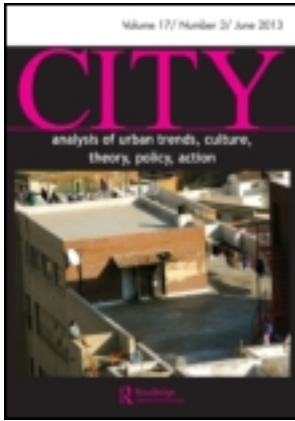


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City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccit20>

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Published online: 25 Jun 2013.

To cite this article: AbdouMaliq Simone & Achmad Uzair Fauzan (2013) On the way to being middle class: The practices of emergence in Jakarta, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 17:3, 279-298, DOI: [10.1080/13604813.2013.795331](https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.795331)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.795331>

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On the way to being middle class

The practices of emergence in Jakarta

AbdouMaliq Simone and Achmad Uzair Fauzan

As millions of urban residents in the majority world attain middle-class status, there is not only a great deal of ambiguity as to what exactly being middle class is, but also an occlusion of many efforts residents themselves have made to attain this status. Because multiple routes have been pursued to improve livelihoods, as well as different conditions and support, there is also a growing ambivalence about the various implications of this attainment. At times, the performance of such status seems to require relinquishing important livelihood practices. While availed of increased consumption, assets and relative autonomy, many such residents are wary of the heightened vulnerabilities that new forms of livelihood and individuation posit. As increased accumulation has been predicated on both the changing global positions of national production systems and the long-term incremental efforts of residents themselves, how the divergent implications of these distinct routes to middle-class status are negotiated on a day-to-day basis are critical issues for the elaboration of urban politics. Focusing on Jakarta, the paper considers some of the ways in which an emergent middle class have improved livelihoods and opportunities, as well as how they hedge their bets in the pursuit of lifestyles and norms conventionally associated with middle-class status.

Key words: middle-class, Jakarta, relational economies, urban practices, incremental development

What has an emerging middle class done for itself in order to emerge?

One of the striking features of urban developments in cities such as São Paulo, Jakarta, Mexico City, Manila and Karachi is the large number of urban residents that have joined the ‘middle class’. On indices that measure purchasing power, social well-being, livelihood security and social ascription, there is solid evidence of the consolidation of a ‘solid middle’ that poses new capacities and challenges for these cities (Kharas 2011). Such

an expansion of middle-class capacity would seem to make ambiguous lingering divides between cities of the ‘North’ and the ‘South’ and attest to the efficacy of global urbanization processes which extend and intensify economic and cultural transactions among cities. The growth of a middle class *might* also seem to posit the diminution of the more stark aspects of spatial segregation that have characterized many ‘Southern’ cities, point the way to greater infrastructural efficiencies and [suggest] more proficient and just governance.

Our concern in this paper, however, is with what is usually an occluded aspect in this rush to celebrate the growth of a middle class: that is, the relative invisibility of the practices, orientations and resourcefulness of residents themselves; what they have managed to accomplish over the years in order to facilitate the improvement of livelihoods. In this, we follow Diane Davis' (2004) call for a more textured approach to middle-class subjectivity. For to be middle class usually comes with its definitive set of characteristics and features that tend to assume univocal trajectories of attainment (Fernandes 2004; Heiman, Freeman, and Liechty 2012). While many important facets of economic behavior take place *within* households, in this paper we focus on some important characteristics of the transactions *amongst* them. We are also concerned with the implications of income improvements on the very environments and conditions that are popularly viewed as critical to middle-class attainment, and the sense that these are being eroded through a narrowing conception of what middle-class attainment should concretely look like.

Our intent is not to establish specific causal connections—that is, identifying clear-cut empirical relationships between specific practices and changed livelihoods. Rather, we work within a milieu of associations where residents who report capacities to improve their life situations discuss the inter-linkages among their households, social networks, local relations and the materiality of their surrounds that they conclude have been important in nurturing and extending these capacities. Additionally we make no claims that particular practices and orientations 'belong' to an emerging middle class, as these same practices and orientations will be at work elsewhere in both similar and dissimilar ways.

We are interested in the possible multiplicities entailed in becoming middle class. Foucault (1995) diagrammed the exposures and folds, stretches and pulls that produce resonance and coordination among the efforts and transactions of different actors. Amidst the

jumbles of interstices, enclosures and openings that ensue from the interaction of materials and metabolisms, power is mobilized through efforts to posit architectures of possibilities—that is, specific lines of association and distancing; gathering up things as mutually implicated and affected, while separating off other possibilities and matters viewed as disallowed and irrelevant. The density of the city was not just that of human bodies but of the multiplicity of possible associations among bodies and various materials. While these associations have been subject to various political technologies of governance and control, there has always been something that slips through, leaks out, overflows or generates long shadows. This is what Foucault (2009) has called the problem of multiplicities.

A wide range of skills and inclinations associated to sociability and collaboration are made matters of individuated performance coupled with the supposedly friction-free circulation of social connectivity and conviviality. The attainment of things is then less that of negotiating relationships than the proficiencies of individual performance capable of circumventing the constraints implicitly registered by the desires and practices of others. As Deleuze (2005, 179) indicates, the practices associated with business are

'dispersive to the degree that they atomize individuals (or "dividuals") within communication networks that track their habits, consumption, addictions ("through continuous control and instant communication") and establish an "inexorable rivalry presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against one another and sets itself up in each of them, dividing each within himself"'. (249)

Therefore, a critical question in thinking about the supposed massive emergence of new middle classes is whether this large-scale attainment signals the end of the possibility of multiplicity—the unspecifiable intermeshing of ways of thinking, seeing,

claiming, affecting and making, that do not belong to specific actors or modes of organizing.

As indicated in a recent McKinsey Global Institute report (Dobbs et al. 2012), what they call the ‘consuming classes’ expanded globally by almost 300 million people from 1970 to 1990. After that point, the rate of growth more than doubled, 3.5% per annum, with aggregate numbers reaching 1.2 billion by 2010. By 2025, 600 million of this class will live in what the authors call the 440 major cities of the developing world. This same report refers to the ‘consuming class’ as those households that are able to use their disposable income for consumption beyond that of their basic needs—that is, shelter, food, health, education and basic urban services.

