

The Urban Poor and Their Ambivalent Exceptionalities

Some Notes from Jakarta

by AbdouMaliq Simone

Rather than being sedentary strata of urban existence, the urban poor move in and out of heterogeneous transformations, becoming a body of critical experimentation in ongoing calibrations of circulation and emplacement. They are sometimes the “wild cards” of urbanization itself, less excluded from rights and livelihood or a reserve surplus of wasted lives than vehicles for both conjoining and disrupting clearly delineated sectors, territories, and policies. Reviewing various dynamics of local economic practice, provisioning systems, and the built environment in Jakarta, in this article I explore the ambiguous presence of the poor in contemporary urban systems of the so-called global south.

The Poor and Plasticity

In his magisterial work *The African Poor*, John Iliffe (1987) emphasizes that the key dimension about the poor is that they have been with us for so long. Similarly, poverty seems to be an intractable dimension of urban life, a necessary component for the now increasing number of modalities and territories through which urbanization is constituted and operates. Consolidations of productivity would deem necessary unproductive others or at least others whose very sustenance requires inordinate effort with few resources with which to work. Theories of urbanization, driven by the imperatives of capitalist accumulation, with its accompanying spheres of dispossession, are well rehearsed (Bannerjee-Gupta 2010; Harvey 2003, 2008). So the intent here is not to reiterate them but simply to reassert their necessity as a platform for other perhaps more experimental explorations of the instantiation of the poor in urban life.

Urbanization has attained a planetary scale whereby the entirety of the earth is affected by, drawn into, and remade by the need to continuously rearticulate discrete geopolitical, geomorphological, and atmospheric domains into the nexus of resource accumulation and the circulation of exchange value (Brenner 2013). As such, the city is no longer the exemplar or the culmination of urbanization. Rather, it exists in a plural field of multilayered patchworks, a component in an extensive regionalization of both coordinated and disjointed production, inhabitation, and governance. But this pluralization of urban

form and process, its extensiveness and intensity (Brenner and Schmid 2011), would seem to depend on inscribing volatility into domains, metabolisms, cultures, and the earth itself. As such, this volatility cannot be exclusively commanded or channeled into a definitive and circumscribed range of effects. It disrupts, dispossesses, and reorganizes according to the logics and actors capable of mobilizing sufficient force and articulation. The dominance of capital is not obviated. But the very processes through which urbanization has attained its reach and diversity would seem to indicate the existence of a manifold virtual domain incapable of exhaustion and from which multiple potentialities for urbanization might be drawn.

The seemingly unequivocal transparency of the urban poor, their trials and tribulations, causal loops, and multiply configured impediments, may be a “mustered clarity.” Without denying the clear hardships experienced by the urban poor, there is something about the visibility of the poor, their very existence, that seems to shout out a sense of clarity. So it may be important to also consider more ambiguous positions, that is, senses where the urban poor “slip through” this clarity and operate in other ways. This is in no way to celebrate the resilience or tactical brilliance of the urban poor—the clever way they manage to eke out an existence in conditions of chronic scarcity and exploitation. There is no romance here. Rather, I consider the intricate interweaving of the poor into the material and social milieu where it is not easy to quickly decide unequivocal relations of power, advantage, or deprivation.

I will take the city where I live, Jakarta, and some of the work I have done with colleagues and institutions over the past years as a site for reflecting on some of the conundrum involved in discerning the urban poor as either a coherent category of urban existence or a specific life trajectory. Certainly the poor congregate in territories in Jakarta that could easily be referred to

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as slums or shantytowns and where there are clear histories of exclusion, dispossession, blockage, and incapacity. Yet the “majority” of the central city of Jakarta remains a heterogeneous composite of ways of life, histories of settlement, economic activities, and contestations that engineer complex circulations of resources and opportunities, equilibrate access to experience, information, and authority, and cut across clear-cut designations of social standing. This is the case even as hierarchical social organizations, institutionalized indifference, and economic parasitism pervade.

Minor, sometimes indiscernible differences can register significant effects in terms of how urban residents perceive themselves connected to each other. In work that I did in Jakarta several years ago with the Urban Poor Consortium—a “congress” of community-based associations of the most precarious residents of the city—assumptions that social similarities could be converted into political alliances were quickly deflated. In the district of Penjaringan, several hundred households had established themselves under an elevated toll road, claiming parcels of space but having to purchase materials and “rights” for self-constructed homes. The costs entailed sometimes exceeded those of residents across the contiguous neighborhoods. These latter residents frequently paid exorbitant rents and fees, often in advance, to various brokers and for living conditions not much different from those living under the toll road.

