

# Making Security Work for the Majority: Reflections on Two Districts in Jakarta

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## Abstract

*Global urban theory has placed increased emphasis on the ways in which residents from different walks of life have created heterogeneous spaces, livelihoods and political sensibilities. Much of this analysis deals with the importance of discernible forms of belonging, organization, and identity as the tools through which relationships among residents and spaces are managed and secured. For residents of mixed income, mixed use areas of the urban cores of megacities in the so-called Global South, securing livelihoods have also depended upon sensibilities and practices that open up multiple venues of collaboration among distinct backgrounds, capacities, and interests. They have relied upon intricate local political and social practices that that foster more diffuse and uncertain intersections—where time, effort, money, and affiliation are “untied” from their usual social anchors. Taking the phenomena of sporadic explosions of violence in Tanah Tinggi and the everyday piecing together of “nationhood” in Kramat Sentiong—two neighboring districts in central Jakarta—the article explores ways in which it is possible for localities to sustain a plurality of livelihoods and initiatives.*

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## Part One: The ruses and fixes of urban security

In the now prolific literature on megacities in the so-called Global South, much attention is placed on the growing middle class and the intractable problems of the urban poor. But knowledge of the “in-between” remains limited—of what is perhaps the “majority” of urban residents. This majority includes a wide range of professions, workers, livelihoods and ways of life. It includes police, nurses, teachers, drivers, storekeepers, secretaries, salespersons, factory workers, artisans, marketers, technicians, journeymen—to list a few.

Urban theorists such as Ananya Roy (2009, 2011), Jennifer Robinson (2002, 2006, 2011), Colin MacFarlane (2007, 2011) and Ash Amin (2006) have incisively pointed out the need to better understand the ways in which cities in the South were actually developed. How did cities come to encompass so many different realities and times? These are cities that have spawned new infrastructures and lifestyles at rapid speeds and yet retain significant areas of both incremental improvements over time and impoverishment. A substantial literature on “post-

colonial urbanism” does detail important changes over the past decades  
[2] (Abeyasekere 1987; Corbridge et al. 2005; Chatterjee 2004; Fouchard  
[3] et al. 2009; Gooptu 2004; King 1990, 2007; Legg 2007; Yeoh 2001). But,  
it often does not account for the complexities in how residents of differ-  
ent backgrounds, capacities and ways of life manage their relationships  
with each other. Too often, the categories of ethnic and regional belong-  
ing and the apparent conflicts between various forms of identity—urban,  
rural, national, religious, class, territorial—overpower what are more  
intricate balances.

This is particularly apparent when we consider how such a “majority”  
of residents has been able to provide a sense of security for themselves in  
changing cities. Much of this literature on postcolonial urbanism has  
emphasized growing consolidations of belonging within ethnic groups,  
professions, specific places in the city, political and economic associa-  
tions. Urban life has often been an arena where different aspirations and  
interests, often forged as specific ethnicities, fight it out in order to win  
spaces of maneuver (Appadurai and Holston 1996), or where an assort-  
ment of brokers and middlemen mediate between “state and slum” or  
between particular population groups and structures of authority (Auyero  
2007; Barker 2009; Benjamin 2000; Hansen and Verkaaik 2009).

What we emphasize here are the ways in which the apparent pre-  
dominance of identity and belonging is also complemented with more  
flexible, tactical collaborations. These collaborations exceed the appar-  
ent forms of social organization in order to make fuller use of the cross-  
cutting opportunities of interchange that urbanization theoretically  
provides. Plöger (2010) refers to this capacity as the “eventalization of  
[4] urban space.” i.e. ways in which collaboration is activated through bring-  
ing together different stories, places, authorities and institutions in ways  
that cannot be specified by any official framework or language.

Much of urban analysis in the past two decades has centered on the  
increasing privatization of resources and processes critical to the making  
of urban life and space. The rendering of both space and life to various  
calculations of efficacy, profitability, normative use, and eligibility—in  
the making a market of everything—considerably narrows how cities can  
be engaged and considered. Policies, thought, and practices grouped  
under the rubric of neoliberalism emphasize the overarching value of  
enrolling space and life to projects for maximizing capital accumulation.  
Urban government, rather than being a mediator among distinctive  
class, economic and political interests or a guarantor of access to the  
possibilities of a viable life embodying a wide range of aspirations,  
becomes a mechanism to promote the potentials for economic growth.  
Instead of growth being defined as the process whereby the potential  
contributions of all residents to a productive life are recognized and  
facilitated, growth is calculated by a total output to be largely defined by  
a highly circumscribed part of a city’s space and population. Maximiza-  
tion of ground rent, inward financial investment, contraction of public  
budgets and collective consumption, privatization of urban services, and  
the flexibilization of production and work are all components of a process

1 that territorializes urban economic growth as primarily a function of  
2 ever concentrated wealth in the upper tiers of city's social hierarchy  
3 <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> (Goldman 2011; Kaminer and Robles-Duran 2011; Peck et al. 2010;  
4 Shatkin 2008; Swyngedouw et al. 2010). At the same time, cities such as  
5 Sao Paulo, Jakarta, Karachi, and Mexico City are replete with districts  
6 that still retain diverse populations and ways of life. While there has been  
7 substantial contraction of such spaces in these cities, a mode of urban  
8 existence continues to survive which depends upon integrating, refract-  
9 ing, resisting, and modifying neoliberal practices all at the same time  
10 <sup>7</sup> (Chattopadhyay 2006; Benjamin 2008; Elyachar 2005; Guarneros-  
11 Meza 2009; Harms 2011; Holston 2009; Perera 2009; Raco et al. 2011;  
12 <sup>8</sup> Sundaram 2010; Whitson 2009).

