World Class Aspirations, Urban Informality, and Poverty Politics: A North-South Comparison

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Abstract

Under the influence of the discourses and practices of global neoliberal urbanism, municipal administrations worldwide aspire to make their cities world class spaces, where informality is an anachronism and poverty can be made history. In this essay, drawing on fieldwork conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, San Francisco (California), and Seattle (Washington), we address the question of how a geographic relational poverty approach can help us understand, or at least expand ways of thinking about these processes by attending to urban informality and the politics of poverty. Informality, a pervasive feature of the global South and North, functions as a survival strategy whereby the monetarily poor can compensate for their lack of income through commoning. Market-driven, state underwritten urban development initiatives for housing those with wealth is limiting the conditions of possibility for the monetarily poor, and informality. This is compounded by emergent political discourses rendering informality as inappropriate, and the monetarily poor as undeserving of a right to the city. Yet long-standing more-than-capitalist and communal informal practices pursued by the urban poor remain effective and necessary survival strategies, supporting residents whose presence is necessary to the city and whose practices challenge capitalist norms.

Keywords

informality; housing; relational poverty; urban development; housing crisis;

poverty politics

Under the influence of the discourses and practices of global neoliberal urbanism (Sheppard et al. 2013), municipal administrations worldwide aspire to make their cities world class—spaces where informality is an anachronism and poverty can be eliminated. In capitalist societies, poverty is defined monetarily—measured by the poverty line—to~~hat can~~ be overcome by enabling the monetarily poor to participate entrepreneurially in capitalist markets (Baldwin and Crane 2020; de Soto 2000; Maskovsky and Piven 2020). San Francisco and Seattle are~~is~~ emblematic of cities seen already as world class—a global centre for an emergent platform capitalism that is reshaping capitalist globalisation. Jakarta is a world class wannabe city: located in the global capitalist periphery, complexly globally connected, and now among the largest (with a greater metropolitan area of some 30 million inhabitants). In this paper, we suggest that these two cities—despite occupying very different socio-spatial positionalities and conjunctural moments—are experiencing remarkably similar politics of relational poverty that revolve around issues of urban informality.

The rich complexity of informality has long been recognised in the global South. Often attending to histories and geographies of colonialism, indigeneity, and development, informality scholarship has long foregrounded the agency, collectivity and creativity of urban informal populations (Hart 1985~~73~~; Perlman 1976), which make up the bulk of Jakarta's residents (Kusno 2013; Simone 2014). Until recently, western urban theory has neglected informality. Indeed, the pervasiveness of informality in cities of the post-colony has been one basis for arguing that a southern turn is necessary in urban theory (Roy 2005, 2011). Yet theoretical insights emerging from taking such cities seriously are also relevant for "northern" cities (Mukhija and Loukaitou-Sideris 2014; Sheppard et al. 2015), as we "ask third world questions of first world processes" (Roy 2011:411). San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle exemplify this insight with respect to informality—not only in terms of informal street trading and black markets.
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The discourses of capitalist, and particularly neoliberal urban policy-making, imagining capitalism governed by a rule of law whereby legitimate forms of housing and economic practice adhere to rules of private property and governmental regimes (Fairbanks 2009; Roy 2003), presume that informal populations will disappear naturally as cities and countries advance through teleological stages of development (World Bank 2009). But this is far from the case. Rather, processes of accumulation by dispossession that render capitalist development possible produce informality as their constitutive outside (Roy and AlSayyad 2004). ~~Through this lens,~~Thus poverty is neither a state nor a deficiency, but a process of impoverishment through deprivation—forcibly transferring assets from one group to another (Baldwin and Crane 2020; De Genova and Roy 2020). Indeed, the inherent tendency of globalising capitalism to reproduce socio-spatial inequality (Sheppard 2016) requires those excluded from or impoverished by capitalist markets to seek alternatives. For monetarily poor urban residents, informal livelihood practices are not only necessary for survival in the city, but also create spaces of commoning that mitigate monetary poverty and enable more-than-capitalist alternatives.