While the use of ‘consuming class’ is a way around the frequent conceptual vagueness and compositional heterogeneity of a ‘middle class’, important multilateral institutions continue to use the latter term. For example, the World Bank sets a benchmark of individual income earning at between \$2 and \$13 a day at 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP), and then goes on to posit the changing share of the segment of the population just above the poverty line (Ravallion 2009). The Asian Development Bank (2010) uses consumption of \$2–20 per day in PPP terms as its definition of middle class. William Easterly (2001) argues that greater conceptual precision rests in examining middle-class status relative to a nation’s income distribution rather than using absolute levels of income or consumption.

In this paper we will continue with the more widely used designation, ‘middle class’, and are not as concerned with the precision of economic designations, but rather with offering a limited analysis of what an *emergent* middle class in Jakarta might mean in terms of the transformations underway in the metropolitan region as a whole. The analysis is concerned with how such a middle class has emerged—not in the context of the macroeconomic

transformations of Indonesia itself, although this is of course significant—but also as the by-product of the efforts, practices and risks undertaken by residents themselves. Increased capacities in consumption, household well-being, and access to higher quality services and leisure time derive from significant increases in national productivity, improvement in the regulatory environment, and expansions of trade and investment (World Economic Forum 2011; OECD 2010; Basri and Hill 2011). These increases are, in turn, contingent upon levels of training, institutional development and the capacities of residents themselves, through their own management of income, daily lives, investment priorities and efforts to engage situations beyond the household. It is contingent upon how they discern and take advantage of new spaces of economic opportunity. It is with these latter capacities that our discussion here is concerned.

The analysis is based on three years of ongoing research compiling a history of the present in three *Kelurahan*, local government districts, in central Jakarta. These three districts, Kemayoran, Senen and Johar Baru, include roughly 250,000 people and are widely known to be some of the most diverse areas of the city—in terms of social composition, and trajectories of economic and built environment development (Figure 1). We are trying to explore *with* various groups of residents how these districts got to be the way they are today. The project is a collaborative effort among the Rujak Center for Urban Studies, a social action research non-governmental organization (NGO), a postgraduate program in urban planning at the University of Tarumanagara, postgraduate researchers from several universities who are pursuing individual research projects and with local *Dewan Kelurahan* (*dekels*) in each district. Established in 2000, these are locally elected advisory groups to what are otherwise centrally appointed local government administrators. Each partner in the project pursues research activities within its competencies and



Figure 1 Map of central Jakarta showing the three districts of research work

interests, and these are collectively deliberated in order to attain a coordination of effort and method. The methodological approach has included some 100 semi-structured household interviews across the three districts, as well as an additional 100 interviews with a wide range of institutional actors and individuals pursuing different occupations and trades. Spatial surveys have been conducted across the three districts although they are not yet fully completed;

the intent is to organize a comprehensive inventory of the built environment, keeping in mind the constant transformations of these environments.

From our research, it is evident that practices of securing livelihoods and residency in large parts of Jakarta have been predicated upon an incessant recalibration of household attitudes and practices in order to cultivate a willingness and ability to transact with people and situations beyond the familiar,

beyond the everyday routines. Many residents had to supplement incomes, make their own livelihood or find ways to insert themselves into economic and social activities of scale. They sometimes did this by reshaping their aspirations, skills, self-reflections and social networks through the very way in which they built, responded to, adapted to and rearranged the material environments—in a kind of ongoing reciprocal feedback loop.

The results of such practices are evident in Ujung Padang, one of the first settled areas east of the Senen Market, which was an important port of entry into the city for new migrants. The area attracted large numbers of inhabitants of different backgrounds. There is a long-standing joke about the way in which the area was constructed—that the demarcations of plots and the design of living spaces were so jumbled that residents kept waking up in the wrong bedrooms. The area is replete with different construction styles and most plots have undergone various successions of remaking, readjustment, add-ons, tearing down one house to completely remake another, and incessant divisions and consolidations. As accommodating new and temporary residents is a major economic activity, sometimes residents who share a lane will pool their money and buy a building in the local area and then either add on to the building or tear it down and then put up a multi-story dwelling and divide it up into rooms for rent with each neighbor responsible for managing a particular proportion of the building.

Not unlike São Paulo, Karachi or Kolkata, much of the urban core of Jakarta is still made up of densely populated, mixed-income, mixed-use districts. However, the density and proximity are not matters of people and backgrounds alone. For there is an intense density of materials, styles and conditions under which the built environment is constructed, such that it is nearly impossible in many areas to discern a standard form of residence. Lane after lane is replete with mixtures of different materials, designs, formats and

construction values that have been deployed to make homes, workshops, businesses, offices, mosques, churches and storage places. There are also highly divergent trajectories of development—some plots have retained their original structures over decades, while contiguous plots have witnessed multiple buildings come and go. Well laid-out grids marking standard plot size may be preserved without alteration. But then in the neighborhood ‘right next door’ it is possible to find a frontage bordering the marked streets that mirror these grids, but with an interior behind that has completely taken on a life of its own—precipitated by a few random subdivisions of anterior plots that then have been extended laterally in different directions, often housing a class of residents markedly poorer than those who continue to live ‘in front’.

What is important for our discussion here is the perception on the part of many residents, that these heterogeneous built environments provide a platform for the rehearsal of different kinds of accommodations, revisions, repairs and experiments. Because residents had available to them a living environment that was to a certain extent ‘all over the place’, they were better able to ‘keep on their toes’. It made them more adept at navigating an urban life that they perceived as changing all the time. In a diverse material environment things did not easily fit together; there were things that would often go wrong. For example, the wrong materials might be used, a structure might intrude upon someone else’s space, the expansion of a building in order to accommodate single workers in dormitory style conditions could put a drain upon available water supplies or overcrowd a particular lane. Yet, such diverse conditions were often viewed as the key for residents to really appreciate the social diversity of their surroundings. It was the very tendency of things to go wrong that provided the opportunity for residents to collaborate together to find solutions to the difficulties, and through this collaboration to also rehearse different facets of themselves.

