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### Floods in (post-) New Order Jakarta

*A political ecology of urbanization*

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# 7

## COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

The starting point of this thesis was my personal motivation to make a difference and support transformational change from within. Hence, I critically engaged with the political ecology of urbanization as it provides a useful framework to re-politicize what tends to be conceived as ‘environmental’, ‘natural’ or ‘technical’. I also ‘ecologized’ dialectical methods to appreciate possibilities and to acknowledge how processes of urbanization are also shaped by ecological dynamics – those that cannot be fully explained by referring to societal or human logics. I developed and experimented with fieldwork methods to operationalize these theorizations. I used my questions, explanatory framework, methods and fieldwork strategies to produce a new understanding of the relation between uneven urbanization and Jakarta’s floods under the (post-) New Order regime. Inspired by the many lively and ongoing discussions among urbanization scholars, I fleshed out a political ecology of urbanization that helps trace and understand how unevenness is produced through overlapping and co-constitutive relations of sociospatial reconfiguration and socionatural transformation.

Using the explanatory framework of the political ecology of urbanization, Chapter 3 situated how Indonesian capitalism unfolds through large-scale land claims and allocation by the state as a ‘concessionary capitalism’. From this analysis I identify how the presence of Jakarta’s urban poor in precarious urban spaces are part of an ‘extended agrarian question’, as processes from the countryside extend into the city. I identify how Jakarta’s urban poor were expelled from the countryside, joining the flows of rural-to-urban migration to occupy flood-prone river banks in the city. In Chapter 4, I go further to

connect the unevenness in the city (evictions) with the countryside (land dispossessions). Methodologically I do this through following the migration of residents, and analyze sociospatial and socionatural processes shaping these rural/urban trajectories. In Chapter 5 I trace how land subsidence in Jakarta is the outcome of uneven sociospatial and socionatural processes of capitalist urbanization. Finally, in Chapter 6 I analyze the sources of cement and sand for flood infrastructure development in Jakarta to identify connections between the flows of water and flows of labour and capital.

In this concluding chapter I summarize the co-constitutive relations of the mutually intertwined sociospatial and socionatural moments in (post-) New Order urbanization and how they are productive of unevenness explained in Chapter 3 – 6 (Table 7-1). From this summary I outline the political consequences following from my understanding of Jakarta’s flooding, and I identify possibilities for political alternatives.

*Table 7-1: The co-constitutive relations of sociospatial and socionatural moments and the uneven outcomes (made by author).*

Chapter	Sociospatial moment	Socionatural moment	Unevenness in terms of ...
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primitive accumulation through land concession since colonial era</li> <li>• Rural-to-urban migration</li> <li>• Explosion and eviction of <i>KMK</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land and labour as constitutive part of capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to land</li> <li>• Access to formal jobs</li> <li>• Impact of government policy (eviction of the urban poor)</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land dispossessed through political forest and political water</li> <li>• City expansion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdependency of human and non-human (farming land, surface and groundwater)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to land, fertile farming soil, and water in rural area</li> <li>• Flood risk in rural area</li> <li>• Prevention from flooding in urban area and the blaming the poor for flood infrastructure intervention</li> <li>• Relations between the city and the countryside</li> </ul>

Chapter	Sociospatial moment	Socionatural moment	Unevenness in terms of ...
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City's growth</li> <li>• Groundwater deep wells</li> <li>• Land subsidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdependency of groundwater and human</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to land (big developers converted green and blue areas; big developer and concessionary holders will gain surplus from the development of new capital; indigenous community will be evicted)</li> <li>• Access to water (urban poor settlements extract shallow contaminated groundwater; commercial sectors and the elites extract cleaner deep groundwater)</li> <li>• Flood risk (it is the urban poor who suffer the most from the impact of tidal flooding caused by land subsidence)</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deforestation in <i>Puncak</i> (upland)</li> <li>• Land reclamation at the Jakarta Bay</li> <li>• Sand and cement mining in Banten and Central Java</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entanglement of human and non-human (farming land, estuarine and karst ecosystem)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to land in <i>Puncak</i> (elites maintained their lands and villas) and the city (development of commercial areas are protected and even promoted)</li> <li>• The impact of flooding (premium space are prevented from urban flooding; urban poor settlements are blamed/evicted; the urban poor settlements are more prone to flood risk)</li> <li>• Surplus (developers gained substantial profit from development of the city and flood infrastructure)</li> </ul>