In this paper, through a comparison of the differentiated dynamics of recent urban development in Jakarta and San Francisco,[1] we examine the impact on informal livelihood practices of the world class aspirations mobilised by urban political elites and endorsed by middle class residents. We illustrate relational discourses that present informal populations as undesirable and out of place in a world class city, but also informality as enabling spaces of political and economic possibility wherein capitalist norms are being challenged close to the heartbeat of globalising capitalism (Baldwin and Crane 2020; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). Destabilising such totalising narratives not only requires attention not only to the diversity of actors and voices that constitute the global majority, but also an understanding of relationships between, within, and across spaces and scales (Crane et al. 2020; Elwood et al. 2017). Drawing inspiration from this work, we ask how a geographic relational poverty approach can help us understand, or at least expand the way in which we think about how the production and practices of informality shape poverty politics in both cities. The paper is organised as follows. Having documented the pervasiveness of informality, we discuss how it functions as a survival strategy for the monetarily poor. We then examine how market-driven, state underwritten urban development initiatives for housing those with wealth are shaping the conditions of possibility for informality. We demonstrate that these changes draw upon and reproduce political discourses that render informal livelihoods as inappropriate, and monetarily poor people as out of place in, and undeserving of, a right to the city. Through this relational poverty lens, we illustrate not only how some lives are devalued and impoverished through the production of a "world class city", but also how this limits possibilities for cross-class alliance. Finally, pushing back against such presumptions and politics, we argue that those living informally are necessary to the capitalist city, but also exceed and challenge neoliberal global urbanism.

Urban Informality, North and South

While commonly perceived as a southern phenomenon, informality is a common feature in San Francisco as well as Jakarta, in part because state attempts at formalising land title and criminalising informal practices have been unsuccessful. In Jakarta, while estimates are imprecise, between 40% and 60% of its urban inhabitants live in informal settlements, dubbed Kampungs (Bahasa Indonesia for village), the bulk of whom are also active in the informal economy. Abdoumaliq Simone (2014) has termed such residents the urban majority—a term we adopt here. In the administrative city (DKI Jakarta) kampung life varies greatly. At one end are long-standing settlements (some dating back to Dutch Batavia) whose residents arrived in many cases generations ago, with autoconstructed but now middle class housing, paved pathways from kampung improvement programs, and legal status accorded by the city. Despite these improvements, many residents lack formal freehold title and access to urban services such as piped water and sewage systems. At the other end are kampungs inhabited by the most marginal—(relatively recent in-migrants with no formal employment opportunities), living in huts cobbled together from plywood and sheet metal, with no infrastructure to speak of, and regarded by the city as illegal settlements. At the height of the authoritarian Suharto era, and modified in 2007, the city passed public order laws (Perda 11/1988, Perda 8/2007) prohibiting settlement within 10 metres of rivers and other water bodies, in parks and green spaces, along railroad tracks, and under flyovers

and bridges. Kampungs that in some cases long preceded these orders were declared illegal overnight, but continue to contest this designation with the help of pro-poor activist groups—with some recent success (Savirani and Aspinall 2018). In peri-urban greater Jakarta, beyond the legal reach of the DKI government, there has been massive expansion of kampung settlement over the past ten years housing migrants unable to find space in DKI Jakarta.

Though less commonly acknowledged, informality likewise is a concern in San Francisco.[2] In 2013, the San Francisco Planning Department estimated that 30,000 to 40,000 units of the city's existing rental stock are illegal dwelling units (IDUs), offering much-needed affordable housing in San Francisco's notoriously costly housing market (San Francisco Planning Department 2014). In 2014, the city launched an aggressive Dwelling Unit Legalisation Program to legalise these units. Property owners with existing IDUs were allowed to apply for permits to legalise their units regardless of existing zoning restrictions (San Francisco Ordinance 43-14). Yet costly permits and a byzantine process resulted in only 109 permits issued to date, meaning that informal units remain a significant portion of San Francisco's housing supply. Less recognised are the myriad shelter strategies of the urban "homeless". Officially called "encampments" by city officials, these diverse housing strategies, ranging from tents to structures constructed from plywood and scrap, have become increasingly numerous and visible. The San Francisco Department of Public Health's first encampment count identified 66 in May 2015 (San Francisco Department of Public Health 2015), swelling to 106 by fall of 2016.[3] Despite a 2016 ballot referendum criminalising all encampments within city limits, they persist, largely due to a chronic lack of available shelter options. In response to increased policing, however, encampments have become smaller and more nomadic.