As Bahwani, a 61-year-old small-time land broker, professes:

'Around here something is always going wrong; we all think we can fix things, and sometimes we can, but sometimes we get ourselves into more trouble, so people have to step in; still, you have to show that you are not afraid of letting things be what they are. This place is never going to be the Promised Land; it has been comfortable to us because we didn't have to break our backs trying to keep things going. Look at this street, look at how many new things are being built up, but none of them are hi-so (high society) type things; people are doing things that are just enough for them now; but they can do them because this is a not place where things are now set in stone; all of these people, they made their connections, they put their money together, and they can do things, even I know for a fact that they don't have certificates and formal permission. You see, there is a lot things going on in a place like this; it might not seem that way, but there are a lot of different interests and goals, so it would never be easy even when the big money people bring in suitcases full of cash.'

It is because certain dimensions of increased proficiencies in livelihood are attributed to the particular composition of residential environments that many households with whom we have talked express some degree of ambivalence about what their elevated economic status means. Given its rate of growth, demand and spatial expansion, Jakarta is presently considered Asia's leading property market (Urban Land Institute and PricewaterhouseCoopers 2012). As property development in the urban core has mushroomed during the past decade, raising property values and eliminating neighborhoods (Firman, Kombaitan, and Pradono 2007; Hutabarat 2010), emergent middle-class residents are under pressure to think about relocation, in part to preserve their limited gains in consumption and to conform to particular lifestyles widely proffered through media and popular impressions as to what a suitable middle-class residential

district should entail. As in many other cities across Asia, the attainment of middle-class status often coincides with the purchase of houses or apartments in planned developments, usually on the outskirts of the urban core and with deleterious environmental impacts and social uncertainty (Silver 2008; Douglass 2010; Bunnell et al. 2012). Residents with whom we have worked view these developments as the appropriate investments for the future, even when they may otherwise not find anything useful about them.

At the same time, in our efforts to document land use changes in the districts in which we are working, we observe many instances where property owners are tearing down existing structures and replacing them with four- or five-story residential buildings, occupying a single story while selling or renting the rest of the structure. Here, the purported motivation is to find more strategic instruments with which to remain rooted in a particular locality in terms of affordability and also as a hedge against external speculative activity.

Despite these internal initiatives, anxiety is pervasive, and later we will briefly discuss some of the ways in which such anxiety is expressed. We do this to reinforce our larger focus on what residents themselves believe to be the factors at work in facilitating enhanced livelihoods for an emergent middle class, as well as to raise the question as to the implications involved in effacing or seriously altering the social and physical environments in which these residents have been situated.

A word on the heterogeneities and conundrums of being middle class

Just what is the middle class in Jakarta? In Southeast Asia, this question has preoccupied urban scholars for a long time—and they point to the relative diffuseness of the concept (Abeyesekere 1987; Dick and Rimmer 1998; Embong 2001; Shiraishi 2006; King 2008; Rimmer and Dick 2009; Budiman 2011; Leeuwen 2011; Roy 2011).

Initially, analyses focused on those whom the state anchored in positions of public management and service and who often differed greatly from those whose historical and ethnic positions have secured long-term advantages in controlling enterprise and capital. In Dick and Rimmer (1998), as well as King's (2008) work, it also includes those who ply various forms of informal authority into diversified channels of accumulation work. In later writing, middle-class status becomes more textured, entailing, particularly in Budiman's (2011) and Roy's (2011) work, the capacity to develop globalized perspectives, to look and think about individual attainment beyond local contexts. While our concern here is mostly with households who have experienced a recent expansion of livelihoods and consumption capacity, it is important to reiterate that middle-class status is a highly malleable concept in Jakarta. It is used in different ways for different political purposes.

For example, when we attend meetings with municipal officials or property developers, or even public forums dedicated to discussing urban issues and with the press, people constantly make the claim that the middle class have left the city. Based on this claim, the assumption would then be that the central city is left with a much poorer population base that is not able to afford to adequately maintain the districts, and thus justifies various plans for their substantial redevelopment. Although there was significant outward migration of the middle class in the 1990s, this migration has slowed and the overall numbers of middle-class residents have increased—as a function of new attainments of this status—so that the middle class still make up roughly half of the city of Jakarta's population (Government of DKI Jakarta 2009). If the reader were to spend even 24 hours walking randomly across the central city, they would quickly ascertain that any purported widespread middle-class abandonment simply is not the case. While again these contentions will make their way back to questions of how

the middle class is to be defined, our surveys in three central districts show that there has been no wholesale abandonment by long-term residents whose occupational histories—teachers, government workers, professionals, technicians, medium-scale business owners—signal middle-class status.

The urban core has had a fluctuating population count over the past decade. However, there is substantial redevelopment underway, where new residential complexes quickly fill up. There is also a large influx of residents who do not register with local authorities and are, for the most part, not captured by existing censuses. As such, available statistics indicate that it is not possible to conclude that a continuous and substantial move toward the periphery of the city is underway (Banyaknya Penduduk Berdasarkan Hasil Registrasi Menurut Wilayah di Provisi DKI Jakarta—Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi DKI Jakarta 2011).

However, in our interviews and from continuous discussions at local public forums, as well as meetings at mosques, schools, prayer groups and social associations, many long-term residents, both poor and middle class, of Kemayoran, Johar Baru and Senen, do seem to possess a sense of inevitability. They feel that the city is changing so fast that no matter what they do, they may eventually have to relocate elsewhere. They know that their central location and the mushrooming of big development all around them exert a great deal of pressure. If this is a predominant attitude then to a certain extent it is reasonable to expect that some households are indeed acting on this perception. Nevertheless, in the spatial surveys of the research, it is also evident, as indicated earlier, that hundreds of new small-scale residential projects are underway, reflecting a belief in continuity. These projects include the acquisition of contiguous plots on which to construct larger houses, vertical expansion of existing structures, the conversion of residential houses into small office complexes and the conversion of older commercial facilities into residential quarters.