On almost all social indexes, there were no differences between residents living under the toll road and those living in the areas next door. In each context, there was the same mix of formal and informal employment, ethnic composition, and length of residency. Some residents shared the same workplace, schools, cultural association, and religious institutions. However, even if average household expenditures were nearly the same, the trajectories of those expenditures could differ. Those living under the toll road were perceived as making strategic choices to accrue savings in lieu of investing in any long-term security. Those living in contiguous neighborhoods were widely perceived by those living under the toll road, and themselves as well, as forgoing any possibility of savings in order to invest in some kind of security, regularization, and access to the possibility of being registered as formal Jakarta citizens.

Under “normal” conditions, this bifurcation in emphasis served as the basis for elaborating a wide range of complementarities among residents. Trade-offs could be brokered, exchanges posited, as the two different strands of emphasis could be combined to make possible numerous small-scale economic initiatives. But when those living under the toll road were faced with the immanence of eviction, proffered over a period of almost 2 years, it was nearly impossible to mobilize any moral or political support among other local residents for them. The municipal government at the time even recruited “vigilantes” among the residents not living under the toll road to start fires under the toll road, which were used as excuses by the state to clear out residents under the toll road in order to protect essential infrastructure.

So if there is a core essence to urbanization, it may be a sense of its “plasticity,” to borrow the term from Catherine Malabou (2011). It is the incessant exchangeability of substances where the entanglements of effort, body, stuff, and flow constantly re-duplicate themselves in ways that do not have to be the same or different. Rather, they constantly move on into and through strange syntheses. Neither fluid or static, landscapes and bodies reflect the traces of what has occurred to them, but how these traces “speak,” what influence they have at any given moment cannot follow a strict hierarchy of valuation. Constellations are torn apart and recomposed without relying on some clear sense of what should have taken place or what must take place. There are times when lives get used to the differences they go through, endure through the transformations. But there are also times when subjects and lives are indifferent to these changes, incapable of restoring a sense of continuity, where things are too different to know exactly what endures (Malabou 2012).

Inclusive Economies?

The sensibility of an overall environment is a particularly important field of inquiry related to the often simultaneously stable, volatile, dynamic, and fragile compositions of local economic production. While homogenous basins of impoverishment certainly exist as spatially marginal from the various real economies of urban life, the probable majority of the poor in Jakarta are inserted in highly variegated, heterogeneous interactions with others whose income levels and access to assets and resources cover a wide range of possibilities. To characterize particular districts as poor or not poor is often impossible, particularly given the limitations on available data sets and instruments for measuring aggregate levels of income and consumption.

The difficulty here is that many important economic domains articulate a wide range of logics, practices, means of remuneration, and temporalities. For example, in the district of Jembatan Lima in Jakarta, with its thousands of textile production and finishing units, at least a quarter of the city’s clothing is produced under highly divergent circumstances that loosely connect different forms of capital investment, skills, and labor at different times.

There are periods when the degree of inclusiveness—in other words, the opportunities for large numbers of residents to be involved in some facet of this sector, from the actual production or finishing of textiles, repair of machinery, transport, retailing, or provision of inputs to the production process—is intensified through fortuitous intersections of different factors outside of any specific actor’s control. These range from the practices of workers themselves spreading work around through sharing orders to splitting shift work or organizing themselves into competitively viable production units. They also can entail productive contestations among local political authorities and entrepreneurial groupings that redistribute opportunities and assets. There are times when certain synergies are attained in various interactions of subcontracting, finishing, piecework, and marketing that allow the scores of small outfits involved to forge

insertions into new markets collectively, acting with some autonomy from the patronage and corporate structures to which they otherwise “belong.” In other words, each unit, given the circuits of information exchange or informal sharing of workers and work, can at times exist in “separate worlds,” that is, working for particular paymasters and brokers as well as working for “themselves” on the side.

Such inclusiveness can also be interrupted through the parasitical and speculative actions of moneyed players, usually from the outside, who skew the distribution of production to particular and highly circumscribed groupings. These players attempt to impose specific linkages among a limited set of production units, suppliers, transporters, and marketers, limiting and undercutting the more varied and flexible configurations that otherwise would be continuously negotiated and worked out.

The kinds of densities required in order to promote the widest possible range of possible connections among various facets of particular sectors of economic production may place substantial stress on existing infrastructure, making upgrades of services difficult to implement. The intersection of different initiatives and efforts requires the ability of participants to pay attention to what each other are doing and for there to be a circulation of information and opportunities to deliberate and act on that information. Many policy interventions that attempt to further equitable access, to clean up or straighten out messy mixtures of residence, commerce, and informal politics, have specific spatial implications that can limit the overall inclusiveness of existent urban economic activities.

