Living Behind the Seawall: Inequalities and Human-Environment Relationship in North Jakarta
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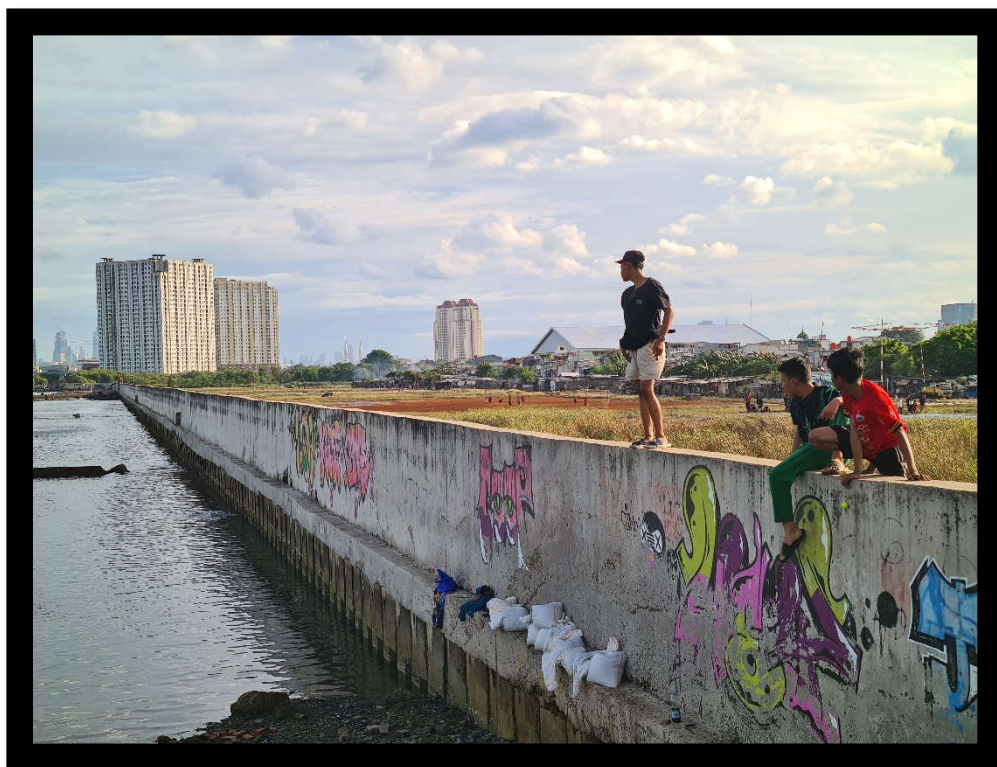
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List of contents

I Introduction

This research focuses on the analysis of the forms of human-environment relationship that characterize different communities in the coastal area of North Jakarta, and on how these might be connected to inequalities between local communities. In North Jakarta, relationship with the environment is strongly affected by the presence of environmental issues, namely sea level rise, land subsidence, and chronic floods, which force local communities to come to terms with the surrounding waters on a daily basis, developing different experiences and perceptions of the environment. Moreover, such different experiences and perceptions are connected to political struggles related to the protection of the Jakarta bay ecosystem, the livelihood of fishing communities, and mitigation projects such as the construction of a giant seawall and of reclaimed islands off the coast of the city.

The research population includes residents of four different neighbouring districts located along the coast of the Indonesian capital. Despite being so close to each other, these are very different areas, home to fish markets, fishing settlements and industries, luxurious residential areas, shining malls and exclusive leisure spaces. These districts are inhabited by very different communities in terms of social class, income, lifestyle, occupation, and ethnicity. Therefore, they are an ideal field to observe diverse forms of human-environment relationship, and to test to what extent could these be related to the above-mentioned inequalities and to different ontologies of the environment.

In the following chapter, I first illustrate the theoretical framework of the research, with anthropological debates on ontology, as well as on climate justice and response to environmental issues. I then illustrate the methodology and main research methods employed for the research, and matters of ethics encountered during fieldwork.

The third chapter is devoted to an introduction to the field in which the research was conducted, providing the historical, social, and environmental context to the research. Separate sections are dedicated to specific descriptions of each area in which the research was conducted.

Chapters IV, V, and VI constitute the main body of the thesis, with description and discussion of the findings. Each of them is related to a specific theme that was explored in the analysis of local forms of human-environment relationship, namely materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity. Each chapter presents the description of a specific theme as observed in different areas of North Jakarta, in a comparative framework.

Finally, in the conclusions, I sum up the findings and connect them to theory on ontology and climate justice.

II Theoretical framework and methodology

2.1 The debate on ontology and human-environment relationship

Traditionally, the object of study of anthropology was constituted by those "primitive" communities whose culture was assumed to be closer to nature, whereas modernity was understood to be that force that gradually brought human communities away from nature, drawing an ever-thicker line between nature and culture. Since then, a lot has changed and the concept of Anthropocene reinforced the idea of modernity as the process of growing impact of human societies over nature (Orr *et al*. 2015: 156). The growing awareness of climate change, the increasing attention devoted to environmental issues, and the success of the concept of Anthropocene in academic debates determined the return of environmental anthropology into prominence, as this particular field of anthropology had already developed an experience in the study of "coupled human and natural systems" before these themes were considered to be of paramount importance (*Ibid*.).

Debates related to human-environment relations between the 1940s and 1970s focused on the ways in which the environment determined certain types of behaviour on humans or limited the possibilities of human communities, while other anthropologists began to theorize how people come to understand and make meaning of their surrounding environment (West 2020: 118). What these debates had in common was the idea of environment as something objective, separated from human understanding and subjectivity, which could be known and described scientifically. However, in the 1980s, things began to change, and anthropologists started questioning the very nature of the environment, developing new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of this theme. At present day, these developments resulted in a diverse array of approaches such as the multi-species turn, the ontological turn, the new political ecology, and new debates about the nature/culture issue (West 2020: 118-119).

In the context of the environmental challenges that human societies are currently facing, environmental anthropology has thus grown into a most important field of anthropology, and has produced a wide host of theories and methodological approaches through which it is called to analyse contemporary challenges and to theorize a novel understanding of human-environment relations, and, consequently, of the nature-culture divide. In order to make sense of such a diverse theoretical and methodological landscape, Orr *et al*. (2015) proposed a classification of environmental anthropology into three large topics: systems ecology, political ecology, and cognitive science. Systems ecology is concerned with finding how societies relate to their environment and how they mutually influence each other; political ecology aims to uncover the influence of global and local political structures on the environment, and the tension between power and agency in environmental relations; while cognitive science is about the ways in which individuals and groups perceive, experience, and develop knowledge of their environment.

Following the same purpose of organizing the vast field of environmental anthropology, Vaughn *et al*. (2021) theorized the idea of intersectional ecologies as a way to approach environmental anthropology through subfields and diverse intellectual traditions, proposing a division into the three major themes of materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity. Materiality refers to the physical matter of ecology that constitutes the environment; knowledge is an umbrella term that encompasses all kinds of Western sciences, indigenous wisdoms, and individual and group forms of knowledge about the environment; whereas subjectivity refers to the ways in which people experience their relation with the environment.

I believe this approach is especially interesting because, compared to the classification proposed by Orr et al., which seems more intended to organize academic material and sub-sections of environmental anthropology, the approach developed by Vaughn *et al*. is more suited for the study of specific communities on the ground, as its focus on themes that can be observe and experienced grants the necessary flexibility and guidance to

explore human-environment relationships while conducting fieldwork. This research thus deployed the three themes identified by Vaughn *et al.* (2021) as a theoretical basis, while also taking the three topics outlined by Orr *et al.* (2015) into consideration. In the specific case study, the concept of inequality was utilized as a lens through which to observe possible differences in knowledge and subjectivity forms, as well as in experience and understanding of materiality.

According to the nature-culture dualist break rooted in Western philosophy, the environment is an independent entity separated from humans, thus, a certain type of environmental materiality will necessarily exercise a specific kind of influence over human communities, resulting in the production of determined forms of knowledge and subjectivity. In this kind of scheme, the environment influences human communities through materiality, producing specific knowledge and subjectivities through which, in turn, human communities influence the environment. The ontological turn forces us to reconsider this assumption and to think about the environment as a "malleable and historically contingent concept" (Vaughn *et al.* 2021: 277), characterized by a multiplicity of interconnected forms of materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity.

When employing the ontological approach, the analysis of different experiences of materiality, and of different forms of knowledge and subjectivity requires the abandonment of the standard ontological stance of the dichotomy between nature and culture. This is because it requires seeing the environment not as a single, objective entity separated from the human world, but as multiple entities intimately connected to the cultural and social worlds of human communities. In order to ground this ontological position in theory, it is useful to examine the possibilities and challenges of going beyond the culture-nature split.

According to Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 8), the idea of a single nature existing independently of subjective experience is the result of a historical process started over two thousand years ago that resulted in the "abstraction of a singular nature from the multiplicity of lived experiences". Therefore, according to this theory, that of an external nature is an illusory idea, made up through abstraction by the human mind as a sort of puzzle, in order to be able to address that which is out there. This process generated the nature-culture dualism, which could be deconstructed by culturally and historically locating the dynamics of abstraction. A similar focus on abstraction is found also in Westley *et al.* (2002: 107-108), who argue that processes of abstraction generate "virtual realities", in the sense of cultural constructions of nature. Because such constructions transcend space and time, they are experienced as external entities and therefore as real (Goodrich 2015: 48).

According to Goodrich (*ibid.*), both Macnaghten and Urry and Westley *et al.* attempts at solving the nature-culture dichotomy issue are meaningful, because their focus on abstraction processes would help overcoming three important problems. First, the idea of single nature arbitrarily separated from culture would be dismissed as simple abstraction. Second, the various natures of different times and spaces can be connected to specific practices through the unveiling of abstraction processes. Third, the power of "nature" as ethical arbiter to shape human activity can be eliminated or utilized in ecological modelling. Despite these apparent benefits, Goodrich also identifies a flaw in the abstraction argument, namely that by trying to overcome the culture-nature divide through epistemological means, the dichotomy is actually reproduced under the form of subject-object dualism. In fact, by postulating multiple abstracted natures, both Macnaghten and Urry and Westley *et al.* implicitly raise questions about the non-abstracted common realm in which they exist (Goodrich 2015: 48).

A possible solution to this paradox is provided by Kohn (2013: 34), who argues that it is not signs that come from the mind, but rather the other way around, and that "[w]hat we call mind, or self, is a product of semiosis". According to Boglioli (2015: 230), this approach proves very helpful to go beyond an anthropocentric perspective to the non-human. Indeed, Kohn (2013: 9) states that "[w]hat we share with nonhuman living creatures […] is not our embodiment, as certain strains of phenomenological approaches would hold, but the fact that we all live with and through signs". This approach allows Kohn to distance his argument from Western Naturalism and the understanding of cultural constructions of nature, in order to devote his attention to the comprehension of "a more basic, mutually constituting, pre-cultural process that brings all living things into a

common communicative network" (Boglioli 2015: 230). By avoiding the anthropocentric perspective, it is thus possible to come to a more unitary comprehension of human and the non-human, centred on the role of signs.

The field of environmental anthropology, however, requires analysing the relations between the human and the non-human, humans and the environment, and describing the meaning-making processes between human communities and the environment. Thus, it is necessary to take one step further: is it possible to go beyond the culture-nature dualism by maintaining a human perspective? Goodrich proposes an argument employing the concept of interobjectivity, that is, the idea that objects are at the same time subjected to different understandings pertaining to different subjects, and exercising an influence on the subjects in virtue of the unconscious, immediate cultural meanings that they represent (Sammut *et al.* 2018: 54). The argument suggests that the illusory unity between multiple natures is generated by the interobjectivity between humans and the surrounding environment, and that multiple natures appear from the disentanglement processes of interobjectively extended bodies (Goodrich 2015: 56-59). In other words, interobjective connections explain why culture and nature are not separated, while still contending that humans assign cultural meanings to the surrounding environment.

West (2020: 120) suggests that these processes of mutual influence and meaning making between humans and environment are continuously re-written and re-stated by different groups and in different historical times, resulting in a layering of meanings, or, in Goodrich's terms, of interobjective connections. West refers to this layering process as "palimpsest", a structure that can be analysed through specific methodologies in order to uncover the various networks that generated them. Secondly, he focuses on the importance of sense and bodily experience, and the central role of translation, intended as ontological translations of "the same biophysical processes, objects, and entities in very different ways" (West 2020: 121-122). The concepts of palimpsest and translation are useful to capture the multiplicity and mutability of human-environment relations, continuously influencing each other in both directions.

Back from theory to the empirical world, the ontological approach found fertile ground especially in environmental anthropology, and above all in studies on human-environment relationship, because it allowed researchers to explain the multiplicity of experiences and meanings associated to elements of the environment. For example, in the context of the Jakarta floods, the processes described above were perfectly captured by Kusno (2018), who identified multiple narratives of the phenomenon of floods, related to as many interpretations and subjectivities. Floods are either *bencana* (disaster), *bocor* (leak), *berkah* (blessing), *budaya* (culture), and more. At the same time they are associated to a multiplicity of actors, such as supernatural beings, urban poor, property developers, the moon, the morphology of the bay, climate change, and so on (Kusno 2018: 51). Such narratives may very well correspond to different forms of knowledge and subjectivity produced from different experiences of the material realities of floods, or different translations of the environment, produced through interobjectivity. Despite the impression of having distanced ourselves from nature, as stated by Orr *et al.* (2015: 157), it turns out that we are all *natuurvolken*, people intimately connected to nature.

The above-mentioned example by Kusno about the multi-faceted social nature of the issue of floods highlights how the ontological approach can be useful in theorizing diverse experiences and understandings of a certain phenomenon or of certain environmental conditions. However, the political aspect of the case here taken into exam should not be neglected. In fact, the realm of human-environment relationship is, more often than not, a politicized one. The environment of the Jakarta bay is a politicized arena subject to contestation by different interest groups. First, an elite group comprised of the local government, developers, investors, high class and upper-middle class residents has since the 1990s embarked on a journey to turn Jakarta into "one of the world-class waterfront cities" (Kusno 2013: 102). This is done by advocating projects for the re-making of the environment such as clearing of swampy areas and mangrove forests, transformation of the beach into facility, building of reclaimed land and reclaimed islands, construction of seawalls, large waterfront buildings or luxurious residential areas. Second, since the post-Suharto era diverse groups for environmental conservation

have started to emerge (Kusno 2013: 100), which include NGOs, the civil society, and part of the middle class. Third, the development of North Jakarta has directly affected local fishing communities, as some of them have been forcibly evicted and relocated inside apartments, while others still live in their original settlements, but are being threatened by the construction of seawalls and reclaimed islands. In fact, such development projects damage the bay's ecosystem and separate the fishermen from the ocean, leading to a loss of livelihood. Despite being very distant from the centres of power, these communities are also trying to put up their own political resistance through protests, albeit guided by NGOs.

As it can be noticed, the human-environment relations taking place in North Jakarta are not just a matter of ontologies, but also of politics. In order to bridge this gap and avoid an ontological but apolitical representation of the issue, it is useful to employ the concept of ontological politics. This concept is employed by Littlejohn (2020) in his analysis of the aftermath of the 2011 tsunami in north-eastern Japan, when different local communities and interest groups advocated for different solutions to prevent such disasters to occur again in the future. Specifically, while local authorities planned the construction of an even bigger seawall and other infrastructural means to separate the coastal towns from the ocean, the residents, and especially fishermen, advocated the return to a closer relationship with the ocean and communal living with the marine environment. Littlejohn refers to such resistance as "ontological dissensus" (Littlejohn 2020: 26), in the sense that it is based on a different ontological view of the world, and argues that in this way ontology takes part in the realm of politics, being the root cause of political struggle (Littlejohn 2020: 26-28).

Another example that shows the connection between politics, ontological questions, and human-environment relations is the case of indigenous politics in Latin America analysed by De La Cadena, in which the author explains how indigenous Andean populations have brought so-called "earth-beings" into the national political debates in the context of anti-mining protests. These are actors commonly referred to as "nature", such as mountains, rivers, and valleys, which become sentient beings in ontological politics, thus pushing towards a new concept of politics by the name of "cosmopolitics" that may include different ontologies as legitimate within the political arena. By doing so, indigenous groups counter the common notion of politics, challenge the separation between nature and culture, and propose a kind of political plurality that is not based on human characteristics such as race, gender, or age, but, rather, on the presence of non-human actors (De La Cadena 2010).

By employing the approach of ontological politics, it is possible to benefit from the insights of the ontological turn, meaning by ontological "what Philippe Descola (2014: 271–272) calls 'worlding', that is, perceiving, conceiving the nature of and relations between, and interfering with the heterogeneous forces given in our environments" (Littlejohn 2020: 26). At the same time, it is possible to embed ontology in politics, so to do justice to the political dimension of the issue, and to avoid the apolitical character that risks emerging when employing the sole ontological approach. Despite these efforts, however, both the ontological turn and ontological politics have been criticized on several levels. Importantly, the attempt to decolonize ontology ends up turning into colonization of difference through the imposition of the ontological approach (Bessire and Bond 2014: 445) to the study of different forms of "worlding". At the same time, the employment of "ontology" as a tool to indicate difference simply reiterates the problem of cultural relativism that it originally intended to overcome, that is, a tendency to excessive particularism that fails to recognize historical processes and forms of inequalities existing within and among societies (Espinosa Arango 2021: 418-419). Moreover, a more concrete critique pertains to methodology and the lack of clear directions on how to conduct ethnography of the non-human, as stated by Boglioli after his analysis of the pioneering works of the ontological turn (Boglioli 2015: 235). Such a lack of a clear methodology is also related to the researcher's claim to overcome one's own bias and ontology in order to reach a complete understanding of the different and the pluriverse. Indeed, there is no way to comprehend the production of dialogues and knowledge exchange between the researcher and the researched, and how the pluriverse is understood as emerging from the power dynamics and intersubjective relations between these actors (Espinosa Arango 2021: 420, 425).

In the context of these complex debates on the possibilities of the ontological turn and ontological politics in the analysis of human-environment relationship, this research aims to test the approach proposed by Vaughn *et al.* (2021) as a methodological tool to engage with questions of ontology starting from the experiences of individuals who live within a specific environment and interact with it on a daily basis. The focus on the themes of materiality, knowledge and subjectivity can be useful in identifying the elements that characterize ontologies and in breaking down what constitutes that "difference" that the concept of ontology is employed to indicate.

2.2 Sea level rise and climate justice

The case of sea level rise and floods in North Jakarta, with its consequences affecting communities marked by several inequalities, falls into the wide debate on climate justice. Dolsak and Prakash (2022) argue that effects of climate change and environmental issues in general disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities, and, in particular, identify three dimensions of climate justice. The first dimension pertains to the uneven distribution of the risks of environmental issues, with wealthy communities being more protected from such risks. The second dimension focuses on the unequal distribution of necessary costs for mitigation and adaptation, which weigh more on underprivileged communities. The third dimension is related to the uneven distribution of the benefits of environmental policies, which are more likely to benefit wealthy communities (Dolsak and Prakash 2022: 285-286). This theorization of climate justice highlights a rich-poor divide in which the underprivileged suffer from the risks of environmental issues and from the costs for mitigation, while the wealthy benefit from mitigation policies.

Exposure to environmental threats, however, is not just a rich-poor matter, as the way in which individuals relate to such risks depends on their specific position within local power structures, and is based on local categorizations. This means that, in the analysis of human-environment relationship and response to environmental issues it is necessary to adopt an intersectional approach that is suitable for a specific context, learning which intersectional factors are meaningful for a certain population (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014: 421-422). For example, Erwin *et al.* (2020) found how factors like gender, age, landownership, language, and migration status all influenced response to environmental issues in the Caylloma province of Peru. Roy (2018) highlights how intersectionality can be usefully employed on small-scale settings such as that of the neighbourhood, explaining how, just like individuals, neighbourhoods too can possess an identity and be subject to stereotypical perceptions from individuals living elsewhere. Moreover, individuals living within the neighbourhood can have diverse perceptions of the space, and are encouraged to experience the space according to the structure of the built environment and the qualities of the surrounding natural environment (Roy 2018: 62-68).

Neighbourhood-level intersectionality applies well in this research, in which various neighbourhoods of North Jakarta are characterized by factors of inequality, mainly income, lifestyle and ethnicity. Niemann *et al.* (2017) explain how the urban poor in Jakarta suffer from three aspects of environmental issues. They are disproportionately affected by floods and other environmental issues; they are exposed to risk of eviction for mitigation projects; and they are blamed in the public discourse for causing floods and pollution (Niemann *et al.* 2017: 200-201). The same issues are analysed by Padawangi and Douglass (2015), who noted how low-income communities are forced into flood-prone areas because their livelihood depends on living within the city's core or along the coast, while the construction of projects for the upper classes are limiting their available space (Padawangi and Douglass 2015: 523-524).

Closely related to the factor of income is that of lifestyle, as the latter is often a consequence of the former. As noted by Leichenko and Solecki (2008), urban development in developing countries has led to the construction

of suburban residential areas for the lifestyle needs of the emerging middle and upper classes. Such areas can be termed "consumption landscape" because, despite their virtuous planning and use of green spaces, they present a high rate of land and energy consumption per capita, generating negative environmental effects for the nearby underprivileged population (Leichenko and Solecki 2008: 613-614). In Jakarta, the upper classes have segregated themselves in detached gated communities that present services mostly unavailable to the rest of the population, and that are safely distant from pollution and environmental hazards (Leichenko and Solecki 2008: 617-618). Thus, while enjoying a comfortable environment, upper classes contribute, with their high consumption lifestyle, to environmental issues that mostly affect underprivileged communities. At the same time, due to lack of awareness or services, a low-income lifestyle is associated to environment-damaging practices such as the use of private vehicles, burning trash, or illegal trash-dumping into rivers, which hinders the flow of water and increases the risk of floods (Indrawati and Purwaningrum 2018).

Finally, ethnicity too can be a factor determining exposure to environmental threats, mainly due to cases of racial segregation. For example, Jones *et al*. (2014) found that, in the United States, living in white-majority neighbourhoods corresponds to exposure to lower levels of air pollution, whereas Hispanic-majority neighbourhoods present higher levels of air pollution. The influence of ethnicity can be extended also to natural disasters, as shown by Wright (2011), who analysed how the 2005 hurricane Katrina that devastated the city of New Orleans had a more severe impact on local communities of colour. This happened because these communities lived in more flood-prone areas, and policies for prevention and mitigation were not as effective for these communities as they were for white communities. In Jakarta, individuals of Chinese-Indonesian ethnicity tend to occupy safer positions and to be less exposed to environmental issues. In fact, Chinese-Indonesians constitute the majority of people living in suburban projects, and they historically have been able to obtain an economic wealth that is unavailable to other communities (Leichenko and Solecki 2008: 617).

Intersectional factors thus determine different perceptions and experiences of environmental issues and the environment in general. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the issue of climate justice as a relational issue that involves both society and nature, paying close attention to the complex ways in which human communities and the environment are related (Steele *et al*. 2015: 123). From an anthropological perspective, the issue of climate justice has been explored with particular attention to the ways in which disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected and how they respond and adapt to new environmental conditions. The same can be said of the case of sea level rise in North Jakarta. Here, response by the government consisted in a four-step approach: construction of seawalls, installation of water pumps, fortification of seawalls, and reclamation of new land (Esteban *et al*. 2020). Parallel to this, however, local communities also developed ways to adapt to a changing surrounding environment. For underprivileged communities, social capital is the main resource to cope with coastal hazards, as the structure of traditional settlements, with the presence of several communal spaces, fosters community bonding and the creation of an emergency network to respond to floods on a mid-term (Bott *et al*. 2019). At the same time, physical means of response are also employed, such as elevation of houses, construction of terraced houses or construction of small dikes to prevent house floods (Marfai *et al*. 2014). Similar results were also found in Semarang, another major city subject to sea level rise in central Java. Here too underprivileged coastal communities mostly rely on social capital and the capacity to self-organize to respond to flood threats. Interestingly, due to long-term exposure to such threats, local people came to perceive floods as something normal, which does not compromise their livelihood. Instead, flood became a common feature of their surrounding environment, to which they adapt rather than retreat, thus developing a new form of relationship with the environment (Bott and Braun 2019, Esteban *et al*. 2017).

