

# 18 Excavating the Ruins of Aspirational Urban Futures in Bukit Duri, Jakarta<sup>1</sup>

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Libi was a cat owned by Ghofur, Muis, Ucok, Deni, Cilog and Dedi—the youths who lived in *Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka* at RT 06, RW 12, Bukit Duri District, Tebet, South Jakarta. Libi was a friendly and faithful female cat that became the favourite of Bukit Duri residents. Yes, Libi was born in the communal house, *Sanggar Ciliwung*. She became a good friend of Indy (four years old) the young daughter of Ghofur (my godson) and Mentari.<sup>2</sup>

Bukit Duri, home of Libi the cat, is a *kampung*<sup>3</sup> neighborhood along Ciliwung River, the main river that flows through the city of Jakarta (Figure 18.1). Historians have speculated that the name, which literally translates into “Hill of Thorns”, originates from the seventeenth century, when thorny fences were constructed by the Dutch to protect against attacks from the kingdoms of Mataram and Banten.<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth century, an entrepreneur named Cornelis (“Meester” Cornelis) obtained the concession to develop the place, and the neighboring areas of Kampung Pulo and Jatinegara, as plantation, settlement, and market. This land concession was later joined with Batavia<sup>5</sup> in the 1930s. In 1968 a part of Bukit Duri was used as a women’s prison for political convicts accused of being communists. The prison continued to be overcrowded and was finally demolished in 1984.<sup>6</sup>

Bukit Duri became the official name of a sub-district (*kelurahan*) in South Jakarta that was home to approximately 9,000 households.<sup>7</sup> The neighborhood that was often associated with the name Bukit Duri was the