To separate out the poor from their embeddedness in such variegated and textured economic activities may have political importance in terms of ensuring greater equity among an overall urban population. But it may not necessarily help in terms of understanding the conditions of their very existence within the city. It is easy to argue that this existence is limited, its nature unjust and indicative of the logics of accumulation through dispossession. But it is an existence nevertheless, and an existence that largely takes place in thickly intermeshed interactions with those who are not poor.

Several years ago I was involved in an initiative, at the behest of a “progressive” staff of a municipal district office in Padamangan, a district in North Jakarta that is the site of a large number of small- to medium-scale textile fabricators, to help organize a formal association of fabricating units. The idea behind such an association was to introduce a common set of rules for enhancing safe and secure work environments, coordinating vehicular traffic bringing goods in and out of the district, and forging a consolidated force more capable of winning better deals with wholesalers who purchased finished products and wholesalers who provided material inputs. The local authorities also wanted to enhance the visibility of the district as a textile sector, bringing many operations out of the shadows and fostering collaborations that could make more profitable use of space, tools, and labor.

While the district personnel were politically astute enough to work on this notion through protracted consultations with the

various actors involved in the sector as well as with scores of local civic and religious organizations, there was little overall willingness to engage in such a project. Participants in the local textile business would often complain vociferously about the exploitative labor practices of others, about how too many firms operated behind “closed doors,” and about the unproductive practices of fabricators undercutting each other. They complained about the excessive number of trucks trying to come in and out, a situation that delayed orders and deliveries; they all affirmed the need to increase their bargaining power with distributors and markets.

But despite these complaints and the acknowledgments of positive benefits coming from the proposed reorganization, they worried that the potential loss of heterogeneity—in the modalities and sizes of production—would somehow limit their own capacities. For example, they were convinced that they would have to eventually adopt uniform payment systems and cease the current practice of paying workers who did different kinds of jobs in different ways—from regular salaries and remuneration by the piece to flexible hourly wages according to the volume of orders. They were convinced that there were too many external, unseen interests behind the scenes and that the only way to strategically deal with them was to retain very different kinds of production and working situations in Padamangan as a way of “rolling with” this opacity.

Although participants could see and understand the various complementarities and conflicts among their different ways of working, it was difficult for them to assuage their fears that such an organization would limit their capacity to take on different kinds of jobs or put different kinds of jobs, workers, and operations together at a moment’s notice as they were accustomed to doing. Even when they recognized the ways in which they already collaborated extensively with each other, the prospect of putting these collaborations into words as a prescriptive policy scared them off.

Any cursory examination of the majority of districts in central Jakarta reveals the intensive proximity of diverse residential conditions and built environments. This juxtaposition is no guarantee that the eventual prospects of any specific poor household would be inevitably enhanced or their security strengthened. But it does point to the necessity of considering the existence of the urban poor within a broader range of economic and social interrelationships, making general statements about the characteristics, expendability, or precarity of the urban poor of limited value.

Entangled Densities

In the vast central city districts of Jakarta such as Bukit Duri, Johar Bahru, Menteng Dalam, or Mataram, land politics have largely centered on where vehicles of certain dimensions can go. As in many cities, automobiles came to embody efficacy in the city. Even if a household had the financial means to acquire a car, it did not necessarily mean that they had somewhere they could easily put it. The past exigencies of urban

residence were—and, of course, largely remain—access to affordable places to live, something accomplished through high densities. Densities not only availed relatively cheap accommodation; they facilitated multiple forms of social connectivity, information exchange, and fluid labor markets that created their own versions of mobility and mobilization. The ways in which these densities were materialized did not permit easy access for automobiles, especially if they were to be directly stored within the confines of household space.

In initial spatial layouts designed through government programs or private developments, the usual pattern was to inscribe a few feeder and through-flow roads. Around these roads were built the majority of residential plots circumnavigated by small lanes whose sizes depended on the characteristics of the terrain or the extensiveness of the inevitable subdividing and parceling engineered by local residents themselves. Properties on feeder roads escalated in value as cars became more plentiful, and in many instances, areas that had not been accessible to automobiles were replotted, a process that required significant funds in order to assemble the land. Those with access to such resources would usually, in turn, construct large homes, often in accordance with local regulations specifying that certain proportions of land holdings had to be developed. At the same time, cars do find ways of fitting themselves into inhospitable conditions. In my neighborhood, Tebet Dalam, the small crowded houses that are a few steps up in size and quality from the conventional working-class three-room bungalow, take on a different aura as they squeeze a car into a makeshift frontage. The surrounding lanes barely allow a single car to pass, so herculean maneuvers are always required if more than two cars show up at the same time.