While ethnography on adaptation by underprivileged communities is abundant, ethnography on response and perception of the environment by affluent communities is especially lacking. This is due to the noble intent to give voice to the underprivileged, and to conduct research where it is most needed. However, because cities are not a collection of neatly separated communities and urban development involves the entire population, it is also important to "study up" and analyse perception and experience of the environment by wealthy

communities. Thus, this research aims to use the peculiar case of North Jakarta, in which underprivileged and affluent communities live next to each other and have to cope with sea level rise, to explore how intersectional characteristics and urban development can influence human-environment relationship, in the wider context of social and cultural changes brought by the intersecting forces of urban development and climate change.

2.3 Methodology and ethics

This is a research of comparative nature that aims to compare different forms of human-environment relationship in several areas of North Jakarta marked by intersectional inequalities. Initially, I intended to focus on response to the issues of floods and sea level rise. However, during my fieldwork, I noticed that this could not be analysed without a strong comprehension of the ways in which local people perceive and experience the environment, so I decided to shift my focus to a comparative analysis of human-environment relationship. The main question that led my research is:

"How do inequalities between communities in North Jakarta relate to different experiences and perceptions of the surrounding environment?"

Because the research was conducted among coastal communities, the term "environment" here largely refers to the sea and the coastal environment in general. The theme of sea level rise and floods maintained its relevance even after the shift in focus, because these issues constitute a change in the local environment, thus offering the opportunity to explore shifting models of human-environment relationship and adaptation to new conditions. Moreover, sea level rise constitutes the actualization of the environment's agency, an issue that forces local communities to come to terms with the surrounding environment and to deepen their relationship with it.

In order to explore this topic, I initially selected two neighbouring areas of North Jakarta: the high-income district of Pantai Mutiara, and the low-income district of Muara Baru, both of which are experiencing severe land subsidence and were frequently flooded in past. Subsequently, in order to test my initial findings and compare them with the populations of areas with similar characteristics, I expanded my research to two other neighbouring districts: Pantai Maju (high-income) and Muara Angke (low-income). Finally, the addition of the waterfront theme-park of Ancol completed the geographical extension of my field.

The research population was initially sampled randomly. In the initial stage of the research, I would simply go to the field and talk to the people I met in order to establish a basic network. This required an additional effort in high-income areas, where I mostly had to schedule appointments in order to talk to local residents and workers. Following this initial network, I expanded my research population through snowball sampling. Despite my efforts to diversify the sample, I am aware that, through snowball sampling, I was dragged towards certain social settings, while I had to ignore others. Moreover, due to widespread gender separation in Indonesia, as a male researcher, access to women was strongly limited for me, especially in low-income areas.

In order to explore different human-environment relationships in different areas of North Jakarta, I focused my research on the themes of materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity identified by Vaughn *et al.* (2021), which allowed me to see how, ontologically, the environment could be different even in neighbouring areas. I explored each of these themes mainly through participant observation, observing seaside activities on a daily basis, and joining participants in sea-related leisure or working activities. During observation, casual talking with participants was a very important source of information to gain insight into the meanings and significance of activities. I also extensively practiced walking with participants, which was very important to gain a sense of what places are important to them and how they navigate spaces and the boundaries between built and

natural environment. Findings obtained through these methods were then tested during semi-structured interviews with participants of different age, gender, income, and occupation. Through these data, differences emerged between the themes of materiality, knowledge and subjectivity of different coastal areas that were marked by specific intersectional traits, thus finding a correlation between inequalities and different forms of human-environment relationship. Finally, this allowed me to reconstruct the picture of two radically different types of environment in North Jakarta, which are perceived and experienced differently by local communities.

Because this research was conducted in different areas, one of the main challenges of this research was related to the aspects of reflexivity and positionality. This peculiar field required me to each time adjust my positionality in relation to the specific participants that I approached, and to the context of the community I observed. Reyes (2020) employs the concept of ethnographic toolkit to refer to the range of tools ethnographers have at their disposal to approach research participants and develop. She distinguishes between visible tools, such as race, age, gender, heritage, or nationality, and invisible tools, such as status, power differences, language skills, or cultural awareness. Her argument illustrates how both types of tools are employed "strategically" by researchers with either positive or negative results, as each tool can either open or close doors while on the field. In my case, these tools were utilized differently in high and low income areas, in order to adapt to the context of these different communities. Visible tools included my nationality, ethnicity, and heritage as a European. These played an ambivalent role, as they are a clear visual marker of my identity of outsider, which at times made participants reluctant to be approached. However, on the other hand, these characteristic also generated a sense of curiosity towards me and my activity, thus making people interested in participating in my research. Such sense of curiosity was rarer among the residents of Pantai Mutiara, who, in virtue of their position in society, are more accustomed to people of foreign nationality. Overall, my knowledge of the Indonesian language and culture greatly helped in establishing a relationship with research participants and a communicative framework that, especially in low-income areas, was rather informal.

From an ethical point of view, during my fieldwork, I prioritized transparency and protection of privacy. When I entered the field, I distributed flyers with information about me and the research, so that as many people as possible could know about me and my purpose. I also made sure to obtain informed consent before interviews and before using certain data. In the case of high-income communities, I had to provide a letter with extra information about the research and my use of data in order to obtain consent. Regarding pictures, I mostly took photos of places or activities, avoiding taking nearby pictures of individuals, and asking for consent as far as possible whenever people were included in pictures.

An important ethical concern that emerged for this research is related to sharing locations. The nature of my research is such that the results can be explained only through an analysis of the space, thus, results only make sense when they are linked to a specific place with specific characteristics. The fact that description of space is so important means that identification of the locations is a necessity for this research. This does not only apply to the wider districts in which I conducted my fieldwork, but also to more specific locations, such as a particular RT (administrative Indonesian unit roughly comparable to a neighbourhood, usually comprising around 30-50 households), a specific café, or another business. In a case like this, even changing the name of the business and using pseudonyms would not be really effective, because description of places would make it easy for anyone to identify the place I am talking about. This ethical concern is even more important considering that I used pictures of places, which may expose businesses, locations, and the people related to them. Nevertheless, I always employed pseudonyms for business names and participants, also avoiding photographing them.

The ethical issue here takes different forms depending on the type of community. In high-income communities, some respondents, especially business owners or employees, were slightly reluctant to the idea of giving me access, to the point that a couple of them requested reading of all the notes I took in their business. According to information I collected later from other informants, such reluctance is probably due to the not entirely regular status of some of these businesses. Therefore, these people may have very good reasons for not wanting their business exposed. In order to conciliate the need to protect privacy with the need to present well-structured

academic argumentations, I directly contacted these people again to ask for permission to use certain data and pictures in my thesis. Secondly, among low-income communities, respondents were much more open and less aware of their privacy and the risks in which they might incur. In this case, even if participants already gave informed consent, I avoided exposing information that might have been compromising.

III Introduction to North Jakarta

3.1 The development of North Jakarta: inequalities and environmental issues

The area known today as North Jakarta (Jakarta Utara) is one of the six administrative municipalities that make up the Special Capital Region of Jakarta (Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta)[1]. It is a long and relatively narrow strip of land that covers the entire coastline of Jakarta, and it is thus a territory that was specifically carved out of the map to have strong ties with the sea in several fields, be it cultural, economic, social, or residential.

Jakarta Utara is the modern administrative unit that corresponds to what once was "the Coast" of Jakarta, also called "Pantura", a place that is both physical and cultural, which took up various cultural meanings throughout its history. Originally, the Coast embodied aspirations for connection, integration and expansion, in a time when oceanic waters united all the islands and regions in Southeast Asia (Kusno 2013: 98). During the colonial period, such aspirations were inherited by the Dutch, who, in 1619, chose this area to establish Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies. From here, they managed the traffic of spices that made the fortune of their colonial empire, employing those waters for their own expansion.

For the Coast, fortunes started shifting when, in the mid-nineteenth century, the Dutch moved their capital further inland, far away from the health hazards and the risk of floods that characterized the coastal areas. The Coast was thus abandoned and it became the backyard of the city, an eerie and mysterious place, associated to the images of the old colonial warehouses, communities of fishermen living in houses built on the water, communities of Chinese merchants, mangrove forests and swamps, and the garbage dumping site of the city (Kusno 2013: 100).

After the independence of Indonesia, the first attempt to revitalize the coast of Jakarta came from President Sukarno, who launched an ambitious land reclamation project to redesign the area of Ancol as a showcase for the new Indonesian nation. However, it was not until the mid-1990s that projects of revitalization for the Coast became systematic. In 1995, President Suharto issued Presidential Instruction No. 52/1995, which decreed that the coastal area of North Jakarta should become the site for the creation of a new Jakarta, the last frontier to turn the Indonesian capital into a world-class city (Kusno 2013: 98). There were several reasons for authorities to turn their eyes up to the coast as a new site for development. In fact, by the late 1980s, developers had already used up the space in the west, south and east for the construction of new towns for the middle class. However, it was clear that the concept of new town had failed, as Jakarta became a city stuck in an unmanageable traffic, a symbol of the country's stagnant economy (Kusno 2013: 103-104). Thus, the neglected and undeveloped area of the Coast was chosen to become the site of the new Jakarta, a new city that would represent the gateway of the nation and the global and local qualities of the country. Jakarta would finally have its world-class waterfront city (Kusno 2013: 101).

In the 1990s, therefore, the ancient aspirations for connection and expansion that once characterized the Coast, made a spectacular comeback, this time under the banner of globalization and nationalism, and the pursuit of economic growth. In later years, the following governors of Jakarta inherited these projects, which are still ongoing up to this day. The development of North Jakarta, in fact, is far from being complete, and the Coast remains the area where most of the development is being carried out. At present day, two projects perfectly embody the idea of North Jakarta as a showcase of the nation. The first is the project to build a series of seventeen reclamation islands along the entire coastline of Jakarta. In the original project, these were supposed to protect Jakarta from high sea tides, however, on September 2018, the Governor of Jakarta revoked permit for fourteen islands, due to the fact that developers had not fulfilled their obligations. Only islands C, D, G and N retained their permission, and, currently, islands C and D are complete and constitute the area known as

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[1] The six municipalities are Jakarta Pusat (Central Jakarta), Jakarta Barat (West Jakarta), Jakarta Timur (East Jakarta), Jakarta Utara (North Jakarta), Jakarta Selatan (South Jakarta) and Kepulauan Seribu (the archipelago of Thousand Islands).

Pantai Maju; island N is almost complete in front of the port of Tanjung Priok; while island G construction is currently halted (Adharani *et al*. 2019: 2).

The second project consists in the construction of a giant seawall in the shape of Garuda[2] called Great Garuda Sea Wall (GGSW), which should enclose the entire bay of Jakarta to protect the city from sea level rise. The seawall should also include reclaimed land and provide space for buildings and facilities, as well as a toll road to connect various areas of Jakarta's coast (Colven 2017: 257). In the Global South, infrastructural megaprojects are often a means to decolonize the urban landscape through the construction of a "world-class city" that can showcase the power of a nation, with its modern metropolis and infrastructures. In this sense, projects like the seventeen reclamation islands or the GGSW are not only important as mitigation infrastructure for environmental issues, but also as symbols of a world-class city, of national power, and of global ambitions to showcase to the world (Colven 2017: 257-258). Importantly, while such development projects in North Jakarta have been around ever since the 1960s, with the first reclamation by Sukarno, and have then been implemented systematically since 1995 with Suharto's decree, they are not presented today as what they are and have always been, that is, projects intended to boost national power, attract foreign investors and encourage economic growth. Rather, they are presented as necessary infrastructure to protect Jakarta from sea level rise, following a cultural construction of the environment as something dangerous for humans that has to be conquered. Thus, the same ambitions for connectivity and expansion have been rebranded in the age of climate change and environmental issues, turning development of the Coast into the necessary action to protect humans from nature.

Following Suharto's decree in 1995, urban development in North Jakarta continued through the collaboration between Indonesian government, foreign companies, and local developers. Land reclamation was used intensely to obtain new land for the construction of new residential districts, malls, parks, and other facilities. Obviously, such an intense development had a considerable social impact, as several communities who inhabited the Coast were relocated, while others saw their living space change forever. This happened ever since the first reclamation project conducted by Sukarno in the 1960s, when, in order to reclaim land for the new area of Ancol with its beach, sand was taken from the old public beach of Cilingcing, which was known as Palm Beach. This process destroyed Palm Beach forever, as in a few years the beach sank into the sea and disappeared in front of the helpless people of Cilingcing, who witnessed the destruction of their beach, as well as the end of the era of public beaches in Jakarta. In fact, the beach of Ancol would remain the only one in Jakarta, and it would be included into the amusement park of Ancol with an entrance fee, meaning that enjoyment of the beach would from then on be reserved only to the middle and upper classes who could afford paying the ticket (Kusno 2013: 108-109).

With the changing of the environment, the construction of new areas, and the relocation of previous communities, North Jakarta became a city with a unique patchwork-like urban fabric, where the modern areas built by big developers alternate with the old fishing settlements; where the new skyscrapers and shiny malls tower over the sprawl of small informal houses. Thus, North Jakarta today perfectly represents its history with all of its components. There are the old informal settlements of fishermen and workers, where the heirs of the original inhabitants of the Coast live, and that still represent the eerie and mysterious Pantura of the old days. Then, there are the futuristic and luxurious new developments, where the elites of the city live, and that represent the new global aspirations of Jakarta, that world-class city that is meant to be a showcase of the nation.

North Jakarta is then a place of contested meanings. It is a place of the past, but also a place of the future. It is still the mysterious backyard of the city, but also its futuristic avant-garde. The urban development that is taking place in this area has changed the social and environmental landscapes of the Coast forever, and is at the root of the inequalities that characterize the communities of North Jakarta (fig.1).

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[2] The mythical bird from the Indian epic poem Ramayana. Garuda is also the national symbol of Indonesia, thus, the construction of a giant seawall in the shape of Garuda is meant to perfectly reflect the connection between infrastructural megaproject and nationalism, and to embody the ambitions for connection and expansion of the new North Jakarta.
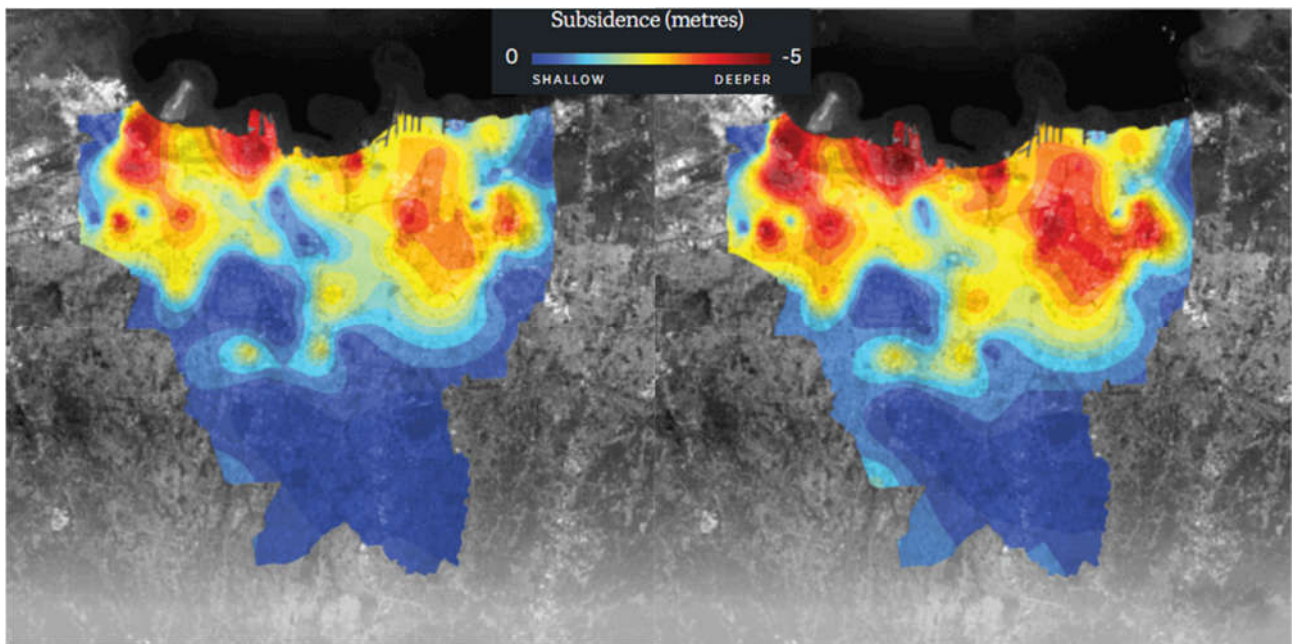
Figure 1. Map of the coastal communities of North Jakarta. Indications on income are based on perceptions of respondents as well as on observations conducted on the ground on infrastructures, services, and housing types. Google Earth (accessed 23/05/2023).

Other than having social consequences, the urban development of North Jakarta also had an enormous environmental impact. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to highlight the correlation between urban development, land subsidence, and floods. In particular, urban development caused land subsidence (and the interrelated sea level rise), and land subsidence exacerbated floods phenomena.

Land subsidence in Jakarta is caused by excessive groundwater usage, natural consolidation of alluvium soil, load of infrastructures and buildings, and tectonic activities. Out of these, groundwater extraction is the most significant factor, while tectonic activities the least significant one. Urban development coincided with an increase in built-up areas, population, and economic and industrial activities, thus signifying a substantial increase in groundwater extraction and load of constructions, which in turn determined a severe land subsidence rate (Abidin *et al*. 2015b: 16). It is estimated that, on average, the sinking rate of Jakarta is between -3 and -10 cm/year (Abidin et al. 2015a: 115), however, this trend is increasing, and between 2019 and 2020 various areas of the city were at risk of sinking between 1.8 and 10.7 cm[3], reaching as much as 12cm in one year in some areas of North Jakarta (Bott *et al*. 2021: 1).

In fact, land subsidence is not evenly distributed in Jakarta, as it is particularly intense in the coastal areas of North Jakarta (fig.2). Here, the recent development weighs on the particularly fragile soil, moreover, water is particularly hard to obtain in this area, and there is a heavy reliance on water refill practices employing groundwater. While groundwater is supposed to be a resource to utilize in emergency cases of drought, its prolonged extraction with no space for recharge periods empties the ground of its water reserves, causing land subsidence. According to the data provided by the Government of DKI Jakarta, on average, in the entire city 5.026.224 m³ of groundwater are extracted every year (Pemerintah Daerah Provinsi DKI Jakarta 2021: 6.23), a huge quantity that determines alarming subsidence rates. This is particularly true in North Jakarta, where even households who are provided with running water from pipelines still prefer to rely on groundwater due to the scarce quality of pipeline water and the high level of pollution that contaminates water in this area (Pemerintah Daerah Provinsi DKI Jakarta 2021: 4.12).

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[3]   https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2021/11/15/jakarta-is-sinking-heres-how-to-stop-this.html   (accessed 23/05/2023)

Figure 2. To the left, the state of land subsidence rate in 2017. To the right, a projection of land subsidence in 2025. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-24/jakarta-is-running-out-of-time-to-stop-itself-sinking/11190928 (accessed 23/05/2023).

As it is evident from the above map, land subsidence is particularly severe in the coastal region, especially in the area of Muara Kamal, in the northwest, and in the subdistrict of Penjaringan, around Pantai Mutiara and Muara Baru, where communities have been strongly affected by this phenomenon. In particular, four different kinds of impact can be identified, namely infrastructural, environmental, economic, and social impact. Infrastructural impact is manifested in cracking of construction and roads, tilting and sinking of buildings, malfunction of sewerage and drainage systems, and breaking of pipelines. Environmental impact can be observed in frequent and ever-widening coastal floods, penetration of seawater further inland, changes in drain flow systems, and deterioration in the quality of environmental conditions. Economic impact consists of an increase of the infrastructures maintenance costs, a decrease in land property values, the abandonment of buildings, and the disruption of economic activities. Finally, the social impact refers to the deterioration of the quality of life and of health and sanitation conditions, and to the disruption of people's daily activities (Abidin *et al*. 2015a: 117-119).

These areas are already far below sea level and rely on seawalls for protection from tidal floods. However, these are not the only kind of flood caused by land subsidence. Through comparison of the spatial coordinates of land subsidence rates and flood frequency, a correlation has been found between the two phenomena, showing how land subsidence causes water to accumulate in low areas, rendering them prone to floods (Prasetyo *et al*. 2018: 7-8). In particular, there are three kinds of flood that can be distinguished, namely *banjir*, *banjir rob*, and *banjir genangan*. *Banjir*, the most common type of flood, refers to floods originating from the nine major city rivers due to heavy rains occurring on the spot or further upstream. The water flows downstream and accumulates in low-elevated areas, flooding the crowded neighbourhoods located along the streams (Bott *et al*. 2021: 5). *Banjir rob* refers to tidal floods originating from the sea, which are caused by exceptional tides or by a leak in the seawalls. Finally, *banjir genangan* is particularly related to land subsidence, as this kind of flood happens far away from rivers when rainwater tends to flow to low-elevated areas as if into a bowl, generating a kind of giant paddle that, in the most severe scenarios, can flood entire neighbourhoods (Abidin et al. 2015b: 17).

14

The combination of social inequalities and environmental issues caused by urban development in North Jakarta generated an interesting case in which very diverse communities have to face the same environmental issues, which results in different perceptions and responses to these issues. In order to analyse how different responses resonate with the inequalities that characterize the various communities of North Jakarta, I employed the inequalities that mattered to my research participants as concepts to distinguish different types of communities in North Jakarta. Specifically, as already highlighted in 2.2, respondents explained inequalities between coastal communities through three main factors: income, ethnicity, and lifestyle.

Income simply refers to the economic and purchasing power of individuals, and it is manifested in the quality of infrastructures, services, and housing type that are found in each district. On one of my very first days in Jakarta, an informant in the low-income district of Muara Baru described the coastal communities of North Jakarta as a series of "the rich ones and the poor ones" (*si kaya dan si miskin*), and as being of "different class" (*beda kasta*). Moreover, while riding motorbike past wealthy areas, respondents from Muara Baru or Muara Angke would often make comments about the wealth of residents of such areas, explaining to me that "people here have a lot of money". In Muara Baru, whenever I pointed my finger towards the large houses on the other side of the strait, asking what was there, people would always say "that's the place of rich people with large houses". Other than to respondents of low-income areas, income mattered also to the wealthy residents of Pantai Mutiara, who, when asked about the surrounding neighbourhoods, explained about how locals have low economy.

Ethnicity refers to the differentiation between native Indonesians (*orang pribumi*) and Chinese-Indonesians, Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent (*orang Cina*, or, with a slightly mocking nuance, *cindo*). Other than referring to income, informants from Muara Baru and Muara Angke also told me that all residents in wealthy areas are Chinese, this was a very common comment when I asked about places like Pantai Mutiara or Pantai Maju. Moreover, during a visit to the fishing port of Muara Baru, a key informant explained to me that all the large boats that collect fish for the industrial and export market are owned by Chinese Indonesians, and that in Indonesia "native Indonesians do the work, while Chinese people get the money". Ethnicity was indeed important also for the Chinese residents of wealthy districts. For example, one of them explained that they would rather not go to neighbouring districts with native Indonesian majority because, with their "narrow eyes", they feel that they are a minority, and that they would not feel safe in such circumstances (focus group in Pantai Mutiara, 31 March 2023). This sense of fear that emerged among Chinese communities has its roots in the anti-Chinese riots that occurred in Jakarta on May 1998, which prompts Chinese-Indonesians to live in close communities with a majority of Chinese ethnicity. This was highlighted also by another resident of Pantai Mutiara, who explained how the fact that the neighborhood is like a Chinatown strengthens community cohesiveness (interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #2, 18 February 2023).

