentrification	State-led Climate Gentrification
Global North (Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, United States)	Market forces as primary driver	Policy tool – Green Dot Map, Road Home Program
Global South (Typhoon Haiyan, Tacloban City, Philippines)	Market forces as secondary driver	Policy tool – No-Build Zone, DreamVille Project
Displacement Outcomes		

Limitations

First, this paper recognizes that climate gentrification involves multiple actors and interacting variables; therefore, the Global North and Global South cannot be fully generalized through a dichotomous framework based on a limited number of case studies. Second, this paper does not aim to provide definitive causal evidence of how climate gentrification operates in each context; rather, it seeks to explore how climate gentrification unfolds through representative cases in which either state or market actors are notably dominant.

3. Different Forms and Similar Outcomes: Climate Gentrification Case Studies Global North (United States) vs. South (Philippines)

Hurricane Katrina (2005) in New Orleans, USA (Market-driven gentrification)

A. **Climate Shock and Disproportionate Damage**

Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and surrounding areas in August, 2005 and is recorded as one of the deadliest natural disasters in the history of the United States. The hurricane destroyed more than 200,000 homes and displaced over 800,000 residents across the region. Although Katrina affected neighborhoods across all demographic groups, available data indicate that communities with fewer social and economic resources experienced disproportionately greater impacts (Logan, 2006).

While the absolute number of victims was relatively similar across racial and class groups, the likelihood of residing in severely damaged areas was significantly higher for specific populations, particularly Black residents, people living below the poverty line, and renters. In the most heavily damaged areas, nearly half of the population was Black (45.8 percent, compared to 26.4 percent in the rest of the region), a higher proportion lived in rental housing (45.7 percent compared to 30.9 percent), and poverty rates were markedly higher (20.9 percent compared to 15.3 percent), alongside higher unemployment rates (7.6 percent compared to 6.0 percent) (Logan, 2006).

Neighborhoods such as the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East, where approximately 85 percent of residents were Black and where the majority of housing stock was damaged, illustrate the racialized geography of disaster impacts. Logan (2006) argues that this disproportionate damage is rooted in long-standing patterns of uneven public investment, whereby high-ground neighborhoods and drainage and pumping infrastructure historically worked to the advantage of certain areas during past storms. As a result, predominantly Black and low-income neighborhoods were more vulnerable once exposed to flooding, particularly due to poorer housing stock and weaker structural resilience compared to more affluent, predominantly White neighborhoods (O'Brien, 2025).

B. **Recovery and Climate Gentrification Mechanisms**

In response to Hurricane Katrina, multiple recovery and resilience policies were proposed and implemented by government authorities. This section examines two key interventions, the Green Dot Map and the Road Home Program, and analyzes how subsequent market-driven recovery processes unfolded following these policies as part of broader climate gentrification dynamics.

Green Dot Map (Failed state intervention to city restructuring plan)

In January 2006, the Green Dot Map was first proposed by the Bring Back New Orleans Commission, a special city commission established to guide post-Katrina reconstruction. The proposal aimed to convert selected heavily damaged neighborhoods into stormwater-absorbing parks and green spaces, while prioritizing the restoration of other areas. Published in local newspapers, the map identified six areas marked with green dots designated for future parkland and twelve red-outlined zones targeted for prioritized reconstruction (Bloomberg, 2015; Bloomberg, 2016).

The green-dotted areas largely corresponded to neighborhoods that had suffered the most severe flooding and were therefore subject to a proposed building permit moratorium, rendering them temporarily off-limits to rebuilding until they could demonstrate “viability.” Many of these neighborhoods were predominantly Black, whereas several predominantly White neighborhoods that also experienced storm damage were spared from such restrictions. The proposal was widely perceived as an adaptation strategy that functioned as a form of racially discriminatory land-use planning. As displaced residents were scattered across the country, strong opposition emerged from community members seeking to protect their homes and preserve the possibility of return. Grassroots and civic organizations formed, adopting green dots in their logos, and umbrella associations emerged to coordinate resistance against the Green Dot Map. Neighborhood rallies featured participants wearing green dots made from paper plates (Matsushita et al., 2024; Lamb, 2020).

