Urbanity and Generic Blackness

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Abstract
As urbanization assumes planetary scales under variegated market regimes, spaces and opportunities for collective provisions of care are constrained. Long honed relational skills and the use of heterogeneous relationships for economic opportunity are disentangled in favor of intensely individuated adaptations to precarious livelihoods. Urban life increasingly becomes a continuously updated series of interoperable standardizations and probabilistic calculations. Yet endurance for large numbers of urban residents remains predicated on indifference to and acts of detachment from prevailing modes of urban power, in operations of stealth and supplement long embodied by blackness, and Black Power. A notion of generic blackness is explored as conveying both the logic exhibited to define and contain the unbounded and errant forces shaping urban life and the opacities elaborated by residents of a lower-working-class district in Jakarta.

Keywords
blackness, collective life, urban power

Why Blackness?

In his essay 'Black Beach', Édouard Glissant (1997) describes the beach, *Le Diamant* in southern Martinique, as terrain with a subterranean existence. Even at the surface of things there is a sense that there are precipices all around. These are not precipices that one falls into, but through which the surface repeatedly emerges, as if viscous and constantly remade even when it seems to be unyielding and mundane. *Le Diamant* is an ever-swirling, constantly shifting landscape of volcanic sediment, changing colored sands, indiscernible winds, falling rock and trees, washed up foliage and stone, and seemingly interminable backwash. It is a volatile, heaving place neither part of sea nor land. In the essay, Glissant talks about a solitary man who constantly paces up and down the beach at different speeds, never saying anything, but always adjusting his steps to the chaos.

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Glissant sees this walker as a metaphor for all of 'the rhythm of the world that we consent to without being able to measure or control its course' (1997: 124); all of the commonplaces that produce a roar. For what could the walker on the beach say to get to the bottom of things, to make anything understood? The beach lives in its right to opacity. This opacity is the excessive tracing of too many journeys and crossings of the flotsam of the world. All of the flailing, rubbing against, working through, clashes and caresses, promiscuous mixing and friction that keep bodies, times, memories, and cultures moving, without having to always take a reading of position or imaging the source of problems or potentials.

So, blackness carries a lot of baggage. Perhaps it carries too much for the notion to have any more inventive use. At the same time, whenever blackness is imagined, seen or talked about, it appears self-explanatory and tends to close down rather than open up new horizons of consideration.

Black people have struggled in cities for a long time. For blackness has made many instances of urbanization possible and is also a result of certain urbanizations. These functions are difficult to sort out clearly. Still, there is something of enormous potential within the experiences of actual black bodies and the various notions of blackness that shroud, mark, reveal and define these bodies. This potential is hard to come to words. It seems immediately qualified by histories of all kinds. But there is something left over that can potentially be called upon, put to work, that is both connected to black urban experiences but detached as well. Something that moves across territories and situations as a maneuver to gather, cull and distribute knowledge that cannot be pinned down. A resource to go with the 'curse', and that belongs to no one in particular.

Here I want to explore this generic aspect of blackness – exploring, and by no means solving, a conundrum that entails extending a seemingly intangible aspect of blackness across peoples and cities that are not black while remaining within all of the convoluted histories and meanings that seem 'most black'. How do you detach something that is not clear or evident from something so rooted in piles of evidence and affect? How do you make something potentially belong to those who may want no part of it, who have no concrete basis to claim it, and which could detract from the concrete nuts and bolts of dealing with those 'real' black bodies struggling everyday? How to make the resource embodied by blackness into something that is not necessarily dependent upon that embodiment? These questions define what the generic means here.

So why go through this process? The purpose here is to just think through some of the substrates of capacity that endure throughout the captivation of urbanization by markets, logistics, finance, and more arbitrary violence. This is not a story of survival against the odds or the

resilience of the oppressed. Rather, it is about the persistence of potentiality within any format of urbanization – its black side. Something that is not reduced to metaphor but rather a reiteration of political contestation played out day in and day out across the ordinary spaces of city life. It is an inversion of the typical invocation that 'black lives matter'. In other words, when they seem to matter only when they are being wiped out. Instead, I want to talk about a force that perhaps never comes to the fore but, nevertheless, endures.

Opacity and Indifference

I make, then, this extension of blackness to Jakarta, where I lived for several years. Jakarta is a city where on the surface there appears to be no existence of race, even as many residents are often preoccupied with looking as white as possible. Many refer to the city as becoming too 'black'. Black becomes a catchall term for all that is wrong, non-modern, and inexplicable; all that must be clarified and straightened out. But the term is also used to convey a sense of the inevitable, the obdurate and the imminent catastrophe looming because too many residents persist in living the city as some improvised show that must go on. In order to survive, as the conventional Jakarta wisdom goes, the city must be emptied of its messy twists and turns, its double entendre and contradictions.

