Navigating the urban rural frontier in Yogyakarta

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The rural–urban dichotomy seems a quintessential feature of modernity and ongoing processes of modernisation. While at the first glance, the characteristics of rural and urban areas appear to be clear-cut and mutually exclusive, further empirical probing calls into question this black-and-white, woodcut-like representation.

This essay is a musing on experiences of navigating the fringes of the city of Yogyakarta on Java on a motor scooter during a 10 month period of residency in Indonesia. The dialectical analytical approach is inspired by the conversations during the ride to school with my 9 year old son Jacob[1]. The daily trips from our rented house through the suburban traffic allowed us to observe, discuss and analyse the rapid changes we could see taking place along the route. The topic of rural–urban relations and signifiers frequently came up in our discussions. Jacob's commentaries drew on his life-worldly connotations and experiences of rurality and urbanity acquired in Lower Saxony and lower Bavaria in Germany. My perspective on the fluid land- and cityscapes we encountered along our way was informed by Lefebvre's theory of urbanisation and Tanja Mölders' critical reflections on the links between gender, place and nature.

In what follows I first briefly outline these two conceptual frameworks and provide some background information on the history and culture of Yogyakarta. I then trace our journey in chronological and spatial order, starting from our house and ending at Jacob's school. At each of the places described along the way, I reflect on what they reveal about societal relations to nature in this rapidly growing metropolis.

The constitutive emergence and decay of urbanity and rurality

Urbanisation and globalisation are central drivers of changing patterns of life-worldly sense-making (Schmid, 2005). Rapidly changing configurations of space and time, linked to particular places, demand theoretical conceptualisation from a social science perspective. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (1974) constitutes a powerful tool for describing and analysing processes and phenomena of urbanisation, and their

1 All names have been changed.

effects on society at different scales (from the private sphere, via the city, to the global scale) (Elden, 2002). Lefebvre was trained as a philosopher before turning to sociology. His reflections on the rapid spread of cities and the loss of life-worldly qualities that this entails led him to conceptualise the all-encompassing influence of industrialisation as a process of deruralisation (dépaysanisation or Entländlichung).

For Lefebvre (1991), urbanisation affects both the city and the rural, following a process along a space-time line that leads through a sequence of stages from the rural to the modern industrial city. His central thesis is that in an urbanised world neither 'the urban' nor 'the rural' exist, but rather different urban configurations. His perspective is a dialectical one, emphasising large-scale processes of change arising through the interplay of opposing forces, but without neglecting the entanglements that are encountered along the way. His reasoning draws on the historical example of the urban development in Europe, a topic that is closely interlinked to the Enlightenment and modernity, as well as with their dark underbelly, colonialism. He predicts the dominance of urban social fabric over rural existence, reducing villages to the status of folklore and tourist attractions. At the same time the proliferation of holiday homes and associated infrastructure and consumerism converts the rural into a part of this urban fabric. His image of all-encompassing urbanity in space and time, nevertheless leaves pockets of rurality (ruralité) within the urban mesh, where seasonality and, in his diction, "nature" survive (Lefebvre, 1971). In Lefebvre's conceptualisation, the *political city* is the starting point of urbanisation. The expropriation and accumulation of surplus value produced in rural societies provides the material basis for the concentration of administrative and military power in urban areas, as well as for the flourishing of art and culture. The divide between the urban and the rural thus reflects a division of labour in both material and intellectual spheres. This vision of a privileged centre surrounded by periphery that is increasingly marginalised and under its control displays striking similarities with the governance pattern of mandala states in Southeast Asia (Dahm, 1999: 174).

The *commercial city* emerges out of the political city, as trade in commodities increasingly dominates city life and moulds the configuration of urban space. Instead of political meeting places, markets dominate the city centre, as a meeting place for the exchange of goods. Land tenure becomes less important as a source of power than the control of money. In rural areas, instead of producing for the landlord, people produce for the market. The rural loses the last vestiges of its autonomy and turns into the 'environment' surrounding the city.

In a final step, Lefebvre sees the *industrial city* emerging in a more or less evolutionary manner from the commercial city. The transition from manufacturing to industrial production breaks open the historical city and creates an agglomeration of social spaces moulded by corporative power and reflecting the associated division of labour. Compared to the commercial city, the industrial city has a less purely 'urban' character: the monstrous spread of urban areas leads to the dissolution of the historical city and the emergence of a rural-urban duality, in which the distinction between rural and urban becomes blurred. Lefebvre (1991) goes so far as to describe the industrial city as 'anti-urban'. From a Marxist perspective, he postulates a shift away from conflicts defined by the categories place and time towards a more fundamental conflict embracing the whole of society.