Finally, lifestyle refers to a particular way to intend and live life. In this case, respondents distinguished between living by the day and careful life planning. When asked about wealthy Chinese neighboring communities, respondents in Muara Baru and Muara Angke explained that Chinese people are "really good at doing business, carefully planning their investments and each step of their life, this is the secret of their success". Meanwhile, for Indonesians, "it is sufficient to have something to eat and a place to sleep for each day in order to be satisfied and happy". Through the distinction between these ways to live life, they seemed to rationalize the reason why their condition and that of neighboring communities are so unequal. Residents of wealthy Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju also often referred to lifestyle when comparing themselves to other communities, claiming that people of low-income areas only "think day by day, and do not really see the consequences of their actions" (focus group in Pantai Mutiara, 31 March 2023). They applied such ideas when discussing issues typical of low-income areas, such as pollution and garbage dumping, or poor economy.

The employment of these inequalities in the research served two main purposes. First, it was useful to substantiate the concept of inequality and link it to real, measurable data on the field. It thus can be said that, for local residents themselves, communities of North Jakarta are unequal mainly in terms of income, ethnicity, and lifestyle. Out of the various communities I worked with, Muara Baru and Muara Angke figured as areas with a high rate of low income, a majority of native Indonesian residents, and a high percentage of people

following a "living-by-the-day" kind of lifestyle. On the other hand, the districts of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol presented a high rate of high-income households, a majority of Chinese-Indonesian residents, and a high percentage of residents following a "carefully planning" kind of lifestyle. It is important to notice that these inequalities represent trends in the resident population of these areas, and do not reflect the entirety of the population. Hence, they are not characteristics that are inherent in these communities and that constitute the boundaries that separate these groups of people and make them distinct communities. Rather, they are historically and culturally informed categories that shape the lives of residents and the direction of urban development. In fact, distinction between these communities is not as clear-cut as it may initially seem. For example, the general categorization of "low income" in Muara Baru and Muara Angke actually includes various degrees of economic wealth, from people owning a modest multi-storied house in brickwork to people owning a small single-room house made of recycled material. Similarly, in the wealthy Pantai Mutiara semi-permanent low-income residents could also be found, living in small houses made of wood and metal sheet. These are local helpers, workers of the water pump, maintainers and gardeners. Several people from low-income areas also daily commute to high-income areas to work, mostly as security, gardeners, cleaners, or staff at apartment lobbies. The same can be said of ethnicity and lifestyle, with exceptions to the majority found in every area. Therefore, the areas in which I conducted the research do not correspond to specific communities with distinct characteristics and a neat separation from other neighboring communities, but are areas that have been shaped by and reflect historical and cultural developments, and thus present certain trends of inequalities.

Secondly, employment of inequalities served a comparative purpose, in particular to observe different types of human-environment relationships and how these resonate with inequalities among communities of North Jakarta. The aim here was not that of identifying a necessary causal correlation between inequalities and human-environment relationships, but simply that of highlighting how such relationships can be diverse even in a relatively small area. The focus on inequalities thus provides a context for this operation, and helps to better understand the fragmentation of the experience of human-environment relationship, and the variety of factors that may influence it. In order to provide further context, in the following section I will briefly outline the characteristics of these areas.

3.2 Research areas

3.2.1 Muara Baru

Muara Baru presents the highest subsidence rate in Jakarta, at -6.175 cm/year on average (Abdullah *et al.* 2021: 5). It is a low-income district located next to the fish market, mainly constituted of *kampung* urban fabric, that is, the Indonesian village model. What is usually meant by *kampung* is an informal settlement often built by the residents themselves with the most readily available materials, such as wood, bamboo, bricks, or metal sheet. The structure of a *kampung* typically features several small houses leaning onto each other, facing a narrow street called *gang* where communal living takes place. In Muara Baru, such informal settlements are concentrated along the eastern shores of the Waduk pluit, a flood mitigation reservoir, and around the industrial complex of the fishing industry, stretching towards the port of Sunda Kelapa to the south.

The various *kampung* that make up Muara Baru are Kampung Bau and Kampung Gedung Pompa in the north, Kampung Elektro, Marlina, and Tembok Bolong in the east, Kampung Waduk in the west, and Kampung Luar Batang in the south. While there is a common sense of being people from Muara Baru, there is also a strong sense of belonging to one's *kampung*, as each of these has its own identity. Whenever I walked with informants to other areas of Muara Baru to meet new people, these would always ask my informant what *kampung* he comes from, in order to place the interlocutor within the social network of Muara Baru.
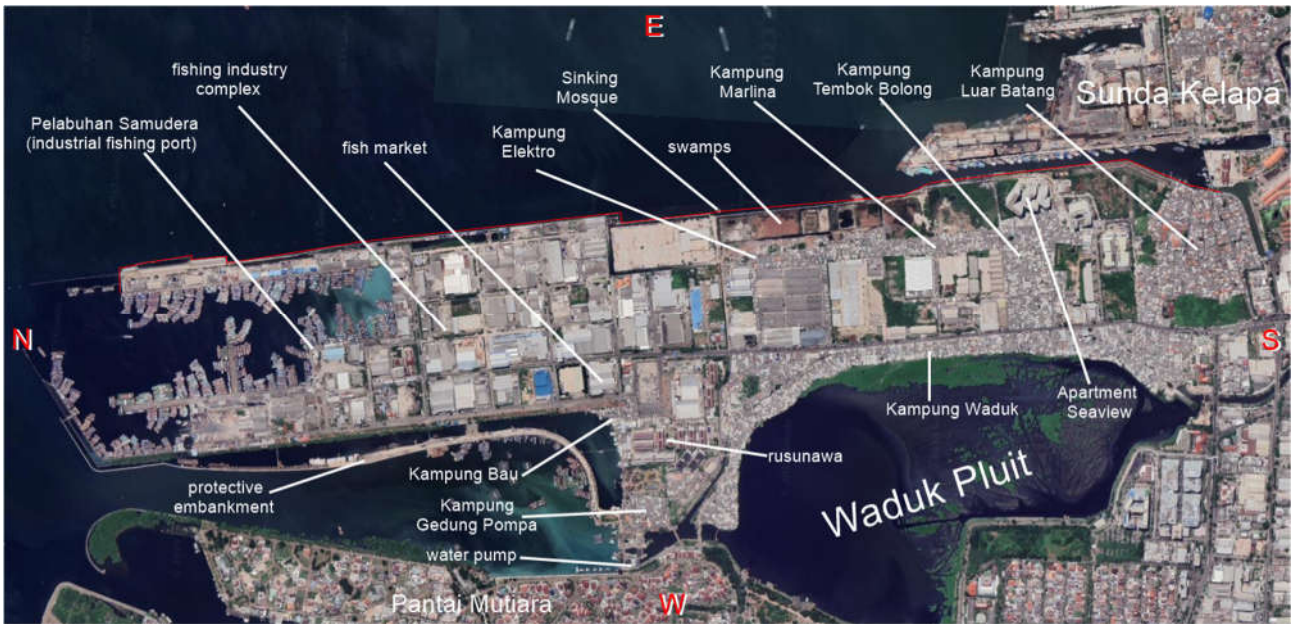
Figure 3. Aerial view of Muara Baru, with the eastern seawall indicated with a red line. Google Earth (accessed 24/05/2023).

The northern and eastern kampung are the ones that have been the most affected by *banjir rob*, due to the fact that these areas directly face the sea and are subject to strong land subsidence. Especially between 2000 and 2018 these areas were routinely struck by floods (interview with an RT leader in Marlina, 25 January 2023; interview with an RT leader in Gedung Pompa, 30 January 2023), which is why the government built a seawall in front of the northern *kampung* (fig.4), and along the eastern side of Muara Baru, from the tip of the fishing port all the way down to Sunda Kelapa (fig.5). Additionally, a protective embankment was built to the north to avoid intrusion of seawater, creating an inner lake in front of the northern *kampung*. According to residents, in the past it was possible to enjoy view of the sea and to set sail directly from home, whereas today the seawall blocks view and access to the sea (interview with a resident of Gedung Pompa #1, 21 January 2023; interview with a resident of Kampung Bau #5, 21 March 2023). Neglecting the risk of flood, because of land shortage, locals built houses beyond the seawall using bamboo platforms. This is the area known as Kampung Bau, a village built over the waters (fig.6).

Figure 4. The seawall in front of Kampung Gedung Pompa.

Figure 5. The eastern seawall covered in artistic graffiti representing the theme of sinking.

Unlike the northern kampung, which directly face the seawall, the eastern ones present a buffer zone between them and the seawall. This is an empty space that I called "the swamps", because it is constantly flooded (fig.7). This area used to be occupied a series of warehouses and even a street for cars. However, when the sea level started rising, these buildings were abandoned and demolished, leaving this area empty. Today, during the morning hours when there is a high tide, seawater leaks through cracks in the seawall and floods the swamps, making this zone uninhabitable with the exception of a few people who built houses on these flooded positions (fig.8).

Other than by seawalls, Muara Baru is protected from floods by three water pumps. Two of them are located at the port and prevent flooding of the industrial area, while the larger one is located at the mouth of Waduk Pluit, regulating the water level of this important reservoir.

Muara Baru also features a large port for fishing activities called Pelabuhan Samudera, which construction began with land reclamation in the 1980s in order to build a port for large-scale industrial fishing. The purpose for the construction of this area was also to move the fish market, which was too far inland, to a more strategic position near the sea (interview with an officer of Pelabuhan Samudera, (16 March 2023). The boats harboured in this port are mostly large fishing boats owned by investors in the fishing industry, rather than small boats owned by independent fishermen (these are mostly found in the smaller ports of Muara Kamal or Muara Angke). Directly connected to the fishing port, there is the Pasar Ikan Modern Muara Baru, the largest fish market of Southeast Asia, and the large fishing industry complex, where many of the residents of Muara Baru are employed. This area features many buildings owned by various local and international companies for the conservation, processing, and distribution of fish.

Figure 6. View of Kampung Bau.   **Figure 7.** View of the swamps.

Another important location in Muara Baru is the housing complex known as Rusunawa Muara Baru. This complex was built following the normalization strategy of the Waduk Pluit, which led to the demolition of illegal settlements along the shores of the reservoir and the relocation of its residents in the new complex (Nindyatama *et al*. 2020: 1-2). However, here one can also find residents of Muara Baru who decided to leave the kampung to enjoy the comforts of the apartment life, but who later experienced issues such as lack of sociality and distance from the working place. Another atypical location is the Apartment Seaview, an enclosed building built for the middle class and well separated by the surrounding kampung with a wall. Out of the four towers that make up the complex, only one is inhabited, while the other three are empty, because the land on which they are built is not sufficiently stable and they are not considered safe for residential purposes.

Figure 8. Houses built on flooded positions.

According to Marfai et al. (2014: 1135), the residents of Muara Baru are mainly fishermen and unskilled labourers involved in the fishing industry or in the selling of daily goods. During my fieldwork, however, I found that fishermen have disappeared from Muara Baru. Instead, many former fishermen moved to the larger fishing industry or found other sea-related occupations, such as collecting and selling plastics from the ocean. This is consistent with what is claimed by Nindyatama *et al.* (2020), according to whom residents of this area adjust their business and occupation according to the spatial features of the place where they are living, and to the chances offered by the market.

3.2.2 Muara Angke

Muara Angke is a relatively small fishing settlement located in between PIK 1 and Pluit that presents an average subsidence rate of -1.950 cm/year (Abdullah *et al.* 2021: 5). It was built starting from July 1977 to accommodate various fisheries that were scattered along the coast of Jakarta, but actual development of the area started in 1999 when mangrove swamps were backfilled with soil to obtain land for the construction of house blocks (Anita 2015: 197-198).
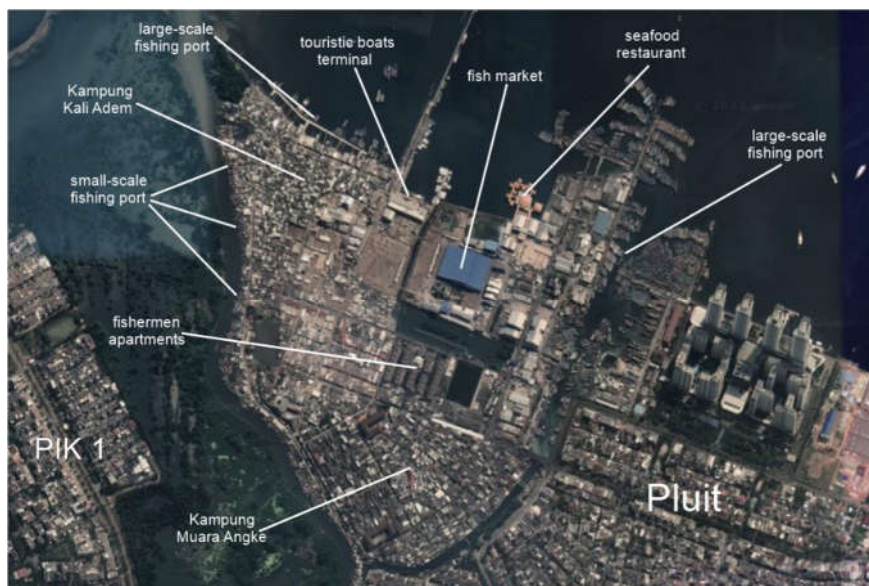

Figure 9. Aerial view of Muara Angke. Google Earth (accessed 24/05/2023).

Today Muara Angke consists of an interesting mix of *kampung*, fishing ports, industrial and touristic facilities. Unlike Muara Baru, this district is not provided with a seawall, however, the outer part facing the sea and the river is built on an embankment standing at about 1m above the sea level, which protects the inner lower areas (fig.10). Despite this, the area is frequently subject to floods when high tides make seawater raise above the embankment, or when water collects in the low areas due to heavy rains (interview with a resident of Muara Angke #2, 12 March 2023).

The two main *kampung* that constitute Muara Angke are Kampung Kali Adem and Kampung Muara Angke. The former is the older one and it mainly hosts fishermen who own a boat and practice small-scale fishing. The latter was built following the development of 1999, and it hosts informal labourers or workers involved in the fishing industry or in the production of *ikan asin*[4] and wood to employ as fuel or building material, the two main economic resources for Muara Angke. Other than these settlements, there is also a block of apartments built to house relocated fishermen.

Figure 10. A canal separating the outer embankment of Muara Angke from the lower inner areas.

Figure 11. The main street of Kampung Kali Adem.

Muara Angke presents two large-scale fishing port of smaller size compared to that of Muara Baru, connected to a more modest fishing industry complex and a fish market. These ports were built to accommodate large boats for industrial fishing (fig.12), forcing small fishermen to retreat from the coastline and use the nearby river as a port for their boats and fishing activities (interview with a local NGO representative, 30 March 2023). In between the two ports, there are the newly built structures of the touristic boats terminal and a seafood restaurant built on the sea. The terminal is meant for tourists who want to visit Kepulauan Seribu, the resort archipelago off the coast of Jakarta; while the restaurant is aimed at visitors who want to enjoy seafood in a comfortable environment and with view of the sea. These look like alien structures, suddenly appearing among the *kampung* settlements, and they are a testament to the development that is taking place on Jakarta's coast and to the space that is slowly being eroded from original communities.

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[4] A kind of dry salted fish with a strong taste, very popular in the cuisine of coastal Jakarta.

Figure 12. The new large-scale fishing port of Muara Angke, blocking access to the sea for the *kampung* houses.

3.2.3 Pantai Mutiara

Constructions for Pantai Mutiara began in 1984 by the development company Intiland, which is still the owner of the land up to this day. This district was built through the reclamation of land along the coastline of Pluit, with the aim of becoming a top-end luxurious residential area for the elite of Jakarta. The project was inspired by the Golden Coast of Queensland, Australia, and it boasted to be the first in Southeast Asia to provide navigable private canals for its residents.

Despite the glorious plans and the success of the project, a dark future awaits Pantai Mutiara, since, together with Muara Baru, this is the area of Jakarta most affected by subsidence. Between 2007 and 2011, Pantai Mutiara lost as many as 40cm in elevation (Pemerintah Daerah Provinsi DKI Jakarta 2021: 6.23), while in 2016 the elevation of the entire district was comprised between 0.31m and -0.99 (Park et al. 2016: 1451), likely being considerably lower at present day.

Figure 13. Aerial view of Pantai Mutiara. Google Earth (accessed 24/05/2023).

This elite high-income neighbourhood is divided into two parts: the southern blocks, located on the mainland, and the northern blocks, stretching towards the sea and provided with canals (fig.15). It is mainly constituted of large luxury single-family houses, each designed by the owner, and it is guarded by security at the entrance. Other than these, to the north, the apartment complex of Regatta stands as an icon of Pantai Mutiara, and, with its futuristic design, of the development of North Jakarta.

Despite it being mainly a residential area, Pantai Mutiara also features exclusive bars and restaurants along the western waterfront. Moreover, there are plans to build a luxury hotel on a new reclaimed land in the nort-eastern corner, a project that triggered protests from some of the residents. Another project present in the area is that of reclamation island G, just next to the western waterfront. This is one of the four reclamation islands that were granted permission, but constructions are currently halted.

Figure 14. The western seawall.

Figure 15. Canals in the northern blocks.

Protection from floods is provided mainly by a seawall on the western waterfront (fig.14). This used to be smaller, but episodes of high tides that ended up in seawater flooding the main road forced developers to increase the height of the seawall. Another seawall, this time financed by the residents themselves, is present on the south-eastern waterfront; while the north-eastern waterfront is protected by an embankment reinforced with sandbags and a strip of mangrove trees. A large water pump is also present between the northern and southern blocks, which is always working and allows regulation of water level and circling of water.

Historically, the coastal area of North Jakarta was inhabited by Chinese communities engaging in trade, and managing a discrete wealth. Following the anti-Chinese riots of May 1998, the Chinese population in this area decreased, however, to this day, the residents of Pantai Mutiara are still mainly of Chinese-Indonesian ethnicity (Kusno 2013: 114).

3.2.4 Pantai Maju

The area known as Pantai Maju is a new seaside development by Agung Sedayu Group and Salim Group, constituted by two reclamation islands off the coast of north-west Jakarta. These are the islands C and D, part of the original plan of building seventeen islands along the coast of Jakarta to protect the city from high tides, and currently the only two islands to have been built. The two islands are connected to the mainland with a bridge, island C to Tangerang, and island D to the district of PIK 1. There is also a small bridge connecting the islands to each other. At present day island C is still in a development stage, meaning that, while the island is complete, houses and facilities are still under construction. Island D instead is already fully developed in its southern portion, while the northern part is still being finalized.

Figure 13. Aerial view of Pantai Maju. Google Earth (accessed 25/05/2023).

Thus, the research in Pantai Maju took place specifically in the southern area of island D, also known as Golf Island due to the seaside golf course present in the northern part. This area was specifically built to be both a luxurious residential area and a touristic spot for leisure. In fact, since its inauguration Pantai Maju has claimed the title for the most high-end and sought for district of Jakarta, taking the place of Pantai Mutiara (interview with a café manager in Pantai Mutiara #1, 19 January 2023). Unlike Pantai Mutiara, however, Pantai Maju is made up of several residential clusters in the inner area of the islands, which present a series of ready-made terraced houses, in the style of North American suburbia (fig.14). Therefore, while in Pantai Mutiara a resident can buy a land and design a house as he/she pleases, in Pantai Maju the house is the same for everyone, and there is less space for intervention in the built environment for the residents.

While island C stands in front of Muara Kamal, suffocating this small fishermen settlement, Golf Island is directly connected to the wealthy area of PIK 1, and it is thus an ideal leisure spot for its residents. This artificial island offers a variety of activities for upper classes: starting from its wide boulevard with malls, restaurants and shops, to the eastern end there is the iconic By the Sea shopping mall, the maximum expression of exclusivity and high-end consumption found in North Jakarta.

Figure 14. Residential clusters in Golf Island.

Figure 15. Chinatown Pantjoran.

The entire island is surrounded by a large embankment that protects it from the sea and that was built considering the land subsidence that will also affect this area (interview with a local NGO representative, 30 March 2023). Next to By the Sea shopping mall, a large terrace over the Jakarta Bay allows visitors to enjoy views of the sea, together with the long seaside walkway that runs all around the island and that is also equipped with cycling lane. To the western side lays the real centre of the district's social life: the areas of San Antonio Beach and Cove at Batavia, two seaside shopping streets filled with restaurants, street food stalls, stores, and other facilities. This is the most crowded and most popular spot in Golf Island, directly leading to Chinatown Pantjoran (fig.15), a recreational area built in the style of a Chinese town, to homage the Chinese-Indonesian majority of Pantai Maju residents. Indeed, just like in Pantai Mutiara, the residents of Pantai Maju are also mostly of Chinese ethnicity. Moreover, these two districts have a special social connection, because more and more of the kids from families in Pantai Mutiara are buying their own house in Pantai Maju, whereas Pantai Mutiara is becoming more of a place for elders.

With its position at the conquest of the sea, its innovative and young energy, its recreational facilities, and its modern infrastructures, Pantai Maju perfectly embodies that side of North Jakarta that is projected to the world, that aims to be "world-class", and that carries the aspirations for global success of Indonesia.

3.2.5 Ancol

The district of Ancol is the perfect example of the evolution of North Jakarta from an abandoned place to the avant-garde of the city, as it was the first place along the coast to undergo development ever since the post-independence years. During the times of the old Pantura, Ancol was the eerie and mysterious place par excellence that perfectly represented the Coast as the backyard of Jakarta, so much so that legends in the mid twentieth century spoke of Ancol as a haunted place where ghosts dump dead babies (Kusno 2013: 100). During the late reign of Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia aimed to turn Ancol in a showcase of the nation, turning the wild area into a recreational place. Thus, in February 1962 he ordered the reclamation of land for the construction of the project, which was led by the French construction company Compagnie Industriale de Travaux and the local developer Ciputra. After the death of Sukarno, however, the area was once more neglected, and the Coast made a comeback in the field of development only in the 1970s, when Ancol and the Thousand Islands archipelago were converted into a series of recreational beaches for the middle and upper classes. This was once again thanks to Ciputra, who also gained a reputation for being the pioneer of Indonesian real estate business, and who, in March 1994, was awarded the Prix d'Excellence Special Mention Award from the International Real Estate Federation for his Ancol project, which had turned the area into an amusement park called Taman Impian (Dreamland) (Kusno 2013: 107-109).
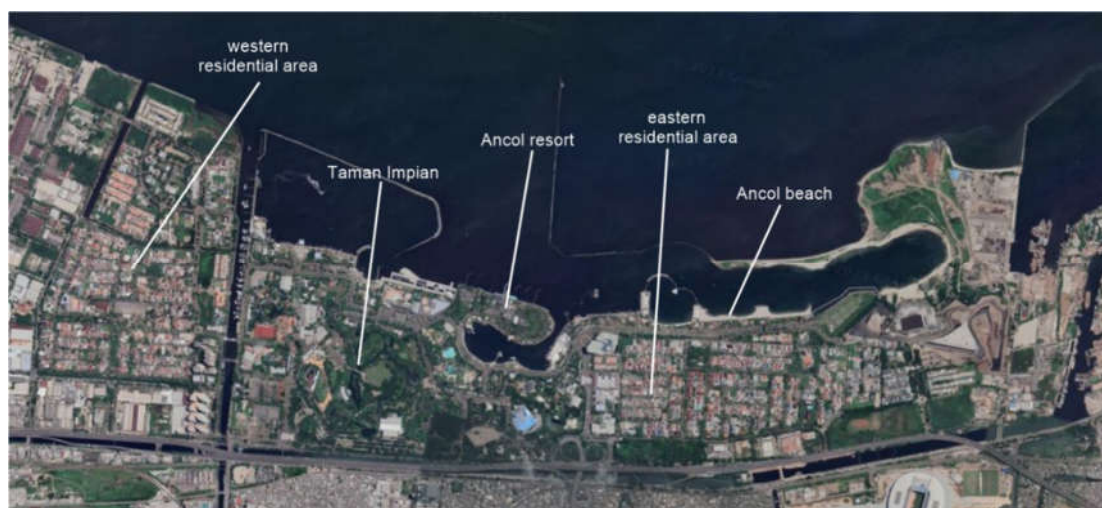

Figure 16. Aerial view of Ancol. Google Earth (accessed 25/05/2023).