13 Of course it can be argued that it is primarily a matter of time before  
14 they fade away; that these areas of the city are simply residues in an urban  
15 game whose outcome has largely been determined. As cities change from  
16 industrial to entrepreneurial economies, as the once vast public sectors  
17 responsible for managing populations give way to more complex and  
18 diversified apparatuses of control, as relied upon forms of sovereignty are  
19 increasingly particularized in terms of religious belief, life style, and  
20 technical interventions into life itself, and as domestic markets are  
21 flooded with commodities from elsewhere, it is commonly assumed that  
22 the very underpinnings of these districts—whatever their management  
23 of local political processes—will crumble. But if the heterogeneity of  
24 these districts has been the basis on which large numbers of city dwellers  
25 have been able to build a viable life and on which various kinds of work  
26 and employment have been created, it is important to understand how  
27 this heterogeneity can be sustained and remade.

28 Past research has emphasized the ways in which households have  
29 long dependent upon engagement with economic activities that supple-  
30 ment their ordinary jobs. This could take place through the provision of  
31 rental accommodation (most often to incoming migrants), running small  
32 businesses, selling services, or going in with others on schemes of various  
33 kinds and duration, from which proceeds are shared amongst “investors.”  
34 Many of these supplemental activities, as well as many full time occupa-  
35 tions, were “off the books.” Thus, their efficacy often depended upon  
36 various forms of brokerage and intermediation. This dependency often  
37 fostered forms of clientelism but more often produced local political  
38 arrangements which were more open—with an emphasis on keeping  
39 various possibilities from being foreclosed. Brokers were relied upon to  
40 get officials either to look the other way, not enforce regulations or  
41 by-laws, or to put money into particular infrastructure or services. But it  
42 was also usually important for residents not to feel overly obligated to  
43 anyone. Already ensconced in hierarchies, associations, ethnic or  
44 regional affiliations, which reinforced solidarity and obligation, the sense  
45 of mobility required to continuously access and revise more informal  
46 <sup>9</sup> economic activity could easily get stuck in obligation (Cetner 2010;  
47 Davis 1998; Kudva 2009; Perlman 2011; Secor 2004; Singerman 2009;  
Smart and Lin 2007; Telles and Hirata 2007).

Political interests and actions certainly did emerge; residents were often vociferous in their demands and identities. But the politics of everyday living tended to foster a need to keep the playing field open. While this attitude could be complicit with the murkiness and corruption of municipal administrations, and contribute to their own long-term vulnerability by not solidifying specific forms of accountability and decision-making, it also precluded the crystallization of power as being the purview of particular kinds of local residents. Relationships between middle class, working class, and poor may have been crossed by ethnic ties and long histories of association. But this crossing also required continuously improvised “venues” of collaboration, where problems that would come up from the multiple initiatives residents were making to improve their situations or seize opportunities when they could, were worked out often by coming up with re-improvised schemes and activities that might have proved difficult if local politics had been more formalized or normatively democratic (Dill 2009; Eckstein 2000; Haber 2006; Heller and Evans 2010; Harriss 2006; Lovell 2006).

### Practices of a “working majority”

Scholars such as James Holston (1991, 2008) and Asef Bayat (2000, 2009) have demonstrated how different populations in Sao Paolo and Cairo respectively sought to create spaces of maneuver through oscillating engagement with formal politics. They point out how it was important for residents with limited means, resources, and rights to both engage and withdraw from different formal political efforts to “account” for them, and sometimes include them in various schemes of participation and legitimation. We build on this work to further explore how residents who are neither clearly poor, nor middle class (those who manage to make some incremental improvements in their livelihoods but who also feel that they must continuously search for supplemental incomes and opportunities) attempt to work their way through rapidly changing economic and political urban environments.

Our work emphasizes the ways in which security and regularity stem from residents pushing and prompting in crowded conditions to create common ground. The basis of similarity does not rest in people’s identities, but is rather recognizable from how residents are trying to make viable use of each other, how they try to insert themselves into each other’s lives while not necessarily feeling that they belong to or owe each other. Instead of control being that which incorporates different actors as elements of some overarching program assigning functions and responsibilities, control is something continuously transferred. In other words, every time relationships among actors are altered, prompting potential changes in individuals themselves, these changes bring a wider range of influences into play—ways in which individuals affect each other and are, in turn, affected.

In the following sections, we present two small case studies from contiguous *kelurahan* (subdistricts), Tanah Tinggi and Kramat Sentiong

1 We explore how  
2 residents who are  
3 neither clearly  
4 poor, nor middle  
5 class attempt to  
6 work their way  
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8 changing economic  
9 and political urban  
10 environments

1 that explore aspects of these practices for securing urban life. Both  
2 localities contain roughly 45,000 people with intensive mixtures of old  
3 and new residents, and income levels. While the local governments do  
4 not obtain any official data on income levels, our own surveys point to an  
5 average household income of US\$200 per month, a level which in  
6 Jakartan terms is that of the upper poor-lower middle class. Here, the  
7 majority of residents appear to secure themselves through an ability to  
8 act without being tied to specific formulations which might make defini-  
9 tive calculations as to the precise characteristics and capabilities of a  
10 “majority.” This does not mean that the importance of belonging, iden-  
11 tity, and conventional notions of stability are thrown out the window.  
12 Rather, by finding ways to remain untied, residents create specific expe-  
13 riences of being in the city that allow a plurality of initiatives to take  
14 place that have the opportunity to productively engage and affect each  
15 other.

