

## **Livelihoods and the Play of Eviction in the Aquarium Neighborhood**

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### **Abstract**

The Jakarta government evicted an urban community of Aquarium in 2016, which caused socioeconomic and immaterial difficulties. Such difficulties appear from destroyed livelihoods but instigated a kind of play in the community. A theory of urban play envisages how the community responds and utilizes failed development projects drawing from the practices of graffiti, car jockeys, and navigation of traffic jams. The research method includes field and internet ethnography for around one year. The respondents in total include 35 people, e.g., 19 males and 16 females, and 44 focus group discussions from various backgrounds in the Aquarium neighborhood. Data analysis methods include a comprehensive approach and manual open coding technique towards the ethnographic data. The research uncovers worsening precarious life, plunging the Aquarium community from poverty to severity. The severity includes massive loss of occupations, and houses, unexpected eviction costs, the loss of markets and crowdedness for market support, and the multi-source of income as in small shops and housing rental. The Aquarium people respond with an urban play as a small tactic for survival, responding to violence and difficulty. The urban play includes bringing appliances, mobilizing small mobs, and opening their clothes with only underwear covering the breasts and sexual organs to seek the empathy of apparatuses for stopping the eviction. Aquarium people showed urban play as a claim of space without aggression and a last-resort weapon to sustain urban life, an archetype of resistance through spatial practice.

**Keywords:** Livelihoods, Urban Play, Resistance, Eviction

### **Introduction**

The Jakarta government evicted the urban community of Kampung Aquarium in North Jakarta in 2016 for urban transformation that aligns with a global trend. Next, the people faced socioeconomic destruction and a repressed mental state. It causes the Aquarium people to become victims of precarious urban life. The urban transformation created a new urban life in

Jakarta with progression but marginalized a particular Aquarium people. The current condition shows that urban transformation has simultaneously modernized the city's spaces and the existence of people with access to wealth but neglected Aquarium people who experience poverty. The global eviction trend showed from 1998 to 2008 that 18.5 million people were evicted forcibly worldwide, according to the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE). Between 2007 and 2008, the COHRE's report further stated that Asia contributed to 55% of 872,926 evicted people (United Nations Housing Rights Programme, 2011). Jakarta has been renowned for eviction, with 193 urban evictions to 5,726 households and 5,379 business units in 2016, when Aquarium people were evicted (Legal Aid Institute-Jakarta, 2017). Urban development through the vocation of urban planning has made forced evictions and exclusion, which signify the insufficient protection of the urban poor and inequitable urban services and economic opportunities as cities' key challenges. It also represents that the cities are arenas of contestation between different interests (United Nations Housing Rights Programme, 2022).

Urban development has displaced the homes and spaces, the material existence, and the livelihoods of the Aquarium people. Aquarium, whose homes and lives are disrupted by development, has no choice but to navigate the new physical landscapes. The disruption of living areas and homes further responded to resistance and identity despite the material loss. Through eviction and gentrification, urban transformation recreated the Aquarium people into an oppressed state and enunciated actions to defend their rights. The two contending situations imply how transformation gives a sense of progression to urban life but displaces and situates the Aquarium people into a marginal position.

The marginalization of the Aquarium people has brought indispensable misery to urban life and resistance against eviction. Kampung Aquarium, an urban settler in North Jakarta, was displaced forcibly in 2016 due to the Jakarta government's urban heritage program. The meaning of kampung is associated with a living area or neighborhood in the Indonesian context. Governor of Jakarta Basuki T.P./Ahok executed heritage programs that evicted the space of Aquarium people. The Eviction of Kampung Aquarium happened on April 11, 2016, through the mobilization of a vast number of personnel from the Indonesian army, police, and public order enforcers, which victimized 500 households (Legal Aid Institute-Jakarta, 2017; Setiawan & Aziz, 2017).

Given its long and significant role in the vicinity of North Jakarta, the Jakarta government and the general public could not simply mention the Aquarium community as an illegal occupant of the area. The history of the Aquarium community started in the 1970s when their elders stayed in the fish laboratory of the Indonesia Institute of Science/LIPI. The neighborhood was formerly known as the Laboratorium of National Oceanography of LIPI, with big aquariums for conserving and examining fish. The fish market in the southern part has been working with the same function for a long time. There was also a Heksagon market next to it. However, both markets have been destroyed for revitalization now. The giant aquariums led to the community's name until now, even though the name is Indonesianized by changing the font q into k, as Aquarium.

Furthermore, there is a related question of rights for the urban community preceding the research objectives. Harms (2016) enlarges how rights become meaningless rhetoric oppressing the marginalized urban in Vietnam. The rights only work for those with connections that oppress powerless people, such as the urban poor. In this research, the Jakarta government utilizes the planning system as a matter of law and politics in their history. Harms' explanation instigates the research that urban eviction led to precarious urban life, then could enact intelligent response and survival in the Aquarium people. In light of the background, this research draws a closer perspective of the Aquarium neighborhood's livelihoods and response with the following research questions:

1. What livelihoods of the Aquarium people exist upon the eviction by the Jakarta Provincial Government?
2. How does the community respond with an urban play towards eviction and gentrification by the Jakarta government?

The article mainly contributes to urban sociology and anthropology by adopting the theory of urban play to deepen further the community's life, movement, and the process of urban eviction and to examine livelihoods secondarily. There is an introduction, a literature review, and a research methodology. Three results sections cover the livelihoods of the Aquarium, the displacement among the Aquarium people, and how it is against the ruination of eviction and keeping the neighborhood. In the end part, this research provides a conclusion.

