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LAND APPROPRIATION IN ILLEGAL PARKING PRACTICES AT ALUN-ALUN KIDUL YOGYAKARTA: A LAND GRABBING PERSPECTIVE FROM DAVID HARVEY'S THEORY

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Abstrak

Urban public spaces in Indonesia have increasingly become sites of informal negotiation between human actors and material infrastructures. In cities like Yogyakarta, illegal parking is not merely a regulatory violation but a complex spatial practice reflecting urban contestation. This study builds upon prior research on urban informality, particularly David Harvey's theory of land grabbing, to examine how public space in Alun-Alun Kidul is informally appropriated and commodified through illegal parking practices. Unlike dominant narratives that frame informal parking solely as disorder or absence of law, this study highlights its embeddedness within socio-material interactions and urban economies. The research aims to uncover how spatial contestation and land grabbing logic operate on a micro scale through daily informal practices in Alun-Alun Kidul, a culturally symbolic and economically strategic public space in Yogyakarta. Employing an ethnographic methodology, the study conducted multi-sited fieldwork involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation from November to December 2024. It also utilized media reports and urban policy documents to triangulate findings. The study reveals that illegal parking is sustained through tactical use of mundane materials, negotiation with local authorities, and integration into local tourism economies. Informal actors commodify public space through practices that displace pedestrians and marginalize alternative users, reflecting patterns of spatial inequality. These practices align with Harvey's conception of land grabbing, where space is seized for capital accumulation under informal regimes.

Kata Kunci: Urban Informality, Land Grabbing, Illegal Parking, Public Space, Alun-Alun Kidul.

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INTRODUCTION

Yogyakarta is often framed as a cultural city, steeped in Javanese heritage, where symbols of the *kraton* (palace) co-exist with the rhythms of urban modernization. However, this coexistence is increasingly strained by spatial transformations brought about by tourism, informal economies, and extractive urban practices. The space of Alun-Alun Kidul exemplifies this tension. Originally designed as a ritual courtyard for royal ceremonies, it has become a contested urban node an arena where multiple actors lay claim to space for economic survival, leisure, or symbolic dominance (Nugroho & Susanti, 2021, p. 89). In this layered terrain, practices such as illegal parking are not merely a logistical or managerial problem, but a symptom of deeper conflicts over land, visibility, and authority.

Urban public spaces in cities like Yogyakarta are increasingly subject to competing claims, both formal and informal. Alun-Alun Kidul, once primarily a symbolic space within the cultural heart of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, has transformed into a site of dense everyday activity: from tourism and street vending to recreation and informal transport services. Amid this complexity, illegal parking has emerged as a persistent and normalized urban practice. Though often framed as a minor infraction or nuisance, the appropriation of public land for private economic gain through illegal parking reflects deeper structural issues related to governance, informality, and spatial justice. In this context, the phenomenon demands analysis beyond administrative enforcement or behavioral explanations (Roy, 2005, p. 225).

Scholars in Indonesia have examined how urban informality persists and adapts in response to governance gaps, particularly where the formal regulation of space is either weakly enforced or selectively applied. Ahmad Hidayat, for instance, identified the widespread acceptance of *parkir nuthuk* (informal parking attendants charging above official rates) as not only an economic strategy but a normalized social practice embedded within Yogyakarta's urban culture (Hidayat, 2023, p. 45). Similarly, Samsa and Anggara demonstrated how certain religious or political organizations informally manage urban space through clientelistic relationships with the state, blurring the lines between legality and informality (Bennett, 2010, p. 46). These practices are reinforced by the presence of symbolic legitimacy and physical infrastructure, which make contested space appear "ordered" to the outsider, even when it operates outside the law.

In this context, land is not simply occupied it is made productive through layered acts of claiming, regulating, and stabilizing. The informal parking attendants (*juru parkir liar*) become not only economic actors but also micro-territorial managers, carving out zones of control using a combination of embodied routines, material cues, and tacit agreements with other stakeholders. The placement of a stone, a plastic chair, or a rope becomes a performative act of spatial authority, signaling to drivers and competitors alike that the space is "owned" (Samsa & Anggara, 2020, p. 54). Such mechanisms echo the broader logic of land grabbing, as defined by Harvey, wherein land is appropriated often without consent for the purpose of rent extraction under capitalist urbanism (Harvey, 2003, p. 35).

Prior studies on informal or illegal parking have largely focused on economic motivations, individual behavior, or the legal-institutional gap in public infrastructure provision. For instance, Syahrullah found that conflict over parking land in Palembang was driven by economic pressure and lack of

regulation (Syahrullah, 2023, p. 8). While Hidayat highlighted the practice of *nuthuk* unauthorized overpricing by informal parking attendants in Yogyakarta (Hidayat, 2023, p. 47). Samsa and Anggara further exposed the role of shadow state networks in distributing control over public spaces to ideologically aligned actors (Samsa & Anggara, 2020, p. 58). While such accounts shed light on surface-level drivers, they often treat human actors as central and material space as passive. They also fail to address how political economy and spatial power dynamics operate at the micro level in shaping these practices.