Like informal urban settlements globally, kampungs in Jakarta and the encampments of San Francisco are spaces of urban commoning that underwrite the means of subsistence for a monetarily poor population largely excluded from formal capitalist labour and housing markets. These spaces provide housing often in the absence of clear title, and informal income generating activities such as street trading, under the table employment, collecting returnable recyclables in San Francisco or employment in informal factories within kampungs. Arising from need, precarity and choice, these informal commons are often characterised by a collective approach to livelihood support wherein individuals and families (both biological and chosen), help one another when food is short or when residents are sick. Excluded from the modicums of security offered by formal regimes of housing and employment, practices of urban commoning are normalised within informal spaces as necessary for safety, support and often survival.

In terms of geographical political economy, informal spaces make possible more-than-capitalist political norms, sociability and informal exchange that exceed those of possessive individualism and capitalist markets (Baldwin and Crane 2020; Gowan 2010; Leitner and Sheppard 2018; Sheppard 2019; Sparks 2017). They provide relatively supportive secure places of refuge for increasingly demeaned residents, are connected by networks working to advance their collective interests, and practice a politics of scale as they seek to push back against the developmentalism of the municipal and national

state (Bayat 1997; Wright 1997). These should not be regarded as halcyon spaces of mutual aid (Kropotkin 1922; Leitner and Sheppard 2018); everyday life also is characterised by self-interest, conflict, power brokers, gendered oppression and all too frequent violence (Bourgois et al. 2004; Simone 2014; Tilley 2017). Nevertheless, in both the global South and North, informal settlements provide crucial conditions of possibility for an urban poor seeking to assert their right to reside, survive and be acknowledged in the city.

Urban Development, Housing Crises, and Informality

Over the past 20 years, San Francisco and Jakarta have undergone market-led and state underwritten property development, expanding housing options for households with wealth to invest in housing, at the expense of housing the urban poor. In Jakarta, the era of *reformasi* that succeeded the fall of Suharto in 1998 has seen a limited democratisation of national politics accompanied by some devolution of power from the national to the regency and municipal scale. The 1998 Asian financial crisis had profound and lasting effects on everyday life, but by the early 2000s, facilitated by national economic policy that incentivised middle class consumption and further opened the national economy to globalising capitalism, a nascent urban middle class grew rapidly, particularly in Jakarta. Burned by the experience of losses in Indonesia's stock market in 1997, this middle class is investing its new-found wealth in housing: not only as a place to live but as an investment strategy. Indonesian developers—both stand-alone companies like Ciputra and the investment arms of well-connected Indonesian conglomerates like Lippo and Sinarmasland—have leapt to meet this demand, reporting rates of return of 30% on their developments. The result has been an explosion of evermore spectacular real estate projects to meet what has seemed—at least until recently—to be an insatiable demand. These have ranged from peri-urban low-rise new towns of "landed houses", to high-rise developments marketed as integrated developments where those with money can escape the hurly burly of Jakarta's congestion and impoverishment (Herlambang et al. 2019; Leitner and Sheppard 2018). Presented as quasi-gated developments (much like New York's recently opened Hudson Yards), developers offer their customers everything they might need from cradle to grave, framed as the opportunity to live the whitened western (particularly southern Californian) lifestyle (Dick and Rimmer 1998; Firman 2004, 2009; Firman and Fahmi 2017).

