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In Search of Middle Indonesia

Middle Classes in Provincial Towns

Edited by

Gerry van Klinken
Ward Berenschot



BRILL

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June 2010: photo by S. Chris Brown.

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INTRODUCTION: DEMOCRACY, MARKETS AND THE ASSERTIVE MIDDLE

Gerry van Klinken

Di mana bumi dipijak di sana langit dijunjung – Where the feet touch the ground, there the sky is held up

(‘Respect local values’, localist slogan common in provincial politics since the 1950s)

Introduction

Asia’s middle classes are in the news. The story is bewitching. Not only are their numbers said to be shooting up towards half the total population, they are democratic and market-friendly. Indonesia’s middle class too, according to this story, has exploded in the ten years from 1999–2009. An Asian Development Bank (hereafter: ADB) study of consumption patterns concluded it had grown from 25% to 43% in that period. This corresponds in absolute terms to more than a doubling in a decade from 45 million to 93 million people (ADB 2010:11–12). These astronomical figures are partly due to an accounting trick – the per-capita household expenditure threshold has been reduced to a very low US\$2 a day. Anybody not in absolute poverty is assigned to the middle class. But the trick does bring to light a surge of millions of poor people who have recently crossed over the poverty threshold due to slight income rises. The increase was spread fairly evenly between urban and rural areas. A Roy Morgan survey conducted in Indonesia in 2012 showed that 74% owned a mobile phone and 81% lived in a household with a motorcycle. ‘Middle-class’ households, defined by the simultaneous possession of a television, a refrigerator and either a car or a motorcycle, constituted 45% of the population, up from 29% just two years earlier (Guharoy 2012). The latter figure is in the same league as that of the ADB, though derived from consumption rather than income patterns. By contrast, in 1980 just 8.9% of all households owned a motorcycle, and 5.6% a TV, leading to an estimate of 5% for the middle class then (Mackie 1990:100, quoting Crouch). Miraculously enough, the new middle class not only consumes

but is also said to be democratic.¹ Other sweeping statistical reports have presented similar breathtaking conclusions, which hold for all Asia (Birdsall 2010; Kharas 2010; Ravallion 2009).

The present book examines this expanding Indonesian middle class up close. Instead of statistics, it contains ethnographic studies conducted in provincial towns, where most of its members live. Our studies confirm that the middle class is larger than previously assumed. The radically expanded notion of the middle class proposed by the Asian Development Bank, Roy Morgan and other institutions captures something real. But whereas these institutions are mainly interested in consumption, our ideas on the middle class have been shaped by more relational, political questions. Class is not essentially a question of income or expenditure categories; it is a political concept, intended to explain why differences remain between the behaviour of rich and poor people over matters of the common good. By watching how they behave, we have come to know a very different middle class than the one the ADB saw in the statistics. In our experience, the booming provincial middle class favours economic protectionism, wants more state and not less, and practises a flawed patronage democracy.

Less than by changing consumption patterns, we were driven to radically expand our idea of the Indonesian middle class by political events over the last twenty years. After 1998 it became evident that the elite political forces dominating the analysis no longer had the field to themselves. The strong push for decentralization amidst the democratization that followed did not come from the national elite, but from a much broader provincial middle class. Since *reformasi* a wave of fresh studies on contemporary Indonesia has shifted the focus from the 'commanding heights' to the middle reaches of the polity. They are conveniently summarized and partly reinterpreted in some of our own work (Van Klinken and Barker 2009; Schulte Nordholt and Van Klinken 2007b). Where the earlier studies had applied the term 'middle class' to what had actually been a national bourgeoisie ensconced within their gated communities on the green outskirts of Jakarta, it now became clear we could no longer understand Indonesia through their interests alone. A much broader group of people was evidently driving the new politics of democratic regional autonomy, the democratic mediascape, the assertiveness of Islamic

¹ John Parker, 'Burgeoning bourgeoisie: For the first time in history more than half the world is middle-class – thanks to rapid growth in emerging countries', *The Economist*, 12 February 2009.

conservatism, and (not to overlook the dark side) new forms of corruption and communal tension. Somehow it was necessary to expand our view of the politically active public to incorporate those who felt much more at ease with the great mass of the poor than the national elite had done. New research questions had led to a broadened notion of the middle class, though the exact definition was usually left unwritten.

This meant a sharp break with long-standing common wisdom among scholars of Indonesian society that the middle class constitutes no more than 10% of the whole society. Howard Dick in a seminal 1985 article quoted its size at a mere 16.6% in urban Java based on consumption criteria (which he linked to the 'privatization of the means of consumption') (Dick 1985). This translated to an even smaller percentage of the national population, and for decades afterwards scholars and politicians alike routinely said the middle class made up around 10% of the population. In our minds this figure is now outdated, both because many more people than this have become consumers and because recognizably middle class political behaviour has changed.

We have something to say both to the economic statisticians and to our fellow scholars of Indonesian society. To the statisticians we say, the possession of consumer durables says nothing about new political commitments. Simply reducing the income threshold to the poverty limit and calling everyone above that 'middle class' begs many analytical questions about political action. *The Economist* exemplified the problem when it breezily sketched all those earning just over US\$2 a day as 'people who are not resigned to a life of poverty, who are prepared to make sacrifices to create a better life for themselves' (12 February 2009, quoting Brazilian economist Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca). This is not only to suggest without any evidence that the poor are resigned to their fate, it begs the question what *kind* of action the non-poor are prepared to undertake to make their escape from poverty permanent, and how their action might differ from that of those who forgot long ago what poverty feels like. The only way to find out is to go to the field.

To our colleagues in the humanities and social sciences we say, the new political commitments are there if you care to look. Class links the more or less coherent material interests of a large group of people. One way to recognize it is when its members act politically in similar ways, even if they are hardly aware of their commonalities. This implies a historical approach that goes well beyond statistics; it moreover suggests there can be no standard definition of a particular class, but that it depends on the question the researcher wants to ask. During the New Order, scepticism

about the common assumption that the middle class sponsors democracy made a great deal of sense. The assumption hardly seemed to apply during Indonesia's New Order when the middle class was on the rise. Indeed, the first studies of the middle class in Indonesia were framed by questions about the stability of the authoritarian New Order (1966–1998). Studies focusing on the middle class as a political force in effect had in view a national bourgeoisie confined to metropolitan areas. This is perhaps the real reason why scholars who have been writing about the middle class since the New Order have also been reluctant to let go of the 10% estimate. The focus of their studies was the hegemonic power of national elites. They sought to identify social support for a strong centralizing and authoritarian state (Hill 1994; Schwarz 1994). A widely deployed idiom of orderly 'state corporatism' drew on parallels in the junta-led countries of Latin America (King 1982).² Subsequent studies of middle-class lifestyles similarly had in mind metropolitan consumerism – the 'new rich' (Pinches 1999; Robison and Goodman 1996), who were 'lost in mall' (Van Leeuwen 2011) – but these tended to conform to this elitist idiom rather than challenge it. Yet today hardly anyone doubts that Indonesia is a consolidated democracy, albeit one with 'adjectives'. The reason is not only to be found in intra-elite disunity or a change of heart among that 10% at the top of Indonesian society; it also arises from a new assertiveness among a much larger proportion of the population, particularly out in the provinces. This book aims to bring to life that surprisingly large group we may readily call 'middle class' for its self-confident consumerism as well as for its new political activism.

Recovering the 'Middle' in Middle Class

An eloquent argument for paying attention to a much larger middle class than commonly assumed has been made by Diane Davis (2004). She began by regretting the excessively narrow notion of 'middle class' that had occupied scholars of the Third World after the 1960s. In the 1950s,

² Other studies emphasizing middle-class support for Indonesian authoritarianism include Tanter and Young 1990 and Dhakidae 2001. Similar studies appeared on other Asian countries (D. Jones 1998; Koo 1991; Masataka 2003). A 'new' middle class of professionals and managers emerged alongside the 'old' middle class of senior bureaucrats, but this class, too, was restricted to the big cities (Arita 2003; Funatsu and Kagoya 2003). One author who bucked the trend by depicting a broader middle class was Solvay Gerke (2000), who defined them as the 'just enough' class (*kelas cukupan*), situated between the poor and the rich.

optimistic modernization theorists had thought the middle classes would be transformative and defined them broadly; but as one newly independent democracy after another collapsed into authoritarianism this optimism wilted. The progressive influences of a broad middle class appeared to have been largely chimerical. After that, middle classes virtually disappeared from mainstream social science research. The dependency theory that largely took the place of modernization theory continued to speak of 'middle classes', but in practice it had raised the membership threshold and now saw them as effectively part of the ruling elite. They belonged to one extreme in a highly polarized society, in which the other extreme consisted of 'popular masses'. D. Davis (2004:57) concluded that while 'the extremes were theorized as most relevant, the middle classes were not considered relevant'.