This study addresses these limitations by applying a critical urban theory approach rooted in David Harvey's concept of *accumulation by dispossession*, framed within the broader discourse of land grabbing (Harvey, 2003, p. 26). Unlike traditional interpretations that emphasize rural or large-scale expropriations, this paper conceptualizes illegal parking as a form of micro-level urban land grabbing. Furthermore, the research draws from new materialist theories, particularly assemblage theory and political materiality, to emphasize how non-human actors objects, infrastructures, and spatial affordances play an active role in the production and normalization of illegality (Bennett, 2010, p. 43). By doing so, it broadens the analytical lens to account for distributed agency in the making of urban informality.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its theoretical synthesis and empirical grounding. By combining Harvey's political-economic lens with new materialist perspectives, the paper offers a novel understanding of how spatial appropriation occurs through both socio-political negotiations and material interactions. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more nuanced reading of how informal actors (such as illegal parking attendants) and material assemblages (such as curbs, trees, or signage) collectively participate in the re-territorialization of public space (Latour, 2005, p. 632). The study also sheds light on the moral and legal ambiguities in urban governance, where state actors may tolerate, negotiate, or selectively enforce rules, reflecting a fluid boundary between legality and illegality (Roy, 2005, p. 36).

Despite growing attention to informal practices in urban Indonesia, few studies have closely examined how the agency of *material objects* contributes to the stabilization of illegal spatial claims. Political materiality theory urges us to move beyond anthropocentric accounts by acknowledging the performative role of non-human elements such as objects, surfaces, and spatial configurations in shaping urban experiences and power relations (Fox & Alldred, 2022, p. 628). As Pilo' and Jaffe argue, the political is not only done by people but also by things (Pilo' & Jaffe, 2020, p. 10). By focusing on how parking cones, broken curbs, and makeshift signage operate within territorial logic, this study extends the scope of land grabbing to include assemblages of both human and material actors.

The aim of this study is to examine how illegal parking practices at Alun-Alun Kidul reflect broader processes of land appropriation and spatial contestation in urban Yogyakarta. It asks how territory is claimed, stabilized, or contested by informal actors, how material objects contribute to these claims, and how these practices challenge conventional notions of ownership and publicness. Through ethnographic fieldwork, spatial analysis, and critical theoretical engagement, the research contributes to contemporary debates on urban informality, land

politics, and the agency of space in postcolonial cities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted in the Alun-alun Kidul area of Yogyakarta, selected due to the city's growing challenges in managing public space amid rapid economic and tourism growth. One significant issue is the emergence of informal practices, especially the mismatch between available parking facilities and the increasing number of vehicles from visitors, which has led to widespread illegal parking. While key tourist zones such as Malioboro, Tugu Station, Lempuyangan Station, and Alun-alun Utara also experience similar problems, this study centers on Alun-alun Kidul for its spatial compactness and dense complexity of informal dynamics. Drawing on Roy's theory of urban informality, this study understands informality not as the absence of governance, but as a mode of governance itself, co-produced by the state, market, and civil society actors (Roy, 2005, p. 150).

The choice of Alun-alun Kidul is also justified by its persistent traffic congestion and high density of social interactions, especially in the evenings and weekends. From a neo-materialist perspective, this space is a rich site of entangled relations between human and non-human actors tourists, vendors, signs, ropes, and road surfaces all contributing to informal ordering. This dynamic configuration is best understood through the lens of assemblage theory, where space is produced through the agency of both people and objects (Bennett, 2010; Latour, 2005, p. 28). The openness and accessibility of this site allowed the researcher to conduct qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation.

Fieldwork took place from November to December 2024. Primary data were collected through interviews and ethnographic observation. Key informants included illegal parking attendants, local residents, visitors, and public officials. Following the criteria of Fetterman, participants were selected for their direct involvement, ability to communicate insights, and availability. Observations were carried out during peak times (e.g., night hours and weekends) to witness firsthand the interactions between assemblages (Fetterman, 2010, p. 23). Particular attention was given to moments of spatial conflict, such as the takeover of sidewalks or negotiation between parking attendants and street vendors.

Secondary data included photographs, social media posts, and official records. Visual documentation focused on how material objects (plastic chairs, ropes, signage) were employed to claim and manage space. In parallel, data were collected from Facebook groups like Info Cegatan Jogja and Instagram accounts such as @merapi_uncover, which regularly publish citizen reports on urban mobility issues. These served as additional sources to triangulate field observations and highlight public sentiment. Complementary statistical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reinforced the context of tourism growth in Yogyakarta over 22.5 million domestic trips recorded by mid-2024 thereby underscoring the urban pressure driving informal parking practices (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024, p. 41).

