17 Reconfiguring Rural Aspirations through Urban Resettlement

Navigating Futurity after the 2010 Eruption of Mount Merapi, Indonesia[1]

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Each morning before dawn, Pak Anto begins his motorcycle commute from Huntap Pagerjurang (*Hunian Tetap*, Permanent Settlement) to a dairy farmer's cooperative located seven kilometers away, where he bathes, feeds, and milks his family's six cows. Huntap Pagerjurang, the place Pak Anto now calls home with his wife, Ibu Yani, and their four young children, is an Indonesian government-sponsored relocation site in one of five urban villages that comprise Cangkringan District, Sleman Regency, in the Special Province of Yogyakarta.[2] Pak Anto's and Ibu Yani's family is one of almost 1,600 households displaced by the devastating 2010 eruption of Indonesia's most active stratovolcano, Mount Merapi (*Gunung Merapi*; Fire Mountain), which killed 386 people and destroyed 2,847 houses.[3] Their rural to urban relocation in the aftermath of the disaster enabled their family to access government recovery funding to purchase six cows, which was ultimately insufficient to replace their seven cows that perished in the eruption.[4] The government livelihoods recovery scheme also failed to account for the reduced profit margin in milk sales that dairy farmers like Pak Anto incurred through their new 6-kilometer commute back up the volcano, where many farmers residing in Huntap Pagerjurang, still own land, on which they grow grass to feed their livestock.

Pak Anto always works alone. He never shares fuel expenses by hiring a communal vehicle to collect grass on Mount Merapi. Nor does he participate in any other division of labor with his neighbors in Huntap Pagerjurang, who are all dairy farmers from the village of Kaliadem on the volcano's south-eastern slope, which was hardest hit by the 2010 pyroclastic

17.1   View of Mount Merapi from Huntap Pagerjurang.

flows.[5] The farmers do not trust each other to distribute the juiciest grass evenly or to bathe each other's cows as carefully or frequently as they do their own. Ibu Siti, who owns a grocery store down the street from Pak Anto's home in Huntap Pagerjurang, says the farmers once tried hiring a truck together to transport grass from Kaliadem village, but it didn't work out because some farmers were lazy and didn't pull their weight.[6] Pak Anto, however, maintains that individual labor is core to his identity as a farmer, which is rooted in his ancestral land on Mount Merapi, and he sees his cows as both a hobby and an investment into his children's futures. He adds that the farmers do not need to spend equal amounts of time at the dairy cooperative or on the mountainside collecting grass because their herds are all different sizes.[7]

The individualistic milieu of relocated Kaliadem dairy farmers has aligned their future trajectories in divergent ways. Not only did the 2010 eruption produce a fundamental shift in how people saw themselves in the world, but it also transformed how they mapped their aspirations onto the future. Indeed, as anthropologist Eli Elinoff points out, the experience of socioeconomic dislocation through rural to urban resettlement transforms people's notions of futurity itself.[8] Thinking about futurity in this way is a

useful heuristic device in that it enables us to move beyond assessing the extent to which the material needs of people are met through formal disaster response and recovery channels and to probe the symbolic and cultural importance of realised expectations and frustrated aspirations after catastrophic events. Zooming in on this aspirational dimension of futurity—the energy and modalities through which people produce situated futures from their present location—also allows us to get at what Bunnell and Goh term the "driving human force"[9] of change. As Arjun Appadurai explains, while the capacity to aspire as a navigational instrument is fluid and dynamic, aspiration is an insufficient goal in and of itself as aspirational capacities are imbricated with a series of real-world conditions and cultural constraints.[10] Similarly, resilience is not something fixed or immutable as displaced peoples must continually negotiate their journeys into the future from the ashes of their ruptured pasts and dislocated presents.

Another consideration that the individualistic orientation of the relocated Merapi dairy farmers brings to bear on contemporary donor-driven agendas is that the prevailing development industry discourse, which treats the "community" as an undifferentiated, and often romanticised entity in terms of its collective capacity for empowered grassroots action, needs rethinking. The sheer diversity of motivations and factors involved in both individual and collective future-making cannot be encapsulated or adequately addressed within singular constructs of "stakeholders", "beneficiaries", or "communities." In other words, the construct of the community in relation to scales of wider power dynamics must equally be understood internally in terms of its highly variegated capacities associated with class, gender and other demographic factors in the interests of developing more effective and inclusive policy options for disaster governance regimes.

The individualistic approach to futurity among relocated Huntap Pagerjurang dairy farmers was underpinned by several factors. First, the devastation wrought by the disaster violently unsettled collectivised life worlds that were spatially anchored in rural villages with localised histories. Disaster displacement and the experience of relocation reconstituted the social arrangements of these relatively closed networks of interdependent relationships. The eruption also eroded the shared spiritual belief among Merapi residents in the volcano's sacred (*keramat*) properties as an eternal giver and taker of life that replenished what it destroyed in the form of fertile soil and groundwater to sustain agricultural livelihoods. Even though the volcano erupts roughly every four to six years, the capacity of Merapi residents to manage this perpetual uncertainty was previously underscored by their spiritual understanding of the mountain, and by their faith in its gatekeeper

17.2 Mount Merapi.

(*juru kunci*), who was appointed by the Sultan of Yogyakarta to manage the volcano's hidden spirits and to warn people of any imminent danger. In 2010, the death of Merapi's 83-year-old *juru kunci*, Penewu Surakso Hargo (colloquially called Mbah Maridjan), unsettled this belief and left people divided and disunited. Many Merapi residents saw Mbah Maridjan's passing and the sultan's appointment of his son as his successor—a university lecturer rumoured to be "out of touch" with the mountain's spirits—as a call to question the legitimacy of the spiritual gatekeeper and a reason to permanently leave Merapi.[11] Many of the remaining 4,000 residents were traumatised by the gradual loss of home, livelihood and community associated with an Indonesian government legacy of forced resettlement. This includes through the historical relocation of displaced Merapi residents to the earthquake and volcano-prone province of Lampung on Sumatra island between 1954 and 1990 as part of the central government's controversial *transmigrasi* [transmigrant] program. Their shattered expectations led them to ignore official directives and rebuild their mountainside homes *in situ*.

The implications of this choice to stay or not to stay were as profound as they were far-reaching. The decision itself was implicated in how communities became more or less divided and in the ways in which people correspondingly recalibrated their relationships with the Indonesian state,

including how residents came to view their rights and entitlements. The minority of Merapi villagers who refused to comply with official orders to permanently leave their mountain homes were able to largely restore their pre-existing life worlds, but repercussions from the Indonesian state were high. Returning residents of three villages in particular (Srunen, Kalitengah Lor, and Kalitengah Gladaharjo Kidul in Glaga-harjo subdistrict, Cangkringan district), located five to seven kilometers below the volcano's summit, were "punished" by the provincial government of Yogyakarta. Denied electricity, running water, and a teacher for their primary school for refusing to move to safer lowlands, they subsequently had to source these services from the faith-based modernist Islamic Muhammadiyah civil society organisation and the neighboring provincial government of Central Java.[12] As such, these villagers came to see their futures as hinging primarily upon strategies of self-reliance and strategic relationships of mutual convenience, or *gotong-royong* (cooperation) with family members and fellow residents, NGOs and "friendly" state agencies in Central Java. This approach was evident three years after the 2010 eruption, for example, when more than 1,000 residents from the three affected villages gathered in protest against their perceived neglect by the Yogyakarta provincial government. Their banners, erected at community entrances, transformed the government acronym "KRB" (*Kawasan Rawan Bencana*; Disaster Prone Area) into Kawasan Ra di-Bantu (Unaided Area). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Team Coordinator of the Yogyakarta-based Merapi Recovery Response (MRR) office:

> It seemed like [their message was aimed at] getting the government to start supporting them, but when I went [up the mountain] to ask them, a completely different picture emerged. What they were really saying to the government and other communities was that "Without your help I am still alive".[13]

By contrast, the majority of Kaliadem dairy farmers who chose to cooperate with the Yogyakarta government's program to move to Huntap Pagerjurang were offered financial compensation and access to livelihood programs. But their social networks were in tatters. The dense concrete housing blocks that formed the skeleton of their new "community", coupled with the uneven dispersal of government funding and unequal access to recovery programs, fuelled feelings of jealousy between neighbors. As Pak Anto's neighbor, Mas Heri, saw it, working together in pursuit of a shared

future was no longer possible because "the style of the buildings here has changed the culture of our people."[14]

The rural to urban dimension of this transition is noteworthy in at least two ways. First, even though the post-disaster *huntap* (permanent settlements) are not physically embedded in the nearby provincial capital city of Yogyakarta, they are constitutive of the sort of "thoroughgoing urbanisation" of Asia that social demographer Gavin Jones says is characteristic of Asia's emergent future. Not only do "urbanised corridors" like Huntap Pagerjurang challenge the official administrative boundaries of cities that are conventionally cast as representative units of "the urban", but they are also imbued with certain urban norms and values that pervade and transform Indonesian societal spaces.[15] For instance, in sociological terms the erosion among relocated Kaliadem dairy farmers of cosmological beliefs associated with the spiritual powers of Mount Merapi that reinforce reciprocal relationships of connectedness to the mountain could be construed as manifestations of the shift from traditional (rural) to modern (urban) belief systems and practices.[16]

The second noteworthy feature of the urban turn among resettled Kaliadem dairy farmers is that it serves as a cautionary reminder to challenge certain truisms in urban studies that assume either a correlation between community size or the duration of residency with the degree of community attachment.[17] Both through their farming identities grounded in land ownership and in the individualistic orientation of their rituals of labor, the Kaliadem dairy farmers did not conform to romanticized clichés about rural collectivism even before they evacuated their villages on Mount Merapi. Although the bonds of community remained stronger among impacted residents who returned to their mountainside homes, this collective identity was at least partly forged in response to their perceived neglect by the Indonesian state and could not be solely ascribed to stereotypes about rural manifestations of sociality.

Despite a lack of community cohesion and everyday cooperation among relocated dairy farming families, interviewed Huntap Pagerjurang residents uniformly believed that their experience of resettlement had somehow made them substantially more resilient in the face of future disasters. That is, social fragmentation and even occasional open conflict had no bearing on attitudes about future well-being. This was mainly because of the physical relocation out of the officially designated ten-kilometer hazard zone and into a safety zone some twenty kilometers below the volcano's summit. Public confidence in future security was further bolstered by intermittent government-initiated disaster mitigation simulations (*simulasi mitigasi bencana*) that granted Huntap Pagerjurang residents occasional access to state

resources such as fire engines, ambulances, and two-way radios, material resources that encouraged their participation in the simulation exercises. As a planned post-disaster settlement, Huntap Pagerjurang also has centrally located and clearly signposted evacuation routes, adding to the general feeling of optimism about the chances of surviving future volcanic eruptions. These factors, combined with a diversification of livelihoods among young people in particular, added to a widely held perception that the future was alive with options and possibilities for regeneration and renewal, at least among younger generation residents.

