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Grassroot free fight neo-liberalism: *Becak motor (bentor)* drivers as *homo sacer* in downtown Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article is an in-depth exploration of the struggle of becak motor (abbreviated as bentor) drivers as homo sacer who must fight hard amidst the wheels of neo-liberalism at the grassroots level. Becak motor is a kind of motorized pedicab commonly found in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java. In the era of the free market, bentor drivers are not only battling over economic resources to get passengers, but they are also fighting against structural barriers where regulations on bentor are left deliberately unclear. The exacerbation of this condition is caused by their uncertainty in obtaining access to proper welfare as citizens. This study employs a qualitative method with a life history approach that specifically explores

KEYWORDS

transportation policy
urban marginalization
urban poverty
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survival strategies
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the journey of life and important events that have shaped the lives of bendor drivers in Yogyakarta. The informants consisted of three categories: first, bendor drivers from urban areas; second, from the countryside (rural); third, bendor drivers who represent becak association administrators. The findings of this study indicate that bendor drivers have to struggle to access economic resources at the grassroots level due to several factors, such as the increasing number of private vehicles leading to a decrease in demand for the use of bendors, increasing competition with online transportation applications; there are structural barriers related to the regulation of bendors which continuously being ignored; and other negative stigma attached to bendors. In facing these challenges, they also have a survival strategy developed from a mutual help mechanism designed within the bendor community. Therefore, this article offers an academic debate on the battle of bendor drivers as a homo sacer in the vortex of neo-liberalism, as well as presents a critical perspective in providing an overview of how neo-liberalism works at the grassroots level.

INTRODUCTION

Bendors are a mode of public transportation that still exists and are used by the community for mobility and tourism purposes. The *bendor* is unique in its physical form, as it is a modification of a pedal-powered pedicab equipped with a motor engine to make it convenient for the driver to transport passengers. In the hustle and bustle of the struggle for economic resources in the Yogyakarta tourism area, *bendors* are a mode of transportation that still survives amid the proliferation of private vehicles and intense competition with online transportation applications (Mardania 2022). In Indonesia, private vehicles (especially motorized vehicles) are experiencing very rapid growth (BPS 2020). It can be seen from the increase in the number of motorized vehicles registered by the Indonesian National Police during the 2015–20 period, as shown in Table 1.

Based on the data above, the number of motorized vehicles in Indonesia continues to increase yearly – both motorcycles and passenger cars. Interestingly, the increase in the number of motorized vehicles is also followed by the rise in online transportation platforms such as Gojek, Grab, Maxim, InDriver and others. According to data compiled by the Two-Wheeled Action Movement (GARDA), the projection of online transportation in 2019 is 2.5 million and 4 million in 2020 (Tempo 2019; Kumparan 2020). By the year 2023, it is projected to double in number. Moreover, the results of a survey conducted by the Polling Institute (2022) show that online transportation (34%) is the second highest choice after private transportation (41.4%). Even if they have

Table 1: Number of motorized vehicle developments in Indonesia from 2015 to 2020.

Types of motorized vehicles	Developments of the number of motorized vehicles by type (units)					
	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Passenger car	15,797,746	15,592,419	14,830,698	13,968,202	13,142,958	12,304,221
Motorcycle	115,023,039	112,771,136	106,657,952	100,200,245	94,531,510	88,656,931
Numbers	136,137,451	133,617,012	126,508,776	118,922,708	112,205,711	105,303,318

Source: The State Police of the Republic of Indonesia, processed from BPS (2020).

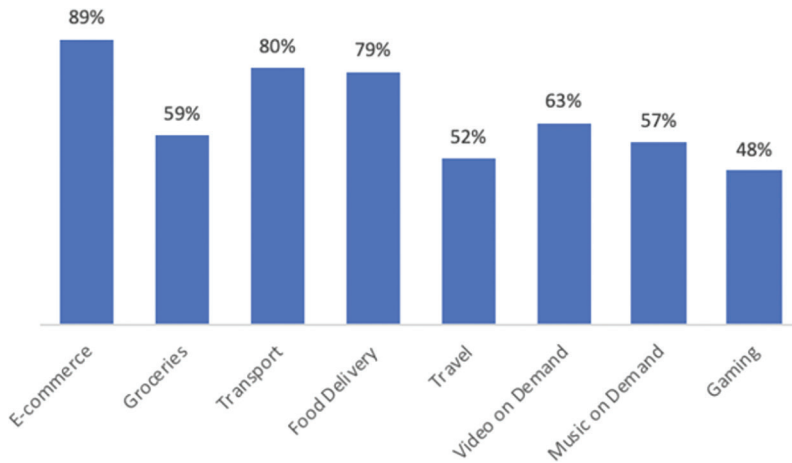


Figure 1: Use of digital technology. Source: processed from Google et al. (2022: 91).

to use public transportation (instead of personal vehicles), respondents prefer to use online transportation (98%) rather than offline transportation (2%).