Today, Ancol consists mostly of the Taman Impian area, but it includes also a residential area. For the purpose of this research, however, my interest was caught especially by the amusement park, which I visited on three different occasions, as being a symbol of North Jakarta's evolution, and of the employment of the coast and the sea as a recreational space, as a product for enjoyment. Taman Impian is actually a large recreational area that includes several spaces for leisure, such as theme parks, water parks, gardens, zoos, aquariums, resorts, and the famous beach of Ancol, built with the sand of the old Palm Beach of Cilingcing. Because the entire area can be accessed only with a ticket which price is prohibitive for low income communities, this section of the coast, as well as the only beach in Jakarta, is accessible only for middle and upper classes.

3.3 Human-environment relationship and socialities

Response to environmental issues is not the same for all communities of North Jakarta, and it is not merely a consequence of social and economic power. Rather, it is rooted in different types of human-environment relationships that these communities present, and that directly influence the way communities perceive their role in relation to the environment, in particular to the sea. These different relationships are manifested in the form of sociality, which is both a sociality between members of the community, and between the community and the sea as environment.

During research among communities outlined in the previous chapter, two main types of human-environment relationship emerged: sociality through the sea, mainly associated to Muara Baru and Muara Angke, and sociality by the sea, mainly associated to Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol. I explored these different types of human-environment relationships through the analysis of the themes of materiality, knowledge and subjectivity in each communities. These themes were identified by Vaughn *et al*. (2021) in order to bring an intersectional approach to environmental anthropology, and to propose a way of anthropologically approach the environment that goes beyond efforts to deconstruct nature/culture dualism. Their argument is that the environment is a "malleable and historically contingent concept", and "always in a process of becoming" (Vaughn *et al*. 2021: 277). In particular, materiality refers to the physical characteristics of the environment that get reimagined through the intervention of economic and governmental forces; knowledge is considered a social practice influenced by colonial histories, scientific cultures, and social involvement with technologies; meanwhile subjectivity entails awareness, feelings, and perceptions of the environment, both individual and collective (*ibid*.).

The difference between sociality through the sea and by the sea can be explained through this threefold approach, by closely looking at how individuals interact with the surrounding environment through the lenses of materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity. It is important to notice how categorization of phenomena into these themes is subjective and highly depends on the gaze of the author. In fact, the separation into materiality, knowledge and subjectivity is an abstract and artificial process that helps the researcher to reconstruct a model of human-environment relationship, but it has to be kept in mind that the way individuals interact with the environment and perceive it is actually an integrated set of ideas and behaviours, in which these three themes always overlap. For example, certain phenomena that are related to knowledge of the environment might also be connected to the individual's subjectivity, thus categorization of phenomena into one or another theme is not definitive and it can always be contested. Aside from matters of categorization, this approach proved useful to outline the two comprehensive human-environment relationship models of sociality through the sea and by the sea. By "sociality", I mean the ways in which human communities manage the tension between themselves and the sea as environment, how they employ the qualities of the environment to develop sociality among individuals, how they make sense of the environment, and how they interact with it.

In the sociality through the sea, the material qualities of the environment are the means through which sociality happens. This can take the form of fishing together, working in the fishing industry, collecting molluscs in a group, swimming in the sea with friends, taking pictures by the sea, exchanging fish as gifts to strengthen

networks. Moreover, in this form of sociality people boast a considerable knowledge of the marine environment and the different types of fish and other creatures that populate these waters, not only in the sphere of the natural, but also in that of spirituality and the supernatural. Finally, the subjectivity of these people is tightly related to the sea, as they define themselves as *orang pesisir* ("coastal people"), most of them feel they would not be able to live far from the sea, and they associate themselves to the smell of fish.

Opposite to the above-mentioned model there is sociality by the sea, in which sociality happens independently of the materiality of the environment. In this case, the focus of sociality is not on the sea itself, but on practices of place making that are relative to the sea. Place making is carried out through various elements such as sea-inspired architectures and designs, branding of locations as exclusive and luxurious or the opening of public water sport activities, and it is reinforced by practices of social media sharing and the selling of an experience as product. In other words, people do not go to a certain waterside café to enjoy an interaction with the sea itself, but, rather, because that café is "exclusive" in virtue of practices of place making that associate proximity to the sea with exclusivity. Furthermore, in the model of sociality by the sea, people do not show a deep knowledge of the marine environment, both in the natural and supernatural worlds, but they have learnt several technical aspects of water regulation due to previous experiences of floods. Regarding subjectivity, people of these communities do not feel any particular bond with the sea, and instead they value practicality, convenience, comfort, and exclusivity of the location. Importantly, in this model, it is not the environment that determines the activity, but it is the activity that determines the environment, because the environment is built and manipulated to promote and facilitate specific kinds of activities.

Thus, in the next chapters, forms of human-environment relationship in North Jakarta will be analysed with a focus on materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity, with each chapter dedicated to a specific theme.

IV Materiality

4.1 Reuniting with the waters: materiality in the sociality through the sea

Sitting on the top of the eastern seawall of Muara Baru, I feel like standing on the border between two worlds. Behind me, there are the swamps, with the crumbling *kampung* settlements. In front of me, there is just the vastness of the sea. It is a calm sea by the flat surface. It does not roar and it does not hit the seawall with violence, but it keeps rising, silently and inexorably. At sunset, the sea breeze carries the smell of fish from the nearby port, gently refreshing the hot tropical air. From time to time, a stronger gust of wind makes me wince, as I hold tightly onto the rough seawall surface in fear of falling down. In front of me, it is a four-metre fall right into the shallow waters. However, just beside me, a group of local boys are comfortably walking on top of the seawall, not minding the risk of falling down, as they head to an area of rocks beyond the seawall that emerges in the afternoon when there is low tide. I ask them where they are going, to which they simply answer "to the sea" (*ke laut*).

Every day, in the afternoon, as waters recede and walkable areas emerge, tens of people climb the seawall and go to the other side to reunite with the waters. They stay for some time, usually thirty minutes to one hour, then they go back, only to leave the space for more people to come. They are men, women, teenagers, kids, couples, families. Each of them goes to enjoy the waters, find seafood, or spend time with loved ones or alone in front of the sea. As I kept observing this phenomenon every day in Muara Baru, I started seeing how the relationship that locals have with the sea has very different characteristics from what I could observe in Pantai Mutiara, and I came up with the idea of sociality through the sea. In all of these activities, the material aspects of the sea are the means through which sociality takes place. In this way, locals generate an alternative social space that is no longer the "cultural" social space of the *kampung*, but is the "natural" social space of the sea, their surrounding environment. This indicates a more intimate connection between the material qualities of human bodies and elements of the environment, which also translates into a deeper connection on the level of consciousness, identity, and spirituality.

The theme of materiality was the first to emerge in the exploration of sociality through the sea. In fact, it was evident how residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke sought to reunite with the waters through contact with the various material qualities of the marine environment. Such material qualities, however, are not the same that used to be in the past, because, as argued by Vaughn *et al.* (2021), they are in a constant state of evolution due to economic and governmental interventions. In this case, interventions are manifested through the construction of seawalls and water pumps, the expansion of the fishing industry and large-scale fishing, and the urbanization of the coast. Thus, seawater becomes an element that penetrates into human settlements, leaking through seawalls or flooding spaces that were previously occupied by humans, blurring the boundary between the space of nature and the space of culture. What used to be the blue water of the ocean now turned into grey, polluted water, with just a little fish and few other marine creatures still populating these waters (interview with a resident of Kampung Bau #5, 16 March 2023). Fish, which once was fresh and abundant, filling the nets of local fishermen, now turned into the frozen fish coming out of the large boats for industrial fishing. These communities are therefore trying to re-establish contact with changing material aspects of the environment that surrounds them, having to negotiate a new relationship with the waters, sands, rocks, fish, and all marine creatures. They do so by reuniting with the waters, whenever they can, in whatever way they can.

In this case, such reunification effort was more evident in Muara Baru, where the presence of the seawall meant that locals had to climb it each time in order to get to the sea. In Muara Angke, access to the water was easier, even though most of it took place at the mouth of the river Adem, because the newly built industrial fishing port blocked direct access to the sea. Moreover, due to the higher subsidence rates, reunification with the waters also had a temporal aspect in Muara Baru, because during the morning hours, with the high tide, the sea level was too high and it was impossible to get to the other side of the seawall. Only in the afternoon,

especially after 2pm, the sea level started decreasing, letting walkable ground appear in certain areas, while in others water would be shallow enough to allow walking. I called these walkable areas beyond the eastern seawall of Muara Baru "stations", because locals would walk along the seawall and get down to any of them to enjoy their time together with the waters. In particular, I identified four different stations. From north to south, the first one is the station of the Sinking Mosque (fig.17). This is the location of an old waterfront settlement that has been abandoned and washed away after sea level started rising. The only remnant of this settlement is a small decadent mosque, surrounded by the waters, and thus called the "Sinking Mosque" (*Masjid Tenggelam*) by locals. During the afternoon hours water in this area is shallow enough to allow walking around, attracting a large number of residents. The second station is the Beach Station. This is where a small rocky beach appears during low tides, becoming an ideal spot to enjoy sea-related activities. Because it is a relatively large emerged area compared to other stations, it is also the most crowded one. The third station is the Lighthouse Station, called like this due to its position in front of the Lighthouse of Sunda Kelapa. It is the smallest of all stations, thus, usually people who are found here are those who want to enjoy a quiet environment. Finally, the fourth station is the Station of Sunda Kelapa (fig.18), located next to the northern end of the historical cargo port of Sunda Kelapa. This station features a walkway where a series of small wooden houses were built leaning onto the seawall. These are the houses of some of the last few remaining independent fishermen in Muara Baru.

Figure 17. The station of the Sinking Mosque, with locals reuniting with the waters.
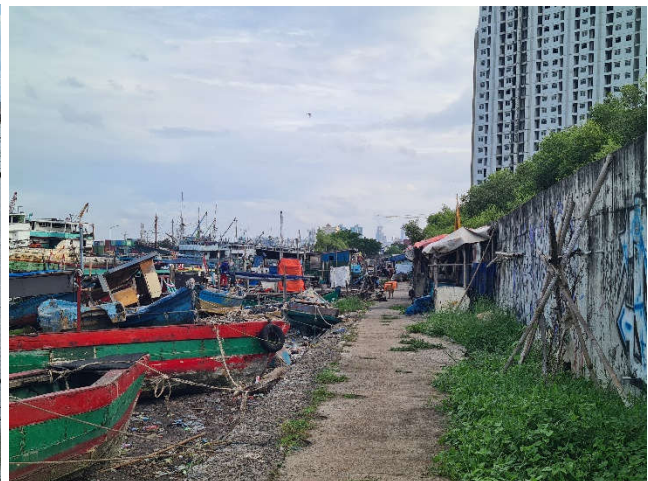
Figure 18. The station of Sunda Kelapa during a low tide, with the boats of independent fishermen.

In the following section, I will illustrate the activities that took place at these stations along the seawall, and that happened through the materiality of the sea, generating a kind of sociality through the sea, and a reunification between the human community and the sea as environment. Importantly, these activities did not exclusively take place at the stations of the eastern seawall, as many of them were also observed at other points along this or other seawalls, or in other waterfront locations in Muara Baru or Muara Angke. The "stations", however, are taken as an example of reunification with the waters because here these activities were observed consistently on a daily basis. Moreover, because this place is ideal to perform sea-related activities, all of them could be conducted at this place.

- **Fishing**

  Fishing with a fishing rod (*mancing*) is one of the main activities in sociality through the sea, and it is also considerably varied, presenting many variants. People of Muara Baru and Muara Angke were found fishing wherever they had chance to, either sitting on a seawall, standing in the middle of shallow waters in the sea, sitting on piers, or simply standing on a rock by the sea. This is a gendered activity, as only men practice fishing, usually in groups, but sometimes also alone. When conducted

in-group, fishing is also largely a social activity, because people enjoy talking, asking how many fishes others have caught, or making fun of those who have not caught any. Some of these people enjoyed fishing with rather advanced equipment, while other employed rudimentary tools to join in this activity. For example, at the beach station, I had the chance to join a man who practiced fishing with a professional rod and advanced equipment for the preservation of alive shrimps to use as baits. This man started fishing when he was still a child, and developed a passion for this activity. He considered it as a hobby to spend his free time in relaxation and also get something extra to eat, which is why he decided to spend his money on this equipment. On the other hand, other people practiced it with rudimentary tools, especially young men and kids. Alongside the seawall of Muara Baru, as well as on the shores of Kali Adem, I often came across group of kids or young men trying to catch fish using simply a wooden stick and a thread onto which they tied a bait. In this case, the purpose is not that of getting fish, which is clearly more complicated with such simple tools, but, rather, that of challenging each other and socializing, with individuals who manage to catch a fish becoming a sort of hero in the group. Such pastime is a very common activity for these groups of kids and teenagers. As an example, at the station of Sunda Kelapa a group of kids trying to catch fish standing on the rocks told me that they often come to that place for fishing or trying to catch other marine creatures. As a proof, they showed me the scars on their knees and legs, explaining that they often fall on the rocks due to the slippery ground.

People living in Kampung Bau or in the waterfront areas of Muara Angke can practice fishing more easily, because their houses built on the water allows them to conduct this activity directly from their home. While visiting Kampung Bau, I met several men, most of whom were elders, who quietly sat in their waterfront veranda, waiting to catch fish (fig.19). One of these even built a small raft to be able to move and try fishing in the waters more distant from the houses. It is indeed very common, in these areas, to find elders who used to be fishermen and who changed their occupation due to the urban development and the expansion of the large-scale fishing industry, but who still practice fishing as a hobby. One of the first informants I met in Muara Baru, for example, who is currently employed as security staff at a nearby restaurant, recalled the times in which he used to work on a boat and he sailed to go fishing, describing the sense of pleasure and relaxation that this daily activity and the connection with the sea granted him. He now still owns his old rowing boat, but he rarely uses it because it has become dangerous for him, and it is no longer easy to find fish in the sea (interview with a resident of Marlina #1, 1 February 2023).

Fishing is such a widespread activity in Muara Baru and Muara Angke that almost all households I came into contact with had at least a family member practicing fishing at least once a week. Interestingly, for some people this was just a hobby (*hobi*), but for others it was a necessity (*kebutuhan*). A small-scale survey conducted on fifty different people practicing fishing in both Muara Baru and Muara Angke, revealed that 39 of them (78%) consider fishing as a hobby, while for the remaining 11 individuals it is a necessity. Those who consider it as a hobby describe it as a fun and relaxing activity, a way to enjoy the sea and stay with friends. In this case, fish constitutes the material quality that acts as the vehicle of sociality, allowing locals to gather and

Figure 19. Fishing from home in Kampung Bau.

29

socialize by the sea. For those who consider it a necessity instead, fishing allows them to save money and obtain a quota of free protein food. In both cases, however, fishing provides additional food that is either shared to strengthen social relations or that is kept for one's family, showing how these community gain material benefit from the sea.

Figure 20. Scenes of reunification with the waters in Muara Baru, with people collecting mussels and kids playing in the water.

Figure 21. Group of people fishing at the Beach Station.

- **Collecting mussels**

  Another very common activity in Muara Baru and Muara Angke is collecting mussels (*cari kerang*). Unlike fishing, this was common for everyone, either adults or teenagers, males or females, and especially in Muara Baru, where there are more ideal places to find mussels. Here, locals gather in great numbers at the seawall stations in the afternoon hours, looking for several kinds of mussels that hide below the rocks. Among all, the most prized ones are the "green mussels" (*kerang hijau*), which are very popular in the local cuisine. Similarly to what happens for fishing, collecting mussels is also a social activity, as people take the chance to meet up and engage in long talks. Moreover, also in this case mussels constitute the material elements through which sociality takes place, establishing a contact between humans and environment. Together with fishing, the practice of collecting mussels is one of the most characterizing of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, and well representative of sociality through the sea. It can actually be said that this activity is even more widespread than fishing, because it is not gendered, it can be easily practiced also by kids, and it does not require special tools other than a scoop to move small rocks or a knife to remove mussels from rocks.

  This activity also grants material benefit and additional foods to these communities. Indeed, most households collect mussels at least once or twice a week, because they are very common and easy to obtain. In most cases, these would be kept for the family and cooked on that same day, since green mussels are an important part of the diet of these communities. Once again, however, changes that occurred in the environment impact the lives of these people, as the levels of pollution of these waters may cause mussels to contain levels of mercury that are toxic for humans (interview with a local NGO representative, 30 March 2023).

  Unlike fishing, which is described as a hobby, or as an activity to either relax by oneself or socialize with friends, collecting mussels has a more strictly material purpose, as this activity is mainly conducted to integrate the diet of local people. As such, collecting mussels is more of a family business, with family members taking turns in going to the beach to find these precious molluscs. A couple of siblings I met at the beach station, for example, told me how it was "their turn" to collect mussels on that specific day, while a woman explained that "it would usually be her son to collect mussels", but because he was busy, she took his place instead. Thus, individuals from different households get the

chance to meet by the sea and socialize while collecting mussels. In some cases, it would also be friends to meet up for collecting mussels together, like two female teenagers I met at the lighthouse station, who explained that they were sent by their respective families to collect mussels, and they then decided to go together.

- **Enjoying the water**
Water is the most important and sought for element in trying to re-establish contact with the material qualities of the sea as environment. This is why many residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke cross the seawall or pass the embankment simply to get into physical touch with the waters and enjoy such contact. This happens under several forms. For elders and adults it is common to simply have a stroll in the shallow waters, enjoying the feeling of walking with feet in the water. This is considered a useful activity to relieve stress, and it is mostly performed together with friends or family members. I met one of my main informants in Marlina precisely in this way, as he was strolling in the shallow waters at the beach station. He explained to me how, as a former fisherman, he still loves to "go to the sea" to either relax as a kind of "medicine", or to "talk and share stories with other people" (*curhat*) (interview with a resident of Kampung Marlina #2, 24 January 2023). Mothers also frequently bring their baby or kids to the sea, in order to let them practice walking or let them play in the water, gaining confidence with the sea. Finally, grown-up kids and teenagers also independently come to the sea to play in the water or exhibit themselves in diving shows, often using seawalls as a platform for jumping into the sea (fig.22). Kids in particular took special pride in showing their diving skill, as in more than one occasion I was invited to watch their performance, and found this activity especially fun. For kids living in waterfront *kampung* like Kampung Gedung Pompa, Kampung Bau, or Kali Adem, diving is also an entertaining activity to freshen up during the hottest hours of the day. Socialization with the sea thus happens since a very young age among residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, where individuals get confident with the waters ever since they are babies, and then living a childhood in close contact with the waters despite the presence of the seawall. In this case, it is water itself that functions as the means for socialization. Moreover, these activities show how the sea is important for these people not only for material benefits, but also for overall wellbeing, experiences of growth, and culturalization to the sea as environment.

Figure 22. Kids performing a diving show next to the Sinking Mosque.

- **Performing masculinity**
In Muara Baru and Muara Angke, waters are not only the means for social activities and experiences of growth, but also for gender performance. I previously mentioned how some of the activities

conducted at the sea are gendered, for example fishing is practiced by men only, taking babies to the beach is a women's activity, while diving is something only male kids do. However, there are also certain activities that are not simply gendered, but that are meant to reinforce a performance of masculinity or femininity.

While both males and females do reunite with the waters and look for physical contact with the material qualities of the environment, males look for a more direct impact with these qualities. In many cases, such direct impact involves a form of challenge between the individual and the environment, a test of ability, strength, or courage. When seen through this lens, men who practice fishing are challenging the sea to get as much fish as possible through their skill, while kids and teenagers who dive are challenging the sea by showing their skill and bravery in jumping into the water.

One activity in particular that is considered a performance of masculinity is swimming, performed especially by male teenagers and young men. This takes place a bit further from the seawall, where waters are deep and currents are stronger, thus allowing swimmers to show their ability in swimming in a more difficult context, their strength in resisting currents and waves, and their bravery in facing the deep waters. This activity was explicitly introduced to me as exclusive to males, claiming that they do not fear swimming in deep waters because "as males, how could they not be strong?" The highlight posed by informants on adjectives like "strong" (*kuat*), "brave" (*berani*), and "skilful" (*jago*), together with the fact that swimming was presented as an exclusively male activity, suggests that swimming is a way to perform masculinity that happens through the material quality of the waters. Exclusivity of swimming for males is also influenced by local customs and the Islamic religion, which encourage women to cover their body, thus making it unpractical for a woman to swim.

It is interesting to notice how this activity is not a new trend, and instead it is the continuation of what used to be a very common activity for these coastal people. In fact, during interviews with old men in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, all of them recalled going to swim every day, in order to "keep fit", "strengthen character", and "feel the excitement", just as in a real challenge between them and the waters. With the passing of time, swimming actually became less common because of the pollution of waters, the higher traffic of motored boats, and an increased difficulty in reaching the waters, but it is still performed by many young man who find new means of adaptation to the new environmental conditions.

- **Performing femininity**

While males reunite with the waters in a challenging way, females do so through contemplation and looking for a cooperation between them and the sea. For example, the sea helps them in providing mussels to cook for their family, or in providing an environment for their kids to play and for their baby to practice walking. Generally, women appeared to approach the most nurturing side of the sea, seeking reunification whenever this was beneficial either for themselves or their family members, and avoiding it whenever the sea showed its most dangerous side, either in the natural form of dangerous sea currents, or in the supernatural form of dangerous spirits of the ocean. These activities of cooperation are not limited to collecting food for one's family or bringing kids to play in the water, but are extremely varied. For example, I once met a woman from Kampung Elektro on her way back from the beach, who was carrying a plastic bag filled with seawater, with a small fish inside it. This was a kind of fish commonly found in shallow waters, which kids often try to catch and bring home. This is why, as she explained, this was a gift for her child, so that he could keep his own fish. Thus, in this example, this mother showed her care for her son through a form of cooperation with the environment, employing the material qualities of the environment as a vehicle of her affection.

Out of all activities, however, the one that is most connected to a performance of femininity is taking pictures next to the sea. This activity was observed only performed by women, always in groups of at least two, in which either they take group photos (fig.23) or they take turns in taking photos of each other (fig.24). Group of men rarely take such pictures, and when they do it is always them sitting or standing on the seawall, not involving the sea. Women instead always took pictures with the sea as a background. In this case, cooperation between women and the sea lays in the fact that, when taking

pictures, the sea is perceived as exalting qualities of beauty, as many informants explained that "photos taken by the sea are the prettiest". Even if this activity does not normally involve physical contact between women and the waters, in this case it is the visual qualities of the sea that serve as a means for the performance of femininity and for the socialization of these women.