In Jakarta, more or less arbitrary distinctions are made between households whose residential choices and everyday economic priorities were once valued as indicating middle-class status and whose status is now revised downwards in relation to a 'new' middle class that expresses different choices and priorities, and which are more consonant to the aspirations of the big players in politics and real estate (Dhakidae 2001; Firman 2004). Municipal and national planning frameworks tend to render long-standing middle-class residential areas 'invisible' in face of the proliferation of 'new towns'. Areas that are characterized as 'impoverished' are often long-term bastions of households who, while never having large amounts of disposable income, nevertheless, as pointed out by demographic surveys, educated their kids and constructed stable urban livelihoods (Dinas Kependudukan Dan Pencatatan Sipil [Demographics and Civil Service Records] 2008).

According to the Central Statistics Agency, Indonesia's average per capita income was \$2271 in 2008. In 2007, Goldman Sachs predicted that the national gross domestic product (GDP) would reach \$700 billion in 2020, with average incomes at \$3000—a level that was attained 10 years earlier in 2010 (*Jakarta Globe*, 11 December 2011). Nielsen Indonesia defines middle-class households as those that spend between Rp 1 million and Rp 2 million (\$110 and \$220) a month on basic needs, such as food, transportation and electricity (Oxford Business Group 2010). As such, this accounts for 48% of the country's population of nearly 240 million. The World Bank claims that the middle-class population has increased in the 2003–10 period, with the addition of 7 million people per year—according to their definition of a minimal monthly income of Rp 2.5 million. However, despite this expanding demographic, the middle class is still dominated by lower-middle-class people who spend \$2.00–4.00 a day. This subgroup represents 38.5% of the entire middle class. In contrast, the upper middle

class, who spend \$10–20 a day on average, make up only 1.3% of the middle-class demographic (World Bank 2011).

Thus the seeming mushrooming of a middle class comfortably settled in their 'private cities', such as Kelapa Gading, Pluit or Podomoro City, may represent only a small portion of those Jakartans who might legitimately be considered middle class.

While the composition of middle-class status may be heterogeneous or ambiguous, the imaginations and lifestyles associated with this status usually fall within a circumscribed range of sensibilities and expectations. Increasingly the message seems to be: you must do everything for yourself and only have yourself to blame. Thus, inhabitation is (re)spatialized in terms of its proximity to 'necessary' and affordable services—that is, education, shopping, entertainment, health and recreation. As labor markets expand in only certain technical sectors, a premium is placed on exposure to communicational proficiency and the concomitant staying up to date with the latest devices. The sense of being able to enjoin others in any context—sharing a sense of social responsibility virtually in a highly individuated world—through social media and incessant and instantaneous documentation of everything thus comes to replace the capacities for social transaction fostered by heterogeneous urban locales (Berney 2011; Heller and Harilal 2007; Huchzermeyer 2007; Shatkin 2008; Logan, Fang, and Zhang 2009; Luigi 2009; Peters 2009; Wang, Wang, and Wu 2009; Raco, Imrie, and Lin 2011; Centner 2010).

In Jakarta this narrow image of what it means to be middle class has implicitly served the interests of property developers preoccupied with inflating their power and importance in the city. For example, the development of 'new towns' has been the locus through which property developers, such as Ciputra, Podomoro, the Sinar Mas Group, Lippoland and Summarecon Agung have come to play a dominant role in dictating the city-making process. By 2006, there

were over 30 new town developments of over 500 hectares in the Jakarta region (Firman, Kombaitan, and Pradono 2007). By maintaining close links to the Jakarta provincial government over the past decades, and by demonstrating the capacity to deliver showcase projects, the big developers established themselves as the symbols of the city's modernity, not just the entrepreneurial vehicle that realized specific projects (Kusno 2013). In terms of affordability, new town residential areas are accessible only to higher-middle-class earners. While provisions were made to set aside at least 20% of residential units to low-income residents, this regulation has been universally circumvented, given the escalating unit prices in the new towns (Hudalah, Winarso, and Woltjer 2010).

The promise by developers to turn Jakarta into a fully modern city was parlayed into the acquisition of large tracts of suburban land at cheap prices that provided the developers with unimpeded territory in which to elaborate 'fully formed' visions of urban living. These visions not only contained residential structures, but schools, roads, hospitals, recreational and community facilities, and shopping complexes (Dieleman 2011). These self-contained infrastructures have been catapulted into the predominant ways in which politicians, businesspersons and technocrats visualize the city's modernity. In order to maintain their viability, developers are authorized to collect taxes in the form of service fees and to maintain control over major infrastructural inputs such as water treatment plants, sewage systems and electrical grids. Influence is even extended over surrounding areas, particularly the poorer *kampongs* from which much of the lower end service labor for new towns is drawn.

The different roads of emergence: on the way toward being (sort of) middle class

Jakarta shared some of the overarching challenges of many postcolonial cities. For many, formal wages were never going to be enough

in the long run; labor markets and worker rights could never be adequately stabilized, so residents had to find ways to insert themselves in each other's lives—through continuous appeals for cooperation, supplication, manipulation and deals of all kinds (Holston 1991; Askew 1994; Berner and Korpff 1995; Benjamin 2000; Hansen 2001; Bunnell 2002; Chatterjee 2004; Konings, van Dijk, and Foeken 2006; Lovell 2006; Whitson 2007; Fawaz 2008; Legg 2008; McFarlane 2009; Segre 2010).

Therefore, despite the clear-cut attainments of an urban middle class in Jakarta, important indications persist that the consolidation of new capacities and livelihoods of an emergent middle class have relied upon a heterogeneous 'wellspring' of practices, work and everyday orientations. These continue to be concretely demonstrated in people's decisions about where to live, how to work and with whom to engage in their daily lives. This is what we want to demonstrate in a selection of ethnographic materials presented below.