To what extent is this Eurocentric, historically grounded understanding of urban development relevant to the situation of cities in non-European countries, such as the 'royal city' of Yogyakarta, in the 21st century? Lefebvre's concept of the dialectical neutralisation of the antagonism of the rural and the urban will be familiar to anyone living through the rapid changes that are taking place in Indonesia and across the developing world. Lefebvre pictures the urban as exploding and spreading over the whole country. This is not the idea of a synthesis of both elements, but rather a violent process of rupture, in which urbanisation not only destroys the rural but also dissolves the 'urban' as this term was historically understood.

Equally relevant for residents of modern cities like Yogyakarta is the concept of urbanisation as a phenomenon encompassing the whole of society; one that not only affects every location, be it rural or urban, but is also part and parcel of every societal transition, influencing ideas, actions and lifestyles. As Schmid (2005: 26) points out, Lefebvre implicitly postulates a dialectical relation between epistemological development and societal change.

Lefebvre is of course aware that the singular chronology he proposes based on the historical case of Europe is an ideal representation of a complex, uneven process. Different places and times become settings for 'negotiation' between rurality and urbanity, which —for the time being— continue to coexist. This give rise to what Lefebvre calls societal space-time configurations, in which rural, industrial and urban formations or 'continents' overlap. These overlaps are critical phases and zones, transitional spheres of abrupt and, for those involved, often painful change. In this essay I postulate that the fringes of modern-day Yogyakarta exemplify one such virulent interface. I apply Lefebvre's conceptualisation of urbanisation to gain insights into the changes —observed from the top of a scooter— taking place over space and time.

The questionable nature of rurality

While Lefebvre focuses on urbanisation, Tanja Mölders (2017, 2018) is interested in the "nature of rurality". Building on insights from social-ecological research, she reflects on the spatial dimension of the societal relations through the lens of the dialectical concept of societal relations to nature (Hummel et al., 2017). She notes that, in contemporary discourse, 'nature' as a category is most often a material and symbolic expression of agrarian production and conservation areas. The term 'rurality' appears difficult to define, since it is a hybrid concept that contains elements of the urban as well as the rural. Nevertheless, both categories immediately connect to notions of space and place. She argues that enriching this discourse with the central social notion of gender is a productive move that allows linkages, both epistemological and ontological, to be drawn between the categories gender, place and nature.

Mölders (2017) postulates rurality as a material-symbolic relation that penetrates the urban-rural continuum. From this perspective, rurality is seen as the product of dynamic processes, in which practices, trajectories and their interaction give rise to changing configurations of place and space. This vision rejects the compartmentalisation of rurality into materialised matter and cultural-symbolism. When the material

and the social are thus merged and conceptualised as a single space, not only human-nature relations, but also power and gender relations emerge as analytical categories for understanding the hybrid nature of rurality.

Rurality is thus an imagined space; it emerges through diverse performative practices, which together co-create the urban-rural difference (Mölders, 2017). Mölders identifies three other performative practices that question this construction of rurality: "Doing gender" engages with gender as both a socially constructed and an operational category. Dominant heteronormativity is not reduced to symbolic-discursive attribution; rather, the focus is on the material conditions shaping gender relations. "Doing nature" participates in the societal construction of nature and resists the idea of nature as being opposed to or existing outside of society. This insight helps to unravel naïve assumptions about women being 'closer to nature'. It shows how the 'naturalising' of women serves to disguise gender based power relations. Finally "doing rurality" interrogates gender relations in the countryside, revealing 'pastoral' images as being intimately bound up with the continuity of patriarchal structures, giving rise to constructed images of rural masculinity and femininity.

Mölders' emphasis on performance brings Lefebvre's sweeping historical overview down to earth and grounds the life-wordly activities of the actors taking part in the changes he describes. Her focus on interactions is a reminder that changes occurring in one sphere cannot be understood in isolation: the material cannot be divorced from the symbolic; nor the urban fabric understood in isolation from the social fabric and, in particular, gender relations. These insights inspired me to follow the connections leading from the sights and sounds of daily life in Yogyakarta to explore the wider, often momentous changes affecting the urban social fabric, and their impacts on material conditions in far-away places.