The down-side to this focus on extremes was that large numbers of people who did not belong to either extreme were left out. Explaining change by incorporating a middle in which polarization is less marked certainly complicates the analysis – on this more below. But the evidence that classes in the 'middle' do act in distinctive ways has been mounting for Indonesia since *reformasi* in 1998, and it forces us to deal with the added complexity. It includes an enthusiasm for democracy and decentralization that is uncharacteristic of national elites. The same goes for provincial protests against the central government's bias towards global capital – leading to local government pressure to partly nationalize foreign mining companies, for example. Diane Davis coined the expression 'disciplinary regimes of development' for those historical trajectories in which the pure interests of global capital are 'disciplined' by middle classes with interests of their own. Those interests might, for example, include smaller, family-based businesses, or rural investment. Middle classes who manage to impose such discipline are defined more broadly than the national bourgeoisie. They may include state workers, the urban self-employed, and small-scale farmers.³

Somewhat earlier, Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens and Stephens (1992) had also argued for a renewed focus on non-elite classes on the grounds that they play a distinctive role. They charted the histories of a large number of nations in the twentieth century to learn why most capitalist

³ Davis plots the likelihood of middle classes allying themselves with either workers or the bourgeoisie on the basis of that nation's particular history of industrialization – from 'early' late industrialization in Latin America to 'late' late industrialization in East Asia. This argument need not detain us now.

economies were also democracies. A little like Davis was to do later, they discovered that democracy comes about not because capitalists want it but because less privileged classes push for it. Capitalism produces contradictions, and these in turn boost demands for political equality by non-elite classes and class coalitions. Where working classes provide most of the energy for these demands, democratic reform is the most inclusive. Middle classes are more ambivalent. They will resist democracy if that means also empowering the poor, but will support it if it means gaining an edge over the national bourgeoisie, notably on regional issues. It is precisely this ambivalent role that Indonesia's middle classes, now broadly conceived, have played since Independence.

Insights from political economy such as those provided by D. Davis, and Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens and Stephens will help us answer questions about democracy in Indonesia. But we need more: a spatial dimension. Part of the impulse for a renewed interest in a broad middle class arose from the turbulent process of decentralization that took place at the same time as democratization. Its very territoriality forced us to think about political geography, 'the study of how politics is informed by geography' (M. Jones, Jones and Woods 2004:2). The natural setting for the middle classes who provided the political steam pressure for both democracy and decentralization was not the globalized metropolis, but the provincial town – a place that foreign researchers rarely visit. The self-employed medium scale entrepreneurs, the private and public sector clerks, the Golkar apparatchiks, the teachers – and the youth aspiring to these positions – who populate this book, belong to a world of their own. They are only partly assimilated with the national bourgeoisie. They may share elite global consumerist aspirations, but their economic interests differ. Their incomes are less secure, their networks of relations more local (where they may be more intense than in the big city), their religion more conservative – in short, their horizon is more parochial. Yet their control of the towns gives them a national clout that belies their relative lack of affluence.

We were not the first social scientists to turn our attention to the urban environment in Indonesia, yet the field has been surprisingly underpopulated. Human geographers have been its main practitioners.⁴

⁴ For example, Franck 1993; Nas 1986; Persoon and Cleuren 2002; Titus and Hinderink 1998; Titus and Van der Wouden 1998. In addition, a large and valuable body of unpublished Indonesian theses and dissertations on the sociology of individual towns (for example, at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta) remains practically unexamined by foreign scholars.

These scholars offer valuable material on uneven urbanization, urban bias, employment and urban–rural relations (on the last of which, see also Leinbach 2004; Rotgé, Mantra and Ryanto Rijanta 2000). Larger questions of the economy and politics, however, have rarely been posed in a spatial way. Howard Dick, one of the few who did pose them that way, remarked perceptibly that most have treated the economy as ‘a peculiarly disembodied thing, having a sectoral structure but no identified spatial structure’ (2002: xxi). Much the same can be said of many political studies, which have treated a politics of elites and (sometimes) masses as if they do not have to span great physical distances. Towns are the nodes in these interactions across distance. One of the first major studies of the provincial town in Indonesia done with such large questions in mind was the Mojokuto project conducted by a research team from MIT in the 1950s. Clifford Geertz was to become its most famous member. Perhaps because what they did was for so long not repeated, their conclusions proved highly influential. In our opinion, however, they also fell short of an adequate explanation. This book attempts to show why.

Questions

We felt the post-1998 surge of studies on local politics in Indonesia had moved the subject of Middle Indonesia back to centre stage. To draw attention to the many productive puzzles that a focus on the surprisingly assertive (lower) middle classes in provincial towns can help to illuminate, we coined a term for this social zone: Middle Indonesia. The term is deliberately ambiguous. It may suggest Middle America, with John Updike’s ‘clean, sad scent of linoleum’ (even if Middle Indonesia probably smells more of deep-fried *gorengan* than of linoleum). This is where the inquisitive must go to meet a ‘mainstream’ American, as opposed to a member of some minority class, ethnicity, gender or culture. Middle England and Middle Australia have similar connotations of the conservative lower-middle-class majority. At the same time the term Middle Indonesia suggests a mediating function between two extremes – between upper and lower, or centre and periphery. This second meaning is likely to reveal a darker side, in which the middle extracts a surplus from its hinterland (as in Cronon’s (1992) magnificent study of Chicago and the Great West), or in which numerous mid-sized towns mediate the imposition of central administrative order on the countryside (as in the long discussion that started with Christaller; see C. Smith 1976).

By the time we began this project, it had become obvious to us from previous work (including our own, referenced above) that Middle Indonesia generates significant political forces at the national level. Our task was now to explain how that came about. Our leading question could be formulated as follows: Why is Middle Indonesia so influential, locally and in Indonesia as a whole, though it is neither particularly rich nor particularly central in geographic terms? This question would lead us to focus on agency in particular localities, and force us to identify who the actors were. Answering it would take us into three related thematic arenas, namely class, the state, and everyday culture. Class, and questions related to the market, was the most fundamental of these, and would inform the other two. Underlying all our work lies the question: How conflictual are the power relations that make Middle Indonesia influential?

Our research questions were informed by recent work done by others elsewhere in Asia. Two scholars were particularly important to us. One had written on the political economy of an expanded and largely lower middle class, the other on the spaces in which these lower-middle classes were the masters, namely provincial towns. To begin with the first, the question the economist Barbara Harriss-White posed in her work on provincial India was: How might an understanding of this expanded middle class help explain political differences between them and both the national bourgeoisie as well as the poor? In an agenda-setting book on this question, she emphasized the informality of what she called 'the economy of the 88 per cent'. While everyone has heard of the Indian economic miracles worked in the steel mills of Jamshedpur and the skyscrapers of Mumbai, this formal corporate economy is largely insulated from another, much more populous and traditional economy that retains a great deal of vitality. She wrote: 'While India is fast being reinvented discursively, there is a great deal of continuity in the real economy at the local level' (Harriss-White 2003:71). The economy of small-town India in which she did her research has almost no modern industry and revolves around agriculture and trade. Almost all labour in these sectors is informal. Where the formal law is ineffective, people regulate contractual relations through personal networks and on the basis of local norms. The lower-middle-class traders, small-scale producers, agrarian elites and local state officials who dominate this economy incorporate the poor into it on highly discriminatory clientelistic terms. Other poor groups, such as the *dalits*, are excluded completely simply on the basis of cultural norms. In Indonesia, too, two thirds of the labour force is informal, in the sense of working in the unregistered economy.

