Interrogating the First Signs of Gentrification in Postcolonial Kota Tua, Jakarta

Author
Remco Vermeulen

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Abstract

Colonial remnants, like buildings, streets and canals, are the main attraction of *Kota Tua*, the historical inner city of Jakarta. Considering known gentrification theories, the restoration and reuse of historical buildings and revitalization of public spaces in the area indicates gentrification is starting to take place here. This article interrogates these first signs of gentrification in the historical inner-city of Kota Tua, and the extent to which four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest themselves in the area. This paper concludes that although some characteristics of the gentrification process are taking place in Kota Tua, there are also developments that counter this observation, adding to the academic discussion on whether the gentrification process in Kota Tua materializes, and what the future of this postcolonial urban area entails.

Introduction

Tourists visit one of Kota Tua's museums or stroll through pedestrianized streets lined with historical buildings, business executives have lunch at the popular colonial-style Café Batavia, students hang out at the side of a canal, and school children ride colorful bicycles rented out at *Taman Fatahillah* [translation: *'Fatahillah Square'*], a large public space which feels like a stony yet relatively peaceful oasis just a couple of hundred meters away from hectic car-clogged streets. Kota Tua is the historical inner city of Jakarta. It means 'old town' and encompasses the seventeenth-century city of Batavia. It was the capital of the Dutch East Indies, which was part of the Dutch colonial empire. Many colonial remnants in Kota Tua, in the form of buildings, streets and canals, have been restored and conserved, and are the main attractions of the area. It seems to indicate *"some preparedness, if only for financial reasons, to accommodate a Dutch legacy within the [Indonesian] collective memory",* as Jones and Shaw noted (Jones & Shaw 2006, 131-132). This colonial history of Kota Tua did not seem a barrier when the national government aimed for a UNESCO World Heritage nomination for Kota Tua in 2015; however, they withdrew the dossier right before voting started on its designation at the annual World Heritage Committee meeting in 2018 due to a critical assessment by ICOMOS (Nugteren 2020). In 2017 the local authorities commissioned the clearing, cleaning and transformation of the historical Kali Besar, the area's main canal in which the Dutch tamed the Ciliwung river 400 years ago, into an urban park (Fauzi 2018; Vermeulen 2018b). Then in 2022, public areas around train station (*Stasiun*) Jakarta Kota were pedestrianized to make Kota Tua more attractive for visitors.

This article investigates whether these developments are the first signs of gentrification taking place in the historical of Kota Tua, and the extent in which *four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest itself in the area*.

"A city's history is part of its identity, and even when buildings are demolished, it cannot be erased."

Postcolonial Shift in Perspective

Gentrification and heritage conservation have been intertwined ever since Ruth Glass first coined *'gentrification'* in 1964. She found that middle class families were attracted to the derelict nineteenth-century working class neighborhoods in the direct vicinity of the City of London, not only because of their central location and (still) low rents and property prices, but also because of the architectural appeal and historical character of its houses (Glass 1964). David Ley (1986) recognized the lure of what he calls *"character districts and heritage dwellings"* in cities in Canada. Sharon Zukin (1987) described that gentrifiers – artists, teachers, government employees, entrepreneurs – in New York City were looking for available and affordable buildings in historical neighborhoods. It is not just that historical buildings attract new inhabitants; the conservation or heritage designation of these buildings is also considered an improvement to a gentrifying neighborhood. Interestingly, existing and new inhabitants sometimes teamed up to achieve these improvements, whether or not they were aware that this may cause a new wave of gentrification, the rise of property values and possible unaffordability of the neighborhood altogether (Zukin 2008; Caulfield 1992; Zukin 1987; Ley 1986). Further research showed that the conservation, upgrading and increased popularity of gentrified neighborhoods indeed has a counter-effect: apart from becoming too expensive, they grow less diverse, they lose their distinctive character, edginess and they become sterile (Sudjic 2017; Ley 2003).

Jakarta is an example of a postcolonial city. In its most basic definition, a postcolonial city is a city that has been shaped by a colonial past and the empire it was part of, but which is currently independent. 'Post' has a double meaning here; it can refer to both a break and a continuity (Chambers & Huggan 2015, 786). Although these cities have become independent, their governance, bureaucratic, infrastructural or cultural structures did not transform from one day to the next. Postcolonial cities harbor a contradiction as well: they are at the same time a representation of a colonial, authoritarian and oppressive power, as well as the cradle of resistance and the struggle against this power (Kusno 2010; Yeoh 2005; Bunnell 2002). A postcolonial city has an ongoing dialogue with its colonial past, sometimes trying to erase it, and other times accepting and embracing it. Every postcolonial city is different, but each has in common with another an irreversible link with its former colonizer. A city's history is part of its identity, and even when buildings are demolished, it cannot be erased (Yeoh 2001; Chambers & Huggan 2015).

Previous studies have shown that different types of gentrification are taking place in postcolonial cities in East Asia and Southeast Asia, such as new-build gentrification and beautification for development and tourism purposes. New-build gentrification occurs in the context of the, often large-scale, new construction of residential or commercial areas, while beautification refers to the efforts of making a neighborhood more attractive, safe and clean for visitors (Zhu and Martinez 2021; Shin 2018; Clark 2005). Projects of these types are usually led by the state and implemented by powerful investors and developers, causing large-scale involuntary displacement of communities, the scale of which has not been seen in the Global North. Since such low-income communities usually have a weak legal position, displacement is inevitable (Waley 2015; Moore 2013). In George Town, Malaysia, the UNESCO World Heritage status of the historical city center has attracted many tourists and foreign investors, causing gentrification, as local communities are pushed out for the benefit of tourism facilities and high returns (Wu & Cao 2021; Lee et al. 2016; Mohamed et al. 2012). Gentrification in Singapore included the large-scale demolition of historical areas to make way for high-end condominiums and is heavily influenced by the state in steering urban change through planning strategies; presently, the conservation of the remaining heritage buildings is in fashion, in a curious attempt to (ab)use the city-state's history (Chang 2016; Hu & Caballero 2016). In Indonesia, examples of gentrification in peri-urban areas in Bandung (Hudalah et al. 2016), early signs of suburban gentrification in Semarang (Prayoga et al. 2013) and commercial gentrification in Yogyakarta (Sholihah & Heath 2016) have been noted. In Shanghai, China there is a direct relationship between a form of gentrification – middle-income families and entrepreneurs renting historical homes of lower-income owners – and heritage conservation and even the creation of a heritage illusion or 'heritagisation' (Arkaraprasertkul 2018).