## **Literature review**

### **Livelihoods**

Livelihoods often work against and tackle material poverty, which has a more significant meaning for people. Individuals and groups strive to meet various necessities, cope with uncertainty, react to new opportunities, and select different value positions (Staples, 2007). Livelihoods are everyday narratives referring to how people work to make a living while focusing on making it meaningful (Bebbington, 2000). Nevertheless, the definition of livelihoods is complete with the economic base in the urban context.

The economic base corresponds to the essential livelihood processes of urban transformation. The base is locally and historically formed, comprising elements that people appropriate, create, share, and use concerning one another. A farmer thinks as base his house, land, and crops. In the Aquarium people, the factory outside their neighborhood, market, and food stall services are the base. Knowledge and skills are also involved in the base, such as the apprenticeship and explicit instruction with the material space they occupy. The base to which persons in a community are connected ensures an identity (Gudeman, 2012). Material accumulations include food, improved land, tools, and equipment supporting present functions. For the most part, households maintain stocks of food and clothing in varying amounts. Poverty means having no base in this regard. The lack of a base affects urban squatters in most parts of the world. The condition of urban squatters entails a large constellation of urban transformation processes, such as eviction and gentrification, allowing a degree of volatility.

The volatile situation happens from the urban form and process that disrupts, dispossesses, and reorganizes according to the reasons and actors capable of moving sufficient force and articulation (Simone, 2015). Das and Randeria (2015) highlight the poor in volatile terms who struggle within the given economic and political structures to ensure they have access to development and secure the economic base while engaging with some arrangements even though fragile within administrative structures. The volatile condition also envisages wild oscillations between the opening and closing opportunities among the urban poor. The oscillated window appears through eviction and gentrification in the Aquarium neighborhood.

### **Urban play against eviction**

Either governmental or capital power forces inhabitants of cities to move from their homes and settlements. Some studies have problematized evictions with various factors, such as land tenure, indigenous community, luxury housing, and environmental programs, as an underlying motive for the government or landlord or both combined to force out mostly the urban disenfranchised or people in general (Portelli & Lees, 2018; Johnston, 2014; Ascensão & Rodrigues, 2020; Doshi, 2019). Learning from Rio de Janeiro, the anti-eviction has its dynamics to the degree of resistance to success or failure based on contextual reasons that shape contentious relationships, including actors' political and economic circumstances and political alignment, changing political opportunity structures, and land values. It may contribute to the hands of either side of the resisting community or the city government (Sørbye & Braathen, 2022). The Rio de Janeiro anti-eviction happened similarly when the Aquarium neighborhood existed through eviction and gentrification as two different political opportunities that their movement began after the eviction.

Eviction often reproduces values yet curtails social life. Harms (2012) coins beauty as a control that creates a modern city with beautiful open spaces in urban anthropology debates. Such beautification involves eviction or spatial cleansing of urban populations. Urban programs are often highly fluid and coded positively to resonate deeply with people at different stations in social life, which can signal hopes, desires, and alternative values. Interestingly, the aesthetic possibilities emerge beyond a dichotomy of domination and resistance that Thu Thiêm people of Ho Chi Minh City are angry about being evicted but not about building a new urban zone (p. 737). Thu Thiêm residents are actively engaged in many actions of everyday and overt resistance to top-down development projects (Harms, 2012; Scott, 1985). Herzfeld (2009) argues that a brutal order of eviction works as a kind of terminal switching between the older residents who stakes their neighborhood and kinship. They also feel the threat from those new entrepreneurs who made enormous profits in the case of modern Rome development.

People might respond to eviction as urbanistic violence is crucial. There is a high possibility for each community to endure a neoliberal form of power with a strategy or a play more than just allowing alternative values. To that end, a scholar recently problematizes urban play that shows graffiti emerging from class differences. An urban anthropologist, Doreen Lee, coined the urban play twice in her articles on Jakarta, which means a response with art and intelligence to failed urban development projects. Lee (2013) highlights how the creation of

graffiti as a wall, mainly drawing without public permission, built upon the existing ruined infrastructure, e.g., sidewalks, bus stops, storefronts, etc., to shove the public with witty urban stories. Graffiti uncovers the difference between the ordered urbanism prepared by the middle classes and the unwanted presence while emphasizing the labor pool outside these exclusive enclaves. Graffiti symbolizes tropical deterioration that the social condition enacts upon surfaces rather than a symbol of a social breakdown in daily context.

Furthermore, the car jockey in the street-based economy and daily traffic indicate urban play. The Jakarta business area applies a three-in-one zone between morning and evening. Each car has to go into there and carry at least three passengers. The car jockeys often appear neat and clean to the professional and privileged class that stops to pick them up. They often negotiate with them the price of their services at the length of the trip (Lee, 2015). Jockey employment is a prominent example of spatial and practical negotiations where the street-based economy accommodates the underclass. A Jakarta artist, Irwan Ahmett filmed a video on navigating the traffic scape in Jakarta using the metaphor of Mousedeer Crossing the Street (*Kancil Menyeberang Jalan*) from Southeast Asian folktales (Ahmett & Salina, 2013). The folktale shows the mousedeer as an agile and small animal, often manipulating a fleet of crocodiles to cross the river safely. The mousedeer is personified in traffic encounters of Jakarta citizens. The traffic is challenging due to a garrison of motorbikers ahead of the cars when crossing the zebra cross. Such an encounter implies traffic agents and effects to exhibit that the takeover of space does not essentially form aggression or a permanent claim (p. 248). Three figures have scholarly potential to uncover how mundane urban life implies urban play's meanings.