Yogyakarta: between the mountain and the sea

The royal city of Yogyakarta lies on the Indonesian island of Java between the mountain and the sea. The city has evolved around the Sultan's palace, the Keraton, located half-way between the volcano Mount Merapi to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south. The Sultan is not only the governor of this Special Province, the only city in Indonesia still ruled by a monarchy, but also the spiritual leader of the people of Central Java (Dahm, 1999: 174). As Sultan and ruler, his sphere of influence is located at the intersection of the worldly and the spiritual world and guarantees the link between them. This is symbolised in close relationship between the male spirits on the volcano, Mount Merapi and female spirits of the sea, ruled over by Njai Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Seas (i.e. the Indian Ocean). According to legend this powerful goddess of the ocean married the founder of the Mataram kingdom in the 17th century (Schlehe, 2008) and continues to watch over the Sultan, his state, and his people (Selosoemardjan, 1962: 18).

Culture and religion thus provide not only social order, but also constitute a symbolic being-in-the-world. As myth they explain both human relations and the interaction of humans with transcendent beings and nature. The individual, society, nature and

cosmos are all connected and, ideally, in harmony with each other (Magnis-Suseno, 1981). Outbreaks of the active Volcano Merapi, earthquakes (Widiyantoro et. al., 2018) and accidents at sea are considered to be messages directed at the political elite from the spiritual world to warn against decline of morals, exploitation of nature, or failure to offer ritual sacrifices. Thus the Sultan depends on nature and the cosmos for legitimation of his traditional status of political and spiritual leader.

Traditional Javanese society was homogenous; political life revolved around the court and displays of loyalty to the Sultan. The late Dutch colonial period initiated a period of rapid change. The emergence of a bureaucratic class shaped by formal education led to a decline in the status of the nobility, while the intelligentsia functioned as the liaison between the European rulers and their Javanese subjects (Selosoemardjan, 1962: 144). Later, the city of Yogyakarta played a prominent role in the struggle for independence and from 1946 to 1948 was briefly the capital of the new Republic of Indonesia (Vickers, 2003). Modern Yogyakarta is renowned as a centre of arts, culture and higher education. Notwithstanding this ongoing process of modernisation, popular loyalty to the Sultan remains high and continues to play an important role in maintaining social stability.

The Sultan's special status is embodied in the layout of the city of Yogyakarta. The Keraton occupies a preeminent position at the centre of the town. Two large squares (*alun-alun*) located at the north and the south end of the palace compound are connected by Malioboro Street, a 'royal road' that forms a cosmological north-south axis. (Keilbart, 2018). The modern city can be roughly divided into the parts south and north of the Keraton. The south is a flourishing centre of the arts, especially traditional art forms such as *wayang*, *batik* and dance. The north is shaped by the presence of institutions of higher education and also of luxury hotels (Hyatt, Ambarukmo, Sheraton, Marriot), malls (Ambarukmo, Hartono, Jogja City, Sleman City) apartments, and gated perumahan, which are still growing in number. Higher education has actually declined in comparison. It houses the campus of Gadjha Mada Universitas, Indonesia's most prestigious university, and many other private academic organisations. The northern city is home to large numbers of students, academics and professionals, as well as growing numbers of working class families making a living from the informal economy.

Methodological approach: transecting the city

Between August 2017 and June 2018 I spent a sabbatical year at the private catholic university, Atma Jaya Universitas Yogyakarta, where I coordinated a joint research project (www.uni-passau.de/en/indorganic/) and engaged in my own research. I was accompanied by my son Jacob, who had his 9th birthday during our stay. Our home during this period was in the municipality of Sleman. Although Sleman, whose official name is Sleman Regency, extends to the summit of Merapi, it is now effectively an extensive northern suburb of Yogyakarta. While I was at my office in the north-east of Yogyakarta, just inside the ring road that encloses the historical city, Jacob attended an international school further out towards Merapi, close to the northward extension of Palagan Street. Throughout our stay, we travelled almost daily back on forth between our home in Con-

tong Catur, close to the bus terminal, an ironically calm place surrounded by ever-increasing private traffic. I came to consider this routine of shuttling the boy helicopter-like to school as a repeated transect. I became aware of how what we saw and heard on our regular ride through the rapidly changing urban-rural landscape was telling different stories of place. This is similar to what Gibbs (2014: 211) calls site-work, when walks through contested places and meetings with informants form the stimuli for responses to place. Gibbs talks of such walks as "experiences in belonging" (2014: 214), through attachment to place and becoming enmeshed in stories that are told about it by people met along the way. Thus our daily journey became an opportunity to engage in a mode of investigation that was new to me, from which new insights emerged, informed by my ongoing research into organic farming (Schreer and Padmanabhan 2019) and Jacob's encounters in school and in the neighbourhood.