These Asian cases show very diverse contexts, which complement the traditional understanding of gentrification, which includes new and different forms of gentrification, and contexts in which they occur, offering valuable insights into understanding global processes of urban change (López-Morales 2015; Lees 2012; Robinson 2011; Shaw 2008; Atkinson 2003). To understand global urban change and the effects on communities, a different and critical perspective in the gentrification debate is necessary. Lees (2012) called this a postcolonial approach, in which comparative studies are made between divergent cities anywhere in the world. Colin McFarlane underlined that this requires a *"constant process of criticism and self-criticism"* of scholars, urban planners and policy makers (McFarlane 2010, 738).

The widening of the traditional, Anglo-American definition of gentrification into a global one does require caution, as it is often stretched to include a more general explanation of the upgrading of an underdeveloped urban or rural area. This leads to confusion as to what extent it differs from terms such as 'urban renewal', 'urban development', 'modernization' or 'beautification'. A gentrification process, however, is typically associated with these four characteristics: (1) *the displacement of lower income residents by more affluent ones*; (2*) the appearance of new functions to cater to needs of new residents and visitors or tourists*, such as coffee places, hotels, restaurants and shops; (3) *the rise of rents and property values*, well above initial levels; and (4) *investments made by the public and private sectors* in the public space, infrastructure and the built environment (Vermeulen 2020; Hayes 2020; Zukin 2016; Čaldarović & Šarinić 2008; Atkinson 2004). This paper investigates the extent to which these four characteristics manifest themselves in Kota Tua.

Research Methods

For this article, several research methods were used to interrogate the first signs of gentrification in Kota Tua. Apart from the previous brief analysis of secondary literature on the main topics, a combination of methods has been employed to get a better understanding of the case study area. These are a *historical analysis* of the case study's past developments, *site visits* to the case study area in August 2016, November 2018, October 2019 and September 2022, and a *visual analysis* in which historical images of the case study area have been compared to contemporary ones. Several main sites within the case study area are mapped in figure 1.

Figure 1: *Map of Kota Tua today, with the 1669 situation of figure 2 indicated with the burgundy line.* In green: 1. Kali Besar urban park; 2. Taman Fatahillah; 3. Kampung Tongkol; 4. Pedestrianized areas around Stasiun Jakarta Kota; 5. Location of new underground MRT station (map via Google Maps, highlights by author)

Additionally, Jakarta-based heritage professionals were interviewed October 2019 and February 2023 to get a better understanding of the current practices. All interviewed experts hold key positions in the fields of heritage conservation, architectural documentation, urban planning, the arts and community empowerment: Fields identified for their relevance to this research.

In October 2019, eight heritage professionals were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews in February 2023 were done digitally: five of the interviewees of October 2019 were re-interviewed to verify observations made during the September 2022 site visit and to reconfirm or update the developments they mentioned in the October 2019 interviews. The other three either interviewees stated they had not visited the Kota Tua area in the past three years, or that they changed profession. One additional heritage professional was interviewed digitally in February 2023. All interviewees have been anonymized, and are only addressed by their profession.

The local experts shared their experiences and points of view on topics such as the reuse of colonial buildings in Jakarta, the different policies on heritage conservation, the city government's development plans for Kota Tua, the city government's capacity to address challenges related to heritage conservation and planning, the local stakeholders and power structure between them, the appeal of Kota Tua's historical ambiance for residents and visitors, Kota Tua's communities, and whether or not they think gentrification is happening in Jakarta. Sometimes the observations of the local experts substantiated the available literature, while some also provided additional insights. It may be possible that other or additional local experts would have provided different points of view relevant to this article: this can be considered in subsequent research. However, the interviews with the selected local informants did provide an understanding of Jakarta's current challenges and practices, which was indispensable for writing this article.

Jakarta, from Colonial to Postcolonial

In postcolonial Jakarta, Dutch colonial traces interact with Indonesian expressions of national identity. The colonial chapter of the city's history started in 1619 when the Dutch East India Company [In Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC*], the world's first multinational company, conquered and destroyed the small town of Jayakarta on the northwest coast of the island of Java to establish a new trading post. They called their new settlement Batavia, see figure 2.

The settlement would later grow into a major trading hub and the capital city of the Netherlands' colonies of Dutch East India. As the port

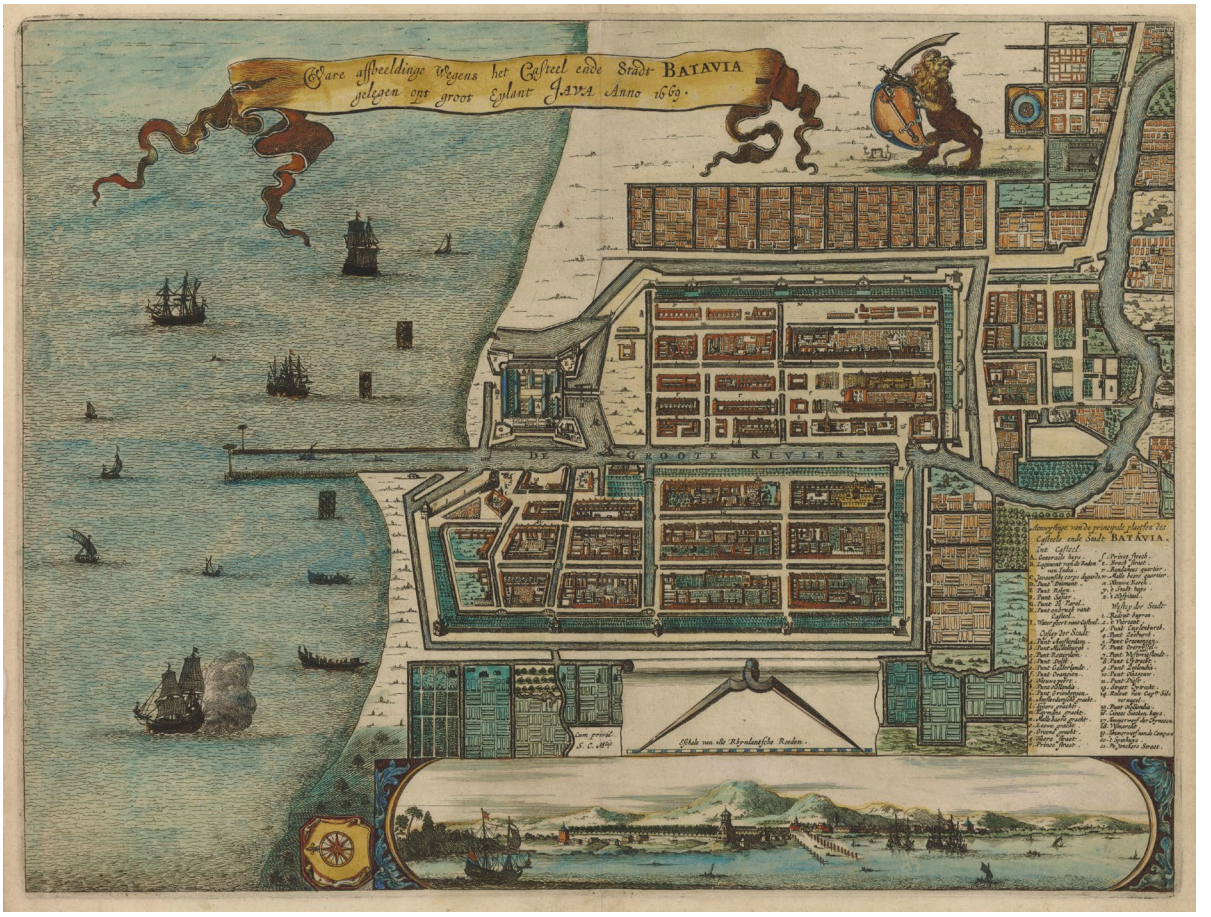

Figure 2: *Map of Batavia in 1669* (Arnoldus Montanus, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons).

