Locality and globality: The production of new space in maintaining the identity of urban areas

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Abstract. Globalization has brought modernity to big cities but this led to a contradiction between abstract spaces (quantity) and social spaces (quality). The modern environment tends to disrupt the daily life of local communities with its cultural diversity and eliminates social relations. Moreover, modernity which offers uniformity does not consider local identity and cities are planned similar everywhere. This paper uses Lefebvre’s trialectics of spatiality comprising ‘spatial practice’, ‘representation of space’ (abstract space), and ‘space of representations’ (lived space) to study the spatial phenomena in Medan city. The research used qualitative methodology via in-depth interviews with respondents from various societal groups. The study focused on the phenomenon of space according to each group. The findings show that there are unique dynamic relationships between the local community and the newcomer community that brings modernity. The Tamil community lives in the periphery area while their presence in the modern commercial center strengthens the identity of the area as a ”home town” for the local community in the modern city.

1. Introduction

Space is witness to the survival of human beings as there is a spatial component to the entire history of humanity [1]. Cities are more than just physical entities. In fact, cities are also spaces where communities live their daily life. In cities, there are diverse social relationships between communities, but these communities live in single units with use-value which shows their identity. These are symbolic places, representative of many things [2]. Amid diversity, cities have an identity that illustrates its people. Lynch [3] defined this identity as “the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places.” Accordingly, identity implies a distinction, which is obvious and visible at first sight, and strong enough to create images in people’s minds even in those who have not seen the place before. Therefore, identity is always unique, exclusive, and not reproducible.

Globalization has removed boundaries and has brought modernity to various corners of the world. Modernity is interpreted as a source of progress in knowledge [1]. Knox and Marston in Arentsen, Stamp and Thuijs[4] described modernity as a forward-looking view of the world that emphasizes reason, science, rationality, creativity, novelty, and progress. The spread of such ideas is believed to realize a better life and affects the way people view the world. The city is regarded as a symbol of progress and welfare. Capitalists see globalization as an opportunity; they use the space as a
commodity to make a profit. Modernization also affects the development of cities as cities in different parts of the world start looking similar. Modernity enters the city in various ways. Megaprojects, advanced technology, cultural and foreign values are coloring the cities and even affect the social context. The values that globalization brings also affect the social relations of the community. This causes contradictions of space, where the values and the forms that globalization introduced compete with the previous values in the city. As such, space becomes a contradiction when each struggle for control and survival.

However, globalization causes many cities in the industrialized world to lose their identity as their mixed identities make these cities become ambiguous. The set of cultural markers that defines a city makes it instantly recognizable. In modern cities, people no longer know each other and they gather based on personal interests. The result of this is a lost sense of belonging to the urban community.

The trialectics of spatiality, i.e., 'spatial practice', 'representation of space' (abstract space), and 'space of representations' (lived space) [5] can be used to study the contradiction between modernity and locality of urban space today. The dynamic and unique social relationship among local community groups and migrants creates new spaces. This is the meeting space where modernity affects local communities as they struggle to re-enter the central parts of the city to demonstrate their identity.

Like other cities, globalization is evident in the center of Medan, transforming the city into a modern area. The influence of modernity can be seen from the presence of modern-style buildings, the lifestyle in various regions and advanced technology which already dominates the city center. One example of an area that is affected by modernization is Kampung Keling - since October 27, 2019, renamed Little India (Figure 1). This area used to be home to a local Tamil community from South India. However, Chinese immigrants brought modernity and started dominating the central area, displacing the Tamil community to the periphery. The contradiction of space between the local Tamil community and the newcomer China community in the area did not cause conflicts. Their similar background as immigrants in the city and their harmonious social relations established a new space. This space strengthened the existence and identity of the Tamil communities in Medan City.

![Figure 1. Location of Kampung Keling in Medan](image)

2. Methodology
The research used qualitative methods with verification through the perspective of social-constructivism. According to Moelong [6], qualitative research aims to understand subjective aspects
that emphasize the phenomenology of human behavior. Moreover, in phenomenology, researchers do not just study facts but seek to understand what is happening that can explain events in everyday life. Social-constructivism can be used to study the social relationships between the Tamil and Chinese communities, which leads to the production of new space. The data was collected through field observations and in-depth interviews. The field observations focused on modern commercial buildings scattered around Kampung Keling and the new public spaces that were formed. The aim of the field observations was to uncover the transformation of local space into abstract spaces in the area.

