

Global Urbanism Inside/Out: Thinking Through Jakarta

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Introduction

In mega-cities across the postcolony, towers of glass and steel have come to signify ascendancy to global city status. In Jakarta, the urban majority (Simone 2014) lives in the shadow of its rapidly burgeoning skyscrapers, in largely auto-constructed informal settlements of widely varying housing quality, referred to as kampungs. Informal settlements such as kampungs (containing 70-80% of Jakarta's residents, Kusno, 2019a) support dense social networks, sociability and distinct cultural and commoning practices, providing essential support systems and a safety net for residents' livelihood practices. In this essay, we suggest that the informal settlements so common in cities of the postcolony are not simply being transformed by NEOLIBERAL global urbanism, but are places from which it can be challenged.

Proponents of global urbanism see informal settlements as spaces of arrested development: As an obstacle preventing 'modernizing' southern cities from realizing global city aspirations (World Bank, 2009) From the perspective of Jakarta's developers, they are an impediment to converting valuable urban and peri-urban land to its highest (most profitable) and so-called best use. From the perspective of Jakarta's kampung residents, the drivers of neoliberal global urbanism (Sheppard et al., 2013)— global discourses and policies shaping global city aspirations, the imaginaries of profit-seeking developers and finance capital, as well as the demand by emergent middle classes for modern residential, commercial and recreational spaces — are more or less invisible. Yet they are a very real force: kampungs are replaced with high-rise apartment buildings and office towers; walls appear, enclosing and separating kampungs from the formal city; and residents' livelihood practices are transformed and often undermined. However, as we discuss below, kampung residents and their allies do not necessarily embrace global urbanism, but are fighting for a right to the kampung as a viable mode of living in contemporary Jakarta, recreating it in new locations or in some cases in-situ, reaffirming the value of spaces of alterity that enable alternatives to global urban imaginaries and practices

In this essay, we draw on our multi-year and multi-sited research on urban land transformations in the Jakarta metropolitan area to advocate for taking kampung alternatives seriously.¹ We examine, first, how global urbanist discourses dismiss kampung living as not fit for purpose in a global city, legitimizing the eviction and displacement of kampungs and their residents. Second, we discuss how kampung livelihoods can be seen as distinct and valuable alternatives to global urbanism. Finally, we highlight kampung agency and its potential for preventing the global homogenization of urban life.

¹ The fieldwork included individual intensive interviews with developers of large-scale development projects, focus groups and interviews with current and former residents in central and peri-urban kampungs, and interviews with residents in these development projects, local officials and other participants in the real estate sector. These were complemented by field observations in kampungs and development projects; and document analysis (including newspaper articles, documents on spatial planning, land laws, relevant government policies and developers' prospectuses). This research has been undertaken in collaboration with colleagues from Tarumanagara University in Jakarta including Jo Santoso, Liong Ju Tjung, Herlambang Suryono, Miya Irawati, Rully Mardona, Wita Simatupang, Melinda Martinus, and Wahyu Astuti, as well as graduate students at UCLA (Emma Colven, Dian Irawaty, Dimitar Anguelov and Sam Nowak).

Global urbanist discourse: Othering kampungs

Before and since independence, kampungs have been represented and looked down on as undesirable spaces - riven with poverty, deviance, criminality, refuse, disease and disorder. While the term kampung translates roughly from the Malay as village—resonating with rural forms of life—in recent years elite discourses have increasingly turned to calling Jakarta’s kampungs slums (Irawaty 2018). Originating in English cities, the term slum has long been redeployed across the postcolony to describe, pathologize and denigrate poor neighborhoods as places in need of being cleaned up or cleared out. This representation has received a renewed boost through the United Nations Cities without Slums program, endorsed nationally and internationally as part of the UN Millennium Development Goals (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2003). We concur with Alan Mayne (2017) that the continued deployment of the word slum is problematic; that it is high time to retire ‘slum’ because it serves to reinforce and reinscribe negative stereotypes of peoples and places. Apparently Mike Davis, the author of *Planet of Slums* (Davis 2006) also has agreed to retire the term (Mayne 2017).