city of the colonizing entity, Batavia's inhabitants consisted of Dutch bureaucrats, European sailors, Chinese merchants, and enslaved men and women from all over the Archipelago. These ethnic groups lived strictly segregated in, respectively, the walled-in city (present day Kota Tua), the Chinese quarter, and the local quarters (Hannigan 2015; Kwanda 2009; Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003).

In 1799 the VOC went bankrupt, and the national government of the Netherlands took up all its possessions, including Batavia. By then, the city was dilapidated, plagued by regular floods and diseases and no longer suitable for living according to contemporary standards. The authorities decided to seek higher ground and built a new, more fashionable administrative center south of Batavia, in an area they called *Weltevreden*. Around a large grassy square named *Koningsplein* [translation: *'King's Square'*] arose the palaces, clubs and mansions of the Dutch elite, as a symbol of the power of the Dutch East Indies. Yet, the old Batavia was not fully vacated and it remained a business district due to its close vicinity to the city's harbor (Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2015).

After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, proclaimed by its first president Sukarno in 1945, and finally acknowledged by the Netherlands in 1949 after an unsuccessful recolonization war, Koningsplein became the center of the new republic, and the showcase of nation-building in an ironic postcolonial continuation, as referred to by Yeoh (2001). It was renamed to *Medan Merdeka* [translation: *'Victory Square'*] and former colonial governmental buildings were reused: the governor-general's palace became the presidential palace; the *Museum van Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen,* the new National Museum; and the *Hogere Hogere Burgerschool, Carpentier Alting Stichting,* the National Art Gallery (Vermeulen 2018a; Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2000). At the same time, the construction of modern Indonesian monuments took command of its colonial surroundings. On the northeast side of the square the gigantic Masjid Istiqlal (national mosque of Indonesia) was constructed, along with several ministries on the south and west side of the square. In the middle of Medan Merdeka, the new *Monas* [translation: *'National Monument'*] towered 132 meters over the new capital city that was now called Jakarta. Jakarta was a direct reference to the former, precolonial village of Jayakarta. In another strong symbolic gesture, Sukarno dictated that the annual national celebration of the country's independence on 17 August was held at Medan Merdeka (Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2015). Abidin Kusno noted that *"Sukarno's Jakarta was a manifestation of Indonesia in which the city, the state and the nation came together, their imagined spaces collapsed into simultaneity"* (Kusno 2000, 62). As a postcolonial city, Jakarta's colonial urban fabric was not erased, but rather became less significant among an ever-rising skyline.

While the colonial buildings around Medan Merdeka were reappropriated directly following Indonesia's independence, Kota Tua followed a little later and for a different reason. By the 1970s, the new president Suharto's economy-focused *New Order regime* was in full swing. One of the local heritage professionals interviewed for this article, an architectural curator, explained that Suharto wanted Indonesia to become one of the world's largest economies. The colonial buildings in Kota Tua were regarded by then-governor of Jakarta Ali Sadikin as assets to attract tourists.[1] He had a vision of making the city into a beacon of *"discipline, economic mobility and national honor"* (Kusno 2000, 109). But local heritage advocates saw the ongoing modernization of Jakarta, which included the planning of new main roads, as a direct threat to Kota Tua's distinct historical character. In 1970 Sadikin designated *Taman Fatahillah* (formerly *Stadhuisplein*, translation: *'City Hall square'*) and its surrounding buildings as a conservation area. In another wave of postcolonial reappropriation

several colonial buildings got a new function as Indonesian museums: the former City Hall was transformed into the *Jakarta History Museum*, former office buildings at *Taman Fatahillah* into the *Wayang Puppet Museum*, the former *Palace of Justice* into the *Museum of Fine Arts and Ceramics*, and former *Dutch East India Company warehouses* at the harbor became *the National Maritime Museum* (Eryudhawan 2017; Kwanda 2009; Jones & Shaw 2006; Kusno 2000). At the time, the heritage legislation in place in Indonesia was still the 1931 *Monumenten Ordonnantie* [translation: *'Monuments Ordinance'*] left by the Dutch colonial regime; an example of a colonial legacy still in use in postcolonial Indonesia. The Indonesian heritage legislation was updated in 1992 and again in 2010 (Fitri et al. 2016; Kwanda 2009). The interaction with colonial traces in a postcolonial city is pointedly described by Roy Jones and Brian J. Shaw (2006):

> *"Many historic icons of the built environment were inevitably viewed as imprints of an exogenous authority, a factor that heavily discounted their preservation value. Postcolonial reality frequently meant the negotiation of a new national psyche through the contested identities of a transplanted polyglot population and the heritage dissonance left by colonial masters" (Jones & Shaw, 123).*

After this initial boost, the conservation of colonial heritage was no priority for local politicians. Kota Tua gradually turned into a derelict, no-go area. In the Reformasi era, following Suharto's abdication in 1998, Indonesian interest in colonial heritage and its development potential started to grow. Rather than a celebration of Dutch-Indonesian relations, the main reason behind this was economic, as an echo of Sadikin's ambitions in 1970: Globalization was spreading its wings and tourism had developed as a major industry and source of income for Indonesia, and Jakarta wanted to be part of that (Sastramidjaja 2014; Kwanda 2009; Steinberg 2008; Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003). This led to the revitalization of Kota Tua from the early 2000s onwards. James N. Rosenau and Diane Wildsmith noted that "*The valorization of historic districts occurs for economic rather than historic reasons. Therefore, the resurrection of the postcolonial city occurs simultaneously with the futurist projections of the global city*" (Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003, 200).

Shaping Postcolonial Kota Tua

To give an impression of the revitalization of postcolonial Kota Tua, and to establish whether the area shows signs of gentrification, in the following visual analysis pairings have been made of several photos of this area. Sometimes these pairings include historical photos from Kota Tua, but mostly photos made during site visits to the area in 2016, 2018 and 2019 have been used. The photos have been selected mainly based on their perspectives, which were to be as similar as possible, as well as on the changes that can be seen within the photos.