In that way, this research extends Lee's above problematizations of an urban play. Graffiti, car jockeys, and crossing traffic in ruined urban infrastructure corresponds with the Aquarium community's response to eviction. Those responses represent deeper insight into the realities of a city's social order. It is an exchange between structure and agency through the condition of urban space. The jockey and navigation signify what kind of games we can play in public in terrible traffic (p. 247). Clifford Geertz understands the play and other cultural forms as social texts. Geertz coins deep play upon the cockfight life in Bali. Deep play is a text inscribed with cultural meaning and a meta-social explanation of Balinese life (Lefever, 1988). Lefever (p. 13) also underlines playing the Dozens as a social text in the ghetto community. The social text allows the essence of masculinity, performance values, and a normative code. Playing the Dozens enables youth to avoid boredom concurrently to increase self-esteem and poke fun at failures. This frequent battle is related to what Bateson mentions as framed behavior, which is understood as part of the ritual and is not taken personally. In contrast, the play element emphasizes its seriousness, and the play is for real. Play is a liminal reversal of ordinary, everyday experience. They express the realities of the ghetto experience while remaking that experience, which represents an inscription of a particular social life (p. 12).

There is also relevance regarding the value and definition of urban play. Castro Seixas (2022, p. 37) mentioned that play has intrinsic social value in an urban context. The importance of inhabitants' lived experiences and power introduce playful applications in the environment

that also improve their daily lives, serving the quest for the right to the city as an interactive, unpredictable, and open-ended nature (p. 37). Urban play can be seen as a way for people to create and reinforce social bonds, negotiate power dynamics, and express their identities and values. Similarly, the Akuarium neighborhood has shown a pattern of contending the eviction while solidifying their neighborhood bond.

Urban play has a cultural dimension beyond the immediate form of spatial and practicality that opens new meanings of survival and its happening process. Urban play can be seen as a way for people to create and reinforce social bonds, negotiate power dynamics, and express their identities and values. There is a need to comprehend the Akuarium's play upon precarious life and movement within Jakarta's social order.

### **Research methods**

The research uses an ethnography to study the livelihood and urban play of the Akuarium community. The choice of ethnography grasps the people's experience through fieldwork and internet mode, which is difficult to cover by other methods. "Ethnography is an artistic way to conceive of the business of being human involved with a multiplicity of conceptual structures that knitted into one another" (Kutsche, 1998). An internet-based ethnography employs online observations, interviews, and supplementary informant materials as a research method (Sade-Beck, 2004).

I conducted fieldwork and online observation to create a robust analysis during one year of ethnography. Field ethnography was completed in around one month and a quarter, while internet ethnography lasted approximately eleven months. To this data, I also ran visualization from official documents and literature. The level of analysis is individuals and social phenomena in the Akuarium neighborhood. The data collection facilitates an intense depiction of what kind of livelihoods exist and how urban play emerges and works. Besides, the preferred research site comes from a theoretical dimension (Gopaldas, 2016). I chose the Akuarium community based on the above theories. All Akuarium people's names and characters testified in the ethnography are pseudonyms, while some names in Figure 2 are confirmed. People in Figure 2 have permitted their names to be published. Ethnography includes document searches, interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and observations. All are processed with manual coding as part of data analysis.

The ethnography collects documents such as urban policy documents, people's archives, and the media, in addition to comprehensive interviewing regarding the Akuarium people from the internet and fieldwork. The documents cover articles, newspapers, magazines, and government online or printed documents. It also includes visualization and narrative explaining their geographical change over time, particularly before and after eviction. An in-depth interview understands Akuarium people from an inner perspective, while a semi-structured interview allows new information to generate potential data. The online process includes asking open-ended questions from Zoom as the primary tool, WhatsApp messages, and phone calls. Besides, a few interview sessions are intended for the Jakarta local officials

and urban activists, such as Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) and Rujak Center for the Urban Studies (RCUS). The total interviewees are 35 people, including 19 males and 16 females.

Focus group discussion (FGD) discovers mutual experience for several people based on a specific topic conducted in some steps. I ask about the experience of changing urban play, livelihoods, and identity regarding urban transformation. FGD run through online, onsite, and mixed process as well. The total of FGDs is 44. I ran FGD during the free time of the Akuarium people. Various social backgrounds in the community joined forty-four FGDs.

Observation means understanding research interlocutors deeply by engaging actively in everyday life as participant observation, whereas passively in non-participant observation during the fieldwork. I participated in various community activities such as charity, money collection, hanging out, and an Independence day celebration. Formal and casual immersion in their event gave me high-quality ethnographic data in non-participant observation. I often engaged with the people who work and voluntarily guard the security post at the front of the Akuarium housing.

Data analysis methods include a comprehensive approach to interpreting the ethnographic data. The comprehensive approach aims to analyze, explain, and contend the data based on the main research questions, the conceptual framework, and theories. The process starts with managing transcripts and field notes and then conducts an open-coding technique to categorize data manually. The research executes ethnographic data analysis based on research questions, conceptual framework, and theories that dovetail with the ethnography method. The manual coding process is used as a data analysis method.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Livelihoods of Akuarium: Irregular worker and business for prolonging life**

Each member of the Akuarium community had their job in the advent, then deteriorated after the eviction. The economic value of the destroyed assets and how people react to the financial loss are the primary concerns of livelihoods. People simultaneously own several economic means, such as food stalls and housing rentals, to fulfill their economic needs. Eviction destroyed the multiple sources of income people kept. Such multilayer livelihood of Akuarium appears more significant through people's stories during my fieldwork, which exacerbates the Jakarta province's statement on the economic loss. According to the report by the Jakarta government (2018), eviction has shifted the community's entire economy. The wide range of jobs owned by Akuarium people had losses, proving the financial loss more profoundly on the ground.