Here we take part of the overall sample of households we worked with across the three districts—households that reported significantly improved incomes and living conditions in the past five years. During our interviews we inquired as to household practices of work, education, savings and economic decision-making. We were also interested in how they saw themselves situated in a broader field of relations, concentrating on those that were more physically proximate. It is this latter field of inquiry that will be presented here. The illustrations below are not comprehensive; for individual responses could also be replete with litanies about the need for hard work, patience, faith in God and luck. However, we want to concentrate on what might seem to be the more surprising aspects of resident attitudes, given the stereotypical ways in which emergent middle classes in the Global South are usually represented—that is, as consumption hungry, education-obsessed, religiously conservative and preoccupied with individualistic aspirations (Lange and Meier 2009).

Therefore, we asked residents about how they perceive their fellow neighbors, how well they knew them, and about the content of their actual and potential transactions. A common response was to report a limited knowledge of surrounding neighbors; 'they are different from us', was a common refrain, with the difference being at times attributed to a dissimilar job, ethnic background or history of residence. Recognizing that these are very different kinds of attributions, they do function differently in specific domains of consideration. For example, ethnic difference may be a dividing line in terms of the willingness to pool money in collaborative projects; whereas history of residence may be cited as a key criterion in terms of the ability of individuals to legitimately undertake particular initiatives in a district, as if an implicit 'waiting period' was in effect.

However, just as importantly, this attribution of difference, this absence of substantial knowledge about the details of the surrounding residents' lives did not necessarily foreclose a willingness to pay attention to each other, to discuss issues relevant to being a resident in the neighborhood or from even spending substantial amounts of time with each other. 'Even though our neighbors are different, doesn't mean we don't trust them; we don't need to know everything about them in order to appreciate them being here' was the reaction of Amina, the 35-year-old owner of a small beauty salon.

What our interviews have pointed to is an important disjunction between the need to understand or the need to compile a particular inventory of knowledge and the ability of residents to make use of each other. Even when we have inquired further into the nature of what perceived differences would mean—that is, what do the categories of difference such as ethnicity or difference in residential history actually mean in terms of how neighbors actually lead their lives, many residents were hard pressed to substantiate specific areas of difference—such as the ways in which households might

organize their domestic, financial or larger social relationships. Instead, differences at times were insisted upon regardless of what often appears as the quite similar composition of daily household practices.

Thus, there appears to be a separation made between understanding and association. In other words, it was not always necessary for residents to understand each other in order for them to collaborate on a wide range of local projects such as neighborhood maintenance, programs for children and youth, and even neighborhood income saving or generating projects such as local gardening, the purchase of common items of consumption at wholesale prices or the collation of neighborhood skills into neighborhood-run businesses.

When we asked residents about what the implications of knowing each other well might be, a common response, such as from Indri, a 30-year-old high school teacher, was, 'we would then always have to think about what we are doing and how we are doing it with the other people in mind; we would have a lot of obligations'. Some respondents indicated that there would be a proliferation of misunderstanding and disputes. For Rifki, the 43-year-old owner of a restaurant,

'if everybody sees themselves starting from the same starting point (being fundamentally linked and identified with each other) then we are going to have to look over our shoulder the whole time; we'll have little opportunity to make mistakes and to be free to do things differently than everyone else expects us to do'.

It appears that if a sense of basic difference is maintained, there is not only an attenuation of mutual obligations, but a sense of being able to use the act of paying attention to each other as a means to think about new opportunities, gain access to new sources of information and impressions.

Seeing difference wasn't only about differences between people and their situations; it was also about the physical built environment as well. As Fendi the 29-year-old head of a

local village council in Kramat Sentiong explains,

‘if you look around here, it looks pretty messy and disorganized; people feel the need to always do something, and most of the time it doesn’t really matter to them what it is, because the important thing is for you to show others that you are willing to do something, do something different.

So people do what they can with what they can afford, where they have connections to get hold of the materials they need, and a lot of times the results are not very pretty and don’t work, so there are problems.

But because no matter how their efforts have worked or not, they have already let others know that they are willing to do things, and so we, too, as a village council, can step in, see what’s going on and also ask others to get involved, either to fix things or help the individual with a new project.’

Fendi talks about the poor conditions of water infrastructure in the area and the long waits for official repairs. Rather than wait, improvised repair teams are continuously mobilized. As residents have many things to do, and the specificities of the particular problems also change, these improvised repair teams are made up of different compositions of residents. Residents take turns; different people are brought in according to skills, who are already widely known given that they have had opportunities to become visible in past interventions.

Ardhi, another member of the village council, adds:

‘it’s always a matter of give and take; you look around and you can either see this place as one big mess, a big construction site or a place that is on its way to becoming something really special; we don’t know for sure right now, but this situation where everyone seems to be going in a million directions at once, really keeps a lot of options open’.

When we asked members of the village council, all of whom had either lived in Jakarta for decades or were born there, why

they all considered themselves as coming from another part of the country instead of seeing themselves as citizens of Jakarta, Fendi replied,

‘what good is it to simply say that we are big happy family; we only find that out when we are forced to put our heads together, and we are only going to do that if we have something that challenges all of us’.

Putting heads together was particularly necessary when the local authority tore down a local produce market, depriving this part of Kramat Sentiong with an important source of daily inputs. Instead of just succumbing to its absence, residents banded together to re-insert the market along a nearby commercial thoroughfare. This required negotiating with scores of different property owners and shopkeepers. Residents of different backgrounds, ethnic identities and occupations then actively canvassed the shape of their own networks and those of the actors they had to negotiate with as a means of targeting specific residents to do the work of negotiation with specific shop-owners, as well as with different levels of the local government. The task also required the insertion of traders in specific sites and the management of different kinds of fees and rents so as to minimize disputes.