“In sum, the visual analysis shows that the colonial urban fabric of Kota Tua is relatively intact and is being used, and that most changes to the area were made to its public space.”

Illustrative Images of Kota Tua

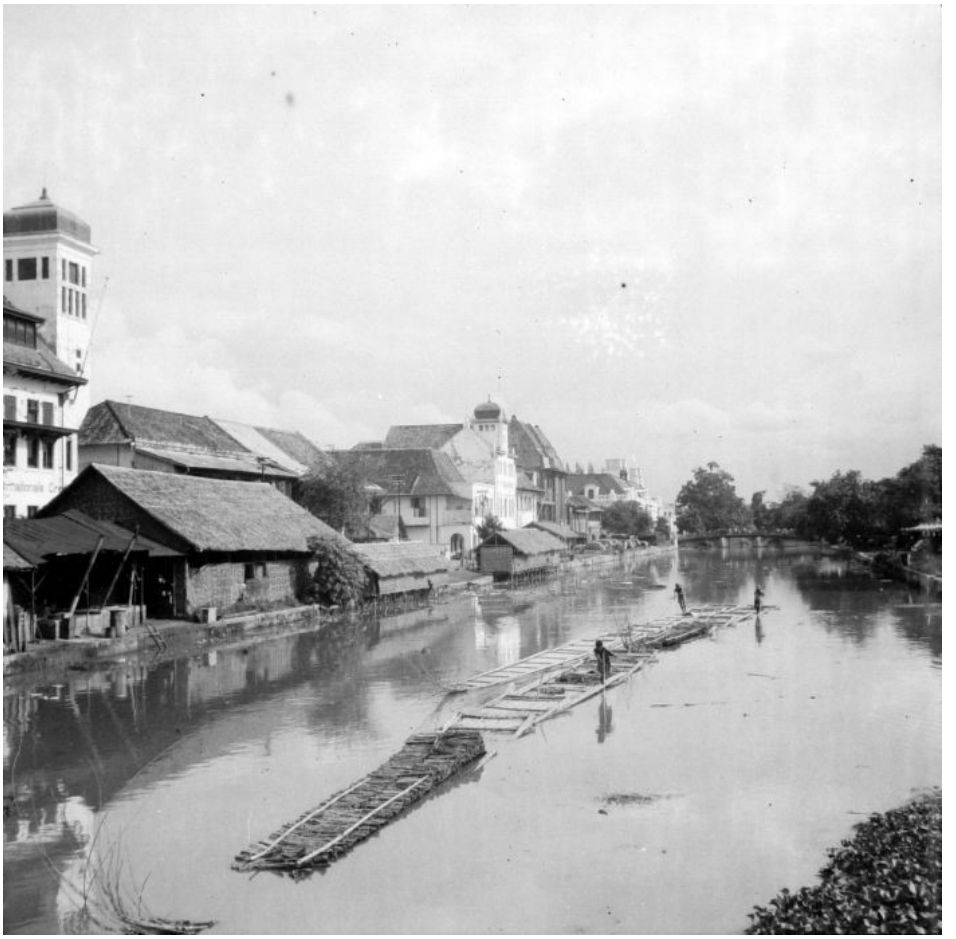

Image 1: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 1947* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons).

Image 2: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 2016*. Photograph by: author.

Image 3: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 2018*. Photograph by: author.

Image 4: *View on the western side of Kali Besar in 1971.* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 5: *View on the western side of Kali Besar in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 6: *View on the corner of Kali Besar and Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2016*. Photograph by: author.

Image 7: *View on the corner of Kali Besar and Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 8: *View on western façade of Taman Fatahillah in 1971* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 9: *View on western façade of Taman Fatahillah in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 10: *View on Taman Fatahillah and the former Batavia city hall in 1971* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 11: *View on Taman Fatahillah and the former Batavia city hall in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

The main objective of the 2018 revitalization project of a part of the Kali Besar in Kota Tua to turn it into an urban park, was not to restore the canal or former colonial waterfront buildings in their original state or with authentic materials, but to create an attractive, modern, clean and structured public space for leisure. Original wooden beams which were part of the historical foundation of the canal and were found when a section was drained during the transformation works and replaced with modern materials such as concrete (Fauzi 2018). Quay walls were replaced with a repetition of curved seating areas, and a new pedestrian bridge was added. Images 1 till 3 show the changes of appearance of Kali Besar, from a 1947 photo to those taken during site visits in 2016 and 2018.

Facing south, from a slightly different position, image 5, taken in 2019, gives a clearer impression of the new developments at Kali Besar. On the water surface, floating walkways with railings, and even a planter with vegetation, have been added. There are no people on the walkways, so either the walkways were closed off, or it was a quiet time. The latter option is plausible as the photo was taken on a Wednesday, and Kali Besar, and indeed all of Kota Tua, gets busy in weekends. New palm trees and low bushes are lining the waterfront on both sides of the canal. The construction with the half cylinder roof on the other side of the canal is a new bus stop for major bus lines connecting the area with other parts of the city. Comparing the 2019 situation with the situation in 1971 in image 4, the buildings on the other side of the canal seem similar; apart from the new bus stop, no major changes can be seen, although it is impossible to assess the state of those buildings from these photos. The water of the canal in 1971 seems dirty, whereas the western quay shows a jumble of bushes and small structures made of wood and other materials. Quite possibly these are informal shops or even dwellings.

Images 6 and 8 were taken on the corner of the eastern quay of the Kali Besar, and the Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2016 and 2019 respectively, to give insight into the differences brought by the revitalization project. The corner building, which was restored or at least received a new layer of paint in 2019, has its ground floor boarded up. Most of the greenery in the 2016 image has been removed. Street vendors present in the 2016 photo are nowhere in sight in 2019. The entrance of the alley, which retained its decorative archway, has a fence to only allow access for pedestrians rather than cars or motor bikes; in the 2016 photo the alley seems a popular parking for motor bikes. The streets in the 2016 photo seem unpaved or covered with a layer of mud, whereas in 2019 the streets, or at least the Kali Besar quay, have been newly paved. The 2019 situation gives an overall

clean and neat impression, with designated sidewalks, parking areas and a one-way driving direction along the quay. However, it seems to miss some of the dynamics and characteristics of the 2016 situation. To refer to the introduction, the 2019 situation seems more 'sterile'.

Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 leads to Kota Tua's central square Taman Fatahillah, just one block down. Images 8 and 9 show the buildings one would encounter on the right when arriving on the square. Image 8 was taken in 1971, and image 9 in 2019. The twin buildings with the spout gables seem quite similar. In 1971 they were still office buildings, but since 1975 they have been housing the Wayang Museum. The tree in front of the 1971 photo has been removed, but the 2019 photo shows a line of other trees closer to the building facades. The cars, trucks and cycle rickshaws (*becak*), which prominently featured in the 1971 photo, have been replaced by pedestrians, rows of colorful bicycles for rent, benches, wastebaskets and potted plants. The square in the 2019 photo has a different pavement, similar to the one on the eastern quay of Kali Besar in image 7.

The last pair of this visual analysis, images 10 and 11, gives a view on the former Batavia City Hall, repurposed in 1974 by Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin as the *Jakarta History Museum* (*Museum Sejarah Jakarta).* In the 1971 situation, the square was still in use as a transportation hub, hence the buses and minibuses. Right in front of the former city hall, three tall trees are standing. The cupola of the building is equipped with a couple of tall antennas; at the time it was in use as the offices for the local military command. In front of the central main entrance of the building there are no vehicles and considering the small guard house on the left of the photo, this part of the square may have been closed off by the military. In this photo too, the square seems to be unpaved or at least covered with dried mud. In 2019, the square is empty and is only used by pedestrians and youngsters on colorful bicycles. In the middle of the square, a fountain can be seen. The trees are gone, but on the right side of the photo still one trunk remains. In front of the former city hall two paintings have been set up. Behind the building, a new, taller building with a hip roof is standing. The pavement of the square is again the same as in previous photos and includes several diagonal lines crossing one another across the full length of the square.

In sum, the visual analysis shows that the colonial urban fabric of Kota Tua is relatively intact and is being used, and that most changes to the area were made to its public space. *Taman Fatahillah* has been pedestrianized, the new pavement and new street furniture invite people to gather. Greenery has been removed and the revitalized *Kali Besar* with its floating walkways and curved seating areas gives more the impression of a

heavily designed theme park than a historical site. Although the business and trading functions of Kota Tua have disappeared, the area still is a dynamic area aimed at attracting visitors and tourists. The observations from the visual analysis mainly indicate one of the four characteristics of a gentrification process, as mentioned previously: (4) *investments made in infrastructure, or public space*. To further analyze the situation in Kota Tua, interviews with local heritage professionals, were conducted.

Is Kota Tua gentrifying?

Not only Kota Tua's public areas have been transformed to attract local, domestic and foreign visitors. Particularly in the past ten years, new businesses have opened to cater to the needs of these new visitors. Already back in 1993, Café Batavia opened its doors in an 1805 former administration building. This restaurant overlooks Taman Fatahillah and offers a 1920s colonial décor to its guests. More recently, several other establishments were opened in historical buildings in the area, such *as Kedai Seni Djakarté* (opened in 2013), Historia Café (2014), Wonderlof Hostel (2017), and the Acaraki Jami Café and Magic Art 3D Museum in 2018.[2] As previously mentioned, the appearance of new functions for, in this case, tourists and other visitors, especially those who can afford to make use of its services, is another of the four characteristics of a gentrification.

The previous secondary literature consulted, however, is inconclusive. Sastramidjaja (2014) mentioned that the development of and activities in Kota Tua may lead to gentrification and eviction of residents in poorer neighborhoods. According to Diah Putri Utami and Mohammad Riduansyah Anza (2017), the local government has not done any research on the social-cultural impacts of the redevelopment in Kota Tua. In the establishment of new businesses, attractions or events, as well as the potential negative impact of large numbers of visitors walking through the area, local communities have not been consulted. In 2008, Steinberg already warned that without an integrated, inclusive redevelopment plan for a historical area like Kota Tua, local heritage may be wiped out. Kusno (2011) even stated that *"developers see opportunities to gentrify the neglected property of the past"* in Kota Tua. He later quoted a then-Minister of Housing, who stated that gentrification is key to solving illegal settlements and social housing issues; investments lead to private ownership and more responsible use by new owners for their own houses (Kusno 2012).

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with local informants in Jakarta in 2019 and digitally in 2023 to get a better understanding of the situation in Kota Tua. When initially asked whether they think

gentrification is taking place in Jakarta, the local informants responded differently. According to an urban planner working at the local authorities, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta*, or in short *DKI Jakarta*, or *DKI*), gentrification is happening all over Jakarta, with no direct relation to heritage conservation. They described the construction of apartment complexes next to new public transportation hubs and stations in less affluent neighborhoods, which are part of the city's expanding rapid transit network.[3] A cultural heritage professional pointed out that gentrification is a pressing issue in UNESCO World Heritage cities in Indonesia's neighboring countries, such as George Town, Penang and Melaka in Malaysia, Hoi An in Vietnam and Vigan in the Philippines. In those cities, gentrification is caused by an influx of tourists attracted to the cities' fame and branding. A process on the same scale they, in 2019, they did not observe yet in Jakarta.[4] A local community expert and an architectural historian described a form of gentrification taking place in North Jakarta, where fishing communities are being evicted for the construction of middle- and higher-income residential towers.[5]

Through the interviews and available secondary literature, six main developments connected to the gentrification process in Kota Tua were identified: *three of these developments can be considered as confirming gentrification*, namely privately initiated conservation projects, government investments in the public space, and the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. At the same time, *three other developments seem to be disproving the process*, namely due to the lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government, the seeming absence of displacement and a case of a community that resisted eviction, and *Large-Scale Social Restrictions* (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or *PSBB*) imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these developments will now be explained in more detail.

Developments Confirming Gentrification in Kota Tua

Firstly, privately initiated restoration projects. Kota Tua as a heritage district has increasingly attracted private investment since the 2000s (Steinberg 2008). Jörgen Hellman, Marie Thynell, and Roanne van Voorst stated that private entrepreneurs stepped up to compensate for the lack of government capacity (Hellman et al. 2018). The development potential of Kota Tua, 'the colonial Batavia', has appealed to planners, heritage conservationists, historians and entrepreneurs for a long time, according to Yatun Sastramidjaja and Abidin Kusno (2011). Entrepreneurs are particularly attracted by the potential of touristification and attractive