The second piece of research that informed our own broke open the question of spatiality. What difference does it make that these surprisingly assertive lower middle classes are most visible in provincial towns? How might the various types of flows passing through provincial towns help explain their political influence within the nation? In an important book that we had partly seen in draft, Malcolm McKinnon (2011) compared the human geography of three large Asian cities with three provincial ones. Whereas life in the cities, he concluded, is shaped to a great extent by the kinds of globalizing processes that have made Asia's megacities look much like megacities anywhere in the world, that is not (yet) the case in Asia's provincial towns. According to McKinnon, two other processes are equally, if not more, important there, namely urbanization and nation-building. In Europe these processes flourished in the nineteenth century and were essentially complete by the twentieth, but in Asia they are contemporary. Urbanization has long stabilized in Europe at around 80%, but in Indonesia it is still in progress and only half complete. Global production chains have penetrated to these provincial towns to a far lesser extent than to the megacities (as Barbara Harris-White also argued). The wage differentials between town and countryside that drive urbanization arise more from a vigorous domestic capitalism than from the global economy. Nation-building, meanwhile, is the process of identity-formation that takes place when the child of peasant parents comes to town to go to school and stays to seek a better future. This, too, is a contemporary process. People are still alive who remember Indonesia's anti-colonial revolution in the late 1940s. Most of the identity issues that occupy people in town are regional or national rather than global in scope. One reason is, surely, that the state is a major source of employment for educated people in many Indonesian provincial towns. The state has a presence in these towns because it is essentially territorial – it needs to be everywhere to retain its sovereignty.

If these hunches based on preliminary reading were to prove correct, then Middle Indonesia promised to considerably complicate the received picture of a globalizing, consumerist and democratic middle class.

How We Did Our Studies

Indonesia's urbanization level was 42% in 2006 (Firman, Kombaitan and Pradono 2007). Contrary to the popular image of exploding Asian megacities, about half of those urban Indonesians live in towns of less than a

million. Indonesia is thought to have about 170 provincial towns with populations between 50,000 and a million (projections calculated from appendices in Rutz 1987). They are scattered all over the map. About 80% of the population lives within the sphere of influence of towns like those that are the subject of this book. Considering that provincial town residents make up a quarter of the world's fourth most populous nation, that they are found in every corner of the vast archipelago and that their world touches practically everything that happens in the country, it is surprising they have not been paid more scholarly attention. The doubling of the ADB's 'middle class' also took place in these towns. The streets are filled with an exploding number of motorcycles and mobile-phone outlets. Yet foreigners hardly know these towns, and thus they go home without having their preconceived ideas challenged about what this urbanizing transition means economically and politically. Most of the authors in this book are anthropologists rather than geographers, and we confess we came rather late to the discovery that geography matters. Like new converts to an old faith, however, we now believe the most important next step in the burgeoning study of decentralized Indonesia is to become more sensitive to the implications of geography.

We chose to do ethnographic work in a few of Indonesia's hundreds of provincial towns. We expected the effort put into doing 'thick' observation in Middle Indonesia to lead to insight into issues of national importance. As Ben White correctly points out in this volume, we studied various social processes taking place *in* these towns, rather than the towns themselves. Each town became a project for one PhD project. We were looking for towns with populations under a million, because big cities are likely to have dynamics of their own. The choice was partly made for us on practical grounds such as the knowledge and access our Indonesian partners at Gadjah Mada University had of and in the regions. The main underlying divide in our minds was economic. At least two of our towns should have economies that were largely market-driven, while two should have economies that were largely state-driven. For the former we settled on Pekalongan and Cilegon, two towns in Java with substantial private sectors, and for the latter on Ternate and Kupang, both outside Java and with middle classes dominated by officialdom. Later we were joined by a fifth PhD candidate with funding of her own, who studied Pontianak, an outer-island town with a mixed state-market economy. Some PhD projects focused on political economy – those on Kupang and Pekalongan – while others focused particularly on youth – those on Pontianak, Cilegon and Ternate. The youth studies have been brought together elsewhere

(Spyer and White 2012). A number of postdoctoral researchers also came to work in the programme. Some looked at the same four or five towns, while others went elsewhere. Only a selection of the research is included in the present volume.⁵

Looking back, our learning trajectories looked less like the boot imprints left by a disciplined platoon on the march than like the swooping arcs a flock of birds trace in the air. Certainly this introduction represents a work of synthesis rather than a summary of everything everyone wants to say in their respective chapters. In the first place we have gotten to know a huge cast of unforgettable characters: Wenty Marina Minza's Lia, a smartly dressed 24-year-old in Pontianak who wants nothing so much as a civil servant's job but who worries that she belongs to the wrong ethnic group to get one; Cornelis Lay's Crazy Wadu, a Kupang vagrant in the 1970s who walked around town naked and did 'yoga' every day, sleeping with his head down and his legs in the air next to the bridge. So many ordinary people become immortal in these accounts of little provincial dramas. But we always attempted to discern in their personal stories those much larger social processes that were shaping their lives. It is to these processes that we now turn.

Why so Influential?

If the national significance of an assertive Middle Indonesia seems obvious today, it was not to the first scholars who turned to this subject. Since their work continues to resonate today, it is worthwhile revisiting it briefly. These researchers tended to see provincial towns as passive zones of top-down diffusion rather than as assertive places. The first post-war students of the Indonesian town were inspired by modernization theory. They saw the town as a zone of transmission. They wanted to know how well it was facilitating the gradual diffusion of modernity to ordinary folk around the country. The Australian Lance Castles (1967) studied Islamic cigarette manufacturers in one provincial town to see if they were developing a distinctive middle-class ethos of 'this-worldly' secularism (not many were). Most famous of all is the series of studies researched in the 1950s by Clifford Geertz and his colleagues of the MIT Indonesia project,

⁵ The full list of publications, funding and institutional details can be found in the KITLV annual reports (http://www.kitlv.nl/home/Organization?subpage_id=349).

centring on a Javanese town they called 'Mojokuto'.⁶ When the MIT group went to Mojokuto they did not consider that the town's relationship with the national centre could be anything other than dependent. They saw it as the (distressingly inert) terminus for modernizing ideas from the centre. Clifford Geertz in particular was impressed with the degree to which this cultural frontier remained immobilized by tradition. The town was a 'no man's land', he wrote (C. Geertz 1963b:16). He thought this 'provisional, in-between, "no man's land" quality of Mojokuto social life' was 'its most outstanding characteristic.' Stagnation caused by a massive influx of resourceless and fatalistic peasants was also the essence of the Indonesian provincial town depicted in an influential paper by Warren Armstrong and Terry McGee (1968). Their term 'urban involution' drew on Geertz's idea of 'agricultural involution'.

The successful diffusion of global and national modernizing influences through the town remains one of the major criteria urban geographers use to assess the benefits of urbanization (Rondinelli 1983). It features strongly in the most systematic inventory of the history and functions of Indonesian towns we have today, by Rutz (1987). Maps portray towns as nodes in a gradually spreading and hierarchical network of roads, shipping routes and administrative districts. In an overwhelmingly rural archipelago, towns grew up to fill the needs of modern administration, first colonial and then republican, as this penetrated ever-remoter regions. They also serviced local economies of trade, plantations, mining and manufacturing that followed colonial pacification in the nineteenth century. Networks diffuse innovations and thus help build social capital. They hold the country together.