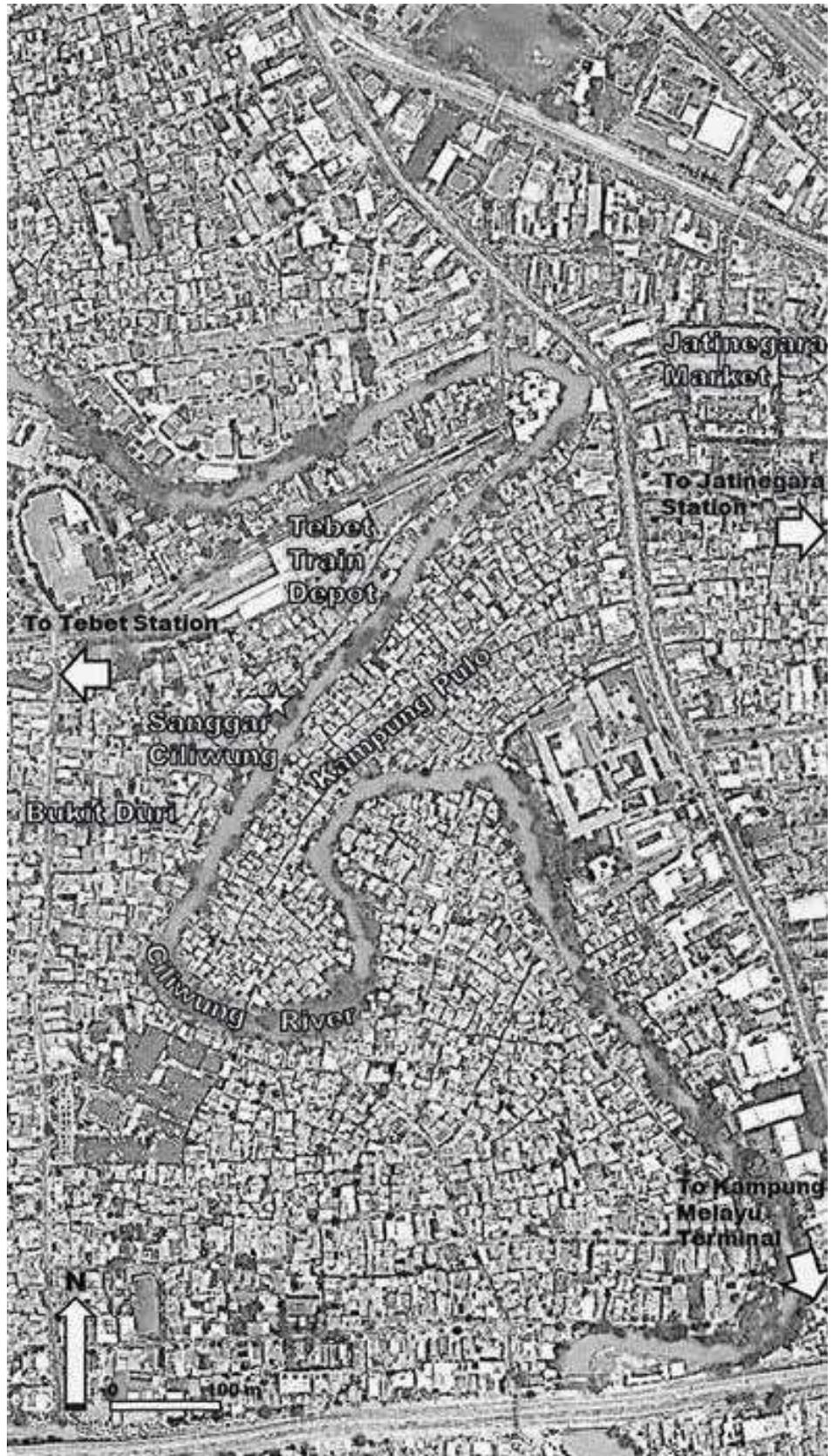


18.1 Kampung Bukit Duri People's Market in 2016.

linear kampung settlement along the Ciliwung River, between the train depot and the river. The kampung was flood-prone, but the location was economically strategic, as it was near transportation hubs such as Tebet train station in the south and Kampung Melayu bus terminal in the south-east (Figure 18.2). The intercity train station Jatinegara was less than two kilometers from the place, and the Jatinegara market was also nearby. For more than a decade, particularly in the 1990s, the neighborhood was notorious for its gang-related activities and drugs. The residents managed to clear that stigma through processes of social organizing and communal activities in the 2000s. *Sanggar Ciliwung*, the communal house at the center of Libi's story, was one of the main spaces for those activities. In recent years, the settlement had been threatened by forced eviction for riverbank clearance to make way for inspection roads and building setbacks as required by several national government regulations.

### Urban Aspirations

How do residents of urban poor kampungs such as Bukit Duri aspire for the future of their kampung? How do they project their neighborhood's future in the wider context of Jakarta's urban development trajectory? These questions become even more pertinent considering that the



**18.2** Map of Bukit Duri.

Source: aerial picture: Future Cities Laboratory, 2013; modified by author.

ethnographic interviews and field observations that I carried out in the area occurred during the three years prior to demolition of almost 400 houses along the river in September 2016.

Building upon the seminal work of Arjun Appadurai,<sup>8</sup> Tim Bunnell and Daniel Goh identified three dynamics of constructing capacities to aspire among urban residents in Asia: 1) the relatively strong role of the developmental state in managing and cultivating aspirations; 2) the state embracing the free market forces in urban renewal; and 3) the “new civic networks of middle class and marginalized residents” that provide possibilities for the poor to voice out their aspirations.<sup>9</sup> Although the third dynamic seems to be the one that is of interest in studying urban poor communities, the poor are also subjected to mainstream ideologies, the state and the free market forces that may affect, constrain, or even be embraced in their aspirations for the future. Therefore, civic networks are not the only forces that interact with marginalized residents, as they are also affected by the state and market forces that often drive urban development decisions.

How do Bukit Duri residents project their kampung’s future in Jakarta’s urban development trajectory? To what extent do they aspire as a collective, as members of “Bukit Duri” rather than as individuals? The size of megacities in Asia in terms of population and land area are likely to be at least one thousand times bigger than one particular neighborhood or kampung. It is getting more difficult for a resident to know each and every corner of the city, and as such the knowledge and depth of interactions are uneven. Yet, all city dwellers construct visions of city futures along the three dynamics of urban aspirations. For economically marginalized communities, survival requires capacities to identify opportunities and to manoeuvre throughout various economic and social prospects that would affect their capacities to aspire.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the process of constructing visions of a better city, these dynamics may be influenced by aspirations for one’s own neighbourhood, yet also have consequences for other parts of the city.

