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Urban Living and Multicultural Cities in Asia: from Colonial Past to Global Future

International Conference on Psychology & Multiculturalism

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URBAN LIVING & MULTICULTURAN CITIES IN ASIA:
FROM COLONIAL PAST TO GLOBAL FUTURE

Important Note:

Scientific Committee did not edit or correct the paper accepted for proceeding. It was assume the paper's grammar, spelling error, and writing style according to APA was the author's responsibility.

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Jakarta, November 2017

Greetings From the Dean

Welcome to the first International Conference on Psychology and Multiculturalism,

In 2017, Faculty of Psychology, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia celebrates its 25th anniversary. On the 8th of June 1992, the faculty was opened with a bachelor degree program and started the academic activities with only about 70 students. Twenty five years passing by, currently we have four study programs at bachelor, master (professional and science), and doctoral level serving about 1500 students. It is a great achievement that this year we finally have a complete level of study program!

As a commemoration of our gratitude and celebration for this achievement, we are convening academicians, students, and practitioners to discuss and learn from each other in an international conference, namely “Urban Living and Multicultural Cities in Asia: From Colonial Past to Global Future”. This is our first international conference and it is a reflection of our academic themes, namely to understand and develop urban dwellers, multicultural, and disadvantaged people. It is relevant with Jakarta, where our campus is located, that the conference covers behaviors and psychological aspects of people within the history of the city, its economic and industrial growth, health, education, and information technology innovations.

Our keynote speaker and panelists are experts in their field. I hope we can learn a lot from them. For presenters and guests, welcome and thank you for joining our conference, I hope you can have wonderful discussions in this conference.

Dr. Angela Oktavia Suryani, M. Si

Dean of Faculty of Psychology, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia

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Urban Nostalgia: Memories of Living in Jakarta among Former Menteng Residents

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ABSTRACT

How has urban life in Jakarta changed in the past decades? This paper will discuss life in Menteng, a Jakarta residential area built during the Dutch East Indies colonial times as an extension of Batavia. After independence it became an elite area with residents coming from various parts of Indonesia, mostly working in the civil service. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former Menteng residents. Fifteen respondents, now in their 60s and 70s, shared what they remembered most about living in Menteng in the past and how they view urban life in present-day Jakarta. Secondary data were also obtained from the social media homepage of GAMENT, a community of ex-Menteng residents. The most dominant response shared were their views of Jakarta being a peaceful place where neighbours of diverse backgrounds lived in harmony. Respondents compared this to contemporary Jakarta which in their views is becoming more conservative and primordial. This paper is part of a larger project to document collective memories of GAMENT members.

Keywords: Urban Living, Collective Memory, Jakarta

Jakarta has often been described as a fast growing metropolitan city since the 1980s, comparable to neighbouring cities like Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, with rapid changes taking places through the decades. Jakarta has also been negatively labelled as a city where urban development often times neglect the human welfare factor. Halim (2007) portrayed Jakarta as a city where its citizens have an “I don’t care” attitude. Jakarta as the melting pot of multi-ethnic Indonesia, has not yet become a place where its inhabitants have a sense of belonging and unity. This certainly can be observed during the annual festive season of Idul Fitri, where about 60% of its inhabitants “return home” to hometowns (*mudik*) for at least a week, leaving the city as it is (“Jumlah pemudik”, 2017)..

Modern Jakarta itself was described by Castles (1967) as a busy metropolitan where one can find the latest fashion style and newest ideas from around the world. Jakarta was probably the “most Indonesian” city in the archipelago, because of its multi-ethnic inhabitants, which has always been the case since the 17th century. Castles even romantically described Jakarta as the place where “God is making the Indonesian”. The 1961 census data indicated that many Jakartans did not identify themselves according to ethnicity, but more based on city or place of origin, even though ethnic customs were still strongly observed by its inhabitants.