The financial loss due to eviction matters more in light of the economic base. One of my interlocutors addressed how she had a problem with the eviction because her economic tools had gone. Before the Eviction, Arida sold fried sausages, fritters, and tamagoyaki for kids and youngsters, earning Rp. 300.000 daily. In doing the business, she owned a fryer cab with a price of Rp. 1,5 million but then sold it at Rp. 500.000 after the eviction. The eviction has implicated more significant financial difficulties where she sold many things to cover unpredicted costs such as moving expenses and renting houses. She traded her air conditioner

and a car after her mom lost four rented rooms to cover the expenses. The implication of eviction happened unexpectedly, emphasizing how the base matters.

The Aquarium economic base entails spatial proximities where crowds generate more income for people's shops. Some owners of small shops were convinced and generalized that eviction made fewer people surrounding the neighborhood area. The fewer people made less income for the owners. A small shop in the Aquarium neighborhood, or *warung* in Indonesian, appears below. Small shop owners believe the old place brought better access for keeping stocks of their goods, cash flowing, and a higher possibility of people visiting the area.

Interestingly, those owners said the current neighborhood with better building apartments did not guarantee better buyers for their shops. It is because the new apartment as a proper building limits the crowdedness. The new apartment below has been constructed as compensation for the eviction. People must take the stairs to reach the shop more actively, not on the first floor. People who wanted to buy from outside the neighborhood were unlikely to come compared to the flat ground, which was more open to people before the eviction. Another shop owner confirmed how the emptier community, only less than one-third of the initial population, makes fewer people visit their shops. Before the Eviction, Arida even personified that the old area brings a strong wave where people always cross her sausage stalls from many directions. Numerous people had better access to buying her sausages. The change in space had an unexpected impact on people's livelihoods.

Space in the form of distance matters when the social housing as immediate reparation is far from their workplace. Most Aquarium people rejected the relocation to social housing or *rusunawa* because the location is remote from places they search for income. One *rusunawa* in Rawa Bebek is around 30 kilometers from the Aquarium neighborhood, where many resettled there after the eviction. What happened here for Aquarium members is a macro representation of people experiencing poverty in Jakarta. Savirani and Wilson (2018) argue that around 80 percent of *rusunawa* residents are victims of eviction and forced relocation and occupy approximately 25,000 social housing. More problematically, the social housing often on the outskirts of Jakarta caused further problems where people needed to borrow money for transport and daily needs from loan sharks, piling up their economic burdens. The congestion and limitation of land in Jakarta implicate how the provincial governments address poverty problems with affordable housing. Affordable housing does not solve the urban poor problem. The spatial distance matters in determining the livelihoods of the Aquarium community as a representation of the poor community in Jakarta.

The livelihoods of the Aquarium people appeared more when I became immersed with them by hanging out in many corners of the neighborhood. In Indonesian popular culture, life in Aquarium is similar to many TV series, as in *Ojek Pengkolan* or *Motorbike Taxi in a Junction* but even worse and poorer. Unlike in the series, many motorbike taxi drivers can fund their children to go to school or college and throw jokes at each other. Aquarium people have little money than them and can only throw jokes. Most men I met also smoked extensively, more than their ability to afford food, which is common in Indonesian communities. Men hanging around the front gate collect and scavenge things like excess iron from a construction project



to resell in the second-hand market. Women usually take care of their kids, whom they know their future will not be much different from theirs. They offer everyday soft loans such as clothes and cooking appliances. One of them, Darina, provides clothes for celebrating Eid al-Fitr to her fellow mothers, who would repay in three or four installments. Such precarious life signifies the irregular and volatile livelihoods of the Aquarium neighborhood.



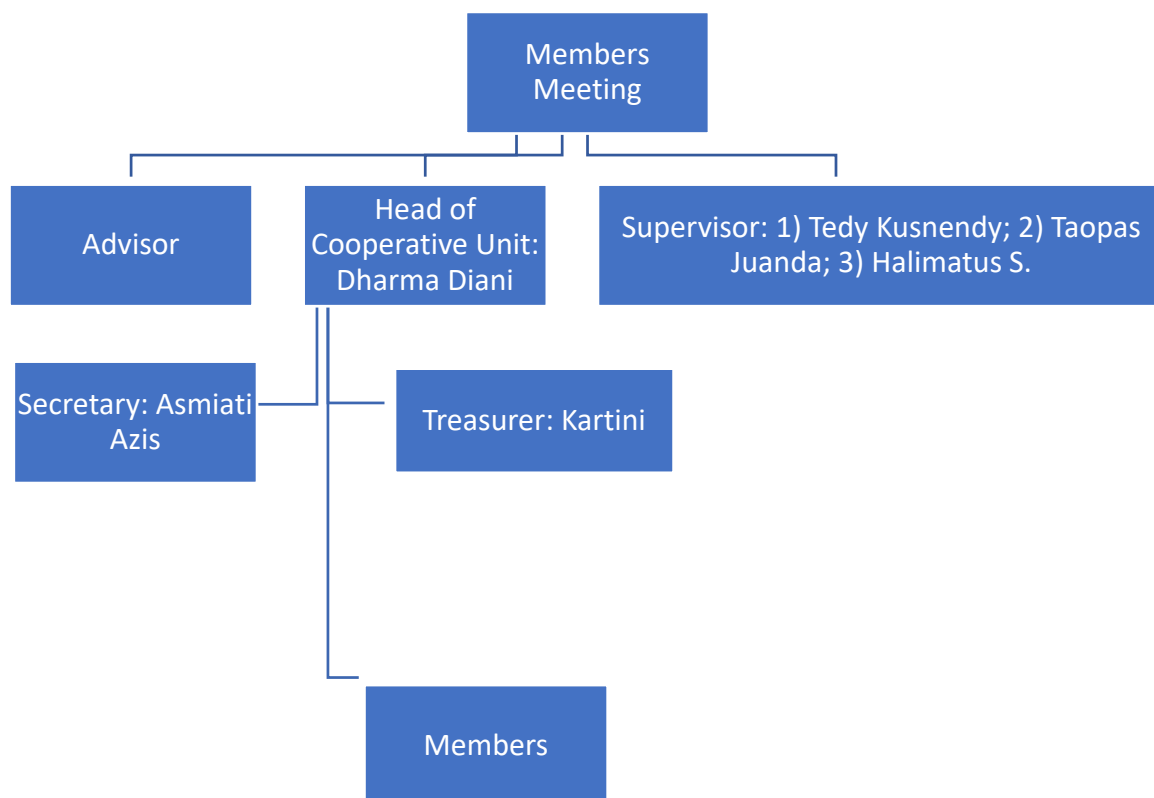
**Figure 1** *Warung* or Small Shop in the Aquarium Neighborhood