Chapter	Sociospatial moment	Socionatural moment	Unevenness in terms of ...
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk (fisher folk in Jakarta Bay will face bigger wave for their fishing activities)</li> <li>• Access to water (will decrease in rural Central Java, Jakarta Bay will be closed; estuarine area for the fish pond are eroded in Serang).</li> </ul>

How do I see the political consequences of this thesis in relation to (post-) New Order uneven urbanization and Jakarta’s floodings? The legacy of the New Order regime has been the subject of scientific inquiries. These have exposed corruption and the exercise of repressive force to critical views (Aspinall and Fealy, 2010), and note the poor economic condition, a tradition of violence, and the ever further politicization of religion (Heryanto, 2004). Studies also point to the breaking down of the left movement due to the massacre in 1965-6 – which helps explain the absence of the left in the present-day Indonesia’s political panorama – and document the resurgence and reorganization of the oligarchical power incubated under the New Order regime (Heryanto and Hadiz, 2006; Hadiz and Robison, 2013; Hadiz and Robison, 2017; Savitri and Adriyanti, 2018). In addition, studies attribute massive agrarian or land-based conflicts in today’s Indonesia to the New Order regime (example: Rachman, 2013).

On the basis of my thesis, I would like to complement and expand this list by showing how the New Order legacy has become cemented into the landscape of both the non-city (example: Kedungwringin) and the city (Jakarta). In the non-city, political forest and political water – the state-supported appropriation of land, forest and water for profit-making purposes – keep producing unevenness. In the city, the New Order legacy shows in how upland catchments, rivers and water front areas have been encroached by luxury real estate, causing land subsidence and increasing the city’s vulnerability to flooding.

As I contribute to this scholarship on the legacy of the New Order, to explain the contemporary city, the final question I ask myself is then, what is to be done? How can these processes of urbanization be made more even, and more just for both the city and the countryside? I identify the overthrow of Suharto from power by the *Reformasi Movement* as a good starting point to answer this question.

The strength of the *Reformasi Movement* was its ability to organize protests that brought together groups from various ideological backgrounds. The overthrow of Suharto from

power marked or symbolized the success of *Reformasi Movement*. Yet, replacing Suharto was not the only point on the agenda of the *Reformasi Movement* in 1998. The People's Democratic Union (*Persatuan Rakyat Demokratik*) which later on transformed into the People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik/PRD*) – the hard core of the opposition against Suharto's – for instance also demanded the abolition of army's dual function. The army has a military role, but also was active socio-politically. A clear manifestation of the latter is the right of members of the army to be chosen by the president as governors. The PRD also demanded lower prices, the repeal of five political laws, increased wages for labour, and a referendum for East Timor people (Miftahuddin, 2002).

The *Reformasi Movement* successfully intervened in Indonesia's politics, with many of PRD's demands being met: the overthrowing of Suharto from power; the abolition of the dual function of the army; and the independence of East Timor. When measured against their own agenda, in this case the demands by the PRD, the *Reformasi Movement* was successful. However, replacing Suharto is different from eliminating uneven development under capitalism. Without a clear and straight-forward critique to the capitalist mode of production, it becomes difficult to see capitalist uneven development and urbanization as common enemies. The effect is that unevenness persists, both in/through rural land dispossession, urban eviction, and urbanization (development of flood infrastructure for example). How to more explicitly frame and explain the battle against unevenness as connected to a critique of capitalist development, then, is the wider question that this concluding chapter would like to deal with.

Indeed, the question then becomes how to deal with the uneven capitalist development. Can I, now, have a life beyond capitalism? Timothy Mitchell's (2002: 303) metaphor is my favourite vehicle to think through this, as he explains how capitalism sits in human "bodies and minds", just like *Plasmodium falciparum*. Once you are infected, it is almost impossible to get rid of it. While typing this concluding chapter, I am fully infected by capitalism – my laptop and font in this text are part of, and even my brain is supported by nutrients I gain from the commodity chain of, a capitalist mode of production.

Searching for alternatives to capitalism, I have been involved with a small collective of *Serikat Tani Kota Semarang* (Semarang City Farmers Collective/STKS) in 2020. I worked with this collective following my move to Semarang, the capital of Central Java Province, in early 2019, as I worked part time as a researcher at the University of Amsterdam in an urban groundwater governance research project – the *Ground Up* project – and finished this thesis. The initiation of the STKS was motivated by the COVID-19 crises, particularly urban food insecurity. STKS was a collective initiative of Semarang citizens who gathered to grow food and protect water: planting in or occupying the ruined or unused spaces/lands (Padawangi, 2020), as well as conserving springs and small pools at the upland-suburb of Semarang city.