As a result of widespread public resistance and political backlash, the Green Dot Map was ultimately abandoned (Lamb, 2020; Bloomberg, 2015). Despite its failure, the Green Dot Map represented the first comprehensive, state-led spatial vision for post-Katrina reconstruction in New Orleans. At the same time, it was widely perceived as a form of top-down displacement, generating deep mistrust toward governmental land-planning strategies (Matsushita et al., 2024; Lamb, 2020).

Lamb (2020) argues that this perception stemmed from the commission’s reliance on properties, rather than households or people, as the primary unit of analysis for selecting green-dotted neighborhoods, thereby disregarding their social significance. Reflecting a strong development-oriented perspective, the commission identified “Infill Development Areas,” marked by pink shapes on the map, as “underutilized sites on high ground” requiring demolition and clearance for residential, commercial, and institutional development, including uses relocated from flood-prone areas. Similarly, “Targeted Development Areas” were marked as numbered points, with recommendations to identify financially capable developers able to build housing rapidly and to consolidate public and private ownership. Crucially, the report did not explain the selection criteria or rationale for these areas, raising questions about whether “members of the commission had specific, unstated reasons to target these particular sites,” as Lamb (2020) suggests.

Importantly, although the Green Dot Map was never formally implemented, many displaced Black and low-income residents did not return to their neighborhoods in the years that followed. Market-driven recovery and reinvestment patterns that emerged after the plan’s abandonment contributed to longer-term gentrification processes, ultimately producing displacement outcomes similar to those the proposed plan would have generated (Rao, A., 2025).

Road Home Program (State intervention based on market valuation and privatized policy execution)

As part of the housing recovery and compensation policies for hurricane victims, the State of Louisiana designed the Road Home Program (RHP). Its primary goal was to provide grants to homeowners either to rebuild their homes or to sell them if they chose not to return. Although the program is often credited with enabling many homeowners to rebuild, it has been widely criticized for producing differential impacts across race and economic class, thereby contributing to socio-spatial inequality in post-Katrina resettlement patterns (Gotham, 2014).

A central problem identified in the literature concerns the grant calculation formula. Grants were calculated based on the lower of two figures: the pre-storm market value of the home or the estimated cost of storm damage, with an award cap of $150,000. This formula resulted in homeowners with nearly identical homes and comparable levels of storm damage receiving substantially different grant amounts depending on neighborhood location (Gotham, 2014).

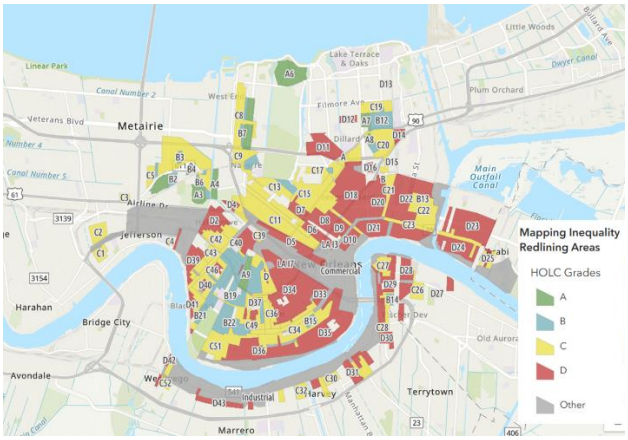
African American homeowners were particularly affected, as they were more likely to live in historically segregated neighborhoods where housing values were systematically lower than those of comparable homes in predominantly White areas. Census 2000 data indicate that Black homeowners in New Orleans were significantly more likely to own lower-valued homes than White homeowners. In response, civil rights organizations filed lawsuits against the Road Home Program, arguing that its design and implementation were discriminatory. According to these claims, the program reinforced long-standing spatial patterns of segregation by restricting choices and limiting the range of individual and collective decisions available to displaced residents.