The representation of informal settlements as slums, eye sores antithetical to the modern, global city, has justified a variety of external interventions. In Jakarta, and across cities in the developing world, government policies to address so-called pathologies have included improvement programs designed to upgrade material and infrastructure conditions (e.g. the Kampung Improvement Program in Indonesia), the commodification of kampung environments and life—such as promoting kampungs as tourist attractions and, last but not least, forced evictions as part of anti-slum campaigns. DKI Jakarta government public order ordinances, introduced in the late 1980s and reaffirmed in the early 2000s, declared settlement to be illegal in designated locations, e.g., along railroad tracks, within 10 meters of rivers and water bodies, in parks and green spaces, and under flyovers and bridges – areas where the poorest of the urban majority have sought shelter. These ordinances formed the basis for designating the kampungs occupying such spaces as illegal, in turn legitimating city-initiated razing of selected kampungs and eviction of their residents (Leitner and Sheppard, 2018). Thousands of residents have been evicted since the early 1990s from such so-called illegal kampungs by the public order police, who then could only watch bulldozers destroy their former homes (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta 2016).

Since the end of Suharto’s New Order Regime, the other distinct, albeit less visible and often overlooked, vector erasing kampungs has been market-driven negotiated displacements. This has affected, again, thousands of kampung residents from central and peri-urban Jakarta’s legal kampungs (Leitner and Sheppard, 2018). Beyond the community-dissolving temptation of life-altering windfall cash (the equivalent in some cases of 40 years of work), negotiated displacements are reinforced by representations even of relatively well-off kampungs as arrested development. This distinction between legal (tolerated) and illegal (erased) kampungs, imposed by the Jakarta government, has had far reaching consequences for the inhabitants of kampungs: Whereas residents of illegal kampungs have been facing forced evictions and have

been fighting to get compensation for being unhoused, residents of legal kampungs with some form land rights were able to negotiate with developers a price for their land in compensation for their displacement.

Kampung lived realities

Jakarta's kampungs date back to Dutch colonial control over what was then Batavia. The Dutch planned a European city of thoroughfares, canals, public buildings, businesses and residential districts, tolerating neighborhoods auto-constructed by Indonesian rural to urban migrants in its interstices. This is where many of them are still found in present-day DKI Jakarta, with their residents living a hybrid lifestyle in which cultural practices brought from elsewhere in Indonesia encounter global urbanism. In peri-urban Jakarta, with its proliferating new towns and industrial districts (Herlambang et al., 2019), even as some kampungs are being destroyed new ones are constantly emerging.

The global urban imaginary is one in which land tenure aligns with western norms of private ownership (freehold, leasehold or strata title), spaces of work are separated from those of social reproduction through zoning laws, with the various zones of the urban land nexus (Scott and Storper, 2015) connected through dedicated pathway, road and rail infrastructure. Applying this to Jakarta, residents would live in landed houses, high-rises and quasi-gated integrated developments, consumption would gravitate to shopping malls and online outlets, and work would be carried out in offices and factories. Urban morphology would conform to the hegemonic model of elite sub-divisions and highrise living and urban growth would be guided by comprehensive plans and zoning regulations. Jakarta's urban minority conforms to this imaginary, residing in often gated enclaves and subdivisions, and consuming and recreating in the ever proliferating shopping malls and entertainment complexes.