Clearly this ecological perspective on the role of towns in the social landscape captures something real. Our own studies sometimes confirmed the diffusive character of the town, particularly in culture. Ideas and resources that originate in bigger cities continue to flow *through* the town to the surrounding countryside. Think of government programmes, new religious practices or global fashions. Every town in Indonesia now radiates 'Indonesianness'. Even the streetscapes look the same everywhere. People move around these networks in all directions, driven by their own desires as well as by the authority that radiates from

⁶ While Clifford Geertz was the most prolific member of this project (C. Geertz 1963b, 1965, 1968, to mention only those concerned with towns), other members who produced important work on towns in their rural context were Donald Fagg (1958), Robert Jay (1963), and Hildred Geertz (1963).

its nodes.⁷ Town is an attractive destination for rural young people, a modern settlers' town with its own pleasures. Migrant Malays come to Pontianak town to study (in Wenty Marina Minza's chapter). Farm kids come to Cilegon town with their parents, who, however, still expect them to behave like rural kids (as Suzanne Naafs (2012) has described in her dissertation on Middle Indonesia). At times the provincial town also attracts people from the metropole. Post-1998 decentralization made provincial towns once more attractive to Jakarta-siders (Vel 2007). Physical distances have shrunk rapidly in recent years, also for non-elite travellers. Indonesia's airports, built for a tiny flying elite, are crammed with small-town folk clutching budget tickets. Internet and mobile telephony costs almost nothing.⁸ Some elites commute to and from Jakarta every weekend. For them, the provincial town has practically merged with the metropolis. For non-elites the town remains more a home (the difference produces a provincial brain-drain), but even for them, often a temporary one. In short, towns are nodes of mobility. This shrinking of physical distance has implications for national integration. Provincial town politics are more like metropolitan politics than they used to be (the state comes to the provincial town, as Deasy Simandjuntak (2009) puts it). The fact that Indonesia no longer suffers from the inchoate rural revolts that afflicted it in the 1950s must be at least partly due to this shrinkage of distance.

However, processes of smooth diffusion are only half the story of the provincial town. They overlook the political agency that emerged in the towns as a result of these very flows. Since the late 1980s, urban studies around the world have taken an active interest in agency over ecology (Gottdiener and Feagin 1988; Savage, Warde and Ward 2003). Even as the 1950s American researchers sweated in somnolent Mojokuto feeling that little was happening, people in somewhat larger towns such as Padang and Menado, in the regions beyond Java, were organizing armed revolts against Jakarta. Assertive processes originate in the town itself and are

⁷ Diane Davis (1999) helpfully depicted a network space spanning four dimensions – geographical space, class, institutions and culture. Each dimension is hierarchical. Some places are more desirable than others (halls of power); classes are by definition hierarchical; some institutions have greater power than others; most nations have a dominant culture. People want to move towards the end that offers them better chances – closer to the state – hence urbanization, upward social mobility and political and cultural struggles.

⁸ Many flights now cost less than the boatfare, as 4 or 5 airlines compete to service a single provincial town; internet cafes cost 50 eurocents an hour; mobile telephony costs a tenth in Indonesia of what it does in Europe; roads, particularly in Java, are full of fast, cheap and frequent buses.

turned against the metropolis, or against the village, or against other classes within town. Think of demands for local autonomy, resistance to global markets, or exploitation of the poor. Even as the MIT team was beginning to draw its conclusions about the town as a 'no man's land', the Dutch sociologist W.F. Wertheim was writing about the enormous dynamism in the towns. By the 1950s he had been in the archipelago for decades. His book on Indonesian social change focused on agency in the urban environment long before the paradigmatic shift of the 1980s. He wrote:

This new Indonesian culture was to be a typically urban culture....However small a percentage of Indonesians may have lived in the towns, these towns were the most dynamic element in Indonesian society and thus assumed a very great influence on the social and political events throughout the archipelago. (Wertheim 1959:185; see also Wertheim 1958.)

Indeed, Wertheim was not alone. A perceptive young American researcher in Indonesia at the time, Gerald Maryanov, described who the provincial folk were who provided this dynamism. They were an urbanized, semi-educated group of non-agricultural workers, then numbering about 2 million out of the national population of 82 million. It was they who created public opinion: 'The definition of problems takes place within this group, and it sets the climate of opinion in which problems are discussed and solved. We would further suggest that the desirability or acceptability of particular policies will be entirely determined here....This...group is characterized [also]...by its distance from the cultural patterns of the ideal type of traditional village community' (Maryanov 1959:63).

In one of the ironies of academic history, it was one of the MIT researchers who put her finger most precisely on who this new middle class was. Hildred Geertz's (1963) long neglected chapter still provides us with a good baseline description of town life. Whereas the metropolises of Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Medan, Palembang and Makassar were cosmopolitan, the provincial towns, she felt, were primarily local in orientation. They had grown rapidly but not through industrialization. Trade and government dominated their economies. The 'urban middle class' she saw there was broad in scope, even if its membership was then far smaller than today. It consisted of clerks and shopkeepers working in Chinese-owned retail and wholesale stores, of the conservatively Islamic owners of smaller shops and market stalls, and of government-salaried staff in administration, schools and the army. Culturally, the wealthy and educated in town adhered to an 'Indonesian metropolitan superculture', characterized by political ideologies of egalitarianism, socialism, economic

development and national advancement; a liking for colloquial Indonesian language and popular films; and a desire for overseas travel and automobiles. Far below this risk-taking group with a metropolitan outlook was the 'urban proletariat', underemployed in the bazaar and 'only a step away in terms of sophistication and skills and non-labour resources from the countryside in which most of them were not long ago born'. As social status moved down towards the poor urban masses, the culture shifted towards 'a large variety of traditional ethnic ways of life'.

Today, a focus on agency in urban studies is surely unavoidable. In India as in Indonesia, urban landscapes were created by middle classes exercising their political muscle. They began to flex those muscles during and shortly after the struggle for independence. The state socialist measures introduced at that time worked mainly to their advantage. After the regional revolts of 1957 the government under President Sukarno introduced measures that penalized large capital and subsidized politically assertive provincial middle classes. The measures included politically driven import and export licensing, nationalization and the virtual disappearance of personal taxation (Mackie 1971). Under the New Order, state rhetoric turned against this class and towards the virtues of direct foreign investment that rather favoured a national bourgeoisie. Yet the oil boom allowed the government at the same time to continue to subsidize provincial middle classes to buy their loyalty, in ways the World Bank at the time considered inefficient. Thus Frans Hüsken (1989) discovered that New Order policy had actually encouraged rural 'decommercialization' while creating rural elites with strong state connections but weak entrepreneurial capacities.

After 1998, Padang, Manado and many other towns were again the scene of rowdy demands by its urban middle classes for special consideration by central state institutions in Jakarta. They succeeded in forcing Jakarta to match its post-1998 democratizing measures with a 'big bang' decentralization programme handing budgetary and appointment powers to the regions. They then set about successfully demanding the subdivision of administrative districts into numerous new districts, each to be graced by a new district capital built by well-connected local contractors. In fifteen years since the mid-1990s, the number of districts in Indonesia has more than doubled to over 450, in the face of opposition from Jakarta which regards subdivision as wasteful (Booth 2011). It is true that provincial towns no longer take up arms against Jakarta (though there is a rural separatist revolt in Papua and until recently another in Aceh), but several of them did host more or less serious communal violence in the chaotic

transition to democracy around the year 2000. Some provincial capitals such as Pekanbaru and Samarinda even threatened to secede, 'like East Timor'. The demands were not new; they had merely come out into the open. Such threats coming from the far-flung, resource-rich regions of Indonesia had been voiced quietly within the halls of power throughout the New Order. Expressed in velvet voices rather than with guns, they forced Jakarta to institutionalize a system of government funding for the regions that was determined less by performance than by loyalty:

A massive patronage system was created in which the central government awarded local governments with budget allocation in exchange for loyalty. Budget allocations were not based on performance or need, but rather on how close local governments were with the central government, and how well local elites could lobby decisions-makers in Jakarta. The resulting rent-seeking system was effective in rapidly building the economy, but was not transparent or sustainable and created great regional dissatisfactions (there are demands for independence from all the above-mentioned resource-rich provinces). (Antlöv 2003:143.)

After *reformasi* the negotiations between centre and regions became far more openly political. Resource-rich districts managed to keep more fiscal revenue for themselves, thus depriving resource-poor ones of development funds. As before, the state patronage benefited not only the elite who negotiated it, but also the thousands of ordinary public servants who got paid for spending most of the day doing little but chatting in government offices all over a town like Kupang, as Sylvia Tidey demonstrates in her Middle Indonesia dissertation (2012a). Here the 'middle' was asserting itself in a way that belied passivity, and that was not entirely within the control of the commanding heights. Local desires to gain more control over the resources available from the increasingly affluent central state after 1998 led to chaotic competition that sometimes turned violent. Investigating this conflictual side to some provincial town life was for one of us an important precursor to the Middle Indonesia programme (Van Klinken 2007).