**Source:** data collection, 2022

Furthermore, mothers exchanging everyday loans such as clothes and cooking appliances happen to support livelihoods. Darina usually provides three or four installments to fellow mothers for a pair of new clothes for the Eid Fitr event. The Eid Fitr often requires people to wear the newest and finest clothes as a remark of the holiest days after the Muslims feast for one month. Some mothers in the Aquarium neighborhood could pay her when the money is available. Darina has flexibility and would only ask about the debt but occasionally

them. She usually goes to Tanah Abang market to get only around a dozen women's clothes, then offers them. The loan payment allows Darina to cover her returning home's travel expenses to rural Banten. Indonesians often return to their home during the Eid Fitr. Everyday loans become an affordable means for mothers to fulfill their livelihood needs.

Darina has a prosperous livelihood in the neighborhood, owning two medium-sized shops and an economic belief before the eviction. I asked her and their husband how the sales at the current small shop compared to the previous one. Her husband answered, "My current shop is reduced. It is more than reduced but completely gone". He elaborated about two medium shops profiting him around 8 million rupiahs per month. Moreover, one day, they could make a total revenue of around 14 million rupiahs. Now, the shop only provides them money far less at around 100 thousand rupiahs. Even their children must support them with monthly remittances. I also asked Darina why she still wanted to stay in the Akuairum neighborhood. She answered, "I believe the neighborhood has *puteran rezeki kenceng* (a strong spin of economic fortune) because it lays both land and sea." She believes the neighborhood's location on the coast covering land and sea could bring *rezeki* or economic fortune. In Indonesian Muslims, *rezeki* is like destined prosperity and possible economic fortune given by the god Allah SWT.



**Figure 2** Structure of Aquarium Bangkit Mandiri (ABM) Cooperative

**Source:** data collection, 2022

One cooperative unit supports livelihoods and tries to solve the precarious life of the Aquarium people, as in the picture above. The highest consensus is at members' cooperative meetings, where each member agrees on a particular issue. The Head of the Cooperative Unit is Dharma Diani, whom people saw have contributed hugely to the struggle against eviction throughout time. During my fieldwork, I witnessed how the cooperative played a significant role as a community administrator in supporting the economy internally and outside the neighborhood. The ABM Cooperative manages the settlement process of vertical kampung through intensive discussion with the Jakarta officials and management of vertical kampung. Aquarium people said the vertical kampung means an old neighborhood with its sociality transformed into vertical buildings instead of its original form in flat land.

In the administration, the cooperative collects a monthly rent of around one hundred thousand rupiahs per unit charged to all people of Aquarium. The money is allocated for water, electricity, and building maintenance. The cooperative uses the overhead cash to save and fund public events such as Independence days and eviction commemoration. Apart from taking from people, the ABM cooperative opened its enterprises commercially. There are five enterprises: rent guesthouses for visitors and workers, laundry, rent space for business, water gallon business, and food catering. These enterprises allow more sources of income for the cooperative yet still support the neighborhood's livelihoods with a minimal amount.

There is a high amount of debt from the construction laborer who built Buildings B and D to the ABM cooperative. Food catering in the Aquarium cooperative has given those workers chances to eat first but pay later when they get paid after the building project is finished. The debt is huge, around 200 to 300 million rupiahs for workers' food during seven months. For the last seven months, food catering as part of the Aquarium cooperative has had to compensate for the food cost. The Aquarium cooperative member said those workers had paid only 28 million rupiahs. So those workers still have vast debt, around 200 million now. The Aquarium cooperative members felt traumatized because of those huge debts. Idi, one of Aquarium's leaders, said there was also nothing to seize as compensation from those construction workers. In contrast, there is a sense of letting the debt happen as those workers were the ones who built the neighborhood.

### **The misery and movement of the eviction**

The geographical conditions varied from heritage, fishery, and coastal to industrial areas that affected the Aquarium inhabitants. The eviction in 2016 destroyed the Hexagon market and the surrounding vicinity that supported the economic means of the people. More importantly, the Aquarium people decreased to only one-seventh of the initial population.