By focusing on Alun-alun Kidul, this methodology enables the study to engage deeply with the performative and material aspects of urban informality. Combining ethnographic immersion, spatial mapping, and assemblage

analysis provides a grounded and reflexive approach to understanding how space, legality, and informality are co-produced in contested cityscapes like Yogyakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. ILLEGAL PARKING AS URBAN INFORMALITY AND SPATIAL CONTESTATION

The illegal parking phenomenon in Alun-alun Kidul, Yogyakarta, reflects a persistent form of urban informality shaped by the city's spatial limitations and rising tourism activity. Based on data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) DIY, tourist visits to Yogyakarta from January to July 2024 reached over 22.5 million for domestic travelers, with foreign visitors increasing by 36.71% from the previous month This influx has significantly intensified demands for space, especially in popular areas like Alun-alun Kidul. The inadequacy of formal parking infrastructure in the vicinity has opened opportunities for informal actors such as *juru parkir liar* to occupy and repurpose public areas like sidewalks and streetsides as commercial parking zones. Rather than being random or chaotic, these practices operate within a logic of spatial contestation, where human agency and everyday material arrangements contribute to an evolving urban order. This section critically examines illegal parking not merely as deviant behavior, but as a manifestation of informal governance, shaped by both structural constraints and local negotiations.

Material Practices and Informal Appropriation

In Alun-alun Kidul, informal parking attendants (*juru parkir liar*) strategically use various objects such as ropes, reflective signs, stools, and even umbrellas to demarcate and 'reserve' segments of public space. These objects act as silent enforcers of boundaries, giving visual cues to both pedestrians and drivers that certain zones are under unofficial control. This material appropriation serves not only a functional purpose but also a symbolic one: it asserts a form of spatial legitimacy in the absence of formal regulation. Similar observations of such tactics have been noted in studies of urban informality across Indonesian cities, where physical materials become central to practices of claim-making and informal governance (Abdillah, 2021, p. 115). In the case of Yogyakarta, the high tourism density especially during weekends and evenings exacerbates the demand for parking, encouraging these actors to creatively reconfigure public infrastructure like sidewalks and curbs as pseudo-private property (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024, p. 6).

This phenomenon echoes Ananya Roy's assertion that informality is not merely the result of disorder or lack of rules but a mode of urban governance involving selective regulation (Roy, 2005, p. 150). The informal parkers, by deploying materials in tactical ways, mimic formal spatial management without institutional authority. As observed during field visits in November–December 2024, these objects are often placed early in the afternoon and rearranged dynamically throughout the evening, depending on crowd flow and vehicle type. Some materials even indicate hierarchical control for example, cones or metal stands typically belong to actors with stronger ties to local authorities, suggesting uneven access to informal capital. This interplay between material agency and human decision-making demonstrates how illegal parking practices are co-produced by both physical and social forces in contested urban space.

Tactical Use of Everyday Objects

The everyday objects used in illegal parking practices at Alun-alun Kidul are far from incidental. Items such as plastic chairs, ropes, cones, stools, and handwritten signs serve as material tools in informal territorialization. These materials are mobilized to signify ownership and create physical boundaries within public space despite the actors lacking formal authority. As observed during fieldwork in November–December 2024, these items are often laid out well before peak visitor hours, most commonly between 3 PM and 5 PM, in anticipation of the nightly influx of tourists. Such spatial marking is not only practical but communicative, sending signals to passersby that certain sections of sidewalk or street are "claimed" and therefore off-limits to other uses, such as pedestrian movement or vending stalls.

These materials play a dual role: they are functional in managing vehicle flow and symbolic in projecting spatial legitimacy. A plastic chair left unattended on a curb functions as a placeholder for a car or motorbike its mere presence sufficient to deter other users. Cones or colored ropes tied between poles are sometimes more elaborate, creating pseudo-gated boundaries. These arrangements suggest coordination and intentionality, often linked to more senior or organized juru parkir groups operating in the area. Such tactics mirror observations in other Indonesian cities where similar objects are used to carve out informal access to public infrastructure (Abdillah, 2021, p. 115). Through repetition and visibility, these items help institutionalize informality in the urban fabric.

Furthermore, the variability in object type and placement reflects a nuanced understanding of space and behavior among informal actors. For instance, umbrellas and signage are more likely to be used in zones closer to vendors or near *odong-odong* rides areas with higher pedestrian interaction while chairs and ropes dominate along the periphery where cars are parked. Field notes suggest that some objects have evolved into semi-permanent fixtures; for example, certain plastic chairs are routinely placed in the same spot each evening, acquiring a kind of spatial memory that even regular visitors acknowledge. This consistent material presence subtly influences how space is navigated and perceived by users, blending informality into the everyday experience of the square.

Importantly, these material interventions also carry social implications. Locals and tourists alike often avoid disturbing or relocating the objects, even when unaccompanied by human attendants, due to an implicit understanding or fear of territorial retribution. The placement of such objects becomes a non-verbal form of social negotiation that reinforces unspoken rules about space use. This aligns with the concept of *inscribed space*, where material traces of informal authority shape behavioral norms in contested areas (Low, 1999, p. 111). Rather than merely blocking space, these objects channel mobility, guide pedestrian routes, and quietly reproduce the power structures underlying informal urbanism.

In this way, the tactical use of everyday objects reveals the ingenuity and adaptability of informal actors in managing limited urban resources. These materials are not random; they are embedded with meaning, memory, and strategy. They enable the informal transformation of sidewalks and streets into controlled economic zones. While city authorities often treat these interventions as nuisance or clutter, they are better understood as grassroots infrastructural responses to a city strained by tourism and inadequate

planning. As such, they form a critical component of how informal economies like illegal parking maintain spatial order in the absence of formal systems.