In line with this, the research conducted by Google et al. (2022) indicates that online transportation is the second-highest sector widely used by today's digital economy society, and this number is only inferior to e-commerce, as shown in Figure 1:

Thus, it can be inferred that people's choices of transportation means for mobility are increasingly varied. They depend not only on their private vehicles but also on online transportation provided by platforms (Fillone and Mateo-Babiano 2018). Within these complex dynamics, *bentor* drivers encounter challenges getting passengers to sustain their income and provide for their families.

Technically, the competition between *bentors* and online transportation shows a struggle for economic resources at the grassroots level. This struggle is not only in their competition for passengers but also in how the free market has played an essential role in regulating unfair price competition (Borchers and Figueirôa-Ferreira 2022; Rizzo 2017). Instead of creating new welfare for the lower economic class, online transportation applications have cut off the livelihoods and lives of *bentor* drivers by offering prices that are far below the average rates of *bentors*.

Amidst the fierce competition between *bentors* and online transportation, the population of *bentors* in Yogyakarta continues to increase in quantity. Based on data compiled from the Yogyakarta Becak Motor Association (PBMY), the number of *bentor* drivers registered with the association and registered with the Department of Transportation as of May 2023 is around 1700 members. This number does not include the proportion of *bentors* that are not registered (non-members). On the other hand, the rapid increase in the number of *bentors* in recent years is a response from the traditional *becak* drivers who converted their vehicles to *bentors* due to their body condition and age, which no longer allow them to pedal a *becak* over long distances and extended period. Moreover, if they have to pass through the terrain that is uphill and the heavy passengers load.

In addition to intense competition in obtaining passengers with online transportation, another issue that *bentor* drivers must face is the lack of juridical protection for their operations. In 2019, the Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta issued Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2019 concerning implementing Road Traffic and Transportation. It contains all the operational rules for public transportation that are allowed to operate in Yogyakarta. Interestingly, of the various types of public transportation in Yogyakarta, *bentors* are not part of public transportation, whose operations are legalized by the government. This phenomenon is a paradox for the existence of *bentors* in Yogyakarta. On the one hand, there are public transportation and tours with local Yogyakarta cultural attractions. However, paradoxically, their activities contradict local government regulations.

Furthermore, *bentors* are considered as a mode of transportation that is less environmentally friendly due to the fuel pollution they produce. Moreover, in terms of regulation, *bentors* are also not classified as motorized vehicles, nor can they be categorized as non-motorized vehicles. *Bentors* in the administrative set do not have clear documentation, so when the police inspect the vehicles on the road, these vehicles are classified as illegal. In contrast, pedal-powered *becaks* and *andong* ('horse-drawn carriages') are regulated and legalized by the local government (DIY Provincial Cultural Office 2014). These two types of transportation can be classified as non-motorized vehicles and have non-motorized vehicle registration numbers.

Even though they have to grapple with various difficulties, *bentors* remain an alternative mode of public transportation that is more inclusive, allowing groups of people without access to smartphones and internet technology to remain mobile. Unfortunately, regulatory aspects hinder the broader operation of *bentors*, leading to their classification as an illegal economic activity. Based on the description above, this article aims to provide an academic illustration of the struggle of *bentor* drivers in the vortex of neo-liberalism. It does not stop at that point; this article also offers a critical perspective in dissecting how neo-liberalism works at the grassroots level. The first section of this article focuses on the history of the development of *becaks* and the emergence of *bentor* in Yogyakarta. In the subsequent section, we delve deeper into the way in which *bentor* is subjected to stereotyping by society. The third section examines the issue of how the existing transportation regulations in Yogyakarta fail to accommodate *bentor's* drivers, despite the fact that *bentor* is part of the informal sector, which contributes to tourism in Yogyakarta. In the final section, we analyse the way in which *bentor's* drivers struggle to survive as *homo sacer* in the face of an increasingly challenging economic life.

