

'Pluralizing lockdowns': Grassroots responses to housing in Jakarta amid COVID-19

*Original*

'Pluralizing lockdowns': Grassroots responses to housing in Jakarta amid COVID-19 / Sutanudjaja, Elisa; Simone, Abdoumalig; Lancione, Michele; Chen, Hung-Ying. - In: RADICAL HOUSING JOURNAL. - ISSN 2632-2870. - 4:1(2021), pp. 41-52. [10.54825/NKAU7649]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2970917 since: 2022-09-06T08:50:05Z

*Publisher:*

RHJ

*Published*

DOI:10.54825/NKAU7649

*Terms of use:*

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

*Publisher copyright*

(Article begins on next page)



Global South Conversations on COVID-19 and housing struggles

# 'Pluralizing Lockdowns': Grassroots responses to housing in Jakarta amid COVID-19 and beyond

With **Elisa Sutanudjaja**

**AbdouMaliq Simone** in conversation with

**Hung Ying Chen**

**Michele Lancione**

Radical Housing Journal

**Elisa Sutanudjaja** is co-founder and Director of the Rujak Center for Urban Studies in Jakarta. RCUS is a think-act tank that works together with communities to generate innovative knowledge and practices to form sustainable cities and regions.

**AbdouMaliq Simone** is Senior Professorial Fellow, Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, as well as a research associate at the Rujak Center for Urban Studies. **Hung Ying Chen** and **Michele Lancione** are part of the Radical Housing Journal. **Contact:**  
[esutanudjaja@gmail.com](mailto:esutanudjaja@gmail.com)  
[a.t.simone@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.t.simone@sheffield.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

In this conversation, Elisa Sutanudjaja and AbdouMaliq Simone are in dialogue with the Editors Hung-Ying and Michele, sharing their observation and analysis about the changes and continuities of housing struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to the passive responses from the government, they discuss the emerging challenges for tenants and depict a plurality of geographical changes, communal responses and organizing strategies as grassroots efforts in pandemic containment.

## **Keywords**

Jakarta, COVID-19, housing conditions, mobility

## **Housing Struggles in Jakarta amid the COVID-19 pandemic**

**RHJ:** Could either Maliq or Elisa start with a general idea on how the particular ways that COVID-19 is managed implicate the housing struggles in Jakarta and perhaps other places?

**Elisa:** Some parts of the housing struggles remain the same, and some other unnoticed parts have emerged. Things that remain the same would be the continual eviction, especially

the land grab in the rural area from the traditional territory of the Indigenous. In the urban area, the violent process of demolishing informal settlements continues as it was. In April 2020, one month after the first COVID-19 patient was identified in Jakarta, seven different civil groups including Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation, and Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) formed a coalition and began our hotline services. We operated the citizen's hotline between April and July 2020 for citizens in Indonesia, through which we were able to receive the complaints, learn about the ongoing issues, and compile reports for the government to consider and act on the urgent issues. A rather underestimated aspect that has emerged in this process is we found that tenants faced a variety of issues during the epidemic outbreak, and due to the long-term absence of tenancy-related regulation, all of such problems surfaced.

Moreover, the Indonesian government has been one of the government authorities that reacted relatively late when the COVID-19 entered the country. While the government continued to deny the health threats posed by the disease, this has led to an explosion of case numbers in DKI Jakarta and beyond.

In particular, the *kampung* (urban villages) in Jakarta has been the major source of the informal rental market. A landlord could potentially own six or seven buildings within a *kampung* and provide short-term lettings for migrant workers in the informal sector, such as the factories. Such rental houses were similar to boarding houses. The nature of sharing with co-workers and strangers makes such housing estates exposed to higher health risk. But, I would say, the housing crisis brought by the COVID-19 not only hit people in the informal sectors but also affected the white-collar as well.

**RHJ:** In the case of Jakarta, how has COVID-19 affected the formal and informal settlements and cross-class relations? Also, how has COVID affected various people's local mobility?