Correa (2016) stated that metropolitan Jakarta has witnessed a rapid growth through the last five decades with a blurred distinction between urban and rural life. Urban development has given new clothing to old modes and geography of social and infrastructural inequity stemming from the city’s colonial history. The process of eradication of *kampungs* and paddy fields in order to accommodate large-scale urban enclaves has paid limited attention to the development of public works projects, which made the city itself unable to keep up with the current pace of urbanization. Halim (2008) considered Jakarta as a place where inhabitants are psychologically distant to each other (“*cuek*”) and do not really care about their neighbours. The population density may also be the cause of stress among its residents. People spend most of their leisure time in this “city of malls” since the late 1980s. Halim also characterized contemporary Jakarta as a place where shopping malls are rarely built in

harmony with the surrounding environment, and people tend to mind their own business and are indifferent towards the needs of others.

However, many older Jakartans who grew up in this city, often times convey positive nostalgic feelings about the past. They talk about the “good old days” when Jakarta was not as crowded as it is today and when people lived in better harmony compared to today. But is that really true? This preliminary study will focus on former residents of the Menteng area as representatives of early, post-Independence Jakarta and how their views may give insights as how the development of this city could be made better. This is part of a larger project to document stories of these residents as a legacy of oral history on Jakarta.

Menteng, a sub-district of Central Jakarta, covers an area of 6,5 square km, with a population of 68,309 in 2010. The area was initially developed between 1905-1912 as a well-planned extension of Batavia, the capital city of the Dutch East Indies colonial government. The new residential area was artistically designed by P. A. J. Moojen, a Dutch architect who envisioned an environmentally-friendly and esthetically-pleasing suburb with modern structures suitable for life in tropical climates. The city was planned accordingly to give residents a pleasant feeling as a garden suburb in the south (Heuken, 2012).

During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) most of the Dutch residents had to leave the country (or were imprisoned in concentrations camps) and the Japanese government allowed Indonesians to occupy Menteng. But development of this area did not continue until the early 1950s, where more houses were built to accommodate the needs of new residents, as a result of the first wave of migration or urbanization to Jakarta during mid- to late 1950s². Menteng became one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in Jakarta, an elitist area for upper-middle class citizens. Classy shopping areas were established to cater to these residents (e. g. shophouses in Jalan Jawa, Jalan Cikini and Jalan Sabang). Schools were also built for the younger generation of the newly established republic, including the state-owned University of Indonesia in the nearby Salemba area (Heuken & Pamungkas, 2001).

However, in the 1980s as the land price and property tax increased, many houses in Menteng were sold by its residents, rented to foreign expats, or converted in to offices. Former residents moved to other parts of the city, or to the surrounding satellite cities in the Jabodetabek (Greater Jakarta) area. Heuken (2012) observed that the new Menteng residents, the ‘newcomers’ (*pendatang*), could be considered as people who do not meet the standards of a modern urbanite (*tidak berbudaya kota modern*). They do not care about the surrounding environment, are indifferent to each other, and have little interest in the historical past of Menteng.

There are many books written about life in Jakarta of the past, mostly as collections of anecdotal stories in Batavia, but rarely are there literature on contemporary, urban Jakarta residents after independence. Heuken (1982) published a few books on modern Jakarta and their historical background, but focused more on architecture and urban planning, including one specifically on Menteng (Heuken & Pamungkas, 2001), whereas Lubis (2008a, 2008b, 2010) published a trilogy of his memoirs living in Jakarta in 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, which covered his adolescent years living with his parents in Menteng, until he became a medical doctor.

GAMENT, an acronym of *Geng Anak Menteng* (“Gang of Menteng Kids”) is a social media-based community organization established in 2010, where former residents of the neighbourhood reconnected. Most of them were former Menteng residents who lived there as children in the 1950s and 1960s. They often time share many nostalgic moments in the GAMENT facebook page, such as posting old photographs and ask fellow members to guess who the people were, or what the building was and where it was (“Remember when...”, “Do you remember....”). Some put personal family portraits, and other members would recognize someone else in the photograph, and everyone feels connected again to each other and start

romanticizing the past as they reminisce their childhood in Menteng, and more collective memories would emerge in the discussions. This could somewhat be related to a psychological phenomena often described as *place attachment* where people consider their dwelling place as part of their identities (Lewicka, 2011).