Ways of seeing

Another facet of the insistence upon difference entails particular ways that residents had of ‘seeing’ each other. Rather than witnessing each other as evidence of a consensual moral economy, the attraction in paying attention was rather the challenge of figuring out what was going on, scenarios that did not offer an easy interpretation. Rachmat, a 40-year-old manager of a large shopping complex, sums it up when he says,

‘I have a great deal of faith in my faith to tell me the right way to live.

I don't need others around me to confirm or dissuade me.

I don't need to see myself in everyone else, and I certainly don't want them looking at me for any kind of confirmation.

I like where I live because there is a kind of action all the time, like reading a really good story full of twists and turns and different characters.'

While residents did not appreciate overt displays of lewdness, stupidity or arrogance—for these demeanors would overwhelm what Budi, a 35-year-old engineer, labeled 'the intricacies of any story'—there was a professed widespread appreciation for neighborhoods as a place of theater, and a theater that did not necessarily have to play out according to a set script. In some neighborhoods, residents reported the existence of tipping points where, for example, the parasitism of particular neighbors in infringing upon someone else's water or power supply, or brash religious proselytizing, or the insistence of some residents to simply take up too much space with their demands, had taken away their interest in paying attention to the neighborhood. It had, as Anisa, a 29-year-old assistant hospital administrator, put it, 'become too much work for no apparent benefit'.

Still, it was important to residents that either they or their progenitors had constructed built environments that facilitated mutual witnessing as a form of continuous renovation of the narratives of economic well-being and social coherence. In other words, opportunities for residents to pay attention to each other were not created in order to ensure that their behaviors conformed to the prevailing standards of propriety and efficacy. Rather, this witnessing was the very condition to continuously remake what those standards looked like and as a means to redraw the lines of social collaboration—that is, folding residents into new constellations of collective action that need not be stabilized in particular forms over time. On the other hand, such continuous mutability did not lessen the ways in which

residents continued to associate with particular structures of belonging—kinship networks, ethnicity, histories of origin and occupational groupings.

During the long dictatorial regime of Suharto's New Order, urban localities were subject to intense surveillance by multiple and usually extra-parliamentary groups (Anderson 2000; Wilson 2006). These groups would often compete amongst themselves and participate in various shakedown of local residents. As Rini, a retired 60-year-old nurse puts it, 'if you wanted to keep what you had, you had to find some way to make it seem that you were part of some bigger picture, that you had people behind you'. Taufiq, a 50-year-old statistician with the housing ministry, said 'you had to give them something plain to see, like white rice, and once you had this in place, you could get on with dealing with people they would never expect you to deal with'. Therefore, in addition to being modalities of common belonging, kin and ethnicity were also screens, tactical devices to regulate external gazes, so that residents could proceed to see other things going on in their surrounds.

Irwan, a 55-year-old mechanic who now runs his own Toyota franchise, said

'it wasn't that we had severe hardships, but if you lived in the city, you always wanted to do more for your family, and so what could you do?

You could borrow money from family members but that always came at a price, so you had to look around for other opportunities, and when work was already so demanding of your time, it wasn't like you could just go around anyway you wanted; so it was important to be able to think about what you imagine doing with the people immediately around you.'

In many of our discussions, residents talked about how they realized that the impact of any single initiative could be increased through its becoming an aspect or component in the initiatives of others—not by virtue of being locked down in contractual

relationships or mutual obligations. Rather, it was a way of making whatever you were doing something that could be made use of by others.

Collaboration among residents then covers a lot of different options: sometimes residents would simply pay attention to what each other was doing in order to do something else. At other times, there might be collective discussions among relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers or colleagues about how to put different skills or contacts together in order to support what remained largely individual projects. Sometimes neighbors would silently agree not to interfere with each other's efforts. Still, at other times, residents would run smoke screens for each other—pretending that certain conditions, events or projects were *not* underway when they were in order to control how much attention outsiders paid to them and to ward off any harmful intrusions.

Often in our discussion with residents, we would point out how much it seemed as if residents were cooperating with each other or avoided cooperation, only to be told that quite the opposite was taking place. Therefore, in all of these practices and strategies, more than one thing is going on at once, and often what looks to be the reality of a situation is really something else. People look like they are cooperating but in reality they are just acting as if they are doing it in order to win themselves the freedom to do their own thing; or conversely, people may look like they are running all over each other, stabbing each other in the back, pursuing their own strong-willed aspirations when in reality they are implicitly learning from and adjusting to each other, affecting each other without it looking like they are doing so.

From these interview materials, the importance of difference is that it is the grounds on which to put together various kinds of relationships, and these relationships have potential economic value. For example, we came across Hikmat, whose family owned and operated a string of motorcycle repair

shops in Taman Sari where there are hundreds of such shops clustered together. We asked him why the family operated several shops rather than just one large one, where they could save on rent and labor, and after all, what value would having several of them basically in the same place provide? Hikmat told us that, while the different family shops operated as distinct entities, with everyone responsible for their own costs and profits, they were basically the 'same' shop. They were not the same in terms of the products or the ways in which they were run, but in how the differences in the way they were situated in the district complemented each other. 'After all, all the different shops in the end succeed or fail together.' The differences are those of what Hikmat calls, 'perspective' or vantage points, not just to capture different kinds of customers, but to build on the different relationships that the immediately surrounding shops have with each other and the relationships of these shops to a larger world.

On relational economies

All economies are about relations. However, in conventional economic calculations, individuals are viewed as largely autonomous entities maximizing self-interest through the acquisition of resources and positions through which to avail to others goods and services that fulfill specific needs and desires. The price relationship then is the device through which these transactions are made optimal given the volume of things to be transacted and the relative demand for them. Actors and the things they deal with, then, are simply considered according to the use to which they can be put.

However, in the conjunction of people and things affected by these transactions there can be a wide range of unanticipated results and opportunities opened up, where things and people may be used according to the identities through which they are conventionally understood but where different mutations

can also occur. The objects transacted index a particular relationship between actors that is always in transition, as the implications of the transaction may ramify across different aspects of the actors' lives, enabling or constraining them from doing and thinking certain things as a function of the transaction itself. These so-called *relational economies* situate an important wellspring of urban capacity. While frequently contained under the diffuse category of 'informality', these economies have played an important role in the gradual elaboration of earnings, assets, security, opportunity and confidence that characterize an emergent middle class.