Gotham (2014) provides evidence that the Road Home Program's grant formula constrained the return of African American residents. Based on the 2010 U.S. Census, predominantly Black neighborhoods such as the Lower Ninth Ward exhibited a repopulation rate of only 23 percent, whereas predominantly White neighborhoods such as Lakeview experienced a repopulation rate of approximately 65 percent, despite having suffered comparable levels of storm and flood damage. Beyond the discriminatory grant formula, the author points out that the privatized implementation of this public recovery policy by a private contractor, ICF International, resulted in severe program mismanagement, including incorrectly calculated grant awards, questionable appraisals of pre-storm home values, and significant delays in disbursing funds to needy homeowners.

Another empirical study of the Road Home Program reveals that it imposed further obstacles to rebuilding homes with lower pre-storm values. While the program did benefit many residents who were able to return and rebuild, it failed to provide a "real choice" for those whose grant awards were insufficient to cover actual rebuilding costs. Figure 1 illustrates the spatial distribution of the gap between estimated rebuilding costs and pre-storm home values, averaged by census block. Darker areas represent locations where home values were lower than the estimated rebuilding costs, resulting in funding shortfalls, while lighter areas indicate locations where pre-storm values exceeded rebuilding costs or reached the $150,000 award cap. Wealthier neighborhoods such as Lakeview and Uptown exhibit higher concentrations of the latter, whereas much of the rest of the city reflects the former pattern (Green, T. F., & Olshansky, R. B., 2012).

Although a formal GIS overlay analysis with historical redlining maps was not conducted, visual comparison suggests a strong spatial correspondence between areas experiencing grant shortfalls and historically redlined neighborhoods (Figure 1). In this way, the Road Home Program demonstrates how disaster recovery policies that appear neutral can encode historical inequalities and produce racially differentiated outcomes. The program's reliance on market-based valuation mechanisms reveals how market-driven displacement can operate through state policy instruments in post-disaster recovery contexts.

Figure 1. Historical Redlining Map (1930) and Difference between rebuilding costs and pre-storm value



*Source: Mapping Inequality Redlining Areas (GIS), University of Richmond; Rebuilding housing in New Orleans: the Road Home Program after the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Green, T. F., & Olshansky, R. B., 2012

C. Displacement Outcomes

By December 2006, more than half of the original residents had returned to the city; however, the remaining population continued to experience prolonged displacement (Fussell, 2010; Florida, R., 2019). Across racial and socioeconomic groups, scholars reveal stark disparities in return rates, with only 51 percent of Black residents returning compared to 71 percent among other racial groups. Ultimately, Hurricane Katrina resulted in the permanent displacement of an estimated 100,000 Black residents. As a consequence, New Orleans ranked fifth among the most gentrified cities in the United States, according to the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (2020) (Rao, A., 2025).

Income status further shaped displacement outcomes. Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab indicates that households earning less than $20,000 annually experienced the longest delays in return or were unable to return at all. One contributing factor was that low-income families had fewer habitable housing options to which they could return (Alvarez, P., 2015).

Nearly two decades later, a growing body of scholarship examines how climate gentrification facilitated the replacement of historically Black communities with more affluent White residents in post-Katrina New Orleans. First, severe physical damage combined with poorly designed recovery policies created opportunities for investors and developers to acquire depreciated properties and redevelop them into higher-end projects targeting wealthier populations (University of Michigan, 2024). Extensive destruction displaced existing residents, enabling developers to assemble large tracts of land and rebuild not only to higher standards but also for more advantaged groups, thereby producing a form of gentrification. Van Holm, E. J., & Wyczalkowski, C. K. (2019) supports this interpretation, identifying a positive correlation between levels of neighborhood damage and subsequent gentrification post-Katrina.