Figures 23-24. Young women taking photos by the sea.

- **Social gatherings**

In Muara Baru and Muara Angke, "going to the sea" means social gathering. The desire to re-establish contact with the sea has turned liminal places of separation like embankments and seawalls into popular hotspots of social life. This is especially true for youth and teenagers, who chose specific waterfront points in Muara Baru and Muara Angke to meet up every evening, mostly between 4 and 6 pm. Usually, at these gatherings, people meet up and start talking and socializing sitting on a seawall or by the sea, then they would break into smaller groups to perform the above-mentioned activities.

There is a particular nostalgic vibe in gathering at these liminal places. It is a sense of standing over the border that separates these communities from the environment that characterizes their identity, but that also protects them from waters that have become too dangerous for them. Sitting on the seawall in groups celebrates the need to reunite with the sea, looking down to the waters that used to be visible from people's houses, but it is also the acknowledgement of changing times and a changing environment. Living behind the seawall is now a necessity, and as land goes down and sea level keeps rising, it is easy to notice melancholy in the eyes of people staring at the horizon. For how long will it still be possible to live here? Indeed, several places that used to be full of life have already been reclaimed by waters. These are not only the Sinking Mosque, or the former warehouses that now turned into swamps, but also other locations that used to be considered "recreational places" (*tempat wisata*) by people of Muara Baru. Since the vast majority of the residents in Muara Baru presents a low income, the mobility of these people is relatively low due to the costs of transportation and leisure activities. Therefore, these communities rely on cheaper options in the nearby areas for recreational activities, be it with one's friends, family, or partner. One of these options used to be the place known as Pantai Muara Baru, located to the east of the fishing port, a long waterfront area dedicated to the leisure of local residents. I visited this place together with a key informant from Gedung Pompa, a young man employed at the local fishing industrial complex. He recalled how this place used to be very lively and how Muara Baru residents used to love coming here, since this used to be "leisure for the cheapest price" (*rekreasi termurah*), just a few kilometres ride from the various *kampung*. He showed me the road that directly connects the residential areas to this place, and we walked along the former waterfront where there once was just a small embankment and people used to come to enjoy the sea view, admire the sunrise, and practice all the above-mentioned sea-related activities, finding comfort and relaxation from the hardships of daily life. A large three-dimensional writing saying "Tanggul Pantai Muara Baru PTPIN" still stands here as a memory of those long-gone good times, however, as

my informant sadly stated, "who would want to come here now?" Social gatherings are now impossible here, except for a few people fishing on the seawall, because land subsidence and sea level rise have completely changed this place. Now the tall seawall makes it impossible for anyone to enjoy the sea view unless one climbs the wall and sits on top. Moreover, the old road that led to this place was never renovated and has been gradually sinking into the state in which it is now: flooded, covered in mud and debris, impossible to walk or drive on. The only way to reach this place is to walk on top of the seawall in order to avoid the flooded areas, but by now it is no longer worth it for most locals. Just like the old Pantai Muara Baru, many places that have marked the lives of these people are slowly disappearing as the sea that they love is reclaiming them in a sort of ironic revenge for land reclamation. As water rises and occupies more and more spaces on land, people of Muara Baru and Muara Angke are trying to re-negotiate their relationship with the materiality of the environment, trying to adapt to new conditions while maintaining the lifestyle in which they grew up.

Figure 25. Youth gathering at the seawall in Muara Baru.

4.2 Turning the sea into luxury product: materiality in the sociality by the sea

From the waterfront terrace of the café, the sunset over the Jakarta bay looks wonderful, with the last sun shining over the sea and the golden haze filling the atmosphere. The gentle sound of the waves is accompanied by the lively tinkle of glasses and spoons, and by the background chattering of the café's guests. People enjoy the sunset's view, have a drink by the sea, take photos of the landscape or group photos with friends or family, or relax on a swing chair on the terrace. From time to time, this quiet scene is interrupted by the passage of a watercraft that noisily shakes the waters, capturing the attention of the café's customers on the terrace. Then, everyone turns the eyes towards the watercraft, cheering the driver or expressing amazement, before turning their attention back to their drink. In my glass there is no tea left and the ice cubes have already molten. A waiter approaches me and asks if I would like to order something else, but I think it is time for me to leave. I feel like I saw what I had to see, I enjoyed the view, I had my drink, and I relaxed enough. Now there is nothing else to do in the restricted space of this terrace.

Waterfront cafes, exclusive recreational areas, shiny apartments, luxurious residential estates, seaside resorts, amusement parks, yachts and watercrafts. This is the side of North Jakarta that represents urban development and aspirations for a world-class city, a series of visions characterized by luxury, enjoyment, pleasure, exclusivity, and all united by the common factor of proximity to the sea. Proximity is a key word here, because in this case there is never unity with the sea. People enjoy a drink or a meal at a waterfront café, stroll by the sea with family or friends, shop at the waterfront mall, look for street food by the seaside, live in large houses

near the sea, but they never really make contact with the sea as environment. Thus, in the sociality by the sea, sociality does not take place through the material qualities of the sea, but only by the sea, and always with a gap between humans and environment.

Unlike what happens in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol experience of the sea is strongly visual. Sight is the main sense employed by most human beings, it is the sense we most use to interact with the world, and the primary sense we employ when we judge something as pleasant or unpleasant. In these areas of North Jakarta, the material qualities of the environment, and of the sea in particular, are employed to unleash all of their visual aesthetic potential. This is achieved through a process of modification of the environment and of the built environment that highlights certain material qualities that are considered aesthetically pleasant. Being aesthetically pleasant is a key quality in boosting the palatability of an area or an urban project, and it is especially important to grant such areas the title of "luxurious". Thus, in the sociality by the sea, the material qualities of the environment are not the means through which sociality takes place and activities are performed, but the means that, when expressly modified, can make a place "luxurious" in virtue of its pleasant visual features. For example, seawater is employed to give a sense of openness and space; sand is employed to develop the image of the ideal golden beach; stones and plants are used to create idyllic gardens; and fish takes the form of colourful species for aquariums or elite aesthetic food, like a painting represented on a plate.

The aspects of luxury, exclusivity, modernity, and comfort are strongly highlighted in these areas of Jakarta. As stated by Kusno, developers frequently employ words like "exclusivity," "lucrative," "luxury," and "lucky" in order to sell their properties (Kusno 2013: 114). Importantly, these characteristics are always associated to the material aspects of the environment under diverse forms. It is these aspects that, thanks to their visual potential, make the place luxurious and help developers to sell house units. For example, Intiland, the developer of Pantai Mutiara, tries to attract potential buyers writing "the right choice for you who love ocean view", in which the visual aspect of the ocean is immediately indicated as the characteristic of major interest for anyone who is considering to buy a house here. Next, they describe the project as follows:

> "The breathtaking view of the sea is now right in front of your eyes with Pantai Mutiara Pluit housing complex, a prestigious residential area with a strategic location in the coastal Jakarta. Pamper yourself in the luxury of this finest residence, built with a private dock for direct access to the high seas."[5]

In this description, view of the sea is highlighted as the most important feature of Pantai Mutiara, and it is then associated to terms like "prestigious" and "luxury". The direct connection between luxury and the sea is further highlighted by the particular feature of private docks providing direct access to the sea.

In the case of Golf Island at Pantai Maju, the developer Agung Sedayu Group recalls the aspirations for global integration and puts forward the idea of North Jakarta as a world-class city, which is meant to be the showcase of the nation. They do so by employing the concept of "waterfront city", inspired by urban concepts in Australia and North America, which convey the idea of modernity, luxury, and economic success. These are the characteristics that are pursued to make Jakarta a world-class city. The project of Golf Island is presented as follows:

> "Pantai Maju Golf Island has several special advantages, the most complete waterfront city concept with luxurious and beautiful residences, as well as prestigious commercial areas, super complete and modern facilities, flood-free and many more."[6]

In this case, the aspects of environmental materiality are of less importance, and they are condensed in the word "waterfront". However, it is important to notice how the "waterfront city" is already a "concept" in itself, and it therefore comes with a whole set of specific associations that mix proximity to the sea with "luxurious", "prestigious", and "super complete and modern" facilities. Thus, in the idea of waterfront city there appears to be a necessary association between sea as environment and characteristics like luxury, prestige, and modernity.

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[5] https://www.intiland.com/en/house/jakarta/pantai-mutiara/ (accessed 02/06/2023).
[6] https://www.agungsedayu.com/en/cluster/golf-island (accessed 04/06/2023).

Finally, it is interesting to see how, considered the infamous floods suffered by Pantai Mutiara, the company highlighted how the area is "flood-free".

Similarly to the promotional strategy of Intiland, Agung Sedayu Group also highlights the visual aspect of the sea in the presentation of its Ebony Island project, the still unfinished island C next to Golf Island. The presentation reads:

> "[…] This exclusive residential cluster is the only one in Indonesia with the largest lake in its cluster and surrounded by exclusive San Antonio shophouses with beautiful open sea views."[7]

Here the keyword is "exclusive", associated to material environmental aspects like the presence of a lake and "beautiful open sea views".

Moving on to Ancol, the introduction of Jaya Ancol Seafront, one of the residential projects in Ancol, employs a very evocative language, which aims to represent an idyllic place through the description of ideal material qualities of the environment:

> "Strategically located near the sea with an exotic design that seems to embrace life itself. You will feel fresh and pampered by the sheer beauty of the lush green garden atmosphere with its stunning sunrise or sunset horizon, all perfectly combined to refresh yet bring a feeling of serenity."[8]

In this example, material aspects of the surrounding environment are turned into a picture of idyllic nature and connected to positive feelings for the potential buyer, such as "serenity", "refresh", and being "pampered". In order to let the reader visualize such idyllic image, there is once again a focus on visual characteristics, like the "exotic design", the "lush green", or the reference to "sunrise or sunset horizon".

The last example refers to The Bukit, another project located in Ancol, which goes back to the theme of luxury:

> "The hillside surrounding view mixed with the beauty of the beach create natural ornament and become the daily theme in Marina Coast The Bukit housing complex. A luxurious complex with the type of modern tropical, […]."[9]

The focus on view is in this case associated to the beach, which becomes a "daily theme", something intimately associated to this project. Once again, such characteristics are connected to the idea of a "luxurious complex", while the imaginary of tropical nature becomes "modern".
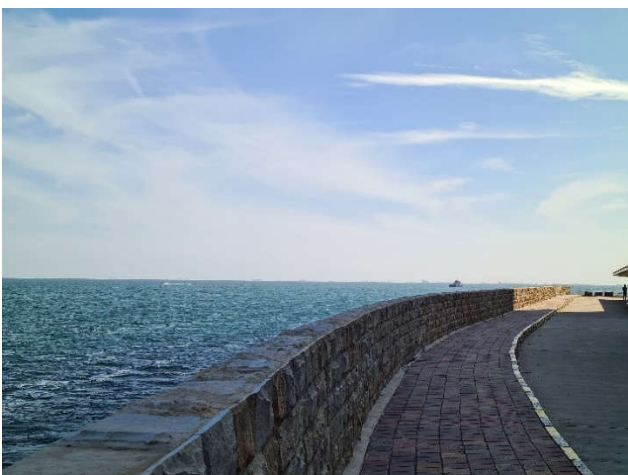
Figure 26. Unblocked view of the sea at Regatta.　　　**Figure 27.** View from the walkable piers in Ancol.

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[7] https://www.agungsedayu.com/en/cluster/ebony-island (accessed 04/06/2023).
[8] https://properti.ancol.com/en/project/jaya-ancol-seafront (accessed 04/06/2023).
[9] https://properti.ancol.com/en/project/the-bukit (accessed 04/06/2023).

These examples should be sufficient to give an idea of the spectrum of strategies employed to turn the sea or, more generally, the coastal environment into a luxury product. The repetitive association between concepts like luxury, prestige, modernity, comfort or exclusivity with material environmental qualities such as the sea, the beach, or greenery generates the idea that proximity to the sea equates to high living standard and prestigious lifestyles. This kind of luxury, however, is not a necessary consequence of living by the sea, but it is the result of a planned intervention on the various material qualities to create an aesthetically pleasant result.

The above-mentioned focus on visual aspects for the experience of the sea can be clearly seen in the spatial layout of various waterfront locations in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol. All of these places are expressly designed to provide visual enjoyment of the sea, such as the terrace over the Jakarta Bay at Pantai Maju; the elevated lookout on the sea at the Regatta complex in Pantai Mutiara (fig.26); or the walkable piers over the sea at Ancol (fig.27). Examples of these places are not limited to outdoor spaces, but also to indoor ones. In fact, many local cafes and other businesses give great importance to the aspect of sea view, and they employ large glass walls to allow view over the sea also from indoor spaces (fig.28). Alternatively, some businesses are provided with outdoor terraces to enjoy view of the sea. In this way, unlike what happens in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, the sea is domesticated. Either kept away in a lower position, or framed within the contours of a glass wall, the sea appears like a domesticated vision from another world, as a video on tv, as a luxury product provided for consumption by a specific business or by developers. Thus, the sea is not something that actually affects humans, it is no longer threatening, it is just a product like many others, a component of the wider "luxury and exclusivity" package. Moreover, some locations do more than just employing the visual characteristic of the environment, as they take the material aspects to separate them from the wider environment and use them for their aesthetic potential. For example, a café in Pantai Mutiara, other than providing view over the sea, also created a garden with sand resembling a beach on its terrace, and built an infinity pool equipped with fishes that grants a constant view over a body of water also at night (fig.29).
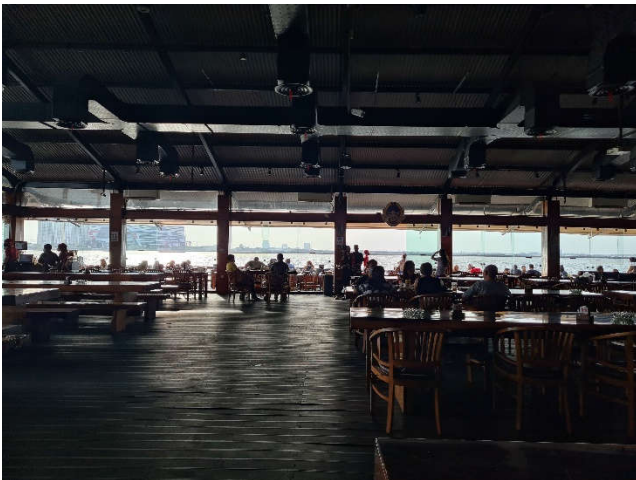
Figure 28. Large glass walls installed to allow sea view from the indoor space.

Figure 29. View over the sea through a glass wall, with tropical garden and infinity pool included.

The focus on the visual aspects of the environment, the domestication of the sea, and the employment of the sea as a luxury product are all factors that imply a separation between human communities and the sea as environment. Unlike what was observed in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, in places like Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol, people never make a direct contact with the sea. Here communities do not seek to reunite with the waters, but, rather, they seek the enjoyment of the "seaside experience". By seaside experience, I mean that set of social activities that is performed next to the sea for enjoyment, and that is reinforced by a specific context and by specific practices that turn it into an "experience". Local developers and business owners capitalize on the association between sea and luxury, creating a context specifically made to generate

an experience that can be sold. The seaside experience is what attracts investors, residents and visitors to these areas, because it is what drives the interest of people for the Coast, and what moves the local economy.

Separation between humans and the sea is determined not only by the relationship that these people have with the environment, but also by the structure of the built environment. In these areas, waterfront places have been specifically built to keep people away from the waters through infrastructural means. These may take the form of elevated terraces, railings, parapets, or empty embankments covered in stones between the seaside walkway and the sea itself. These omnipresent infrastructures of separation give a clear idea of how people and the sea should stay separated, and how the sea is intended to be enjoyed in a purely visual way or as a luxury product, with no other form of contact with human communities. Unlike what happens in Muara Baru, where the seawall also constitutes an infrastructure of separation, but where locals pass it in order to reunite with the waters, in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol locals respect these boundaries and do not venture beyond them. This is because they consider the sea to have a purely visual and prestige value, and instead prefer to reunite with the materiality of the environment within domesticated spaces, such as private swimming pools or gardens.

Figures 30-31. Seaside signs stating prohibition to do fishing or collect mussels in Ancol (left) and Pantai Mutiara (right).

Moreover, other than implying a separation between humans and environment, in these areas it is expressly prohibited to perform certain activities that are typical of a sociality through the sea. In fact, when walking by the sea in these areas, it is very common to find signs that prohibit doing activities like fishing or collecting mussels (fig.30-31). This is done also in the interest of protecting the beauty of the sea view, because, as highlighted by residents of Pantai Mutiara, "if fishing was allowed then a lot of people would come also from outside, and it would ruin the view" (*merusak pemandangan*) (focus group in Pantai Mutiara, 31 March 2023). Through these strategies, in the newly developed areas a different kind of sociality is produced, while also ensuring that "through the sea" sociality, which is associated to backwardness and poverty, is kept away. Only in this way North Jakarta can legitimately be considered a world-class city, and can be worthy of being the showcase of the nation. It is also interesting to notice how, if in type Muara Baru and Muara Angke it is the environment that determines the activities performed by locals, in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol it is the other way around, as it is the activities that determine the environment. This means that here the environment has been specifically manipulated and built to favour certain activities, and, in other words, the

idea of the activities came first, and a specific environment emerged consequently. I will next list some of the typical activities observed in the sociality by the sea.

- *Ngecafe*

  Indonesia, especially in big cities like Jakarta, has a very strong café culture. These, together with malls, are some of the main places of socialization, where people go to spend time in company and escape the heat, while also enjoying a drink and a snack. These activities take the name of "*ngecafe*", which could be roughly translated as "going to the café" or "spending time at the café". Importantly, this term also has a social meaning, as it implies spending time together with other people. This very social activity was one of the most commonly observed in Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, where the numerous waterfront cafes present the added value of sea view, an additional aesthetic element that pleases the visitors. Indeed, the vast majority of customers choose to sit either on the outdoor terrace by the sea, or when this is not available or the climate is too harsh, next to the glass wall, so to enjoy sea view at its best (fig.32). Here people may enjoy talking for hours, either in small groups of a couple persons or in large groups of over ten people, often bursting in noisy laughs. Everyone orders at least a drink, but many also have snacks or even full meals, with seafood being the main choice in all of these cafes. It is clear that, in all these social activities, the sea has a purely visual value, and it is only a background element. The contrast with the scenes observed in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, where locals dive into the waters, search in between the rocks, or fish for hours is staggering. In these cafes, people just occasionally give a glance at the sea before focusing again on their interlocutor or their drink. Always separated from the waters, behind a glass wall or up above on a terrace, the materiality of the sea does not play any part in this sociality. Here sociality happens only **by** the sea.

  It is important to notice that cafes do not only target local residents as customers, and instead promote themselves as social hotspots for the entire city of Jakarta by branding themselves as waterfront trend places. Thus, these businesses encourage a certain type of relationship with the sea for people who live further inland and otherwise do not have any kind of connection with it. Through these trendy cafes, sociality by the sea is promoted as modern and of high class, while sociality through the sea is increasingly dismissed as backwards and of low class.

Figure 32. Groups of people at a waterfront café in Pantai Mutiara.

Figure 33. Cove at Batavia PIK, a popular spot for seaside shopping in Pantai Maju.

When considering local residents specifically, attitude towards ngecafe is varied. Some residents of the long-established Pantai Mutiara do not like these cafes, as they are seen as an element of disturbance of their peaceful environment and free sea view, while others appreciate the comfort of having an additional service like a nearby high-end café to go out for eating or enjoying a drink by the sea. For example, a retired woman living in the northern blocks of Pantai Mutiara complained about

the noise and disturbance that these cafes generate, reminiscing the old times when there were no such businesses and she could enjoy free sea view and a more peaceful environment. A middle-aged man living in the Regatta apartment instead stated his satisfaction with the numerous waterfront cafes, because they give him multiple choices to take his family out for eating and leisure. Residents of the newly built Pantai Maju, on the other hand, were consistently satisfied with the numerous businesses in their area, and claimed to visit them often. This is because, why Pantai Mutiara has evolved during time, leaving some residents unhappy with the changes, Pantai Maju has just been established, thus the new residents were looking precisely for the present day conditions when they moved in.

- **Seaside walking**
Seaside walking grew up in popularity since the development of the new areas of North Jakarta. This is mostly a western-inspired activity that comes from the imaginary of waterfront cities, where it is possible to comfortably stroll by the sea. Seaside walking is a common activity especially for residents of these areas, while visitors prefer to directly target cafes or stores. Several residents in Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju explained how they find pleasure in walking by the sea, especially in the morning or at sunset. However, in Pantai Mutiara, people also complained about the fact that, because of land subsidence and the seawalls becoming taller and taller, the value of sea view is slowly getting lost, and it is not as easy as it used to be to enjoy the view while walking. Nonetheless, seaside walking is still a common activity, which I also had the chance to observe extensively. In fact, going to Pantai Mutiara or Pantai Maju in the early morning was the only moment in which I could be sure to find local residents hanging around, either strolling or jogging by the sea, before they all disappeared behind the golden gates of their homes, or they went to work. One of my main informants in Pantai Mutiara, for example, a middle-aged man of Chinese ethnicity, goes every morning for a jogging session along the waterfront road in order to "keep fit and breathe fresh air" (Interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #3, 11 March 2023). Another retired woman explained how she used to have a seaside morning walk every day in the past, complaining about she reduced the frequency of her walks due to the gradual disappearance of the sea behind the seawalls (focus group in Pantai Mutiara, 31 March 2023). Together with them, many other individuals take advantage of the waterfront roads and walkways to practice physical activity by the sea, ranging from elders slowly walking along the trees-filled seaside walkways to young men and women doing jogging on the main road or on top of the eastern seawall. It is also common to see caregivers accompanying elders to do some movement by the sea.
Also in this case, the materiality of the sea does not take part in the activity, and the visual aspect is the most important one. It can be also noticed, however, that the sea does play a certain part in the wellbeing of these communities, as walking by the sea was often described as a "pleasant and relaxing activity".

- **Seaside shopping**
In seaside shopping, the sea does not have any wellbeing-related role. Instead, it is just an element that conveys prestige and exclusivity to the area, so that the stores and restaurants that people explore also have to be prestigious and exclusive. Seaside shopping is common in Pantai Maju, which was designed as a commercial and touristic area, and therefore presents several waterfront areas with shops and eateries. These places are extremely popular for both residents and visitors, and get very crowded especially in the weekends, when many families and groups of friends choose to spend time by the sea rather than in a mall (fig.33). Seaside shopping does not necessarily consist in buying. Instead, it consists in hopping from one store to another, grabbing a street food, stop to take a rest by the sea, then going again for a new store. Here, the combination of proximity to the sea and a high number of commercial and food businesses is the key that turned Pantai Maju into the most popular high-end spot for leisure in the entire Jakarta, taking the title that was once owned by Pantai mutiara (interview with a business owner in Pantai Mutiara #1, 19 January 2023).

During participant observation in Pantai Maju, I had the chance to follow two local informants (a young man and a young woman) to experience what seaside shopping consists in. We first reached the waterfront area by motorbike from the clusters, heading to the By the Sea mall, and sitting at a very exclusive café. The design of the place, its location in the waterfront district, and the above average prices qualified the place as "exclusive". After enjoying a high quality coffee drink, a testament to the booming coffee culture in Jakarta, we delved in conversation for about an hour and then moved to the seaside walkway. Here, we rented a couple bicycles and had a ride along the sea on the long waterfront walkway that surrounds the island, until we reached the leisure district to the opposite side. Here we hopped from one store to another, exploring the various products on sale and occasionally buying street food. Our tour ended just before sunset at the waterfront lookout, where we completed our experience taking some pictures. These activities constitute the standard model for most visitors and residents who enjoy leisure in this area, with a wide choice of services and businesses to enjoy, and all united by the theme of exclusivity. The specific built environment constructed for the purpose of these economically stimulating activities determines a model in which the sea is a domesticated tool, a mere background element that serves to reinforce the theme of exclusivity.