To take one example: in the massive motorcycle parts and repair district of Taman Sari in central Jakarta there are continuously oscillating relationships among individual retailers. They are often grouped through joint ownership or family relationships, but more importantly intersect through changing calculations of value and opportunity accorded to each potential transaction. For example, for those outfits situated at the borders of the district and along the major thoroughfare entrances, the priority may be to quickly capture particular kinds of needs—such as the rapid acquisition of small parts and accessories—or to get a big picture about the largest volume of flow-through traffic so as to get some idea about what aggregates of demand look like—how many are looking for repairs, new or used parts; how many seem to know the nature of what needs to be fixed and how many are less certain. Outlets also have to anticipate how potential customers think about the different reputations that have been made and lost among them, and where to situate themselves in relationship to each other.

While each outlet exists as a distinct entity, these are continuously being reassembled into various chains of cooperation—the joint buying of parts from specific wholesalers, sharing certain skilled labor and investing in particular kinds of engagements with customers in terms of what can be gleaned from their background, and then

passing them on to other outlets that might be better prepared to capitalize on that background. In this way, information and reputations about the district and particular groups of outlets within it might more easily amass and spread across a larger territory. Even if a given outlet is capable of fixing a particular problem, it may know that the outlet across the street has better mechanical capacity. If they find out, for example, that the particular motorcycle and driver come from a pool in a specific company, they may attempt to capture some of that larger pool for sales of another kind—parts or accessories—by virtue of steering this particular customer to the best possible deal. Outlets don't only want to grab onto traffic passing through looking for specific goods or services, but to also use these moments as particular opportunities to reach out into and tap both the larger collective dynamics of hundreds of outlets—with different suppliers, skills, networks and reputations—and the larger city itself.

Here, then, the objects and actors are engaged in what look to be fairly straightforward and simple transactions—where customers are looking for the best price and outlets are looking to make the best sale. However, what also takes place is a more oscillating cascade of relationships where a wider range of outcomes is possible. Specific ends are addressed—making outlets profitable, paying workers and putting bread on the table. Nevertheless, the performative characteristics of transactions are also devices that allow people to maneuver more effectively among their relationships with people and things both within and outside the district. This maneuverability constitutes a kind of momentum that can solidify a particular bringing together of action, understandings and components but also rearrange the operations of a larger field of transactions in which this *bringing together* is situated—thus altering its meaning and the scope of what it brings about.

As a result, customers fill this district—not only in search of things related to motorcycles—but in search of contacts,

information and opportunities that may have nothing to do with these machines. Many customers come to this district looking for a small repair they could have easily taken care of closer to home, but nonetheless come here because they have the sense that many different things are underway—to be learned, witnessed, taken advantage of, even if they cannot always specifically put their finger on it. Not only does the district itself expand in terms of sector-specific businesses, but once declining neighboring areas are re-animated with different kinds of investments, which in turn help secure this area—strategically located for many potentially threatening gentrification projects—over the long run.

The uncertainties ahead

It is precisely the capacity of *bringing together* that some residents feel is being attenuated. Instead of the mutual navigation across different perspectives, positions and networks in order to come up with a tenable, if albeit temporary, vision of what it is possible for residents to do together, now the challenge is for households to find ways of fitting into predetermined formats. This is the case even when residents know that this is not in their immediate interests.

Indra and Faras are a couple in their late 20s with a small child. Indra is a nursery assistant and Faras repairs air conditioners in a large office building. They rent a small house in a crowded lower-middle-class section of Johar Baru. The rent takes up about 20% of their income, which they supplement by preparing sweets for special events sponsored by the many schools in the surrounding area. They are generally satisfied with the conditions of their neighborhood and have no difficulties with the fact that there are many new residents coming from all over the country to work in nearby factories and shopping malls. However, they anticipate that the people they would aspire

to be would likely not look favorably at their present place of residence. Faras says,

‘my seniors at work wouldn’t like it here because there are a lot of unmarried couples, and many neighbors drink and the pious ones complain to no avail; still everyone gets along, and I am able to earn more because my neighbors have different connections to places which always need their air-cons fixed’.

Indra says that she relies upon her neighbors to pick her son up after school if she is late getting home, and this is never a problem.

‘But it is not the right kind of place to really think about making sure our son lives the right kind of life; in this life you have to be worthy in order to succeed, and we worry whether or not living here will make us worthy.’

Rather than assess the prospects of future viability in terms of what a person is capable of doing and the networks of support and information that a person has available to them, Indra is saying that a person has to be ‘eligible’ for success, and that eligibility can literally be a matter of where one is located in the city. The couple is saving hard to acquire the down payment for a small flat in Pondok Bambu in East Jakarta that they consider to be a more Islamically correct place to live. While neither of them considers themselves more religiously devout than most, they believe that living there would maximize their eligibility for eventual success, even though they both know that they will go into long-term debt paying off the apartment and that their opportunities for supplemental income and childcare will also be reduced.

Other residents worry that they will increasingly have no choice but as Rani, the 28-year-old proprietor of a small computer shop, puts it ‘to play it safe’.

‘For my parents, they tried a lot of different kinds of economic activities, and when they didn’t work, well, there was always the opportunity to try other things because we lived around a lot of other people who were

also trying to do things; they took different ideas and ways of doing things from each other, and even more important, the neighborhood seemingly could take it all in; a person wasn't going to ruin anything, because things were being changed all of the time.

But when I move to an apartment, who am I going to see and what am I going to do there except just eat and sleep.'

Denny, a 60-year-old owner of several *warung* (local shop selling basic food and supplies), indicates that,

'It wouldn't be bad to have everything you need managed well, but realistically, we took so many risks to get this far, had to try and get along with so many people we were not prepared to deal with, but it got us somewhere, made us better people.

I look at all of those people in those towers and have no idea who they are.'