GAMENT now boasts a membership of more than 3,000 persons, living not only in the Jabodetabek (Greater Jakarta) area, but also in other countries in Europe and USA. They occasionally hold gatherings and parties for the sole purpose of reconnecting and having fun. The facebook page itself became more like 'extended family' gatherings, not unlike the typical Indonesian *arisan keluarga*. The term 'extended family' (*keluarga besar*) in this case is not unique to Gament, as Indonesians tend to consider their community organizations as family, which has nothing to do with blood relationship, but rather a psychological and cultural connection with members of the same organization.

Method

To explore what urban life in Jakarta in the past was like for these Menteng residents, members of GAMENT were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in this preliminary study which would give some insight on how Jakarta was like in the past. Participants were invited through the GAMENT Facebook page. Twenty-nine members have shown interest and were willing to be interviewed, however, only 15 were able to give their time for the actual interviews.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with one basic open-ended question: *what do you remember best about life in Menteng when you were younger?* Interviews were conducted by various methods: face-to-face, telephone or virtual interviews (through email and messenger), whichever was convenient for the participants.

Probing questions included inquiries on school, family life, festive occasions, and any unpleasant memories, if any. Additional information was also collected from comments on the GAMENT facebook page which could complement the questions about life in Menteng as other former residents perceived it.

Results

There were three major themes which appeared in participants' stories about the past, namely (1) a real sense of community where residents frequently socialized with their neighbours, (2) the feeling of safety and security in the neighbourhood, and (3) the diverse background of people living in harmony.

Sense of community. When sharing about the sense of community they felt was significant to their lives, nearly all participants mentioned about knowing their neighbours, not only those living in the same road, but around Menteng in general. Many participants had school classmates whose parents happen to know each other. Most participants had relatives (grandparents, uncles or aunts) who also lived in Menteng, and they frequently visited these relatives. Paying visits to their neighbours with parents was also a common activity they remembered.

Some mentioned about childhood games which they enjoyed playing with their neighbours. Some of these traditional games are almost unknown by Jakarta children these days, such as *gasing*, *samse*, *kasti*, *galah asin*, *tak kadal*, kite flying, and rope jumping. Another participant mentioned about the joy of playing fireworks with neighbours as a memorable experience during the holiday season (usually during Idul Fitri, Jakarta Anniversary and New Year's Eve).

One participant mentioned about having a neighbor who runs a local cinema and would often invite him and other neighbors to watch children movies. Three participants mentioned about the fun of riding bicycles and roller skating along the streets which had less traffic

compared to today. Another mentioned about visiting a nearby bookstore (which has now been demolished) in Jalan Jawa every afternoon.

Another participant who has lived for twenty years in a semi-rural part of central Bali mentioned that the sense of community in her village often times reminded her of Jakarta in the 1960s where people greeted each other and *gotong royong* (mutual help) is still strongly practiced by its inhabitants.

The sense of community was even stronger during religious festivals such as Idul Fitri and Christmas. Neighbours would have an “open house” gathering where people visit and greet each other, regardless of religious affiliation, a fact that many participants regret is no longer the case in Jakarta today. None of the participants mentioned about the tradition of “going home” (*mudik*) for Idul Fitri, except one participant who was of mixed Javanese-Betawi origin, shared her experience of going to her Betawi Ora (name of ethnic group) extended family in Tangerang but only for a day visit. Tangerang today is very much a part of Greater Jakarta.

Independence day was also a special occasion where the sense of community became stronger. Participants only remembered the fun of playing games, joining competitions and participating in carnivals. One participant remembered that every morning of the 17th of August, the whole family would first gather in their living room and turn the radio on to listen to President Sukarno’s annual inspiring speeches before they went out to the street festivities.

Safety and security. Participants mentioned about safety and security in Menteng. Streets were less crowded with traffic. One participant even mentioned that the strongest memory she had as a child in Menteng is that she go anywhere with her friends by foot. Children could walk to school or visit neighbours, or ride *becaks* to go to the market, without having parents feel worried.. Compared to Jakarta today, this is almost impossible, according to participants.

Houses also usually had low fences (either wooden or shrub fences), with no gates at the entrance. Front doors were also often left open during the day. Neighbours could frequently drop by without notice just for friendly visits and rarely would residents feel unsafe (in comparison to the Jakarta they know today).