As noted above, the highly individualistic orientation of relocated Merapi residents sits uncomfortably alongside development industry agendas that ignore or overlook the role of the individual while treating communities as homogenous entities in "donor-beneficiary" programs and activities. Even in contemporary scholarship, the capacity of displaced peoples to rebuild their life worlds after the "rupture" of a catastrophic event has been explored mainly in collective terms across the social sciences, with considerably less attention devoted to differentiations along gender, class and other demographic lines. By privileging community-centric notions of empowerment in the service of a greater common good, both scholars and development actors ignore the range of forces that bring people to-

17.3   State Sponsored Disaster Simulation Exercise in Yogyakarta.

gether or draw them apart in the frictious interface between collective and individualised future-making.[18] Moreover, there is a tendency to categorise "the community" as a singular subject in wider scales of unequal power relations, such as the state, big businesses and donor and lending agencies. These sorts of structural power dynamics certainly pervaded the rural-urban relocation experiences of Merapi dairy farmers, not least because their recovery options were framed and presented to them as necessarily collective by the Indonesian state. But the individualistic orientation of their post-disaster future-making activities and aspirations warrants some reflection on the role and complexities of individual agency in forging post-disaster futures.

The complexities of individual agency become ever-more apparent when we consider that the capacity of relocated individuals to aspire to more resilient post-disaster futures did not automatically translate into empowerment in other spheres of life. In many cases, individuals felt that greater disaster resilience did not pave the way for more secure futures generally. For instance, Pak Anto felt that while his family's future looked safer in Huntap Pagerjurang than in Kaliadem, he was too tired from the daily grind of commuting to the dairy cooperative and his land on Mount Merapi to conceive of any alternative socioeconomic future for his four young children. This feeling of being "too tired to aspire" was commonly articulated by people with dependents, typically middle-aged parents, many of whom also cared for elderly family members. Before the 2010 eruption, the elderly in Kaliadem village had been responsible for tending family fruit and vegetable gardens or managing private poultry farms. But in the cramped, garden-less houses of Huntap Pagerjurang, old people were denied any productive societal role and were excluded from government livelihood schemes on account of their perceived inability to generate as much income as younger residents. As a result, the elderly tended to see their future as safer, but also bleaker and devoid of purpose and meaning.

Conversely, younger relocated residents generally felt more capable of navigating futurity across all spheres of life. These variations in future expectations along generational lines were especially pronounced among young men, for whom the opening up of employment opportunities through government livelihoods programs was key to their capacity to carve out a better life. When coupled with their greater connectedness to wider urban networks in their new homes, the young men of Huntap Pagerjurang felt that the future looked bright. Whereas young men, as well as a number of unmarried, childless young women, continued the family tradition of dairy farming, they also diversified their livelihoods by participating in

the physically demanding and dangerous, but more financially lucrative, sand mining (*tambang pasir*). Still others abandoned farming entirely by learning a trade such as carpentry or motor mechanics. Pak Anto's 19-year-old neighbour, Mas Heri, believed his ability to work fluidly across sectors, made possible by his move to Huntap Pagerjurang, was instrumental to his capacity to build a more resilient future founded on socioeconomic mobility. As the teenager explained, "Knowledge and choices give us power, not community" (June, 2016).

What the 2010 Merapi resettlement experience highlights, above all, is that if resilient future-making in Asia's rapidly changing societies is not clearly linked to the degree of community cohesiveness, then further research is required into the navigational capacities of individual agency. This is especially true in post-disaster settings, when individual aspirations are subordinated to perceived "community interests" in donor-driven agendas. Relatedly, the Huntap Pagerjurang example shows that when romanticized notions of rural togetherness are uncritically transposed onto relocated "communities", the differential capacities of resettled individuals and groups to rebuild the multifaceted components of their life worlds are ignored or overlooked. This does not mean that the countervailing argument of methodological individualism that reduces future-making processes in urbanizing societies in wholesale terms to individuals and groups is more constructive or equitable. But declining generational, gendered, and other demographic variations among displaced populations into urban disaster governance policy options would better support programs that enable impacted peoples to navigate their pathways into the future in more comprehensive, meaningful, and ultimately resilient ways.