From the very beginning we knew that, for us, Yogyakarta was a place to pass through, as our period of stay was finite and fixed in advance. The notion 'passing through place' encapsulates our way of belonging the city, one not based on fixity or longevity, not permanent, but vital nonetheless. Our rides back and forth to our temporary home provided a lens through which we could view relationships between places, people and the more-than-human world (Gibbs, 2014: 216). The interactions with neighbours, shopkeepers, services and participants in traffic were motivated by our need for sense- and place-making, and these interactions dominated our conversations along the road. Interestingly, rurality and urbanity were the central topic of our conversations from the very beginning. In what follows I trace our outward journey in chronological and spatial order, starting from our house and ending at Jacob's school. At each of the places described along the way, I reflect on what they reveal about the different dimensions of spatial, societal, and economic relations to nature.

Mixing different people: Townhouse

Our rented town house sits in the middle of a little compound, comprising of 10 similar single-story concrete buildings, to create a small block. Each house is surrounded by a tiny garden, sporting decorative flowering frangipani trees, smaller than the front yards typically used to park cars or the scooters that are the most popular means of transportation among the middle class. The alleys between houses are neatly paved with cobblestones, installed by the investor who built the compound. In the rainy season, the little street between the houses turns into a river, carrying along quantities of plastic garbage. Much of this plastic will end up in River Eloprogo, classified as one of the twenty most polluted rivers in the world (Asean Post, 2019) Our immediate neighbours are families, either Javanese or Peranakans of Chinese descent. The latter typically lead a secluded life, a legacy of the long history discrimination against them, both under colonial rule and since independence. Their well-guarded houses speak of caution in the face of continuing prejudice. By contrast the activities of the Javanese families often spill out onto the street. Many families also rent out rooms to members of the huge student population in the area. Our days start when we are woken by the sound of the Morning Prayer, the first of five daily prayer times, coming from the local mosque

close by. Immediately afterwards, regular as clockwork, the *jamu* lady arrives on her motor scooter to deliver one her herbal concoctions (*jamu*) to the Javanese lady next door. The *jamu* lady is knowledgeable in Javanese healing traditions (Beers, 2001) and supplies freshly prepared herbal mixtures to her regular customers, selecting those that are appropriate to treat their ailments from her many bottles on the rack of her motor scooter.

The townhouses are part of a larger residential area, whose diversity in class finds tangible expression in the layout of the housing. The townhouses provide secure housing in the city to wealthier families, as well as some more affluent students, whose presence reflects the proximity of the academic higher education institutions. The townhouse area is not gated off; it is a busy thoroughfare for local people passing through the neighbourhood. Despite this, it still feels somewhat like an island, surrounded by the neighbouring *kampong*, where working class families live in brick bungalows, interspersed with a few traditional Javanese houses constructed of intricately designed wooden panels. A few owners of these bungalows have plans to add an upper floor, (revealed by the concrete reinforcing rods sticking up out the roof), but most of these remain 'under construction' for a long time.

Many people in the *kampong* find employment in the informal services sector. For young men without education, the online service provider Gojek (Ford and Honan, 2017: 276), whose rapid expansion across Southeast Asia recalls the success of Uber, provides access to unregulated and highly competitive employment. Little shops and service agencies like laundries are also a common sight and in most cases are evidence of the industriousness of the women of the house – every housewife in the *kampong* dreams of running a small business. We take our clothes to one of the laundries to be washed. They can be seen hanging out to dry on the streets of the *kampong* — where, on one special day, they witness the marriage of our laundry woman. Next to the mosque and under its charge are a kindergarten and a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), which cater for the children of working class families in the kampong. The children of our townhouse neighbours commute, like Jacob, to other schools further afield.