> [In our district] we knew each other pretty well; we knew what to expect and everyone knew that if they got too much out of line they would get what was coming to them; people knew that they were in for big trouble if they were to steal and cheat or get violent, but what was always a little bit strange was the way in which people would do all of these little things that were just a little bit unusual, the way someone might stop someone in the middle of the street they didn't know and simply tell them a little something about something taking place somewhere else, or the strange way they might decorate their door, or the way they might walk the streets in the middle of the night looking for god only knows what, or the way they might invite total strangers to sit and drink coffee with them in the front of the house. We always knew where we were living, but who knows for sure where we live. (Yohannes Lubis, a bus driver living in Sentiong, Jakarta)

> We do all kinds of strange things, most of them barely noticeable, but we take notice. And all these small things are simply a way for us to get up the courage and to get familiar with attempts to make something big happen, to look at the places where we worked and

lived as something more than that, as full of hidden secrets and mysteries that could be turned into something useful and without it seeming that we were doing something big, because that would only get us into trouble, with our neighbors, the police and the authorities. There is that American expression about 'living large'; we do that, but you keep your head down, stay close to the shadows, and act like you know all the small details of the places you have never been or probably will never be. (Abaye Warsono, the 'unofficial' manager of a fruit and vegetable market living in Utan Panjang)

Opacity is at the heart of these comments. In the textures of everyday life, this opacity emerges not as some essential secret, not as a slippage in the watchfulness of residents, nor in their inability to discern what transpires. Rather, something is always detached, subtracted from what passes for a normative orientation. People may need to be confident about where and how they operate, just as they always need to go beyond that confidence by taking risks on uncertain actions and places while not acting as if they are actually doing so. In these citations, operational space is won by indifference. It is an indifference to empirical realities, control, and locational constraint. At the same time, these things are always kept in view. When property regimes act as the predominant forms of seeing the city, of rendering all that takes place as visible within the optics of transparency, indifference requires opacity, just as opacity is a reflection of the indifference of residents to be fully understood or recognized.

In this article I want to explore these postures of indifference, of ways of operating in contemporary urban space that are largely imperceptible. Compliance to new sensibilities of self-management and entrepreneurship may indeed be taking place. But what else may endure? Across cities where generalized precariousness seems to be the new norm, where residents of all kinds worry about being expendable, black histories can be important for thinking about such realities. They offer sensibilities of care, of taking care, that show up in various ways across different urbanities. Again, what I call a generic blackness.

These citations from Yohannes and Abaye talk back to the high-speed, beyond speculative transformations of cities and urban regions. Urban-built environments appear to outpace each other in their elaboration of the spectacular, as well as the prolific imaginations and deployment of purportedly innovative and sustainable best practices. In the pursuit of resilience, maximized ground rent, algorithmically-designed optimal atmospheric conditions, and well-oiled public-private partnership, long-honed practices of making and living through heterogeneous relationships on the part of perhaps the majority of urban residents, particularly in the 'apparent Global South', are diminished

(Desai and Loftus, 2013; Rodgers, 2012; Kanai and Kutz, 2013; Karaman, 2012; Lemanski and Lama-Rewal, 2012; Raco et al., 2011; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2013). While these transformations are well analyzed, particularly under the critiques of variegated neoliberalism, questions remain about the prospects for residents of cities who are not seamlessly folded into homogenized middle-class formats of inhabitation. Various practices of making life, of feeling and thought, have been subsumed within post-industrial capitalism, but yet often persist with their own temporalities and sensibilities (Tsing, 2013; Bear, 2014).

As urban life is increasingly enclosed within concrete forms of immunization – gated residences, highly formatted and standardized vertical apartment blocks, massive outlays of cheap housing at peripheries – and particularized, parceled, and distributed across multiple medias, what constitutes some enduring stability of residence? How do these polarities become material to be experimented with, in maneuvers that go beyond the problematic status of the individual urban subject and the categories of neoliberal, global urban citizenship or precarity?

Part of the conundrum in addressing this question is the extent to which experimentations with knowledge become a critical locus of accumulation and control. Thus experimentation on the part of the expendable may have to look as if nothing is being experimented with. Sometimes it may appear as if those who are to be made expendable are indifferent to how their situation could change, how they could become less expendable. At the same time, those that become marginal to an urbanization process that emphasizes continuous self-renovation are likely to know that no matter what they do to make their existence more entrepreneurially effective – no matter how much they do the 'right thing' – that this may not be enough. Instead, individual existence is hedged, and so experimentation is always fraught with risk.