### **Bukit Duri and Jakarta’s Urban Development**

Bukit Duri is one of many neighborhoods that organically grew within the administrative boundaries of Jakarta. These neighborhoods grew denser particularly when the city experienced an exponential growth in the 1970s, owing to an oil-propelled national economy at that time.<sup>11</sup> Real estate expansion in the 1980s opened up lands in urban fringes for private housing development, but in the 2000s large-scale projects came back to the city.<sup>12</sup> In the period between 2003 and 2010, at least twenty-one mega-

projects were approved by the governor's office, covering a total land area of 13.6 million square meters. This development trajectory intensified the struggle for land space in the city, threatening organically-grown kampung neighbourhoods like Bukit Duri, which at the beginning of my research had about 814 of its houses categorized as "semi-permanent".<sup>13</sup> Land ownership status in the riverbank settlement of Bukit Duri varied; some had land certificates and most had some form of purchase documents. Many residents continued to pay property tax even without land certificates. This way of proving land status has been commonly found across organically grown settlements in various cities in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>

Kampung neighbourhoods such as Bukit Duri have long been absorbers of migrants who come to work in Jakarta, which outstrips all other Indonesian cities and localities in terms of economic development and services. Jakarta's primacy is reflected in the city's annual budget of USD 4.7 billion (2016), compared to less than USD 1 billion for Surabaya, the next biggest city in Indonesia. Consequently, Jakarta has become the imagined land of opportunities, and continues to attract migrants from across the archipelago. Yet affordable government housing programs have long been insufficient. Housing provision was largely placed in the hands of private developers in the 1980s, who have until now only managed to build around one million houses, all of which were sold through property market mechanisms. Neighbouring cities within the metropolitan area have also geared towards upper-middle class housing.<sup>15</sup> The National Housing Company (Perumnas) that had the mandate to provide affordable housing had also turned to middle-class housing projects that yield higher economic returns, while the low-income housing projects are pushed "farther and farther away".<sup>16</sup> As a result, the kampung as organic settlements performed the role of providing affordable housing through practices of renting houses and rooms for low-income workers.<sup>17</sup>

## **Kampung Aspirations: Past, Present, and Future**

### ***Dark Past, Hopeful Present***

Although Kampung Bukit Duri was dense and bustling with a mix of those who were born there and those who migrated in, long-term residents noticed changes in their lifetime that had transformed the image and feel of the place. Ranto Tambunan, a professional musician who was born in Bukit Duri, remembered the "darkness" of the place in the 1980s, known for its gangs, gambling, and drinking.

[Before 1985] The youths here were involved with those [local gangsters] .... When I was small, I was often scared going to school because I had to pass the local gangsters. Sometimes I was told to buy them drinks on my way back from school ... From there to here were all gambling places and lottery sellers. In the past this was a quiet area because many people did not want to stay here .... My relatives were also concerned that we stayed here, because it was a “dark valley” ... but because my grandfather lived here so I like Bukit Duri.... In the past, for taxi drivers if we say “SMA 8” [a high school in the vicinity], nobody dared to take us. (Ranto Tambunan, 45-year-old, resident in Bukit Duri, interview, June 2014).

Ranto’s view on the lack of safety in the past was corroborated by the view from Pak Mulyadi, a senior resident who migrated into the kampung more than 30 years ago, and who eventually became the residents’ committee leader.<sup>18</sup>

Wah, Bukit Duri in the past was scary for people who wanted to come in. Now it is just an ordinary thing if you come in here, there is my house here, night and day it is safe. We also often have passers-by at midnight. Ariel [as a young woman] also often comes back midnight, right (looking at Ariel, a resident who accompanied me in conducting the interviews), but *alhamdulillah* it is safe, nobody touches you, right, Ariel? Nobody on the street disturbs you, right? (Mulyadi, 67-year-old, RT leader, interview, June 2014).

The transformation of the neighbourhood in overcoming the gangster problem, besides being attributed to the heightened presence of the police through a police post near the train depot, was linked to several civil society initiatives, involving religious leaders, community leaders, and a non-governmental organization (NGO). One religious leader mentioned was *Ustad* Mualium Yunus who started prayer activities (*pengajian*) that steered youths and children away from gang-related activities. The role of community leaders was also important as the ones with the authority to ban gambling and drinking. Finally, the NGO that worked in the community was Ciliwung Merdeka, the communal house and activity centre where Libi the cat and her owners resided. Ciliwung Merdeka activities included

study group, dance, music, and theatre performances, such as the Ciliwung Larung musical that was based on the experiences of living on the riverbank and being constantly threatened by eviction (Figure 18.3).