The cultivation of wild beauty

When opening my own locked gate to roll out the motor scooter in the morning, I meet the Javanese lady Nani, who has already watered the street and her plants, enjoyed her *jamu* drink and chatted with the *jamu* lady – all activities I unintentionally und unconsciously witness through the street noises and interspersed with the sound of her singing coming through the open windows. Later the day her *pembantu* (servant) will sweep the street and hang up the washing in a quiet corner of the paved alley way. When I was looking for somewhere to live, my first encounter with this pastoral sight of fresh laundry hanging in the public space of the street was the decisive moment that convinced me to opt for this particular neighbourhood. While the garden of our town house turned out to be of concrete covered up with a thin layer of earth —we found out when trying to plant bananas— our neighbour Nani's front yard is covered in all kinds of lush greenery. While almost all Javanese households —be they rich or poor,

at the motorway or in the kampong— decorate their homes with potted plants, hers are exceptional. She specialises in growing orchids, which she also sells and are held in high regard. During the 10 months we spent in the neighbourhood, I could observe her little front garden and the orchids hanging from wire trellises. During this period, the ultimate status symbol of the middle class, the car, was sold —to finance a medical emergency in the family— but thereby making space in front of the house for a reception area for the customers who came to buy these rare plants with their beautiful flowers, as her business of trading in orchids expanded. Her husband used to work in Coca-Cola bottling plant, but when we arrived had recently joined the fast expanding textile industry in Yogyakarta as a clerk.

While a home garden of potted plants, if possible combined with a little pond, is an essential part of the ideal Javanese home, it also reveals much about contemporary human-nature relations. Nature is tamed (by being potted) and cared for. Women and men alike tend the plants after long days in the office and keep them watered and fertilised. Poor people recycle tins and pots to grow decorative plants around their homes. The orchids propagated and meticulously cared for by Nani around her townhouse originate from the forests of Kalimantan or Borneo. Traders deliver the plants to her doorstep, the bounty of plant hunting expeditions undertaken in forests of Kalimantan[2], an hour's flight away. These highly appreciated, aesthetic plants, each different species requiring different humidity and handling to mimic its natural habitat, have to be imported from one of the so-called *Nusantara* or outer islands. For a long time Indonesia has been identified with Java by the independence movement, and especially under Suharto. Java is considered the centre, and other islands the periphery. In this vision, Yogyakarta functions as the cultural centre of Central Java. However, to maintain the performance and display of harmonious human-nature relations in the space of the Javanese home, central items of appreciation must be imported from Kalimantan. The beauty of rare and exotic orchids adds to the enjoyment of the person who looks after them and enhances his or her status, as a visible display of harmonious relations to nature at the front door. However, this phenomenon can be read as a sign of crisis of societal relations to nature. The wilderness of Kalimantan and its presumed rurality must be tamed and brought into the urbanity of the townhouse to re-enact the balance between the individual, the community, nature and cosmos. This veneration of adorable nature is made possible by a commodification of exotic flowers uprooted from the wild to meet consumer demand from an affluent middle class, as a means of mitigating their overwhelming material urbanity through possession of a culturally appropriate and fashionable expression of rurality.

The different modes of employment of this husband and wife give an insight into the contradictory drivers middle class families are dealing with. On the one hand, the food-industry exemplified in Coca-Cola, the husband's previous employer, is reshaping eating habits and the provisioning of food, catering to a consumer society that enthusiastically embraces malls and convenience products. The textile industry, his current employer, exemplifies the export sector, which since the Asian Crisis of 1997 has been

2 The Indonesian part of Borneo, the largest island in the Indonesian archipelago.

seen as the key to achieving continuous economic growth and guaranteeing the economic well-being of consumers. On the other hand, the Javanese longing for a harmonious relationship to nature and cosmos leads to the import of wild orchids from the outer islands, while the island of Java suffers from vanishing forests, traffic congestion and increased pollution.