profit margins (Sastramidjaja 2014; Kusno 2011). Private initiatives such as the Konsorsium Kota Tua Jakarta (legally as PT Pembangunan Kota Tua Jakarta and in short *'Konsorsium'*, previously known as '*Jakarta Old Town Revitalization Corporation'*) received a mandate in 2014 from then-governor of Jakarta Joko Widodo, the current Indonesian president, to play a pivotal role in the revitalization of Kota Tua (Sujatna 2018). In 2016, two years after its foundation by nine local companies, Konsorsium rented twelve buildings in Kota Tua from the state-owned companies who owned them and had restored nine of those. The main challenge for the consortium was to find new functions for the buildings and make business plans for their new use (Elyida 2015; Robertson et al. 2014). Apart from a focus on the built environment, the Konsorsium cooperated with DKI in restructuring and controlling street vendors in Kota Tua, to *"guarantee public interests"*, meaning cleanliness and safety (Sujatna 2018, 307). According to Yayat Sujatna, project director at Konsorsium, this multi-stakeholder project was successful in taking measures against illegal traders and relocating street vendors to another, centralized location elsewhere in the area (Sujatna 2018). The street vendors were relocated to Taman Kota Intan, close to a major bus station but a few hundred meters north of the main bustle of Taman Fatahillah. Konsorsium also played a major role in drafting the Kota Tua UNESCO World Heritage nomination; their different projects should be viewed in this context dossier (Nugteren 2020; Budiari 2015). The story of Konsorisum is not just a successful one. A heritage development manager described how Konsorsium managed and renovated Gedung OLVEH between 2015 and 2018, at the time owned by insurance company PT. Asuransi Jiwaraya. The agreement was up for renewal by the end of 2018, but after an appraiser assessed the renovated building, the annual rent was tripled. Konsorsium then only extended the agreement for one more year. Since the end of 2019, the building has been left empty and without function, despite Konsorsium's earlier efforts.[6]

The local community expert confirmed that private entrepreneurs are a major stakeholder in Kota Tua's development, apart from Konsorium also managers and owners of cafes, restaurants, shops and hotels catering to both affluent local and foreign guests. Yayasan Kota Tua, a foundation created in September 2019, received support from DKI's Centre for Conservation of Cultural Heritage to redevelop the historical Gedung Rotterdamsche Lloyd just off Taman Fatahillah into a community center. The building is managed by Konsorsium. Additional functions for this building include a tourist information center, shops, co-working space and a mosque.[7] This project addressed the call of the urban planner working at DKI for new func-

tions in Kota Tua especially for local communities.[8] The cultural heritage professional stressed that there is a strong communal sense among the martial arts performers, photographers, bicycle renters and living statues in Kota Tua. They observed that this informal sector is organized through close mutual contact, regular meetings and that they help each other out when necessary. Many are economic migrants who came to Kota Tua from other provinces or even other islands of the Archipelago.[9] According to the local community expert, those newcomers are not familiar with the history of Kota Tua or the fact that it is a designated heritage site; their focus is their livelihood. Sastramidjaja (2014) asserts that the current developments in Kota Tua and its popularity may lead to the loss of local history. The redevelopment of the new community center may be a first step in creating awareness of and preserving this local history for both local residents and visitors.

Secondly, government investments in the public space. The revitalization of Kali Besar and its effects have been described previously. The project consists of several phases. The first phase, between the bridges of Jalan Pintu Besar Utara and Jalan Kopi, was finished in 2017. During the site visits of 2018, 2019 and 2022, it was observed that the floating walkways were closed to the public, but that the other areas were well-used, with people sitting on the new benches, strolling around or playing music on the new pedestrian bridge crossing the canal. By the site visit of 2022 the second phase of the revitalization project had started, from the bridge of Jalan Kopi towards the historical Jembatan Kota Intan, a hanging bridge dating from 1628. According to both the heritage development manager and an architectural researcher, the project is supposed to contribute to improved connectivity between Taman Fatahillah and the sites of Sunda Kelapa, just to the north, including the Museum Bahari (Maritime Museum) and the operational harbor with traditional wooden ships. This project was initiated during the tenure of DKI governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama (2014-2017), popularly known as Ahok. Although officially the revitalization was meant to welcome tourists to Kota Tua during the ASIAN Games of summer 2018, it is commonly understood that the project was accelerated to be finished for the installment of the new governor, Anies Baswedan (2017-2022), in order for the outgoing governor to leave his legacy on the city (Fauzi 2018).[10]

Under DKI governor Baswedan, in 2021, the extension of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line from its current final station HI Bundaran to Stasiun Jakarta Kota was kicked off. The extension is intended to improve the connectivity of Kota Tua with the rest of Jakarta, and to contribute to

further revitalization of the area. Significantly, the official kick-off was held on Taman Fatahillah, with the Museum Sejarah Jakarta as background. As part of this seven years project, an underground station will be constructed with entrances at the Art Deco-styled Stasiun Jakarta Kota from 1870, and the renovated Pantjoran Tea House in the heart of Glodok, the historical Chinese neighborhood just south of Kota Tua. As part of this major infrastructure project, the square in front of the station (Plaza Beos), the street between the station and the Pantjoran Tea House (Jalan Pintu Besar Selatan) and the street between the station and Taman Fatahillah (Jalan Lada) will be pedestrianized. The newly pedestrianized areas of Plaza Beos and Jalan Lada were festively opened by Governor Baswedan in August 2022, who announced that the 'revitalization of Kota Tua' was complete. During the September 2022 site visit, it was observed that the Jalan Pinto Besar Selatan was closed off, since the underground MRT station is being constructed here. Particularly the Jalan Lada, main connection between Stasiun Jakarta Kota and Taman Fatahillah and during previous site visits still noisy and car-clogged, was a very crowded public space with street

Image 12: *Weekend crowds on the newly pedestrianized Jalan Lada in 2022*. Photograph by: author.

artists and selfie booths (see image 12). Baswedan finished his tenure in October 2022 (Purwantiasning & Bahri 2021; Firdaus et al. 2018).[11]

Thirdly, the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. During all site visits to Kota Tua, it was observed that most people taking selfies, riding bicycles or just sitting down in small groups were young people. Particularly in the weekends, the area gets very crowded. Indeed, Sastramidjaja (2014) observed that cosmopolitan young people are engaging in activities of what she called *"heritage re-interpretation"* and *"colonial nostalgia"*, with historical re-enactments, heritage walks, exhibitions on the Dutch colonial period, festivals and sleepovers in one of the area's museums. The architectural researcher confirmed that many young people visit Kota Tua on the weekends to attend these activities, or just to meet up and hang out with their friends.[12] The architectural historian felt that Kota Tua's colonial buildings have a certain romantic appeal as part of Jakarta's urban fabric, just like the post-independent monuments and contemporary skyscrapers.[13] The cultural heritage professional confirmed that the colonial buildings are an obvious part of the city's history, but stressed a decolonizing perspective is needed to plan for the use and reuse of these buildings from a local or eastern, rather than a western, perspective.[14] Indeed, rather than dwelling in a nostalgic Dutch, or Indo-Dutch, sentiment of *tempo doeloe*, or longing for the former Dutch East Indies, Sastramidjaja (2014) described that the young people in Kota Tua are reinterpreting the local heritage by adding their own understanding of Jakarta's multi-layered history. One of the contributing factors is the fact that neither these young people, nor their parents, lived through colonialism. Another is the lack of education on this part of Indonesia's history in school curricula: Particularly during the regimes of the country's first presidents Sukarno and Suharto, close to no attention was given to the era of colonial rule. Now that young people can learn more about these 'hidden parts' of their history, not just at school but also through social media and the multitude of history-inspired activities, they can actively (re)discover their own history. A trend that goes hand in hand with the redevelopment of Kota Tua by local government and, mainly, entrepreneurs, into a postcolonial playground (Sastramidjaja 2014).