16 This work is based on ongoing research, underway for the past four  
17 years, that has brought together academic researchers from the Univer-  
18 sity of Tarumanagara, policy researchers from the Rujak Center for Urban  
19 Studies, activists from the Urban Poor Consortium, and resident asso-  
20 ciations to collaborate in examining how three *kecamatan* (government  
21 districts) in Central Jakarta (Senen, Johar Baru, Kemayoran) have con-  
22 structed intensely heterogeneous residential and economic spaces over  
23 the past decades. This research has included household surveys, focus  
24 groups, ethnographic observations and interviews of a cross-section of  
25 residents and economic sectors.

26 We have also worked closely with local *Dewan Kelurahan* (*dekels*) in  
27 each district. Established in 2000, these are locally elected advisory  
28 groups to what are otherwise centrally appointed local government  
29 administrators. Intended to be the vehicle that gradually would intro-  
30 duce local democratic governance, they have limited official power  
31 and formal competencies. In 2007 *dekels* were folded into *Lembaga*  
32 *Musyawarah Kelurahan* (LMK), a body established by Local Legislative  
33 (DPRD) and Governor of Dki Jakarta in each *kelurahan* (subdistrict), in  
34 order to manage local infrastructure, economic and social development  
35 projects and to assure greater monitoring and accountability of *dekel*  
36 activities. Through this research project, *dekels* have not only become the  
37 most important investigators, but have come to see enabling their con-  
38 stituencies to better understand the history of the locality and the pos-  
39 sible developmental futures residents can shape as a critical part of  
40 their work.

## 41 42 Part Two: Fights about everything and 43 nothing in Tanah Tinggi 44

45  
46 . . . Street brawls broke out in Tanah Tinggi, District Johar Baru,  
Central Jakarta, with colored rain of Molotov cocktails. Sunday

morning, the mothers in the High Land Road area are afraid to shop for fear of being hit by Molotov cocktails . . . the shops around the location of the brawl also delay the opening of shops, “All activities were halted due to fighting,” said Ning, one of the residents who witnessed the incident . . . the sting of tear gas thrown at officers to beat back people who are involved brawl is still felt through Sunday afternoon . . . According to the police . . . Inspector Firmansyah, none of the brawls involved adult residents. In contrast, they involved junior and senior high school students. (*Kompas*, July 3, 2011).

Jakarta has a long history of highly localized and momentary explosions of violence that seem to appear out of nowhere and quickly fade away, even if within a particular neighborhood, they can be repeated with great frequency. Known as *tawuran*, these fights tend to be largely precipitated by minimal triggers, e.g. competition over rights to a small parking lot, over a “stolen” girlfriend, or refusal to pay out a bet on a local football match. Usually occurring in the late hours of the night, they are sudden and explosive outbursts that usually take place in more public gathering spaces, near markets, transport hubs, bridges, canals, school yards—although they have been known to take place virtually anywhere. They are usually situated in the city’s high density districts with their heterogeneous mixtures of ethnic groups, incomes, and residential histories; although they increasingly take place in the poorer sections of these districts. Analysts have frequently attributed them to the uncertainties infused into masculine and ethnic identities through the long decades of the stifling militarized politics of the New Order regime, and the way this regime capitalized on these uncertainties for its own legitimacy (Boellstorff 2004; Sidel 2007; Tadie 2006; Wieringa 2003; Wilson 2007).

1 *Everyday violence*  
2 *has become a*  
3 *normalized routine*  
4 *across many cities*

Everyday violence has become a normalized routine across many cities. It is an expression of the substantial undermining of conditions and practices that have been relied upon by urban residents to make viable urban lives. But it is usually referred to in terms of local inadequacies in fully adapting to the new realities of urban life—shifting to new emphases on nuclear family households, the pursuit of education, formal wage employment, or effective local governance. At the same time, as urban space is incorporated into logics of accumulation and use that are seldom attentive to past histories and valuation, the specificity of transformations underway also become occluded in the sense that what takes place “here takes place everywhere,” something beyond local collective understanding. There are then few mechanisms available to draw links among specificities. As the opening up of urban space to the maximization of speculative value erodes the social memory and resources required to imagine how a specific locality is positioned within a larger world of actual and potential connections, the etiology of such violence is something opaque, something that must be distanced, put over “there” as a kind of public secret (Taussig 1992). But perhaps this same violence also operates to keep attributions of culpability and ramification unsettled, and defer certain apparently foregone conclusions.

1 Tanah Tinggi is one of Jakarta's densest districts, a place renowned  
2 for sleeping shifts and its extensive mixture of ethnicities and decaying  
3 infrastructure. It is popularly represented as one of the city's most dan-  
4 gerous and poorest neighborhoods, a reputation which available demo-  
5 graphic and socio-economic indicators show is not necessarily warranted.  
6 As observers who have covered the entirety of the district, what is most  
7 striking to us is the degree of heterogeneity in both social and physical  
8 environments. There is a profusion of micro-territories, even if the dis-  
9 trict is largely "summarized" in the often cited contrasts (and conflicts)  
10 between the contiguous neighborhoods of Kota Paris and Ballardewa.  
11 Kota Paris is an area where the fact that plot size is just a little less divided  
12 than average and where the streets are just a little wider (permitting the  
13 through-fare of automobiles) reflects the slight advantages secured by its  
14 original Betawi residents some four decades ago over the surrounding  
15 neighborhoods. Belladewa is much more crowded and poorer, but it is  
16 also more dynamic, where things are happening all the time. The appar-  
17 ent advantages of Kotal Paris have been subject to different explanations  
18 during the past years, from attributions to money making in prostitution  
19 and gambling, to capacities to resist incursions from outside gangsters, to  
20 a much more homogenous ethnic composition. There has always been  
21 bad blood between the two areas and the stories that attempt to account  
22 for this change all the time.