- **Photo sessions**
  Taking pictures is one of the most popular activities for Indonesians, especially when they are in a social situation, and especially when the photo background is interesting. These two aspects are both present in these areas of North Jakarta, where the aesthetic locations and the view of the sea add up to the context of sociality typical of cafes or commercial areas. If, in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, taking pictures by the sea mainly has a value of femininity, in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol it has the value of reinforcing an experience. Here, both males and females take the same kind of pictures, and they do so to reinforce their seaside experience, to certify that they have been there with certain people. Often, they also share these pictures on social media, in order to display their experience to their network. Once again, it is the activity that determines the environment, because in several public locations, as well as in private businesses, one can find specific spots designed expressly to allow visitors to take pictures and thus reinforce and certify their experience. These are often lookouts on the sea that are decorated and "branded" in specific ways, thus giving a sense of positionality, indicating a place located in a specific space with specific characteristics. In this way, through the picture, the visitor can certify that he/she has been to and has experienced this particular location. In this case, the seaside experience is what counts and it is what is being sold, while taking a picture acts as the "seal" of the experience, certifying it forever and for everyone. These photos are often uploaded on Instagram, the social medium of photography and aesthetics par excellence. Thus, analysing the number and quality of pictures uploaded on Instagram for a certain place can give an idea of the value that this place has. For example, as of June 2023, searching the hashtag #sunsetcafe[10] produces over ten-thousand results, a number that, also considering possible posts unrelated to the place in question, is still impressive. With the more specific hashtag #sunsetcafepantaimutiara, the results are almost a thousand, a good indicator of how popular picture-taking is, and how important certification of the experience is for the visitors. In another example with a public area, the hashtag #coveatbataviapik produces over a thousand results, which, compared to, for example, the mere twenty-two results of #masjidtenggelam (the Sinking Mosque in Muara Baru) indicate the importance of branding and the values of luxury and prestige that are associated to places in Pantai Mutiara,. Most pictures of this kind show the person posing with the sea or a local landmark in the background, often centred on the theme of aspirational consumption, but the most interesting aspect lays in the different value that the sea has within these pictures and those taken by women in Muara Baru and Muara Angke. While in the latter the sea was described as the element that exalts beauty, in the former it was mostly simply referred to as the main characteristic of the place, because North Jakarta is a coastal place, thus it is normal to take a picture by the sea. It can be noticed that the first case is a lot more personal and related to the subjectivity of the person that is being photographed, while the second is impersonal,

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[10] The name of the cafe is a pseudonym.

related to the brand of the place and the certification of the seaside experience, with a clear gap between the human subject and the sea. Such gap is not only theoretical, but also physical, as in Muara Baru and Muara Angke there is always a closer distance to the sea or even direct contact, whereas in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol infrastructural means separate people from the waters.

During my experience of seaside shopping, taking photos served as a sort of ritual that ended the experience. While photos were occasionally taken for the entire duration of the experience, and especially wherever the view was good, there was something solemn in the pictures taken by the sea before parting, as my informants described this action as necessary "to remember about this day". A day spent through cafes, seaside bike rides, waterfront stores, and street food, ending at sunset by the sea. View of the sea is the element that cannot miss to characterize the experience as special and different from any other similar experience that can be done in other areas of the city. After taking the picture, the experience is validated and certified as exclusive, different, and special.

Figures 34-35. Photo sessions by the sea in Pantai mutiara (left) and Pantai Maju (right).

- **Watercraft experience**

Riding a watercraft is an elite hobby that grew in popularity especially in Pantai Mutiara, where there are a few spots to rent and buy a watercraft, and where several watercraft facilities are available. It is not rare to see watercrafts flashing through the waters of Pantai Mutiara, going back and forth or heading towards the open sea. Indeed, Pantai Mutiara is also the seat of an exclusive watercraft club that organizes weekly group activities for its members, usually consisting in watercrafts races or group trip to the archipelago of the Thousand Islands, just off the coast of Jakarta, by watercraft. This club welcomes members from Pantai Mutiara, but also from several other areas of Jakarta, as it is an elite activity that attracts individuals of high class from the entire metropolitan area.

Other than the exclusive club, watercraft activities have recently opened to a wider public, mostly catering to local residents. These consist in single tours of the duration of fifteen minutes to several hours along the coast of Jakarta or to the Thousand Islands, and usually accompanied by an instructor. This is why, other than in Pantai Mutiara, watercrafts have become a common sight in a wider area, ranging from Pantai Maju to Ancol. These tours are organized by Seadoo Safari Indonesia, an organization affiliated to some cafes in Pantai Mutiara, service points in Ancol and Pantai Maju, and

a mall in Pluit. From these points, customers and visitors can rent their watercraft and depart for different kinds of tours. Despite the prices being prohibitive for most people, ranging between a hundred and five hundred euros for a single tour, collaboration with private businesses allowed this business to expand to wider segments of the population. For example, the Seadoo Safari Baywalk, affiliated to Baywalk mall, offers short tours with prices ranging from twenty-five to ninety euros, thus allowing many people to enjoy this experience, even if for a short time only[11].

In the watercraft experience, the connection between the sea, luxury and exclusivity is reiterated once again. This form of elite hobby emerged from the high-class residents' need for an exciting leisure activity that would be associated to prestige and exclusivity. Indeed, as it can be read on Seadoo Safari's website, the business "was established to meet the high public demand for recreational island hopping on a personal watercraft"[12], and now, with the expansion of the offer, this activity is being increasingly practiced occasionally, for example as an alternative weekend activity, with no need for an extensive commitment. In this way, the watercraft experience is quickly growing as an important element of the culture of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol.

- **Island hopping**
  Island hopping does not only refer to watercraft tours, but more widely to the activity of visiting several islands of the archipelago of the Thousand Islands. This is a common leisure activity for residents of Pantai Mutiara especially, but also for some residents of Ancol and pantai Maju that own a yacht and that have a chance to independently travel to the islands. A resident in Pantai Mutiara told me how she used to go island hopping with her husband every weekend when she was younger, but that she rarely goes now due to her older age. Another resident, instead, explained how island hopping constitutes a great relief from the stress of life in Jakarta, and how this is a privilege for residents who live by the sea, once again highlighting the perceived connection between sea and exclusivity.
  It could be argued that in the case of watercraft experience and island hopping residents of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol also reunite with the waters. After all, this is also about passing seawalls or other infrastructures of separation in order to perform an activity in the sea. However, considering the type of relationship between humans and environmental materiality, the kind of sociality expressed in these activities is still by the sea, and not through the sea. In fact, the primary means through which these activities take place are always man-made tools, either a watercraft or a yacht. Island hopping and watercraft experience are not about getting in touch with the waters, enjoying the sea itself, or getting fish. Instead, it is riding a watercraft for excitement or sailing by yacht to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. Even though the sea clearly plays a part in these activities, there is still a gap between it and humans, and there is no real reunification with the waters as it was observed in Muara Baru and Muara Angke.

- **Beach enjoyment**
  This activity refers to spending a day at the beach. This is a very specific activity because it can happen only in one place: Ancol Beach, the only beach left in mainland Jakarta. I was particularly attracted to this place because, despite it being in a high-income district like Ancol, here I could see several activities that are typical of sociality through the sea. As it is common for a beach, here people swim and dive in the sea, kids play with the water and sand, and women walk by the shoreline. It appeared that, in this specific location, the environment was designed specifically to permit sociality through the sea kind of activities. Indeed, while in other areas of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol several infrastructures of separation keep people away from the waters, here the space is design to encourage reunification with the waters, albeit always with the purpose of providing enjoyment in a branded, exclusive and prestigious place. This is a first, important difference with what was observed in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, where residents reunited with the waters even if the space does not favour such reunification. Moreover, a series of short interviews with a random sample of 100 visitors at

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[11] https://www.instagram.com/p/CotaatCPLpi/ (accessed 06/06/2023)
[12] https://seadoosafari.com/ (accessed 06/06/2023)

Ancol Beach revealed some other key differences. First, visiting Ancol Beach is an occasional experience that caters not only to local residents, but also, and mostly, to tourists from other areas of Jakarta or even out of Jakarta. Very few people come here frequently, at most on a monthly basis, but for the majority of visitors this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. In contrast, in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, it is only residents that reunite with the waters, and they do so frequently, with an added value of growth and experience. Second, Ancol Beach is part of a large theme park with an entrance fee, thus, every visitor pays to enjoy the beach, which points to the fact that, once again, the sea in these areas is considered a luxury product. Moreover, because the sea is intended as product, there is no real connection between people and the sea here, except for the kind of connection that one might find between a user and a commodity. Here people come and go, they get their seaside experience and then leave, without establishing the kind of relationship with the sea that is commonly observed among residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke.

It can be concluded that, while the activities themselves are the same or similar to those observed in the sociality through the sea, their meanings and cultural associations are different, as in Ancol Beach the notion of sea as luxury product is dominant.

From the examples presented in this section, I hope I have demonstrated that, in the high-income districts of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol, the transformation of the sea into a luxury product produced a separation between human communities and the material qualities of the environment. This generated a kind of sociality that is performed "by the sea", but in which there is never a real reunification between humans and waters.

V Knowledge

5.1 Working with the sea: knowledge in the sociality through the sea

As we are standing in front of a large industrial fishing boat at the port of Muara Baru, me and a key informant are observing the big pile of frozen fish that is being unloaded from the boat. The port is boiling under the scorching sun of the midday and the humid marine air, and a cloud of vapour rises from the frozen fish due to the sublimation of ice. My informant looks around and starts listing all the kinds of fish he can see: "*Ikan tuna, cakalang, bawal, sauri, kakap merah, dori, tongkol, barongan*… There are some more, I also tasted all of them. Do you want me to write a list for you?" I try to quickly examine the piles of frozen fish in front of me, but, aside from some fish being bigger than others, I cannot notice any difference. The informant notices that I am confused, so he quickly grabs a fish and shows me the back fin. "You see? This is what makes it unique", he says.

Figure 36. Workers sorting fish at the port of Muara Baru.

Figure 37. A *kastorit* building in Muara Baru. (Photo by research participant)

Every day, thousands of fishes pass through the hands of workers at Muara Baru and Muara Angke. Some of them will go through the process that turns them into a product for the national and international market, while others will be sold at the fish market for local consumption. Whenever a new load of frozen fish comes from a newly arrived fishing boat, fish is first sorted by type and size by the workers at the port (fig.36), and then it is dispatched to the various companies located near the port. The industrial complexes of Muara Baru and Muara Angke serve the purpose to process fish in order to obtain a complete industrial product from raw fish, operating a transition from material quality of the environment to cultural product. This is something that was still unheard of around thirty years ago, when most of the port workers were kids, and it is part of the external interventions that altered the material qualities of the environment. For these communities, working with the sea thus became a matter of processing, a matter of turning what nature provides into a finished product designed by a company. It is no wonder, therefore, that most workers in Muara Baru are employed at the section of the industrial complex called "*proses*", which involves processing fish in various ways, such as

cleaning, cooking, or seasoning it. One of my key informants in Muara Baru is employed at the *proses* section of a local company, with the task of cleaning fish from its entrails and supervising cooking in large ovens. Another common section where many local residents are employed is the section called "*kastorit*" a peculiar loanword from English "cold storage", that locals use to identify industrial buildings where fish is sorted, packed and stored in freezers before they are sent to processing points (fig.37). Here workers unload frozen fish from trucks coming directly from the port, they drag it and sort it using a big hook-shaped tool, and they store it into boxes that are then placed within large freezers.

Both jobs at *proses* and *kastorit* are mechanical and repetitive, as it is typical of jobs in industrial fields. This means that every day, locals at Muara Baru and Muara Angke spend large portions of their time interacting with fish, and naturally develop knowledge about it, being able to distinguish each type of fish that one can find at the port, and that populate the surrounding waters. This knowledge is manifested primarily in the material and visual qualities of fish, such as colour, shape, or characteristics of fins, eyes, and teeth. Being able to recognize various kinds of fish is an ability that I found only among residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, signifying their deeper knowledge of the marine environment.

It is to be noted, however, that urban development determined a change in the type of knowledge that these communities have. As it was highlighted in the previous chapter, fish as a material quality of the environment changed from being living and abundant fish living in these waters, to frozen fish coming out of large boats. With the expansion of coastal urban settlements and of industrial fishing, water pollution levels increased greatly and fish started disappearing from coastal waters. Independent fishermen thus found it more and more difficult to find enough fish to cover the costs of fishing, rendering their job no longer economically sustainable. These fishermen thus gradually disappeared, especially from Muara Baru, where access to the sea is more difficult and the presence of the industry is very strong. Some of them kept their boat and turned into sea-plastics collectors, gathering and selling plastics that infest coastal waters in order to get an income, but the vast majority of them was simply substituted by a large amount of informal workers who are employed at various sectors of the fishing industry (interview with a resident of Kampung Bau #4, 21 March 2023). Therefore, while there is still widespread knowledge of the marine environment, nowadays this is leaning more and more towards a knowledge conveyed through frozen fish and pollution of the waters than through a direct contact with a living ecosystem. For example, some fishermen reported to have found various coloured muds along the coast, especially near construction sites of reclamation islands (Adharani *et al*. 2019: 5), while others explained about the evolution of the colour of the waters, which turned from being blue to be increasingly grey-brownish (interview with residents of Kampung Bau #2 #5, 16 March – 21 March 2023). Some locals in Muara Baru also claimed that nowadays there is less fish compared to earlier times, which results in a lack of job opportunities and makes it harder to find an occupation. These phenomena offer a glimpse into an interesting evolution of the ways in which communities that present a close relationship with the environment develop knowledge of the environment. It is a kind of knowledge strongly represented by the presence of a seawall, which determines separation between humans and the sea, and in which knowledge is no longer direct. Instead, it is a filtered knowledge, as the material qualities that convey it mostly reach human communities when they are already altered, such as the frozen fish or the polluted waters.

In order to illustrate this shift in the type of environmental knowledge that characterizes these people, it is useful to briefly describe the life parable of two long-term residents of Muara Baru. The first is Pak Hasan, a talkative and outgoing man in his fifties, who showed particular interest in my research and became one of my key informants. Pak Hasan was born on another island in eastern Indonesia, but he moved to Jakarta when he was still a kid, joining the multi-ethnic community of what was still a growing Muara Baru in an early stage of development. As an immigrant young man, Pak Hasan did several jobs in the area of the port of Sunda Kelapa, when the fishing port of Muara Baru was still under construction. He repaired boats, unloaded goods and fish, or sorted them in the warehouses. At this stage, the coast of Jakarta was still relatively underdeveloped, stuck in the imaginary of the backyard of the city, and the life of coastal communities was really different, with a smaller naval traffic limited to the traditional non-motorized boats of the fishermen and trade boats for small-scale trade on national or regional level. Perhaps because he was not born in a coastal community, Pak Hasan has strangely always feared the waters, mainly out of respect for the spirits dwelling in it. He avoided

swimming, for example, but every day he would go to work from his house in front of the sea directly by rowing boat. The area next to Sunda Kelapa that is today an enclosed body of water was still open at the time, and it was common for residents to traverse it by rowing boat. At this age, Pak Hasan learned to meet and know the sea, the currents and the winds. As his body and muscles struggled every morning and evening to lead the boat to his workplace and back, he learned to feel the sea in each row, feeling the response of the sea in his own body, in the strength he had to unleash from his muscles while rowing. Sometimes he had to challenge malevolent currents, other times he was gently accompanied by benevolent winds. These stories made the greatest impact when listened while observing the present state of the area where Pak Hasan used to live: cut away from the houses because of the tall seawall, the portion of sea he once traversed every day is now a silent, still body of water surrounded by dams. The rowing boats have disappeared, and nobody can cross it anymore because of the new infrastructures and the presence of the industrial port. In fact, as investments started targeting North Jakarta and land begun sinking under the weight of development, more and more infrastructure was built to cut off residents from the sea. Some of these are actual infrastructures of separation, like seawalls, but others are infrastructures of connection, like port infrastructures, which enable trade connections, but also hinder maritime traffic for local residents. Thus locked within infrastructures, the people of Muara Baru lost much of their contact with the sea. This is no longer an open space to meet and to move through, but is merely the backyard of home, a small area where to perform reunification with waters, beyond which lays a space that is no longer the sea these people used to know. As the environment around him changed, Pak Hasan eventually followed the same fate of much of his fellow community members, and he found a job as a worker at the industrial complex, working at various *kastorit* points since then. He now goes to work by public transportation, getting to see the sea only when he visits the seawall after work. He does no longer know about the currents, the splashes of cool salty water on his hot skin, nor the strength required to direct a boat. That same sea has now turned into the water that every morning leaks from the seawall, flooding the swamps and sometimes reaching his house, while he now daily works with frozen fish, a distant reminiscences of the fish that once used to traverse the sea with him. Knowledge of sea currents and of how to cross a portion of sea turned into knowledge of flooded areas and of how to traverse them; knowledge of the sea as a living creature turned into knowledge of anatomical characteristics of frozen fish.

The second case is the story of Pak Ibnu, an old man in his sixties who was born and raised in Muara Baru, and who still works at sea. As a local since birth, Pak Ibnu witnessed the profound changes that affected the area in the last few decades. Since birth, he lived right next to the sea, thus his life has always been at sea. As a young man, Pak Ibnu started sailing when he bought a broken boat for a cheap price. He repaired it by himself and started working as an independent fisherman, just him with his boat and a fishing net. He sailed at night and came back in the morning with abundant fish to make a living. One day, as he was sailing, he met a Chinese man who offered him to work as a crew member on his fishing boat. Judging the prospect of a regular wage safer than being an independent fisherman, Pak Ibnu accepted the offer, and for a few years he experienced being a crew member and collecting larger quantities of fish. At that time industrial fishing was not yet developed, so Pak Ibnu would not spend more than a couple days at sea. As the business started switching, however, his employer invested in a large boat for industrial fishing, and Pak Ibnu, unsure with the prospect of having to spend months at sea and leave his family on land, decided to go back to being an independent fisherman. Times, however, had changed, and the development of North Jakarta had already affected the seascape, with terrible consequences for its ecosystem. As stated by Pak Ibnu: "before it felt like there was no limit to money and we lived well. I just had to sail, throw my net into the sea, and I would catch enough fish to make one million rupiah, then as time passed by it became more and more difficult to reach one ton of fish per week". As the colour of the sea turned grey, large buildings appeared along the coast, seawalls and dikes were constructed, and more land was reclaimed, fish started disappearing from the waters of the Jakarta Bay. This is why, three years ago, Pak Ibnu made the decision to switch from being a fisherman to collect plastics from the ocean. Indeed, the problem of plastics in the sea became a major problem for coastal Jakarta in the past twenty years, as in the worst periods plastics completely covered the sea and were so thick that boats had trouble passing through. Pak Ibnu receives money from foreign donors who fund programs for the cleaning of oceans, a wage far superior than the money he could make with the few fish he managed to collect. Therefore, he also had to adapt and his knowledge changed, from knowledge of the open seas, living fish and the

behaviour of each species, to knowledge of pollutants, plastics, and places of collection of trash. The same sea that provided abundant fish now only provides plastic, forcing Pak Ibnu to develop a new, filtered knowledge of the sea.

Figure 38. The waterfront area of Kampung Bau, once located directly next to open sea, it is now flanked on both sides by reclaimed land, while also being enclosed by a dike for flood mitigation on the front. Thus completely surrounded by infrastructures and cut off from the sea, it is impossible for local fishermen and seafarers to get direct access to the sea.

These communities, therefore, are not only seeking to reconnect with a new materiality of the environment, but they are also developing a new knowledge of it, based on the changing material qualities. In fact, while spending long time with informants, I had the chance to listen to them talking about fish very frequently. This happened both during activities involving fish, such as fishing or working at the industrial complex, and during moments of leisure. However, because for these people knowledge came mostly from frozen fish, such conversations were always about fish as food, or at most about their physical characteristics, and never about experiences with the living being. For example, during a break time from work, a group of men at a *kastorit* discussed what kind of fish and what part of that fish is suitable for what kind of recipe. In another case, my key informant approached two men fishing at Waduk Pluit. They were catching a type of fish called *sembilang*, so he discussed with them about the differences between this and another similar kind called *lele*. They then talked about the beneficial properties of *sembilang* as a food, how it is healthy and how it is used in Chinese medicines. Moreover, during some free time at the *gang*, a group of men in Marlina were discussing the best technique to cook a certain type of fish.

Interestingly, this kind of knowledge relative to working with fish is not strictly confined to North Jakarta. In fact, while following an informant tasked to deliver fish from Muara Baru, I found that there are several *proses* points scattered around the city. We hopped on a small truck loaded with frozen fish and we departed from one of the kastorit in Muara Baru, embarking on a long journey through the traffic of Jakarta, just when a heavy storm was bearing down on the city. After five hours of driving around the city, we had delivered fish to four different *proses* points, one in Central Jakarta, three in West Jakarta. Unlike those in Muara Baru, these are less industrial and more artisanal points, especially those in West Jakarta, and they are intended for the local market (fig.39). The relevant aspect for the purpose of this thesis is that pockets of the local cultures of

Muara Baru and Muara Angke were found in other areas of the city, in this case relative to knowledge from working with fish. Indeed, these "dislocated" *proses* points had the same functions of those observed in Muara Baru and Muara Angke, even though with non-industrial methods, and its workers appeared to have the same knowledge displayed by coastal workers when interrogated about fish. This shows how urban development and evolution of logistics caused a dispersion of certain aspects of coastal cultures, as certain material qualities of the sea such as frozen fish reaches far inland areas of Jakarta. Consequently, the borders of these cultures and communities are blurred, as it can be questioned that these people living in inland areas are also somewhat part of the communities of Muara Baru or Muara Angke, because they also work with the sea and, in certain aspects, possess the same kind of environmental knowledge.

Figure 39. A *proses* point in West Jakarta.

Figure 40. Artisanal production of *ikan asin* in Muara Angke.

Even though most work is done with frozen fish, knowledge is conveyed also through other means. First, there are some exceptions also in the field of fishing industry. In the heavily industrialized Muara Baru these are limited to the fresh fish one can find at the local fish market, but in Muara Angke they are more common, due to the absence of a seawall and the presence of more independent fishermen. These people continue practicing fishing in a traditional way, sailing at night and coming back in the morning. Large portions of the fish they catch is employed in the local artisanal production of *ikan asin*, one of the backbones of Muara Angke's economy (fig.40). In this case, the material qualities of the sea are not filtered, and there is still a more direct contact with the environment. The same can be said for activities like fishing or collecting mussels, for which locals get to pass the seawall and find that direct contact. These activities are a source of important knowledge for any coastal communities, because people learn about the functions of the various creatures and about which ones can be beneficial for them. For example, while following participants practicing fishing, I learned what types of fish can be found in shallow waters, which ones are good to be eaten, and what bait can be used to catch them. Also, when I joined participants collecting mussels in Muara Baru, I was told where I could find the prized *kerang hijau*, along with other types of mussels, and I learned how to distinguish the edible ones by observing their size, shape, and colour. These are all "beyond the seawall" activities in which contact with the environment and knowledge are direct, whereas in "behind the seawall" activities knowledge is filtered.