**Elisa:** The government has been very slow in handling this pandemic, especially at the national level. Therefore, people voluntarily chose to carry out their lockdown since the third week of March across the *kampung* informal settlements and the middle- or upper-middle-class residential areas. To reduce the chances of exposure outside, people increasingly relied on the super app called *Gojek and Grab*. It offers platforms for food, grocery and package deliveries, transport arrangement, and financial services, etc. Meanwhile, the platform economy such as this also became the source of meager income for the informal sector to make a living. Despite *Gojek and Grab* having closed some of their non-core services, such as housing cleaning services and in-house spa services, the delivery sector sees the gain. The emerging need for house cleaning and community maintenance became crucial as the epidemic outbreak triggered the instability and shortage of the workforce.

While the COVID-19 is considered a disease brought in and spread out from the middle-to-upper class, the once-controversial statement made by Mr. Achmad Yurianto, the spokesperson of COVID-19 response and management, is emblematic of the chaotic moment as well as misleading at the beginning of the pandemic. He explicitly stated that,

‘The rich should take care of the poor so they can live without hardship, whereas the poor can look out for the rich by not infecting them with the virus.’ This statement suggests the virus began from the poor, despite the statistics that the first 20 cases found and identified in the DKI Jakarta were from affluent neighborhoods.

In contrast to passive responses from the national and local governments, people took proactive responses across the *kampungs* (informal settlements) and the upper-middle-class neighborhood. To give you an example, Kampung Aquarium in Northern Jakarta, which is among the 21 *kampungs* being prioritized for urban revitalization in Jakarta under Governor Anies Baswedan. Residents there enforced their lockdown by setting up spatial barriers for checkpoints. They also set up five spots of hand-washing facilities. The community leaders kept reminding everyone in the *kampung* to wash their hands and clean their body after finishing their daily work, and so on. But this level of vigilance was only in the beginning. The local implementation gradually relaxed.

**RHJ:** That’s very interesting. Thanks Elisa! Maliq, do you want to step in, add anything to this, or expand on any point that Elisa just made?

**AbdouMaliq:** Perhaps three points. One, halfway during the initial period of the pandemic, a colleague of Elisa and mine, Miya Irawati from the Future Cities Lab in Singapore, used some simple GIS tools and attempted to do an initial mapping of the disposition of the rates of infection and morbidity rates across the city of Jakarta.

The map shows basic details about density levels, a sort of rough cut of the built environment, percentage of commercial or residential areas, distance to health clinics, all the kind of standard features of neighborhood composition. What was interesting about her conclusion is that: on the surface, many of the sub-districts—what they call ‘*kelurahan*’—that looked the same on every available criterion in the indices, were in reality, showing often markedly different dispositions of the pandemic.

What I am trying to suggest here is, it says something about the fact that, across Jakarta, there’s a plurality of modes of inhabitation, a plurality of different kinds of local economic and local authority systems at work. Which, in some ways, make the formal/informal divide and all the other descriptors of the built environment not necessarily irrelevant, but just adds a kind of different dimension, a different fine-grading dimension that is important. For example, within Jakarta, there are, what one might conventionally consider to be ‘slums,’ the kind of classic composition of areas of the poor. But for the most parts of the districts, they are very heterogeneous in composition, where the poor are instantiated within a plurality of different kinds of situations. Housing types, relationships with different kinds of income, and different kinds of livelihood are often intensely mixed. Systems of local provisioning and cross-class collaboration are often very effective. The way in which the poor are instantiated spatially, within an intensive proximity to those that might be considered working class, lower-middle-class, this is in some sense the majority of situations.

These kinds of intensities and complementarities usually work fairly well. But within a crisis situation, these heterogeneities each face a variety of different tipping points. And

those tipping points may vary. Some districts may compensate well, they may find ways in which to recalibrate relationships among various actors and ways of making a living. In other instances, the tipping points can exponentially frazzle and fissure in unexpected ways. When you consider the fact that the leasing and subcontracting of space is a really important source of income for a large number of urban residents, the contraction of the short-term rental market can have disastrous implications.

The informal rental market largely operates in a mode where the poor rent accommodations to the poor through intricate subcontracting relationships. During a crisis, particularly in the time of pandemic, many residents increase their reliance upon loan sharks, informal finance channels, with people borrowing heavily to maintain paying the rent, and they already have large amounts of indebtedness. Some of this can be cushioned by working out new arrangements to delay payments, barter or offer services in lieu of cash, but in some situations these arrangements are simply not possible.