Here, we might appropriate Laruelle's notion of rebellion as a generic practice, what he would call a 'vectorial' trajectory of a constantly present supplement (Laruelle, 2013; Smith, 2013; Galloway, 2014). This supplement always adds something to the capitalist city's consolidation. For Laruelle, there would always be something within the formats of neoliberalization that could not be specified and steered. Yes, it is difficult to envision how to draw the line on the seemingly planetary expansion of propertied urban relations and finance's 'freedom' of infinite derivation (Aalbers, 2009; Ancien, 2011; Goldman, 2011; Brenner and Schmid, 2014). There have been many sacrificial attempts to mark firewalls, to etch out lines of flight, and to sustain the continued presence of low-income and working-class households within urban centers, or at least near-peripheries (McFarlane, 2011; Caldeira, 2012; Gazdar and Mallah, 2013; Atehortúa, 2014; Vasudevan, 2014).

At the same time, the formal restructuring involved in the consolidation of urban market regimes is not seamless. It is replete with scams, short-cuts, cost-cutting measures, broken agreements, messed-up contracts, plans gone wrong, and fights within and between municipal and state ministries, architecture firms, consultancies, contractors, property developers, construction firms, infrastructure regimes, planners, local and prospective residents. The power of money, imaginaries of efficient cities and middle-class norms may often trump all of the concrete difficulties entailed, but the process of consolidation remains messy and fraught with unanticipated twists and turns (King, 2008; Edensor and Jayne, 2011; MacLeod and Jones, 2011; Roy, 2014; Weinstein, 2014). Still, the formalities of consolidation can go on and on.

So the generic refers to a condition of insufficiency – whatever we think the urban is never can quite get at what it is able to do. The generic is an infrastructure outside the incessant need to divide things, outside the fundamental epistemological maneuvers that cut the world into specific existent conditions and then bring in the analytical tools needed to account for them. The generic refers both to the condition of being 'anything whatsoever' and being 'nothing beyond what one is'. As such, no matter how the details of city experience and its components might be explained, these explanations remain insufficient to what these details might be and how they might act. It doesn't mean that anything we might identify as an entity or actor has a capacity or being on its own separate from other things. It doesn't mean that it is impermeable to being affected and connected into all kinds of arrangements and structuring. Rather, Laruelle is suggesting that we might view infrastructural arrangements, which are usually seen as combining, reticulating, representing, and enjoining, as also a process of subtracting and detaching. Instead of seeing such subtraction as exclusion or segregation, we might also see it as grounds for viewing urban spaces in new ways, of keeping things out of analytical connections, and to think of the potentials of the supposedly useless, marginal or anachronistic in different ways.

Based on this notion of the generic, then, *generic blackness* points to *both* the process of making expendable the practices of opacity that have long settled and unsettled popular working and lower-middle-class urban districts *and* imperceptible yet obdurate city-making sensibilities. These sensibilities do not exist as alternative urban worlds or representational structures but as corollaries to long histories of subjugation and modernization. Generic blackness is not a place where a person resides, that can be known; it is not a project waiting to be realized. Rather, it points to the uninhabitable in all that makes itself known as exemplarily inhabitable. It extracts from what has long been viewed as uninhabitable – the slum, the wasteland – materials that can be used to enact a different sense of 'home' (Tadiar, 2013).

All of those forces of making the urban that cannot be grounded into a clear project of self-furthering – all of the errant and unbounded forces that have nothing to do with the survival of residents within the city (Colebrook, 2012) – are 'black-boxed' within blackness. So generic blackness is both the 'black box' of unfathomable operations and the implications of the Middle Passage. It is the way that the erasure of black peoples' subjectivity could be converted into unexpected, unplanned capacities, what McKittrick (2013) called the interweaving of body with multiple species of the plantation 'surrounds'. By this, McKittrick refers to 'the actual growth of narratives, food, and cultural practices that materialize the deep connections between blackness and the earth and foster values that challenge systemic violence' (2013: 10).

When black people left in mass from depleted rural areas of the US South to cities in the North, they had to constantly navigate between their own long-term experiments with using space as a means of configuring collective life and the institutionalized attributions of their individual insufficiencies (Pattillo, 2007). So blackness continues to point to the inexplicable and the incalculable *and* traditions of care that appear to be critical practices in the face of what Stiegler (2009) calls the generalized formalization of life. Blackness also calls attention to the very existence of forces indifferent to the sustainability of the urban as a place of inhabitation. This is evident in the way that residents of Jakarta talk about the city becoming too black, as it seems to rush headlong into looming disasters of all kinds. At the same time, the notion of Jakarta getting too black is also invoked to point to all of the ways in which residents seem 'stuck' in their messy experiments with neighbors and strangers – what Yohannes and Abaye talked about at the beginning of this piece.

