

The Indonesian City in Urban Theory

Peter J.M. Nas* and Welmoet Boender

*Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2333 AK Leiden, The Netherlands
Email: <nas@fsw.leidenuniv.nl>

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ABSTRACT This contribution to urban theory determines what concepts developed in the Indonesian context play a role in general urban studies and conversely this study also describes what widely used terms have proven to be valuable in the specific context of Java and the Archipelago. The focus of this literature research is mainly directed towards migration, mega-urbanisation and urban symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, it is possible to classify urbanists studying the Indonesian city within two broad approaches, namely those who look at the specific characteristics of urban areas in Indonesia and those who have focussed on its general characteristics. In the former approach they focus largely on the exotic and try to locate and describe the typical Indonesian aspects of these cities; in the latter they tend to see Indonesian cities as part of a global phenomenon and refer to the reality of rapidly growing urban concentrations and world-wide urbanisation. In this contribution we will analyse the literature on the Indonesian and particularly the Javanese city and describe the contributions made by both these approaches to the understanding of the phenomenon of urban development. We will focus on theory and try to determine the main concepts developed in the Indonesian context and examine what role they have played in the general literature on urbanisation and conversely also describe what general concepts have proved to be valuable in the specific context of Java and the Archipelago. Before enumerating these theoretical findings, we will present a short overview of the history of the Indonesian city and of the main topics dealt with in the urban studies concerned.

The city can be considered a total social phenomenon, which means that it is related to all sorts of aspects encompassing the material as well as the social, cultural, linguistic, political, and economic aspects. Therefore it is studied by scientists from various domains such as sociologists, anthropologists, historians, social

geographers, linguists, economists, architects, city planners and these scholars studying art, administration and politics. We as a team comprising a sociologist and anthropologist will restrict ourselves largely to the socio-cultural aspects that form our domain. This means that, we have to deal with the role of special concepts such as focal and local urbanism, dual society, plural society, urban involution, subsistence production, *desakotasasi*, *merantau*, transmigration, and *kampung* improvement, but we cannot ignore general concepts such as urbanisation, mega-urbanisation, informal sector, urban meanings, urban ritual and symbolism, migration, and slum improvement. Of course, in such a multitude of concepts, we are forced to select some issues which we consider most apt to lead to an understanding of the inherent dualism of urban theory and its consequences on both sides.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In the study of the development of the Indonesian city, as well as in the history of the Indonesian archipelago in general, three phases are often distinguished: the early, the colonial, and the modern period. The origin of the present Indonesian town is rooted for the most part in the earlier phases: in indigenous centres, old coastal trade centres, and colonial settlements. Some of the old principles of architecture and the division of space are still visible in present-day urban society. The exposure to foreign influences, and the struggle between different ethnic and religious groups to gain the upper hand in a city, have been significant factors in the development of Indonesian towns.

Any knowledge of the early Indonesian cities can only be fragmentary. The major character of these towns was not the direct marking of the limits of space, as was the case in e.g. early Western European and Chinese cities, but instead the marking of power on the basis of control over social relations. This is called focal urbanism (Nas, 1990) and fits well into more gen-

eral theories of pre-colonial political control (Reid, 1988-1993).

Roughly two types of early Indonesian towns can be distinguished, namely inland or agrarian and coastal or trade cities. In the fourteenth and again in the fifteenth century it was powerful Javanese-Hindu Majapahit, which had its urban centre inland and had its economic basis in agriculture. In contradiction coastal towns were based on trade. Banten prospered in the sixteenth century and was greatly influenced by Islam imported by traders. Trade with China, India and later the West offered a sound source of livelihood for these coastal kingdoms.

A. Reid (1980) stresses that labour, and not commodities, formed the major source of livelihood in the early Indonesian city. Establishing and maintaining social relationships formed a very important way of acquiring and holding power. The focus was situated at the centre of an urban settlement from where power relations were structured and reached as far as the periphery of the jungle. These early societies developed governmental structures with a rational, juridical bureaucracy of civil servants, the so-called patrimonial states (Wheatley, 1983). In this process of focal urbanism the religious legitimisation of the king was of major importance. Underlying the morphological structure of the early Indonesian town was a religious tradition. Hinduism from India characterised by its hierarchising rituals and symbols and Buddhism from China both had a strong impact on large areas of Indonesia in the classical period.