This kind of natural knowledge is interrelated with supernatural knowledge. In fact, many residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke navigate the natural environment through supernatural lenses, meaning that the "natural", or the material qualities of the environment, is never separated from a "supernatural" component. Thus, for example, sea currents are related to the presence of spirits, just as sea creatures are associated to supernatural beings called *ghoib*, and it is not always clear when a fish or another creature is just an ordinary animal or it may be a *ghoib*. The combination of natural and supernatural knowledge helps these people navigate the surrounding environment and negotiating daily life matters with it, establishing a set of rules that have to be followed in order to maintain a relationship with the environment. Because this theme is tightly connected to the subjectivity of these people, it will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

5.2 Place-making and the sea aesthetics: knowledge in the sociality by the sea

Homes in Pantai Mutiara look even larger from the inside. Sitting at a big table, I take a look at the many foods prepared by a local family that invited me to their house for lunch. There are all sorts of delicacies, ranging from salads to beef stew, from rice rolls to fish soup, from sautéed noodles to banana cakes. Turning my gaze upward, I am amazed by the wide open-space that constitutes the entrance to this house, with a six-metre tall glass wall facing the inner garden and the swimming pool. Seeing the bright azure water, I try to direct the conversation towards themes related to the sea and floods, but I do not get a positive response. The man in front of me cuts it quickly: "I do not know about the sea or anything like that to be honest. I'm a former doctor, not a marine biologist. We just want to enjoy our retirement here". He laughs brightly as if amused by my questions, when his wife suddenly jumps into the conversation, raising her index finger: "But! If you want to know when a high tide is coming, just see the cockroaches. When you see them around in large numbers it means they are running up to escape rising waters!"

In the wealthy areas of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, knowledge of the environment did not emerge as a significant element. All residents I worked with simply lived there to enjoy their life in an area marked as prestigious, but they did not have much information to share about the environment that surrounds them. The short conversation I described above sums up the general attitude that these people had when I asked about their knowledge of the sea. Mostly, they appeared confused and amused, as if I had not understood that they were not the right people to ask such questions. The only exception came from residents of Pantai Mutiara, who, either occasionally or prompted during interviews, shared some anecdotes about their experience of floods, thus sharing knowledge relative to their own experience.

With time, I came to see how what they intended as knowledge of the environment was actually knowledge of the built environment. In fact, because of the transformation of the sea into luxury product, in high-income areas the natural environment is translated into the built environment. By such "translation", I mean that certain characteristics of the natural environment, in this case everything that is associated to the sea, are transferred to the built environment in several ways, such as space layout, employment of environmental material qualities associated to the sea, naming of places, or specific designs. In this way, the built environment comes to be associated and connected to the sea, generating an interesting case in which it is the built environment, rather than local communities, to be connected to the sea. Thus, the kind of knowledge that residents seem to have developed, is a peculiar sensitivity for a "sea aesthetic" and for the ways in which the built environment is structured. For example, several residents apply, in their private spaces, the same design strategies that can be found in public places like cafes or malls. As explained in the previous chapter, these businesses take the material qualities of the environment, separating them from their natural context in order to domesticate them. In the same way, local people design their home in a way that connects their private space to the natural environment, for example designing gardens with sand and plants, and with an extensive use of water, in either fishponds, small waterfalls, or swimming pools. This kind of knowledge also extends beyond the boundaries of one's house, as many residents have very strong opinions on how the surrounding area should be designed and developed for the maximization of enjoyment. This is especially true in Pantai Mutiara, where each

resident can independently design his/her own house, and where there is more space for intervention in the built environment. For example, residents may agree or disagree with certain new developments in the area, and they may promote infrastructural changes according to their own liking. The most clear example in this sense is the construction of the eastern seawall of Pantai Mutiara, which was funded and designed by the residents themselves, and constructed with a wide walkway on its top, so that residents could still enjoy the sea view and walking by the sea, thus maximizing the aspect of enjoyment.

Therefore, rather than knowledge about the natural environment, it was knowledge about the built environment that emerged as important in these wealthy areas, both by residents and, indirectly, developers. Through this knowledge the built environment is constructed to be associated to the natural environment, but how does this concretely happen? Mainly through a set of practices of place-making, which can be defined as "[t]he process of transforming abstract space into concrete, meaningful place" (de Koning and Jaffe 2022: 27). In this case, through place-making, meanings are associated to specific spaces, turning them into places that translate natural environment into built environment. The first of these place-making practices is "discursive place-making", that is, to attribute meaning to a space by naming it or by sharing information on it through conversation, social media, or other means of communication (de Koning and Jaffe 2022: 29-30). Analysing the names of places, it is immediately evident that many are discursively associated to the sea. For example, Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju respectively mean "Pearl Beach" and "Flourishing Beach", indicating how the entire areas are immediately associated to the sea in their concept. Several local businesses also employ this form of discursive place-making, as, when analysing the names of these businesses, it is possible to find a multitude of sea-related terms, such as "ocean", "sea view", "beach", "blue", "cove", "bay", or other names relative to species of fish. Finally, residential complexes, apartments and malls also frequently present sea-related names, such as the famous "Regatta" complex, the "Marina Tower" apartment, the "Gold Coast" apartment, the "Greenbay" apartment, the "By the Sea" mall or the "Baywalk" mall.

Figure 41. The Greenbay complex, resembling a large cruise ship.

Figure 42. The Regatta complex, resembling a series of sailboats.

51

Other means of discursive place-making are meanings created and shared on social media, such as the Instagram posts discussed in the previous section. For instance, posts related to Cove at Batavia PIK, in Pantai Maju, are mostly relative to social gatherings, cafes, photos by the sea, or the subject posing in front of the sea or a local store. This associates a meaning of exclusive leisure, sociality, aspirational consumption, and enjoyment, making Pantai Maju an ideal place to go shopping and food hunting or to open a business in the collective imaginary. Posts relative to Ancol Beach, instead, mostly portray groups of friends having fun at the beach; scenes of families with kids playing in the water; people relaxing under the shade of palms; groups having a picnic at the beach; or the subject posing by the sea. This associates the place to an idea of fun, relax, vacation, and family times, thus constructing Ancol Beach as a suitable place to spend a weekend afternoon, to have fun with friends, to relax, or as a good vacation spot and kids-friendly place. Moving on to Pantai Mutiara, posts relative to the Regatta apartment complex show scenes of luxury; bright indoor spaces with view over the sea; an abundance of blue chromatic tones; and promotional messages like "Live Side by Side with The Sea" or "We Ensure your Daily Dose of Vitamin Sea". Regatta is thus associated to sea view, luxury, exclusivity, bright and wide spaces, and sea-related activities. In the collective imaginary, Regatta will be then perceived as a prestigious and luxurious residential complex with stunning views of the sea, and as an ideal location for a vacation home, with many possibilities for island hopping and watercraft experience.

Other than on social media, a large part of discursive place-making takes place in day-to-day conversations, when people exchange experiences and information that contribute to give meaning to spaces. I already mentioned, for example, that some business owners in Pantai Mutiara considered Pantai Maju to have taken the spot previously held by Pantai Mutiara as the top high-end destination in Jakarta for leisure and for housing. During interviews with residents of Pantai Mutiara, when asked about Pantai Maju, many interviewees highlighted that Pantai Maju is more business-oriented and ideal for those who want to live by the sea because of the flood-free environment. Many people also spoke of Pantai Mutiara as the best place to watch the sunset and associated these areas to water sports, seaside cafes, and sea views.

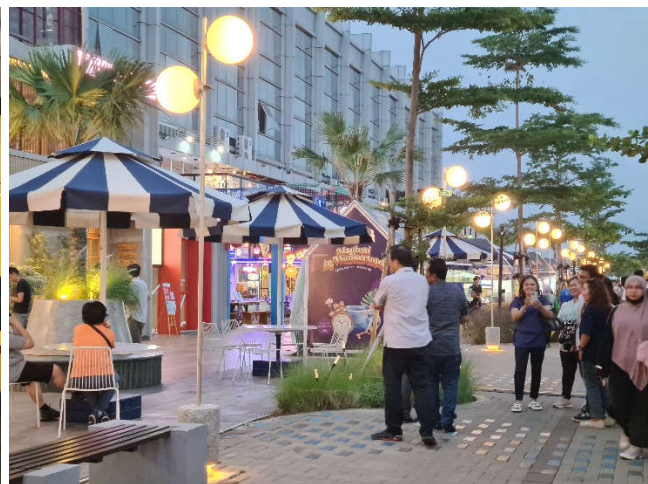**Figure 43.** The By the Sea Mall.   **Figure 44.** Beach umbrellas at Cove at Batavia.

Finally, another very important way of place-making in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol is aesthetics, which includes architecture, space layout, and overall design of spaces. Here, the purpose is to research a "sea aesthetics" that would make spaces immediately associated to the sea. Even more than other means of place-making, aesthetics is the means that most strongly generates the translation of the natural environment into the built environment, connecting the two in a sort of fusion. The clearest examples of such attempt to blur the boundaries between natural and built environment are the Greenbay and Regatta apartment complexes, which were designed to merge with the sea by resembling, respectively, a large cruise ship standing next to Jakarta (fig.41), and a series of sailboats sailing towards the high seas (fig.42). In the case of Greenbay, the Baywalk

mall constitutes the body of the ship, while the four apartment towers resemble the chimneys of the ship. On the other hand, the Regatta complex is made up of several towers, each resembling the sail of a sailboat, even with actual sails installed at the top of each tower. Both complexes are intended to be admired from the sea, as they are easily associated to a cruise ship and a series of sailboats when seen standing above the waters. However, even when seen from close distance on the land, their design is a clear association to the environment of the sea.

Other such elements of sea aesthetics can be observed inside cafes, restaurants, or malls. Here blue and white chromatic tones are often employed to form an association with the colour of the sea and the foam of waves. Moreover, an abundance of other elements related to the sea can be found, such as small bodies of water like pools or ponds; extensive use of sand; seashells; palms; elements typical of the seafaring culture; and design motifs with waves and fishes. In the By the Sea mall, for example, a series of white and blue drapes hangs from the ceiling filtering the light coming from above and giving a gentle light blue atmosphere to the entire place, while the alley is divided into two parts by an installation that alternates potted palms and small pools (fig.43). In an extreme example of sea aesthetic, a café near Pantai Mutiara presents a design that resembles a beach, with white and beige tones, decorations made from dry palm leaves or dry wood, and the entire floor covered with sand, just like on a real beach.

Finally, examples of place-making through sea aesthetics can be found in recreational spaces like Cove at Batavia or San Antonio Beach. Here the entire walkway is flanked by a series of beach umbrellas that strengthen association to the sea (fig.44), while, among all restaurants that employ a sea aesthetics, one stands out particularly as it is located on a boat (fig.45).
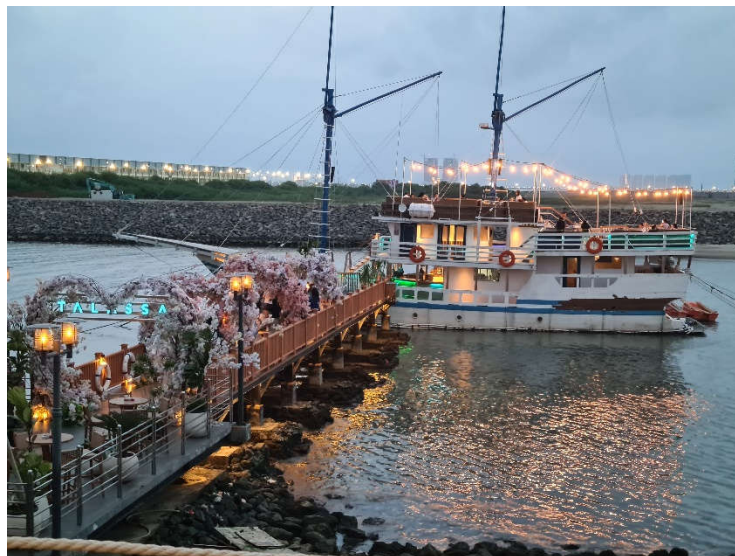

Figure 45. A restaurant located on a boat at San Antonio Beach.

These place-making strategies, coupled with the presence of exclusive cafes, stores, restaurants, and residential areas, strengthen the association between built environment, sea as natural environment, and luxury. Place-making also plays an important role in the relationship that these communities have with the sea, because it contributes to turn the sea into a luxury product by translating its qualities into the built environment through a luxurious aesthetic of the sea. In other words, the key difference with residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, is that, in high income areas, people do not go to waterfront locations because they are actually interested in establishing a contact with the sea, but, rather, because these places are perceived as interesting and connected to high status in virtue of practices of place-making that associate proximity to the sea to luxury and exclusivity.

VI Subjectivity

6.1 Being an *orang pesisir*: subjectivity in the sociality through the sea

While in Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol experience of the sea is visual and is all about aesthetics, the first experience of the sea one makes in Muara Baru is an olfactory experience. As soon as the motorbike carrying me crosses the bridge that separates Pantai Mutiara from Muara Baru and drops me in front of Kampung Gedung Pompa, I am overwhelmed by the fishy smell coming from the nearby fish market and the industrial complex. It is a thick smell that fills the salty air, a mix of fresh fish, seawater, and fish waste that is precisely the smell of this district. Every time I smell it I know I am in Muara Baru and the sea is close. Indeed, the sea is just a few metres away, behind the seawall that stands in front of Kampung Gedung Pompa. In front of me the road that leads into the *kampung* is wet and muddy because of the seawater that penetrates through micro cracks in the seawall, and I have to mind my steps if I do not want to slip. As I slowly proceed trying to avoid paddles, I look through the open door of one of the houses flanking the road, where I see a woman cooking a fish stew.

Fish, fish, fish. It is what people work with, what grants them a living, what they eat, what they trade. However, here it is also what people associate themselves to. The key informant that is accompanying me tells me that they are "*orang pesisir*", an expression that literally translates as "coastal people". But what does it mean to be an *orang pesisir*? Interestingly, the first thing my informant associates to being an *orang pesisir* is fish: "We are *orang pesisir*, we already smell like fish", he says. He also explains that they always bring fish as a gift for family or friends when they visit them, because this is what they have, this is what characterizes them. Thus, humans and fish are so tightly connected in Muara Baru and Muara Angke that some characteristics of the latter become part of the former. The smell that pervades these districts becomes part of their people; it becomes embodied in their own flesh, connecting humans and environment in an olfactory dimension, and blurring distinction between the two. Several participants in Muara Baru and Muara Angke commented about the smell of fish that characterizes the place and the people, sometimes pointing to the fact that they are so used to it that they do not feel it anymore. For example, when passing beside a canal where industrial fish waste was flowing, I started coughing uncontrolledly because of the terrible smell. My informant appeared confused at first, but then remembered that I am an outsider, commenting: "No wonder you cough. For us this is normal, we are so used to this smell that we already do not feel it anymore". Thus, the difference between the orang pesisir and the outsider was evident, as the former was one thing with the smell, while the latter was alien to it and could not stand it. The smell locals talk about is not simply that of fish or fish waste. Rather, it is a complete olfactory experience that includes seawater, fresh fish, fish waste, salt, and mud. Because the sea has disappeared behind the growing seawalls, it now manifests itself primarily through smell, thus, these people express their connection and identification with the sea especially through this particular sensorial experience: "We are *orang pesisir*, and we smell like fish".

The fact that communities of Muara Baru and Muara Angke call themselves "coastal people" is in itself a testament to how much they feel their subjectivity is related to the sea, and the connection between this subjective identification and the sensorial experience of fish smell is the way in which they make such identification concrete, as a bodily characteristic. However, being an *orang pesisir*, feeling that one's subjectivity is connected to the sea means much more than just smelling like fish.

The second affirmation relative to being an *orang pesisir* is that people always bring fish when they visit family or friends because this is what characterizes them. This was indeed widely observed both in Muara Baru and in Muara Angke. Fish that is brought as a gift is mostly frozen fish coming from the industrial complex, usually from a kastorit point. It is very common that workers take one or more fishes for themselves to bring back home, but this is rarely cooked at one's own household. Instead, it is used as a gift to share with friends, or when visiting relatives that live in other households. While it is not a strict rule that every visit should include bringing fish as a gift, it is quite common especially when meeting with a group of friends or when visiting

family members that live quite far away and that one does not meet often. For instance, in one occasion, after spending a day at the *kastorit* with a key informant, he took five frozen fishes and put them in a plastic bag. We then headed back to the *kampung* where we met a group of friends and gave the fish as a gift to be shared for dinner. The group quickly decided to roast it, and while some prepared the fire, others were mashing chilies and spices to make the seasoning, or cooking rice. In a very short time, the dinner was ready, and the fish we brought made for a beautiful moment of sociality with food being shared amid jokes and laughs. The next time, it will be someone else to bring fish to share.

This episode exemplifies the ways in which fish serves to maintain, strengthen, or even expand social relations in Muara Baru and Muara Angke. It is something that is considered unique of coastal people, as only they would bring fish as gift when visiting someone. Thus, for *orang pesisir*, fish is not just something that overlaps with their bodily characteristics, but also something that is inherent in the local social networks, that serves to maintain relationships and create sociality. The same thing can be said, on a wider level, of the fishing industry itself, which creates a complex social network that transcends *kampung* networks. Normally, life in Muara Baru and Muara Angke is characterized by scarce mobility, with most of the social life taking place within the single *kampung*. Each *kampung* has its own network, its own identity, and its own characteristics. What really keeps them together under a common Muara Baru/Muara Angke identity is their connection with the fishing industry, the fact they are coastal districts, inhabited by coastal people. In fact, because the vast majority of the population of these areas is employed within the fish industry, bonds that are created at the working place create a large cross-*kampung* network that really unifies these areas under a common sense of belonging. This was evident in several occasions when following informants to other *kampung* always meant that we were going to visit a friend from the *kastorit* or *proses*. This was one of the very few reasons to move out of one's *kampung*, and it was what really gave the idea of being within a large integrated community above the single *kampung*.

Finally, a distinctive characteristic of being an *orang pesisir*, which was not found out of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, was supernatural knowledge of the surrounding environment. While the supernatural is ever-present in Indonesia and beliefs in the supernatural are found in any segment of society, what characterizes people in these areas is a knowledge of the supernatural relative to their surrounding environment. In particular, I believe it is wrong to speak of a knowledge of the natural and a knowledge of the supernatural as two separate things, because, for those who possess this knowledge, these appear to be integrated into one single kind of environmental knowledge, with no distinction between the two. This kind of environmental knowledge that unites natural and supernatural, and that I will call "comprehensive environmental knowledge", is based on the idea that natural and supernatural are two sides of the same coin: when one looks at one side, the other cannot be seen, and vice versa, but there is no distinction between the two. Thus, for example, seawaters next to the eastern seawall of Muara Baru are just waters, but at the same time they are the dwelling place for local spirits capable of drowning people when offended; fish is just fish, but at the same time it is a vehicle for spirits to interact with humans; and certain buildings are just buildings, but at the same time they are the shrine of supernatural energies.

Through the integration between natural and supernatural, local people navigate the surrounding environment through a set of rules that establish specific boundaries. In other words, it is comprehensive environmental knowledge that determines what can and cannot be done within the environment. During daytime, the sea is open for everyone. Water is just water, fish is just fish, mussels are just mussels. Thus, people can freely connect with the waters, collect mussels, or practice fishing. However, at night, the "coin" flips and the sea is no longer a place for humans. In both Muara Baru and Muara Angke, I was told countless times not to go to the sea at night by practically everyone I talked to, but whenever I asked more information, people were reluctant to talk about it, as they admitted to be scared of those things. Mostly, they would simply point to the fact that it is dangerous, or that several accidents happened, such as people being dragged down to the bottom of the sea by spirits, or boats suddenly being set on fire. Many also warned me that, being an outsider, local spirits would not recognize me, and would thus be irritated in seeing me walking around in their home, violating their waters, their sand, and their fish. In their own way, participants tried to protect me by helping me to navigate the environment the same way that they do: the environment is not just empty materiality, as

we often consider it, but there is another side to it, and whenever we interact with it, we have to consider this other side. Thus, one cannot just walk around or swim carelessly wherever one wants, and one cannot just take everything as one pleases without being careful. In this sense, some people were more careful than others in their interaction with the environment. One of my key informants, for example, was very wary of getting too close to the waters, and every time he crossed the seawall or took something from the environment, he would say "*permisi, assalamualaikum*" in order to greet local spirits and ask them for permission to pass or take something.

Figure 46. The seawall in Muara Baru becoming deserted as night approaches.

Figure 47. Waduk Pluit by night, believed to be a "residence of spirits".

Some people also avoided entering places that are considered to have a particular supernatural energy. These are historical places, empty places, and abandoned places. An example of historical place is the lighthouse of Sunda Kelapa, an old white lighthouse built by the Dutch that used to be in the middle of the sea and that is now incorporated within the industrial complex of Muara Baru. This lighthouse is much shorter than it used to be because of land subsidence, and it is currently enshrined within a court, protected by the keeper of a nearby water pump. When I wanted to see this place, my informants refused to accompany me because they feared to irritate spirits. In this case, the fact that a place is historical means that it contains many memories and that it has a high chance of hosting leftover spiritual entities by the name of *jin qorin*. Secondly, an example of empty place is the unfinished apartment south of Muara Baru. Whenever I asked about the reason why this building was unfinished, respondents would try to quickly bypass the question, partly because they were unsure about the reason, and partly because, as they said, "empty places become homes for spirits", following the idea that emptiness must be filled by supernatural energy. Finally, an example of abandoned place is the famous Sinking Mosque. This place was presented to me since the first day as a "mystical place" (*tempat mistis*), involving the presence of spirits and supernatural energies. While the fact that this mosque is the only building still standing from a pre-existing waterfront settlement points to the idea that it is "protected by God", on the other hand, its status of abandonment and the fact it was reclaimed by waters makes it an ideal location for spirits. For my informants, this was a mystical place suspended between good and evil, and when, one evening, I was hanging around it, they forbid me to get too close, as night was quickly approaching and they felt they had a responsibility to protect me.

These supernatural aspects are not just abstract or "imaginary", as some would call them. Instead, they are very concrete in the life of these communities. Sometimes, the *ghoib* (supernatural creatures) take a concrete form through specific representations that locals share in their stories, like the giant white snake that is widely believed to reside in the waters around the Sinking Mosque. In most cases, however, *ghoib* are much more concrete, as it is believed that water creatures themselves may be *ghoib* that directly interact with humans. There are several examples of such cases, and it will be appropriate to report some of them. In the first story,

after a severe flood that occurred in Muara Baru in 2013, a large snake was seen emerging from the Waduk Pluit. This water reservoir is considered to be a "residence of spirits" (*istana ghoib*) by the people of Muara Baru, however, due to safety reasons, in that occasion the snake was captured by a local man and locked into a large bucket. The man reported repeatedly dreaming of the snake asking him to be set free, otherwise he would have soon taken his place. He believed the snake was the *ghoib* that caused flood, and then decided to let the snake go, and he could finally rest without nightmares. This and other similar stories made people believe that animals living in the Waduk Pluit or in the sea may in fact be *ghoib*, which is why whenever a large snake, lizard, or fish is captured nobody wants to buy it because they are scared of their real nature (interview with a resident of Gedung Pompa #2, 27 January 2023). In the second story, it was reported that the spirits that are believed to live in the waters of coastal Jakarta were repeatedly demanding for gifts and a sacrifice once a year, but these were never granted to them. In the end, when a group of kids playing in the sea disappeared never to be found again, this tragic event was attributed to the spirits dragging them to the depths of the sea (interview with a resident of Marlina #2, 5 February 2023). Finally, in the third story, a resident of Muara Baru recalled that he had once accidentally killed a *biawak*[13] while fishing by the sea. Later on, one of his friends got possessed by a *ghoib*, and he began threatening him saying that, had he not apologized to his son (supposedly the *biawak* he had killed), he would have taken his wife and children as a form of revenge (interview with a resident of Rusunawa, 4 March 2023).