A second mechanism is explained by Keenan's (2018) Elevation Theory. As climate risks intensified, housing values increased in safer, higher-elevation areas, attracting wealthier residents. CNN (2021) reports that property prices rose significantly in elevated neighborhoods in New Orleans, while the relationship between elevation and race became

increasingly pronounced between 2000 and 2019: higher-elevation areas became increasingly White, while lower-lying areas remained predominantly Black. During this period, the share of Black residents living in census tracts with the highest median elevations declined by approximately one-third. Keenan attributes this shift to climate change reshaping residential preferences. Additionally, local opposition to affordable housing development in high-ground neighborhoods further restricted access for Black and low-income populations.

Ultimately, Hurricane Katrina produced deeply unequal outcomes for Black and low-income residents, not only due to preexisting vulnerabilities in infrastructure and housing stock, but also through post-disaster recovery processes that facilitated their replacement by more affluent White populations. Although the government initially attempted to restructure land-use planning in ways that aligned with racially segregated geographies, community resistance prevented the formal implementation of these state-led interventions. Subsequent recovery policies, most notably Louisiana's Road Home Program, appeared race-neutral but relied on grant formulas tied to pre-storm property values. This design systematically disadvantaged homeowners in historically Black neighborhoods, where property values were lower despite similar housing characteristics.

Unequal climate impacts, limited resilience, and policy-induced barriers to return prevented many displaced residents from reestablishing their lives in the city. Meanwhile, private developers capitalized on these conditions by introducing high-end infrastructure and redevelopment projects that left little space for original residents to return (Jacobin, 2025). Rising demand for safer, higher-elevation neighborhoods further priced out remaining low-income Black residents as housing costs increased. In this process, explicit state-led restructuring efforts failed, yet government policies indirectly favored higher-income populations and enabled market forces to drive displacement. In this sense, the New Orleans case aligns closely with traditional gentrification theory, characterized by capital reinvestment, the state as an enabling actor, and market dynamics that render central urban spaces increasingly unaffordable for marginalized populations.

Typhoon Haiyan (2013) in Tacloban City, Philippines (State-led gentrification)

A. **Climate Shock and Disproportionate Damage**

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Eastern Visayas group of islands in the central Philippines. It is recorded as one of the most destructive natural disasters in the country's history, causing an estimated US$2 billion in damages and more than 6,300 deaths. Tacloban City, then the fifth fastest-growing urban center in the Philippines and located in Leyte Province, experienced the highest loss of life and property, accounting for more than 2,600 of the total recorded deaths and the destruction of approximately 29,000 houses (Iuchi, 2023). Poor residents were disproportionately vulnerable to the disaster, as many lived along coastal areas or beside streams and riverbanks. In particular, informal settlers faced extreme exposure to storm surges measuring between five and seven meters in height along the coastline, resulting in a fatality rate of approximately 8.4 percent among this population (Dialogues Health, 2022; UNDP, 2015).

B. **Recovery and Climate Gentrification Mechanisms**

In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, the Philippine government declared a No-Build Zone and implemented a planned resettlement strategy in Tacloban North as a climate adaptation policy aimed at mitigating future disaster risks and relocating residents from flood-prone and severely affected areas to locations perceived as safer.

This section examines two key state-led interventions: the No-Build Zone and DreamVille, one of the 31 resettlement sites developed in Tacloban North; and analyzes how these policy tools contributed to mass displacement and gentrification under the government's aspiration to reshape Tacloban City into a "world-class" city.

Before examining these state-led adaptation strategies in detail, several contextual factors are important.

First, the Philippine government had already identified Tacloban as a fast-growing city and envisioned its development as an international port entry point and regional economic hub. In alignment with the development efforts, the city government had already planned to relocate informal dwellers from Anibong district of Tacloban to Tacloban North in 2012, a year before the typhoon occurred (See et al., 2025a; See et al., 2025b).

Second, planned resettlement has long been adopted in the Philippines as a legal climate adaptation strategy. In particular, See et al. (2025) explain the country's long history of government-led relocation for political, economic, and environmental purposes dating back to the colonial era (Ortega, 2016). While top-down planned resettlement, including forced evictions, has been framed as climate adaptation, scholars emphasize that it has frequently been implemented to acquire land for infrastructure construction, decongest urban areas, and facilitate urban renewal (Fitzpatrick & Compton, 2017). The primary targets of such relocations are often slums and informal settlements located in so-called danger zones, including waterways, riverbanks, and coastal areas (Tadgell et al., 2017). Multiple studies show that informal settlers are forcibly expelled and prohibited from rebuilding their homes in coastal zones (Yee, 2018a; Yee, 2018b).