The plan of the early Indonesian town corresponded to the social structure of society. The ruler in his *kraton* (palace) in the centre formed the focus of a city. He was surrounded in concentric circles by religious and worldly leaders respectively, and by servants, soldiers, and artisans, and outside the town by foreign traders and farmers. This represented the structure of the cosmos with the gods in the centre surrounded by the common people in the periphery.

Stratification remained very apparent in the colonial period, this time with the Europeans at the centre of power. Their influence generated specific urban forms in Indonesia. L. Marcussen describes the colonial town as "a societal system, where economic position and political relations coincided socially with race, [and which] found spatial expression in a segregated settlement system" (Marcussen, 1990: 186). This segregated system consisted of a "native quarter," which

was made up of the *kraton* and the *kampung*, a "Chinese quarter" with its shophouses, and a "Western quarter," which comprised the fort and the colonial quarter. The "Indo-Europeans" lived as an intermediary group between the "natives" and Europeans. There was not a fixed order of dominance among these various quarters. In one city the Western sphere dominated (e.g. Batavia), in another the native (e.g. Palembang when the Dutch fortification was destroyed), sometimes it was the Chinese sphere (e.g. Lasem), which was most important. It could and did happen that one sphere was eliminated by the others (cf. Nas, 1998). The colonial leaders of this segmented society were "actually only moderately interested in the final visible result of urban development" (Wertheim, 1958: 67).

Since the growth in the urban population began to accelerate at the beginning of the twentieth century, it became too unwieldy to administer them all from the capital. The solution was for the colonial government to introduce decentralisation, and municipalities were created after the system current in the Netherlands (Wertheim, 1958; Nas, 1990). This measure allowed the local interests of the growing middle class and the increasing group of educated indigenous people to be better represented. Land for housing began to become a scarce commodity in those times and programmes to improve the living conditions in the *kampung* were initiated. This system of municipal government, including the building and planning regulations pertaining to it, was inherited by the newly established Republic of Indonesia (Nas, 1990; Marcussen, 1990).

The central features of the colonial Indonesian town were its focus on the West (expressed for example in buildings, street-names, statues and the like), its function as administrative and economic centres, and a certain degree of segregation of population groups on the basis of their ethnic background. The segregation gradually decreased after the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia "when economic force replaced legal compulsion as a mechanism of segregation" (Marcussen, 1990: 187).

Since Independence, the population of Indonesia has grown tremendously, and so have the cities both in number and in number of inhabitants. In the wake of economic development and increasing educational possibilities, major urban problems have appeared. Examples are the absence of laws concerning the use of the land, which had not belonged to a traditional

Indonesian land owning class, uncontrolled expansion of *kampung* settlements, water and air pollution, and traffic congestion. The earliest urban growth was concentrated around the open spaces in the centre of the cities, which in colonial times were built on a spacious scale. Nowadays, the city has taken the form of a mega-urban region, which is constituted of configurations of old centre and old suburbs, incorporated villages and rural areas, and urban sprawl development comprising completely new towns.

Questions of urban planning, of what to do with the urban heritage from colonial and even pre-colonial times, and of how to create new living environments for the increasingly urban population are of considerable importance in present-day Indonesia. Keeping pace with the expansion and proliferation of the cities, the scholarly study of the urban development of Indonesia has boomed and diversified.

This urban research had solid beginnings in the colonial period when classic studies of the big cities, such as Batavia and Surabaya were produced. These provided a considerable input for understanding the urbanisation process in order to foster urban planning and regulate unbalanced development. Quite apart from this, important historic, archaeological, and linguistic research was directed towards understanding the traditional societies of pre-colonial states and cities, such as Majapahit and Banten. After Independence, especially during the 1960s, the focus remained concentrated on the understanding of the urbanisation process in general and more particularly on the rural-urban migration and ethnic integration processes which were its main constituents. In the 1970s and 1980s research began on this solid base diversified mainly with regard to the situation of the poor, and their informal sector activities and housing conditions. This research was often connected to development activities, such as *kampung* improvement and sites-and-services projects, the stimulation of informal sector activities with regard to *becak* drivers, street vendors, scavengers and so on, and social services delivery in the poor wards. In the 1990s, when it was generally acknowledged that the authorities were not able to solve all the urban problems, urban management again became an important issue, leading to decentralisation and public-private co-operation policies. Besides this major theme the urban natural and the urban cultural environments have constituted relatively new research topics, which are taking shape respectively in studies on sustain-

able urban development and urban symbolism.