23 Accounts of the *tawuran* change all the time. Usually initiated and  
24 fought by youth, they involve the throwing of stones and more recently  
25 Molotov cocktails; sometimes swords are brandished. Sometimes,  
26 depending on the time of day, as most incidents occur late in the night,  
27 entire neighborhoods will be mobilized to join the youth, and the fights  
28 persist until the police arrive. Even though the Jakarta Provincial Gov-  
29 ernment has arranged for police posts to be widely established, particu-  
30 larly across historically difficult neighborhoods, these posts wait until a  
31 sufficient size of back-up is assembled before attempting to intervene.  
32 This is the case even when they know that trouble is brewing, as indi-  
33 cated in the scraping of electricity poles that occurs as a signal for  
34 opposing sides to mobilize their forces.

35 In a district where almost everyone knows pretty much what is going  
36 on; where word travels quickly about local events and personalities, most  
37 everyone we talk to claims to have little idea about what is causing these  
38 outbreaks of violence. While they have been a feature of everyday district  
39 life for decades, there is also a nascent sense that these fights could  
40 become a serious problem. But when we attempt to discuss why they  
41 should become any more of a problem now than they could have become  
42 in the past and whether there was something fundamentally different  
43 about these fights now, no one seems to know. The usual response is that  
44 the Jakarta region as a whole is becoming less tolerant of religious and  
45 class differences, and that these *tawuran* thus threaten to become some-  
46 thing more than they have in the past. But when residents are asked  
47 whether there is any evidence that current *tawuran* are now reflecting  
religious, ethnic or class divides these prospects are firmly denied.

Nasrullah, a long-term imam (prayer leader) at a local mosque told us that, “I suspect that those who do the fighting feel that they are fighting ‘themselves’ more than anyone else.”

The absence of confidence in making causative attributions does not reflect a reluctance to talk about these incidents in general. They are on people’s minds and everyone has many stories about them, particularly in terms of how superficial they may be in reflecting any deep seated resentments or social differences. One local leader in a subdistrict just across the small river that divides Tanah Tinggi from neighboring Kampung Rawa—increasingly drawn into these local fights—says that his sons and son-in-laws live in different contiguous neighborhoods. When fights break out they battle each other, but shortly after the fight is ended, gather at his house to play cards as if nothing happened. Such depictions are often used to emphasize that these fights are not about specific personalities or issues *per se* but rather characteristics of specific spaces, such as tightly compacted interfaces or *terroir vague* where there is no clear possibility of mediating competing claims for use by different groups of youth. As one sub-district head indicated, there would be no problem with fights if youth were simply in their proper space, i.e. able to have somewhere to sleep during the night instead of having to take shifts with other household members.

Tanah Tinggi has been one of Jakarta’s most ethnically mixed districts, given its proximity to one of the city’s oldest markets, Senen. This market has been historically used as a nexus for various ethnically based translocal commercial networks, such as the Makassar, the Padang, the Ambon, and the Batak. While most districts in the city have mixed ethnic populations, Tanah Tinggi tends to have a broader, more diverse mix than the surrounding areas, and with a larger non-Muslim population. As indicated earlier, Muslim-Christian conflict is becoming more pronounced in the city, in part because of the growth of Christian congregations and the increased difficulty they face trying to find suitable sites and facilities for worship given the restrictive policies that require neighborhood consensus concerning the insertion of religious structures. But there is nothing to indicate that such splits have anything to do with the proliferation of fights in Tanah Tinggi.

Drug dealing has become a major feature of the local economy, especially in Baladewa. This has introduced large amounts of fluid money into areas where most people are poor and work long hours for little, as well as opening up already nearly impassable neighborhoods to a steady stream of outsiders looking to purchase drugs. The sudden accumulation of substantial amounts of money by youth has overturned generational hierarchies and many households report an inability to exert any kind of control over their children. Households become sites of increased domestic violence. According to most local leaders, residents in their jurisdictions prefer to act as drugs were simply not present, and even when there are residual benefits in terms of household accumulation, there is widespread resentment that the big profits are exported to police and military officials lurking on the sidelines and probably controlling much of the

1 overall trade. Again, no link is made between drug trafficking or com-  
2 petition over markets and territory and the *tawuran*. In fact, those  
3 involved in the drug business express frustration with the frequency of  
4 these fights as they must then lie low and pull in their operations in the  
5 face of more extensive police presence.

6 During the last month before this essay was written, local govern-  
7 ment elections were imminent. Efforts are underway to substantiate the  
8 decentralization of municipal governance by availing more development  
9 resources to districts. The so-called original inhabitants and landowners  
10 of Jakarta, the Betawi, have largely divested their holdings in face of a  
11 widespread inability to diversify from landowners to other economic  
12 activities and the inability to maintain ownership in face of increasing  
13 costs and development pressures. They are increasingly compensating for  
14 this loss by attempting to dominate municipal politics through a wide  
15 variety of organizational forms: from *majlis t' alim* (informal religious gath-  
16 erings) that indirectly attempt to mobilize political sentiment to extra-  
17 parliamentary, to quasi-military groups, such as the Betawi Brotherhood  
18 Forum (FRB) which provides a highly visible display of defending Betawi  
19 interests.

20 Local politics is also drawing upon a new generation of more edu-  
21 cated residents who seek to bring more transparent and rational practices  
22 of administration to the running of local government. This newer gen-  
23 eration usually possesses full time jobs and is not reliant upon the limited  
24 compensation offered to neighborhood and subdistrict leaders. This is an  
25 implicit threat to an older generation of local leaders who relied upon  
26 these positions as a vehicle for a variety of informal accumulation largely  
27 centered on their roles in providing identity cards, registering local  
28 populations and facilitating the processing of critical documents neces-  
29 sary for health care and social services. While increased levels of fighting  
30 provide evidence for political challengers to point out the ineffectiveness  
31 of current local leaders, these local leaders also use the problem of the  
32 *tawuran* to cement ties across districts and consolidate resistance to these  
33 challenges.