Control Through Visibility and Placement

Visibility plays a central role in maintaining control over informal parking territories in Alun-alun Kidul. Juru parkir utilize their physical presence standing, sitting, or patrolling certain areas to communicate authority and claim dominance over parking spaces. Field observations revealed that during peak evening hours, groups of 2–3 juru parkir were strategically stationed at entry points to pedestrian pathways and street corners. Their constant visibility creates a performative display of control that deters newcomers from encroaching, not through legal enforcement, but by projecting a social order sustained by habit, reputation, and mutual recognition. Even in the absence of uniforms or official signage, these actors were perceived by the public as legitimate controllers of space, based on their consistent presence and informal network.

Spatial placement is not random but carefully calibrated to maximize visibility, access to vehicles, and territorial reach. Juru parkir tend to occupy spaces with high flow of traffic and pedestrian volume, such as the east and south entrances of the square. By positioning themselves at these critical junctures, they are able to monitor incoming traffic, negotiate with drivers, and reassign space dynamically. Their positions often align with previously placed objects like chairs or cones creating a coherent system of control. This physical embedding into the urban fabric gives the impression of semi-formal authority, even in the complete absence of municipal regulation.

Control is further strengthened by the use of verbal and non-verbal cues. Shouts, hand gestures, and whistle signals are common tactics used to guide parking arrangements and assert dominance when disputes arise. These performative strategies mirror the "street-level bureaucracy" described by Lipsky, where informal actors become de facto enforcers and regulators. Notably, their visibility is selective and strategic. At times when enforcement by municipal Satpol PP is anticipated, juru parkir may temporarily vacate their post, removing markers like cones or signs, only to return later. This reveals a tactical negotiation of legality, where visibility is both a source of power and vulnerability.

The practice of controlling space through strategic visibility and placement does not only shape individual interactions but contributes to broader spatial inequality. In prioritizing vehicular access and economic gain, pedestrian movement is frequently obstructed or rerouted. Trotoars that should serve walkers become colonized by motorcycles (Lipsky, 1980, p. 24). The spatial logic of informal actors thus mirrors broader processes of urban land grabbing at a micro-scale, where the most visible and assertive actors claim space not through law, but through repetition, familiarity, and control over material-symbolic practices.

Material Practices and Informal Appropriation

Material appropriation in Alun-alun Kidul is not a passive act it reflects a deliberate transformation of public space through recurring, practical routines. Juru parkir, for instance, manipulate and configure physical elements like ropes, cones, and signage not only to organize vehicles but to signal boundaries of informal authority. These tools act as extensions of their agency, enabling them to transform sidewalks and open streets into revenue-generating zones. This act of repurposing public infrastructure for private use aligns with the concept of

informalization, where the public commons become fragmented through personal claims and economic necessity (Abdillah, 2021, p. 117). In many cases, the same materials are reused nightly, further entrenching their role in shaping the social geography of the space. What appears to be makeshift infrastructure thus becomes a permanent part of how the city functions informally.

Moreover, the everyday repetition of these material practices constructs what Lefebvre would call a *rhythmanalysis* of urban life predictable, cyclical patterns of informal governance through spatial tools (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 58). Reused chairs and poles, though weathered, gain symbolic weight as signs of invisible rules, demarcating parking rights and enforcing compliance through familiarity. While government signage regulating official parking zones may exist, these are often overridden or ignored in practice, demonstrating how material appropriation carries social legitimacy when sustained by actor repetition and collective recognition. These practices also contribute to broader transformations of the public realm, where material interventions however minor alter the function and accessibility of urban spaces, often privileging private interests over collective urban rights.

Territorial Behavior and Social Legitimacy

Material practices in informal parking at Alun-alun Kidul demonstrate how non-institutional actors not only utilize but restructure urban space through repeated physical routines. These routines are not spontaneous but reflect a calculated orchestration of space using materials that carry both practical and symbolic weight. Chairs, ropes, makeshift signs, and even small plant pots are routinely arranged to demarcate parking slots and pedestrian flow. These materials, though ordinary, act as tools of informal governance claiming and organizing public land without legal authority. As observed during fieldwork between November and December 2024, certain objects were placed with routine precision, such as cones laid out from 15:00 to 17:30 as a prelude to nighttime operations, forming clear territorial markers that regulate parking before peak crowd arrival.

The repetition of these material appropriations gives rise to spatial habits that are rarely questioned by visitors or passersby. In many cases, the presence of a chair or rope is enough to signal ownership, as citizens have internalized informal codes of space created through these objects. This process produces what de Certeau calls "tactics of everyday life," where informal actors maneuver within imposed structures to carve out operational autonomy (De Certeau, 1984, p. 37). Such tactics blur the line between public and private, as publicly owned streets and sidewalks become sites of revenue extraction through material occupation. Tourists and locals often comply silently, not because of formal rules, but due to the power of informal repetition and community-based recognition of these claims.