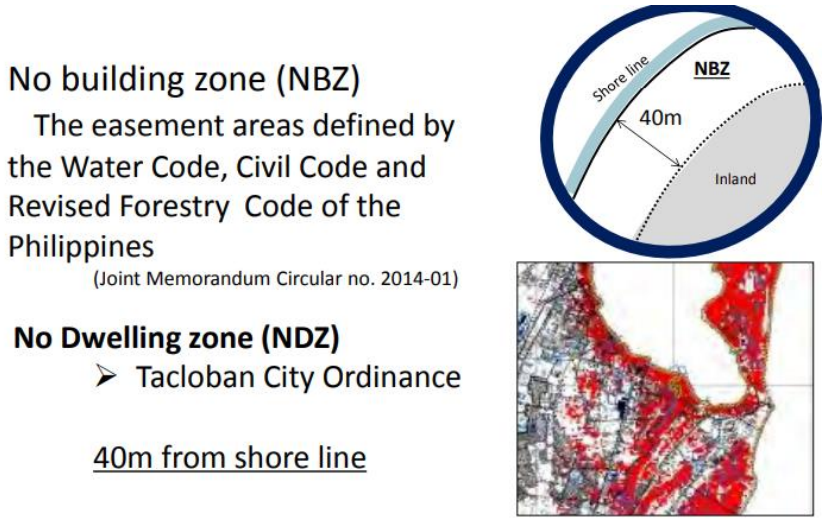
No-Build Zone (State intervention through restrictive land-use planning)

Shortly after the disaster, in December 2013, the central government of the Philippines enacted the No-Build Zone ordinance in Tacloban City. Former President Benigno Aquino III emphasized the need to "build back better" by creating climate-resilient cities and relocating or removing communities located in high-risk areas. Even before any concrete relocation or adaptation strategy had been announced, the No-Build Zone was implemented based on existing legal bases, including Republic Acts 386 and 10121, as well as Presidential Decrees 1067, 1096, and 705. The policy primarily prohibited the construction of any infrastructure within forty meters of the coastline, ostensibly to protect citizens' lives in areas deemed unsafe.

News reports estimated that more than 7,000 families would be heavily affected by this policy (Sunnexdesk, 2013). These residents were predominantly urban poor populations, including fishermen and vendors engaged in the informal street economy, who were devastated by the news and insisted on remaining in place in order to sustain their livelihoods (Yee, 2018a; Yee, 2018b).

Geohazard maps were produced by the national government in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to identify populations exposed to coastal hazards. Housing located within high-risk zones identified through this mapping was marked for demolition by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). In addition, residents who refused to relocate were deemed ineligible for government cash assistance for recovery (See et al., 2025a).

Figure 2. No-Build and No-Dwelling Zone



*Source: JICA

See et al. (2025) argue that political power played a decisive role in reshaping the city and determining who was allowed to remain. In 2014, the Tacloban city government adopted the Tacloban Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan (TRRP) to guide post-Haiyan recovery, rehabilitation, and development. A key strategy within the TRRP was the transformation of agricultural land in the northern area into residential zones to accommodate the relocation of approximately 40 percent of the city's population. In parallel, the city's Comprehensive Land Use Plan reclassified coastal areas such as Anibong district as commercial and industrial zones.

As a result, the No-Build Zone policy was modified into a No-Dwelling Zone, which prohibited residential use while permitting commercial development. This policy shift laid the foundation for private and commercial investment as part of the post-disaster reconstruction process. The transition enabled higher-income residents and commercial property owners with formal legal titles to remain in these “unsafe” coastal areas, provided they could comply with and afford disaster-resilient building standards. These developments were further protected through the construction of barriers and other protective infrastructure (See et al., 2025).