34 Districts such as Tanah Tinggi are also subject to repeated waves of  
35 inward migration, often by individuals and households equipped with  
36 more adept entrepreneurial skills. The demand for residential space has  
37 prompted most owners of homes and buildings to turn over at least part  
38 of their dwellings for rental accommodation. In some neighborhoods this  
39 migration has tripled the population of already dense neighborhoods.

40 The absorption process is subject to many ambivalent feelings. Many  
41 migrants are young workers with jobs in the vicinity living temporarily in  
42 neighborhoods where many youth are unemployed. Their unemployment  
43 is largely due to their lack of education—local officials are always  
44 citing that most youth in Tanah Tinggi never finish secondary school.  
45 Additionally, since their Jakarta identity cards say they reside in Tanah  
46 Tinggi, they are discriminated against by employers given the reputation  
47 of the district. Whereas new migrants may be required to register with  
local authorities—something that most single residents seldom do—their

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identity cards still reflect an official residence elsewhere. Other new residents seek locational advantages given Tanah Tinggi's proximity to key markets and transportation centers; many could probably afford to live in better conditions, but live in the area in order to start businesses and also save money. Often this money is used to buy local properties and construct homes or commercial buildings that far exceed the prevailing conditions of the local built environment. These divergences prompt certain tensions and resentment on the part of households that have lived in the area for many years.

1 *New residents*

2 *bring new vitality*

At the same time, the infusion of new migrants opens up new fields of affective relations and wards off tendencies toward parochialism. New residents bring new vitality, and even if new enterprises rarely incorporate long time local residents, there is widespread intermarriage and circulation of information. While the newcomers in one subdistrict may largely make up the force that fights youth coming from long term resident households in a neighboring subdistrict, such clashes will rarely take place within neighborhood. In this way ambivalence may find expression, i.e. there is resentment, but most youth indicate that newcomers provide incentives for them to try on different kinds of attitudes and versions of themselves; to circulate through surfacely discrepant identities and affiliations.

The difficulty of everyday life and the crowded conditions under which people live compel a certain sense of solidarity—a profession of family ties where everyone looks out for each other regardless of whether this indeed takes place or not. Still, under the rubric of such solidarity, everyone is expected to accede to the performance of this solidarity. No matter how essential or supportive, such a performance is also restrictive, reining space in rather than extending and differentiating it. The question becomes how such space can be elaborated; how to act in ways where individuals are not necessarily made accountable.

In some cities such space is opened up through extending the scope of actual mobility, going beyond the territory of residence to fan out across the city through the vehicle of various forms of popular culture. In Jakarta, such space tends to be opened up by youth circulating through various forms of affiliation and expression—for example, by involving themselves in populist Islamic gatherings on one night, participating in a theater troupe on another night, and by involving themselves in a local youth organization on another night, and so forth. The emphasis is less on finding coherence or ideological consistency in terms of one's associations and involvements, but to use a plurality of opportunities as a means of creating space. This raises the possibility that the very same youth who may be battling it out as residents of different neighborhoods may be collaborating as participants in the same Islamic youth group on another occasion.

During our work in Tanah Tinggi there were organized efforts to address the purported intensification of *tawuran*. But the mobilization of a response almost always ensures that no adequate response is forthcoming. District officials, appointed by the provincial government, will

1 usually notify elected subdistrict and neighborhood heads that some kind  
2 of organized response is necessary. Alternately, certain local leaders will  
3 call upon district officials to facilitate or sanction such efforts. During a  
4 particularly acute period of *tawuran* in November 2010, there was broad  
5 recognition in Tanah Tinggi that something had to be done, or more  
6 precisely, that the district had to demonstrate that attempts were under-  
7 way to do something about these fights. A district wide popular assembly  
8 was called for on December 8<sup>th</sup>. In the days leading up to this event, we  
9 spoke with different subdistrict heads, residents, religious and civic  
10 leaders about the shape of this assembly and what would come out of it.  
11 Like attempts to explain the causes of the *tawuran*, this process of orga-  
12 nizing a response also had many different versions, as if many, not one  
13 assembly were to be held, and many, not one organization formed to deal  
14 with the problem.

15 The actual event turned out to have made little effort to draw in  
16 either youth or neighborhood heads, and was instead a gathering with  
17 strong traditional religious (Muslim) inflections, little representation  
18 from district administrators, and a somewhat odd announcement by the  
19 District head, the *Camat*, that the mayor for Central Jakarta had been  
20 replaced by someone more in line with the sentiments of those gathered.  
21 The event turned out to be a stage where many actors were eager to  
22 perform. The District head was busy accepting interviews from local  
23 journalists. The FBR groups from different districts came with their  
24 distinct uniform just to behave like paramilitary guards for the event, and  
25 a local resident group in their newly made t-shirts acted as if they were  
26 one of the organizers of the event, their new t-shirts proclaiming them-  
27 selves as “community concerned with the neighborhood.” It seemed  
28 evident that the shape of this particular gathering was more a display of  
29 the way this particular configuration of actors, under the auspices of  
30 prolific religious symbolism, had persisted in face of implicit—never  
31 mentioned or identified—challenges to this particular form of organized  
32 response. In other words, the threat being addressed seemed less the  
33 *tawuran* itself than a managerial form more consonant to efforts under-  
34 way to make district administration and politics more seamless and  
35 accountable.