After there was a police post and a community leader who cared about this, the area changed. Actually, Sanggar Ciliwung did not only begin in 2000, even in the 90s it already started although only in a rental house. It got better and better, a lot of positive activities available. So why did Bukit Duri get denser? Because people are not scared anymore. (Ranto Tambunan, 45-year-old, resident in Bukit Duri, interview, June 2014)



**18.3** Ciliwung Larung Musical Theatre Performance by Bukit Duri residents at Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2012.  
Source: Ciliwung Merdeka.

### *Beautiful Past, Degraded Present*

Although long-term residents indicated pride in overcoming the “dark valley” stigma through civil society leadership and engagements, there was an inverted pattern when it comes to environmental quality. Residents consistently identified that flooding had become worse in recent years, particularly after the year 2000. Furthermore, the increased density of the kampung population had resulted in higher noise disturbances that affected their living comfort.

Ooh, Bukit Duri has changed very much ... In the past, it was better. It was never flooded. Now every day we have

floods, every day at the back, until now. Today it is not that bad because it doesn't reach here [this floor]. [If it floods here], I have to evacuate. [In 2007, the big flood] it reached my second floor, all my belongings upstairs were hit. I thought only until this floor, but the water hit everything. The mud ... weehhh. I can't stand the mud [that comes with the flood waters]. (Nenek, 78-year-old, resident of Bukit Duri, interview, June 2014)

When I was still a child, flood water in my house at most was knee-deep. At that time, there were still lots of swamps in Bogor [the upstream area of Ciliwung River]. Now, [the disappearance of the swamps] has worsened the floods. (Ranto Tambunan, 45-year-old, resident of Bukit Duri, interview, June 2014)

Increased flooding in Bukit Duri is part of a more general trend in the city of Jakarta over the past three decades.<sup>19</sup> As part of a riverbank settlement, Bukit Duri residents had first-hand experience of the impact of development-induced environmental degradation of the Ciliwung river system. Empirical data since 2003 has shown the decrease and degradation of natural lakes in the river system, which resulted in reduced capacity to retain river runoff at the times of heavy precipitation. Environmental NGO Wahana *Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia* (WALHI) had slightly different data than the *Balai Besar Wilayah Sungai Ciliwung-Cisadane* (BBWSCC) under the Ministry of Public Works, but both showed consistent decrease in the capacity of these natural lakes.<sup>20</sup> At least twenty-four lakes have disappeared between 2007 and 2013 because of land use change, for example to build housing estates.<sup>21</sup> Land use change to build housing on the upstream areas of the river system is a result of the growing housing demand in the metropolitan area due to the growing population, increasing land prices in Jakarta, the inability of the Jakarta government in providing affordable housing, as well as the role of private developers in the metropolitan area's housing provision.

Bukit Duri's noise pollution, another worsening characteristic of the kampung, grew along with increasing density. As one 57-year-old resident who was born in the kampung said, "In the past there was still a lot of empty land there, we played [on the riverbank]. The space was big and empty and we could play there. We could fish for some shrimps and swim in the river. Because it was still clean, it was so nice in the past." And Nenek,

the 78-year-old resident, said along the same lines: “in the past, it was nice ... these houses (pointing to several houses) were not here ... but now it is full and filthy.” The increasing density, besides being an effect of the wider affordable housing shortage, was also linked to the social improvements that had taken place in the neighborhood that residents believed had made it a more desirable place to live.

### **Aspirations for a Better City**

Despite the relative absence of the state in efforts to socially improve the neighborhood in the past, the residents who were interviewed were still hopeful that the government would someday come in to help improve their quality of life.

[The improvement] has to come from the national government. I mean from the president and the national parliament (DPR) have to be serious, not just always *kongkalikong* (nepotism) between friends, no. Even if they are friends, justice has to prevail. It has to be from the top. If the top is good, then the bottom will be automatically good. (Ranto Tambunan, 45-year-old, resident of Bukit Duri, interview, June 2014)

Many Bukit Duri residents indicated their awe at the development of Jakarta as a city with big, glamorous buildings at the center. At the same time, most interviewees acknowledged that the city has worsened in terms of housing, traffic, and flooding, and modestly aspired to be able to stay where they were even when the floods were getting worse. During the period when my interviews took place, the community was already facing a looming eviction as the riverbanks had been ordered to be cleared of buildings. Although floods brought difficulties to their homes, residents perceived the prospect of being evicted from their birthplace as more painful. Ranto's hope for top-down intervention might seem to contradict longer-term narratives of civil society activities having improved the place, but seen from the experience of an engaged community member, it also expresses frustration with the government for perceivably not doing its job.