Diversity. All participants mentioned about the diverse background of their neighbourhood when it came to ethnicity, but never once did they experience any ethnic-based conflict in Menteng. (Participants interviewed in this study had the following ethnic background: Betawi, Batak, Chinese-Indonesian, Javanese, Minahasan, Minangkabau, and Sundanese).

Some participants described that in those days it was common to mention ethnicity to describe somebody (e.g. “the Ambonese family next door”, “my friend, the Chinese kid”) or even using stereotypes for teasing (“oh, you typical Javanese kid – *Dasar Jawa kamu*”) and nobody would consider that offensive. One participant boldly crowned Menteng as “Little Indonesia” as he said most of his friends were of various ethnic backgrounds. They knew that they had different backgrounds, but strongly identified themselves as being Indonesian. Nobody used local languages (*bahasa daerah*) in their daily conversations outside of the family. Everyone used Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) as their medium language, but mostly mixed with colloquial Jakarta slang.

Unpleasant memories. When asked about unpleasant memories, most participants mentioned very personal ones, such as witnessing a train accident in front of her house, witnessing a thief being beaten by a crowd in the street, seeing cows and goats being sacrificed for *Idul Adha*, or facing a foreigner conducting an indecent act (showing his genitals to little girls). Only four participants associated unpleasant memories with the social-political and socio-economic context of the 1960s. One participant who lived in a road near the Hotel Indonesia roundabout, vividly remembers see the British Embassy being burned

down by demonstrators during the times when anti-Neocolonialism movement was strong. She remembered the looting and burning and that the whole family had to stay at home. Another participant mentioned about the rising price of goods and items at that time and two others mentioned about the 30th September Affair (G-30-S).

It is assumed that other parents may have taken precautions in protecting their children during those times, so that they did not have significant bad memories about that period. One participant, however, mentioned an incident when she was 11 years, walking home from her dancing classes and having to pass a checking point with military personnel guarding the road. She was interrogated not knowing why she was asked so many questions. She kept the incident to herself, and never shared the experience to her family. It was only when she grew up that she realized how scary the situation was in reality.

Views on Menteng today. How do the participants now view Menteng, and life in Jakarta in general? All participants mentioned that Menteng is no longer the friendly neighbourhood as they used to know. Three participants who still lived in Menteng, mentioned that the “newcomers” are often the new rich (*orang kaya baru*) who moved in this affluent neighbourhood without having interest in the surrounding. They renovated their houses (mostly starting in the 1980s) with modern, outlandish styles, with high fences, as if living in their own castles of fortresses, and transformed part of their gardens or front yard into car ports. Whenever there are neighbourhood and community association (Rukun Tetangga and Rukun Warga) meetings, the “newcomers” rarely participated, but send their domestic helpers, guards, or drivers to represent them instead.

Discussion

Contrary to what most people think about the spatially dispersed interactions in urban areas like Jakarta, former residents of Menteng shared many positive experience of living in a peaceful, harmonious neighbourhood which was the Jakarta they were familiar with in the 1950s and 1960s. If the first urban planners during the Dutch colonial times had envisioned a garden suburb where life would be more peaceful than the hectic lifestyle in Batavia, then it perhaps had achieved its goal in the 1960s. Was it the reality of life in Jakarta, particularly Menteng, that the spirit of *gotong royong* and sense of community was always part of our nation? Or were participants overly romanticizing the past and thus giving biased, nostalgic responses? Could this be related to what environmental psychologists name *place attachment*, the emotional bond between person and place (Florek, 2011), which is highly influenced by an individual’s personal experience (Lewicka, 2011)? This would be subject to further discussions.

Perhaps the early urban planning of Menteng, which took into account factors such as climate (more buildings appropriate to the tropics), socio-economic factors (houses were grouped according to size and price), and building a green environment (a concept which is very relevant to the 21st century), could be a model for future urban planning in Indonesia with the idea that physical environment does affect interaction of its people, as often studied in environmental psychology. But again there is much more to be explored before we come to a conclusion.

Participants of this study, and scholars such as Heuken (2012) cynically mentioned about the “newcomers” in Menteng. The newcomers were somewhat perceived as those who destroyed the peace and harmony of Menteng. Was this a manifestation of a stronger, in-group identity, or even snobbism? Or is this a genuine observation that urban newcomers lack the sense of attachment to place and thus tend to be more self-centered in their own family lives? These questions should also be further explored to provide more insight to urban living in Indonesia.