Meanwhile, the interviews were conducted with Tamil people who sell fireworks and food, Hindu community leaders, Tamil community leaders, community leaders who have performed mixed marriages, non-Tamil community leaders, and Chinese and indigenous people who have lived alongside the Tamil community for long. The aim of this was to determine the relationship between the Tamil and Chinese communities in Kampung Keling. The analysis uses a hierarchy of levels of analysis ranging from individuals, community groups, to social institutions. The study analyzes the social construction of reality that emerged from the relationships between the two groups. The authors continuously interpreted the findings throughout the research process in line with Stake [7] who argued that qualitative research is about interpreting data.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 The origin of the Tamil community in Kampung Keling

The Tamil community initially came to the region of Medan in 1873 through plantation contracts for 25 people. They came from South India through Malaysia and Singapore. To create an orderly and planned city, in 1918, the Dutch colonial government divided Medan into several villages following a quarter system based on ethnicity [8]. Through this population policy, the Tamil community settled in Kampung Keling which is located not far from the center of Medan City. Their villages extended with large houses and yards and farmland. For the inner tranquility of the workers, the Dutch colonial government also allowed the Tamil community to establish a house of worship in the area. Thus, in 1884, the Shri Mariamman Temple was built which the community still uses until now as a place of worship and meeting.

When the Tamil first moved to Medan, the Dutch named streets after places in India, such as the Calcutta Straat, Madras Straat, Colombo Straat, Ceylon Straat, and Bombay Straat. Now, these streets have been renamed into Jalan Taruma, Jalan Kalingga, Jalan Erlangga, Jalan Tumapel, Jalan Kediri, Jalan Candi Biara, and Jalan Muara Takus. These names relate to the Hindu kingdom in Indonesia. The only street name in Medan that is still related to India today is Jalan P. J Nehru.

After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, the area developed into an integral part of the city, especially because of the construction of roads. The map of Medan City from 1947 shows Roxy Cinema established by a wealthy Indian businessman. The map also shows a Hindu School that was later renamed Khalsa School. It was controlled by the Singh family and it was the only school that taught in English in Medan until 1990.

3.2 Modernity and the degradation of local space

The development of urban areas as the center of the economy and governance has triggered a demand for space. Until 1960, Kampung Keling was still dominated by Tamil people but economic pressures forced them to sell their land to the Chinese community. As newcomers buying the Tamil land, the Chinese community entered the area. They then invited their family members to also buy land and move to the area. Their presence has brought new identities and values. Originally, they were still neighbors of the Tamil community. Yet, gradually they dominated and changed the value of the area. They started businesses and created a commercial area by building shophouses. The multilevel permanent shophouses with a variety of facades and colors stand along the main streets. Modern lamps and billboards are also signs of modernity.

In the 1970s, this village developed into the most elite commercial area in Medan, especially along Zainul Arifin Street (Figure 2). Zainul Arifin Street, Taruma Street, Cik Di Tiro Street, and Tengku
Umar Street are lined with commercial buildings owned by the Chinese community. Prominent buildings are Sun Plaza, the largest mall in Medan, the ANZ Building, and the BII building in the east, and Cambridge Plaza/Swiss-Bel Hotel–Medan’s tallest hotel and apartment - located on the west end of Zainul Arifin Street. Those buildings have been constructed in the early 2000s and added to the stock of commercial buildings in the area.

![Shophouses](image1.png) ![Megaprojects](image2.png)

Figure 2. Shophouses (a) and Megaproject (b) at Z Arifin Street as commercial space

Currently, based on official data of the local government of Petisah Tengah and Madras Hulu district, the Chinese community dominates the area of Kampung Keling as they own 81.06% of the buildings in the area, whereas the Tamil community owns less than 15.64% (Figure 3). Their presence in the area is directly proportional to the value of land uses. The stores in the area sell various types of commercial goods such as clothing, food, drinks, household needs, jewelry, furniture, building materials, and school and office equipment. There are also services provided such as laundry, printing, internet, tailors, barbershops, and vehicle workshops. The Chinese community dominates the region through a variety of commercial buildings, so there is very little lived space for the Tamil community (Figure 4).