The realities of kampung life are quite different, however. First, kampungs have an organic morphology reflective of their auto-construction. Kampung housing ranges from the opportunistic use of found materials, graduating to bricks and tiles as residents acquire income, with building codes rarely adhered to. The kampung also houses places of worship--mostly mosques, tiny stores (*warung*), informal businesses and social spaces, connected by winding pathways that are challenging for non-residents to navigate. Electricity is now broadly available, but this is not the case for water, sanitation and solid waste disposal. Housing is low-rise but high density (at times exceeding densities in Manhattan), and residents have differentiated land rights. These range from a lack of any land rights, to rights conferred by local district level (*Kelurahan*) officials, to a variety of formal rights regulated by the National Land Agency (*Badan Pertanahan Nasional*), including use and occupancy rights (*Hak Pakai*), the right to build (*Hak Guna Bangunan*), and freehold (*Hak Milik*). Collective spaces and pathways are lively, dedicated to the pursuit of everyday life; people hang around outside their often cramped homes, socializing, celebrating weddings, gossiping, and learning from one another (Figure 1). Kampungs have been quiet neighborhoods until the relatively recent proliferation of motor bikes, with pedestrians, hand carts and pedicabs (and now motor bikes) threading their way

along pathways that generally are too winding and narrow for cars and trucks (which are relegated to the periphery and thoroughfares).

Second, kampung livelihoods are characterized by informality. Indeed, kampungs constitute the geographical base for informality in Jakarta – an extensive informal housing market and informal economy. They provide shelter – mostly autoconstructed - to its residents who work in the informal sector to survive in the city, and offer affordable housing for low wage workers employed often close by in the formal sector (Santoso et al. 2009). Kampungs house small factories hiring local residents and markets serving both the local population and beyond (Santoso and Irawati 2015). They are also places from which mobile, itinerant street traders spread across the city to sell their wares, with kampung residents providing services as maids, security guards, etc. In these ways, kampungs provide cheap labor, food and services beyond their boundaries to the rest of the city, as well as cheap rental housing and food for formal sector workers (Santoso et al. 2009, Kusno 2019b).

Third, kampung life is about conviviality, community and mutual aid. There is a strong collaborative and collective aspect to urban kampung life: When a family runs into financial trouble, e.g., through loss of work or unexpected medical bills, it is normal for neighbors to help out. Precarity means that margins are small and disaster only a step away, so the same could happen to anyone. Many kampungs also have distinctive cultural and linguistic identities because chain migration often gathers migrants from a particular locality to this one place in Jakarta. Residents thus share a place-based identity that extends to the reproduction in Jakarta of pre-existing social and political structures.

As we have learnt from our intensive interviews, Kampung residents across gender lines and different ages value many attributes of kampung living, which they see as not only enabling them to live in the city but also vital to their quality of life. Even residents who sell out relocate to another kampung instead of buying into the condominiums to be built on their land. Residents value the sociability, mutual aid, and close-knit sense of community of the kampung, even as they aspire to the cleanliness of, and utilities provided in, more formal settlements. This was beautifully expressed by a teenage girl in one of our focus groups: ‘My dream is to combine the quality of a *rumahan* [housing in planned development] with the life-style and neighborliness of the kampung’ (Leitner and Sheppard 2018).

Kampungs also have much to offer the broader city. Kampungs provide places of refuge from the crowded, noisy and congested spaces of the formal city. Further, in an era when fostering urban environmental sustainability and resilience are policy priorities, kampungs and their residents have a much lower carbon footprint than the city built under global urbanist imaginaries. Kampungs residents use significantly less energy; air conditioning is rare and car ownership is low.

It does not follow, however, that kampungs are some halcyon space of the good life where everyone gets along. First, kampungs range enormously in quality: First generation immigrants, seeking a foothold in the city with little to no resources find themselves often in desperately

poor and unhealthy environments. By contrast, residents who have lived in Jakarta longer, for up to three generations, have auto-constructed pleasant and green spaces characterized by established networks of collaboration such as saving circles (*arisans*), where many residents are able to live comfortably. Such inter-kampung inequalities are reinforced by unequal legal status, as discussed above. The most precarious kampungs are designated as illegal, subject to eviction because the land they occupy has been deemed non-residential, whereas better-off kampungs, long tolerated by the municipal state, are designated as legal. Further, residents' practices are shot through with self-interest and power hierarchies (Simone, 2014); strongmen (*preman*) use threats and violence to rule the roost, patriarchy can be the order of the day, and residents seek to and take advantage of capitalist market exchange, also monetizing the commons. In short, however much they enable more-than-capitalist livelihoods, kampungs are not simply spaces of commoning.