Material control also provides a low-cost and adaptable alternative to formal infrastructure. For example, instead of standardized signboards or painted lines, juru parkir use plastic stools, painted bricks, and mobile signboards to shape parking zones. This flexibility allows them to respond dynamically to changing spatial and temporal conditions, such as market days, weather patterns, or patrol timing by Satpol PP (municipal police). Their improvisational approach turns the city into a patchwork of claimed territories whose boundaries shift fluidly depending on context. In this sense, the

objects are not passive markers but "actants" in Latour's terms, facilitating control, negotiation, and the continuous production of informality (Latour, 2005, p. 27).

The broader implication of such appropriation is a slow but steady reconfiguration of public space. Material practices legitimize informality not through legal frameworks but through perceived functionality and familiarity. Reused signs that read "Parkir Penuh" (Full Parking) or directional arrows hand-drawn on cardboard lend an aura of legitimacy and establish informal regulation. These signs were documented in high-density points at Alun-alun Kidul's east and north gates, especially during weekends or special events. In doing so, the juru parkir not only assert agency over physical space but also co-produce urban narratives shaping who gets access, how long, and under what conditions.

Encounter and Negotiation with Authorities

Interactions between informal parking operators (*juru parkir*) and state authorities at Alun-alun Kidul are shaped by a delicate balance of avoidance, anticipation, and occasional negotiation. These encounters are rarely confrontational; instead, they tend to follow informal rhythms and tacit understandings. According to field interviews, juru parkir often possess early knowledge of impending municipal patrols (Satpol PP) through informal information networks, prompting them to temporarily vacate their stations, remove material indicators like ropes and signage, and disappear from sight. Such behavior reflects a tactical withdrawal rather than submission an acknowledgment of state authority without conceding territorial control. These actions are not expressions of fear, but strategic acts of invisibility that allow the informal system to resume shortly after the threat passes.

This cyclical pattern of "disappear and return" reveals how informal actors adapt to regulatory pressure without systemic displacement. The juru parkir understand the limits of enforcement and exploit them most Satpol PP operations are brief, predictable, and seldom escalate into confiscations or legal consequences. In many cases, the state's presence functions more as symbolic performance than sustained governance. This creates a gray zone of governance, where actors on both side nformal and formal coexist through unwritten rules. Interviews with nearby food vendors suggested that Satpol PP presence is more frequent during ceremonial or tourism-heavy weekends, yet enforcement rarely leads to lasting disruption.Instead, it becomes part of the negotiated rhythm of the street, reinforcing informal actors' resilience and adaptability.

Moreover, some forms of passive tolerance or implicit consent from lower-level authorities reinforce informal legitimacy. Several juru parkir mentioned that certain local figures (e.g., RT leaders or neighborhood heads) are aware of their operations and may benefit from them indirectly, such as through shared fees or maintaining public order in high-traffic areas. While this does not amount to formal sanctioning, it demonstrates a negotiated form of informality where authority is diffused across multiple actors not only municipal enforcers but also community leaders who mediate access and discipline. These micro-negotiations often determine who gets to occupy space, for how long, and under what social conditions.

At the same time, juru parkir cultivate a public image that shields them from harsh crackdowns. By performing helpfulness guiding traffic, managing parking queues, or offering directions

they embed themselves as "useful" components of the urban landscape. This aligns with James Scott's notion of "public transcripts," where subordinate groups mask resistance through accommodation and apparent compliance (Scott, 1990, p. 16). These small performances generate public sympathy and reduce the likelihood of eviction, making them critical tools of spatial endurance. In interviews, several visitors described the parkir staff as "ramah" (friendly) and "membantu" (helpful), further legitimizing their presence as integral, rather than disruptive, to the public space.

The phenomenon, therefore, is not simply one of confrontation between legality and illegality. It is a dynamic of spatial negotiation where power, visibility, and usefulness are constantly recalibrated. Rather than being swept away by the formal apparatus, informal actors adapt through rhythm, concealment, and relational work with the community and authorities. The result is a co-produced urban order fragmented, plural, and governed as much by informal negotiation as by formal rule.

Table 1. Patterns of Interaction Between Informal Actors and Authorities

Encounter Type	*Description*	*Outcome*
Informal Warning (via network)	Word of mouth alerts of Satpol PP Patrol	Temporary removal of objects and retreat
Passive Monitoring	Satpol PP present but non-interventionist	No disruption, actors remain visible
Coordinated Absence	Operators vanish before official patrols arrive	Return after 1-2 hours
Community Mediation	Local leaders mediate presence of *juru parkir*	Informal permission and spatial compromise
Tourist Season Enforcement	States shows stricter control before or after events	Short-term displacement followed by retrun

The interaction patterns displayed in Table 4 underscore how informal parking actors at Alun-alun Kidul navigate state authority not through direct confrontation, but via adaptive strategies rooted in timing, discretion, and social negotiation. Rather than being eradicated by formal enforcement, these actors employ subtle tactics such as coordinated absence and relational mediation with local leaders to maintain spatial presence. The fluidity of these encounters reveals a cohabited governance structure in which informal control persists alongside formal oversight, shaping an urban order negotiated daily through visibility, usefulness, and strategic withdrawal. This reflects the endurance and institutionalization of informal systems within the contested terrain of urban public space.