Against Expendability: From Jakarta to America and Back

In the massive demographic shifts ahead, decisions will inevitably be made about the value of specific existences (Lorimer, 2012). Decisions will be made about whose bodies and lives are most worthy to be reassembled into complex circuits of cognition and performed action. Decisions will be made about who gets resettled from no longer habitable environments and who gets to have shelter in overcrowded urban regions. Vast restructuring of urban space that has pushed out poor, working and lower-middle-class residents to ever more distant peripheries in most regions of Asia and Africa is a form of making people expendable (DiMunzio, 2008 ; Ghertner, 2010; Gidwani and Reddy, 2011). Even if climate imperatives force a renewed, spatially dense proximity of residents with heterogeneous backgrounds, there is little indication that such spaces will be 'socially' dense. In many cities, urban cores entangled diverse walks of life. These entanglements often enlarged opportunities for making different kinds of livelihoods. Then they were

disassembled. Residents were parceled out to the fringes of the city unless they could afford substantially inflated living costs. Now, with irony, they face the prospect of being reassembled. But these urban cores will likely be reassembled with people who have lost the capacity and interest to know what to do with each other.

In Jakarta, desires for security and ownership of property, widely believed to be a critical guarantee of security, prompt large numbers of young urban residents to acquire it at the peripheries of cities. Vast tracks of cheaply built, largely single storey dormitory-like small houses are constructed with initially 'shiny surfaces' and offered at low prices. These are being taken up *en masse* by a young generation of aspirant middle-class couples and households whose incomes can no longer match the escalating prices of rents and property values in the urban cores and near-suburbs. They are also taken up by households who wish to retain a larger proportion of income for non-housing expenditures or saving. Often these tracts are the legally mandated provisions of affordable housing which accompany more upscale and lucrative developments of gated communities and new towns. Whatever the scenario, developers of cheap housing at urban edges frequently cut and run, leaving households holding bank mortgages in developments whose infrastructure and services rapidly fall apart.

Municipalities responsible for these developments make little investment. At great distances from work and ill-served by public transportation, households wait. For not only have their acquisitions been premised on attaining affordable housing but by the conviction that their decisions to locate themselves far from the urban core would eventually, in the not-distant future, be rewarded by the city catching up to them. Land values would then appreciate and the futures of these residents would be secured.

Indeed, such interstices are often filled. But rarely does this take place as fast as residents had calculated. In the interim the built environments corrode. They fast lose their gleam and instead sometimes become slums. Solidarities among residents are often cultivated in face of the absconding of developers and indifferent municipalities. But there is usually too little in terms of resources and time to work with in order to build the heterogeneous built environments and social economies that often characterized previous and similar minimal outlays of housing and infrastructure in other parts of the city several decades ago.

Residents had anticipated that they would find themselves eventually embedded in a rapidly urbanizing context through which diverse articulations with the surrounds could be built. Instead, in periods of protracted waiting, residents are hesitant to make any major moves – whether it is upgrading, economic investment or the cultivation of social institutions. The initial constructions that are purchased from the developer are often so minimal that residents have to basically finish their own

houses to make them inhabitable. But after these early adjustments, there is rarely further adaptation or development. Many residents grew up in dynamic working and middle-class urban core districts, which may have been proximate to slum areas. But they never lived in slum conditions per se. The rapid deterioration of these developments, often accompanied by drastic impingements of nature, reproduces the very conditions which most residents sought guarantees to avoid.

At the same time, those that wait often say that they are actually in the 'central city' that has yet to catch up to them. And as this purported center has been cheaply built, often quickly collapsing or returning to the bush, residents, nevertheless, continue to experience themselves at the 'urban core'. What is interesting about this belief is that residents are not waiting for something at which they will be at the center. Rather they often remark that their decisions to live in these places exposes them to the snowballing interactions of deals, conflicts, aspirations, infrastructures and economies headed 'their way', and it is this snowballing that will radically change their lives. Their actions might rightly be interpreted in terms of speculation, investment, affordability – these are indeed all at work.

But the 'sense' that they talk about is also one of detaching themselves from increasingly sedentary positions in the 'actual' urban core to reposition themselves in the line of urbanity's 'full force'. This is the case even though they cannot point to exactly what that force of the urban is, or break it down into specific parts. So they say that the important thing in this interim period is to help each other stay in place, to tend to each other's impatience, while much time is spent spreading out across Jakarta, not looking for new places to live but experiences to bring back to these peripheral areas. As one resident pointed out, 'to keep the winds coming this way'. This is a particular instance of Jakarta's generic blackness. For even while being unwilling or unable to dissect this snowballing complexity, residents retain a faith in the ability of the urban to address them, if not necessarily redeem them. They are 'in the way' both as impediment and recipient and, as such, this sensibility is part of a struggle against being made expendable. They may have nothing to 'show for themselves', but they retain the conviction that they are always on their way somewhere, prepared for whatever that might be.

The contemporary resurgence of interest in the Black Power movement of the 1950s through the 1970s also reflects the urgency to struggle against expendability. It reflects the need to consider the terms of political struggle in a situation where the composition of subjectivities and agencies is becoming increasingly uncertain. What is particularly important here is that while theorists of the *precariat*, such as Franco Berardi and Bernard Stiegler, warn about the diminution of the capacity for people to care for each other, the Black Power movement was, more than anything else, a concerted, coordinated effort to provide care.