On the other side of the globe, the immense wealth generated by the tech and finance sectors has driven an already elite housing market to new heights. As Dick Walker (2018:4) argues, San Francisco may not stand in for the whole of contemporary capitalism but "it may be about the best possible case for it". Having emerged relatively unscathed from the 2008 recession, the tech driven boom that began in the 1990s and survived the 2000 dotcom crisis has intensified and dramatically reshaped the urban landscape. With its origins in San Francisco's working-class ethnic enclaves, gentrification in and around the central city has become so all-encompassing that it seems little more than an historical epoch from which San Francisco is now emerging. This post-gentrification landscape has become a magnet for well-heeled tech workers and foreign investors alike. Housing costs have skyrocketed by 50% since 2010, making San Francisco housing the most expensive in the USA (Zillow 2018). The promise of

astronomical returns, combined with an expanding economy, state incentives and developer friendly policies, has driven a building boom wherein luxury apartments and condos spring up like weeds in the urban core and along the fringes of the city's central business district.

Despite vastly different physical, economic and political geographies, San Francisco and Jakarta are undergoing a reclamation of space for real estate and infrastructure development that profoundly impacts the conditions of possibility for informal housing. In Jakarta, kampungs are the prime space to source that land. Forced (to their frustration) to resort to the market with little state support, after 2000 developers set about purchasing land from "legal" urban and peri-urban kampungs—deploying land brokers to divide and conquer residents' hesitancy. By offering sums that seem astronomical from residents' perspectives—albeit well below the capitalist market rent—brokers induce those with land rights to sell. The developers then convert residents' varied land titles to the freehold necessary to build real estate projects, thereby formalising the informal land market. Collective life in targeted kampungs is dissolved by the power of cash on the nail; better off residents take the money and run to more distant, cheaper kampungs, whereas worse off residents (renters and those with no marketable land title) are simply evicted.

Illegal kampungs have experienced periodic evictions led by Jakarta's governors (most recently in 2015 and 2016 by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama) in the name of making Jakarta a world class city. These most recent evictions were enabled by a discourse of ecological security, under the label of "normalisasi" policies. Seeking to dramatically reduce Jakarta's endemic flooding, the residents of kampungs built along the riverbanks (misleadingly blamed for causing the flooding [Leitner et al. 2017]) were evicted, so that Jakarta's slow-flowing rivers could be dredged and concrete embankments added. Some qualifying evicted residents were relocated into "rusunawa": low quality public housing designed, with little success, to push residents to abandon informal sector lifestyles. Those not qualifying for compensation were forced into increasingly crowded kampungs, often remote from economic opportunities, by a state that sees their lifestyle as inappropriate for a world class Jakarta.

Whereas elites in Jakarta live better than in the global West, and middle class real estate developments often have vacancy rates of 30% or more (properties bought but not occupied), the urban poor faces ever greater housing challenges. The capitalist market has, of course, proven unable to provide housing that is affordable to the urban majority. Periodic state-initiated public-private projects for housing the urban poor (e.g. the 2003 Million Houses Program and the 2006 1,000 Towers Program) have lasted no longer than the administrations proposing them, and private developers are skilled in shaping and evading regulations mandating a certain proportion of upper-, middle- and low-income housing in their developments (successfully lobbying to reduce this from 1-3-6 to 1-2-3 in 2011, and widely ignoring even this mandate).

By contrast, much of the development currently occurring in San Francisco has been directly supported by government incentives. Yet, the geographies of displacement are eerily similar. In 2014, then Mayor Ed Lee announced his intention to build 30,000 new

housing units over six years. Since then, city tax incentives, upzoning efforts, and the transfer of city-owned land for private residential development have increased the rate of new residential construction by 20% (2000 units) since 2014, almost all of which are market rate (San Francisco Planning Department 2018). With median rents topping $3600 a month and a vacancy rate of just 3%, the city is far out of the reach of most Bay Area residents.