Eviction has brought controversy to the Aquarium community. The urban policy initiated the incident, which the Jakarta Government report called "relocation" to make it more humane. The controversy is that the Jakarta provincial government could not show their land certificate as a basis for removal, according to Rujak Center for Urban Studies (RCUS), an urban NGO that assists the Aquarium community. RCUS informed that the Jakarta provincial government only showed the Aquarium land under an inventory list of asset management. Such

controversy exercised how the poor command of urban governance has caused a lethal effect on the community through eviction.

The devastating impact of eviction is apparent to the Aquarium community. The Jakarta provincial government (2018) confirmed that eviction has significantly worsened the community's economy. The report mentioned that the primary economy of people there was opening grocery and dairy stores, renting houses, fishermen, and carpenters. In general, the Aquarium community perceived themselves as the urban poor of Jakarta. Similarly, outsiders see them as a low-income community. Some people and most officials perceived them as urban slums or squatters of Jakarta in derogatory way. One community leader of Aquarium did not like and rejected this naming. After the eviction, enterprises who work are only grocery and dairy stores, cooking gas sellers, and fishermen. The report (p. 278) believed this changed due to the eviction eliminating land for enterprises. This situation shows a particular livelihood of the community with its structural weakness and disadvantages due to poverty. As a perpetrator, the Jakarta government realized the eviction they executed had plunged the community into precarity.

Aquarium people did not sleep for a night on April 11, 2016, to secure the incoming eviction the next day. All Aquarium residents have stood by their area precisely at the call for dawn prayer. They were there to halt. Excavators and officials came to demolish houses, while 300 people of Kampung Aquarium prevented them. Males of Aquarium stood to stop eviction but were then arrested. Then, the mothers linked their hands to create a human chain, but the officials of more than 5,000 personnel detained them individually. Chaos happened after this hustle. The officials evicted the entire neighborhood at around 8 a.m morning.

Aquarium people used a range of movements to stop the eviction, while the Jakarta provincial government strived to make it happen. There were around 6.000 apparatuses from Indonesia's national army/TNI, national police/POLRI, and public order enforcers/Satpol PP to evict 500 households (Januardy et al., 2017; Setiawan & Aziz, 2017). Aquarium people called those apparatuses three pillars. The extremely imbalanced power between the people and the official shows the violent eviction process for them. Aquarium people kept staying in their place while previously asking for help from Legal Aid Institute/LBH Jakarta. The Jakarta government destroyed more than the physical structure but also its social life, which triggered resistance among them.

LBH Jakarta strengthened the Aquarium position with the prominent figures' influence to organize further. Ratna Sarumpaet, an activist and celebrity, advocated the Aquarium issue productively. She explained the eviction chronologically and disseminated it in printed and electronic media, as in the picture above. Her overnight visit to the area was with friends to gain more support. There are also civil society organizations, e.g., the Rujak Center for Urban Studies and Urban Poor Consortium (UPC). Their involvement pushes more flourishing movements. Ratna asked her daughter Atiqah Hasiholan, who has a similar background, to create a donation for tents and bedsheets. Such pieces of equipment were necessary at that time. Atiqah is an icon of LBH Jakarta. Anonymous Informant Kmd considered this organizing significant for a small area like Kampung Aquarium. He emphasized that many environmental

activists supported their movement during the incident. The stronger position signifies how they utilize networking and action to fight against eviction.



**Figure 3** Ratna Sarumpaet protests the eviction

**Source:** data collection, 2022

Reflecting on the movement against eviction, those actors engage in an urban revival in which the community takes a solid basis beneath it. Resistance emerges from each counterpart that helps the Aquarium people's movement. In Lefebvre's term (1996), the movement resembles what *oeuvre* means in a city, implying the everyday action of human beings to alter and revive the urban life of Aquarium people. The urban revival builds over their grief of eviction. Sense of a victim catapulted them to demand fair treatment without force and their homes back. The community who lose their place turns to feel disturbed, making them unable to dwell in the neighborhood. As shown in the picture below, many Aquarium people saw the neighborhood as a home to gather their children and future generations. The community rejuvenated from tragedy to urban revival with the above actors.

The sense of victim appeared more when people passed away because of rubble conditions. Twenty-seven elders got various diseases, such as respiratory problems, and died after one year of eviction. This health problem occurred because of the neighborhood's worst and the dirtiest environment. Additionally, Aquarium people supported younger leaders to



escalate change and advocacy. Sense of victim and encouragement of young leaders are essential elements to contend the eviction.

The eviction shattered social life, mainly when a little conflict occurred. A quarrel followed between those who stayed and those who took replacement houses. Aquarium women convinced each other to refrain from taking housing from the Jakarta government. The conflict not last because both sides accepted each explanation and let go. District officials offered residents the replacement in social housing or *rumah susun* individually. The offering caused little conflict among the people. The officials initially proposed Marunda and Cakung social housing, but the people rejected it. In the end, they gave Kapuk social housing with consideration of close distance after making the house vacant from occupants who had not paid.



**Figure 4** The Aquarium vicinity before eviction

**Source:** data collection, 2022

The urban movement by the Aquarium people implied a high survival of countering terror. They were recreating places and created a neighborhood tasking. The work distribution included things that involved women residents. People guarded the area and distributed work to handle the mess upon eviction from 2016 to 2018. There was a guarding in the ruins of their neighborhood against terror apparatuses from the Indonesian army/TNI and the national police, who often came unexpectedly regardless of the time.

A real sense of place was in peril, reflected by renaming the praying site or *musalla*. The officials who evicted the area did not find *musalla* before. They realized the Aquarium people were resting during the three days of terror after the eviction. District officials joined the military the following day to destroy the praying place. The Aquarium people rebuilt the praying site and changed the name from Al-Ikhlās to Al-Jihad. In Islamic terms, *jihad* means powerfully striving for something that signals the community's power to resist eviction. Many of them believe the changing name ignites more energy for resistance. The renaming of the praying place implies the intertwining between resistance and Islamism in the Aquarium neighborhood.