Even as political theater and a drama of self-valorization, the crux of Black Power was the dogged mobilization of both rural and urban residents to enact the relational skills honed over long periods of time. These were skills that either lay dormant or were repressed in systems of intentional governmental neglect at all levels. Rhonda Williams (2005) and Peniel Joseph (2009), in particular, demonstrate the ways in which public resistance, international networking, political demonstrations, and media events were underpinned by careful study of local situations, of playing to the strengths of local black populations. This included the helping each other out that transpired on a day-to-day level, the circuits of information exchange, and collective religious worship. These efforts pressed overly bureaucratic, often inept municipal administrations into various political accommodations. In taking over agencies and committees that existed on paper and imbued with particular competencies and powers, but seldom used, new configurations of municipal power were concretized.

All of the efforts were demonstrations that blacks did not have to be relegated to the margins. For, even at the margins, there was still space, whether sufficient or not, to create the possibilities of shared existence, of deflecting rather than internalizing the systemic violence of the broader society into an insistence upon a singularly black vision of being American. The message was that the power needed to 'complete' the USA, to actualize it according to its own presumptions, could not take place until blacks took back the possibility of creating their own collective subjective experience unimpeded from always anticipating what white people would have to say about it. Such a possibility required the power to invent.

The Black Power movement was less about implementing a particular agenda of rights and affordances, even though it was instrumental in both securing new legislative guarantees and policies as well as managing substantial resources that were mobilized to address poverty and discrimination. Rather, Black Power was aimed at inventing a collective subject from the bits and pieces, the scattered efforts and memories, the idiosyncratic experiments of preachers, polemicists, musicians, and trade unionists, and the insistence to defend the bodily and psychological integrity of populations subjected to constant abuse (Theoharis and Woodward, 2003; Alkebulan, 2007). It was a means of stitching together a wide range of initiatives. Above all it was to demonstrate that people cared about each other and that care had to be extended into ensuring the conditions for its sustenance and reproduction. It was to demonstrate that people could actively make something from such a platform for creating new kinds of cities, rather than care simply being a compensation for the inadequacies of public housing, terrible schools, redlined neighborhoods, and underemployment.

Cities now come to rely upon various forms of algorithmic governance and pursue the exigency of being 'smart' and knowing exactly what is going on. Built environments are being loaded to the hilt with sensors, monitors and tracking systems. As such, we are on the verge of having individual lives reshaped through and into various mutant entities. These entities will operate in ways for which we do not have a functional political language. It is not clear what their operations will bring about. So there is a prospective void at the heart of emergent urbanisms. It will be increasingly difficult to see what urban residents have in common except for the increasing precarity of their existence. This is a precarity that both holds doom and enormous potential. The commonality that Black Power worked during its heyday was less that of a shared racial identity than it was the making of common concert among disparate situations. It was a way of tying together the various strands of black life and empowering those strands by articulating them in new ways (Joseph, 2010). This is also how 'irregular' markets and textile workshops in Jakarta operate, something I will explore below.

Black Beach, Black Market, Black Box

Black beach is not only Glissant's *Le Diamant*. Black beach is also what they call the large street market in Tambora, Jakarta, after the floods in the rainy season leave a black sludge across the landscape. Getting rid of the sludge forces the traders, porters, fixers, police, customers, wholesalers, and cleaners to engage in new conversations, as if seeing each other for the first time. As the sludge is shoveled into burlap bags and shuttled out into new landfill, people say whatever they want to each other regardless of their positions or any other markers of who they are.

This displacement of status, history, age, ethnicity, and gender, however, reiterates what happens all along: The market is run through devices and operations that for the most part connect and arrange transactions that can be excessive, veering off all over the place, threatening to bring in and involve all kinds of characters that would make it difficult to maintain traders, trades, and objects in their space. Just because goods may be arranged according to sector or kind, just because specific costs are required in order to maintain a specific emplacement, or just because the density of participants and goods might suggest a necessary articulation doesn't mean that things will connect, or connect without incessant frictions. Long employed protocols and actors exist to cultivate familiarity and institutional memories. There are fixers and brokers who both create and tend to the interface among actions. They grease palms, get tough, ward off intrusions, and do their best to ensure a sense of integrity to the place.

This black beach largely exists as the remnant of the usually short-term interruption of sludge-like conditions. But black beach here may be

seen as more than just the sludge, and rather, in Glissant's sense of surface, full of twists and turns. It exists in an area full of seemingly incompatible productions. The majority of the residents of the surrounding districts, Jembatan Lima and Tanah Sereal, work in the textile sector. This is a sector made up of hundreds of small to medium-sized fabrication units. Some cut, stitch, design, pattern, color, and recycle remnants. Some are family-owned and labored workshops. Others are small factories run according to different hiring schedules, forms and temporalities of remuneration using different combinations of skilled and unskilled labor. Some are components of larger and stable assemblages managed by a single or corporate owner. Others are components of ever-shifting subcontracted arrangements. Some specialize in particular articles or designs, while others take on a variety of work that is available.