Class

Let us now zoom in on the middle class in its provincial-town setting. What does it look like up close in the early 2000s? What sources of economic power does it tap? How do its members relate to the poor in their immediate environs? How wide and how deep is the gap that separates them from the poor within town and beyond it? If the gap amounts to a

ravine, any democracy that empowers both sides is likely to be difficult to achieve. Would we find, as the Lynds did in provincial America (Lynd and Lynd 1929, 1937), a town riven by internal class conflicts? Or would our towns look, as Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt's (1941) did elsewhere in America, and as Clifford Geertz's did in Central Java, like a peaceful, integrative middle, a smooth transition zone?

A provincial urban middle class consisting of bureaucrats, traders, medium-scale businesspeople, clerks and professionals are central actors in our stories. On the national level, these occupations largely belong to a lower middle class, but within town they are more likely to be seen as an 'elite'. The chapters by Nico Warouw and Cornelis Lay make this contrast particularly clear. This complexity was one reason why the researchers in this book had difficulty agreeing on a common nomenclature or even a precise definition of the class of people in question. Some stayed with the term 'intermediate class', as first proposed by Michal Kalecki (1972) with its *petit bourgeois* associations (notably Ben White and Nico Warouw, following Harriss-White 2003). Most preferred the more common term (lower) middle class. Although this does not have the same precise association with intermediary political action, it has been adopted in the present chapter because it is likely to be more familiar to the reader.

Of greatest interest to us was political action emerging from this group of people towards other groups. As far as influence is concerned, its members still resemble the political public described in the 1950s, whether defined in terms of culture as by Hildred Geertz (1963); of newspaper readership as by Herbert Feith (1962:109–113); or of education as by Gerald Maryanov (1959:63). But the middle class has grown in size. At the same time its members share the consumerism familiar from the ADB reports and other studies of the middle class done in bigger cities. They enjoy considerable mobility – flying to Jakarta is now affordable for them from almost anywhere. Their career choices are wide open (see the chapter here by Wenty Marina Minza). Culturally, many can still be seen as adherents of a metropolitan superculture, interested in contemporary forms of religious pluralism (see Noorhaidi Hasan's contribution to this volume). Their religious and even their eating habits differ markedly from those in the *kampung* class in their own town, as Cornelis Lay shows in his childhood reminiscences set in 1970s Kupang.

Recent studies of class tensions in urban Indonesia, though few in number, led us to expect no easy answers to the question of their severity. Some have emphasized rather stark class differences. Howard Dick begins his economic history of twentieth-century Surabaya with a focus on

industrialization and ends with the human-rights abuse that the resultant land grabs caused among poor urban residents. His final chapter portrays rather brutal 'class conflict' between a bureaucratic indigenous middle class and impoverished kampung dwellers (Dick 2002:472). Kathryn Robinson's (1986) study of a new mining town in Sulawesi showed that, as the village of Soroako grew into a town, a class structure began to emerge that created new ideological and cultural forms in everyday life. However, others cautioned that prevailing tensions did not seem to follow conventional class lines. In his theoretically sophisticated history of Padang, Freek Colombijn (1994) found that 'conventional class analysis', such as that being advocated for urban studies at the time by the sociologists Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre, was insufficient to explain social relations in his town. Instead of cleavages based on possession of the means of production, Colombijn saw a (Dahrendorfian) conflict between those in and out of power. Like many provincial cities and towns in Indonesia, but unlike Surabaya, Padang had and has little industry to speak of. Trade and state employment dominate its economy. Colombijn's observation is important for our search for Middle Indonesia, which looks for it not in Jakarta and Surabaya, but in the more numerous middle-size towns around the archipelago.

Here we offer a synthetic alternative interpretation that yet gives a central place to class. The argument goes as follows. The politically active core of the provincial middle class is indigenous and bureaucratic, with their commercial allies. (Members of the ethnic Chinese middle class, whose wealth is purely commercial, until recently hardly participated in formal politics, though many have long maintained backroom political relations.) The source of indigenous wealth in the middle class is on the whole not control over the means of production (rich batik producers in Pekalongan are an exception), but control over rents they obtain from the state or from managerial positions. In one notable reinterpretation of Karl Marx by Aage Sørensen (2000), rent-seeking replaces the labour theory of value. The exploiters have access to assets that earn them rents while the exploited do not. Assets do not have to be money but can be many other things, such as knowledge (education) or official power. Clearly the power to deny others similar access is a form of exploitation. The power provincial bureaucrats exercise, in other words, is also a kind of class power. They wield that power in formal bureaucratic ways. Education is an important qualification for entry to this privileged group in town. Those who finish high school have a chance of making it into the public service or even a big firm in Jakarta, while those without are likely to get stuck

selling mobile-phone cards in front of the local mall (as Wenty Marina Minza richly illustrates). But bureaucratic power is also expressed in informal, social and cultural ways. Corruption and ethnic, religious or kinship favouritism are widespread in provincial towns, as Minza and Savirani both make clear. It is a central part of the bureaucratic politics in town.

Informality in the economy is the crucial matrix for local-elite power. Middle Indonesia's economy is strikingly informal. More than half of all urban workers are informal, and in the trade and agricultural sectors the figures rise above 80% (Angelini and Hirose 2004:6–9). Jan Newberry writes evocatively in the present volume that 'the kampung class is profoundly shaped through its economic role in the Indonesian economy' [providing] 'cooking candy to be sold, name card printing, piecework labour, haircutting, a small snack and drink stall, numbers games, as well as the spiritual help to win at them'. Globalization actually stimulates growth in the informal sector rather than deflating it as people move into formal industry. An authoritative study by Alejandro Portes writes that the informal economy is 'the realm where the embeddedness of economic action in social networks and the unanticipated consequences of purposive official action emerge most clearly' (2010:161). Socially embedded power plays out within the informal economy, operating through local cultural values to produce mechanisms of exclusion as well as inclusion. Examples in this book are the religious teachers who exploit contract labour in Cilegon, and the ethnic Dayak bosses who seize bureaucratic turf in Pontianak. Part of this informal economy is moreover illegal, consisting for example of unregistered timber cutting, prostitution or the smuggling of stolen motorcycles, drugs or oil. This domain, too, is dominated by provincial middle classes (including corrupt police, military and state prosecutors) rather than by the poor or the very rich.

The political power developed at the intersection of the formal and the informal can be exercised downward against the local poor, or outward towards the central state. We consider the first here, and the second in a subsequent section on the state. Nico Warouw in this book describes political operators in the town of Cilegon who finance their political careers by winning informal labour contracts under the corporate social responsibility (CRS) programme of the gigantic steel manufacturer Krakatao. For factory managers, having locals paint their sheds and maintain their machinery through CRS represents small change. But for the underemployed in Cilegon's kampung communities it is a lifeline, even if it means working for an unscrupulous local boss who gives

them zero protection on labour standards. In the chapter by Minza, poor job-seekers place great hopes on possible patrons in their environs, but the rich can afford to follow their ideals of self-realization while enjoying the services of the poor. Unlike the socially isolated tycoons of Jakarta, lower-middle-class provincial actors, such as these bureaucrat-politicians-cum-labour brokers, can swing power in the informal system of social relationships in which they are immersed. Such 'non-price institutions for achieving social order', as the new institutional economist Janet Landa (1994) put it, dominate life in the provincial town and its informal economy to a far greater extent than they do in the city with its skyscrapers and factories.

Gauging the level of tension these power differences generate was not an easy task. Ben White points out in his chapter on this question that 'you don't find classes unless you look for them'. He suggests that researchers in the 1950s Mojokuto project did not look. Not all of us looked equally hard, but even those who did, did not notice a high degree of class polarization. At the time that we studied them, our five towns were largely peaceful. Everyday discourse in town is not strongly class-oriented. Indeed, the Gini index of inequality is somewhat lower in Indonesia's trade-, agriculture- and bureaucracy-dominated provinces than in the industrialized cities (Akita and Lukman 1999). The town has an internal spatial structure consisting of business and government quarters, middle-class housing, and lower-class kampungs, not so different from that once described by Wertheim (1959:180–1). The level of spatial segregation by income class is not as high in most provincial towns as it is in big cities such as Medan or Jakarta.⁹ The slums are less wretched, the villas of the rich somewhat less ostentatious, and the spatial segregation less clear than in Jakarta, Sylvia Tidey finds in her survey of Kupang in this volume. We think it is fair to conclude that Middle Indonesia is relatively unpolarized. Inasmuch as Middle Indonesia is dominated by a broad middle class, that class, too, is 'non-polar'. Both Barbara Harriss-White and Diane Davis deploy the same term in their own recent discussions of middle classes.