In response, urban informal settlers organized the social movement People Surge in 2014 and mobilized in peaceful protest against what they perceived as unequal policies, forced displacement under the guise of disaster risk reduction, and corporate land grabbing. However, members of the Philippine military, mobilized under the mandate of “disaster response and community building” were reported to have harassed and intimidated protesters (Yee, 2018b).

Scholars have evaluated the No-Build Zone as a form of restrictive planning, arguing that it was fundamentally anti-poor and disproportionately beneficial to elites and business owners. Mahanty et al. (2023, p. 187) describe Typhoon Haiyan as “an open moment that exposes existing power relations and injustices, leading to opportunities for institutional change.” Similarly, Yee (2018) characterizes this restrictive planning approach as exhibiting three key features:

“(1) post-disaster conditions are manipulated to advance the economic and political agendas of the capitalist class;

(2) private actors increasingly dominate disaster response and reconstruction; and

(3) post-disaster reconstruction institutionalizes privatization, trade liberalization, and structural adjustment policies.”

Supporting this assessment, See et al. (2025), based on fieldwork conducted in Tacloban City, observe that by 2024 most informal housing had been demolished, resulting in large-scale forced displacement of affected residents.

DreamVille in Tacloban North (State-planned resettlement and displacement)

Alongside the No-Build Zone, the government implemented planned resettlement by relocating residents to 31 resettlement sites in Tacloban North. Among these sites, DreamVille was developed by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a U.S.-based non-governmental organization, in collaboration with local public authorities. Approximately 883 households were relocated to DreamVille and provided with climate-resilient housing designed to withstand typhoons and earthquakes. The houses were constructed on mortgaged land, with relocatees required to repay housing loans through PAG-IBIG, the Philippines’ national financing agency for socialized housing (See et al., 2025b).

Although DreamVille has been relatively regarded as a successful relocation project due to its provision of safer housing and a natural built environment, displaced residents from Anibong experienced a second phase of climate gentrification after relocation (See et al., 2025b).

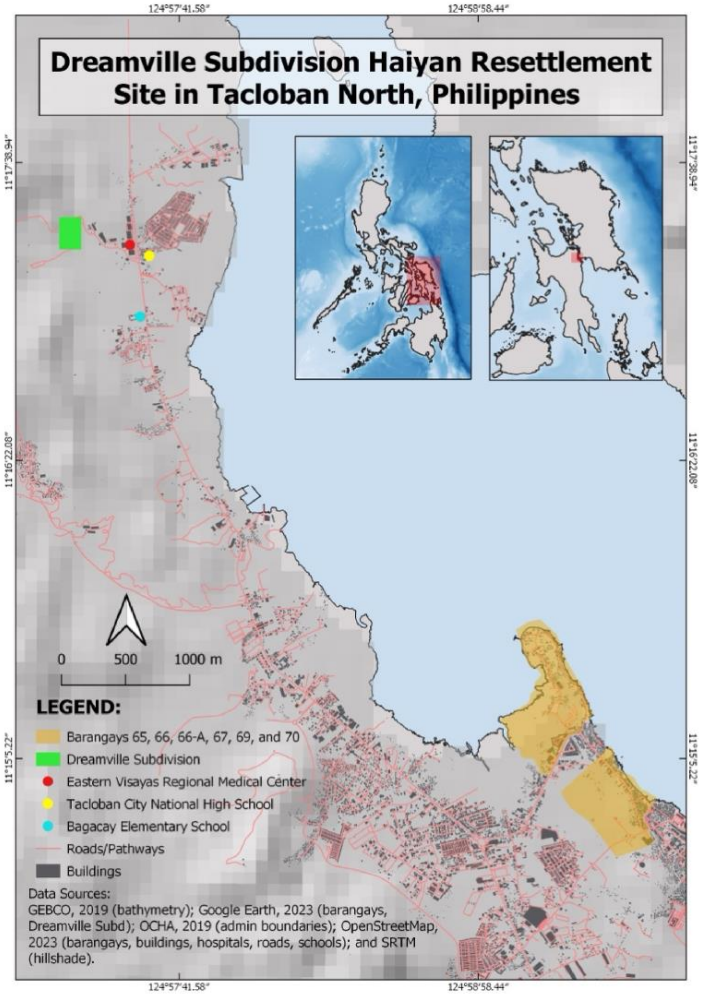
First, relocatees in DreamVille suffered from a severe lack of basic infrastructure and public services. Residents were required to travel long distances to access essential services such as schools, hospitals, and employment opportunities located in Tacloban City and neighboring areas. The financial burden of transportation costs and extended commute