36 On the day following the assembly, no one seemed to take it seriously  
37 or had any conviction that it was actually organized to address the  
38 problem. Herein may lay the “role” of the *tawuran* in local affairs. Tanah  
39 Tinggi is indeed subject to many strains and changes. Any urban district  
40 with this level of density, social mixture, struggles for space and oppor-  
41 tunity and demographic turnover is not going to persist without substan-  
42 tial volatility. Additionally, residents are largely aware of what the fault  
43 lines are and could be. They do not put excessive faith in local traditions  
44 of solidarity, even when such solidarity comes to rely upon large measures  
45 of disattention and silence in face of serious difficulties. Where drug  
46 markets, household conflict, complicities between police, criminals and  
47 elite may be public secrets, everyone looks at and talks about the *tawuran*,  
while almost everyone claims to have no idea about where they are

coming from. These fights cannot be included in the conventional ways of explaining local affairs. They indeed belong to Tanah Tinggi—and in such a way that people are more ready to talk about them than any other feature of the district. But at the same time, they do not represent any specific conflict; they are not attributable to any specific condition, actor, or status. At the same time, they can be appropriated at will to point to the tensions they do not represent.

As one local businessmen states, “they have always been with us so, in some way, we are with them, even if we do not know what they are.” This kind of intimacy, between historical prolongation and its inability to settle into any particular form of apprehension goes beyond simply constituting an “alert” for the residents of this area; goes beyond a problem that needs to be fixed. If *tawuran* does not belong to any contestation or group in particular, then it belongs to everyone, can be used by everyone, despite whether a sociological instinct might relegate it to an existential condition of local youth. If it belongs to everyone then no one in particular is implicated in terms of transitions underway. This situation may defer any systematic way of dealing with a complex process of transition or of mobilizing resident involvement and support in local development activities. But it may also create necessary space for residents to venture a wide range of initiatives without them necessarily being implicated and measured by each other. This does not mean that everyone gets along or simply does their thing without interference or contestation. Rather, the *tawuran* seems to indicate that the “real fight” is both simultaneously very much in the moment in which it occurs and elsewhere—somewhere far removed from the fight itself, and something which permits these fights to have their own temporality, sometimes in rapid serial succession persisting over months, and then nothing for a long period of time.

Their disappearance is then as much of a “mystery” as their presence, particularly as nothing really discernible changes and many of the apparent triggers remain on a daily basis. Seemingly unbounded to anything, *tawuran* occasions a multiplicity of responses. Each seems to embody a fundamental indifference to the fights themselves. They are about other things, other agendas. But since they link themselves to the *tawuran*, come to the fore, are made visible in ways that buy them time, do not necessarily link themselves to other issues of local politics and economy, even if these interventions may be fundamentally about them.

### Part Three: Doing the work of the nation in Kramat Sentiong

Notions that deal with securing the lives of individuals within a particular setting have usually centered on the willingness of those individuals to subsume their lives to an abstracted collective. This collective, in turn, becomes the object of protection (Weber 2009). That which acts as a sovereign power does so in the name of a

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people or citizenry that has no particular existence of its own except as the means through which that very power exempts itself; acts according to its own rules and decisions. There is a fundamental gap at the heart of predominant notions of security—that which is to be secured seems to be nowhere in sight. Without the specificity of a “target” and an object of concern, apparatuses of security become self-aggrandizing, i.e. they attempt to tie together more and more aspects of daily life, implicate them in each other, make them have something essential to do with each other. It is as if in the absence of something identifiable, the maneuver is simply to surround everything.

In many ways Kramat Sentiong upends these notions about security. Kramat Sentiong is the district immediately to the west of Tanah Tinggi. It is an older district, perhaps not as dense, and its proximity to a major commercial thoroughfare, Jalan Raya, gives it the veneer of a more economically dynamic area. But in most respects, Kramat Sentiong is not that different from its neighbor, even though most local residents perceive a marked difference in terms of attitude and confidence. It is also a district full of talk; full of people on the street in animated conversations, something more than the perfunctory greetings and gossip of everyday routine.

Most of the original landowners are gone and the area is replete with signs of multiple generations of repair, rebuilding and new construction. Because flooding is growing worse following even minor rainfall, there are always efforts to improve drainage and circulation, and for this, residents rely upon reiterated solidarities. Even though the legal basis of their tenancy is secure, the signs of an encroaching larger world are everywhere, particularly in new office buildings and warehouses. The location of the district has opened up some of its areas to the infusion of new, more middle class residents, who acquire contiguous plots on which to build spacious residences. *Tawuran* may be an occasional problem but they seem to quickly dissipate.

Most residents were able to instantiate themselves in Kramat Sentiong through reliance upon ethnic networks that elaborated specific trades and niches in the city. This did not mean that everyone, or even the majority of residents, was ensconced in the trades to which their ethnic groups were most well-known. But these trades did provide an anchor for household networks regardless of how many actually labored within them. They did provide a kind of “coverage,” a base, an insurance policy, for ventures undertaken in other pursuits (educational, occupational and political). If these ethnic affiliations were the way in which the majority of residents had secured themselves in the city, given the hegemony a particular ethnic group could exert over a needed economic activity, they now act as a point of reference whose maintenance is precisely contingent upon specific acts of risk. In the absence of new initiatives, business ventures or attempts to network across discrete economic sectors or territories, ethnicity would seem to lose a great deal of meaning, since it now seems to operate as a vehicle for individuals to ensure “a piece of any action” rather than pointing to the solidarity of

Making Security  
Work for the  
Majority

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specific economic or social sectors. In other words, they provide a consolidation of residents that have to be taken into consideration by others.

Kramat Sentiong is not only made up of diverse ethnicities but a mixture of new and old residents. Most of the original Betawi residents have sold their land, and this land is both subdivided and consolidated—processes that permit, on the one hand, more inhabitants in dense conditions and, on the other, the investment by new middle class residents in larger homes and businesses. Established ethnic ascriptions are criss-crossed by equally powerful notions of separating “stranger” from “local,” “old money” from “new money,” “resident” from “businessperson.” Thus, divisions can appear in many forms, not only depending upon where people are from, but for how long they have lived in the area, and whether their primary concern is residential, entrepreneurial or speculative. For example, offspring of original inhabitants who may have spent their childhood in the area, left for years of schooling elsewhere, and then return to implant an upper middle class lifestyle may be considered “strangers.” On the other hand, localities may actively “recruit” persons from under-represented ethnic groups known for their skill at various businesses to locate in the area, where they may be fully embraced as having been “locals” all along.