The stereotypical portrayals of automobility as producing less dependence on others—individuals capable of moving around the city according to their own individuated temporality and desires—seem to ring true in Jakarta's car-accommodating areas. Here, a persistent quiet seems attributable to the fact that residents are either rarely at home or have little need to occupy the street as a space of social conviviality or economic necessity. Although professionally, I often meet many people who reside in such situations, I rarely inquire anymore about events or conditions regarding the larger district in which they live because they always seem to know little about what is going on.

But this is not the case in some districts, where seemingly middle-class pavilions front a drivable street, creating the veneer of upward mobility and tranquility. For in the spaces behind these homes, often an entire other world has been implanted over time. In the volume of space between parallel streets, in the back lots of property, long histories of subdivision, subtenancy, and long- and short-term leasing have created highly dense "interiors" seemingly rendered invisible by the veneer of middle-class frontage. While conditions of density can be overwhelming, as intense crowding takes its toll on available infrastructure, residents of the interior often have far more extensive networks into the larger city than do the middle-class residents.

Highly intricate circuits of information exchange are forged that enable residents of greater means to circumvent their otherwise claustrophobic reliance on bureaucratic and patronage networks, based largely on where they work. As they are usually trying to complement their official salaries with income derived from various entrepreneurial initiatives that are usually provisional, experimental, and that do not consume large amounts of disposable income, these circuits become valuable "windows" on the larger city as residents of the "interior" are often folded into them as labor.

Cooking, chatting, grooming, cleaning, repairing, gossiping, and gaming all take place as part of the domestic and convivial neighborhood life. But residents primarily use crowdedness to experience another kind of mobility. They have a sense of enlarging their reach and access into events and territories that having cars would not really expedite. For they mostly talk about what is going on elsewhere; what others are up to who are not visibly present. Sometimes this interest in exteriority is concretized through specific projects—travels to markets or to distant work sites, collective investment in a trading place outside the district, taking over a food-selling operation near the parking lot of a new shopping mall, appropriating abandoned space for storage, inserting small trades in the fringes along busy thoroughfares, or running protection services.

Whatever form this interest takes, it becomes a possibility for residents of a district to be in a larger world together in ways that do not assume a past solidity of affiliations, a specific destination, or an ultimate collective formation to come. As such, what many Jakarta residents have come to misconstrue as poor neighborhoods generate an economic dynamism that enables those with a comfortable middle status yet increasing nervous dispositions to stay put and thus help ward us the incursions of big developers—for now.

Once one gets past the commonsense assumption that the poor are always more vulnerable, the spatial politics of the traditional residential districts of Jakarta dramatize a series of complexities and trade-offs. Contiguous districts of relative wealth and impoverishment offer each other specific affordances—each covers, hedges, protects, and sustains the other in ways that are not clearly just or without manipulation. The penetration of cars for the time being generates money that enables the areas where cars can not go to keep the really big and debilitating money at bay. These are twists and turns not easily available to concrete.

Marshaling the Poor for Urban Development

The ambiguities, exceptionalities, and intermeshings of the urban poor with intricate circuits of economic production and social affiliation are tempered by the ways in which they are positioned in shifting governmental policies and regulatory regimes. The purported clarity of how urban poverty is produced and what needs to be done about it are posited with increasing adamancy.

While housing shortages prevail in Jakarta as in many other major metropolitan areas, the exigencies associated with climate

change, infrastructure adaptation, and the promotion of greater social equity are cited with greater frequency as compelling rationales for “finally” doing something about urban poverty. In Jakarta, the engineering projects to mitigate flooding will force the removal of nearly 400,000 residents living illegally along the Ciliwung River. The multiple problems faced by the national and municipal state in acquiring land complicates the resettlement issue, and the unavailability of land is normatively attributed to an excessive volume of urban land having ambiguous status. The problems of flooding have been greatly exacerbated by overdevelopment, where megacomplexes are not articulated to the municipal water system and instead dig enormous ground wells that accelerate rates of subsidence estimated at various locations in Jakarta to be between 185 and 260 mm per year. That parastatals such as railway corporations and military complexes retain enormous amounts of centrally located undeveloped land as devices to hide budgetary deficits and speculation are rarely calculated in as factors to land shortage.