II. URBAN LAND GRABBING IN THE MICRO-CONTEXT

David Harvey's concept of land grabbing traditionally refers to the appropriation of land by state or capital actors for the purpose of capital accumulation, often displacing existing users in the process.[2] While most scholarship situates this process in large-scale rural acquisitions or megaproject urbanism, Harvey's logic of accumulation by dispossession can also be applied to micro-contexts—where everyday actors capture public urban space for private economic gain.[2] In Yogyakarta's Alun-alun Kidul, what appears to be low-level informal parking activity can be interpreted as a micro-scale form of land grabbing, where public land is reclassified, reconfigured, and commodified through informal mechanisms. This reframing highlights how processes of capitalist accumulation and spatial control are not exclusive to state-corporate actors but may also be enacted through informal, decentralized practices.

In this context, land grabbing is not enforced through legal decree or zoning change, but through repetitive

[2] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 145.

acts of occupation and symbolic claim-making. The juru parkir (informal parking attendants) participate in this by carving out fragments of public space and converting them into sources of extractive income. The lack of formal sanction does not negate the economic logic behind the practice. Instead, it reinforces the fluidity with which neoliberal logics operate capitalizing on regulatory ambiguity and infrastructural gaps.[3] This also links to Harvey's critique of urban entrepreneurialism, where cities become battlegrounds of resource control not only among large institutions but also between informal actors competing for the right to extract value from urban commons. In Alun-alun Kidul, the sidewalk, curb, and even parts of pedestrian areas become prime territories for informal commodification, especially during weekends and peak tourism hours.

Such micro-scale land grabbing also reorders access to public space, privileging those with the tools, networks, or informal legitimacy to occupy and monetize it. Harvey's theory thus helps illuminate how informal practices reproduce urban inequality: while the juru parkir gain revenue and control, pedestrians, street vendors, and visitors without negotiation power are displaced from rightful public use. These dynamics echo the broader processes Harvey warns about, where accumulation is achieved not through production but through dispossession often hidden in the folds of everyday life and overlooked urban corners. Recognizing informal actors as participants in this process challenges binaries of legal vs. illegal or formal vs. informal, instead offering a spectrum of contestation over space that is deeply economic, spatial, and political.

Public Space as Economic Asset

Public spaces like Alun-alun Kidul, while historically designated as communal grounds for recreation, ceremony, and pedestrian use, have gradually transformed into sites of economic extraction particularly in the hands of informal actors. The shift is evident in how space once intended for collective leisure now hosts parked vehicles, mobile vendors, and semi-permanent infrastructure operated by informal workers. These actors reclassify space not through legal mechanisms but through daily repetition, claiming territory by simply being there. In this sense, the value of space is no longer derived from its social or civic function, but from its potential to generate revenue. This commodification aligns with Harvey's critique of the entrepreneurial city, where all urban assets including sidewalks, curbs, and roadsides are reimagined as units of capital (Harvey, 2003, p. 18). The transformation is subtle yet profound: public land becomes a private asset, informally held and informally monetized.

What is particularly striking in the Alun-alun Kidul case is how this commodification persists in the absence of formal property rights. Informal actors deploy tools such as ropes, plastic chairs, or even physical presence to "mark" territory and control its access, thereby establishing a functional monopoly over small urban plots. While technically illegal, these micro-enterprises are deeply embedded in local economies, often accepted if not actively tolerated by surrounding businesses and residents due to the services they provide. These practices reveal how informal economic activity is not separate from capitalist urban development, but fully enmeshed within it. The curb becomes a rent-generating surface, the street a profit zone, and the public square a marketplace. As a result, the idea of public space as a shared resource erodes,

replaced by fragmented, contested ownership structures managed through informal agreements and market logic.

Revenue Strategies and Informal Economies

In informal urban economies like that surrounding illegal parking at Alun-alun Kidul, revenue generation hinges on creatively leveraging public space outside formal markets. Juru parkir operate micro-enterprises by charging "fee-based access" a flat or negotiable charge per vehicle to occupy segments of pavement or sidewalk. In essence, the public street becomes a private asset. Scholars have noted comparable dynamics in related informal sectors. Purwaningsih et al. identify how street vendors in Indonesian cities rely on social networking and precarious spatial advantage to sustain income, adjusting prices and mobility to changing enforcement patterns (Purwaningsih et al., 2022, p. 39). Similarly, parking attendants create "zones" by marking space, then extracting rent from users who comply with implicit rules.

Second, revenue strategies are shaped by adaptability and responsiveness. Our field observations in November–December 2024 show that *juru parkir* adjust pricing and location according to time, expected crowd flow, and visible enforcement presence. This mirrors findings in Chalid & Kuswini's study, which shows that informal traffic controllers shift positions and rates dynamically at Jakarta intersections to maximize earnings while avoiding authorities (Chalid & Kuswini, 2023, p. 406). These flexible routines allow them to maintain operations even under intermittent crackdowns.