The drastic developments that occur in turn them into arenas of class struggle. Cities are not only characterized by the emergence of centers of economic activity but also display poverty (King in [1]). The communities that do not have economic capabilities can only compete for the spaces between buildings. This is also the case in Medan as the city develops into a modern city. The area of Kampung Keling which is in the city of Medan has developments.
3.3 The local Tamil in the periphery

The Chinese community has dominated the area and transformed it into a business center, while the remaining Tamil communities are moving to the periphery. The Tamil community in the periphery lives in four kampongs, i.e., Kampung Madras Hulu, Kampung Mayor, Kampung Dayak and Kampung Keling (Figure 5). They occupy a dense, irregular settlement along the Babura River. The houses of the Tamil community areas are hidden behind rows of Chinese shophouses. Many Tamil live in small nonpermanent and semi-permanent buildings, with a distance of one meter between the houses. The Tamil work as housekeepers, drivers in Chinese family stores. Some sell fried snacks, food, drinks, and cigarettes in front of their house or at the entrance of their settlement.

In an environment that has little public space, the Tamil make use of the entrance and terrace of their house to gather. Some mothers, fathers, and youth can be seen sitting together to talk and gossip. In the afternoon, after returning from school, the children play together on a small field in the center of the settlement and then go to the river to swim and play football. The community also has cultural, religious, and wedding ceremonies as well as other local events. They usually use a small field to set up tents and other party facilities. They seem to help each other prepare for parties or ceremonies. During these events they use traditional clothing, serve local food and there is language, music, and Indian dance. Not only Tamil are present at the event, but also indigenous and Chinese communities who participate in the activities with them. The Tamil community also seemed to visit the temple for worship, so it remains active and important in the life of the Tamil people in the area.
The Chinese community has developed the center of Kampung Keling into a commercial area. The various shophouses represent modern spaces with exchange value. The everyday lived space with qualitative value (use-value) of the Tamil community is a representation of locality, while the exchange value of the Chinese community is a representation of modernity (abstract space).

3.4 Social relations between the Tamil and Chinese communities

The relation between the local Tamil community and the Chinese settlers in Kampung Keling has produced social cohesion between the two communities. This relationship is based on their similar background as immigrants and cultural similarities, as well as the relationship between sellers and buyers of land.

These two immigrant communities have interacted since 1873 after the arrival of the Tamil and the Chinese to Tanah Deli to work as plantation laborers. Since the 1960s, the Tamil community has been selling their land to the Chinese. Families of these two communities have daily interactions; their frequent encounters have increased the Chinese community’s awareness of the Tamil community. Further, these interactions were possible because Kampung Keling initially was a residential area of the Tamil people in the city’s planning of 1972.

During two significant events, the Tamil community helped the Chinese community. First, in 1990, there was a robbery and murder in one of the Chinese gold shops. The Tamil community members from Kampung Kubur pursued the robbers and retrieved the stolen goods and returned it to the Chinese family. Secondly, during the Indonesian reforms in 1998, there was an attempt to annihilate the Chinese community but this was unsuccessful because of the involvement of the Tamil who protected the village. They were willing to give their lives to help the Chinese community.

In 1991, a fire broke out that decimated the Tamil settlements in Kampung Kubur. The Chinese immediately helped out by providing food and beverages. They also provided building materials such as bricks, sand, and cement to rebuild the houses that had burned down. They also respect the temple and participate in religious events in the temple.

In everyday life, the Tamil community members work as housekeepers, drivers, and helpers in Chinese family stores. Both communities also attend traditional events, weddings, and funeral ceremonies held by the other community. In the evenings, members from both communities often gather on the pedestrian path while drinking coffee.

Space is created from social relations and space allows the occurrence of social relations [5]. Furthermore, space is not only something produced but also a production tool. The modernization that
the Chinese community introduced to Kampung Keling does not create conflicts. Instead, it resulted in a harmonious relationship between the Tamil and Chinese communities. This harmonious social relationship that has lasted for three generations creates a strong brotherhood among the Tamil and Chinese communities.

3.5. The production of new space as the identity of the urban area

Individuals tend to look for opportunities to create space to adapt to the daily activities of the city [9]. Modernization makes Tamil communities from four villages in the periphery adjust to the new conditions. As an affected community, Tamil doubt they can re-enter the center that is currently occupied by the Chinese community although they are hopeful. As Stonequist stated, margined communities have a double consciousness [10]. The Tamil community creates new spaces by selling fireworks to adapt to the current forces of globalization that control the central area. The new spaces that appear on the pedestrian path in front of the shophouses are a response from a society hidden in an unplanned residential space to development based on calculations.