This is to say that you get a wide variation of dispositions in districts. Within environments that otherwise look very similar. But the thing to emphasize is a plurality of different modes of inhabitation that are operative within the city. And then the other point, and in some ways related to this, is the degree to which the region itself depends upon large degrees of the transitory, of transience, of movement, of circulation. And this comes back to the point about the subcontracting and the leasing of space. Where large numbers of residents from all backgrounds derive a lot of their income through availing the possibilities of short-term rentals because people are in motion. People are circulating.

People may have a formal address in the far periphery of the region, but may only live there one or two days a week, because otherwise, they're either commuting, they're looking for work, they're going through different kinds of short-term employment opportunities. It is a region that is highly mobile and increasingly transitioned. What happens then, when you have all of these kinds of interruptions, stop-gos, and impositions that you're now supposed to retreat and stay in place, which counters the kind of logic by which your livelihood is derived? In some ways, it's very difficult to apply measures of curtailing movement, when movement is really at the heart of a lot of people's livelihoods. So yeah, these were just some points I wanted to add to what Elisa was saying.

**RHJ:** Can we ask both of you to say something on how people responded to that? Because one can imagine that facing this particular disruption of movement, which is a disruption of livelihood, then people somehow start to respond. One way, of course, is to complain. The other way is to register that complaint, and communicate it to the government. But another way could be organizing other forms of making movement possible anyway. And this may be not strictly directly through housing, but is still very much relevant to what we're talking about, so was there kind of a way of going around these limitations or new forms of organizations that were not there before at all during the pandemic?

**AbdouMaliq:** Elisa would know much better because she is there. All I can say is that, for example, in the district where my partner grew up, which was a lower-middle class district in the urban core, the majority of people have long moved away to more distant areas,

like Bintaro or Cityam, and long before the pandemic. It was a very interesting dynamic where people would return back to the original neighborhood in order to buy certain things, to maintain relationships, to attend to the emotional affiliations that they had. Even though people find these peripheral areas more affordable, they would still want to develop a sense of a connection with the original districts they grew up in. What has taken place is that then certain people have been designated by groups of people, for example in Bintaro to return to maintain some of the connections, as almost delegates of maintaining a kind of social capital. Here, there is a sense that something has been lost along the way to greater middle class attainment and consumption, a loss of some kind of capacity to deal with the process of space-making, of making collaborations, of reciprocal ties and responsibilities. And so maintaining these historical connections is one way of attempting to recoup an ability to make collective life.

But if considering the borders and boundaries, the difficulty of attempting to manage these movements would come to the surface. Questions such as who goes where, who is responsible for what, and how do you manage those forays out into a larger world. In many Jakarta neighborhoods, the major issue is that inside the neighborhood, residents were subjected to heavy social pressures on how to behave, how to perform, what were your obligations, responsibilities with each other? But everyone wanted to extend themselves outside the neighborhood, to develop new relations that could feed back as new ways of doing things. For that process, a great deal of autonomy was tacitly accorded to what you could do.

People could do what they largely wanted to do, and were encouraged to do so, as long as nothing negative came back. There was a functional balance between the heavy social regulation inside, and the greater autonomy outside; each operated as some kind of interdependent thing. And now it's become really difficult for many districts to manage that kind of a process.

### **Disruptions in Mobility and Housing**

**RHJ:** Thank you Maliq. Elisa, we would also like to learn about policies related to inter-regional mobility changes in the Greater Jakarta region and beyond. How have people reacted to the kind of blockage and the interruption of the circulations that people were once used to?

**Elisa:** There is no travel restriction between different cities in Greater Jakarta. There are ten cities and regions and three provinces—Jakarta, West Java, and Banten Provinces—in Greater Jakarta. Only the Jakarta Provincial government tried to impose a travel pass system (SIKM) that people will have to show their pass to travel to Jakarta. Together with this restriction, the Jakarta Provincial Government also imposed a regulation restricting 'large-scale social movement.' These policies were imposed around the second week of April 2020 and lasted until the end of May. However, the national government allowed

11 sectors, such as construction, manufacturing, etc., to operate as business-as-usual while implementing ‘stricter’ health protocols.