Faced with the threat of losing their land, several members of the community, who were involved as community leaders and those in the NGO Ciliwung Merdeka, presented a proposal to the gubernatorial candidate Joko Widodo in 2012, who came to *Sanggar Ciliwung* and promised

to follow through on their proposal. Another proposal was tabled when the neighboring community across the river, Kampung Pulo, was under eviction threat in 2015. After a presentation at the City Hall this proposal earned praise from the then governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. Called “*Kampung Susun Manusiawi*” (“Humanitarian Kampung Susun”), both designs involved a pro bono architecture service by Akanoma Studio from Bandung, which represents the civic network in promoting the capacity of the kampung residents to aspire for neighborhood upgrading (Figure 18.4). In the proposal, the building setback from the river was also adopted, signifying the embrace of existing laws and regulations even when they were drafted and issued without consultative processes.



**18.4** “Humanitarian Kampung Susun” at Bukit Duri, Visualization of the Proposal, 2012.  
Source: Ciliwung Merdeka.

## Conclusion

How do members of urban poor communities aspire for the future of their kampung? The case of Bukit Duri illustrates “civic networks of middle class and marginalized residents”<sup>22</sup> carrying out their own urban renewal, in terms of both social and physical improvement, and through proposing new forms of housing on the land. The developmental state did not entirely dominate the aspirations of the residents in terms of the kind of neighborhood or kampung they envision, but residents were not totally free from developmentalist visions or ideology. Imaginings of tall buildings as the modern city and “progress” also indicate the seepage of market forces that are behind those developments as the makers of aspirational urban visions. Associated images were externalized vis-à-vis the kampung, which resulted in the separation of organic, kampung settlements and the aspired image of the city. The “Humanitarian Kampung Susun” proposals represented an effort to reconcile this separation. However, those proposals also internalized environmental degradation and increasing density, which were more structural problems in the wider urban region and were beyond the scale of the kampung to solve by itself. As a result, while participating residents might increase their capacity to aspire through this initiative, the inability to intervene beyond their own neighborhood remained.

How do they project their kampung’s future in Jakarta’s urban development trajectory? To what extent do they aspire as a collective, as members of Bukit Duri as a kampung rather than as individuals? Most residents who were interviewed in 2015 remained modest in their aspirations: to remain where they were, and to encounter less flooding. The aspiration to remain is an outcome of the threat of eviction that would separate them from their community, and the one for less flooding arises from the worsening floods that brought mud into their homes and stopped their businesses. These aspirations were responses to what were perceived as external threats beyond their control. Thus, even when they had the capacity to aspire, they were also pragmatically modest in their hopes, as they were also aware of the necessity to rely on other actors in the city, whose interests may not align with their own, to fulfil their aspirations.

## Epilogue

On September 28, 2016, the aspirations for better lives along the river were cut short by the bulldozer that finally came and razed the row of houses along the riverbank and the walls of the train depot in Bukit Duri.

The bulldozer came again a second time on October 3, 2016 to tear down several more houses along the train depot wall to make more space to punch in concrete sheet piles and to build an inspection road along the river. Large trees along the river were also chopped down, and the neighborhood totally changed after the demolitions.

Ranto had moved into a rental house while awaiting the result of Bukit Duri's class action lawsuit against several government institutions involved in the eviction.<sup>23</sup> Twenty other families who were involved in the lawsuit rented a house communally, still in the Bukit Duri area. The rest were spread throughout Bukit Duri subdistrict, away from the river. Those who were not involved in the lawsuit, 313 families, moved into public rental housing flats about sixteen kilometers east of the city.<sup>24</sup> Pak Mulyadi, who highlighted that the kampung had improved itself to become a safe neighborhood even for women to walk at night, passed away on June 11, 2016, four days after the first class action lawsuit hearing.<sup>25</sup>

Libi the cat refused to leave *Sanggar Ciliwung* and was still seen jumping around on the second floor when the bulldozer started knocking the house down. When the house crumbled, Sandyawan thought Libi was killed. But in the afternoon after the eviction, the *Sanggar* youths saw Libi, still alive. They claimed they saw Libi crying on the ruins of *Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka*.