Constructing and reconstructing life worlds of Nusantara

Putting on our helmets and, if it is pouring with rain, tent-like gold and silver ponchos, we start our two-wheeler and drive to the end of our crisply paved alley to face the bungalow of our landlord and landlady across the street. They bought our townhouse to rent it out, and keep an eye on us, their tenants, on their regular walks to and from the mosque. Ibu Mar is a retired secretary, who used to work for the accounting department of a mining company. Her husband is still employed and has a fly-in-fly-out job as a technician at an open-cast lignite mine in Kalimantan. Two of their sons are already settled in Jakarta, while their youngest son still lives with them at home. Like women in the *kampong*, and my neighbour Nani, our industrious landlady Mar has her own business, which she is eager to expand, selling premium ice-cream of a Singaporean brand on the door step to passing school children (and exhausted working mums). Using my down payment of the whole year's rent for the house as is customary, busy construction work started at their house soon after we moved in. Walls are being torn down, doors moved, and the house remodelled to accommodate both the necessary car and the expanding ice-cream business (although while we were there we always went to the back door to get our cold lump of sweetened fat). During our stay, more of our rent money and their time were invested in marrying off the last son, and laying on a splendid reception attended by more than 1000 guests.

Facing our landlord's house, we may either turn left or right. If we turn right, we pass bungalows and small residential estates. The street is lined with trees and full of animals: hens looking after their chicks, beautiful cocks showing off, cats moving stealthily about and occasionally a pure bred dog. Javanese ladies in informal batik dresses with their hair uncovered feed the animals. Alongside well-kept gardens and fenced verandas, some plots lie fallow, covered with dense undergrowth and wild banana trees. Jacob calls these semi-wild areas 'chicken forests' as these animals can be seen dashing in and out as we pass by, slowed down by the 'sleeping policemen' that cross the street. Chicken are an important part of the local diet and kept for consumption of their flesh, with chicken feet considered a special delicacy. Cocks are cherished as pets to be admired or as fighting cocks. The fowl run in and out between the well-kept town houses and the neighbouring chicken forest. These patches of semi-wild greenery help maintain a pocket-sized social-ecological system that is a remnant of home gardens in rural areas in times gone by. In addition to the poultry, young men like to keep racing pigeons or songbirds, which are fed and catered for with utmost attention and presented at shows and races at weekends. The young men can often be seen on motor scooters with the birds in cloth-covered birdcages worn like rucksacks, a sight that encapsulates the love

of nature in Javanese culture, as an aesthetic object to be tamed, cultivated and cared for.

If we turn left, we go down a narrow street, lined by larger, multi storey houses, interspersed with smaller, older dwellings. Here a bamboo *pendopo* hut has been erected as accommodation for the community members or paid guards who take turns to watch over the neighbourhood at night. The *pendopo* is equipped with mats to sit on and chat, and a *kentongan* slit drum made of wood to call for reinforcements in case of trouble. Decorations and small personal items help turn it into a convivial meeting place for male members of the community. At present they are watching over the construction site of a new mosque opposite. With three stories planned, the building is going to more than the usual tiled prayer room, and a placard outside the building site proudly proclaims the construction of rooms for meetings and classes. Financed by generous donations from Saudi Arabia and local benefactors, this building under construction displays the growing influence of wahhabi Islam in Indonesia. With its investments in educational institutions, and orthodox interpretation of the Koran, wahhabi Islam challenges the Javanese tradition of syncretism, in which Islam is combined with local beliefs as well as Buddhist and Hinduist influences. As the density of mosques increases, affluent urban women display their commitment to orthodox notions of Islam by wearing the hijab, stockings and gloves. This is a break with tradition, since Javanese women used to go uncovered, and often still do in the vicinity of their houses and home gardens.

Hot and coal, ice and cold

After the daily decision to either watch the animals or the progress on the construction site, we re-enter the main street, which takes us meandering up the constant slope past a brickyard. Under the roof of corrugated iron and palm leaves, men mix lorry loads of finest volcano sand mined further up the slopes of Merapi with cement, moulding bricks, gutters, grids and other products to meet demand from the booming construction industry. The sun hardens the products quickly and they are stacked up in piles, from where they are sold off as fast as they can be made. Trucks deliver loads of volcanic ash, mined from accumulations deposited higher up the mountain after the last major eruption of Merapi in 2010 (Widiyantoro: 2018). This eruption killed the royal guardian living on the slopes and altered the course of several rivers. Merapi is the constant source of worry, but also provides airborne fertilisation. Throughout the year the volcano can be seen puffing out ash, and this constant low-level activity is interrupted now and again by lava bursts and minor earthquakes. The citizens of Yogyakarta deal with this immanent danger and source of prosperity on their doorstep by mythologising human-nature relationships and developing seismographic early warning systems. The never-sleeping builders obtain concessions via dubious channels to harvest the volcanic sands wherever they can be found, to feed the city's insatiable hunger for housing and desire for urbanity, which is best expressed in concrete. Corruption and tolerance of illegality leave the way clear for unregulated resource extraction, regardless of environmental externalities, as nothing is allowed to stand in the way of urban development.