An entire gamut of production logics, labor markets, ownership structures, agglomerations, and niche markets are at work. Often there is a jarring incongruity in the side-by-side arrangements of production or finishing units that operate by completely different rules and logics. The spatial array of units across the area follows no apparent order. While the competition for skilled machine operators is intense, there is little remarking on these disparities.

The frictions that do exist in the simultaneous operations of different kinds of fabrication result in lots of made-up stories that everyone feels to be the case but for which direct evidence remains outside of anyone's view. For in contrast to the Tambora street market, most textile production in this district takes place behind closed doors. Only through the prolific signs taped on the gates of what otherwise appear to be residential units seeking machine operators, the whir of machinery filtering out to the street, and the steady stream of small trucks that load and unload and thus reveal parts of the work interiors does a passerby get any evidence that all these small factories exist. Still, everyone in the district knows what is going on. Everyone has the confidence to tell you how all of the other operations in the area work, even when they almost always are reluctant to reveal any details about their own operation.

These stories could easily be reduced, as they sometimes are in other sectors and areas, to the domination of particular big men, e.g. the gossip that Indonesian Chinese run everything. But most stories here give wide scope to the importance of various actors, times, and ways of doing things. Collaboration among fabricators may fall into specific grooves and long-term agreements. Different units on their own would rarely attempt to articulate themselves in arrangements radically different from what is a highly limited series of forward and backward linkages. But this seldom rules out the professed capacity or willingness of most workshops to work with almost anyone if that is what is required.

Nor does it preclude an ability of individuals to provide detailed accounts of what could take place and how it would work.

Without seeming to have direct evidence, confirmed by mutual and amassed sightings, these representations of the textile business then seem fabricated, products of individual dissimulation. But in my attempts to go door-to-door in the past years, to accumulate information from different workers and owners, and to try and put the pieces of the puzzle together, these representations appear to be accurate. The fabrications aim for an inclusiveness of points of view; they provide room for many different things to take place, and enfold a wide range of relevant actors. For this inclusiveness seems to be hard-wired into the district as a kind of common sensibility.

Even though the Tambora market has been operating for a long time, it thrives today largely on the basis of the viability of the textile sector. The market provides fresh produce to many different customers from all over the city – restaurants, hospitals, food hawkers, and households. It also services the consumption needs of the expanding work force in Jembatan Lima and Tanah Sereal, most of which are paid very low wages.

The present official market building that overlooks the 'black beach' of Tambora was built 40 years ago. Usually markets that have outlasted their functions are torn down and their staff redeployed. Some 80 percent of the market interior has been vacated; the former tenants are no longer able to pay the rent. Almost no revenue is generated from within the walls of the market. But the structure remains, as do its staff. Each morning, a single woman unlocks the doors of the abandoned stores and drags out racks of clothing, arranging them across the public access ways. The entire collection could fit into a single store, yet the meager volume is distributed across the facility. The clothes do not and will not sell; they have probably been in storage for many years.

During the morning and early afternoon hours the 'parking lot' in front of the market building is full of sleeping bodies. But around the corner on the side streets another market geared exclusively toward local consumption is in full swing, usually between the hours of 4–10 a.m. By mid-afternoon, those in the parking lot will have received and arranged voluminous supplies of fresh vegetables and fruits, as the lot is organized into 180 selling units. These units will work through the night, into the early hours of the morning, generating enough visibility and perhaps income to keep the game of the market going. A massive street market unfolds just beyond the frontiers of the parking lot beyond the 'official' purview of the market authorities. Official regulations stipulate that the trade on the outside, in the parking lot, should be taking place inside – in facilities whose official price exceeds what any trader could afford, particularly as rents are coupled to a host of other 'fees' and extractions. The regulations are not enforced, but neither are they forgotten or erased.

While the traders on the outside are exempt from prohibitive costs, they also operate outside almost any official regulative structure that might apply. The weak attempts at dissimulation – to make it seem that the interior of the market is still capable of generating income for the municipality – simply signal the operation of another game. Major deals with big hotels and restaurants are put together to supply their kitchens with fresh produce and, in part, the municipality's market staff brokers these arrangements. This is something that their official job description would not allow them to do. But since the deals come together outside the official trading area, in a parking lot where things are not supposed to be sold, they can legitimately claim that they are not in violation of the rules. This is despite the fact that only this violation enables them to generate sufficient income for the municipality in order to keep the market open.

Again, the deception hides nothing. It is simply part of the apparatus necessary to convert the market into a phantom, where it can, as phantom, do much of whatever it wants to do. Commonly in cities, a key facility, business, or attraction will anchor the dispersal of activity, such as a famous building or monument, or even a market. The trading area surrounding this market continues to expand and become more central as a critical source of supply for a wide range of goods and services. But the central building at the origin of the market itself does not appear to have the density capable of exerting any gravitational force. Squatters fill the upper stories and the basement which, when it is not flooded, is used to peel and shuck, making the produce outside presentable. Everyone knows that the official market is 'dead', that the real action is elsewhere, and for the traders surrounding it, they know the market is 'really' in their hands.

However, talking with traders, truckers, customers, security guards, cleaners, brokers, local authorities and those that keep the traffic flowing, there remains some uncertainty as to just how much capacity does lie in their hands. Ironically, reference continues to be made to the 'main market'. During times of confusion on the street or incipient conflict, people wonder what 'the market might think', as if it still was some kind of command structure. Even as power and efficacy have been distributed across a complicated network of authorities, unofficial regulators, and brokers, reference is made to the sentiments and inclinations of something that has been thoroughly hollowed out.

It is as if this hollowing itself embodies the multiplicity of potentialities entailed in a given sale, an additional seller added to the street, a revised supply chain, or an influx of new workers in the nearby textile fabrication zone. Rather than influence exerted as a function of an ability to define and impose, whatever is left of the official market registers its power in the way it induces a constant wondering. Traders, customers and neighborhood residents alike wonder what happened to

the market and what is it 'up to' now, even when the games it may be playing appear to be well known. But no matter how much knowledge may be in circulation, the hollowing out of the market in the face of a thriving everywhere around it continues to disconcert and prompt unease. As the interior of the formal building is always dark, many traders affectionately call it the 'black box'. For, even as the arrangements of power and money throughout the surrounding street may be crystal clear, there remains a sense amongst all involved that things are not completely settled.

While everyone has their prescribed roles, some of which are reiterated for decades, at times the important thing is to find ways of operating between them. In a situation where the 'central market' seems to control without possessing any of the conventional pre-requisite components to control, thus instilling a pervasive unease in otherwise tightly defined market activities, the exigency is for individuals to assume no one particular role. Carters, hawkers, enforcers, loaders, and cleaners all know how to do each other's jobs, and often will. Those that operate in Tambora act in the interval, precisely so as not to annul the incommensurability entailed in a 'real market' where everyone and no one is a boss, where control is in the hands of those who put it together and also in a shadow that looms over it (Nielsen, 2010). For such incommensurability provides cover for jumps in 'scale'. It provides cover for specific actors trying their luck to reach across the landscape of power-laden transactions. These leaps may come off simply as a means to maximize opportunity at any expense. But they engender a sense of collective modulation, of give and take, of an ability for the overall constellation of trading spaces to 'breathe', to incorporate new information and practices and, as such, ward off atrophy and sedentary repetitions. No matter how repetitious the market may seem, everyday there is something new – a new trader, worker, or set of goods and games. Things and people may be replaced, but no one is expendable.

In Tambora traders find all kinds of ways to incite purchases, as well as coax others into something else besides buying and selling. Cooperative housing is organized for an assortment of workers and traders. Collective investments are made in assets elsewhere. Social events are organized across the city. Those in Tambora pursue methodical, often mundane, instruments that aim for long-term stories, for an endurance capable of absorbing the pressures and pulls, the incessant anxieties about having enough, of having to implicitly share the burdens and benefits of doing the same old thing in intense proximity with others. Whatever form the street market generates must be grasped over the long haul. It must be grasped in its ability to fold in and ward off, its seeming tolerance for accommodations of all kinds, and its indifference to every attempt to grasp what it is, to make it into something specific or to generalize it as a solution or as a testament to resilience.

Conclusion: The Right to Indifference

In her studies of fugitive life in the Antebellum South, Sylviane Diouf (2014) recounts stories of worlds parallel to the plantation. These worlds entailed not only those of maroon communities but also many instances of mostly black men residing in the plantation surrounds who would help maintain families still embedded in the plantation system, providing food and other materials. They would return and leave in stealth, living in stealth in the apparently uninhabitable interstices. Many slaves did attempt to extricate themselves and their families from the system altogether. But for most this was not something that could be logistically achieved as households or small collectives. Small degrees of autonomous maneuver had to be opened up through indiscernible supplements, possible only through cultivating moments of indifference to capture.

The Black Power movement constituted a highly visible, assertive posture of indifference to the reigning political constraints on black expression. It posed itself as the driving force behind American precepts about democracy and freedom and the errant and unbounded forces that could not be contained by these precepts. Behind this posing, hundreds of local initiatives took place as supplements to the multiple configurations of racialized socio-spatial organization. While the national gaze was largely drawn to the public performances of militancy, the persistent efforts of localities to stitch together specific instruments of black power deployed within particular sectors, such as housing and social welfare or the control of municipal institutions, took place largely under the radar. They took place with a wide range of accommodations and deals.