Acting in the name of more equitable and comprehensive provisioning systems for the poor launches a wide range of ramifying effects. Take the issue of low-cost housing, *perumahan rakyat*. As states have largely signed on to a host of international concords proclaiming shelter as a human right, states have largely withdrawn from any direct responsibility for subsidizing the costs of constructing and maintaining low-cost housing (Durand, Lasserre, and Selod 2009; Hoek-Smith 2008). Like many countries, selling mortgage-backed securities on capital markets has become the dominant source of housing finance. While it is true that even when states continue to allocate subsidies in some form for low-cost housing that its volume is woefully inadequate in relationship to need, the assumption is that aggregating the not insignificant savings of many lower-income (if not absolutely poor) households can provide the long-term capitalization of sustainable housing programs. The assumption is that such a strategy enables banks to lend at affordable interest rates over long time periods (Kusno 2012; Reerink 2011).

But in order for securitization to work, land has to be imbued with unequivocal status, its ownership clearly determined and registered. It is estimated that up to 70% of land in Jakarta remains uncertified, with most parcels falling within a nebulous region of being legally but not legitimately occupied. Land was transacted largely at a local level and through localized processes of registration with district authorities, a process from which arose a highly diverse mixture of lease rights, shared ownership, and land trusts (Mercy Corps and URDI 2008). Responsibility for land certification—as opposed to the actual multiple modalities of “informal” land transactions—belongs to the Badan Pertanahan Nasional (National Land Agency).

The advantages of land regularization have been widely touted for a long time in terms of the ways in which property can become a fungible asset for lower-income households and institute greater security of tenure. But many Jakarta residents cannot afford the plethora of fees that surround the

actual certification costs. These costs include investigations of any competing claims and payment of past taxes to local district councils. They often cannot deal with the social implications of definitive assignment of ownership in tenure situations where multiple actors have long worked out complementary responsibilities in regard to land use. Certification is not just a matter of bureaucratic efficiency. The National Land Agency has initiated a program that sends mobile offices across the city to accelerate the certification process. For many residents, certification entails complex readjustments of already intricate social and economic relationships—readjustments for which they are either ill prepared or are reasonably afraid will eventually push them out of the city.

In 2011 the government established the Liquidity Facility for Housing Finance program with an initial \$268 million in investments—a facility that encourages both the consolidation of land needed to build low-cost housing at scale and the incentive for developers to provide low-cost housing and to precipitate the financial packaging necessary for households to take on affordable mortgages. Again this approach not only requires land certification but proof of creditworthiness, and credit is accorded only to those who can offer proof of full-time formal employment (Kusno 2012).

As such, this facility, purportedly undertaken in order to enlarge opportunities for long-term residence for low-income households in the city, potentially bifurcates neighborhoods where a thick intermeshing between formal and informal work has existed for decades. These are areas where residents may have formal work only for certain periods of the year, or where, more significantly, levels of stable income register no significant difference between those employed in formally registered production and service units or those working either in unregistered firms or, as is more often the case, working for shifting networks among formal and informal firms. For example, many Jakarta workers may be affiliated with formal firms but not be employed by them directly. Instead, they either work in what turn out to be more lucrative jobs in subcontracting positions or in plying the relationships between different kinds of firms. A person may work as a mechanic in a formerly registered motorcycle parts and repair shop part time but spend more time servicing company pools that use a large number of motorbikes for their work, a service that is shared among a number of different formal shops but for which there is no formal contract with the company.

This does not mean that there are no differences between formal and informal work or that they always complement each other or that there are not vast instances where informal work is simply a means of avoiding payment of minimum wages or taxes. Formal work, even if its direct remuneration does not always exceed informal wages, conventionally comes with benefits and guarantees not available to informal work. Rather, the point is to emphasize that most districts in central Jakarta have elaborated complicated interdependencies, market sharing, and mixed labor uses whose efficacies would substantially diminish and thus negatively affect the overall urban

economy if formal land certification and creditworthiness of individual heads of households were the only devices available for accessing large-scale government programs of housing finance. Tools of administration are of course necessary in order to curtail misuses of informal mechanisms. In the absence of clear ownership and use provisions, much land can be tied up in protracted legal struggles, usually among family members, about inheritance rights, which many Indonesians prefer to remain ambiguous, as the specification of these rights is closely tied to the immanence of death. But any land regulation and adjustment system must make provisions for the long-established historical efficacies in how land is actually used.