However, such restrictions did not lessen the potential risk of local transmission. Because this locks people within their neighborhoods. People still walk around inside their neighborhoods. Many Indonesians have a motorcycle. They drive around the neighborhoods as usual. Nevertheless, the restriction has significantly reduced the local traffic and left the main roads empty. Thus one would see how different kampungs and neighborhoods become the kinds of space that remain connecting people. Before the pandemic started, kampungs used to provide a shortcut for people to travel between places. The micro-lockdown of kampungs could make the majority of people lose their access. Of course, such a policy evokes lots of complaints in the beginning. For the people who are using public transportation, it is still allowed. In reality, people might testify how strict the so-called ‘limitation’ is implemented on the ground.

Moreover, soon they would find out: if the government is still allowing people to move around, there is practically no restriction. More recently, the national government has launched a new policy called ‘micro lockdown (PSKM)’. It has been implemented for almost 1.5 months but is similar to what kampungs and neighborhood did since March 2020—namely to deliberately lock themselves down.

**RHJ:** Has COVID-19 amplified or intensified forms of housing injustice that were already there before? And how do people respond to that?

**Elisa:** At the beginning of the pandemic, we were afraid the state could utilize the pandemic as an excuse for explusing kampungs, just like in the past, dating back to colonial times. We might be correct again this time. For instance, in July 2020, the President announced that he wanted to speed up the fight against tuberculosis by using multi-sectoral approaches, including infrastructure: ‘In order to prevent transmission, houses with a high humidity level and a limited access to sunlight and those without ventilation must be repaired, especially in densely populated areas.’ Reading between the lines reminded us of past policies when diseases became excuses to demolish kampungs and erect new vertical housings or move the residents far away and hidden from the city sight. Nevertheless, this is outside of ordinary people’s daily scope. Therefore, there are not many people aware of the move. A hilarious thing concerning grassroots organizing and mobilization is that nowadays, housing advocates, including community architects and housing activists, basically have a good relationship with the local government. They anticipate their proposals to be adopted and implemented by the local government. This networked relationship reduced agnostic nature and impeded people from sensing the potentially harmful scenarios in the urban future. For me, our routine continues despite everything becoming more intense during the COVID-19 outbreak. Our online meetings with the government continue regularly, and some even doubled than before because it’s easier to set the meeting schedule with the government people, rather than in the past. Therefore, COVID-19 certainly brings about new temporality towards the need for urgent anti-eviction policy.

**RHJ:** Okay. Do you want to add anything on the ways in which COVID-19 and its management can be used to enhance some of the processes pertaining to housing, Maliq?

**AbdouMaliq:** On the one hand, the more overt, invisible struggles have been around areas of the city which in some ways are easy pickings. Those areas that have become iconic battlegrounds are partly vulnerable because they have a certain kind of visibility, and they're 'easy to deal with.' For example, where Rujak has been working recently, Kampung Aquarium, it was an easy place to pick off for it being a visible site. It was situated within conditions that made it available for not only eviction but also the demonstration of a new model for similar projects. That is to say, even though a lot of struggles and negotiations went into the possibility of rebuilding Kampung Aquarium, the visibility of these places have made them amenable to not only being picked off but also to be visibilized as new forms of housing development, which would seem to embody the aspirations of the urban poor. The only difficulty is that it's a very small proportion of the actual landscapes of inhabitation.

Take the places where I am more familiar with as an example, over the past 10 years, places like Tanah Tinggi, Kampung Rawa, Galur, Johar Baru are solidly working poor areas and have been built with a kind of intricate density. Such places are the heartland of the city and are some of the poorest districts of the city. However, these places did not have a strong history of recognized and official social movements, and NGOs haven't been really working there. What takes place there is the intensification of struggles of different residents that have fought through different religious organizations and movements. These examples show the sort of plurality of authority systems. There were different kinds of defenders groups and local political struggles amongst the political parties. Even competitions between different women's prayer groups.