Agentic spaces of alterity

Kampungs are shot through with individual and collective agency. Abdoumalik Simone (2010; 2014; 2018) has demonstrated the prevalence of such agency—not just within and across kampungs, but connecting such local economies to informal trading practices of global scope. As our research also has shown, kampung residents continually invest sweat equity and any disposable income they have into improving their dwelling and to maintain kampung spaces and communities, in some cases over several generations. Indeed kampung residents, particularly women and youth, highly value the sociality of the kampung, the closely knit social networks and support systems, continuing to participate even after being displaced. Former residents regularly returned to the kampung, visiting friends left behind, especially during the first year after displacement. One group of families, now dispersed, continued monthly meetings of their savings group (*arisan*). Displaced residents' commitment to and positive valuation of kampung living is evident also in their desire to relocate to another Kampung; in one (peri-urban) case they collectively rebuilt their kampung at a new location. Kampung livelihood strategies also quietly encroach on (Bayat 2000) the rest of the city, disrupting its rhythms, as informal traders set up stands on sidewalks or informal motorbike taxis jam thoroughfares—providing services that the urban minority also takes advantage of.

Kampung residents actively resist and contest any threat of eviction, deploying a variety of anticipatory and reactive strategies, often co-evolving with one another. Anticipatory politics seeks to proactively head off evictions. Kampung residents set about documenting their legal status—for example by claiming that past relations with city officials and services amount to de facto acknowledgment of a kampung's legitimacy. They have engaged in counter-mapping; working with residents of Bukit Duri, the Ciliwung Merdeka NGO documented their history of settlement, the auto-constructed built environment, and how kampung-based economic activities benefit the city more broadly (Padawangi et al., 2016). Under the leadership of Gugun Muhammad, residents of Kampung Tongkol in North Jakarta took collective action to move homes back from the riverbank, clean up the river and green the riverbanks, also experimenting with alternative housing designs, to demonstrate to the city how kampungs can conform with public order restrictions and thereby avoid eviction (see Figure 2).

Other strategies are more reactive, with kampung residents challenging eviction notices and resisting the destruction of their homes by the public order police. Such strategies have included legal action, as when residents of Kampung Bukit Duri challenged eviction notices in the courts, using land certificates to bolster their claim of legal occupancy status (Irawaty, 2018). In Kampung Pulo, violence ensued in 2015 when kampung residents attempted to prevent destruction of their homes by the public order police, without success. Similarly, residents in Kampung Aquarium on the north shore of Jakarta in 2016 were at first unable to prevent evictions. However, some families returned to reoccupy and reclaim their kampung space and associated livelihoods, building make-shift dwellings on the rubble (Figure 3).

The re-occupation of Kampung Aquarium, coinciding with pending gubernatorial elections, enabled anti-eviction and housing justice activists to negotiate and sign a legally binding political contract between representatives of Aquarium and 16 other kampungs and the then candidate for governor, Anies Baswedan. The contract included certain commitments and promises by Anies, including legalization of land rights and financial support for kampung upgrading, in exchange for their electoral support. After his election as governor, Anies initiated a Community Action Plan program for these kampungs and consultants were hired to assess the needs and provide plans for kampung rehabilitation.

Many forms of kampung agency have been supported by NGOs (Winayanti and Lang, 2004) and grassroots organizations, such as the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute, The Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) and Ciliwung Merdeka, supplemented by a network of architects, artists, scholars, lawyers, students and journalists of diverse backgrounds, mobilizing claims to expertise to enhance the voice to kampung residents and draw attention to their needs and desires. For example, the design of *rusunawa*, the mid- to high-rise replacement public housing built by the city for those kampung residents offered post-eviction compensation, did not provide room for informal sector economic activities or spaces of sociability, a hallmark of their previous kampung living. In response architects, working with kampung residents, developed alternative housing designs for 'vertical' kampungs that would enable residents to pursue such practices (Irawaty, 2014; Padawangi, 2018). With one minor exception, none were taken up either by the local or national government.