The Powers to Usurp

In addition to housing issues, invocations of the need to do something about the urban poor frequently stand in for a host of other urban problems. At the moment Jakarta is seen as “just getting by,” largely on the swelling numbers of the “barely middle class” (van Leeuwen 2011; World Economic Forum 2011). The combined urban region of Bogor, Depok, Jakarta, Tangerang, Bekasi, and Cianjur has approximately 29 million inhabitants, making it one of the world’s largest urban regions. In the absence of any effective regional planning and administrative mechanisms linking the municipalities contiguous to Jakarta, these municipalities complain that the problems of low-income residents are being “exported” to them, thus limiting their own capacities for rational development. This is despite the fact that they now host a new generation of export-led and domestic manufacturing.

Among Indonesian cities, Daerah Khusus Ibukota (DKI) Jakarta commands the lion’s share of national revenue sharing through fiscal transfers based on an apportionment of national income taxes and revenues derived from oil and gas, forestry, fisheries, and mining. In part, this skew has enabled minimum wages to double in the city during the last 8 years. But these wages still do not exceed on average 1.29 million rupiahs per month, roughly US\$130. This figure does not include 30% of the population that depends exclusively on some form of informal work (Mulyana 2012). The crowdedness of informal sector work oscillates according to macroeconomic dynamics. For example, the informal economy expanded substantially during the national economic crisis of 1997 and the global downturn of 2008, when demand for manufactured goods contracted, resulting in widespread job loss to subcontracted, casual, and temporary work (Bunnell and Miller 2011).

When the extensiveness of such transformations in the labor market were fully realized several years after the initial crisis—and after the rocky transition period following the end of the New Order regime in 1998—the national government instituted the Program Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Kelurahan in 2001 as a revolving loan fund for microenterprise creation, which in the subsequent 6 years had 413,03 beneficiaries (Mulyana 2012). This program was complemented by the Jaminan

Sosial dalam Hubungan Kerja di Luar Jam Kerja, which provided 24-hour insurance coverage for injured workers. This program was initiated because of the relaxed enforcement of both in-house work and transportation regulations, regulations viewed as an impediment to the absorption of larger complements of labor.

As much informal work requires some kind of space in which to operate, and where access to such space is sometime foreclosed by inadequate available capital, licenses, and connections, so-called public space may be appropriated as the site from which informal work is launched or managed. Additionally, where informal work centers on hawking, repair, carting, unlicensed transport, or food preparation, profitability is maximized by the proximity of these activities to major markets and transportation hubs. As the competition for customers can be fierce, various shortcuts are taken in order to assure the most advantageous visibility, access to needed inputs, and easy waste disposal. The volume of encroachments on public space not only increases but so do tensions between transport operators looking for places to pick up passengers or park, food hawkers, *ojek* motorcycle taxis, pedestrians, and so forth. The sorting out of spatial allocation and the policing of functional enclosures becomes the purview of “unofficial authorities,” known in Indonesia as *preman*. These “authorities” have also largely gained this position through usurpation and through collusion with public authorities who simply do not want to enter the fray of such complexities and are content to collect a variety of “rents” derivable from the officially illegal status of all of the activities involved (Harjoko, Dikun, and Adiarto 2012).

Thus there is a long history in Jakarta of the poor’s effort to sustain themselves in the interstices of intersecting vectors of control and possibility. Because they are often officially considered illegitimate yet mostly tolerated without prospects for substantial citizenship rights, they are subject to the structuring and policing mechanisms of increasingly sophisticated extraparliamentary mafia-like “agencies.” These extract rents from the many different activities engaged in by the poor. They curtail efforts at assembling more proficient, mass-based consolidations of particular economic sectors or various forms of widespread political mobilization. Increasingly, these associations operate under the auspices of promoting religious virtue as an additional means of extorting money from a wide range of illicit activities that are allowed to exist as long as they pay up (Wilson 2011).

At the same time, associations of *preman* operate as facilitators of various transversal economic and social connections. They exert power not simply because of their ability to deploy violence and to act arbitrarily but also because they spend an inordinate amount of effort understanding the details of how each economic sector operates; they reach out to almost everyone with a genuine sense of generosity in terms of understanding the dilemmas and ins and outs of how individuals actually conduct their activities and livelihoods. This capacity has often been parlayed into efforts to defend districts, markets, and transportation hubs from the incursions of “big players.” Prop-

erty speculators have often been deterred from effacing specific neighborhoods because they do not know exactly what the implications of their “development” might be. This is because *premen* have been known to act with daring and impunity in staging (and exaggerating) their capacities to disrupt development plans.