So it's sometimes hard to tell what will take place there. It's also hard to tell all the different kinds of modalities of authority at work and the kinds of competitions amongst them. But these are landscapes that would be very difficult to 'straighten out' in any conventional sense of the term. They differ from, for example, Menteng Atas, another major working class district where the state could unsettle the entire area by cutting right through with a new feeder road that connected two of the city's major thoroughfares and contributing to the consolidation of a new financial district. But for the most part, I don't see how any engineering work, imagination and rectification are going to 'take care' of much of these extensive residential landscapes of the poor. Elisa probably sees things differently because she knows it better than I do.

**Elisa:** What Maliq mentioned about the differences between North Jakarta—like Muara Baru, Aquarium where UPC and Urban Poor Network (*Jaringan Rakyat Miskin Kota*, JRMK)'s work—and Central Jakarta are two distinctively different territories. When you move to Southwest Jakarta, again, it is significantly difficult for people like UPC to go and work with the grassroots as each of the places implies a widely different culture, ways of living, and operation. Rujak center has been working with different organizations in Tanah Merah that have never been part of the city planning and were not on the map for the past 60 years. Also, in these places, different organizations were working together



there but may have been operated in totally different ways, such as the case of Tanah Merah, even though it's also part of Northern Jakarta.

**RHJ:** Do you find there are any kind of emerging changes for organizing the tenants' movement inside, within Jakarta, or is there any kind of collective form of dealing with the tenants' situations?

**Elisa:** Personally speaking, I have a dream to organize the tenants, but apparently it's not easy at all. First, the difficulty of organizing I assumed is because of the pandemic, that makes it difficult to set up a meeting. Also, in the experience of operating the COVID-19 related hotline on housing issues, the sorts of complaints you would receive from people were not things like '[W]e cannot pay for the rent.' Rather, what they were telling was their whole life, almost their whole life as a problem. Anyone who tries to sum up would soon realize that would be a long list of problems. Secondly, these rental cases were geographically discrete. Third, even though we tried to follow up on the cases, sometimes the complainers were uncontactable. Some perhaps changed the number and some might have already left the place or simply ignored us? While tenant organizing certainly requires more manpower and resources that we currently do not have, we have to admit that we might miss the chance to organize the tenants.

**RHJ:** Elisa, continuing on this vein and moving forward. Let's imagine for a second the post-pandemic scenario. While the health threat of COVID is gone, some of the effects still remain. How do you see the ways of organizing would take place after the pandemic? Have the conditions changed? Do they create new opportunities that were not there before? Or do you see even less chance of organizing because of what we inherit from the pandemic?

**Elisa:** I think we will have a lot of challenges, but it is not because of the pandemic. The reason is that the government has utilized the pandemic as an excuse to release a new set of laws called Omnibus Law on Job Creation. This will affect a lot of housing, land and zoning policy, intensifying trends of privatization and attracting the foreign capital to come to invest in the housing sector in Indonesia. For instance, one major scheme of the nationwide Economic Recovery Programme is to incentivize developers and banks to propel housing (re)construction. The pro-construction scheme not only targets urban areas but also taps into rice fields outside Jakarta. During one of the propaganda events for economic rehabilitation, a government official of the Ministry of Public Works commented that 'because one hectare of the paddy field only produces work for two people. But if you go, stick to real estate, then it can generate work for 600 to 1,000 people.'

Meanwhile, the governmental response to pandemic control certainly changed the regulatory conditions. Since the government turned the fact that the pandemic spread over all provinces across Indonesia into a chance to centralize the regulatory power. The communications between the local governments and NGOs have certainly increased. This is not only reflected on Rujak Center's experience but also our allies on housing issues. However, recently we have found such negotiation becomes difficult as the

centralized efforts in the regulation-making process. I would say the challenge is majorly because of the changing nature of the law, rather than that of the pandemic.

**RHJ:** To follow up on this point, Maliq, it seems the government is pushing harder and harder the agenda of private property and the enclosure movement. How does that relate with that circulation, with modes of leaving that you were discussing before? If people are incentivized, especially to settle down, and do it, how does that impact what you were describing? Let's imagine in five years' time, what kind of Jakarta are we going to look at?

**AbdouMaliq:** The government can encourage and operationalize the registration of land. But I seriously doubt that given Indonesian political history, whether or not, or to what extent, land will be freeheld and privatized will happen anytime soon.

So there's a difference between the privatization of land and its registration in terms of making a systematic cadastral. And I think the ongoing essential public character of land within Indonesian law does constitute a kind of hedge against a wholesale restructuring of the built environment. Does it mean that there aren't all kinds of games played with this? As Elisa was saying, many of those paddy fields are corporate-owned as a tax hedge against their developments elsewhere. So you can maintain all of this agricultural land, and not develop it, but it's owned by the major developers as a way to reduce their tax burden on the mega-developments that they are building in the same area. So those kinds of games will continue. Just because the state is a guarantor of some kind of public character for land does not mean that it cannot be alienated in all kinds of other ways.

There are large numbers of people who, in terms of what they thought were to be the concretization of their class aspirations, try to find affordable places to construct a house on the outskirts of the urban core, and it's one of the reasons why the region's expanded so exponentially, it's why you have a region of now almost 35-million people. But there seems to be a kind of attitude amongst many that these new settlements are just a provisional place of operation. It's a place to bide time, it's not a place, in some sense, to invest all your resources in. Because you don't know whether or not the thing that you've acquired is going to work in the long run.

Because you know that there are many kinds of projects and developments that don't work, that have very limited half-lives. At the same time, there has been a sense spreading through older neighborhoods that, 'Where you are now is not adequately preparing you for what is to come next.' But you didn't know what was to come. But you knew you had to sort of extricate yourself from the situation you were in, to be able to read what was coming better. But you weren't committed to any particular kind of temporary holding pattern.

So even though a lot of people have moved out, and they've acquired small pavilions, or apartments somewhere, oftentimes they don't even live there. They rent it out, or they only stay there part-time, or this is where they put their aged parents who need a place to be parked. So what I'm saying is that, it isn't so much the desire to be settled or to find a workable environment to operate in, I think it's just manifested in different kinds of ways. And the more the region expands, the more opportunities also move around, and you

have to go chase those opportunities, and that means not being rooted too heavily in one particular location, and one particular set of circumstances.

### **Reimagining Cause of International Solidarity**

**RHJ:** Do you find any changes in the patterns of evictions that were caused or intensified by COVID or any sort of international solidarity movement or collaborations that emerged in the process?

**Elisa:** So yeah. Like I said, most evictions happen in the rural area, but it's related to contestations against the national government or private sector's development plan to bolster tourism and mining industries. For the urban area, not one. I think local governments really restrict themselves to eviction during this COVID time. Again, there are two sets of government, you have this national government and the local government and sometimes they collide with each other.

Regarding the international solidarity, we work closely with Ms. Leilani Farha, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, and she later launched the initiative called The Shift. At the outset of the international housing rights campaign concerning COVID-19, they drew more attention to homelessness. However, as a kind of a partner organization based in Indonesia, it is difficult for us to relay it and then translate it into a local campaign. Because in Indonesia, we have homeless people but in a widely different context. One might find homeless people more in the Global North. The number and population percentage of the homeless is not so significant in Indonesian cities. So again, for us at the same time, it is pretty challenging to narrate it or put it into local issues. Although it looks good for being part of the international campaign, Indonesia's housing condition does not speak to its highlighted issue. Even though you probably don't have a (purchased) home in Jakarta, you might still have a decent home in your hometown for the middle class or the kampung residents. In Indonesia's context, we can informally fulfill our housing, with varied living conditions and arrangements. Alternatively, it is more in the case that you live with your extended family, and then you can still call it 'home.' That's why we have not succeeded in launching a good campaign for homelessness and COVID-19.

**RHJ:** Elisa, this is very interesting. So let's imagine for a second that if you are the Global Coordinator to launch an international campaign, as someone coming from Indonesian context and not carrying Western parameters. What would be the key thing that you want to bring forward? If it is not homelessness defined in that way, what would be the thing you would organize an international campaign around?

**Elisa:** I think one that could connect us is perhaps the tenants' rights. Regardless of having rental control, many could potentially face the predicament of unaffordability in the rental market and were forced to become homeless. However, this is an unlikely scenario for a city like Jakarta. It is a city where you would have a lower chance of becoming homeless due to the unaffordability of rent compared to other Global Cities. Because you might

first go to your neighbors or relatives or go to someone to borrow money first and pay the rent, it does not mean that housing in Jakarta is more affordable than in other Global Cities. Nevertheless, there is always a space to live in Jakarta according to your budget. However, the living conditions usually follow the money.

**RHJ:** If the question is the rental issue, broadly defined, having in mind the conditions in Jakarta, what is the solution so to speak, what would be the action agenda that you propose? Is it to subsidize the tenants? Is it to put a rent cap? Or is it to organize from below and to squat buildings?

**Elisa:** I do not have a formalized and firm answer for now. Nevertheless, to make sure that you can get a subsidy, or you can get a rent cap, or whatever the goal is, you have to acknowledge that there is a rental market outside the housing system. Furthermore, local governments can address the following issues, such as building safety, subsidy, tenant protection, step-by-step. From there, we recommend establishing a platform between the government and the building owner who's already commodified these rental units. This might lead to positive turns that either the government could offer subsidy to refurbish the rental units or allow them to increase the floor spaces and make it more adequate for housing. But the first thing would be to acknowledge the existence of an informal rental market, and to make the connection first.

**AbdouMaliq:** Historically, Jakarta was considered to have a fairly effective social housing program. Elisa, could you elaborate the context of this social housing program? What happened?

**Elisa:** Ah, so we have the social housing program that is run by the state-owned company and also by the local government. It was once perceived as a successful case because it's always located in the central area at the beginning of social housing in the 1980s. In this way it was able to resettle people in the desirable area where they used to live. Nowadays this programme has failed to attain its reputation. Because the ways in which they tend to demolish the kampung and rebuild a formal neighbourhood from scratch. And the new social housing programmes that were built after 2010 mostly located far away from where the original residents live.

While the quantity of social housing provision is getting bigger, these housing units are often located somewhere like 20 kilometers away from the central urban area, disrupting the original work-home distance, so nobody wants to live there. Right now, the Jakarta government has 14 towers in one location called Nagrak of such social housing and about 3,500 units were empty despite the rent being insanely cheap. The rent is basically free, all you have to pay is for the maintenance fee. The cost is around \$15 USD per month. Concerning its remote location, the government tried to provide free buses. But it apparently does not help since the traffic jam is insane. Also, there is one [social housing project] located in Manggarai, Central Jakarta, which also has around 2,000 units sitting empty because of the regulation and managing issues.

**RHJ:** Thanks Elisa, social housing is always the solution to housing problems, isn't it? We would like to conclude with a final question to Maliq that may tell us about Jakarta under

the pandemic. Maliq, in the past one year, I guess you have attended hundreds of meetings, I guess, in very different places around the world. So you have been in touch with movements in South America, in Africa, and in Southeast Asia. Given you might have a broad array of conversations like this one, I wonder what would be the theme that you consider that really stands out in relation to Indonesia and in Jakarta at the intersection of housing and COVID, what that thing is? Even if you said it already, if you want to repeat it, what would really stand out that maybe is not so evident in other places, or not present?

**AbdouMaliq:** It's not much different than what I've always felt Jakarta to be, which is the manifestation of a heterogeneity of modes of inhabitation that are unparalleled anywhere else I know. Also, at one in the same time posits a kind of vitality and vulnerability that is, in some ways, difficult to disentangle. So, for me, Jakarta still remains perhaps the most heterogeneous region of the world, in terms of the plurality of ways of inhabiting it.

And so it raises questions about, 'What are the kinds of politics and organizations and forums and formats and...' Yeah, it makes it very challenging in that respect.

## **Participants**

**Elisa Sutanudjaja** is co-founder and Director of the Rujak Center for Urban Studies in Jakarta. RCUS is a think-act tank that works together with communities to generate innovative knowledge and practices to form sustainable cities and regions.

**AbdouMaliq Simone** is Senior Professorial Fellow, Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, as well as a research associate at the Rujak Center for Urban Studies.

**Hung-Ying Chen (RHJ)** is Post Doctoral Research Associate at Durham University (UK), and member of the Taiwan Alliance of Anti-Forced Eviction and International Tribunal on Evictions (ITE).

**Michele Lancione (RHJ)** is Professor of Economic and Political Geography at the Polytechnic of Turin (Italy) visiting Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Sheffield (UK), and member of the Common Front for Housing Rights (Bucharest).