Rising costs and a lack of tenant protections further pushes a racialised working poor to the metropolitan margins and into homelessness. Evictions have grown with economic prosperity, exceeding 1600 in 2018 alone (San Francisco Rent Board 2018). Landlords increasingly utilise statewide laws, which limit local rent control and allow no-cause evictions when a rental property is sold, in order to convert apartment buildings to luxury apartments and condominiums (San Francisco Anti-Displacement Coalition 2016). The brunt of the displacement has been borne by the region's non-white populations, reducing diversity within the city and reinforcing racialised discourses of neighbourhood desirability that view white neighbourhoods as more desirable, orderly and safe thant those with high proportions of people of colour, particularly African Americans (Brown and Barganier 2018; McElroy and Szeto 2017). For those pushed out of the formal housing market the options are even fewer. Of the 7000 individuals identified in 2017's one night homeless count, more than half were reported as unsheltered and the shelter system itself is woefully inadequate (San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing 2017). Thirty-four percent of San Francisco's homeless population identify as African American and 26% Latinx, despite comprising 6% and 17% of the total population respectively. This has created a deeply racialised double bind for the city's poor and working class residents. On one hand, skyrocketing costs and high eviction rates have pushed many out of the city's housing market, while low cost and emergency housing options have not kept pace. On the other, rezoning efforts and the creation of special development zones in the Mission Bay and Hunter's Point neighbourhoods have concentrated over 90% of new-build construction in the Southeast portion of the city that has historically served as informal refuge for those for whom shelter was not an option (Gowan 2010). The elimination of the vacant lots and deindustrialised landscapes that provided at least a modicum of sanctuary has rendered San Francisco's rationcialised poverty increasingly visible as unhoused people are increasingly forced to seek support and safety in tent encampments on sidewalks, under freeways, and in otherwise unoccupied public spaces.

Notwithstanding occupying very different socio-spatial positionalities with respect to globalising capitalism (see above), Jakarta and San Francisco are experiencing a common process of relational impoverishment with respect to housing opportunities. San Francisco's largely formal housing market has gone dramatically upscale for (primarily white) upper middle classes—a Silicon Valley spillover—driving a largely non-white population with little to no wealth into the periphery and/or homelessness. In Jakarta, space for spectacular middle class developments is created by inducing the urban majority with recognised land titles to sell and relocate to more remote kampungs, while those without such title find themselves forced out into other already crowded kampungs or depressing public housing blocks. Welcoming middle class

residents into world class neighbourhoods, with services to match, is enabled by banishing ~~already~~ those with little wealth. Yet the intertwined practices of socio-spatial dispossession and repossession described above do not happen in a vacuum. They are justified and naturalised through transnational discourses of "propertied citizenship" that produce and reify axes of socio-spatial distance (Crane et al. 2020; Roy 2003).

Demonising Informality and the Urban Poor

The incongruity of informal homeless habitations with the legal confines of San Francisco's land use code narrows the conditions of possibility for the survival strategies of the urban poor ~~but~~ and reframes the informally housed from thinking, acting subjects to offending objects (Blomley 2007). With the increased visibility of informal habitations on San Francisco's gentrified streets has come a corresponding upsurge in complaints by residents about the unsightliness of the monetarily poor. In response, on 15 October 2015 the city added "homeless concerns" to the list of categories citizens could report on its popular 311 app, which duplicates the "see, click, fix" or other Customer Relations Management (CRM) platforms increasingly used by US municipalities. The addition of "homeless concerns" to this list illustrates a shift in San Francisco's policing of the unhoused from a nuisance-based "broken windows" approach to a land use-based focus on the informal habitations and survival strategies of the monetarily poor (Herring 2019   Here is the full citation for this article, to add to the bibiography:

Herring C (2019) Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space. American Sociological Review, 84(5):769-800.   ). When a user clicks to report a "homeless concern", they are required select one of four subcategories: "encampment", "clean up/waste removal", "aggressive behavior" or "wellness check". While "aggressive behavior" complaints are routed to the police and the very infrequent "wellness checks" are handled by public health, the vast majority of complaints are resolved by the public works department (DPW), which is tasked with the removal of offending items. Though DPW only has the ability to remove "tents" and "trash", the police are summoned if a person refuses to give up his or her possessions or habitation, and the offending individual can be charged with a 647e (illegal lodging) violation. Ultimately, digital reportage and the language of land use combine to transform unhoused people from human agents to "disorderly objects", subject to removal in the name of the orderly movement and the spatial norms of propertied capitalism (Blomley 2010; Crane et al. 2020; Valverde 2012).