As it can be noted from these examples, comprehensive environmental knowledge is something very present in the daily life of people. These stories refer to ideas such as releasing animals, respecting nature's spaces, and respecting boundaries with the sea, thus they all point to rules of interaction between humans and environment, on how to negotiate spaces and daily issues. These are the guidelines that people of these communities employ to navigate the environment and to interact with it on a daily basis. Among these communities, the environment is considered neither as something to be exploited and to work on, nor as a large ecosystem to protect, but, rather, as something alive that simply is there, that also contains humans, and that each person has to negotiate with on a daily basis. During my stay, I was also advised by my informants to pay attention to these matters and to always ask for the spirits' permission when I went to the sea or I walked around. At first, this seemed awkward and useless, but, gradually, I came to see how these people relate with the environment as with a living entity that is not inferior nor superior to humans, but that humans have to respect as one of the many natural and supernatural creatures that populate it.

These matters naturally lead to questions on ontology and on what is the environment for these people. Is the sea, together with its rocks, sand, and all water creatures ontologically different from what it is considered to be by other communities? Are we in front of a case of a different reality? This is a complex issue and it would be tempting to say that, in coastal communities like Muara Baru and Muara Angke, ontologies of the sea are indeed different, as the above mentioned examples on comprehensive environmental knowledge may indicate. However, first of all, it has to be noted that these communities are not isolated uniform blocks, and that they present a certain degree of internal difference. While the majority of people I spoke to did apply comprehensive environmental knowledge in their life, not every resident of Muara Baru and Muara Angke had such beliefs. In particular, educated youth like university students and some people in a position of power like RT leaders tended to dismiss these matters as superstitions. An RT leader in Marlina, for example, attributed the disappearance of kids in the sea to the fact that they dive from high positions and sea currents are too strong (interview with an RT leader in Marlina #1, 25 January 2023). In this case, the RT leader simply applies a natural knowledge about sea currents, whereas those who employ comprehensive environmental knowledge believe there is another supernatural side to the simple natural aspect of sea currents. Thus, they explain the fact that currents were there in that particular moment and had that particular effect through the idea of spirits living in the sea. Also, when I interviewed a local university student, the response was that there are indeed many stories about spirits, and that, also in Islam, the idea is that humans live together with creatures that cannot be seen by naked eye. However, it is better not to think about it and just be rational (interview with a resident of Kampung Bau #3, 6 February 2023). Moreover, what makes it the most problematic to talk about

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[13] An aquatic giant lizard, very common in this area.

a different ontology is that, probably because these communities are internally diverse and exposed to various worldviews, even many of the people who apply comprehensive environmental knowledge admit that believing in spirits is a matter of what one wants to see, and that in the end it all depends on each person's mind. Such a claim is clearly not compatible with the definition of a different ontology, which is identified by actually different realities, and not just by mere opinions and by "what one wants to see". Thus, while comprehensive environmental knowledge does seem to be related to a different ontological stance, the status of this stance is at least dubious and somewhat weak, as its boundaries are blurred.

What is evident, instead, is that through their identification as *orang pesisir*, their association with fish, their network centred on exchanging fish and the fishing industry, and the coexistence between comprehensive environmental knowledge and natural knowledge, the subjectivity of these people is strongly connected to the sea, identifying a close relationship with it.

6.2 Living in the brand: subjectivity in the sociality by the sea

Walking along the northernmost embankment of Pantai Mutiara, where a new reclamation project has turned a mangrove forest into solid land, it is easy to imagine why this used to be such a pleasant place, with the gentle and fresh sea breeze, and the delightful scent coming from the sea. Unfortunately, the only memories of such good times are the dry branches of the trees that have been cut down and are now abandoned on the red dusty land that will serve as the base for the a new incoming hotel. "What about the hotel when this new land will also start sinking?" I ask. Quite understandably, all the old woman that guides me can say is "I have no idea! This is what they do!" Ironically, we can already see some seawater leaking from the embankment, turning the red earth into a clay-like mud. Beyond there is only the sea with the silhouette of the Thousand Islands archipelago at the horizon, but this is only for now. Maybe it is just yet another frontier for new reclamation?

Figure 48. New reclamation project in Pantai Mutiara for the construction of a luxury hotel.

Figure 49. Massive development taking place in Pantai Maju for the construction of new residential clusters.

Living in an area like Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, or Ancol means to be continuously exposed to development, building, and modification of the built environment around one's place. This is what residents of the newly built Pantai Maju have not had the time to appreciate yet, but that residents of decades old Pantai Mutiara know very well by now. As it has been argued in the previous chapters, developers adopt a series of strategies to present the sea as a luxury product through practices of place-making and the research of a sea aesthetics. The

obtained product is the main feature that drives sales of residential units and attracts business investments in the area, but, in order to work well, the entire package needs to come under a brand. This is why Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol are first of all a brand, with their own website, logo, concept, and promotional strategies. A necessary characteristic for every brand that aims to thrive in the capitalist market is the necessity to evolve and change in order to keep up with the times, to attract new customers, and to increase profit. Thus, just like any other brand, Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju and Ancol also have to evolve, opening investments for new businesses like cafes, restaurants, malls or other facilities, and for new development projects such as new land reclamation in Pantai Mutiara (fig.48) or new residential complexes in Pantai Maju (fig.49).

Unlike what happens for residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, who directly live within their surrounding environment, residents of Pantai Mutiara, Pantai Maju, and Ancol primarily live within a brand, and then within the surrounding environment. The brand thus acts like a sort of bubble, separating people from the environment. Concretely, this means that infrastructures and the layout of the built environment in general, specifically constructed to represent a well-planned brand strategy, force a certain kind of relationship with the surrounding environment, filtering what can and cannot be done, and the interactions between the sea and human communities. Because it has such a powerful role, the brand is what local people feel connected to, and the reason that ties them to that specific space. Residents of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, in fact, choose to live in these areas not because of the sea itself, but because of the comfort and prestige that are associated to it. Thus, also on a subjectivity level, between these people and the sea there is always a gap occupied by the brand, by the concepts of luxury and exclusivity. As a matter of fact, for none of the interviewees in these areas there emerged a significant sense or connection with the sea on a subjective level. Instead, every reference to the sea was always filtered by aspects relative to the brand. For example, a woman who has been living in Pantai Mutiara for twelve years explained the reasons that pushed her to buy a house in this area as follows:

> "It is just because Pantai Mutiara is an elite area. As you can see, the place is really cosy and it is one integrated complex, whereas elsewhere it is not. So in the end, since we are looking for comfort and a relaxed atmosphere, here it is actually good because it is a premium area, so I bought a land here. […] I don't even really like the sea, but we have been to the islands a few times. So in front of here we have a quay that we can use to go to the islands, but I've never done any activity there." (Interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #1, 18 February 2023)

This fragment is exemplifying of what was the general attitude of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju residents towards the surrounding environment. The reason for them to live on the coast is not because of any particular sentiment towards the sea, but because of the prestige related to the area and constructed by the brand. Moreover, it can be noticed how experience of the sea is filtered by the activities and infrastructures that are part of the brand "Pantai Mutiara", in this case island hopping and the integration between house and quay to freely sail the seas. The words that were most used to describe what residents were looking for when they bought a house in these areas were "prestigious", "elite", "comfort" (*kenyamanan*), "tranquillity" (*ketenangan*), "safety" (*keamanan*), and "privacy", indicating how they were looking for specific characteristics that were advertised by developers and that are part of the branded construction of each area. In particular, each resident presented a different nuance of what he/she was looking for, but all of them pointed to the brand rather than to the environment itself, be it because of good view of the sea, facilities and comfort, privacy and isolation from the hustle and bustle of the city, or luxury and exclusivity of the place.

Another interesting fragment came from a man who has been living in Pantai Mutiara for thirteen years, who explained his reason to live in this area as follows:

> "We are used to live on the coast (*kita terbiasa hidup di pesisir*), by the sea. So we like that the air here is not too polluted. Before I moved here I also lived in East Ancol, and it's just the same, East Ancol is also quite safe and peaceful." (Interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #3, 11 March 2023)

After hearing these words, I instinctively connected them to what my key informant in Muara Baru told me about his identity: "We are coastal people (*kita orang pesisir*), and we smell like fish". On a subjectivity level, it is immediately evident how "we are coastal people" expresses an identity value in which there is a direct

connection between the people and the coast. This is especially clear in the Indonesian language, in which the word *pesisir* (coast) directly follows *orang* (person, people) as its determinant, highlighting a direct connection in which the latter noun determines the former. On the other hand, "we are used to live on the coast" does not imply the same identity value, as it simply highlights that the subject happens to live in a certain place, but could be living elsewhere as well. An *orang pesisir* lives by the coast because his/her identity is necessarily related to the sea, whereas for residents of wealthy Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, they simply happen to live by the coast because they chose it in virtue of specific characteristics they were looking for, and that are related to a branded representation of the place. What follows these affirmations is also significant. As argued in section 7.1, by saying "we smell like fish", the resident of Muara Baru is establishing more than just a connection with the sea, a penetration of the materiality of the environment within the bodies of local people. On the other hand, the resident of Muara Baru refers to the air quality of the coast, pointing to an element of the environment from which he can gain benefit, then mentioning how the place is safe and peaceful, which are again characteristic derived from a specific construction of the space.

Figure 48. View of private quays with docked yachts in Pantai Mutiara.

Finally, I found it interesting how residents in Pantai Mutiara referred to activities related to the sea. Out of thirteen interviews conducted with residents of Pantai Mutiara, all of them considered these activities as pure leisure, to be practiced for fun, relaxation, or as a hobby. For six of them, however, there emerged a certain enmity towards activities like fishing, watercraft riding, or even *ngecafe*. This is because they considered them as disturbing the overall peace of the environment, either because they generate noise or because they ruin the sea view. In this respect, one of the interviewees firmly and vehemently stated that "this is not a resort", highlighting how, in her perception, these sea-related activities are limited to the sphere of vacation and pure leisure, and should not be performed in a residential area (interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #3, 27 February 2023). This statement leads to two considerations. First, this once again implies a gap between these people and the environment, because they consider a more active kind of relationship with the sea to be bound to the context of a vacation (thus as a product), and not for everyday life. Second, all of these interviewees are, significantly, long-term residents who have been living in Pantai Mutiara for over fifteen years. By opposing these activities, they are showing subjective attachment to what the brand of Pantai Mutiara used to be before it started evolving, that is a brand centred on privacy, tranquillity, and sea view.

Attachment to the brand emerged as the main feature for the theme of subjectivity among residents of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju. In particular, the case of Pantai Mutiara was especially interesting because, being it a relatively old district, some residents (mainly those who have been living in Pantai Mutiara for a long time) opposed its evolution, showing attachment to the previous model of brand, while others (mainly relatively new

residents) approved the new services, showing attachment to the new model of brand. In order to illustrate this conflict relative to attachment to brand, I will present the story of Ibu Hana, a retired woman who has been living in Pantai Mutiara for over thirty years. Ibu Hana moved in when the district was still brand new, fresh from reclamation. She was looking for a place that offered privacy and tranquillity, but that would still be well connected to the city, as needed for a woman in career like her, and the new district concept embodied by Pantai Mutiara perfectly fit her requirements. She had her house built according to her own like, over one of the canals in the northern blocks, with a garden, a pond, and a swimming pool. Here, she lived the last years of her career life, and she is now spending her retirement. For years, she has been enjoying the view over the canal and long walks by the sea just next to her house, she has been sailing to go to the Thousand Islands with her husband, and she has been enjoying the peacefulness of this district, far away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. Then, as the years passed by, she noticed the level of the water rising slowly but inexorably. Together with her neighbours, Ibu Hana raised the concerns of residents of Pantai Mutiara, trying to get response from the government. However, as seawalls were being built in Muara Baru, the government could not intervene in Pantai Mutiara, because the area is still a property of the development company Intiland. Just like many other countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has been building its infrastructural project following a procurement system known as BOT (build-operate-transfer), which does not require expenditure of public money. According to this model, a sponsor that wants to realize a project, in this case the Indonesian government, entrusts a private company, in this case Intiland, to carry out its realization, from the design to the building. The sponsor leaves the property of the project to the private company for a certain time, usually between twenty and thirty years, so that the company can cover the costs of construction and gain a profit, before transferring property to the sponsor (Tam 1999: 377). Because Pantai Mutiara is the project of an entire district built on reclaimed land, and because Intiland also conducted land reclamation, in this case Intiland actually owns the land on which Pantai Mutiara sits, thus the Indonesian government cannot intervene on this area. Ibu Hana and other local residents therefore tried to reach the management by Intiland, but with scarce results. Left with no other option, she and other residents called for the construction of the Great Garuda Seawall, and they had to fund infrastructural projects to mitigate sea level rise. These were first of all projects within her own house, such as private water pumps and the construction of an embankment in front of her garden, which she already raised three times; and secondly projects for the entire community, such as the eastern seawall of Pantai Mutiara. Finally, faced with the issue of increasingly frequent floods, Intiland also built a modest seawall in western Pantai Mutiara. What the development company seemed more interested in, however, was continuous development of the area to increase profits. In fact, Ibu Hana witnessed several facilities for the residents being torn down to make space for new businesses open to the public, thus suddenly the tennis court where she used to go play disappeared, alongside with the swimming pool and other social spaces for local residents. At the same time, restaurants, cafes, and other businesses popped up along the waterfront street, with the sole effect, according to Ibu Hana, to disturb the quiet environment and hinder the view of the sea. In her own words:

> "I'm disappointed, yes. In the end, it turned out that all the promises that were made by the developer were not fulfilled. This environment is actually made to make living more comfortable, and people who buy here are people who can buy and think in the long term, figure out a future here. But people who are business-minded turned this place into a touristy spot, renting boats and watercraft, or opening restaurants that are often noisy. Want it or not every weekend they are going to make a party. But for us residents it's difficult to complain because they do have permission from the developer."

What Ibu Hana was witnessing was simply the evolution of the brand Pantai Mutiara, from peaceful district that grants privacy and comfort, to touristy area filled with cafes and spots to enjoy the sunset. Ironically, the same kind of branding of the sea that attracted her and other early residents in the first days of Pantai Mutiara, is also at the root of the booming of new businesses in this area. Unfortunately for her and other long-time residents, the situation is only going to get worse, as new projects for the construction of another waterfront street on the eastern side and a new five-stars hotel on reclaimed land are under construction. Thus, Ibu Hana shows attachment to the brand that Pantai Mutiara used to embody when she moved in, and she now has to face current changes, just as residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke have to face changes of the sea and

the ways they are connected to it. It is interesting to notice that, in her fierce statement, when Ibu Hana talks about "environment" (*lingkungan*), she refers to the built environment, to Pantai Mutiara as a district, rather than to the natural environment as residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke did. This use of the term "environment" was found in all interviews with residents of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, pointing to the fact that they first feel connected to the built environment, and then, indirectly, to the natural environment only as an ecological matter.

Therefore, what emerged from these interviews is that, while the subjectivity of residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke is intimately connected to the sea as environment, in the case of residents of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju there is a gap between them and the environment intended as natural environment. Instead, their subjectivity is more related to the brand of the built environment and to the characteristics it seeks to express. These are, for example, prestige and exclusivity, which residents aim to reflect in their own subjectivity.

6.3 Beyond fixed socialities?

In these chapters, I illustrated two different types of relationship with the environment as different "socialities" that take place between human communities and the sea, associating them to different communities of North Jakarta based on observed activities, recurrence of these activities, and information shared during interviews. I once again highlight that these results reflect a tendency within the populations of different areas, and that are not representative of the entire population. However, during my fieldwork, it appeared clear that the communities I worked with presented distinct types of relationship with the sea, and I hope I have demonstrated it in these chapters. Thus, the question that emerged is: because the brand structure of newly developed areas promotes a certain type of relationship with the sea, is it possible for a person to change type of sociality when moving to a different coastal area? For example, would a "true" *orang pesisir* from Muara Baru change his relationship with the sea when visiting Pantai Maju?

In order to answer this question, I asked participants questions about visiting other areas of North Jakarta, and I found that these are scarcely integrated. Simply put, residents of low-income areas like Muara Baru and Muara Angke tend not to visit high income areas like Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju, and vice versa. Residents of Pantai Mutiara and Pantai Maju mostly explain this in terms of safety, describing the neighbouring areas of Muara Baru and Muara Angke as "troubled" (*rawan*), thus causing a sense of fear and unsafety for them. Such sense of unsafety is related on one hand to the prevalent different ethnicity, which causes Chinese-Indonesians from high-income areas to feel as a minority and therefore in danger, and on the other hand to fear of "riots" related to the perceived social inequality between these areas. Interestingly, when asked what neighbouring areas he usually visits, an interviewee from Pantai Mutiara framed his answer in terms of development, explaining that he does not visit Muara Baru because the area is "relatively underdeveloped" (*belum terlalu berkembang*). Overall, the presence of a different sociality makes these people feel that, in areas like Muara Baru and Muara Angke, there is no activity to do that suits them, as one of their most common remarks about visiting these places was "what for would we go there?" Indeed, in a sociality through the sea scheme, there is a lack of services and infrastructure, and the aspects of enjoyment and exclusivity that these people look for in their leisure time are completely missing.

Residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke, on the other hand, perceive wealthy areas as alien worlds that they are unable to navigate. The clearest example of this took place when a key informant in Muara Baru told me he was reluctant to visit me at an apartment in Pluit because he did not know how to act in such a context and he felt uncomfortable. Overall, among these communities, there is a widespread sentiment of "not belonging" to high-income areas, even when these are open to the public and not exclusively residential. Residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke explained that they do not need much for their free time, as simply sharing roasted fish, having a coffee and a cigarette at the *warung*, or chatting in front of home or at the seawall is enough for them, while places like Pantai Maju or Ancol feel like another world to them. This feeling was

increased by a process of social exclusion that was carried out in these districts to keep low-income communities and their sociality through the sea far away. For example, in the past, residents of Muara Baru used to go to the main boulevard of Pantai Mutiara and sit on the seawall to enjoy the sunset, practice fishing or dive in the sea. For them, this is what they call a "tourism place" (*tempat wisata*), that is, a place to have fun with family or friends while escaping one's routine. This spot in Pantai Mutiara was really suitable due to the easy accessibility of the waters and the perfect view of the sunset. Complaints by local residents, however, led to the prohibition to practice fishing or to sit on the seawall, and to limitations for visitors who want to access the area, turning it into a gated area patrolled 24/7 by a security service. In the end, it was Waduk Pluit that became the most popular "tourism place" for residents of Muara Baru (interview with a resident of Pantai Mutiara #1-#9, 18 February 2023-20 March 2023).

Two surveys conducted in Ancol Beach and Pantai Maju on a sample of 100 individuals for each[14] confirmed that most visitors come from wealthy areas. In Ancol Beach, none of the respondents came from a low-income coastal area in which sociality through the sea would be dominant. However, nine respondents came from non-coastal low-income areas. The majority of visitors came from wealthy South Jakarta (37 respondents) or from other areas of Indonesia (42 respondents). In Pantai Maju, there was a more local type of tourism, with the majority of visitors coming from nearby wealthy areas of North Jakarta such as PIK, Pantai Mutiara or Pluit (45 respondents), and a large number of local residents (33 respondents). Here, two families were found from Muara Angke, and one from Muara Baru, all of which had little kids and explained their visit as a special day to let their kids have fun. These results give an idea of the type of visitors that usually attend these areas and to which the model of sociality by the sea caters, suggesting that these spaces are not attractive for the majority of people that live in a sociality through the sea model.

Obviously, the fact that residents of low-income areas avoid places like Pantai Maju or Ancol is also due to an economic factor, as these are expensive destinations specifically thought for the needs of the upper and middle classes. Ancol, in particular, cannot be accessed without paying the expensive entrance ticket; and the costs of services, food and activities are beyond the possibilities of the average salary of residents of Muara Baru and Muara Angke. Expensive costs, however, are not the only reason for these people to avoid a visit, because it would be technically possible, at least for Pantai Maju, to go by motorbike and just hang around, without necessarily having to buy something or engage in costly activities. This, however, rarely happens because these people feel uninterested with the activities and unsuited to the context, implying that they do feel a sense of discomfort due to the different type of context and sociality. The exception to this trend came mostly from youth like university students or young workers, mostly aged twenty to thirty, who occasionally do organize visits to coastal recreational places like Pantai Maju or PIK 2. Having grown up in an age of greater connectivity, these people are more used to move around and to experience diverse contexts with sufficient awareness to navigate different socialities. These youths consititute a bridge between different types of human-environment relationship, and offer a different point of view that goes beyond fixed socialities.

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[14] The survey was conducted on a random sample on two separate days for each location, with fifty respondents for each day. The sample was varied, including people of different age and sex, families and groups of friends. Because I was interested in sea-related socialities, the survey in Ancol was conducted only at the beach, while the survey in Pantai Maju took place on the seaside walkway that surrounds the artificial island. Questions regarded the place of provenience, frequency of visits, and activities conducted.

VII Conclusions

The threefold approach employed in this research, with a focus on the themes of materiality, knowledge, and subjectivity, proved a useful and flexible methodological tool to explore different forms of human-environment relationship, and to reconstruct ontologies of the environment. The employment of these themes allows keeping the focus on the human experience, while at the same time considering the agency of the environment and the changes that occur within its very material aspects, which in turn influence human experiences and perceptions.

In the case of North Jakarta, intersectional characteristics appeared to be related to a specific form of human-environment relationship. High income, Chinese-Indonesian ethnicity, and a careful planning lifestyle are generally associated to sociality by the sea, a form of human-environment relationship characterized by a gap between individuals and the sea, and an experience of the natural environment that is strongly filtered by the built environment. On the contrary, low income, native Indonesian ethnicity, and a day-by-day lifestyle are generally associated to sociality through the sea, a form of human-environment relationship characterized by a strong connection between individuals and the sea, and an experience of the natural environment that presents close ties with people's subjectivity. These forms of human-environment relationships are not fixed and immutable, but are the result of historical processes, urban development, the influence of economic structures, and social change. They are the expression of process, a change trend that affects both society and nature, and that is reflected on individuals who try to adapt to new conditions. In an urban setting, such conditions are constituted by both the built and the natural environment, especially in a liminal area such as the coast.

While differences in human-environment relationship between the neighbouring areas analysed in this research are staggering, it is not safe to say that these are distinct, ontologically different environments. On the one hand, the sea does have different meanings and different ontological values, it is experienced in radically different ways and perceived differently within individuals' subjectivity. However, on the other hand, it is hard to speak of different ontologies when the supposed "other world" is just a few steps away. These are not sealed and immutable communities. They move around, create networks, share stories, and they are fairly aware of what happens within neighbouring areas. Participants considered their way to perceive and experience the environment as one of several possible realities, rather than as the one and only reality. This is because, within an urban setting that is quickly evolving, they naturally come to experience and know realities that are other from their own on a daily basis, and they have to come to terms with these other possibilities. Thus, when one's reality becomes one of many possibilities, I believe it is no longer possible to speak of ontologically different worlds. Perhaps, in absence of a theory on clashing ontologies, it would be more simple and appropriate, in a case like this, to speak of different ways to relate to the environment, which I termed "socialities" in this research, in virtue of the sociality that these ways to relate produced, both among humans and between humans and the non-human.

In a complex and entangled system like that of a big city, it is increasingly difficult to isolate cases and phenomena. What is important to notice, however, aside from matters of ontology, is that affluent communities too have specific experiences of the environment and environmental issues, which are equally important to analyse. The case of North Jakarta shows how many contrasting voices on environmental matters there can be even in a very localized area, and how the prevalence of one over the others can determine an important shift in human-environment relationship, and in how development and conservation are conducted. In the context of a society that is called to face increasing environmental challenges, analysis of various forms of human-environment relationships and the ways in which they meet and clash can help providing answers that are not only technical, but also increasingly social and cultural, related to the sense of living within the *cosmos*, as human beings.

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