Local government reform has introduced a new system of district management that attempts to strike a balance between the administrators appointed by the Jakarta provincial government and newly established and democratically elected district wide village committees, *dekel*, mentioned earlier. These same committee members, however, emphasize their reliance on quotidian informal consultations conducted in various configurations and sites. While attribution of local decision making power across Jakarta still centers on the role of the neighborhood head, the ability to decide, negotiate, deal and work out accords for the use of space and common resources, and to resolve actual and potential problems, largely rests with these informal consultations. As committee members point out, they take their role seriously as a conduit between the district and larger administration venues and programs; they must demonstrate initiative and increasingly speed in order to intersect with limited budgets and widespread municipal needs. Still, this role is perceived as less important than their availability to circulate and “show up” in a wide variety of local contexts as a kind of “hinge” that opens any situation onto a broader range of considerations. And so this is what they spend most of their time doing: inserting themselves into different gatherings and conversations, not to appropriate them for local government business, but to do the work of local governance through them.

The role of the neighborhood head, (the RT) largely centers on making an account, i.e. counting the number of people living in their small jurisdiction, counting the number of people who pay their taxes, who receive health benefits or supplementary income grants, and to keep account just what kinds of supports and favors the neighborhood may receive from the village, district and provincial offices. But the real politics concerns practices that seem to defer making accounts. In local

1 vernaculars, the process of everyday negotiation draws upon but does not  
2 necessarily hold to account what kinds of problem-solving and deals have  
3 taken place before. In a district in which many different ethnic groups are  
4 present, and where ethnicity is reproduced in large part through eco-  
5 nomic specialization and commercial networking, it could be seen as  
6 reasonable to make each group accountable to each other. In other  
7 words, it would seem reasonable to ensure some kind of balance among  
8 how different groups use and live in the district, in terms of how they  
9 pursue economic livelihoods, use essential resources such as water, power  
10 and sanitation, and perform their cultural and religious values. It would  
11 seem reasonable to elaborate some kind of common series of norms, some  
12 kind of practical behavioral shortcuts to minimize the time spent in  
13 regulatory transactions and dealing with misunderstandings.

14 But these are not the professed elements of day to day negotiations.  
15 Residents we spoke to in Kramat Sentiong prefer to shy away from social  
16 calibrations based on accounts of which group gets to do what, and under  
17 what circumstances. They do not want to be tied down to common rules  
18 or behavioral styles; after all, who would define them, what would have  
19 to be left out in terms of developing something recognizable and acces-  
20 sible for residents to get a hold of. Rather, in a district like this, where  
21 everyone has to find a way to get along, the sheer plurality of actions and  
22 backgrounds is seen as being a better bet. For if some residents are doing  
23 something that is not readily measurable or understood, then what you  
24 are doing puts people in the same situation; and there is simply too much  
25 going on for it to be worth any one resident feeling like their own lives  
26 are being judged, constrained, or made insecure by the diversities going  
27 around. Everyone knows that ethnic groups have their own ways of doing  
28 things and that there is little anyone is going to say or do to change this.  
29 After all, these differences will often come in handy in a district where  
30 incomes, residents, and opportunities come and go.

31 At the same time, daily informal negotiations, while cognizant of the  
32 ethnic backgrounds of participants, are conducted as transactions among  
33 individuals; individuals trying to find a way to accomplish a particular  
34 task, disseminate information, test out interpretations about what is  
35 going on, or solve problems by virtue of their being simultaneously  
36 neighbors, perhaps relatives, workers with particular trades, enterprises  
37 and skills, members of particular religious organizations, civic groups or  
38 political parties, In such an economy of transactions, there will always be  
39 those who get more and those who get less, but these disposition are in  
40 turn themselves rapidly recalibrated in different settings, times and tasks:  
41 A household may have run out of materials for raising the ground floor  
42 several meters to keep out flood waters; the sudden illness of a breadwin-  
43 ner may seriously strain a household budget; the death of local imam  
44 requires funeral preparations and new recruitment; a raid on informal  
45 sellers forces schoolchildren to travel outside their regular routine for  
46 afterschool lunch; a household wants to hold the marriage of their daugh-  
47 ter on the street in front of their house which will close down through  
traffic for several hours or; a household wants to construct two extra

*In a district like* 48  
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levels on their home which means that they will overlook the roofs of several neighbors who use them as occasional bedrooms—this is just a small sampling of issues prompting negotiation.

Participation in negotiations as individuals is important not in the sense that these are transactions among autonomous, individuated citizens responsible for managing their own lives. Rather, individuality is important here as a sign that everyone is eligible to negotiate, and if everyone is eligible, then the concept of “eligibility” has limited use in terms of specifying the rights and responsibilities of those who deal with each other on a daily basis. Again, this does not mean that there are not authorities and hierarchies at work in sorting out social and political arrangements. Rather, it means that in the contexts that are viewed as the most significant in terms of working out the governance of the district, residents can say things, make their views known and make recommendations without necessarily having to consider whether they are eligible to do so. In this position, the transaction exists as a potential singularity, i.e. it need not be tied to what has happened before; it need not participate in a particular calculus of balanced interests or compensations. Instead, it is a possibility of keeping people on their toes, deferring any reified notion of what an ethnic group can or cannot do, or what is has had an opportunity to do in the past. What ethnic affiliation means then is something that can participate in what is to come, not only in the characteristics, practices or occupations of the past. It becomes a resource to be put to work for the future as a point of orientation and stability that can now risk undertaking new perspectives and tasks that may be too difficult or risky to contemplate for individuals without such affiliation.