The addition of homeless concerns to the 311 system represents a co-production of the relationship between state and citizen that affirms the legitimacy of some bodies and norms and excludes and criminalises other voices, bodies and ways of being. Presenting "homeless concerns" specifically as a municipal service, the 311 app allows users to voice their complaints with the expectation that the city will address and "resolve" them (311.org). The 311 user is thus interpellated as a responsibilised citizen imbued with the power to declare as waste the status of the homeless person, habitation and possessions—thereby affirming their own status through their ability to summon the coercive power of the state (Burchell 1993). Middle class norms of race, property and public space are reproduced while foreclosing possibilities for mutual engagement through encounter from which cross-class alliances and new forms of socio-spatial possibilities might emerge (Lawson and Elwood 2014).

In Jakarta also, the aspirations of urban elites to make Jakarta world class, and of its middle classes to realise the western capitalist lifestyle, have been abetted by an expansion of formal property rights and a steady denigration—even demonisation—of the urban poor. This has been reinforced by discourses, and supported by legal measures, that render their presence in the city illegitimate. The better quality "legal" urban kampungs offer an attractive alternative urban lifestyle—characterised by sociable living in quiet, green and low carbon spaces in comparison to those commuting in their SUVs between villa, condominium and office. Yet, while tolerated by the city government, the vision is to upgrade these into properly capitalist residential developments with western-style property rights that will enable their inhabitants to prosper as entrepreneurs (de Soto 2000). Indeed, those already holding such "hak milik" rights offer a ready market for developers to assemble kampung land for integrated projects. The residents of illegal kampungs increasingly are presented as out of place, as people whose eviction—from kampung and city—is in the larger public interest of the city. Elites see them as lazy, unproductive and standing in the way of urban economic development.

The perspective of the formally housed middle classes also has dramatically shifted. Whereas in San Francisco, poverty stereotypes are reproduced and hardened through legal banishment (see also De Genova and Roy 2020), in Jakarta, social distance is often the result of spatial segregations. Jakarta has experienced a dramatic spatial residential restructuring in the last 30 years, from a city in which middle class families would live cheek by jowl with the kampungs of the urban poor to one in which these two groups occupy separate urban activity spaces, particularly as middle class families have begun to spatially segregate themselves from the rest of the city by moving into new towns and integrated developments. Under the former arrangement, the urban poor and middle classes encountered one another daily, with the latter buying goods marketed by the former, hiring them as drivers, gardeners and maids, and encountering their families. Life was unequal, but synergies and daily interactions helped foster a culture of respect across difference. With the segregation of the middle class, and the decline of everyday encounters that exceed those of employer and employee, the middle classes now commonly reiterate the idea that the urban poor are to blame for their misfortunes and are a blight on city life. As others have observed elsewhere in Asia, this is triggering a formal and informal politics of intolerance and exclusion (De Genova and Roy 2020; Ghertner 2012; Roy 2014).

Urban Informality as More-Than-Capitalist Alternative

A leitmotif throughout our this essay paper has been how, in both Jakarta and San Francisco, the practice of neoliberal global urbanism, inter alia, has sought to formalise the informal so as to enable "proper" and profitable (capitalist) markets. Yet this project remains both incomplete and contested (Leitner and Sheppard 2018; Maskovksy and Piven 2020; Padawangi 2014; Savirani and Aspinall 2018; Simone 2014; Tilley et al. 2017). The congenital failure of capitalism to end poverty as we know it means that urban informality remains a necessary alternative, demonstrating that capitalism also can be destabilised from the grassroots (Baldwin and Crane 2020; Gibson-Graham 1996; Sheppard 2019).