After passing the brickyard, we have to stop at an intersection. While watching the balletic antics of the self-employed traffic policeman and waiting for him to give us way, we have ample time to study the billboards advertising the newly opened hardware and appliance store. The store is trying to sell wall-mounted wash basins, under the brand name WASSER, to replace the traditional *bak mandi*, the deep square-section bath which is used to store water for washing and as a reserve in case of shortages. We turn left to leave the main road in front of the fenced entrance of a gated community, the embodiment of 'anti-*kampung*' and one of thousands of secluded and serviced residential compounds for the affluent middle class springing up all over Indonesia, but especially here on the fringes of the city.

Further up on our way to school, on the main road up the slopes of Merapi towards the resort town of Kaliurang, we pass the fenced-off area of the large transformer station that converts the electrical energy supply to household voltage. The street alongside this large industrial area contains none of the usual small shops or *warungs* offering a cup of strong Javanese coffee, and even the mobile fruit vendors seem to avoid the area. People in cars and on scooters accelerate past the area and rush by as if nothing is to be seen or done. The transformer station is a giant that is vastly visible, but at the same time unseen and cut off from the organic urban fabric of the city. Unnoticed, it carries out its vital work of providing the city with the constant supply of electricity that residents expect and now take for granted, enabling fast internet connections, street lighting, ice boxes, air conditioning and the increasingly popular online services from banking to food ordering.

The transformer is the last stage in the process that converts lignite extracted from the far away forests of Kalimantan into energy in the form of electricity. The huge opencast mines operating in Kalimantan (Großmann, Padmanabhan and Afiff, 2017) extract vast amounts of low-grade brown coal, not only to supply the energy needed to meet the Indonesian state's ambitious economic growth targets, but also to sell to the equally voracious economies in India and China. The goal of development defined as economic growth overrides concerns about the effects of fossil energy on climate change. These concerns are still rather intangible, though increasingly perceivable in changing weather patterns. In Kalimantan though, the environmental impacts of deforestation, the large scale removal of the earth's surface, and the noise and dust caused by transportation of vast quantities of lignite are all too apparent (Langston, 2019). Massive amounts of groundwater have to be pumped out of the deep holes, changing the hydrology over an area much larger than the mine itself. Runoffs from the mining process contaminate drinking water supplies. Indigenous Dayak groups on the island are fighting for their property rights, asserting their ancestral land tenure rights (adat) against the state's claim to own the land as the successor to the colonial government (Großmann, 2019). At these far away frontiers, hidden from the eyes of travellers, a vastly different conception of human-nature relations and manifestation of rurality makes possible the performances of energy-hungry urbanity. City dwellers can turn on their electrical appliances without having to experience the environmental pollution or witness children drowning in the abandoned mines (Maimunah, 2019).

Consumerism and change at the urban-rural frontier

Where at the beginning of our stay was a fruit vendor and juice shop is now a mobile phone dealer. We enter Jalan Damai, a street that follows the contours of Merapi, a dominant presence although still 20 km away. The street is densely packed with urban eateries that even extend into the side lanes. Alcohol consumption is rare, replaced by conspicuous consumption of strong coffee and heavy smoking as markers of masculinity. Urban hipsters, most often than not tattooed, frequent the currently most fashionable restaurants. Culinary styles, ranging from Japanese and Korean to the posh coffee parlours, change fast as restaurants open, close, and reopen. Like the food, the interior decoration is constantly renewed and remodelled to provide new stylish locations for Instagram-likable selfies. Cafes decorated with nostalgic phones with rotary dials offer free Wi-Fi to cosmopolitan professionals and aspirational students, who can travel the world with no more than a smartphone and some discrete culinary adventures. Passing through these enactments of urbanity, we finally turn into a small lane.