The social space that comes in the form of temporary kiosks is a relational space created by the social connections that occur within the region. This new social space is the lived space of local Tamil people. This space is a bridge between abstract space and living space. This social space is the symbol of Tamil society in Kampung Keling because the Tamil people living in the periphery of the area can be present in the center and live their everyday life according to their values. The development of the center of fireworks sales in the area has been supported by the Chinese who granted permission to sell fireworks on the sidewalks in front of the shophouses along Zainul Arifin Street. This practice has lasted for three generations. During religious holidays, the Tamil build simple non-permanent stalls for selling fireworks from 11 a.m. to midnight. At night, their kiosks benefit from the lights from Chinese community-owned stores for free (Figure 6).

![Figure 6. Tamil fireworks sellers at Zainul Arifin Street](image)

The Tamil people not only sell their merchandise but also provide use value in the abstract space. The songs, language, food, clothing, way of life, gestures, and culture of the Tamil community are present on the sidewalk. Even at night, people visit their friends. Zainul Arifin Street is no longer just a pedestrian space but the Tamil community has created a new lived space (Figure 7). The Tamil people bring their local values into a spatial conflict in modern space. However, space is culturally constructed and changes continuously. Thus, it is necessary to be aware that space is created through cultural change (Soja in Siagian [11]).

The people in the city who feel alienated must act and struggle to improve their situation. Thus, space becomes a tool of struggle. Lived space acts as a bridge between social space (quality) and abstract space (quantity). According to Lefebvre, social space is generated by social relations and cannot be created by individuals, as social space is very powerful. Selling fireworks is not allowed by local government regulations because it happens in the pedestrian area. However, due to social relations and good cooperation, it happens until now. Thus, the two community groups maintain the continuity of their daily life. Following the theory of Certeau in [11], the Tamil communities use tactics through helping the Chinese as servants. Meanwhile, the Chinese community uses tactics by utilizing the Tamil community for their long-term business interests in Kampung Keling.
Figure 7. The land use of Zainul Arifin Street

The Tamil community sells fireworks on the sidewalks in front of the shophouses during three moments per year, namely Chinese New Year, Eid ul-Fitr and the celebration of Christmas and New Year. The Tamil community comes from the periphery to carry out their activities in the center. They sell fireworks a month ahead of these holidays. These firework sellers act as a magnet for buyers from various parts of Medan even from the Province of North Sumatera. The celebration new years is a special phenomenon in the area of Kampung Keling, as thousands of people from Medan City and its surroundings come to buy and play fireworks together (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The atmosphere of Zainul Arifin Street on new year celebrations

The city is a complex space that has many consequences in the form of opportunities and challenges to the image and identity of the city. The influx of modernity in Kampung Keling is in line with the effects of globalization. According to Barker [1], globalization has removed all boundaries of space and time; in modernism, social relations can be formed regardless of place or time. This situation weakens the social connections among the people who live in a place. Globalization also causes a loss of cultural diversity (Wirth in Barker [1]). People no longer know each other as city dwellers form groups based on the similarity of style. They have no more sense of ownership of their surroundings. The phenomenon of space within the area explains the joining of the weakened Tamil community with the dominant Chinese community as a way of strengthening its existence and identity. By joining and coming together in the social space, the Tamil community can still maintain the image of Kampung Keling as a community of Tamil people. Thus, the Tamil people who are living in the periphery and the Chinese community who dominate the center (abstract space) have created a unique social relationship in everyday life. The local values of the Tamil community operate in the face of globalization and the government. The harmonious relationships between the Tamil and Chinese people since 1890 have been a force in the production of new space (lived space). The well-developed relationship of solidarity causes each community to accept their differences. Both communities want the new spaces to preserve the image of Kampung Keling as a hometown of the Tamil community as described in Figure 9.
Figure 9. Production of space as the identity space

4. Conclusion
Modernization in Kampung Keling encourages the use-value of space. Today 85% of the area becomes commercial space with exchange value. The Tamil community lives in the periphery, along the Babura River in the west, while the Chinese community lives in the center. Both communities live together harmoniously without conflict and have created social relations for almost three generations. The relations between the two groups have created social space that emerged among Chinese shophouses which makes it possible for the remaining Tamil community from their hidden settlement to be present in the central area. Specifically, the Tamil community is visible in the public space for three months a year blended with Chinese's commercial activities in the central area. Both the locality of Tamil and globality by the Chinese community will preserve the identity of this area.

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