In Jakarta and San Francisco, the urban majority heavily depends on informality to secure an ongoing presence in the city—a right to reside therein. Elites and middle class residents denigrate the monetarily poor, yet the latter are inescapably necessary for supporting middle class lifestyles in the comfort they are accustomed to. Drivers, maids, dishwashers, cooks, street cleaners, security guards etc. are hired out of spaces that are increasingly reframed as undesirable "slums". In these and other ways, informal livelihoods are connected to the formal capitalist city. Yet they also exceed it, underwriting the conditions of possibility for the monetarily poor to enrich their livelihood possibilities via informalised economic, political and cultural commoning.

To illustrate the excessive possibilities of informality, we briefly open the closed loop of our relational inquiry to consider the case of another city with world class aspirations: Seattle, Washington. Similarly to Jakarta and San Francisco, Seattle has undergone a dramatic restructuring of its residential spaces that in many ways mirrors the geographies of accumulation by dispossession described above. However, in contrast to efforts in San Francisco and Jakarta to criminalise and marginalise informal spaces, in 2015 Seattle passed an ordinance allowing self-managed tent cities to exist in near perpetuity on city-owned property. While many immediate factors contributed to the ordinance's passage, both the community solidarity with unhoused activists that pressured the city to consider the bill and the city's willingness to consider legalised encampments would not have been possible without Seattle's long engagement with Tent City 3. Tent City 3 is the third iteration of a semi-formal, self-managed encampment initiated in 1990 with the twofold goal of publicising the plight of Seattle's homelessness and allowing a space where residents could stay "together and safe" (SHARE/WHEEL 2010). With the help of community advocates and legal counsel, in 2002 the encampment residents were able to secure a semi-formal status through the issuance of a court-ordered consent decree. The decree granted a renewable temporary use permit that allowed the camp to exist in perpetuity provided it is located only on church-owned property and for a period of no more than 90 days within a one-year period. This decree was an important precursor to the current legislation. Under the decree, the tent city operated as a space of quasi-formality; its existence was officially sanctioned but its operation fell outside the statutes and limitations normally placed on homeless habitations. Here, the city of Seattle, possibly unwittingly, utilizsed the very land use tools deployed in San Francisco to marginalise and isolate street dwellers to enable and foster practices of mutual care and collectivity.

Outside the disciplinary gaze of the shelter system and the isolation of SROs[4] and weekly motels, the space of the camp enables practices of urban commoning, social and material support. In addition to the safety and security provided by this group setting, the camp serves as a site of collective decision-making, resource sharing and community formation. Within the camp, acts of mutual aid are ubiquitous and normalised ways of attaining daily necessities—much like in Jakarta's kampungs. For instance, residents commonly pool food resources in order to provide for more than themselves, or they combine SNAP allotments to capitalise on bulk discounts to purchase enough food for the entire camp. Similarly, contingents of campers visit food pantries together, coordinating their baskets to feed the maximum number of people. Blankets and warm clothes were similarly procured and exchanged, as was medicine

and other supplies, and furniture and electronics were scavenged for camp use (Sparks 2009). Such "more-than-capitalist" practices not only helped sustain basic needs, but, in the words of one resident, "It's like a REAL community … We give, we share, we complain". With the enactment of the 2015 encampment ordinance, the city normalised these spaces, expanding the Tent City model of self-management to the seven camps in existence today.

This sense of community within the camp also extended into surrounding areas. In interviews conducted in 2017, City officials and service providers expressed the unanimous opinion that the success of the tent city model stems from its long-term presence in Seattle's middle class neighbourhoods. One city administrator opined that "nobody wants an encampment in their neighbourhood before it arrives—then six months later, nobody wants it to leave!".[5] A recent effort by state Senator Joe Nguyen seeks to expand this model by allowing new camps to bypass some aspects of the permitting process. As he puts it: "This is for cities that basically have acknowledged the fact that this is a problem and they want to cut through the politics and just want people in the community … Our goal is just to help folks in the community" (Markovich 2019). Yet such alternatives remain precarious. Self-managed camps are a rarity in the US; new camps often face stiff opposition even in Seattle, with many criticising them for doing too little to transition residents into formal labour and housing markets.