times placed a significant burden on households. As a result, some residents eventually returned to their original coastal neighborhoods as informal settlers, while using DreamVille primarily as an evacuation site during disasters (See et al., 2025b).

Second, DreamVille's perceived safety (located approximately 10 kilometers inland and 10 meters above sea level, making it less exposed to storm surges and flash floods) attracted higher-income groups seeking climate-secure housing (Best and Jouzi, 2022). This influx of wealthier residents altered the socioeconomic composition of the settlement.

Third, as new infrastructure and amenities were introduced in DreamVille, the cost of living increased, rendering the area increasingly unaffordable for original relocatees. Between 2019 and 2024, housing prices in DreamVille increased by approximately 70 percent compared to their original acquisition value. This escalation contributed to both economic and social displacement. Low-income residents reported growing feelings of social and cultural alienation as the community transformed. Additionally, households unable to meet mortgage payments sold their units, moved in with relatives, or returned to prohibited coastal areas, despite ongoing risks of eviction and house demolition (See et al., 2025a; See et al., 2025b).

Figure 3. DreamVille resettlement site in Tacloban city, Philippines.



*Source: See et al., 2025

C. **Displacement Outcomes**

While I could not identify precise displacement rates, multiple studies indicate that informal settlers and low-income urban poor populations were disproportionately affected by forced displacement, gentrification, and housing demolition in Tacloban City. The Brookings Institution (2014) reports that poor and landless populations not only suffered from climate risks and forced displacement but also endured prolonged displacement processes that unfolded over several years. Under the No-Build Zone policy, residents were prohibited from returning to their original homes, while resettlement sites were not yet fully prepared, leaving many households with no viable place to live.

The Global South case clearly demonstrates state-led gentrification, in which government intervention served as the primary driver of mass displacement under the banner of climate adaptation policy. See et al. (2025b) acknowledge that environmental and socioeconomic factors also contributed to climate gentrification, particularly in the case of DreamVille, where higher-income residents were attracted to safer, elevated areas. As infrastructure and amenities were introduced in DreamVille, living costs increased, eventually driving out lower-income residents.

However, the authors identify three distinctive characteristics of climate gentrification in Tacloban City. First, climate gentrification emerged from postcolonial aspirations to construct a “world-class” and climate-resilient city. Second, climate gentrification was shaped by competing land claims and interests among government authorities, private developers, and local communities, with active state intervention aimed at “cleaning the city of visible poverty” in order to attract investment and promote a business-friendly urban environment. Third, displacement in Tacloban followed multi-directional pathways, unlike the unidirectional displacement typically emphasized in traditional gentrification theory. Displaced residents were forced to leave, yet some later returned to areas such as Anibong as informal settlers due to economic necessity and inadequate resettlement conditions.

In the Tacloban case, displacement occurred prior to significant market intervention, underscoring the central role of the state. Residents were forcibly displaced and prohibited from remaining in designated areas through the No-Build Zone policy, which was later modified to accommodate higher-income populations, business owners, and private investment. These policy shifts reveal a clear governmental intention to selectively determine who is allowed to remain in the city and how urban space is reshaped in the aftermath of climate disaster (See et al., 2025b).

4. Comparative Analysis

Based on the case studies, different mechanisms of climate gentrification are observed across regional contexts, yet they produce similar displacement outcomes.