Furthermore, the eviction in 2016 implies urban politics. Aquarium people had already received various political acts and urban policies from different Governors of Jakarta. One of them, Governor Basuki TP. (Ahok), made the eviction an apex. Three governors performed variedly to the community, including Joko Widodo (Jokowi), Ahok, and Anies B. Governor Jokowi, who later was Indonesian president, had visited the neighborhood twice during political campaigns with a promise to secure land legality in his early Jakarta political career. However, the promise has yet to happen (Guntoro, 2020). Eviction in 2016 during Governor Ahok's term was not the first attempt to remove the people. The eviction effort had already appeared around 1996 or 1997. The 2016 eviction was unstoppable and changed the vicinity in Figure 4 before. In contrast, Governor Anies is now rebuilding the area into a new settlement. Each of Jakarta's governments reigned and dominated the Aquarium neighborhood.

The Jakarta planning is a political matter in which urbanism was at play to take part as a political alignment and the changing of political opportunities towards the Aquarium neighborhood. The case above shows that two different governors, Ahok and Anies, determine the pathways of the Aquarium neighborhood life. Sørbøe and Braathen (2022) emphasize that the context of anti-eviction has been proven in that case referring to political circumstances and alignment. Such alignment appears from the political contract that the Aquarium neighborhood was part of Urban Poor Consortium's agreement with Governor Anies when he was still a gubernatorial candidate. Governor Anies utilized and remade a previous planning system with a Letter of Approval for Granting Location and Land to rebuild the Aquarium's vertical kampung.

Letter of Approval for Granting Location and Land or *Surat Persetujuan Penunjukan Penggunaan Lokasi atau Lahan* (SP3L) is a core policy instrument to the Aquarium gentrification program. The letter became a primary basis for the Jakarta government to initiate the rebuilding, which refers to Governor Decree No. 640 in 1992 and the revision of Governor Regulation No. 118 in 2020. SP3L allows affordable social housing built by the funding of private sectors without the local state budget. This program is a follow-up because private housing developers have built commercial apartments or luxury buildings with excessive widths. The follow-up program is like a compensated social responsibility for developers to build housing for the general population, especially people experiencing poverty. The specific articles underline these ideas. Article 53 of Governor Regulation No. 118 of the Year 2020 urges compulsory construction for private developers. Moreover, Article 54 encapsulates the

mandatory buildings of flat houses or apartments for developers who have built more than 5000 square meters (Jakarta Provincial Government, 1992; 2020).

More importantly, Governor Ahok's Eviction without a land certificate was followed by sugarcoating with a different motive of water canal development and pretending the eviction would not happen to the Aquarium people. Perez (2014) argues a similar pattern in which planning, bureaucratic action, and expert knowledge have become instruments for exercising different forms of urbanistic violence to the displacement in Bogota. Having no land certificate did not make the Aquarium people stop to sue the Jakarta government for destroying their private buildings. However, they revoked the lawsuit when the shelter started to be rebuilt during the period of Governor Anies. The Aquarium situation matches the following Harvey's explanation when there is no protection for the property. Harvey (2008) argues that a lack of private property rights that the urban government state can remove the urban disenfranchised from the land by fiat, offering a minor cash payment to help them on their way before turning the land over to developers at a high rate of profit.

Ordinary inhabitants or leaders of the Aquarium community emerged as active agents countering the eviction with a specific strategy and intelligence in urban play. In the urbanism of the two regimes, eviction has proved to have a devastating effect apart from an opportunity for recovery in the rebuilding as part of the ruling of urban politics in Jakarta. Beyond, there is a deep humanism propelling to which the community bonded members together and kept a sense of place in the neighborhood.

### **Play to keep neighborhood**

The incidents of urban play happen in a specific way as a means of survival. Katarina is a women leader in the Aquarium community. She met Anies with Prabowo, a political figure who ran for the Indonesian presidency several times, and Sandiaga Uno, later the vice governor of Anies. The time was before Anies was elected as the governor. Anies cornered her, asking what the Aquarium people would expect if he got elected. Katarina replied with an extensive and sole expectation of returning to their neighborhood and did not hope for money.

More experts championed the eviction, whereas Aquarium people condemned it. Notably, she had argued about the violent Eviction with Bestari Barus as a local parliament member/DPRD of Jakarta Provincial Council. Bestari criticized the Aquarium people for why they were still there at that time. The argument was ironic since the role of Bestari as a local parliament should have probed the Jakarta government for the incident instead of questioning Aquarium as the victim. He was also with his media entourage to scold people throughout the interview. Katarina then cried while bravely answering him during the media interview, eviction violating human rights, and, even worse, identity revocation. The colonial Dutch did not erase people's identities. We were born here with our identity cards. All of you bureaucrats use our tax for your work." Aquarium members lost their identity cards because Governor Ahok canceled and forbade the cards to make them leave their neighborhood permanently. In the end, Governor Anies, a successor of Ahok, reactivated the cards. Then, Katarina scolded an urban planning expert, Yogi, who supported Governor Ahok about the displacement. Her



argument questioned what kind of age Yogi lived now, so he prioritized heritage development instead of people's lives. Heritage development here means the eviction based on the Old Town preservation program. Various arguments with officials and experts demonstrate a means of survival as part of the Aquarium's play.