Third, the informal economy's embeddedness in local networks is another key strategy. Juru parkir often share information about enforcement times or peak visitor hours through peer networks, enabling synchronized territory shifts and fee structures. This web of communication enhances resilience and optimizes revenue flows. Purwaningsih and colleagues highlight how informal sector workers in Bekasi utilize social capital to sustain their businesses during crises, reflecting the same pattern of reliance on relational trust and mutual support (Purwaningsih et al., 2022, p. 42). In Yogyakarta's Alun-alun Kidul, this networked coordination allows even less visible actors to participate economically, expanding informal reach and reducing vulnerability.

Fourth, the legitimacy of revenue strategies is reinforced through service provision. Attendants often go beyond mere space reservation assisting drivers to park, guiding through crowds, and even safeguarding parked vehicles. These acts cultivate a perception of utility, decreasing resistance from both drivers and authorities. Such a performance aligns with Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy, where informal actors assume regulatory roles on the ground (Lipsky, 1980, p. 22). Visitors and local users often describe them as helpful, tolerating payments because the service offsets the absence of formal parking provisions. Revenue, in this sense, becomes tied to tacit public service recognition.

Finally, informal revenue practices feed into a broader political economy of rent extraction. Juru parkir capture value from collective, civic infrastructure without legal sanction but through repeated presence and selective enforcement cycles, they assert de facto spatial ownership. This micro-level economic logic echoes Harvey's *accumulation by dispossession*, where capital accumulation is enabled through dispossession of public space, even on a tiny scale (Harvey, 2003, p. 43). Through these strategies, the everyday becomes

entrepreneurial: sidewalks become rent zones, and routine attendance becomes a form of value capture. The informal economy, thus, does not sit outside urban governance it is woven into it.

Market Logic in Urban Informality

In informal urban settings, particularly within dense tourist areas like Alun-alun Kidul, market logic frames public space as a convertible asset extractable through the everyday, informal economy. The public realm is transformed into income-generating zones when informal actors such as parking attendants enact value capture through tactical occupation. One illustrative case comes from Chalid & Kuswini in 2023 who analyzed "informal traffic controllers" in Jakarta. They revealed how these actors operate within congestion-prone intersections, claiming space temporarily and dynamically pricing their services based on demand and enforcement patterns (Chalid & Kuswini, 2023, p. 407). Similarly, juru parkir in Yogyakarta set fees and position themselves strategically during high-demand windows e.g. weekends and evenings to maximize revenue.

Moreover, market logic in these contexts is deeply rooted in adaptability and real-time responsiveness. Purwaningsih studied street vendors in Jakarta and Bekasi, finding that informal workers adjust prices, locations, and mobility strategies to optimize earnings under shifting regulatory and environmental conditions (Purwaningsih et al., 2022, p. 46). This flexible revenue logic is mirrored by juru parkir who change their asking price depending on crowd density, time of day, and the presence or absence of enforcement. Such elasticity in pricing and spatial deployment enables them to sustain operations without formal protection, operating like micro-entrepreneurs responding to immediate market signals.

Embedded social networks further reinforce informal market logic through coordination and knowledge-sharing. Chalid & Kuswini documented how Jakarta's informal traffic controllers communicated impending enforcement schedules among themselves a mechanism that enabled coordinated vacating of space and seamless return once patrols passed (Chalid & Kuswini, 2023, p. 408). In Alun-alun Kidul, interviewees described how juru parkir share intel about municipal patrols or heavy tourist events via close-knit WhatsApp groups or word-of-mouth networks. This peer-to-peer information circulation allows them to reduce risk, synchronize territorial claims, and stabilize income flows in a subtle, decentralized fashion.

Service provision is another dimension where informal market logic intersects with spatial legitimacy. In practice, juru parkir often go beyond mere fee collection: they assist in parking, manage pedestrian overflow, offer vehicle protection, and provide directions. This behavior fosters a social contract of sorts residents and visitors tolerate informal parking in exchange for these services. The dynamic resembles Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy, where front-line actors regulate and mediate public needs (Lipsky, 1980, p. 38). Through visible acts of assistance, informal actors accrue symbolic capital that translates into economic legitimacy, enabling them to thrive despite lacking formal sanction.

Public Space as Economic Asset

In rapidly urbanizing cities like Yogyakarta, public space is increasingly commodified—not through formal privatization, but via informal appropriation and transactional use. This commodification transforms public

assets into economic tools, especially in areas with high tourism and minimal infrastructure. At Alun-alun Kidul, actors such as juru parkir (informal parking attendants) appropriate sidewalks, street edges, and open spaces to operate micro-rent economies. As Harvey theorizes, space under capitalism is not neutral it becomes an object of accumulation, where value is extracted by removing or restricting access to others (Harvey, 2003, p. 27). In this context, public space loses its purely civic function and becomes a field of economic contestation. Rather than open and collectively governed, space becomes conditional its access mediated by informal actors who charge fees, define boundaries, and offer "protection" services, echoing informal governance structures found in other Southeast Asian cities (Roy, 2005, p. 149).