In the past few decades urban research in Java - and not only there - has experienced an upsurge and diversified, unfolding its potentials, like a tree, sprouting branches on a firm trunk. Overview studies and bibliographies show a strong increase in publications on almost all fields dealing with urban settlements (Nas, 1986, 1995; Mboi and Houston Smith, 1994). However, the research is often practical and project-bound in nature and not published through regular commercial channels, resulting in the limited accessibility of the results. Another drawback is that this research is heavily biased in favour of the big cities, particularly Jakarta (Mboi and Houston Smith, 1994).

The scientific perception of the Indonesian city is based on a number of basic contrasts. The first cornerstone of the Indonesian urban image is the opposition between focal and local urbanism, which is used to define the specific character of the Malay city in contrast to European cities of the Middle Ages. The second element is the distinction between coastal and inland cities with the concomitant differences in ethnic composition and cultural background. This contrast, though not completely irrelevant, is probably strongly exaggerated, ignoring correspondences between and nuances in both categories. The third polarity differentiates the compact cities of the past from the recently emerging mega-urban areas, which incorporate all sorts of areas such as traditional cities, countryside, nature, recreational areas, suburbs, and completely new towns. These pairs of contrasting elements strongly colour the image of the Indonesian city by specifying it, but also by conventionalising it. This makes it difficult to develop new conceptualisations.

Within the framework of these urban development processes in Indonesia, the concomitant growth and diversification of the research efforts, and the evolving image of the Indonesian city, in the following sections we will describe and evaluate the specific and general character of the theoretical achievements. We will respectively deal with migration, mega-urbanisation, and urban symbolism.

MIGRATION

As a consequence of the shortage of land and the high population density in Java, migration from Java to other, sparsely inhabited islands has been underway since the nineteenth

century. This migration can be spontaneous or organised in character. Despite this out-migration, Java has kept its administrative, economic, and educational core function, which exerts a great attraction on migrants from other islands. This leads to both permanent and circular migration to the urban areas, particularly Jakarta. Therefore, as in other parts of the world, urban sociologists make a distinction between general migration categories, such as spontaneous and planned, and the more specific categories of permanent and circular migration.

When exploring the specific character of the Indonesian town, two distinct Indonesian concepts appear to be indispensable. The first regards the Indonesian form of permanent migration from Java, which is called transmigration. The second concept concerns a particular Indonesian form of circular migration, namely *merantau*.

Merantau as a system of temporary migration has a long history, especially in the matrilineal Minangkabau society of Sumatra. The term *merantau* has become familiar in other parts of Indonesia as well, referring to the temporary migration of (young) men, while women stay behind, taking care of agriculture and raising the children. As in other forms of circular migration, the contact with the village or town is maintained. Circular migrants return to their place of birth regularly (for funerals, marriages, and religious feasts) and often send money home. Both the social network in the town or village of origin and the establishment of a new socio-economic network in the city appear to be highly important to the survival of the migrant. In Indonesian cities, network analyses have been used as a tool in studying these processes. G.J. Hugo (1978) points out the importance of informal links and network systems for circular or commuting migrants in Indonesian cities. L. Trager (1991) has studied these relationships using the concept of dispersed family networks. M.A. Costello et al. (1987) stress that research on circular migration should focus especially on the informal sector as the relationships between this sector and migration are in need of further empirical verification and elaboration.

Studies as J. Rodenburg's (1997) analyse the culturally embedded relationships between circular migration and gender-roles in patrilineal North Tapanuli, Sumatra. Discussing the feminisation of agriculture, Rodenburg sheds light on the position and role of the women who stay behind.

Merantau has cultural meanings, originating from a matrilineal kinship system. The concept has become acculturated in Indonesia as a form of circular migration. Evidently, it is constantly transforming and adapting to new situations. This produces a more "globally" used concept of circular migration and, a specifically Indonesian form of temporary settlement for both of which the term *merantau* is utilised.

The same applies to permanent migration. In Java, a highly unique system of transmigration has developed. Here, the enormous population growth has been considered a problem since the beginning of the twentieth century. This has become even more pressing since Independence. Transmigration was developed as a governmental policy to create new living environments for the rapidly increasing urban and rural populations. These inter-island migration programmes, (especially) from Java to other islands, are a continuation of the colonial "emigration" policy. A complex bureaucracy guides and subsidises the departure of families and supports them for a while with houses, land, and other facilities in transmigration areas.

This Indonesian transmigration programme is unique in the world. There is no programme to be encountered in any other place, which has been executed on such a large scale and over such a long time span. Transmigration can therefore be counted a typically Indonesian concept, embedded in national Indonesian policy. Besides the intention of relieving population pressure on Java and developing sparsely inhabited and infertile areas on other islands, transmigration has encompassed a more covert aim of promoting national integration and is not without strategic considerations, namely the protection of the relatively uninhabited borders of the archipelago.

Any study of transmigration has to take account of both the consequences for the newly inhabited territories, which have been tremendous, and the more modest impact on Javanese cities. As early as the 1950s it had become evident that at most the rate of increase of Java's population growth could be only marginally reduced (Rigg, 1991). Studies on these Indonesian resettlements often mention that the central aim of the transmigration programme no longer seems to be the restriction of overpopulation on Java, although this is still governmental policy, but the development of outer islands, where the soil is often infertile and difficult to cultivate. Family planning programmes seem to be a more effective tool nowadays to relieve the pressure on

Javanese cities. J. Rigg (1991) emphasises that the key to the improvement of the conditions in Java does not lie in the "outer islands," but in Java itself. Transmigration studies should indeed focus on the success of the programme in isolated cases, but should not overlook a solution to overpopulation in Java itself. Rigg therefore stresses that, besides family planning, the urban-industrial sector seems to be particularly important, for there the greatest potential for labour absorption can be realised.

The reflections on urban theory in Indonesia have resulted in a specification of migration in different forms. *Merantau* and transmigration especially are essential contributions to the theory of migration from the typical Indonesian context. They exemplify the importance of culture in the process of migration and counterbalance the stress generally laid on the role of economic factors in migration.

MEGA-URBANISATION

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Greek architect C.A. Doxiadis developed a model for the future world city, which was called "ecumenopolis" (Doxiadis, 1972). This city consisted of one large grid-shaped urban tissue covering almost the whole world. Besides the virtually unpopulated inner parts of the grids, it left untouched the uninhabitable areas of the world, which were too high or dry or for other reasons unsuited to intensive human settlement. J.A. Stewart (1969) applied this model of the world city to Java, where interlocked urban areas were projected with a strong axis along the northern coast of West and Central Java and several grids made up by links via Bandung and also via Yogyakarta to the southern coast.

At that time, this urbanisation pattern was elucidated by means of concepts opposing, for example, the urban and the rural, or delineating a continuum from village, via town, to city. It was often described in terms of overwhelming and almost insoluble problems, indicating high population density, lack of infrastructure, traffic congestion, poor living conditions and so on. Four important notions were designed in research on Indonesia to understand the social transformations occurring in these increasingly interlocking urban systems, namely "dual society," "plural society," "urban involution" and "urban subsistence production".

J.H. Boeke (1940) pointed out the segmented character of Javanese and other colonial societ-

ies. These societies were considered to consist of two parts, namely a capitalist, metropolitan, mass production segment that penetrated a lower stratum of Eastern economic activities made up of traditional handicrafts and small-scale trade. Boeke considered the colonial, Western part of the dual society as exercising a fairly destructive influence on the Eastern part, which was consequently curtailed and became less differentiated. This concept of a dual society was challenged by J.S. Furnivall's notion of plural society, which alongside the indigenous and Western elements also postulates a Chinese segment. The plural society is comprised of two or more social orders, existing side by side, without mingling into one socio-political unit (Furnivall, 1939). The concepts of dual and plural society have become the points of departure for two theoretical developments in urban sociology where the idea of a formal and informal sector became embedded in the notion of dual society and the concept of a multi-racial society encompassed social relations in modern states, acknowledging cultural differences while comprising political co-operation (Evers, 1980). As such, they have functioned as important references for the understanding of the processes of modernisation and urbanisation in Indonesia and also other colonial and post-colonial settings.