While tensions are not confronting, however, they are certainly present, and they may be rising. Sylvia Tidey noticed that though Kupang's middle class do not always live in enclaved housing estates, they do

⁹ Medan's crime-ridden Amblas and Binjai suburbs contrast with the elite Helvetia suburb. Jakarta has the impoverished Kampung Melayu or Ciliwung River slums on the one hand, and the gated communities in southern Jakarta on the other. I base these statements on my own (unpublished) calculations of an 'index of dissimilarity' for several cities using 2005 Susenas census data at the neighbourhood (*kelurahan*) level.

increasingly prefer them. These estates did not exist in the small town that preceded today's Kupang. Other authors noticed that while members of the middle classes did not talk about class, those of the lower classes did. When Nico Warouw visited the fishers kampungs on the outskirts of Cilegon and Pekalongan, he heard class talk all the time. People complained that they were excluded from politics by those who had better access to the state than they. They called the excluders 'elites', though in reality these were lower-level civil servants, people who would generally be classified lower-middle class. Among the excluded were factory workers (including skilled migrant labour), contract workers and informal workers. Wenty Marina Minza writes of the different life chances for Malay and Dayak youths of the 'lower middle class' versus those of mainly ethnic Chinese 'middle class' origin. The former fervently hope to become civil servants – any type will do – whereas the latter can afford to dream of developing their own unique potential as professionals. Janice Newberry, writing about a kampung in Yogyakarta, distinguished a self-conscious 'kampung' class of informal workers (many of them women) from an 'urban middle class' of white-collar workers.

There was a time when the communist party mobilized on these resentments – indeed this was happening in the very years the MIT team was still in Mojokuto. The Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or PKI) explicitly aimed to wean the poor off their dependency relations with patrons (Huizer 1974:100–1). In 1965/66 provincial towns around the country became the scene of bloody pogroms against communists. Members of provincial middle classes collaborated with the military, turning the massacres into the denouement of suddenly white-hot local class conflict (Kammen and McGregor 2012). Perhaps half a million people were killed, and many more detained for years without trial. Here the 'middle' was not asserting itself so much against Jakarta as against their own poor.

After the destruction of the communist party, memories of this episode were quickly encouraged to fade. Few of our researchers heard locals talk about them. Clientelistic attachments to middle-class patrons once more became the best option for the poor. Jan Newberry describes patron–client links between the kampung and urban middle classes that even extend to giving away their children in the desperate hope of improvement. She writes: '[H]ierarchical relationships are described in familial terms. The poorer, lower-status man is child to his senior officer (*anak buah* or literally, fruit child). Many poor people in my acquaintance hope to become the *anak buah* of a powerful man, and thus derive the benefits

(often economic) in exchange for loyalty (often political).’ Anyone who does not belong to a clientelist network gets nothing. Wenty Marina Minza spoke with poor Dayaks in Pontianak who felt that they lacked the *koneksi* to make the most of the greater Dayak access to civil-service jobs that recent patronage democracy had created. One of them told her: ‘My parents say that they can seek help from my father’s friend. But his friend’s position is not strong. The position will probably go to someone else with a stronger connection.’

Clientelist networks are marked by mutual obligations that can only be enforced by social sanctions. The trust that lies at the basis of these unequal relationships is often drawn from some family-like identity, which can be neighbourhood-based, religious or ethnic. The informality of state and market that is so characteristic of Middle Indonesia (as it is of Third World towns everywhere – see Datta 1990) makes clientelism pervasive. Rivalry between clientelist networks therefore often takes on communal dimensions. The most striking social differences within town are in fact ethnic. Others who examined provincial societies in Indonesia have noted that claims to local power seem to be based, not on possession of the means of production, as conventional analysts would expect, but on ethnicity and religion (Amal 1992; Asnan 2007; Schiller 1996). Several of our authors mention them, but Minza’s chapter revolves around them. It seeks to explain why in Pontianak, as she put it, ‘[e]ntering the bureaucracy was apparently not a matter of acquiring the right qualifications but of being born into the right ethnic group’. In three of our five towns – Kupang, Ternate and Pontianak – people still recalled vividly an extensive episode of communal violence that took place in their town almost a decade earlier. These episodes were associated with the introduction of democracy, and the result has been to increase the salience of ethnic differences in these towns until the present day.

Much political-science literature about Indonesia revolves around the clientelistic relations that exist within government and between government and citizenry at the national level (Crouch 1979, 2009). Recent studies have demonstrated the prevalence of neo-patrimonial relations also at much more local levels (Van Klinken and Barker 2009). In the present study they turn out to be ubiquitous in provincial *kamungs* everywhere, particularly among poorer sections of the community. Most local-government and market institutions are ‘socially embedded’ in such patron–client networks. The networks are both integrative (by connecting people they build social capital) and oppressive (they often prevent citizens from claiming their rights). These interactions

produce the kind of business and politics for which provincial towns are best known – clientelistic, anti-liberal and, sometimes, intimidatory. ‘Intermediate-class’ operators, as we see them in the chapters by Nico Warouw, Wenty Marina Minza and Amalinda Savirani, mobilize, dispense patronage and threaten rivals with violence, all in an attempt to monopolize access to state contracts for their own network. The absence of formal legal sanctions to adjudicate these personalized deals creates considerable insecurity, as Minza’s chapter makes particularly clear. Civil society, too, remains elusive, although Nico Warouw sees signs of it emerging as electoral democracy becomes more routine at the local level. Provincial societies are dominated, not by citizens who are free to speak truth to power, but by collusive, Gramscian blocs of bureaucrats, legislators, entrepreneurs, NGOs and journalists who *are* the state in their town.

There are some signs that the urban poor are increasingly looking for alternatives to a clientelistic arrangement. Nico Warouw describes local-neighbourhood actions to resist the patrons that they call ‘elites’ because they feel democracy offers them the chance for direct access to state resources. If inequalities continue to rise within Middle Indonesia – as experience elsewhere leads us to expect, at least until urbanization reaches maturity at around 70% – and if democracy holds, we may see clientelism give way once more to open class politics. This could make urban middle classes lean once more towards authoritarianism, as Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens and Stephens (1992) predicted, and as had actually happened in Indonesia in 1965. The Bangkok unrest of 2010 is a recent Southeast Asian example of how this might happen.

State

This section returns to the question of the disproportionate political influence Middle Indonesia has on national issues such as democracy and the role of the state in the economy. Unlike middle classes in the conventional western imagination, Middle Indonesia’s lower middle classes generally love the state. Nearly every indigenous university student Wenty Marina Minza interviewed in Pontianak told her they wanted to become a civil servant; not because the work fascinated them, but because it provided a steady income with which they could help mum and dad. Nearly every construction contractor Amalinda Savirani spoke to in Pekalongan told her they relied on state procurement for their living. The politics in

which these members of provincial middle classes engage are not about reducing state power over their lives, but about gaining more direct control over state resources. They are not about giving the market more room to breathe, but about increasing state powers to redistribute market profits to non-market players. This is most clearly the case in a town like Kupang, whose economy has little of interest to a middle class other than the state, as Sylvia Tidey shows. But it also holds for Pontianak, which is a trading entrepot for the resource-rich interior as well as a bureaucratized provincial capital. Minza demonstrates that its economy is segmented in such a way that the numerous and growing indigenous lower middle class is excluded from the middle and upper reaches of the market. The civil service is still the only place for them to go. As Kracauer's (1998 [orig. German 1929]) white-collar salariat of Berlin became for the first time in history the formative power in the public sphere in Weimar Germany, so Middle Indonesia's bureaucratic middle class shapes public life more than any other social force. The mutually constitutive role of the state and the provincial middle class is one of the most important emphases in the present set of studies.