Developments Disproving Gentrification in Kota Tua

Firstly, the lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government. The Kota Tua area is legally protected by several regulations, and its future development has been included in several master plans drafted by DKI. Nevertheless, as the city is growing and urban expansion is pressing, the private restoration and redevelopment projects previously

described lack a coordinated, integrated approach, and the revitalization programs announced by successive Jakarta governors have often stranded due to a lack of management, allocation of resources and technical knowledge of the area's assets (Sulistyo 2019; Dila 2017; Utami & Anza 2017; Steinberg 2008).

A complicating factor, as pointed out by the cultural heritage professional, is the periodical changes in governor (Jakarta's equivalent of a mayor), as every governor has his own vision and priorities. This affects the implementation of the masterplans. Another challenge is Kota Tua's building ownership, as for many buildings it is unknown who the owner is. Other private owners that are registered either lack the funds, or the interest, to restore their buildings.[15] Sastrimidjaja stated that the local "*government owns less than 10% of the 283 buildings listed in the conservation zone*" (Sastrimidjaja 2014, 459). Partnerships between local government and local stakeholders and buildings owners have proved to be difficult due to a lack of trust and involvement from both sides (Sastramidjaja 2014). The urban planner working at DKI confirmed that planning in Kota Tua depends on who is in charge. They advocated for a more comprehensive development plan for the area, not just with a focus on the direct vicinity of Taman Fatahillah and Sunda Kelapa harbor to benefit tourism, but also on the communities living in the surrounding neighborhoods. For their benefit, the development plan should include a multitude of functions, particularly education.[16]

The local community expert and an urban heritage researcher both mentioned the autonomous status of DKI as a capital city as a challenge. This status gives DKI more power and independence from the national government. The Ministries of Education and Culture and of Public Works for example cannot impose any policies on Kota Tua if the DKI government does not agree, and at the same time DKI can implement policies not necessarily in line with national policy. The urban heritage researcher commented that although Jakarta was the first Indonesian city to adopt heritage regulations, a clear vision by the responsible departments is essential for the implementation of the relevant regulations.[17] The architectural researcher confirmed that these departments need stronger mandate as well as more knowledge and capacity through education or training in order to manage heritage buildings or districts of Jakarta.[18]

Secondly, the seeming absence of displacement and the case of a community that resisted eviction. Indeed, as pointed out by the urban heritage researcher, between 2015 and 2019, the number of inhabitants in Kota Tua's areas (Kelurahan) of Pinangsia and Roa Malaka have remained stable. Pinangsia covers the area east of Kali Besar including Taman

Fatahillah and Stasiun Jakarta Kota and their direct surroundings, and Roa Malaka covers the area west of Kali Besar. Pinangsia for example had 10.851 inhabitants in 2015; 10.855 in 2016; 10.859 in 2017; 10.861 in 2018; and 10.863 in 2019. In Roa Malaka, the number of inhabitants has changed from 3.224 in 2015 to 3.296 in 2019 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Administrasi Jakarta Barat).[19]

An interesting case is the community of Kampung Tongkol, which lives along one of the arms of the Ciliwung river, a ten-minute walk northeast of Taman Fatahillah. It is located close to the site of the former Batavia Castle, nestled behind a remaining chunk of the city walls and a seventeenth-century grain warehouse. Depending on the source a *kampung* can be described as a traditional village, informal settlement, or slum area. In Jakarta, many kampungs are built along water ways or the coastline. Kampungs are dynamic satellite settlements, with home industries in transportation, food business, logistics or administration. They typically emerged when migrants from other parts of the country came to the city and settled down on vacant plots of land. During the Dutch colonial rule these settlements were unofficially tolerated by the government but investments in facilities and infrastructure were few. It was not until the 1930s that kampung improvement programs were implemented to upgrade roads, construct gutters and bridges and provide public facilities such as toilets and street lighting (Irawaty 2018; Silver 2008).

Kampung Tongkol has a similar history, though it is only about seventy years old. A local community organizer explained that the first residents settling on the wetlands along the Ciliwung were administration staff working at a nearby army base since the base's dorms were overfull. Later, new industrial sites in Ancol further east attracted a lot of workers from all over Indonesia; a lot of them moved to Kampung Tongkol due to a lack of formal housing in the city. In 2014, DKI threatened to evict the kampung residents in order to widen the Ciliwung from 20 to 40 meters for water management reasons and to create a path for tourists along the historical castle wall. The kampung residents, led by the community organizer and aided by community organizations such as Urban Poor Consortium, started to negotiate with the government. Eventually DKI settled for a river broadening of five meters. The kampung residents rebuilt their houses themselves, making them five meters shorter on the waterfront side. They created a new, unpaved path along the river to access the houses and the river (image 13), and a paved path along the city wall. They cleaned the riverbanks, planted new greenery, set up a waste recycling system and placed information signs on the kampung and the former castle for visitors. The

Image 13: *View on the new pathway along the Ciliwung river at Kampung Tongkol in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

residents agreed to take good care of their kampung; not only of their own houses and public areas, but also of the colonial city wall they live next to. This initiative was widely supported by educational institutes, NGOs and community architects, and today Kampung Tongkol is still thriving.
During the site visit in 2019, it gave the impression of an organized, neat village where the rush of the surrounding city seems far away. According to the community organizer eviction currently is not a threat, although the residents are still vulnerable as they do not officially own the land on which their kampung is standing. They are in the process of formalizing their ownership as communal land. Dian Tri Irawaty (2018) and Rita Padawangi (2018) both describe and praise this initiative as an example of alternative development and community design, as opposed to market- or government-led development schemes. According to the community organizer, the initiative of Kampung Tongkol's community can be applied to other kampungs in Jakarta.[20] The architectural researcher noted that other riverbank development projects initiated by DKI along this arm of the Ciliwung river on the eastern side of Kota Tua, to the south of Kampung Tongkol, have not led to displacement of the several kampung communities living there.[21]