METHOD

This article uses a qualitative method with a life history approach to see the phenomenon of the struggle of *bentor* drivers in the free market in the Malioboro tourist area, Yogyakarta. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with *bentor* drivers in the area. The informants in this study involved three characteristics of *bentor* drivers. Some are from urban areas (Wirobrajan, Yogyakarta), rural areas (Sedayu and Pajangan, Bantul) and representatives from *becak* association administrators. The three characteristics of these informants were chosen because they could provide strong narratives regarding the struggles of *bentor* drivers seen from various walks of life.

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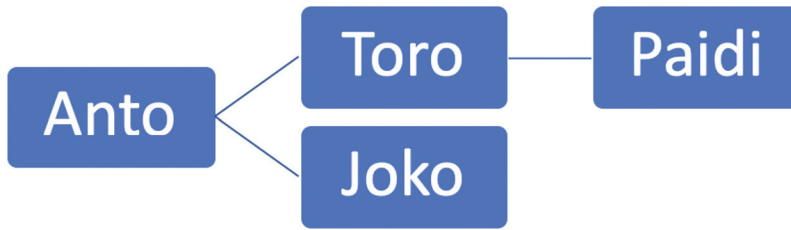


Figure 2: Data collection process through snowball. Source: Researcher Primary Data (2023).

The author uses the snowball technique to get informants with the three characteristics above. We have anonymized the real names of the informants and used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the informants involved in this study. The key informant in this study is Anto (a *bentor* driver from the urban area of Yogyakarta). Starting with an interview with Anto, the author obtained recommendations from several other informants. The author also gained access to meet Paidi (the administrators of the *becak* association). The processed data in this article are an intersubjective experience experienced by *bentor* drivers. Hence, the narration provided reflects a description of the journey of life and important events that shape their life today. Employing the snowball technique, we initiated the process by involving a limited number of informants closely associated with the operation of *bentor*. As we identified additional possible informants, we carefully chose individuals who met the specific criteria outlined in our research. In this article, we focus particularly on the informants who supply pertinent information concerning the topic under consideration.

The data collection process can be observed in the following chart:

In addition to primary and secondary data obtained through in-depth interviews with informants, we also utilized some supporting documents such as legal documents, local governmental regulations, scientific publications and government records containing statistical information.

INFORMANTS' BACKGROUND

The concise summary detailing the backgrounds and life stories of the informants aims to give an overview of the informants' life trajectory to becoming *bentor* drivers. Each informant underwent a unique process and particular challenges before deciding to be a *bentor* driver.

First informant is Anto (54 years old), a main provider of his family who has three children (two boys and one girl). Prior to his involvement as a *bentor* driver, Anto was jobless while his wife served as the primary breadwinner of the household through her job at her sister's laundry service. Anto's transition to becoming a *bentor* driver was spurred by a friend's offer of a *bentor* unit, which he accepted and subsequently utilized the unit to help his wife's earnings for the family.

The second informant is Toro, aged 56, a Javanese and a primary family breadwinner with two daughters. Before transitioning to work as a *bentor* driver, Toro served as a salesperson at a motorcycle showroom, where he met and later wed his wife, who is of Chinese descent. As a female of Chinese descent, Toro's wife does not get an inheritance from her family, as inheritance is typically

designated for sons. Hence, females of Chinese descent are often advised to find financially successful spouses in order to secure their future. However, Toro's wife decided to marry Toro despite his modest financial circumstances. Following the 1998 Reforms in Indonesia, the motorcycle showroom where they worked faced bankruptcy, prompting Toro to pursue diverse job opportunities to provide for his family. Initially assisting *bentor* drivers in repairing their broken units, Toro eventually decided to become a *bentor* driver himself.

The third informant is Joko, aged 50, who heads a household with three children, the youngest of whom is a baby. Prior to becoming a *bentor* driver, Joko worked as a construction worker involved in residential construction within his locality. Recognizing that his earnings as a construction worker were insufficient to meet his family's needs, he transitioned to becoming a *bentor* driver. His rationale for venturing into this new occupation was the potential to generate income from providing transportation services during periods when he was not engaged in construction work.

The last informant is Paidi (59 years), who heads the household and has three children and two grandchildren. His eldest son is married and has blessed Paidi with two grandchildren. His wife is a homemaker who also sells food in their village. Throughout the years, Paidi's primary occupation has been working as a pedicab or *becak* driver. Paidi experienced the transition from utilizing pedal-powered pedicabs to *bentor*. With extensive experience in this field, