Commodifying an urban commons: Contested accumulations through displacement in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT:
Across cities of the global South, major initiatives are underway to assemble land from informal settlements, in order to make it available for large-scale infrastructure projects and commercial real estate projects. Driven by global city aspirations, profit-seeking developers, demands from emergent middle classes for modern residential, consumption and recreational spaces, and, last but not least, the availability of finance, these land transformations seek to commodify, privatize and enclose residential urban commons. Operationalizing the framework of geographical political economy, we seek to conceptualize how these processes work in Jakarta, Indonesia. Through an examination of two field sites, an authorized kampung where land is being acquire through negotiations between kampung residents with land rights and developers’ land brokers, and an unauthorized kampung whose residents were evicted in the name of flood mitigation, we conclude that the default theory for explaining these processes—accumulation by dispossession—is inadequate for capturing the variegated and complex nature of such processes. Thus we propose an alternative conceptual framework: Contested accumulations through displacement.

KEYWORDS: Land transformation, informal settlements, displacement, contestation, accumulation by dispossession
Introduction

A dramatic urban land transformation is underway across Asian cities (and many other cities of the post-colony). In the context of the variegated neoliberalization of global urbanism, conjoined with political elites’ intents that their city achieve world class status and an emergent middle class aspiring for the western urban lifestyle, real estate developers seek to convert informally settled spaces of an urban commons into privatized, commodifiable land assets. This is a geopolitical struggle over space, shaped by political and economic power relations. Yet it also is one that exceeds the classical, international domain of geopolitics. While influenced by supra-, inter- and national scale developments, it plays out locally—at the neighborhood and household scales of everyday and grassroots geopolitics. Further, these processes are not only variegated but also contested, entailing geopolitics from below. Finally, they intersect with issues of subject formation and materiality. In short, they stretch across the breadth of geographical political economy (Author 2011).

It has become conventional to conceptualize this commodification of the commons in terms of accumulation by dispossession: The dispossession of those living in more-than-capitalist ways on land from which they pursue their livelihoods, enabling capital accumulation by developers and other capitalists who use that land for commodity production. There is much to this argument, but also much that it misses. Thinking through Jakarta has provoked us to complicate this conceptualization, bringing into view multiple forms of displacement and accumulation, and contestation (Authors 2007). Studies of these processes in other ‘southern’ contexts—from Rio de Janeiro to Shanghai—are dominated by stories of eviction. In Jakarta, one of the world’s largest metropolitan areas—albeit
understudied by non-Indonesian scholars—authorized informal settlements are commodified via land brokers' negotiations with residents holding rights claims to urban land (Kusno 2013; Santoso, Febrina, and Ferry-Cueilar 2009). Since 1998, eviction is largely reserved for state-led razing of 'illegal' kampungs, currently in the name of flood mitigation.¹ For these various vectors of displacement, differently positioned participants face unequal opportunities to accumulate economic and political capital. Displacement is not the same as dispossession, and there are multiple opportunities and pathways for accumulation. Finally, these processes are contested, doubly: Contestations include contesting displacement itself (resistance), but also persisting in the more-than-capitalist livelihood practices associated with kampung life. In short, capitalist Development (Hart 2002) is never complete.

In this paper, we draw on our research experience in Jakarta, taking seriously its positionality and post-colonial attributes, to develop the notion of contested accumulations through displacement. Put otherwise, thinking through Jakarta, in the spirit of geographical political economy and post-colonial (urban) theory, enables us to rework (perhaps provincialize) accumulation by dispossession into a more capacious framework for understanding such land transformations. In the first section we compare two GPEs, geopolitical economy and geographical political economy, arguing that the latter is a better fit for our purpose. In the second section, we review current scholarship on the urban commons and the application of accumulation by dispossession to explain its commodification in 'southern' cities, and make the conceptual case for contested accumulations through displacement. The third section turns to contemporary Jakarta,

¹ Informal settlements in Indonesian cities are called kampungs ('village' in Bahasa).
placed within the ‘context of context’ (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010) of its encounters with globalizing capitalism and global geopolitics, to report on two case studies suggestive of contested accumulations through displacement—one examining negotiations, the other forced evictions. In the conclusion, we draw out the implications for this theoretical debate, also for those bodies and places caught up in land transformation.

2. A tale of two GPEs: Decentering macro-geopolitics

In his framing essay, Glassman (this issue, p. 1 of MS) discusses the “somewhat short and spotty, if suggestive, history” of the term geopolitical economy. Noting variegated uses of the term, and of the GPE acronym, he leans toward one that “foregrounds some of the specifically geopolitical determinants …, as part of a broader geographical political economy” (p. 7). This emphasizes geopolitics as a global and structuring process. There is no question that any analysis of struggles over urban land in Jakarta must be placed within such a global geopolitical context, if the city’s status as a post-colonial metropolis is to be taken seriously (Roy 2011; Authors 2013). The spatial colonizing policies of the Dutch, who founded Jakarta as Batavia, created an intra-urban geography of formal and informal settlements that persists to this day (Santoso et al 2009). After successful armed struggle against colonizing powers reluctant to grant Indonesian independence, President Sukarno helped catalyze the post-Bandung movement of former colonies seeking a third way to those of capitalism and communism. Under him, Jakarta was redesigned as a symbol of nationalism and unity in diversity (as read from Java): a city reflective of the strong, progressive state he sought to put in place. His violent replacement by President Suharto
triggered a US-oriented authoritarian regime. Suharto presented himself as Indonesia’s father figure, guiding its Rostowian, market-oriented development (Kusno 2013). During this period, sweetheart deals between Suharto, his family and Indonesia’s Indo-Chinese family conglomerates opened up vast tracts of land for commercial real estate and infrastructure development, as Jakarta stretched into its current megalopolis (Jabodetabek), now with some 28 million residents. A further global event, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, spelt the end for Suharto, and his replacement by a putatively democratic regime characterized by the devolution of power from central to local state institutions (reformasi) (Bunnell and Miller 2011). It is only fifteen years later, with the 2014 election of President (previously Jakarta governor) Joko Widodo (Jokowi), that the determined grip on power by those associated with the legacy of Suharto is being loosened—a process that remains far from certain or predictable.

Notwithstanding the influence of this broader geopolitical context, our focus in this paper is different. It resonates more closely with initiatives by others to extend geopolitics into the local and the everyday, under such labels as feminist geopolitics, everyday geopolitics, and geopolitics from below (e.g., Routledge 2003; Dixon and Marston 2013; Smith and Pain 2012). This is partly a question of scale: The struggles over urban and peri-urban land in Jakarta that we analyze here resonate with the unequal power struggles to occupy and control territory that are the very stuff of classical geopolitics but play out largely at scales ranging from the household, to the neighborhood and megalopolis. Yet simply shifting the scale of geopolitical struggle remains insufficient for our purpose. It also is necessary to conceptually extend what is meant by geopolitics, going beyond state-centric conceptions of the geopolitical that focus on the exercise of state sovereign and
biopolitical power within and beyond the territory of the nation-state, and the privatization and depoliticization of the public sphere. While these processes are vital to acknowledge, politics cannot be reduced to the exercise of and struggle to possess power: “Politics ought to be defined on its own terms, as a mode of acting put into practice by a specific kind of subject and deriving from a particular form of reason” (Rancière, Panagia, and Bowlby 2001). We thus seek to attend to the powers and practices of a diverse set of non-state civil society actors in relation to one another, as well as in relation to levels and agencies of the state. In particular, arguably of particular importance in the post-colony, geopolitical accounts that focus on the powerful run the danger of neglecting the necessity and possibilities of contestations from less powerful places and bodies (Slater 2004).

We find a variant usage of GPE more amenable to our purposes: Geographical political economy (Glassman acknowledges this alternate, tracing some of its genealogy). As we use it, geographical political economy stresses four aspects of capitalist political economic processes (Author 2011). First, the economy (and society more generally) and its spatialities are co-implicated: Political economic processes ‘produce’ distinct, multifaceted spatiotemporalities in particular contexts, but these processes also are shaped by emergent spatiotemporalities. The late, lamented Ed Soja (1980) enduringly dubbed this the socio-spatial dialectic. Second, economic processes cannot be separated from other societal and more-than-human processes and events, even for the purpose of analysis (nor are other processes reducible to or dominated by economic logic). Such econocentrism, hegemonic in mainstream/geographical economics and a lingering hazard also for Marxian political economy, must be resisted. Geopolitical economy emphasizes how political processes are bound up with and constitutive of economic processes. Geographical political economy—
taking advantage of Geography’s ‘radical intra-disciplinarity’ (Domosh and Magilligan, personal communication)—extends this to incorporate cultural processes (discourse and representation, but also identity and performativity) and materiality (more-than-human agency). In this view, cultural, biophysical, political and economic processes are co-constitutive of one another.

Third, following from this, is the importance of attending to socio-spatial positionality (Author 2002; Authors 2008). This accounts for the unevenly empowered relations between human agents reflective (and constitutive) of their different social locations and intersectional identities, but also how these relationalities are shaped by spatial location (Mohanty 2003; Nagar and Geiger 2007; Valentine 2007). Positionality also is an attribute of places. Indeed, geographical political economic analysis of globalizing capitalism finds that the bodies and places occupying marginalized positionalities (e.g., in the postcolony) are persistently disadvantaged by capitalist political economic relations—relations that produce prosperity for some at the expense of precarity for others.

Fourth, it is vital to attend to the geography of knowledge production: To where various imaginaries of economy and development and their attendant practices emanate from. Those embedded in the global north habitually imagine a single path to capitalist development and prosperity to be followed by all. The power of this locus of enunciation is such that this discourse has become commonsense. Yet those embedded in the global south, encountering capitalist development as a force associated with impoverishment and marginalization, have a very different take (Escobar 1995). From this vantage point, alternatives to capitalist development trajectories are both desirable and necessary—other worlds must be possible (Fisher and Ponniah 2003; de Sousa Santos 2007). Indeed, from
these loci of enunciation North Atlantic social science theory should itself be opened up to the possibility that it may need to be provincialized (e.g., Chakrabarty 2000; Derickson 2014; Authors 2016). In this spirit, it is by thinking through Jakarta that we argue for extending accumulation by dispossession to contested accumulations through displacement.

3. Commoditying the urban commons: Contested accumulations through displacement

A shared feature of urbanism across the post-colony is the high proportion of land occupied by informal settlements—in formal in the sense both that residents generally do not possess freehold rights to their spaces of habitation, and that they frequently work within the informal economy. The United Nations estimates that one-third of urban populations in ‘developing regions’ reside in informal settlements (862 million people); in Jakarta, this proportion is approximately 60% (Silver 2007; UN Habitat 2013). This feature is reflective of distinct processes of urbanization in those parts of the world whose long-standing peripheral positionality—dating back to encounters with European colonialism—undermines the possibility that they can follow Rostow’s (1960) stages of capitalist development. In much of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, urbanization has been significantly more rapid than in Europe, Japan and white settler colonies, has not been matched by economic growth and job creation in the formal sector. It also has not resulted

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2 Disadvantaged positionality, produced through globalizing capitalism; undermining capitalist development possibilities in these places
in the wholesale transfer of populations from rural to urban areas observed in wealthier capitalist economies—the rural-urban transition.

Informal settlements\(^3\) create a challenge for capitalist economic development because they lie outside the market. Their pervasiveness also challenges North Atlantic urban theory, in which it is presumed that residential urban land is available to the land market, and thus that rent theory can account for urban land use patterns (Alonso 1964; Harvey 1972). Asserting the applicability of a common development trajectory for all places and bodies, mainstream analysts seek to resolve this disjuncture between theory and reality in favor of the theory. For example, Scott and Storper (2015, 12) seek to "guard against over-hasty impulses to take certain dramatic or peculiar instances of urban development (e.g. ... the extensive slums of Mumbai ...) as a clear-cut signal that a reformulation of theory is required". Further, major initiatives have been undertaken to privatize ("normalize") land ownership in cities of the post-colony in the name of modernization and development. Inspired by Hernando de Soto’s (2000) claim that urban poverty can be reduced, and by social justice arguments that the poor’s occupancy of urban land should be legally recognized, the UN and the World Bank have pushed post-colonial urban administrations to undertake cadastral surveys and 'regularize' property rights in informal settlements (Durand-Lasserve and Royston 2012).

\(^3\) Informal settlements: places produced through capitalist development
An urban commons

We follow others in conceptualizing informal settlements as a significant space of the urban commons (e.g., Foster 2009; Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan 2012). But what constitutes an urban commons? One influential approach is common property regimes, developed by Elinor Ostrom in a lifelong body of scholarship that persuasively undermines the presumption that collective ownership of resources is a tragedy in the making—the tragedy of the commons (Hardin 1968). Common property is defined as: “Property owned by no-one...owned and defended by a community of resource users...used by multiple individuals regardless of the type of property rights involved” (Schlager and Ostrom 1992, 249). The third part of this definition is applicable to urban land, but this land generally is not a resource in the sense meant here: A collectively organized means of production for primary commodities. While common property theory challenges the presumption that primitive accumulation represents economic progress, its applicability to the urban context is thus limited.

The urban commons includes a heterogeneous bundle of spaces, including parks, roads and the spaces of mass transit, public housing, community gardens, as well as informal settlements. These are important spaces in all cities, spaces whose extent and status as an urban commons is increasingly contested everywhere in this era of neoliberal global urbanism (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). Nick Blomley (2008, 320), analyzing struggles over the recommodification of a former department store in a low income area of Vancouver, extends the definition of the commons beyond collective ownership and use, seeking a legal basis that is not rooted in land tenure: “[T]he claim to the commons of the poor ... is based upon and enacted through sustained patterns of local use and collective
habitation, through ingrained practices of appropriation and ‘investment’. By virtue of being in place for a long time and using and relying upon the commons, residents both acquire and sustain a legitimate property interest.” Such an urban commons is a particularly trenchant feature of cities of the post-colony. Informal settlements are the most land extensive aspect, but definitions from North Atlantic theory should be further extended to embrace other characteristics of ‘southern’ urbanization: “municipal garbage that provides livelihoods to waste-pickers; wetlands, water bodies, and riverbeds that sustain fishing communities, washerwomen, and urban cultivators; streets as places where people work, live, love, dream, and voice dissent; and local bazaars that are sites of commerce and cultural invention” (Gidwani and Baviskar 2011, 43).

Informal settlements pose a challenge for real estate and finance capital seeking to make urban land occupied by informal settlements investable (Li 2014) through incorporation into the urban land market. The pressure to commodify informally settled urban land is particularly strong at present. This pressure reflects the convergence of several processes: Fast policy initiatives to ‘regularize urban land ownership, referred to above; the rapid emergence of a wealthy urban middle class demanding urban spaces consonant with living a ‘modern’ lifestyle (condominiums, villas, shopping centers, office towers, etc.); developers seeing profits to be made in supplying this upper end of the residential population; municipal officials, seeking to enhance the attractiveness of their city to mobile capital and wealthy residents; and last, but not least global finance capital, residents with disposable incomes, developers, all engaging in speculation, with urban land and property being a highly attractive investment option worldwide (Goldman 2011). Informal settlements are at the sharp end of this pressure to privatize, commodify and
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assetize all urban land, triggering a body of research accounting for this under the conceptual label of accumulation by dispossession.

Accumulation by dispossession

In cities across post-colonial Asia, Africa and Latin America, scholars have determined that the commodification of informal settlements commonly involves displacement through forcible eviction. The mechanisms driving this range from formal declarations of eminent domain—whereby state power is used to abrogate property rights in the name of what is declared a high societal priority (with compensation for displaced residents)—to various informal and illegal pressures and violence. Responding to this, the critical urban studies literature has devoted considerable attention to dispossession and enclosure. This process resonates with Marx’ (1967 [1867]Part 8) analysis of primitive accumulation: The enclosure of rural commons in eighteenth century England, dispospossessing peasants of the means of food production and displacing them to cities to become an industrial working class. In Marx’ account, primitive accumulation clarifies the transition from a feudal land-based political economy to industrial capitalism. Others have argued, however, that such processes are a permanent feature of capitalism’s enrollment of non-capitalist practices and practices into its logic (Glassman 2006; Perelman 2000; De Angelis 2001). In this spirit, Harvey developed accumulation by dispossession to conceptualize the many ways in which contemporary capitalism, colonizes its constitutive outsides in order to redress emergent internal contradictions and repeated crises:
What accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use. In the case of primitive accumulation as Marx described it, this entailed taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation. … [I]f capitalism has been experiencing a chronic difficulty of overaccumulation since 1973, then the neo-liberal project of privatization of everything makes a lot of sense as one way to solve the problem. (Harvey 2003, 149-50)

Urban scholars have turned to accumulation by dispossession to illuminate processes of land transformation, land ‘grabs’ and struggles over land. Dispossession and enclosure have been elevated to mid-range concepts that illuminate struggles over land as varied as global ‘land grabs’, the privatization and sales of council housing in the UK, and the clearing and ‘upgrading’ of urban informal settlements across the post-colony (Anwar 2012; Ghertner 2014; Hodkinson 2012; Jou, Lund Hansen, and Wu 2012; Li 2010; Ince 2014; Gillespie 2015; Shin 2015). Enclosure in particular has become a broad-ranging term, capable of capturing multivalent processes of dispossession in variegated contexts (Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey 2008; Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan 2012; White et al. 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago 2015). With respect to dispossession, Rossi (2012, 348) goes as far as to argue that it constitutes one element of capitalism’s ontological “dispositif”.
Across the post-colony, scholars examining land commodification have sought to place accumulation by dispossession into conversation with post-colonial theory, offering cautionary comments on and proposing modifications to North Atlantic theory. With respect to primitive accumulation, Ince (2014) argues that applying a genealogical approach to the role of globalizing capitalism in the post-colony raises questions about whether enclosure of the commons necessarily entails the spatial displacement of peasants theorized by Marx. For example, land grabs can commodify subsistence land for globalized commodity production without displacing peasants (who become an agricultural labor force, albeit with increasingly precarious livelihoods). With respect to enclosure, Jeffrey et al. seek to extend its conceptual capacity beyond the fencing off of land, to incorporate “materialities, spatialities, and subjectivities” (Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan 2012, 1249), thereby acknowledging the constitutive role of spatial, cultural and biophysical processes. Further, challenging pessimism about capitalism’s capacity seemingly to dispossess, enclose and commodify everything, they argue that processes of communing continue to contest those of enclosure: “If enclosure is a seizure of the commons, the commons is a generative spacing that is not simply reducible to but that variously precedes, responds to, and exceeds processes of enclosure” (Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan 2012, 1249).

Gillespie makes a similar point in seeking to provincialize accumulation by dispossession. Thinking through Accra, he argues that North Atlantic theorists neglect the ongoing capacity of residents and social movements to push back against dispossession through acts of ‘quiet encroachment’ (Bayat 2000; Gillespie 2015). This resonates with others’ arguments about the persistence of contestations and alternatives to globalizing
capitalism (Escobar 2001; Escobar 2008; Gibson-Graham 2008; Authors 2007). Relatedly, Ghertner questions whether gentrification, as conceptualized in the North Atlantic realm, is applicable to the displacement of residents in cities of the post-colony, where the social upgrading of housing occurs through wholesale replacement of the housing stock by large real estate developments (see also Lees 2011). Finding that it has limited relevance in Mumbai, he concludes that “‘urban revolution’, ‘enclosures’, and ‘accumulation by dispossession’, while equally abstract terms, ...” are better suited than gentrification for a north-south comparative analysis of displacement (Ghertner 2014, 1554). Examining ‘gentrification’ in Guangzhou, Shin finds that dispossession is an important precondition for implementing upmarket residential developments, unlike in the North Atlantic economies. Beyond this, he questions whether forcible dispossession is adequate for describing the putative vectors of displacement: “dispossession occurs in a nuanced way, involving a mix of co-optation and coercion, or ‘negotiated consent to displacement and forced eviction’” (Doshi 2013, 848; quoted in Shin 2015, 14).

Contested accumulations through displacement

Thinking through Jakarta underlines Shin’s reservations about the adequacy of accumulation by dispossession for explaining geopolitical struggles over land in Asian cities. Land transformations are not simply about dispossession and capitalist accumulation, but are more complex. As we will show, displacement cannot be reduced to dispossession, but takes a variety of forms. Second, it is not only capitalists who have the opportunity to accumulate; a variety of actors are unequally socio-spatially positioned to accumulate wealth and power through the land transformation process. Last, but not least,
contests over land transformation may block or exceed the logic of the capitalist land market (For similar arguments, see Levien 2012; Sarkar 2016).

First, *variegated vectors of displacement exceed the usual meaning of dispossession.* Under former President Suharto, the principle articulated in the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law that still governs land policy—management ‘for the people’—was reinterpreted “to equate the people’s well-being with the state’s capital-intensive developmentalist program” (Lucas and Warren 2013, 8). Large tracts of state-owned land were handed over to well-connected Indonesian conglomerates, whose urban land developers told us that land assembly and evictions were easy because they could call on the state to come in and remove people.  

Since Suharto was deposed in 1998, ushering in democratization and *reformasi,* developers seeking to assemble informal settlement kampung land must resort to the market: initiating a complex and time-consuming process of negotiating sales with kampung residents holding land rights. By contrast, evictions from ‘illegal’ kampungs have been ordered by Governors of DKI Jakarta in recent years, not for real estate development but in the name of flood mitigation and modernization (Authors 2016).

Second, *there are multiple forms of, and conditions of possibility for, accumulation,* exceeding Marx’ definition of capitalists’ accumulation of profits for expanded commodity production. With respect to money capital, not only developers but also land brokers and a variety of residents are unequally positioned to benefit from the land transformation process, in the form of investment capital and/or wealth (Simone 2014a). Depending on the land rights they can document, their willingness to sell and their negotiating skill, kampung residents may make a great deal of money or none at all during the land transformation process.

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4 Interviews with developers, Jakarta, December 2013
acquisition process. Even households facing eviction may be (differentially) compensated, opening up opportunities to invest in small-scale commodity production, engage in land or other speculation, or participate in other urban commons (Levien 2012; Doshi 2013).

There are also multiple, unequal opportunities to accumulate power and influence, tracking but also exceeding those of monetary wealth. These asymmetries are associated with different socio-spatial positionalities.

Third, accumulations through displacement are contested. On the one hand, are attempts to resist the commodification or alienation of kampung land: Residents and their allies may protest, refuse to sell, or resort to the courts to prevent land transformation, blocking the expansion of land and finance capital. On the other, are practices that exceed such expansions. Those displaced may purchase or simply occupy cheaper or more thinly settled kampung land in peri-urban areas. For those making windfall profits, instead of converting these into entrepreneurial activities of capital accumulation (cf. de Soto 2000) they may choose to use (or lose) the money in a variety of more-than-capitalist activities.

4. Land transformations in Jakarta

In Jakarta, the demand for housing, commercial space and offices has exploded over the past decade, fueled by a number of developments. As elsewhere in Asia, a rapidly expanding middle class aspires to the North Atlantic urban lifestyle, also seeing investment in land as more secure than the stock market in light of their experiences with krismon (the 1997 Asian financial crisis that remains far more influential over Indonesian imaginaries and practices than the 2008 global financial crisis). Identifying urban real estate as a
profitable investment opportunity, Indonesian conglomerates have become very active in urban real estate development. Able to sell every unit they build, with anticipated profits approaching 30% annually\(^5\), they have built urban super-blocks, peri-urban new towns and ‘integrated’ industrial estates, also now turning to Dubai-style island reclamations (17 currently permitted) between Jakarta’s north shore and a planned Great Sea Wall (Kusno 2013). In 2012 and 2013 it is estimated that Jakarta offered the highest return on luxury real estate investment in the world (37%) (Chow 2014). Spectacular, gated and defensive architecture, combined with provision of a full range of services (retail, office, primary to university Anglophone education, religious facilities), has created communities where the better off can segregate themselves from the poverty and congestion that they associate with Jakarta’s kampungs and streets (Firman 2004; Suryono et al. 2013). From the perspective of national and municipal officials, such real estate projects will enhance Jakarta’s global competitiveness as a destination for mobile investment capital and economic and political elites.

Given these pressures, urban and peri-urban kampungs are highly sought-after spaces from which land can be assembled for real estate development, and thereby commodified. Kampung residents pursue urban lifestyles that cannot readily be reduced to the western, neoliberal capitalist norm (Simone 2014a). Many participate in the informal economy. Kampung politics are a hybrid of Indonesian representative democracy (overseen by locally elected representatives: RTs and RWs), indigenous political structures that accompanied rural-urban migrants to Jakarta, and fixers (preman) who take it upon themselves to mediate between the two (Simone 2014b). Neighborhood life has a strong

\(^{5}\) Interviews with developers, Jakarta, December 2013
urban commons orientation: Helping out neighbors, socializing in and maintaining kampung public spaces, and collective decision-making (as well as conflicts). Jakarta’s Kampungs are of highly variable quality. They range from those dating back to the Dutch era, where families have lived for several generations and have benefitted from kampung improvement programs, to desperately poor and unhealthy spaces occupied by first-generation rural-urban migrants on marginal state land. Although all kampungs begin life as squatter settlements, most long-standing kampungs have been accorded legal recognition by the state (authorized kampungs). Unauthorized kampungs are increasingly dubbed illegal, and/or slums, to legitimize their erasure.6

Some residents of kampungs hold land rights, but these need not be freehold. In Indonesia, as elsewhere across the post-colony, newly independent nation-states sought to craft land rights that recognize both indigenous principles (adat in Indonesia) as well as western-style formal legal principles (Seidman and Seidman 1994; Fitzpatrick 2008). Michael Leaf (1993) describes the persistence of two systems of recognized land rights in Jakarta: unregistered ‘indigenous’ adat land rights (girik and garapan) that Indonesians had been granted on foreign-owned land, managed by the Lurah (the appointed official in charge of a Kelurahan)(footnote), and rights registered with the National Land Agency (Badan Pertanahan Nasional—BPN). Only limited progress has been made with land registration, notwithstanding the 1981 PRONA (program nasional) national certification

6 Public and media discourse uses legal and illegal to distinguish between kampungs based on whether or not they are accorded official recognition. Yet this distinction is more a political decision than an official category, ‘illegal’ is deployed to justify evictions also from kampungs that have received public support in the past. In addition, recently the English word slum has been deployed to encode kampungs as undesirable living spaces that are rife with social pathologies and environmental degradation. We use un/authorized to avoid such loaded and misleading language.
program and the creation of BPN in 1988, tasked with formalizing land ownership. As of 2001, 22.3 million of Indonesia’s 60.7 million parcels of land had been registered, mostly on urban and peri-urban land (Wallace 2008). Leaf estimates that land rights in Jakarta’s kampungs were ‘almost exclusively’ unregistered in 1993, with such rights ‘grudgingly and unofficially’ recognized by the state for market transactions (as are purchase receipts from such transactions) (Leaf, 1993, 489). In the spirit of Hernando de Soto and neoliberal global urbanism, World Bank-initiated attempts at land reform in 1991 (the Land Administration Project) and 2004 (the Land Management and Policy Development Project) sought to “improve land tenure security and enhance the efficiency, transparency, and improve service delivery of land titling and registration” (http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P064728/land-management-policy-development-project?lang=en, accessed December 20, 2015). In part as a result of these programs, registered land rights now have penetrated Jakarta’s kampungs, but these take a variety of forms, including use rights (hak pakai) and the right to build (hak guna bagunan), in addition to freehold ownership (hak milik).

Kampung residents wishing to convert unregistered land titles into BPN-registered hak milik find this very difficult. The registration process is time-consuming and costly—costs that are elevated by under-the-table payments to officials, and by the cost of conforming to the numerous planning requirements that apply to registered landowners. Political connections to local officials (RT, RW and the Lurah) also are important to this process. It follows that lower income residents cannot afford to register their land (Monkkonen 2013). For developers, by contrast, a system of development and building permits created under Suharto (Izin Lokasi and Izin Mendirikan Bangunan) enable them to
acquire development rights to tracts of land from local governments, also in Jakarta’s long-standing kampungs. Legally, the residents of these tracts can only sell to this developer, undermining their negotiating power. This arrangement also imposes constraints on developers; developers cannot begin construction until the land governed by these permits is acquired and registered as *hak milik* (Monkkonen 2013).\(^7\)

Under *reformasi*, Suharto’s authoritarian pro-market developmentalist regime underwent democratization, including the re-scaling downward of state power. With the devolution of spatial planning decisions to local authorities, Indonesia’s top-down spatial planning process has become increasingly ambiguous and manipulable as national-scale laws and implementation rules are countermanded at the local scale. The development arms of large Indonesian conglomerates are expert at working with local officials to game the changing system to their advantage. This exemplifies how *reformasi* has yet to significantly reshape Suhartan hierarchies of power and influence, notwithstanding international expectations of and pressure for ‘good’ governance (Hadiz and Robison 2013; Hadiz 2010).

5. Jakarta’s Kampungs: Displacement, accumulations and contestation

In order to examine the variegated nature of land transformation in the kampungs of

\(^7\) According to the World Bank’s ‘doing business’ calculations, Indonesia has the fourth highest cost in southeast Asia for registering property (after East Timor) and the fourth highest cost for obtaining construction permits (http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings, accessed January 16, 2016).
contemporary Jakarta, we analyze two case studies from fieldwork between 2013 and 2015. The long-standing, authorized kampung of Menteng Atas in south central Jakarta has been shrinking since 1992, when Bakrieland began its signature Epicentrum development including the corporate headquarters and a series of condominium towers. As several developers explained to us, eviction was the order of the day under former President Suharto, easing land assembly and the commodification of kampung land. Since 1998, however, this has become very rare: developers are compelled to conform to market norms and negotiate sales with residents holding land rights. By contrast, for unauthorized kampungs built over the banks of the Ciliwung River and the Pluit retention pond, the city administration has declared these as illegal, as the basis for rapid, forced eviction.

The findings reported here draw on multiple sources of information. In collaboration with Miya Irawati, Rully Mardona and Wita Simatupang we conducted three rounds of fieldwork in December 2013, August and September 2014, September and October 2015. The fieldwork included individual intensive interviews with developers of large-scale development projects and residents in central and peri-urban kampungs, and focus groups with residents of a south central Jakartan kampung. The intensive interviews and focus groups were supplemented by intake questionnaires soliciting information on the sociodemographic characteristics and settlement history of residents, and by informal individual conversations. These were complemented by observations in kampungs and development projects; and archival records (including newspaper articles, documents on spatial planning, land laws, relevant government policies). Focus groups with residents were. Resident participants were recruited through elected neighborhood representatives (RT and RW), and developers and public employees through e-mails. The focus groups were separated by gender, held in a private kampung home, lasted approximately two hours, and were audiotaped. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in English and Bahasa. Interview and focus group transcripts, intake questionnaires, debriefing notes, and observations were transcribed and analyzed through iterative coding, based on repeated close readings of the transcripts.

Interviews with developers, Jakarta, December 2013.
An authorized kampung: Land assembly and negotiated displacement

In central Jakarta, authorized kampungs, on very valuable land squeezed in between and surrounding highrise office and apartment buildings and shopping malls, have been a prime target for land acquisition by developers. Similar dynamics can be observed in peri-urban areas where developers are acquiring land for the future expansion of new towns and integrated industrial estates. In the post-Suharto era, land assembly by and large has been a quiet and piecemeal encroachment of the modern into these traditional settlements. Developers and land brokers pursue, sometimes haunting, residents to sell their land, ensuing often in a lengthy negotiation process over the price of land. It begins with a few people agreeing to sell their land and the home in which they have lived for 30 plus years, raised their children and carved out a living. The process usually speeds up as more and more people sell their property, until only a few holdouts are left behind. We were able to experience this first hand in a sub-area of Kampung Menteng Atas in South Central Jakarta that we stumbled into by chance in December 2013. At that point in time just a handful of properties had been sold. These were typically razed to the ground, and the property enclosed with a fence or concrete wall, but the area was otherwise inhabited and intact (see Figure 1). Spirits were high, with heated negotiations between residents and various brokers, as well as local public officials (RT, RW, Lurah) about whether and when to sell the land and at what price. As we walked around the kampung residents roped us into this discussion, seeking our opinion as to whether they should sell or hold onto the land, and how they could negotiate a good price.

Figure 1 about here
Interviews with residents revealed that local public officials frequently serve as intermediaries between brokers and developers, in various ways. They may help residents to obtain land certificates, giving them the rights necessary to be able to negotiate with brokers, but may also smooth the sale of the property. Notwithstanding the excitement around land transformation in the kampung, residents had not formulated a collective response. Indeed, their negotiations with brokers were highly individualized; brokers told them not to share with their neighbors the price they had obtained for their land. The going price in December 2013 was between 10 and 12 million Rupiah – US $800-1000 per square meter. Many families’ land plots were 100 sq.m., making the prospect of being paid US $100,000 extraordinarily tempting. According to interview responses, household incomes in this sub-district averaged between 2 and 6 million rupiah (US $150-450) per month. For those earning approximately US $200, with a plot of 100 sq.m., selling the rights they hold to their home paid them a sum equivalent to wages for almost 40 person years of work.

Under these pressures, Menteng Atas experienced dramatic transformations of its urban commons. Within a 5 month period 1/3 of the housing in the subdistrict was sold and enclosed, and 2 ½ years later most of the subdistrict had been cleared (Figure 2). Residents repeatedly commented that their willingness to sell was not only due to pressure from the brokers; the destruction and enclosure of other residents’ homes undermined kampung sociability, making the neighborhood increasing undesirable as a place to live. If negotiation, demolition and enclosure was one trajectory, an alternative could be observed elsewhere in the kampung. Speculating on these changes, some developers, brokers, and

10 Interviews with Menteng Atas residents, December 2013.
11 Interview with Menteng Atas residents, September 2013
wealthy individuals, acquire property from kampung residents, which they then rent out to newcomers working in adjacent commercial and residential developments. The lack of affordable rental units in the new high-rise apartment complexes for office and retail workers has enhanced demand for space in remaining nearby kampungs.

The accumulations associated with such negotiated displacements depend on the participants’ socio-spatial positionality. Residents with rights to sell stand to gain what, for them, is an unprecedented accumulation of wealth. However, legal residents who have been unable to obtain any kind of recognizable land right cannot take advantage of this opportunity and renters are simply displaced without compensation (as in any capitalist market). Brokers make undetermined monetary gains, local officials trade on their political influence, and landlords gain returns on their speculative investments. Developers stand to gain the largest profits: Residents’ negotiated land prices, while presented to us by some developers as usurious, were described to us by other developers as less than 50% of the market price.¹² Eventually, once land has been developed the developers’ potential for long-term capital accumulation is enormous.

It is easily imaginable that the prospects of potentially life-changing windfall-profits are hard for kampung residents to resist. This makes them complicit in the assetization of kampung land, as well as in undermining the kampung as an urban commons and a space of sociability. At the same time, these changes are regretted by some kampung residents, This became the center of conversation in interviews and focus groups with residents who had already sold their property and moved further out towards the urban fringe. Women

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¹² Interview with developer, September 2015.
and youth, in particular, expressed very deeply the loss of community, neighborliness, and sociability and the informal social safety net that their kampung had provided (when I was sick neighbors collected money so that I could pay for my medication). Some regularly return to their old kampung to visit friends left behind. In a girls’ focus group, participants weighed gains in housing quality and status against loss of sociability, seeking both. As one girl put it: “My dream is to combine the quality of a rumahan with the life-style and neighborliness of the kampung.” The experience with and desire for maintaining community and sociability leads families to seek out and construct similar living and material environments on the urban fringe. Indeed, one developer told us that he offered kampung residents a condominium in lieu of monetary compensation, but none took up this offer. This exemplifies contestation: Taking advantage of the capitalist market to make money that is reinvested in another informal urban commons.

As this example of land transformation in an authorized South Central Jakartan kampung demonstrates, there is more to land transformation in the urban commons than dispossession and capitalist accumulation: a variety of different actors accumulate capital but also wealth, albeit unequally.

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13 Interview with kampung residents, September 2014.
14 Focus group discussion, September 2015.
Unauthorized kampungs: Evictions and contestations

Unauthorized kampungs house the poorest of the urban poor in Jakarta, who have built their makeshift shelter on marginal state-owned land, particularly along the city’s riverbanks, canals and retention ponds. These are areas that bear the brunt of flood events that have intensified in recent years. For example, two well-established kampungs along the Ciliwung River – Kampung Pulo and Bukit Duri - flood every year during the rainy season, damaging the homes and belongings of poor residents and often forcing them to evacuate temporarily. Residents of these kampungs not only are the most vulnerable and exposed to these environmental threats, but also find themselves at the center of the local politics of flood mitigation. They have been blamed by political leaders, the media and the middle and upper classes for contributing to clogged-up rivers and thus responsible for flooding. Thus Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama), the current governor of DKI Jakarta, publicly stated that Jakarta floods because the rivers “are surrounded by illegal residences. Therefore the rivers’ surroundings cannot properly absorb the overflowing water” (Wardhani, “Governor Ahok Defends”). Discourses advancing the need for river revitalization measures, laying blame on unauthorized kampung residents for the flooding, and designating these residents as illegally occupying state land have been mobilized to justify forced evictions from the community that they built with sweat equity.

Since 2013 thousands of residents in such kampungs have faced ever-increasing threats of eviction as part of internationally funded flood mitigation measures, which also include river dredging, embankment reinforcement, and new development set-back regulations. Governor Ahok has been uncompromising in implementing forceful evictions since July 2015. In the early morning of August 20, police, bulldozers, heavy machinery, and
construction crews moved in to raze riverside housing in Kampung Pulo, leveling the area and destroying hundreds of homes within a few days. We observed the aftermath of this eviction (Figure 3). Bukit Duri likewise was cleared on December 13. Although the river dredging and reinforcement programs include a plan for resettlement and full compensation for those displaced, Jakarta government officials declared that these inhabitants are illegally occupying state land, thereby asserting the right to evict them (de facto eminent domain). Residents need to hold land rights certificates and/or a Jakarta identity card to qualify for any compensation, but many of those residing along the Gliwung River do not possess such documents. Even those possessing required documentation and able to obtain replacement housing and/or compensation remark on its inadequacy, such as the insufficient and inappropriate provision of resettlement housing, whether in-situ or on the outskirts of Jakarta.

Figure 3 about here

We could document concerns with respect to a previous evictions of kampungs along the shore of the Pluit retention pond in North Jakarta, where thousands of residents were evicted and their homes destroyed in order to restore the flood reservoir to its full capacity. These evictions were to enable extensive dredging of the reservoir, enhancing its capacity to absorb floodwaters from Jakarta’s rivers, and to construct a park for the recreation of the adjacent upper income residential neighborhood. Evicted residents’ biggest grievance has been that the newly built housing units are too few to accommodate all those evicted, that they are often poorly built, that the design is ill-suited to residents’
needs, and that piped water is inadequate.\textsuperscript{15} The largest nearby replacement public housing complex, the Rusunawa Waduk Pluit project, was constructed under the previous governor (now President of Indonesia) Joki “Jokowi” Widodo. It provides 1,200 apartments in twelve four-story apartment blocks for residents evicted from the banks of the Pluit reservoir. The apartments average approximately 30 sq.m, accommodating households of 4 to 8 people.

Dian, who we visited in September 2015, commented on the advantages and disadvantages of her new home, where she lives with her husband, two children and 1 cousin in a 36 sq.m. unit on the top floor.\textsuperscript{16} She emphasized how much she had looked forward to a cleaner environment and finally having piped water in her home. Yet the housing project only receives piped water intermittently and of poor quality, forcing residents to continue to purchase water from water vendors at a higher price than they paid in the kampung.

Asked about the biggest difference between her everyday life in the rusunawa compared to the kampung, she lamented the loss of community with her neighbors: They no longer live near one another, or share food when individual families have too little to eat.\textsuperscript{17}

Yet it would be wrong to portray inhabitants of these informal settlements as passive victims. In collaboration with non-profit organizations, such as Ciliwung Merdeka (a non-profit organization seeking to empower residents on the banks of the Ciliwung river), the Urban Poor Consortium (an advocacy and service organization for housing rights, social and environmental justice), RUJAK (a non-profit think-act tank promoting grassroots democracy and sustainable urban development), and Jakarta Legal Aid, kampung residents resist evictions through a variety of strategies, including legal appeals

\textsuperscript{15} Interviews with Rusunawa residents, and the Urban Poor Consortium staff, September 2015.

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Dian, September 2015.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
(Winayanti and Lang 2004). Non-profits also have helped kampung residents to advance demands for replacement housing and compensation, and for a voice in the design of replacement housing. For example, Ciliwung Merdeka helped residents of Bukit Duri document and map the homes they have constructed, maintained, and improved over time, drawing attention to the historical significance of this kampung and its residents’ contributions to Jakarta’s economy, seeking to legitimate their demands for compensation after eviction. A violent protest during the Kampung Pulo eviction caused significant ripples within a government nervous about unscheduled protests of any form. Despite such local resistance, appeals against eviction orders and alternative proposals, evictions continue apace at the time of writing (February 2016).

Although these various contestations pushed the local government to develop resettlement plans for the evicted, the disjuncture persists between promises and practices, especially in terms of the insufficient quantity, poor quality, and unsuitability of replacement housing. Rusunawa projects are too small in scope to provide replacement housing for all evicted residents, the apartments are too small for extended family units, and the building design is ill-suited to the needs of residents employed in informal sector activities. Residents and their advocates also continue to be marginalized from the planning and decision making process.

Such evictions undermine the ways in which co-habitation in an urban commons enables the poorest of the poor to find foothold in Jakarta. But they are consistent with middle-class desires to remove the poor from their sight and make the city a respectable playground, and with official aspirations that Jakarta should become world-class (Firman 1998). In these ways, such evictions, framed as mitigating flooding, also facilitate longer-
term accumulation strategies for political and economic elites and middle class residents. Yet they tend to reinforce impoverishment of the very poor, who have no option but to pursue resistance and contestation.

6. Conclusions

It is important to reiterate that the complex local dynamics experienced in Menteng Atas and along the Ciliwung River in Jakarta, while specific to this geographical context, bear a family relationship to urban land transformations underway across cities of the post-colony, but also elsewhere. Under the overarching umbrella of the norms of neoliberal global urbanism, and the policy mobilities propagating this in variegated forms worldwide, urban elites actively seek to modernize/westernize their cities: privatizing urban land ownership, formalizing economic and settlement activities, promoting infrastructure development and urban sustainability, and enjoining citizens to self-identify as entrepreneurial and responsible individuals. Emergent middle classes, benefitting from these processes, are both investing in urban spaces designed for their lifestyles and making speculative real estate purchases. Profit-seeking developers are commodifying informally settled land to construct spectacular real estate projects, and global finance firms underwrite the funding. All of these come together particular ways to create a perfect storm of urban land transformation—a storm that too often washes away the urban poor/majority.

We use the lens of geographical political economy to make sense of these processes in Jakarta. Enlisting the socio-spatial dialectic, the urban morphology constructed by the
Dutch, and reinforced under Sukarno, created a postcolonial landscape of compact kampungs encased by major roads. This is ideally suited for developers, facilitating a piece-by-piece assemblage and assetization of Jakarta’s informal urban commons. These local events are shaped by (and may possible shape) inter-scalar and horizontally networked political and economic relations. Socio-spatial positionality is key to understanding who gains and loses through these processes. Developers, their backers and funders, well-connected local political and economic elites, the middle classes and well-off kampung residents each are positioned to accumulate capital, wealth and/or power. The urban poor, particularly recent rural-urban migrants, are disadvantaged from the beginning. They are compelled to squat on marginal land, unwanted by others, where they seek through mutual aid to gain a foothold in the urban economy. As middle class families find ways to separate their activity spaces from those of the urban poor—living in gated estates rather than interacting daily with the urban informal economy and settlements—they become increasingly dismissive of the urban poor. At the same time, the poor contest such attempts to excise them, as eyesores and unwanted detritus, from valued urban spaces. They continue to pursue more-than-capitalist ‘informal’ livelihood practices, and openly resist and fight marginalization and exclusion.

Thinking through Jakarta, taking this field site seriously as a place from where urban processes can be rethought, we are dissatisfied with the current default concept for understanding land transformations seeking to commodify the informal urban residential commons. The variegated forms of land transformation—from quasi-market transactions to evictions, the various ways in which multiple actors may accumulate money and power, and ongoing contestations of these attempts to transform Jakarta into a capitalist city
proper, cannot be reduced to accumulation by dispossession. We thus propose
reformulating and extending accumulation by dispossession, as contested accumulations
through displacement.
References


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Figure 1: Land Assembly and enclosure, Menteng Atas, September 2013
Source: Authors
Figure 2: Land use Menteng Atas RW2, May 2015
Source: Map drawn by Rully Mardona
Figure 3: Evictions, Kampung Pulo, August 2015
Source: Authors