Just as “eviction,” “incursion,” “rehabilitation,” and “renewal” are the terms with which urban betterment is often posited, usurpation in its various ambiguous forms is marshaled as an approach to create spaces of operation for low-income residents. Associations of *premen* and their mafia tactics are of course parasitical and exploitative. They divide up turf and opportunities. But these delineations, these enforcements of particular enclosures, are never definitive and never prohibit—and in some instances implicitly suggest—“lines of flight” across designated territories. Once rackets, economies, and authority relations appear settled, once networks of tributes and rents have been elaborated, then these become staging areas for some residents to elaborate collaborations across them, under the radar, working out the wide range of problems that ensue when any unofficial organization seeks to sustain its hegemony over a particular domain.

In our discussions with participants in many of these associations of *premen*, they know full well all of the things that are going on behind their back. They even come to depend on many of them because they explore a wider range of potential relationalities among places and activities than their concentrations on maintaining control over particular turf or sectors allow time for. Thus, even when key, supposedly powerful, unofficial authority figures in particular neighborhoods act in collusion with big politicians, developers, and military entrepreneurs, they often know full well that they can only pretend to “deliver” a district in its “entirety” to a particular agenda.

The Politics of Provisions

Law 40/2004 requires the Indonesian government to provide the poor with free health care and social security. Additionally, the *Beasiswa untuk Siswa Miskin* provides tuition support for low-income children. There are a range of unconditional cash transfer programs offered during periods of economic crisis, particularly during spikes in fuel costs, as well as cash transfer programs conditional on households maintaining their children with adequate nutrition and schooling. But during the last decade there have been continuous renovations of sectoral programs in health, social security, school subsidies, job creation, and housing. Although the professed impetus for such renovations is the determination to “get things right” and to attain more dynamic synergies among programs, it also means that the integration of these domains, largely viewed as necessary in order to reduce poverty, is constantly tenuous and subject to institutional fractures and delivery gaps (Tambunan 2004). The circuits of poverty’s reinforcement—for example, poor health makes it difficult to work, which results in lost income compensated by child labor, which means limited education and access to jobs

and living conditions with significant health risks—require structural changes in the allocation of resources and a grasp of how resources are actually put to work in specific contexts.

The Indonesian government spends 6% of total government expenditures on poverty alleviation and 0.6% of its overall GDP (World Bank 2012). It concedes its inability to really grasp the trajectories of resource use, as well as certain responsibilities for macrostructural change, through the widely touted Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (PNPM; National Country Empowerment Program). In this program, small capital development grants, usually of about US\$30,000, are allocated to each *kelurahan* (administrative district, which in Jakarta totals roughly 8,000 inhabitants). Democratically constituted committees use the allocations to repair local infrastructure, such as roads, sewage drains, and markets. A primary objective is to use this program as a means to enhance the capacity of local residents to participate in the administration of community affairs.

The absence of such participation was seen as a major impediment to one of the world’s largest urban infrastructure renovation programs, the Kampung Improvement Program (KIP), led by the World Bank, which ran for 25 years, upgrading local infrastructure and benefitting some 3.3 million people. While KIP enhanced the basic functionality of precarious districts, it did not have sufficient funds, political determination, or community engagement to significantly adjust and consolidate land holdings in order to make significant improvements in actual shelter. It could “make over” deteriorating situations, but it could not engage the multiplicity of ways in which land was organized so as to mobilize interventions at scale and with sufficient authority to restructure districts (Silver 2008). Today most households across the city extend and reshape the residential structures they have access to in order to accommodate growing families or, more usually, to rent out for extra income. But the subsequent material and population densities and demands on aging or barely functional infrastructure suggest many immanent tipping points. Significant readjustments of land—that critical and volatile element of urban life—require substantial concords between the state and local populations that go beyond certification, compiling a comprehensive cadaster, or regularizing private property rights.

Without such concords, government-cultivated empowerment programs, such as the PNPM, rely too heavily on either cultivating mafia-type networks that deploy provisioning as a form of patronage, consolidating party machines that attempt to develop some delivery capacity at a local level but primarily act as a mechanism with which to link to big party figures at the top, or a more populist mobilizing of the poor through a generalized push for redistribution strategies (Rosser and Wilson 2012). While the latter gestures toward the structural shifts necessary to at least mitigate poverty, they are frequently proffered without an informed sense of how any such redistribution would actually be put to work.

What further complicates provisioning programs is that there is significant mobility in and out of poverty at approximately

equal rates. These transitions do not seem to be related to occupational transitions but more to educational attainment and the scope of work, particularly access to full-time work regardless of its degree of formality.