Notes

1   This research was supported by the MOE Tier 2 grant, *Aspirations, Urban Governance and the Remaking of Asian Cities* [MOE2012-T2-1-153]. I am grateful to Giuseppe Bolotta, Tim Bunnell, Eli Elinoff and Daniel Goh for their valuable comments and suggestions on earlier iterations of this chapter. Any remaining shortcomings are entirely mine.

2   A nationwide process of decentralization that began in 1999 devolved "special" powers of regional autonomy to the provincial governments of Yogyakarta, Aceh, Papua and Jakarta. In all other parts of Indonesia political, economic and administrative authority and resources were devolved to the sub-provincial level. Michelle Ann Miller, "Decentralizing Indonesian City Spaces as New 'Centers'" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, 3 (2013) 834–48.

3   Elizabeth Maly and Ardhya Nareswari, *Housing Relocation after the 2010 Eruption of Mt. Merapi, Indonesia*, Reconstruction and Recovery in Urban Contexts, London, UK, 7 July 2015 (6 July–8 July 2015).

4   The government compensation scheme awarded Rp.12 million (USD$919) for each bull (which usually cost around 20 million [USD$1,530]), Rp.8 million [USD$612] per cow (normally Rp.15 million [USD$1,149) and Rp.5 million [USD$383] per calf, which generally sell for Rp.8–9 million [USD$612-USD$689]. Approximately 3,500 cows died in 23

villages in the 2010 eruption. Various interviews with residents of Srunen and Pangkuk Rejo villages, 13–14 June 2016.

5   Estuning Tyas Wulan Mei, Franck Lavigne, Adrien Picquout, Edouard de Bélizal, Daniel Brunstein, Delphine Grancher, Junun Sartohadi, Noer Cholik and Céline Vidal, "Lessons Learned from the 2010 Evacuations at Merapi Volcano" *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 261, 1 (2013) 348–56.

6   Interview, 13 June 2016, Huntap Pagerjurang, Kabupaten Sleman.

7   On average, most farmers own 3–5 cows that produce between 9 and 15 litres daily. Andarwati, S.; R. Rijanta, R. Widiati and Y. Opatpatanakait, "Analysis of The Factors Motivating Dairy Farmers in The Southern Slope of Merapi Volcano to Return to Their Endangered Settlement Post Eruption 2010" *Animal Production* 16, 1 (2014) 64.

8   Eli Elinoff, "Smouldering Aspirations: Burning Buildings and the Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Isan" *South East Asia Research* 20, 3 (2012) 381–97.

9   Tim Bunnell and Daniel Goh "Editorial: Urban Aspirations and Asian Cosmopolitanisms" *Geoforum* 43, 1 (2012) 1–3.

10   Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London and New York: Verso, 2013) 186–89.

11   Various interviews in Huntap Pagerjurang, Pankuk Rejo and Kinah Rejo, Sleman Regency, 12–16 June 2016.

12   Various interviews, Srunen village, 15 June 2016.

13   Interview with Rinto Andriono, Team Coordinator, UNDP-MRR Office, UNDP, Yogyakarta, 29 November 2013.

14   Interview, Huntap Pagerjurang, 13 June 2016.

15   Gavin Jones, "The Thoroughgoing Urbanization of East and Southeast Asia" *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 38, 3 (1997) 237–49.

16   Although, in practice, modern or scientific forms of calculation coexist and intertwine with inherited cosmological engagements with the future in this region. See Tim Bunnell, Jamie Gillen and Elaine Ho "The Prospect of Elsewhere: Engaging Futurity through Aspirations in Asia" *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, 1 (2018) 35–51.

17   Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" *American Journal of Sociology* 64 (1938), 1–24; and John D. Kasarda and Morris Janowitz "Community Attachment in Mass Society" *American Sociological Review* 39 (1974) 328–39.

18   Eli Elinoff unsettles collectivist development narratives in his critique of future-making in community planning in "Sufficient Citizens: Moderation and the Politics of Sustainable Development in Thailand" *PoLAR* 37, 1 (2014) 89–108.