If the economy had been largely formal and transparent, and if the state had been capable of acting coherently everywhere in its territory, then these lower-middle-class preferences would be a losing proposition. They would be a sign of their marginalization in a world in which states aim largely to facilitate global capitalism. But in Indonesia the provincial economy is overwhelmingly informal, and central state institutions are hardly capable of exercising their will without appeasing local bosses. The hidden strength of the provincial middle classes lies precisely in the opacity of the economy of their towns, caused by the informality of their intricate local arrangements and their impenetrability to central supervision. The fact that Middle Indonesia controls what Harriss-White for India called 'the economy of the 88 percent' creates political realities in Indonesia as well (Van Klinken 2009a). Provincial middle classes are not exactly rich in comparison with the national bourgeoisie, yet their demands for local autonomy have managed to keep the latter off balance. Their control of the local informal economy allows them to organize on their own turf. The local 'big men' Nico Warouw describes in Pekalongan and Cilegon – religious leaders and other community leaders – are essential to the state as political operators because they control territory to which the central state needs to have access too. The process of state formation that they represent resembles the 'strong man centered politics' that Patricio Abinales described in his history of Mindanao (2000:12), and

the street-level authority so essential to governance in Joshua Barker's (2009) Bandung.

Provincial assertiveness thus has its roots in the economy. Economic relations between subnational regions and national and global markets are complex. We have not studied them in detail – something we hope others will do. But what we have seen suggests that these relations are as politically charged as the administrative ones. On the one hand, private and public investment remains crucial to the economies of all provincial towns. But on the other, distrust of big capital is stronger among provincial business entrepreneurs than it seems to be in Jakarta. Provincial enterprises are smaller than those in the big cities. Entrepreneurs and local-government leaders know each other well. Together they organize to resist what they regard as threatening incursions from outside. Contrary to the suggestion created by the 'shared poverty' that Clifford Geertz detected in small-town Indonesia in the 1950s, these towns do have an economy to protect. Amalinda Savirani describes local officials who collude with construction contractors in town to circumvent new rules demanding transparent tendering. They fear these rules are a wedge in the door for an invasion of bigger builders from Jakarta. They have a shared interest in keeping outsiders out, and networks in the town are tight-knit enough to develop control over the process of awarding government contracts. Middle-class bureaucrats and their class allies increase their rents by subverting institutions and regulations intended to improve market operation. Rents are thus earned through the political process, by building political alliances, rather than on the basis of quality of service and a perfect market.

At the same time, Middle Indonesia loves democracy, provided it comes with local autonomy. The present book offers only glimpses of the way Middle Indonesia practises democracy – with a gritty and often manipulative kind of energy and without nostalgia for centralized military rule. Other scholars are devoting a great deal of attention to it. Their work is too rich to summarize here, but among the most analytical is Ryan Tans' (2012) typology of local political actors. We recognize his depiction of local actors who combine some highly predatory behaviours with competitive mobilizational work that is sometimes good for democracy. Their skill at building coalitions sometimes brings previously excluded groups into politics. This helps them trump rivals who would have defeated them under a centralized authoritarian system. Particularly in those poorly governed, thinly populated areas that we here call Middle Indonesia, the central state is happy to appease rather than enforce rules.

Democracy has offered the local elites who populate our studies chances they would not have had under a more centralized regime. As noted above, this might change if the poor demand a bigger slice of the cake of provincial state rents than they do at present. But that possibility remains hypothetical at the moment.

Everyday Culture

Culturally, Middle Indonesia is a crossroads, a skein of mediatory processes. These processes are relatively unpolarized within the town, but they tend to be localist within the nation. The mediatory function of Middle Indonesia is at the heart of Joseph Errington's analysis of everyday language use in Kupang. Kupang Malay differs from both standard Indonesian and from local languages spoken in the rural province of East Nusa Tenggara. Faced with striking differences among these languages, everyone in town has to negotiate which combination of Kupang Malay and Indonesian they will use in any particular setting. The boundaries in these negotiations seem to be shifting towards Kupang Malay, as local status markers adapt to the town's growing confidence in its regional autonomy. 'Mixed use of the two languages serves to create a way of talking that is socially intermediary', he concludes. 'It allows speakers to enact middle-class identities grounded in both the city and the nation.' Mixed language use is 'mediating in an integrationist dynamic'. At the same time, these shifting patterns are the linguistic counterpart to rising localist sentiment. Visitors from the centre are regularly reminded of the popular injunction, mentioned at the start of this chapter, 'where the feet touch the ground, there the sky is held up' (*Di mana bumi dipijak di sana langit dijunjung*), meaning 'respect local values'. Kupang has no history of separatism, yet its distinctive language mediates a kind of regional identity. This, too, is an expression of Middle Indonesian assertiveness.

If there are class tensions in town, they do not extend to culture wars. At least at first sight, internal differences seem minimal. But much depends on the vantage point of the analyst, and some observers have seen striking differences. In the eyes of the town's better-off denizens, integrative, diffusive processes of modernization appear to be the most powerful. Noorhaidi Hasan describes established provincial middle classes who introduce cosmopolitan religious ideas to the town from the big cities that they so frequently visit. The talk they stimulate in public is an optimistic and universalizing one of democratic, consumerist Islamic

piety. The top layer of the provincial society enjoys almost the same lifestyle as in Jakarta or Hong Kong. To the wealthiest members of the provincial middle class – successful entrepreneurs, education professionals, religious leaders and senior officials – the town feels not that much different from the big city. Their culture sets the tone for the whole town in terms of formal dress codes, architectural taste, publicly funded entertainment or religious events. They have ensured that their towns have mediated the hegemonic metropolitan cultures and practices well, facilitated by ever-tighter political, economic and infrastructural integration throughout the twentieth century. The education system they run is among the most powerful means at their disposal. Noorhaidi Hasan describes the Islamic members of provincial middle classes whom he met as ‘active negotiators between the global and the local, and between the cosmopolitan centre and the hinterland’. As a result, he writes, ‘Indonesian Islam has experienced a process of gentrification, favouring global high-technology and consumerist Islamic appetites’. This way lies civility. Contrary to the arguments of some that globalization makes people withdraw defensively into local cultures (Juergensmeyer 2005), Noorhaidi finds the global flows smoothly into the provincial and is welcomed there. It has to be said that opposition from the more traditional provincial conservatism remains somewhat understudied in this account, as is the dark side of the hegemony the town’s establishment exercises over the permissible public discourse. Half of Kebumen town is classified as ‘poor’, yet the public discourse is not one of dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, the contribution that the town makes to the diffusion of global values remains an important argument of this book, even if that contribution is not without limits.

Cornelis Lay, by contrast, provides a view from below. His reminiscences of growing up in a lower-class *kampung* in Kupang in the 1970s bring to light a culture at odds with that of the town’s middle class. *Contra* the MIT team in the 1950s, and *contra* those who source today’s provincial localism to the ill-educated poor, *kampung* values were not ‘traditional’. They were proletarian. The poor enjoyed a loud and somewhat irreverent neighbourly solidarity that expected little from the wider world. Not resigned involution, but strong aspirations for upward mobility circulated there. Meanwhile the culture of personal piety, restraint and hygiene practised in the homes of the ‘bosses’ in town – nearly all civil servants – was to Kupang’s poor a source of wonderment. The days when they could vent that irreverence in loud protests against ‘bureaucratic capitalists’ (*kapitalis birokrat*, or *kabir*) had passed shortly before, amidst the brutal

anticommunist purges of the mid-1960s, which Connie Lay still remembers vaguely. By the 1970s, as in Jan Newberry's account of the kampung poor in today's Yogyakarta, the route to upward social mobility lay in approaching the bosses for patronage. The basis was there in the town's cross-class bonds of ethnic community, as well as in a paternalistic faith in progress through hard work that glowed in the bosoms of the bosses. This is how Cornelis Lay got his scholarship to the university in Java. Not everyone was so lucky. Repeated disappointment creates real resentment. The poor still believe fervently that education offers them a way up, but the usual meritocratic principles do not work well (see the chapter by Wenty Marina Minza). Today, the urban poor know democracy has not yet brought equality to them. That awareness of their rights makes them part of a wave of rising expectations washing the globe from Burma to Morocco.