Concluding reflections

In this essay we argue that kampungs, and other such informal settlements across the urban post-colony, should not be dismissed as failing to adhere to global urbanist norms. Instead, flipping the comparative script, these can be seen as the basis for alternative forms of urban housing and living that hold up a critical lens to those norms and are worth taking seriously in their own right.

Kampungs are distinct urban environments that allow for a mode of urban living that stands in sharp contrast to the values and forms promoted by neoliberal global urbanism. They are distinctive, organically autoconstructed neighborhoods whose low rise and high density urban morphology does not conform to mainstream city planning dictums; kampung life is sociable, convivial and based on expectations of mutual aid; kampung politics is redolent of forms of

governance that exceed those of the national and municipal state; and kampung households have a foothold in both the formal and informal economy. Instead of the spatial separation of production, consumption, politics and social reproduction expected under global urban imaginaries, these co-exist within the kampung. Importantly, kampungs should not be idolized: They house competition as well as cooperation, exploitation as well as emancipation, co-evolving with the more formal city surrounding them. Yet kampungs are where more-than-capitalist urban lifeworlds are most likely to be found. Beyond this, taking kampungs seriously as an alternative to the global urbanist norm can also challenge northern urban theory (Leitner and Sheppard, 2018).

Jakarta's kampungs are threatened by dissolution: While some kampungs flourish as informal spaces of capitalist opportunity (especially in peri-urban areas), residents in central city locations are rapidly being displaced. They occupy land that developers and the city seek to assemble to realize the rent gap and pursue global city aspirations. Negotiated displacement, driven by the dissolving power of money, is pushing kampung residents further out. Evictions, currently in the name of ecological security (flood mitigation), unsuccessfully seek to push the most marginalized populations into poor quality *rusunawa*, or out of the city altogether. As middle-class families move into planned developments that wall them off from nearby kampungs and thus isolate them from the urban majority, and kampungs are rebranded as slums, it has become commonplace for elite and middle-class voices to dismiss kampung residents as lazy, backward, and out of place in a world-class city.

Yet kampung residents are not passively accepting dissolution; they actively contest it. This includes everyday grassroots contestations: relocating to another kampung instead of buying an apartment the new highrise building replacing the informal settlement, sometimes even relocating whole kampung communities, recreating kampung environments at the destination: the quiet encroachment of the ordinary. But it also includes contested politics, longstanding struggles by residents aided by pro-poor NGOs to challenge and offer alternatives to state-initiated evictions. This extends beyond questions of compensation and replacement housing, to legal cases, negotiations with the governor, and the development of alternative, housing designs. In these ways, residents seek to assert the broader right to inhabit the city on their own terms—to have a say over shaping urban environments that support the modes of urban living they value. Beyond Jakarta, annual urban social forums have been convened in Indonesian cities for the past six years, inspired by the world social forums, under the motto “another city is possible”. All these activities seek to advance alternative urban imaginaries to those of global urbanism from above.

Such struggles for alternative urban imaginaries that underwrite citizens' claims for a right to the city on their own terms are happening across the globe. This amounts to a grassroots approach to global urbanism from below, enacting an alternative to the dominant neoliberal global urbanism that is based on the demand that not only the elite, but also ordinary citizens should be able to realize their ideals of urban dwelling, habitation and living. It gives voice to all those who inhabit the city and confronts attempts to homogenize cities worldwide in the name of neoliberal global urbanism, lobbying for valuing a diversity of urban lifeworlds. After all, it is

precisely this kind of diversity and heterogeneity that long has made cities and urban life attractive, stimulating and replete with new possibilities. This, can only be realized, however, through addressing the increasing inequalities across different lifeworlds. Thus global urbanism from below endorses and is committed to making, more socially, environmentally and spatially just, and sustainable cities.

Figure 1: Kampung street life
Source: Authors



Figure 2: Kampung Tongkol: Rebuilding homes away from the riverbank
Source: Authors



Figure 3: Reoccupancy of Kampung Aquarium
Source: Authors



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