**Figure 5** Shack of the Aquarium Community (Setiawan and Aziz, 2017)

**Source:** data collection, 2022

The eviction created a social shock. The Jakarta government caused precarity from the eviction, which deteriorated the Aquarium's mental state. Katarina vigorously explained the erasure of their history more than economy and housing upon the incident. In a way, it destroyed friendship and customs. She often did something with friends but entirely changed afterward. There was a precarious life immediately and homelessness after the removal. The residents put a pin over the destructed area to identify each house they owned. There was Katarina's house, which still had a complete and decent floor. She said, "I dug the rubble, and the wall was still half. I refurbished it with wood and a cover into a tent. I lived there for two years after the eviction before the shelter finished." Living in a tent was very rough for her. People yelled at each other that their roofs, made of plastic cover, were occasionally displaced when heavy rain came. Indonesians call this kind of house a *gubuk* or shack in English, as in the picture above.

In a shack, living as an Aquarium was adverse. There there needed to more electricity and water. They just connected illegally to an electricity tap and bought the carried water from the seller. To deal with unstable electricity, they use the old mode with kerosene to light their area, making them all body black and smokey. People used wood for cooking food. Some rats bit their babies' feet. She reminisced how she often cried telling this story a while ago but is more resilient now. Then, she continued that it was like a dream that they could pass a hard time. Such a precarious life shocked the overall community.

Beyond that adversity, the history of survival from eviction elucidates more about women's play since a long time ago. President Soeharto and his party, Golkar, intended to occupy Kampung Aquarium through the same eviction mode between 1996 and 1997, according to an Anonymous Interview with Kmd on July 2021. Katarina addressed that past efforts failed because mothers brought appliances, mobilized small mobs, and were nude during that time. Mothers opened their clothes to uncover their vaginas. The dramatic events followed with taunting and chanting of appliances to distract the apparatuses. The loose apparel also implied a gaze of "*oh kasian nih*" or "oh so pity." Besides pity, Diana, a former Aquarium community leader, assured that the opening clothes symbolize *kualat* or bad luck as a little curse in Indonesian culture. *Kualat* works because the apparatuses see women's organs. Their defense mechanism caused the apparatus's pity and cursed them to stop the eviction that signifies the protection of the built environment. These small tactics successfully stopped the eviction but failed in 2016. Apparatuses employing women officers made opening clothes did not work in 2016 by employing women officials to secure the women group. The small tactics showed urban play in the community's history and recent times that have transmitted across time as a survival strategy.

The force of the Jakarta government instigates an urban play for two reasons. The appropriation of space using eviction violated the Aquarium people and recreated them into active agents. Then, the people who think and feel they are victims cause a survival response. The Aquarium community conducted urban play incidentally, with small mob action and survival purposes, which differs from other urban plays, such as car-jockey, graffiti, and traffic, which are routinized for a longer time. Such urban play supports previous research that Bayat (2015) argues that the urban poor of the Middle East tend to be involved in concrete, locally meaningful, and manageable struggles under the articulation of rights terms during the Arab Spring revolution. Also, the urban poor possess social existence with autonomy, flexibility, and pragmatism based on survival and self-development because of structural disadvantages (Bayat, 2007; Wilson, 2019).

### Conclusions and recommendations

Eviction leading to severe poverty and mental conditions have signified the Aquarium community's precious life. Livelihoods in a low-income status as a structural problem deteriorate more in eviction time. The incident erased the various streams of income people, precarious life leading to the destruction of the neighborhood's economic base. As the mastermind, Jakarta's government believed eviction abolished land for community enterprises.

Moreover, eviction disrupted the economic base before and after the event. It includes income, building, citizenship, and market as much as spatial dimensions. The space covers vicinities and crowdedness, which are fundamental factors of people's economy. The Jakarta provincial government wrote off citizenship by revoking the identity card of the Akuarium people. The implication of eviction happened unexpectedly for the community's economic base. Beyond such material conditions, eviction allows the Akuarium people to induce a survival strategy.

The disappearance of the economy and housing overarch social life, including the Akuarium community's history. The mental state of the Akuarium community is affected by the disappearance of social that lead to precariousness. The precarious urban life has triggered the Akuarium people to enact urban play. Urban play emerges as a means of survival from the complex implication of eviction as a failed urban development project. Akuarium people enact an urban play as a small tactic to a variety of violence. Such a strategy is a material form that has been passed across generations.

Urban play among Akuarium people is a claim of space without aggression and a last-resort weapon to sustain community life. In part, resistance is incorporated in the urban play that happened through spatial practice and has been an archetype in Akuarium. It underlies a bounded process of social relations and the city space to contend the forced eviction. The social relation is rooted in their dwelling to home and destroyed social life. The Akuarium members' resistance has been transmitted across generations, such as chanting appliances, mobilizing small mobs, and being nude during the eviction effort. The dramatic events distract the apparatuses, which signify the claim of space without aggression. Urban play is a material form in terms of biopower. The power in a specific time and space causes the response of particular sociality as the Akuairum people have exercised in the urban play.

Furthermore, the research recommends two issues of eviction and gentrification in Jakarta's government and Indonesia's context. There is a significant demand for positioning eviction in the housing policy context in urban governance. Urban governance in Jakarta must consider eviction violating and obstructing the spirit of housing policy. Evicting people violates housing rights and human rights in general. The eviction of the Akuarium people took a fragile basis without any proper land certificate, which should be a bad precedent for urban policy and the public. The halting of local leaders from evicting seems utopic at the current time, but it is crucial to figure out how to stop eviction. What Governor Anies did in rebuilding the Akuarium neighborhood need more appreciation in housing policy in an urban context. The way and process Governor Anies developed is crucial to be expanded nationally in Indonesia's urban policy.

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