What is interesting is that all participants, and also comments on the GAMENT facebook, mention about their concern, and even bitterness, about the current social and socio-political situation in Jakarta today. The growing prejudice and recent conflicts between religious groups, the tendency to label people according to ethnicity, which occurs in Jakarta and throughout Indonesia, has been mentioned by some participants as an annoying setback (*kemunduran*). Could it be that citizens living in Jakarta as “the most Indonesian city” (Castles, 1967) felt a stronger sense of unity as a new, independent nation in the 1950s and 1960s as compared to Indonesia in 2017? Societal changes in the past decades in Indonesia has been a great concern to most GAMENT members, without knowing any practical solution to suggest. Were these negative changes related to education, socio-cultural factors or the dynamic changes of the Indonesian political environment, or all of them? Or perhaps the values of unity in diversity as a multicultural nation still remain strong within the hearts of Jakarta citizens in general, but may have often been clouded by negative news of certain events?

Again more studies and discussions need to be conducted, particularly on the collective memory, or as Werstch (2002) termed the more active “collective remembering”, of these former residents as narrative history of Jakarta. Collective memory is defined as a shared pool of knowledge and information in the memory of two or more members of a social group. Halbwachs (1992) mentioned that spatial images play an important role in collective memory which creates an adherence of a group to its location. GAMENT members often shared collective memories of places, rather than historical events. Examples would include discussions on a famous ice cream parlour (Tjan Njan) and horse-cart ice cream vendor (Es Kuda), market places (Pasar Cikini and Hias Rias), noodle houses in Jalan Sabang, and the two iconic cinemas (Menteng and Metropole theaters).

Another example of collective memory linked to a specific place is the *depot es* (ice cube vendor) located in Jalan Lombok. When the *depot es* was demolished by the municipal government in 2015, many GAMENT members resented it and numerous past experiences related to the place was shared on facebook. Many members regretted the demolition and bitterly mentioned the fact that the provincial government officials (i.e. the Governor, Mayor and *Camat*) were all “newcomers” (*pendatang*) who had no emotional attachment to the city artefacts. The *depot es* itself was not something esthetically pleasing, nor was it economically a big business, but for most Menteng residents it had a sentimental value and many GAMENT members shared a collective memory of this place. Pictures and stories of other landmarks like the Menteng Theatre and Persija Stadium (both demolished), Metropole Theatre and Persija Stadium were also often shared on social media, bringing back pleasant collective memories of the “good old days”.

To conclude this paper, I will quote a post from the GAMENT facebook page, which indicates the pride of former Menteng residents and how they identify themselves:

We, members of Geng Anak Menteng (“Gang of Menteng Kids”), are descendants of various ethnicities across the Indonesian archipelago as well as other parts of the world, who were born and raised in Jakarta. Since our childhood, we have been socialized to see ourselves as part of the Jakarta community. Jakarta is our home. We share our joys and sorrows as equals, and work and live together as Indonesian citizens in the capital of this republic. (Harry Kawilarang, 20 July 2017)

Kami yang tergabung dalam kelompok Geng Anak Menteng berasal dari berbagai turunan suku bangsa kepulauan nusantara ataupun pendatang berbagai penjuru dunia lahir dan dibesarkan di Jakarta. Dengan pergaulan sejak kecil, kami merupakan bagian dari masyarakat Jakarta dan Jakarta adalah rumah kami. Saling

berbagi nasib sama rasa dan sama rata dan bekerja sama di ibukota republik ini sebagai bangsa Indonesia.

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²Dwianto (2008) stated that there were three waves of urbanization in post-Independence Jakarta. The first two intensive flow of urbanization, as initially stated by Tomagala (2002), took place between the late 1950s and early 1960s and between the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the third wave took place after the monetary crisis of 1997. In all these

urbanization flows, most of the migrants were of lower class and lower educational level from West, Central and East Java, who later became informal sector workers in Jakarta, except for the first wave. During the first wave, there was also a significant proportion of people migrating to Jakarta who had higher educational attainment and were of middle and higher class, originally coming from North and West Sumatra, North and South Sulawesi, and Maluku, besides Java.