As the Seattle case indicates, the persistence of informal, more-than-capitalist practices in capitalist cities depends upon both community building and an unwillingness (or lack of capacity) to erase informality, on blockages created by ethico-political considerations, and/or on a tolerance for such spaces and activities. Yet day-to-day acts of commoning, potentially contesting capitalist norms, also require cross-class engagement and solidarity—an alternative politics *from, but not limited to* the poor—if they are to advance from activities of the urban margins to become an accepted alternative form of urban life.

Conclusion

Our starting point has been informality, an aspect of urbanisation widely presumed to be pervasive in cities of the post-colony but undertheorised within urban research situated in the global north. The challenge of understanding our work relationally pushed us to interrogate both metropolises through a southern theoretical optic. The global historical conjuncture of neoliberal urbanism enjoins each city to aspire to a world class status of being globally economically competitive, practicing market-oriented governance that is expected to reduce poverty and enhance urban sustainability (UN MDGs and SDGs). Within this context, San Francisco and Jakarta occupy very different positional conjunctural moments (Sheppard 2019). If San Francisco can be seen as located close to the core of this phenomenon, Jakarta is squarely in its post-colonial periphery, meaning that their conditions of possibility for achieving world class status are very different. This creates space for a relational comparison, focusing on their positionality within global processes (cf. Crane et al. 2020; Söderström 2014) rather than on inter-urban connectivities (Ward 2010).

Viewing the other city through a relational poverty lens and from the perspective of each positionality, it was surprising for each of us to learn how similar the relational production of wealth, poverty and social difference are across these northern and southern ~~cas~~positionalities. Both metropolises have a significant and pervasive presence of grassroots informality. In both cities, market-oriented strategies seeking to address the housing aspirations of middle class residents are squeezing spaces of informality. In both cities, this squeezing is accompanied by an increasing middle class intolerance about having to share their city with the urban poor. In both cities, informality not only persists but also provides spaces for more-than-capitalist practices that can push back against capitalist hegemony. Pushing our relational approach further, the Seattle case illustrates that other approaches to informality are possible and that the boundary defining tools of the state can be used to facilitate boundary transgressing, contact and interaction.

Thinking relationally also provides insight into the very real differences in the relationship between urban development, informality and unequal housing opportunities in Jakarta and San Francisco. For example, understanding why San Francisco's "housing crisis" seems more manageable than Jakarta's involves moving beyond questions of local governance to global relations. The wealth accumulating in the Bay Area in good part is due to mechanisms of uneven geographical development that benefit places like this at the cost of places like Jakarta. Thus, differences between the two in the conditions of possibility for addressing inequality cannot be reduced to differences in urban governance capabilities~~, but~~; it is also conditioned by capitalist uneven geographical development. To take a second example, racial formations associated with these processes play out very differently in a US city, embedded in a racial capitalism redolent of the country's slave-owning past, than in an Indonesian city. Race matters in certain ways in Indonesia: middle class families avidly buy properties in projects marketed as offering them a whitened lifestyle, and being Chinese Indonesian remains controversial. Yet religion, culture and language are more significant markers of everyday intra-urban difference than western racial categories. To take a third example, contestations of capitalism in the global periphery may (again) be more effective than those located in the core (Therborn 2012). Taking a relational approach creates space for teasing out the complex ways in which impoverishment—part of the DNA of capitalism—plays out across socio-spatial positionalities.

Endnotes

[1]The findings reported here are based on field research undertaken by the co-authors, in part with others, in Jakarta, San Francisco and Seattle.

[2]Informality has many aspects: street trading, illegal drug trade, sex trade, not to mention various forms of elite informality, but our focus here is on housing.

[3]Source: San Francisco Department of Public Works Encampment Database—11-01-16 Data (obtained through Sunshine Request 18-2922).

[4]Single Room Occupancy residences are small one room apartments that generally lack private bathrooms or kitchens and are generally aimed at low-income single residents.

[5]Personal interview conducted on 17 August 2017.

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