The massive re-formatting of urban space, labor, and livelihoods that has taken place in urban areas under regimes of market rule and hybrid forms of urban governance substantially narrows the possibilities for the political expressions and community organizing exemplified by the Black Power movement. The seeming disentanglement of collective life everywhere, although potentially remobilized with new tools and modalities (Corsín Jíminez and Estalella, 2013) or more foam-like forms of sociality (Lury et al., 2012), produces intensely particularized responses to the conditions of urban residency that appear increasingly precarious and uncertain.

Yet, as the discussion of everyday economic life in Tambora indicates, a process of taking care deployed as collective acts may still endure. They endure in ways that demonstrate elements of indifference to the severity of those conditions but are also elaborated with large measures of opacity. These are black acts, both in their sludge-like appearance and in their pointing to aspects of the urban that remain outside apprehension. They are not subsumed by market valuation. They are not computable in interoperable assessments of how different urban sectors and materials impact upon each other or into probabilistic assumptions about what

different spaces and persons are about to look like. These acts are beginning to intersect in uncertain trajectories with emergent architectures of social policy and economic development. They, in turn, give rise to heterogeneous intermediaries and collaborations that fall neither under the rubric of state or market-centered logics (Larner, 2014).

While race continues to wax, wane, and mutate as the critical engineer and arbiter of urban relations (Keith, 2013), the obdurate mobilization of blackness as method of place-making (Hunter et al., 2016) reiterates a platform where singular engagements with the urban can be deployed. A generic blackness points to the continuities in which the dangers of urban life are still attributed to particular kinds of bodies, and thus held outside sustained consideration. It points to the systematic deskilling of those bodies, immobilizing them in ways that turn them into the dangers that have been attributed to them. But it also points to the substrates of city-making which prevailing regimes of urban power can never fully apprehend or control, particularly as they define and contain the dangers of urbanization. These are dangers that partly ensue from forces of the earth (Matts and Tynan, 2012) and those that are wrapped up in the imagination of the urban itself as something steeped in an englobing vision of coherence and self-sufficiency (Colebrook, 2012).

Within a generic blackness, nothing can be sufficient. Throughout six years of research in Jakarta asking residents how their neighbourhoods got to be the way they were, I would hear over and over again the invocation of a wily, sometimes even disingenuous ignorance: 'we cannot be so sure about what happened'. Obviously such a response contains specific ideas, but as soon as they are posited, as soon as residents hear themselves bringing voice to them, these ideas immediately sound either foolish or something to be withdrawn. It is as if their impact, no matter how correct these propositions might be in their analytical capacity, would inevitably sound false.

These acts of standing down, of hesitating and indifference to definitive accounts were not the result of the informant's distrust in being asked, for there was often an eagerness to talk. This was something unusual for Jakartans long accustomed to reticence bordering on hostility. Nor did it seem this act of indifference came from any sense of humility.

Rather, as Lia, a 37-year-old teacher, puts it:

To have a clear idea about something means you have to have a clear course of action. Just because the people in my neighbourhood were all pretty much in the same situation, facing the same daily realities, didn't mean that they all saw things the same way; in fact quite the opposite, but you wouldn't really know this for sure; it was just something you felt, because if people really expressed how

differently they saw things, it would mean that there would be some kind of related action on the way, maybe not now, maybe not ever, but you would assume it, and so people simply let each other be. Of course around here no one could keep quiet for more than two seconds so, one way or another, those points of view were always going around. A lot of times you wouldn't know where some specific idea or opinion was coming from, as people might say that they heard this from somewhere else, even though you probably knew that it was their idea anyway. It might seem as if we were hesitant to act decisively, but I think it was more a matter of letting a lot of things happen on their own.

What I think Lia points to here is a respect for the complexity of things, a willingness to accept a lack of clarity, or a rejection of pronouncing, let alone acting in a 'clear' way. As such, a critical matter of concern for today's urban politics may be how spaces are created through collective acts of indifference. These are acts that do not impose definitive, comprehensive plans on cities for their salvation, nor expect some kind of fundamental resilience to emerge in the sheer act of letting the 'other ones' in, other actors, organic or inorganic.

The recognition of the limitation of human intentionality and capacity today comes at the same time as new claims are being made about the 'right to the city'. This usually refers to the right of urban inhabitants to use the promise of the city, its convergence of domains, backgrounds, and possibility, to make livelihoods compatible with their aspirations, their sense of things (Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2014). While these claims for rights aim to ensure a broader sense of inclusiveness, they are also claims for clarity. Demands for the clarification of tenure and citizenship, while important in terms of securing livelihoods, also risk being complicit with the very rationalities of private property long instituted in liberal economies. These rationalities were the mode through which urban space is inscribed with a sense of clarity – of what can be done, without the messy negotiations of political contestation and transaction costs (Davies, 2014). In some respects, then, rights to the city thus require a city without rights, without superseding claims and abilities. As such, there may be a right to indifference, not as a cynicism or paralysis, but as the capacity to 'let things be', without having to incessantly make a decision about what is a 'right' way or not.

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