What is particularly significant here is that these negotiations take place among residents, the vast majority of which continue to see themselves as “newcomers” even when many have resided in the area for decades. Even for a younger generation born and bred in this district, there is a tendency to view their primary residence and affiliation to towns from which their grandparents or parents came from, places like Kunigan, Yogyakarta, Pekalongan, Cirebon, Padang, Makassar, or Malang. Every Eid al Fitr (end of the Muslim fasting month) over one-third of Jakarta’s population undertakes an exodus to home towns and regions, obligated to return with gifts and displays of well-being in the nation’s capital. Money remitted from Jakarta continues to constitute an important share of household expenditures and budgets. While a small number of residents continue to profess their intention to return to their “places of origin,” few will, and now the largely youthful population of Kramat Sentiong has only a cursory familiarity with these places. On top of this, those considered the original inhabitants, those who belong to the district, are largely gone, leaving almost the entirety of the district to so-called strangers.

In a district where the proficiency of daily negotiations, still valued as the key arena of local politics and decision-making and conducted on the basis of individuals who simultaneously embody many different positions and roles for each other, why the persistence of an ethnic identification

1 *Even for a*  
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1 which would seem to impede the cultivation of a full sense of residents  
2 being citizens of Jakarta? It would seem that continuing to emphasize the  
3 status of being migrants and strangers even when most or the entirety of  
4 a resident's life has been spent in Jakarta would limit the ability of  
5 residents to exert effective power over the decisions and directions of the  
6 city. As long as residents defer fully identifying with the city and hold the  
7 intensity of their affective ties elsewhere, it would seem that their sup-  
8 posed temporariness would be used to legitimate the actions of more  
9 powerful forces which may appropriate land and resources. It would also  
10 reiterate the salience of ethnicity identity over citizenship so that indi-  
11 viduals are more implicated by the dynamics of their corporate belong-  
12 ings than in terms of their own attainments and aspirations. Not only is  
13 urban citizenship deferred through these more primordial affiliations, but  
14 these affiliations increasingly gain credence—not in terms of what they  
15 actually perform or remember—but in their sheer capacity to defer citi-  
16 zenship. They thus become a kind of negative, shell identity that steers  
17 politics at a metropolitan level into being increasingly a patchwork of  
18 balkanized accords that make it difficult for the kinds of spatial and  
19 transportation planning that need to be coordinated at a regional level.

20 Yet, this persistence of being strangers potentially raises important  
21 questions about what citizenship actually does. What does it mean to be  
22 a citizen of Jakarta? Local sustainability and livelihood are more matters  
23 of how the fragments of various institutions, practices and backgrounds  
24 are interwoven in efforts to maximize the inclusion of all that takes place  
25 within a particular place than the specification of rights or a sense of  
26 being “covered” by a municipal framework of administration and ser-  
27 vices. Rather, as reflected in the comments of *dekel* members, the ability  
28 of the district to stay in tune with the larger city—to anticipate what  
29 changes need to be made and what interactions are needed to engage the  
30 multiple networks that run through the district and beyond—required a  
31 sense of stability. But, critically, the bulk of local attention was not to be  
32 placed on maintaining that stability, but rather for individuals to be free  
33 to pursue a wide range of livelihoods and engagements with larger met-  
34 ropolitan spaces. This ability could only develop as long as residents  
35 were not overly tied down to having to calibrate their actions to each  
36 other, without residents feeling that everything they did necessarily had  
37 to be assessed in terms of its implications for their neighbors. Because  
38 this is not a district of atomized households but one where everyone  
39 knows and deals with each other on some kind of basis, tensions and  
40 misunderstandings could be worked out through the very density of  
41 interactions that residents have no choice but to participate in day in  
42 and day out.

43 Just how ethnicity is to be taken into consideration in the day to day  
44 informal negotiations among individuals, not impeded by specific forms  
45 of eligibility in order for them to negotiate, is an open-ended question.  
46 These negotiations do not ask individuals to “perform their ethnicity,”  
47 but are the venues through which inter-ethnic deliberations take place.  
Within them, ethnicities are stretched, regarded in different ways,

compelled to do things outside of their stereotypical purview but also remain points of anchorage. 20 21

Security then is the oscillation between stability and risk, between reiterating what one is known for and deploying it in new arrangements with other residents. Because ethnicity retains its power, when it no longer necessarily needs to do so, either as a locus of economic accumulation, social security, or as a matrix of affective ties, it remains something to be engaged in everyday district life; something that warrants negotiation. But, again, as we have pointed out several times, the modality of negotiation seems to “forget” ethnicity as soon as it is engaged. What is important are the negotiations themselves as a context in which residents can continuously realign their efforts and break open new potentials for accessing information, support and resources. 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

In this way the work of the nation, of which Jakarta is the capital, is performed on this day to day basis. Rather than national belonging being the protection racket to which individual residents subsume their possibilities and maneuvering, the work of nationhood instead takes place in a wide range of settings among individuals who are simultaneously many different things to each other, who work out temporary arrangements knowing that there is a “drawing table” to always go back to. 33 34 35 36 37 38 39

This does not mean that an overarching framework of rights and responsibilities usually associated with citizenship is not salient. But rather that security of a majority of urban residents securing the possibility of being able to make urban life in ways that keep open a wide range of aspirations and potentials is located in the density of heterogeneous public transactions that life in heterogeneous districts such as Kramat Sentiong engenders on a daily basis. 40 41 42 43 44 45 46

1 Security of a  
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