Further Research

As the title of this book indicates, Middle Indonesia is not a set of conclusions but a research programme or, more accurately, another step forward in an effort that scholars have now been pursuing for some time. This section highlights three broad suggestions for pushing research into Indonesia's middle classes forward.

The first is to learn more from the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences in recent years. The premise of that turn can be expressed very simply as follows: '[W]here things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen' (Warf and Arias 2008:1). Many social processes of practical importance in a large country such as Indonesia are spatially selective. Industrialization creates employment near large cities (and a few towns like Cilegon), but rural peasants dispossessed by advancing cash crops are likely to become a permanent 'surplus population' (Li 2009). Religious conservatism is more mobilizable in provincial towns than in villages or large cities. In Indonesia's complex political geography, Jakarta Golkar apparatchiks are slowly gaining ground over local party 'mafias' in densely settled coastal areas, but not in thinly populated, poorly governed upland areas (Tans 2012). In short, whether focused on the impact of globalization or 'islamo-fascism', governance or electoral politics, the most fruitful research agendas will include spatial comparisons. Provincial towns play important roles in these extended spaces.

The second is to broaden research on class beyond the present, predominantly cultural, interests (such as questions about glocalization and

hybridity) to include material interests, antagonism and exploitation. In Indonesia, class in this sense has not been a focus for many years (Farid 2005). Many well-known factors have led to a decline in such studies over the last two decades: the Cold War has ended; class tensions seem to be muted everywhere, except in Latin America; liberalization has caused the prestige of central states that were once the object of class struggles to decline; identity struggles appear to assume greater prominence the closer the anthropologist approaches a local arena. Yet the emotions on the streets of crisis-hit southern European cities are class emotions, harbingers of more if the global economy and, with it, the capitalist narrative continue to falter. Class antagonisms were overt in the Red versus Yellow battles that paralysed Bangkok in 2010, and they underlie the Chinese Communist Party's fears about explosive urban-rural inequalities. The present book has begun to explore the subtle interplay of dependence and antagonism, of identity and class, of clientship and citizenship, that can be seen in the everyday relations in provincial towns where these concern access to the resources of the local state.

The third broad suggestion is to do more with networks, no longer merely as a metaphor, but also as a complex map of actual relationships. Networks have always been prominent in the lexicon of human geographers. They are now also central to the spatial turn pioneered by social scientists such as Bruno Latour, David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Manuel Castells. They offer a way of resolving the contradictory observations about diffusion and an assertive middle by introducing key notions such as mediation and brokerage. On the one hand, the network idiom is appropriate for the patron-client ties that characterize so much social interaction within the town, as well as for the politics of decentralization that have boosted Middle Indonesia's influence. Networks emphasize interconnectivity, they build social capital, and this is reflected in much of the positive work of diffusion that we have observed in Middle Indonesia. On the other hand, just as important (though less often remarked) is the fact that networks of antagonism also exist. Brokerage can be extortionary under certain circumstances – think of the lucrative chokepoints along the Rhine that made Germany's robber barons rich. Gatekeeping, even sabotage, are also brokerage functions. The regional revolts of 1957 can be seen as Middle Indonesian brokers ganging up on the centre. 'Urban bias' occurs when towns grow fat at the expense of the countryside – they are acting like brokers who charge commission. Such behaviour is typical of provincial towns in Indonesia (G. Jones 1988:150), and, to a much greater extent, of the cities of sub-Saharan Africa (Bates 2008; Kitching 1980).

These more complex aspects of network theory could help us visualize the simultaneous existence in town of uneasy class tensions between patrons and clients on the one hand, and communal rivalries between multiple middle-class patrons on the other. The political economy of gatekeeping games played by members of provincial middle-class 'elites' is not the simple binary one of capitalists and workers, but the more complex one of control over sources of rents. These games can possibly be described either in terms of 'non-polar' classes or of network brokerage.

Summing Up

Our Middle Indonesian studies are producing a grounded explanation for many features of Indonesian social and political life once attributed vaguely to an abstract Indonesian culture. Among them are the resurgence in Islamic piety and of ethnic identities; the tradition of *gotong royong* kampung solidarity; and a messy interplay of democracy, corruption and anti-market sentiments. These beliefs and practices turn out to be most visible in particular spaces, namely provincial towns, while their agents are members of particular social classes, namely provincial (lower) middle classes. That is what Middle Indonesia is about – the power of the middle to impress itself on the whole. The idea is that we can explain higher-level processes (national democratization, anti-market sentiment, religion, conservative types of solidarity) by means of lower-level processes.¹⁰

A focus on Middle Indonesia offers a new interpretation of the massive growth in the number of people who can afford more than the absolute basics in life. The increase in purchasing power as well as in political influence has been rapid particularly among an overwhelmingly *lower* middle class. They resemble less the comfortable bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Europe than an anxious and conservative petit bourgeoisie. Historically this politically active group has been created by the state – they are teachers, government clerks, police officers and their private business partners. In recent times the proportion coming from the private sector has grown – though probably less so in provincial towns than in the big cities. The prosperity even of those in the private sector also depends on connections with the state through government contracts and subsidies. Informality and social embeddedness characterize

¹⁰ This is a basic principle in process theory (Stinchcombe 1991).

all state and market institutions at this provincial, lower-middle-class level. Perhaps it is true that people's behaviour there constitutes the consumer revolution that excites the ADB, but it is not matched with a revolution in the economic productivity to underpin it. The threatening 'middle-income trap'¹¹ has its home in Middle Indonesia too.

Democracy is important to this group because it promises them greater access to the resources of the state and the state-managed market. This distinguishes them from the national bourgeoisie who already had all they wanted under the authoritarian New Order. In 1998 many observers feared the new democracy might have been merely the unintended consequence of an intra-elite spat, to be withdrawn once elite unity was restored. The fact that today Indonesia is a consolidated democracy is due as much to those millions in Middle Indonesia who continue to make it work as to a bourgeoisie who initiated it. That said, the quality of democracy also bears the imprint of Middle Indonesia's peculiarly clientelistic and informalized class tensions. Scholars of provincial politics elsewhere in Southeast Asia have made similar discoveries. Daniel Arghiros (2001:273) summed up Thai provincial democracy by naming 'just two phenomena: vote buying and political clientelism' (see also McVey 2000; Ockey 2004). The 'gangsters' in an edited volume entitled *Gangsters, democracy, and the state in Southeast Asia* were mainly provincial operators (Trocki 1998). We have called what they do 'patronage democracy' (Van Klinken 2009b).

Decentralization, not human rights or justice for the poor, was for this bureaucratic middle class the central reform. Indeed, whenever the poor do organize today, the charge of communism is quickly heard from the mouths of these same provincial democrats, with all its echoes of the death of democracy in 1965. The analysis of Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens and Stephens suggests that the single most important explanation for the deficiencies in Indonesia's democratization is the minimal role that the poor have played in the post-1998 reforms.

In short, Middle Indonesia on the whole resists rather than welcomes globalized, open markets (while of course enjoying the consumer goods on sale). The picture here is not wholly unambiguous, as seen for example in the globalized provincial-elite lifestyles in Noorhaidi Hasan's chapter, but it is strong enough to be a core argument of the book. In the political arena, Middle Indonesia enjoys democracy but uses its political skills and

¹¹ Changyong Rhee, 'Indonesia risks falling into the middle-income trap', *The Jakarta Globe*, 27 March 2012.

clientelistic networks to make the system work to its own advantage, which is not necessarily that of either the national elites or the poor.

We make no predictions about the future of Middle Indonesia. Those who think it represents a rearguard conservatism, bound eventually to wither under the onslaught of global capital, may be right, as may those who think Middle Indonesia represents the core of an admittedly flawed, yet ultimately hopeful, resistance to that same global capital. As Ben White points out here, this question was already raised by the originator of the 'intermediate-class' concept, Michal Kalecki, in the 1970s, and it remains an open one. But we do claim that the social and geographical rootedness of Middle Indonesia makes it an instructive and durable object of study.