This informal commodification aligns with broader critiques of urban neoliberalism, where state withdrawal from public service provision creates openings for shadow economies. In Yogyakarta, limited investment in accessible public infrastructure such as formal parking areas or pedestrian walkways invites informal interventions that meet functional needs while simultaneously creating exclusion. As noted by Simone (2004), urban actors in Southeast Asia frequently "improvise infrastructure," converting shared space into income streams (Simone, 2004, p. 408). The transformation of Alun-alun Kidul into a site of micro-capitalism reflects this dynamic, where space is not simply used but economically leveraged. Informal actors establish territorial claims through routine presence, object placement (e.g., chairs, signage), and social negotiation further entrenching the market logic of space in a site originally designed for communal gathering. Thus, public space becomes not just an economic

Exclusion of Pedestrians and Alternatives Users

In many urban contexts, the informal appropriation of public space by vehicular users significantly undermines pedestrian mobility and safety. Research from Bucharest, for instance, shows how informal sidewalk parking not only confiscates pedestrian space but also reshapes urban behavior, turning sidewalks into quasi-residential extensions for vehicles (Popescu, 2022, p. 307). This spatial conversion mirrors practices at Yogyakarta's Alun-alun Kidul, where informal parking occupies sidewalks and curb edges effectively pushing pedestrians into the middle of lanes or detours through vendor alleys. These material usurpations disrupt safe walking routes, interfering with pedestrian norms and causing routine exclusion from what should be universal public pathways.

Secondly, the presence of illegally parked vehicles increases the risk of pedestrian–vehicle conflicts and reduces visibility at intersections. A major global study noted that illicit parking contributes to a fourfold increase in pedestrian vulnerability, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Kutty, 2021, p. 49). Third, exclusion also emerges from economic interactions at these contested spaces. Pedestrians and vendors who do not pay parking fees may face nonverbal enforcement: they are subtly discouraged from walking through marked zones and sometimes confronted by attendants when bypassing informal territory. This dynamic creates an implicit hierarchy: those paying to park assert territorial control, while non-paying pedestrians are marginalized spatially. As a result, pedestrian mobility is shaped not by urban design but by informal transactions, penalizing low-cost transit users and spontaneous

walkers while reinforcing the economic logic embedded in flawed spatial governance.

Fourth, the marginalization of pedestrian space reduces the accessibility and inclusivity of public areas. In cities across the Global South, urban design scholars emphasize that inclusive public space must support diverse users children, elderly, disabled individuals without requiring payment or negotiation (Khateeb et al., 2020, p. 1237). However, practices in Alun-alun Kidul reflect the opposite: accessible sidewalks become parking lots, and pedestrian pathways are diverted into narrow vendor alleys. The displacement of walkers, especially vulnerable users, reveals how informal economies undermine basic principles of urban equity and access.

Social Conflict and Spatial Inequality

Informal parking practices in urban public spaces often catalyze social conflict, especially in contested areas like Alun-alun Kidul, Yogyakarta. Here, the informal seizure of sidewalks and curb zones by unauthorized parking attendants displaces pedestrians and alternative users, intensifying spatial tensions. These frictions mirror a broader trend across Southeast Asian cities where encroachments on pedestrian infrastructure provoke confrontations and reflect unequal access to space (Kutty, 2021, p. 47). Actors like juru parkir assert territorial dominance through physical markers ropes, signage, plastic chairstransforming public areas into controlled economic zones. Pedestrians, especially those without financial means or community ties, are pushed into secondary spatial roles (Islam & Lata, 2019, p. 23). This everyday reordering of urban space reveals a layered inequality: one not just about space, but about power, visibility, and urban legitimacy.

Moreover, the enforcement of spatial rules is often selective, privileging well-connected informal actors while disproportionately penalizing vulnerable ones, such as itinerant vendors or non-paying users. This double standard exposes the political economy behind informality, wherein micro-spatial rentiers negotiate access through social networks rather than law. In doing so, they reproduce urban exclusion while presenting themselves as functional service providers. As Roy (2005) and Van der Merwe (2017) argue, these patterns constitute a quiet yet systemic form of dispossession, where everyday practices of informal occupation result in deeply rooted spatial inequality. Thus, informal parking is not merely a logistical issue but a visible symptom of urban governance that privileges certain actors while marginalizing others.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the phenomenon of illegal parking in Alun-alun Kidul, Yogyakarta, as a manifestation of urban informality and spatial contestation, drawing on David Harvey's theory of land grabbing and a neo-materialist lens. Through ethnographic observation and analysis, it becomes evident that illegal parking is not merely a question of regulatory failure, but a complex assemblage of socio-economic strategies, material tactics, and informal negotiations over urban space. Public space, in this context, is transformed into an economic asset appropriated through micro-practices of control, visibility, and daily encounters with both the public and the state.

The findings reveal that informal actors such as *juru parkir* exercise territorial power not only through physical occupation but also via embedded relationships with local governance and community dynamics. These practices reinforce spatial inequality, displace pedestrian access,

and reflect broader urban struggles over who has the right to the city. By framing illegal parking as a form of micro-scale land grabbing, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how informal economies and spatial appropriation shape urban life in Indonesia. This research underscores the need for more inclusive urban policies that consider the realities of informal actors, while simultaneously protecting public accessibility and equitable space distribution.

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