To the left, a single row of two-storey houses is guarded by a lonely watchman in full attire; to the right an abandoned open-air restaurant. Both have seen better days. Leaving the constant stream of vehicles and scooters behind, bumping over the speed breaker, we slow down. In the distance, we can already spot the school building. This is the moment when Jacob leans forward, closely watching as the houses pass us by, giving way to fields. Counting down metre by metre, he exclaims: Now…now…we are entering the countryside! In his perception, the imagined border between houses and field clearly marks the frontier between the urban and the rural. Daily this scene is re-enacted and, as we pass fields and tree nurseries, we witness the changing seasons on the fields. What started as a paddy field, with farmers planting the bright green rice seedlings, will later turn into a cornfield. The men and women working the land usually arrive by foot or on top of old-fashioned bicycles, wearing the conical hats as protection against the sun, in sharp contrast to the bare-headed drivers dropping off children from air-conditioned cars.

Jabob's private international school caters to cosmopolitan Indonesians, mixed Indonesian-Western families, a Korean diaspora in the furniture industry, and the occasional academic like myself. It capitalises on the scenery provided and produced by the pocket of rurality in which it is located. The birds, the air and the scents of the nearby fields enter the open schoolyard and add to the feeling of carefully curated well-being. Adjacent to the field, where we watch the agricultural cycle unfold during the year, and opposite to the parking lot, a *warung* with the telling name *kampong Java* is sitting. The kiosk serves Javanese food, which is not to be found in any of the posh places along the main road, and only locally produced drinks. Constructed by reassembling the wooden panels of traditional houses, and furnished with wooden Javanese furniture, the *warung* is a conspicuous display of Javanese rurality that is intended to contrast with the surrounding areas of urbanity. In the back garden, decoratively arranged wooden *pendopo* provide attractive settings for rendezvous and Instagram shots. The staging of rurality, using accessories of village life as props, turns the rural into folklore and, as such, a component of the urban social fabric. The backdrop is provided by sight of people engaged in manual labour on the land, and the

planting and harvesting of the food crops, signifiers of a remaining pocket of rurality within the vast urban sprawl.

Farewell

When it was time to take leave and return to Lower Bavaria, I wanted to recommend my *pembantu,* Mbak S., to a family living close to school. Before we left, Mbak S., who always arrived by bicycle, sometimes with her son or one of her daughters, wanted to invite us to her house. One Sunday, we followed her, walking in hitherto unknown direction. After a long walk, we took seats at a terrace in the *kampong* and she offered us fruits and drinks. Only after a while, I realized this was not her house; hers was the makeshift hut in the backyard, where she lived in one tiny room with her family. The place where we were sitting was for her use by courtesy of her neighbour. She told me that the household close to the school where I had thought she might be able to work was too far away for her to travel to every day. The urban poor enable urbanity in townhouses, but are restricted by mobility to rural patterns of life despite deruralisation.

The frontier between the urban and the rural in Yogyakarta is demarcated more or less clearly by the situatedness of actors, the configuration of the landscape and the re(enactment) of place-specific human-nature relations. When riding through Yogyakarta on our motor scooter, we experienced physical space defined through spatial practice. We encountered imagined concepts, expressing the social dimension of the urban life world, manifested as spaces of representation (Elden, 2002: 30). We understood how 'doing nature' in urban zones also takes place, unseen, in rural zones, in a process of connection and disconnection, as ordinary plants and animals from far away sites acquire new symbolic meanings in the content of urbanity. The life-worldly rurality of planting a field acquires a new meaning, beyond the simple production of food, as counterpoint to the urban fabric, in the context of all-encompassing urbanity. Everyone in Yogyakarta participates in the daily enactment — visible and invisible, imagined and performed — of human-nature relations. 'Doing gender' intersects with class, religion and age and plays out differently in each setting. Women and men navigate the various and sometimes mutually exclusive enactments of feminity and masculinity according to the stratified norms of Javanese society, in which one can still catch glimpses of the court culture of years gone by. But just as the mandala state faded into history, today the spheres of cultural influence of the Sultan are shrinking further – though he is governor for life with executive power – as Indonesia embraces modernity. Doing rurality and doing urbanity in the contemporary setting of Yogyakarta is manifested, spatially, in some areas as a more or less painful transformation and in others as ignorant coexistence. Through the two dialectic lens of a Lefebvrian perspective on space and a social-ecological critique of societal relations to nature, the road trip through the fringes of Yogyakarta reveals the ongoing contradictions and entanglements of rurality and urbanity.

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