Dita, a 50-year-old manager of a small textile workshop, further explains that,

'we might have had our specific hopes or specific ideas about what we thought we could do, but we also knew that other people with more money and more connections probably had the same ideas as well, and that we could never go from point A to point B without making adjustments along the way.

But when we did this, we found out not only that we could make compromises, but that we were quite excited to discover different plans that we hadn't thought of before.'

Andi, a 58-year-old owner of a fleet of *bajaj* (a three-wheeled covered motorbike), said 'it was always a risk finding the activity that worked for you'.

The sense of risk pervades a lot of residents' comments. We are mindful of the slippery connotations associated with risk: the way that risk becomes knowledge critical to practices of governance in that it renders visible the actions of populations in a field of chance. Here differences among people and situations are instrumentalized and abstracted from the ways in which they are

produced by the economy and politics. Such instrumentalization then permits accumulation to proceed without it having to take into consideration all of the negative impacts it brings about. More significantly, it illustrates that only capitalist production is capable of making these conditions better in the long run (Stanley 2012).

However, instead of risk being the language of contingency that obscures the processes through which a household reality has been constructed—a language that abstracts that experience in terms of particular appearances in statistical calculations—contingency for many of the residents we interviewed seemed to become a means of 'freeing' up livelihoods from a limiting commitment to specific modalities of self-recognition. Residents could get on with negotiating complicated interactions with different facets of the city without necessarily being hindered by the defense of 'ultimate bottom lines' or 'territories of belonging', or by taking on cascading social obligations which limited the kinds of perspectives and information residents had available.

Viable, if often limited, livelihoods derived largely from a multiplicity of incremental maneuvers undertaken to build upon and extend whatever a household had access to. These maneuvers often relied upon positioning whatever assets the family had—financial, social or psychological—within new 'neighborhoods' of association. As such, households would speculate on the very conditions that consolidated them as a social unit. In other words, speculative activities put into play the very conditions through which households recognized themselves as a life shared together—that is, a sense of predictable bonds, shared assets, common collective performances.

New initiatives often operated against the grain of what the household was accustomed to. As some of our informants have indicated here, they would have to signal their willingness to participate in schemes and with actors that they otherwise might have shied away from; they would demonstrate their

willingness to perform roles with others that might be discordant with the way they performed their relationships with each other. Instead of the wider neighborhood being an extension of household ethos, it was actively cultivated as a divergent arena of interests and operations, even when ties of belonging through ethnicity, commonplace or origin or religious practice were maintained. Households knew that they operated in a crowded field of various initiatives and that the best laid plans would probably require continuous revisions and adaptation to those of others in order to accomplish anything.

Through this, many opportunities for work, improvement of living conditions and insurance against various volatilities of urban life were secured. However, as with all experimentation, there were inevitable fallouts and failures, some of which could not be compensated for, smoothed over or forgotten. Several residents expressed the sentiment that they would not miss a life 'way too crowded with different feelings'. Still others indicated that despite all of the complications, they would not know what to do without them.

Like in many parts of the world, aspirations to middle-class household organization and consumption patterns, moves to suburban single pavilion residences or apartment blocks are assumed to be the norm. There is of course substantial evidence of this change. People indeed are moving away from the complicated hard work of living in older, more central, highly dense parts of the city.

Take the case of Rafaz, who came to Jakarta 15 years ago when the factory in Cirebon in which he was working suddenly closed. He moved his family into one room in a cheap boarding house in Johar Baru and found work as a cleaner in a nearby market. He listened to the complaints of sellers about the ventilation system and afterhours, gaining access to the machinery room, started to experiment with small repairs. The local strongman (*preman*) who unofficially coordinated the different services in

the market appreciated his initiatives and arranged a mechanic's job with the district authorities that officially managed the market. Rafaz also helped the *preman* with other jobs across the area, so that his skills became more widely known. Rafaz then quit his regular job to become a 'specialist' with problems not only in market ventilation but also in local factories that ran short on power or large commercial enterprises that were vulnerable to flooding. For years he and his family remained in the rooming house as he watched carefully the dynamics of the neighborhood, particularly the buying and selling of property, and the prices and relationships involved. After almost 10 years, Rafaz moved from the rooming house into a four-story house of his own covering three contiguous plots and just a two-minute walk from the rooming house. However, after two years he sold the house and moved into a condominium in Kebon Jeruk when someone offered to buy the house for almost twice the amount it cost to build it.

A lingering question in the work presented here is to what extent this dispersal of residents from urban cores represents just another version of a very old strategy for controlling urban populations through re-containment. It is clear in the reports of residents here that they have learned a lot from residing in the very heterogeneous neighborhoods of Jakarta's central city, no matter the difficulties entailed. Even in their own musings about the future, they point to an eventual loss of skill even as their security and comfort increases. They talk about the loss of their technical skills to operate on their surroundings in ways that coax from them a wide range of responses and possibilities—the ways in which the various designs, materials, construction, repair and adaptations at work generate opportunities from the sheer process of having to manage the frictions of things not quite fitting but yet still connectable.

Whether it be in particular histories of auto-construction and capacities to enroll

diverse ways of life or populations into loosely configured projects of political influence that 'slip through' the crevices of bureaucracies and power brokers; whether it be in particular constellations of seemingly unrelated economic activities capable of providing employment over time or in the mobilization of sentiment that protects specific cultural practices or ways of being in the city, Jakarta has demonstrated a capacity to generate pluralized urban formations. These ways of being in the city suggest often radically different interrelationships among bodies, things, infrastructure, materials, space and language than that operative in the 'normal urban world'. They point to a circulation—not necessarily of self-contained subjects and citizens moving through different dimensions and times of the city—but the intermeshing of different bodies and materials that generates transactions and associations that are difficult to read and make clear sense of their effects and implications. As indicated earlier, this is what Foucault (2009) has called 'the problem of multiplicities'. This problem continues to posit the challenge, regardless of the widespread growth of an urban middle class across the globe, as to whether cities will remain places of multiplicity, of a plentitude of relations and ways of doing things.

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