Since then, this poor cat comes back every day, especially in the afternoon, at around 3pm, she would sleep on the ruins of her former land and beloved home.

Libi is a witness of faithfulness. Faithful to friends and always knows the way home. Being faithful means being firm, being one with the value systems and the love that are given by those who love her. As if she is not interested in other temptations that are material and transient.<sup>26</sup>

Before the evictions, most residents of Bukit Duri merely hoped to remain in place. In contrast, the story of Libi encapsulates less modest aspirations for an ideal society, one that is still far removed from Jakarta's materially-driven urban development trajectory.

## Notes

- 1 The fieldwork and interviews that inform this chapter took place between years 2013 and 2015 and were part of the research project “Aspirations, Urban Governance and the Remaking of Asian Cities”, which was funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE2012-T2-1-153). Thanks to Abdul Muis and Ariel Shepherd from Ciliwung Merdeka who assisted with the interviews and transcription.
- 2 Sandyawan Sumardi, “Kesaksian Libi dalam Penggusuran Bukit Duri” *Koran Tempo* 29 October 2016. <https://koran.tempo.co/konten/2016/10/29/407371/Kesaksian-Libi-dalam-Penggusuran-Bukit-Duri>. *Sanggar Ciliwung* was a house that gradually transformed from 2000 to accommodate more social activities and services. “Sanggar” means a place for arts activities. The first floor was publicly accessible for twenty-four hours and was open for community gatherings.
- 3 Although often translated as “village”, the use of the term *kampung* in Indonesia usually refers to an urban neighborhood in which residents relatively know each other, with a local economy that is inseparable from social and cultural relationships (see Patrick Guinness, *Kampung, Islam and State in Urban Java* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009); and Lea Jellinek, *The Wheel of Fortune: The History of a Poor Community in Jakarta* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991).
- 4 H. M. Zaenuddin, *212 Asal-Usul Djakarta Tempo Doeloe* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Ufuk Press, 2012).
- 5 Jakarta’s colonial name.
- 6 “Siaran Pers Gugatan Komunitas Bukit Duri,” *Ciliwung Merdeka* 12 May 2016. <https://ciliwungmerdeka.org/siaran-pers-gugatan-komunitas-warga-bukit-duri/>.
- 7 BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik), *Sensus Penduduk Indonesia 2010* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010).
- 8 Arjun Appadurai, “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition” *Culture and Public Action*, eds. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 59–84.
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- 13 Ardiego Herviantoro, “Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Melalui Pendidikan Berbasis Komunitas (Studi Deskriptif pada Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat Bina Mandiri, Kelurahan Bukit Duri, Jakarta Selatan)” (Undergraduate Thesis, Depok: Universitas Indonesia, 2009).
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- 15 Herlambang, “On City Commercialization”; and Abidin Kusno, *After the New Order: Space, Politics, and Jakarta* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).
- 16 Kusno, “After the New Order”.
- 17 Jo Santoso, *The Fifth Layer of Jakarta* (Jakarta: Centropolis, Graduate Program of Urban Planning, Tarumanegara University, 2011).
- 18 Ketua RT (*Rukun Tetangga*), in Indonesian.
- 19 Rita Padawangi and Mike Douglass, “Water, Water Everywhere: Toward Participatory Solutions to Chronic Urban Flooding in Jakarta” *Pacific Affairs* 88, 3 (2015) 517–50.
- 20 Robert Ksp. Adhi, *Banjir Kanal Timur: Karya Anak Bangsa* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2010); and Rafika Aulia, “24 Situ DAS Cisadane-Ciliwung Menghilang,” *Tempo.co* (Jakarta) 8 February 2013. <https://metro.tempo.co/read/news/2013/02/08/083459998/24-situ-das-cisadane-ciliwung-menghilang>.
- 21 Aulia, “24 Situ DAS Cisadane-Ciliwung Menghilang”.
- 22 Bunnell and Goh, “Urban Aspirations and Asian Cosmopolitanisms”.
- 23 “Siaran Pers Gugatan Komunitas Bukit Duri,” *Ciliwung Merdeka*.

- 24 Puput Tripeni Juniman, "Penggusuran Bukit Duri Ditargetkan Selesai Hari Ini" *CNN Indonesia* 28 September 2016. <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20160928113006-20-161733/penggusuran-bukit-duri-ditargetkan-selesai-hari-ini/>.
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- 26 Sumardi, "Kesaksian Libi".