Although no empirical studies have been conducted in Jakarta on the relationships among sociability, network extensiveness, and the heterogeneity of social interactions as they relate to income levels and precarity, it is safe to assume that the outcomes of such a study would parallel those done in São Paulo. There, access to structured work and schooling as well as to institutional participation of various kinds constructs social networks much less dependent on family ties and local connections. This heterogeneity is directly related to differentials in income among the poor and the degree of their vulnerability to everyday crises (Marques 2012).

Access to full-time work regardless of its formality is important because only 3% of workers in Jakarta transition into formal work, whereas the reverse transition is higher at 5% (World Bank 2012). Informal work often comes without guarantees, security, safety, and usually offers only low wages. Informal work, particularly for those who have to run very small businesses, is usually exhausting, and the managers of these businesses often wish that they could find regular wage work even if their earnings would be lower (Duflo 2012). But informal work also can be folded into many different forms of compensation and asset creation that prove more adaptable to local conditions over the long run. For example, a friend of mine, Abaye, “runs” a small local market, selling mostly fresh produce, that stays open 24 hours a day, something that is unusual in Jakarta. He took control of the market through informal means, clearing out the existing mafia that controlled it, formally registering it not as a market but as a small enterprise, funding a police post nearby to provide the appearance of “official security,” and then undercutting the prices of produce at other markets. Abaye has no official status, but everyone acknowledges that the market “belongs” to him.

While the usual extraction of proceeds takes place under the auspices of covering “management and cleaning fees,” Abaye has also over time used the accumulated money to purchase houses in the area surrounding the market and resell them at fair prices, with low-cost interest rates, to the market sellers who can afford them. He also provides low-cost, rehabilitated rental accommodation for market workers who had been living in shacks along the creeks near the market. Instead of using funds to improve the market infrastructure, which mostly looks like a mess, the funds have been invested in developing a trade in second-hand goods in an area contiguous to the market that specializes in printing and attracts a large number of customers from across the country. Workers in the market have become “shareholders” in this second business as an additional economic protection against seasonal fluctuations in produce market sales. While these efforts here are replete with ambiguities and contradictions, informal work does sometimes activate security-enhancing potentials that could exist in formal work but that largely do not,

even if formal workers may enjoy greater individual autonomy over the disposition of their earnings.

Conclusion

The questions of the urban poor are largely questions about what it means for residents to “make it” in the city. How do residents negotiate the aspiration to be just as good as any other urban resident of the world yet, at the same time, remain close to the toolboxes of practices, sensibilities, and tactics that enabled them to keep adjusting to the changing realities of the city? If residents had once made significant accomplishments in building districts that worked for them, then what now? How are ongoing practices of autoconstruction and auto-management related to the professed determination of municipal institutions to reassert control over basic planning and delivery of services? What has to be considered in order for these accomplishments not to exist as mere relics or shadows of themselves but to constitute a source of influence on subsequent events? What kind of institutional assumptions are prevalent about who residents are and what they can reasonably or legitimately do? How can urban policy more effectively engage the various initiatives undertaken by residents to claim space and opportunity, but more importantly, be articulated to the specific ways that land, shelter, and economic activity have been provided and managed by various constellations of effort? Given the constraints on what residents can do to secure a place for themselves in the city and aspire to particular ways of living within it, what are they now willing to risk, what do they see as possible, and what are the terms that they are willing to adhere to in terms of actualizing these possibilities?

Policy making and projects of development and the resourcefulness of resident livelihood formation have largely been elaborated as parallel, untranslatable worlds. It is self-evident that neither is sufficient without the other, although the terms of articulation are seldom apparent or consistent. The articulations and divides are full of complexities and deceptions: histories of apparent resourcefulness have often raised more problems than they have addressed (infusing cities with untenable degrees of complexity and dispersal). What often look like substantial assets of social capital, democratic practice, and social collaboration can be highly murky maneuvers of opportunism and trickery. Policy making is not always a reflection of capture to elite interests or an instrument of capital reformation. The categories used to describe processes, actions, and decisions on the part of different social and institutional actors are usually too stark and deliberate, not reflective of the complicities, exchanges, and imitations that constantly take place among actors and sectors that seem essentially different.

Thus, the challenge is to produce an account of urban contemporary city life that demonstrates the intricate interlinkages among how residents are housed, how land is used, how work and income are created, where people can circulate and congregate, how residents can access critical knowledge and use the

city as a resource for knowledge, and how residents can effectively register their ideas, needs, and aspirations and participate in the critical processes that determine their livelihoods and rights.

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