In relation to my search for alternatives to capitalism, STKS's initiatives carry two meanings. First, STKS's initiatives reconfigured the space of the suburban landscape. Urban wastelands and brownfields are a capitalist commodity. Even if land in or around the city is abandoned and/or degraded, it is still owned by someone or by the state. Those lands are there to be sold, bought, or planted/built on. STKS's initiatives planted on the abandoned and degraded land, and distributed the harvests to its members or other people "according to each needs" (*sesuai kebutuhan masing-masing*) (Batubara and Handriana, 2021a: 43) without a need to pay. This distribution scheme worked beyond the market scheme dictated by capitalist exchange-value, as it was organized under the scheme of use-value. STKS's initiatives of urban farming produced non-commodity food (non-capitalistic) products out of commodified (capitalistic) land. The distribution of the harvest produced by STKS operated beyond the capitalist mode of production founded on the uneven/exploitative relations of labour by capitalist and the unevenness of market exchange looking for profit. Second, the conservation of natural springs and pools by STKS helped to store rain water in the upland area of the city, so contributing to the flood management of the lowland part or of the city as a whole. Here, STKS's practices of conservation transformed the society-nature relation by conserving the function of springs and pools – reconfiguring the function of abandoned and/or degraded urban spaces.

STKS's initiative was certainly small in terms of the city's overall food needs, and the harvest was unable to fulfil all of the food needs of its activists. Practices of water conservation of STKS were also too small to have a significant impact on the hydrological cycle over and/or below the city of Semarang. In total, in 2020, STKS and its network in and beyond Semarang planted less than half of hectare (STKS internal document, unpublished); the city of Semarang occupies 373,700 hectares (BPS Kota Semarang, 2020a: 5). STKS's small initiatives operated within the much larger capitalized urban landscape, and the actions of the coalition were perhaps less than a ripple in the capitalist ocean ("*hanya remah dalam celah-celah kapitalisme*" [Batubara and Handriana, 2021a: 44]). However, while small in terms of its food supply and hydrological significance, STKS members meet weekly to discuss routes to political change, and through this designed a proposal for how to advance direct democracy (STKS, 2021). In this proposal, the state is considered as an obstacle to direct democracy and is to be replaced with municipal organizations (*Majelis/Dewan Rakyat*) which further on are aggregated in a confederation of municipalities. The proposal is designed according to the principle of direct democracy, so that the higher the order of the regulatory framework, the less power it possesses. For example, the confederation of municipal organizations is not given much authority to make strategic decisions, but is there rather to administrate strategic issues already decided at the level of the municipality.

Reading the actions and ideas of STKS through the lens of my thesis, I see merit and hope in how this proposal for direct democracy could change the allocation of power to the central (*pusat*), and regional (provincial/*provinsi* and district/*kabupaten*) government and

their apparatuses, the (post-) New Order capitalist state, as well as the oligarchical groups using the state as a vehicle for their own interests. The proposal for direct democracy generated from the small activist circle of STKS resonates with other ideas for direct democracy now discussed in many cities in Indonesia, including Semarang itself (Semarang Melawan/SM, 2020), Jakarta (Talan et al., 2020), and Yogyakarta (Aliansi Rakyat Bergerak/ARB, 2020).

The imagination of alternatives to the current political system – and organization of life – in the form of direct democracy is of course just a beginning and there is no clear or easy pathway to change the Indonesia’s politics. As I have shown in this thesis, the movement of capitalism progressing into the opposite direction of promoting spatial concentration, wealth centralization, and capital accumulation. This type of development will further widen the unevenness, expanding the differences between the have and have not, between capital reproduction and social and ecological reproduction, between human and non-human, between the city and the non-city, and deepens the uneven urbanization of capitalist development. My task in this thesis has been to make sense my own life and to unravel the uneven processes of urbanization in its relation to Jakarta’s flooding – to connect the more-than-human and more-than-city, all the survivors of uneven urbanization – and to scientifically open more possibilities for changes the system from within. The rest – if you agree with my explanation throughout this thesis – of what is to be done, are ours collectively to work out. I echo David Harvey (2001: 203) when he discussed action for change, “No one can go it alone”.