Key Similarities

1. Gentrification operates through both political and economic processes, with government and market forces interacting under a broader capitalist regime.
2. In both cases, climate gentrification results in the exclusion of historically marginalized populations (Black communities, informal settlers, and low-income groups), alongside the influx of higher socioeconomic groups (White populations, formal tenure holders, and higher-income residents).
3. Keenan's (2018) Elevation Theory (areas with lower exposure to climate risks become more desirable and expensive) applies to both regional contexts.

Key Differences

1. Climate disasters play distinct roles in the Global North and Global South. In New Orleans, climate risk functioned primarily as a *trigger* that accelerated existing patterns of gentrification, whereas in Tacloban City it operated as a *justification* for forced eviction and relocation framed as climate adaptation.
2. In the New Orleans case, state-led attempts to restructure land-use planning, deeply embedded in the historical marginalization of Black communities, ultimately failed due to grassroots mobilization and civic engagement. In Tacloban City, although community resistance also emerged through protests and rallies, such movements were forcibly suppressed through state and military intervention.
3. While post-disaster reconstruction processes motivated climate gentrification in both cases, aspirations to become a "world-class city" were more explicit and pronounced in the Global South context.
4. Although economic growth pressures underlie climate gentrification in both regions, tenure diversity and the presence of informal settlements in the Global South enabled stronger state-led interventions, which in turn paved the way for private investment.
5. Exclusion and displacement were primarily driven by implicit market mechanisms in the Global North, with indirect support from state actors, whereas they were directly and explicitly enforced through government intervention in the Global South.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis Climate Gentrification Mechanisms in the Global North and South Cases

Dimensions	Global North	Global South
Location	New Orleans, United States	Tacloban City, Philippines
Climate Hazard	Hurricane Katrina (2005)	Typhoon Haiyan (2013)
Role of Climate Hazard	Trigger to expand and intensify historic gentrification	Justification for enforcing state power to displace specific populations

Primary Motive	Attraction of investment	Attraction of investment to become a world-class city; removal of informal settlers
Primary Mechanism	• Private investment as reconstruction processes; • Real estate market based on the property elevation; • Public policies for house rebuilding grant based on historic market valuation	• Planned relocation (forced resettlement) as climate adaptation strategy; • No-Build Zone policy for restrictive land planning for low-income populations; • Real estate market based on the property elevation and infrastructure development
Displaced Population	Black, low-income populations	Urban informal settlers, low-income populations
Temporal Pattern	Failed direct state intervention (Green Dot Map) ➔ Indirect policy support (Road Home Program) ➔ Market-led recovery ➔ Selective return ➔ Long-term demographic change	Direct state intervention for territorial control (No-Build Zone) ➔ Rapid displacement ➔ Planned relocation and house demolition ➔ Subsequent market entry
Outcome	Exclusion of low-socioeconomic groups (black, low-income)	Exclusion of low-socioeconomic groups (informal settlers, low-income)

5. Conclusion

Based on the case studies, this paper demonstrates that climate gentrification aligns with broader gentrification theories, while operating through regionally distinct mechanisms. In the Global North, climate-conditioned gentrification is best explained through traditional market-driven processes rooted in capitalist urban development, with the state playing a largely supportive or indirect role. In contrast, in the Global South, state-led intervention operates as the primary driver of climate gentrification, particularly within contexts characterized by tenure diversity and postcolonial aspirations to become “world-class” cities.

Across both cases, climate gentrification reflects a hybrid interaction between state and market actors that disproportionately displaces populations with the least political and economic power, albeit through different dominant pathways. While the literature on climate gentrification has thus far accumulated empirical evidence largely from Western contexts, this study highlights the need for further research in the Global South, where climate risk is more explicitly mobilized as a political and territorial tool.

Future research could expand this comparative framework to include more granular regional contexts, such as East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. Additionally, beyond sudden-onset disasters, examining slow-onset climate processes would deepen understanding of how climate gentrification unfolds across diverse environmental and institutional settings.

*AI-based tools were used for grammar checking and organizational support only. All analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are the author’s own.

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