A third Javanese-based concept is "involution," which refers to "an overdriving of an established form in such a way that it becomes rigid through an inward over-elaboration of detail" (Geertz, 1963: 82). The hypothesis related to this concept was that the colonial, capitalist economy suppressed the bazaar economy by imposing surplus extraction, so that no accumulation was possible and any investment in the bazaar economy was frustrated. 'Involution' was used by W.R. Armstrong and T.G. McGee (1968) to compare urban situations in different countries on their revolutionary potential, particularly Indonesia and Cuba. In this comparison they presumed that in Cuba, because of the far-reaching penetration of the capitalist economy, no urban involution was possible, so that revolution became inevitable. Indonesia and particularly Java, in contrast, offered involutionary opportunities to the bazaar economy, which was later labelled the urban informal sector, and no revolution evolved.

A fourth concept, derived largely from research on Jakarta was put forward by H.D. Evers (1981). He pointed out that budget studies greatly underestimated the income in kind of poor

people and argued that what he called "urban subsistence production" contributed about twenty percent to their total consumption expenditures. This urban subsistence production is, according to Evers, made up of agricultural production on small plots, the construction and maintenance of houses, the collection of firewood and water, food processing, household production and other activities useful for private consumption (Evers, 1981). With this concept, the dichotomy of formal and informal sector, developed in the 1970s, was supplemented by a third category of activities generally neglected in the urban context. Nowadays urban agriculture particularly has become a major field of attention in the context of urban environmental research (Aoyagi et al., 1998; Nagtegaal and Nas, 2000).

T.G. McGee and I.M. Robinson (1995) discuss the situation of the mega-urban regions of Southeast Asia. They present an intriguing picture of the urbanisation patterns in the ASEAN countries which fits the basic idea adduced by Doxiadis and offer a specification of current developments. Southeast Asian urban growth patterns are taking the shape of region-based urbanisation as opposed to city-based urbanisation. The major urban regions have three components, namely the city core, the metropolitan area, and the extended metropolitan area; the latter constituting a patched area of mixed agricultural and non-agricultural activities. These urban regions follow divergent patterns of spatial growth, namely the expanding state model as in the growth triangle of Singapore, the extended metropolitan region as in the case of Kuala Lumpur, and the high-density extended metropolitan region as exemplified by Jakarta.

These new forms of region-based urbanisation with highly variable patterns of land-use cannot be explained by means of traditional concepts. They have to be understood within a broader Asian and global context characterised by the emergence of new forms of the international division of labour, global and regional competition, international networks, and development corridors based on the spillover of development incentives from one mega-urban region into another.

We fully agree with McGee that the myths of large size, unsustainability, parasitism, excessive poverty, and poor quality of life do not produce adequate and realistic perspectives on the mega-urban developments in Java, Indonesia or Southeast Asia, or probably even the world as a whole. Indubitably the value of concepts originating

from the region, including urban involution and urban subsistence production, should be re-evaluated against this new context. A new 'mindset' for the analysis of the mega-urban regions in Southeast Asia in general and in Indonesia in particular is needed. Armstrong and McGee argue that the old concepts fail when confronted with the new urban reality of the 1990s. This new mindset also requires fresh notions about urban planning.

One of the new notions originating from research in Indonesia is the concept of *desakota region* derived from the Indonesian words village and town and referring to "regions of dense population and mixed land uses" in which "traditional agriculture is found side by side with modern factories, commercial activities, and suburban development" (McGee and Robinson, 1995: ix).¹ These regions are part of the new mega-urbanised areas such as the "high-density extended metropolitan region" of Jakarta and deserve further empirical and conceptual exploration. Moreover, the cultural and even more particularly the symbolic dimension of these mega-urbanised regions should be paid more detailed attention. This is particularly pertinent in the framework of urban planning as part of a new conceptualisation of these extensively regionalised city areas.

URBAN SYMBOLISM

During the last decade of the 1990s urban symbolic ecology has become one of the main foci in the study of the Indonesian city (Nas, 1993). In this approach various urban situations are analysed from a material, cultural, and structural point of view, through which urban sociologists explore symbolic meanings attached to urban public objects and manifestations in modern urban situations, such as religious buildings, government buildings, statues, and rituals.

Symbolic ecology is a relatively new approach in the study of the city (both Western and non-Western), which has been elaborated in Jakarta and other Indonesian urban areas, and has led to the formulation of an explicit theoretical framework, drawing upon the "polyvocality" of urban symbols (Gray, 1998), particularly their openness and ambiguity. The search pursued by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians for the official, unofficial, and hidden meanings of symbols has produced revealing insights into urban social structure and change.

Urban symbolic analysis may pursue several objectives. Firstly, it can be used to map and elucidate social history. Configurations of symbols reflect the historically constituted socio-cultural state of the urban community and function as its common memory (Nas, 1993). The changeability and variation of symbolic meanings make these a revealing indicator of the historic development of a city, and of the nation as well. Symbolic objects (e.g. statues and buildings) can be linked to certain historical periods. New meanings can be attached to existing objects in the course of time. In architecture, newly created forms can assume (more or less clear) specific symbolic meanings (see e.g. Colombijn, 1994).

Secondly, urban symbolic analysis may constitute a means by which to delineate national, regional, and local perspectives on symbolic meanings. Since symbols are close to the common people, every individual or social group can give them its own interpretation. Yet, it is highly possible that from a formal, ideological point of view, a different meaning is attached to such a public object. This ambiguity may result in deviant outcomes from those intended by the government. That such a discrepancy exists, is shown by the example in Jakarta of the statue of the so-called "7-Up man". It concerns a statue also seen as the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman. Its official name is Dirgantara, which means space and refers to "the conquest of space by the Sputnik". It is also called "Pancoran," after the area in which it is located. Its informal meanings vary from Hindu-Javanese mythology, via an advertisement for an internationally known soft drink, to a symbol of progress (Nas, 1993).

A third theme in urban sociological studies is connected to this. Precisely in the cultural role a city assumes and is supposed to take are indications found for the understanding of balances of power. In the past decade several studies have been devoted to looking for urban, regional, and national interests expressed in local urban symbolism (Colombijn, and Evers; Padang; Peeters; Palembang, Nas; Jakarta and Denpasar, etc., published in Nas, 1993, 1995). In 1967 T.G. McGee had already pointed out with reference to Southeast Asian cities that it is on "the base of the former colonial cities, now the independent capitals, that the urban-based elites are attempting to accomplish the difficult task of building a sense of common nationality in their countries' population" (McGee, 1967: 100). In Jakarta Sukarno used urban symbolism as a means to reach this objective in a relatively short period,

ordering the execution of a number of great works, such as the national monument and the Istiqlal mosque, as well as a number of colossal statues, including Hanuman, which has just been mentioned.

Case studies have proved to be a fruitful method for the description of urban symbolism in Indonesia and other countries. The image of Jakarta as a metropolis, capital-city of an independent nation with a colonial past and booming economically in the early 1990s has been vividly described in such a way. It is a city where the government of an extremely diversified nation has its seat. Using symbolic ecology it is possible to sketch a picture of this rapidly growing and modernising city on the basis of public objects and their underlying meanings (see Nas, 1993; Leclerc, 1993).

Studies of this kind take a number of typical public objects, such as street-patterns, street-names, statues, ornaments, patron saints, stamps, codes of conduct, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and festivals as their point of departure and also look at houses, religious buildings, and architectural features which seem to be specific to a special region. Myths about the founding of a town are taken into account, too; in some cases it is possible to discover that a new meaning has been given to an old myth, putting the city in a new perspective. These studies show the frequent expression of a mixture of tradition and modernity. Both cultural particularity and general globalisation are simultaneously present in urban development. It is precisely in the globalisation process that the expression of the local identity of a city is revealed.

From these studies it becomes clear that every town is characterised by a more or less explicit imagery and that this concept is also applicable to the Indonesian towns. As has been mentioned before, Indonesian cities are characterised by focal urbanism. The *kraton* as the centre forms the symbolic and ritual focus around which the urban settlement has extended. The areas of these settlements as such are not delineated as ritual and mythical spaces. Moreover, in founding myths of Indonesian cities, such as the myth of the East Javanese city of Banyuwangi, it turns out that to create order and culture out of chaos and nature, it was necessary to make an offering, to sacrifice a human being, in order to establish a relationship with the ancestors to ask for permission to establish a new community.

In modern times focal urbanism is still present, notwithstanding the large population concen-

trations and the new forms of mega-urbanisation rooted in traditional settlements with their particular founding myths. The studies on urban symbolism are an attempt to unveil the basic cosmological and social principles underlying and determining the modern spatial order, to prove the specific character of the Javanese and Indonesian city. We consider the motif of "to die in order to live" fundamental to understanding the meaning of the three most important Jakarta monuments: the National Monument, the Crocodile Pit and the monument at Trisakti University. The so-called Crocodile Pit Monument, located at the place where seven officers were killed in the *Coupe d'Etat* of 1965, portrays such a sacrifice. This also applies to the National Monument where in a national historic museum in the basement the sacrifices of the ancestors are shown by representations of their dying in their struggle against the enemy. The Trisakti Monument is reminiscent to the students shot during the 1998 Reformasi Movement. Besides continuity, national unity, and freedom, these monuments stand for a basic theme in Indonesian culture: ancestor worship and the cult attached to this (see Nas, 1984, 1993).

Since Independence, when the character of the nation was stressed by the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), besides continuity, a change can be observed in urban symbolism in Indonesian cities. It can be noticed that from the centre in Jakarta the national unity of Indonesia is accentuated, while the fundamental motif of founding myths and symbols remains constant. In contrast, the regional cities emphasise their cultural singularities, thereby stressing diversity. Through the analysis of symbols urban sociologists and anthropologists try to understand the pattern of modernisation and social change. This is possible because "the symbolic universe of cities is changing over time, both in terms of number, volume, size and variety of symbols as well as in the meaning attached to symbols" (Evers, 1993: 80). There lies the power of the symbolic ecology approach: both diachronic change as well as synchronic comparability are encompassed, and both the ordinary people as well as the powerful are studied in the ways they interact in creating urban imagery, even in mega-urban settings.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of the specific and general characteristics of the Indonesian city and the

role of research on these settlements in urban theory formation has led to the presentation of their unique historical development in the early, colonial, and modern periods. Besides this, three major branches in urban theory have been discussed, namely migration, mega-urbanisation, and urban symbolism, in order to evaluate some of the main concepts used in these central fields.

It appears that indeed underlying many a study in the field of Indonesian cities, a search for the specific character of these centres in contrast to those in other cultural contexts can be discerned. The contrast between local and focal urbanism is crucial in the discussions. In Indonesian culture, as part of the Malaysian field of anthropological study, the founding of a centre is experienced as an act of creation. The centre, as the focus of the realm, is marked by a real or symbolic sacrifice establishing the essential relationship with the ancestors. This fundamental motif is still present in modern Indonesian cities, such as the Jakarta multi-million metropolitan area. Research on urban symbolism and ritual in the urban setting is basically still directed towards the old ideal of exploring Indonesian identity, albeit in a modern context. Nevertheless, in this same context of mega-urban areas the interest in new socio-cultural configurations is also emerging as predominant. So, urban research in Indonesia can be characterised as a Janus-head, being founded on and driven by two basic images, namely of the unique and the general character of the Indonesian town.

Instead of a distinction between two types of concepts as proposed in the introduction of this article, three types of concepts appear to be dominant in the body of literature searched. Firstly, there are those notions that refer to a specific Indonesian phenomenon or forms of policy, such as transmigration, *kampung* improvement, and *merantau*. Secondly, we find concepts like dual society, plural society, urban involution, urban subsistence production, and urban symbolic ecology, which have been developed in the Indonesian context but are applicable in other regions of the world offering opportunities for comparison. Thirdly, we may distinguish a category of concepts, such as circular migration and mega-urbanisation, which cover a great variety of phenomena all over the world and do not have any specific Indonesian meaning; they are completely comparative in nature. As far as we can see at this moment, the third category of concepts is widely used in Indonesian research; in the second category

some concepts have and some have not been transmitted to general urbanisation literature; and the first category has become generally accepted to cover specific Indonesian phenomena.

This exploration of the literature on the Indonesian city has not only resulted in an overview of some accomplishments in theory formation,² but also led to the general feeling of an urge for the creation of a new mindset by which to understand modern mega-urban developments and the related planning problems. Old concepts probably no longer fit new realities. The fundamental question of how the city is culturally conceptualised, however, will certainly continue to attract the attention of scholars. Besides the general, it is the unique, the specific that will lure them into the field of mega-urban cultural studies.

NOTES

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1. N. Schulte Nordholt (1995: 193) writes that the concept of *desakotisasi* was coined by Timothy Firman. The concepts of *desakotisasi* and *desakota* regions, however, were used earlier by McGee (1989, 1991).
2. For a more general assessment of theory formation in research on Southeast Asia compare V.T. King who writes: 'that in sociology at least local studies have not, in general, provided much in the way of theoretical developments of regional scope' (King, 1994: 198).

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