And thirdly and lastly, Large-Scale Social Restrictions which were imposed by the government during to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 14 March 2020, after the first COVID-19 infections in Indonesia were diagnosed, the tourist attractions under management of DKI Jakarta, including the Taman Fatahillah area and its museums, were closed to the public. Since Taman Fatahillah and the surrounding streets were a popular tourist destination, especially drawing large crowds in the weekends, these public spaces were completely sealed off to prevent transmission of the virus. The Kali Besar area remained largely open. Only sporadically, when the COVID-19 situation allowed, visitors were allowed on Taman Fatahillah in small numbers and with the necessary precautions such as the wearing of face masks. The area remained closed until November 2021, as tourism had a lower priority than the general public health, the business and industrial sectors and education. This had an enormous impact on the restaurants, coffee places, shops and other businesses in Kota Tua, as well as on the overall development the area experienced before the pandemic. Employees had their salaries cut or lost their jobs altogether, restaurants tried to find a different source of income such as food delivery, and shops were forced to close. According to the heritage development manager, Konsorsium lost a few of their tenants, including Locarasa, Mel's Dorm Hostel (both in 2020) and Mula in 2022.[22] Government income from tourism taxes evaporated. Since Indonesia had closed its borders to foreigners, and domestic transportation between different islands of the country was decreased, tourism mobility dropped dramatically. Amrullah et al. calculated that the number of local (Indonesian) tourists visiting the city of Jakarta went down from 21.683.578 in 2019 to 10.637.261 in 2020: A decrease of 51% (Amrullah et al. 2022). The number of foreign tourists even went down from 2.421.124 in 2019 to 421.247 in 2020: 83% less. Indeed, for most foreign tourists Jakarta is merely a transit city on their way to other, more popular destinations such as Bali and Yogyakarta (Amrullah et al. 2022, 327, 334). Numbers of tourists visiting the Kota Tua area throughout the pandemic, or data on the exact impact on the museums and businesses around Taman Fatahillah have not yet been published at the time of this research (Amrullah et al. 2022; Patnistik 2020; Soehardi et al. 2020).

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite its colonial history, Kota Tua is a popular gathering place, particularly among local and domestic visitors. The historical urban fabric has increasingly been recognized for its development potential by both local government and investors, as described by Jones and Shaw, Yeoh, Kusno,

and Chambers and Huggan. This tendency originally started under Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin in the early 1970s, with the opening of new museums in former colonial buildings and designation of Kota Tua as a conservation area. After this initial boost, the following decades the future of Kota Tua was no political priority. This changed more recently, with the founding of Konsorium Kota Tua Jakarta in 2014, the attempt to gain UNESCO World Heritage status in 2015, and recent revitalization projects of Kali Besar (2017) and the area around Stasiun Jakarta Kota (2022). All of these initiatives can be regarded as tangible legacies of subsequent Jakarta governors Joko Widodo, Basuki Tjahja Purnama and Anies Baswedan. Kota Tua was such a popular destination, that the area had to be closed off during the COVID-19 pandemic, to prevent people for gathering in its public spaces. As the restrictions are being lifted, the visitors are returning.

This article investigated the first signs of gentrification in Kota Tua, and the extent to which four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest itself in the area: (1) displacement of lower income residents by more affluent ones, (2) the appearance of new functions to cater to the needs of new residents and visitors, (3) the rise of rents and property values, and (4) investments made by the public and private sectors in the public space, infrastructure and built environment. To achieve this, several research methods were used.

The visual analysis mainly pointed to one of the four characteristics of a gentrification process: Investments made in infrastructure, or public space. Interviews with local heritage professionals, conducted in 2019 and in 2023, and the analysis of secondary literature, provided further insights. Six main developments connected to Kota Tua's supposed gentrification were identified: Three of these developments can be considered as confirming gentrification, namely privately initiated conservation projects, government investments in the public space, and the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. At the same time, three other developments seem to be disproving the process: The lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government, the seeming absence of displacement and a case of a community that resisted eviction, and Large-Scale Social Restrictions imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the findings of this research and referring back to the four characteristics of a gentrification process, some conclusions can be drawn. Displacement is not yet taking place in Kota Tua, despite recent revitalization initiatives: The number of residents in the area has remained stable between 2015 and 2019, and kampung communities living along

the Ciliwung river in the eastern part of Kota Tua were not evicted. In the past ten years, new businesses have opened their doors in Kota Tua, mainly catering to more affluent tourists. The longer-term impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on these businesses, however, still remains unclear. With regards to rising rents and property values, this research has proved less conclusive: the only example found is the OLVEH building which was leased and redeveloped by Konsorsium between 2015 and 2019, and which endured a rent tripling in the last year of the agreement. Investments made in public spaces may be the most visible and apparent characteristic of the gentrification process observed in Kota Tua. In the past five years, the main infrastructure of and around Taman Fatahillah, including the Kali Besar and streets leading to Stasiun Jakarta Kota, have received upgrades. Yet, these interventions do not always seem to be successful: During the 2022

Image 14: *Closed off access to floating walkways on Kali Besar in 2022.*
Photograph by: author.

site visit for this research, the revitalized part of Kali Besar was partly closed off and was relatively abandoned (see image 14).

The research shows that at the moment gentrification is not yet taking hold of Kota Tua. Although the first signs of gentrification such as the arrival of new functions, investments in public space and adaptive reuse of historical buildings are undeniable, they have not yet led to common gentrification effects, such as the displacement of communities, nor has the area become sterile, as addressed by Zukin, Caulfield, Ley and Sudjic. Therefore, it is recommended to continue studying the area for another five to ten years. This can include measuring the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and on Kota Tua as tourist destination; analyzing whether tourists return to pre-pandemic numbers; establishing whether rents and property values are rising; keeping track of the number and backgrounds of residents in the area; as well as whether the Kali Besar revitalization project will be finished; and what effects the opening of the new MRT station at Stasiun Jakarta Kota has on the area in terms of accessibility from other parts of Jakarta and with regards to new developments in the station area. The move of Jakarta's political function to Indonesia's new capital city Nusantara in East-Kalimantan (under construction since 2022) may impact Kota Tua, although the effects may be limited since the financial and cultural functions will remain in Jakarta. As such, further research is needed to establish whether the gentrification process in Kota Tua really materializes, and what the future of this postcolonial urban area entails.

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Endnotes

1 Interview with architectural curator, 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

2 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

3 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

4 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

5 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta and with architectural historian by author on 8 October 2019 in Jakarta.

6 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

7 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

8 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta

9 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

10 Interviews with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online) and with architectural researcher by author on 15 February 2023 (online).

11 Interview with urban planner by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

12 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

13 Interview with architectural historian by author on 8 October 2019 in Jakarta.

14 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

15 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

16 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

17 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta and with urban heritage researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

18 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

19 Interview with urban heritage researcher by author on 13 February 2023 (online).

20 Interviews with community organizer by author on 16 October 2019 in Jakarta and on 14 February 2023 (online).

21 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 15 February 2023 (online).

22 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).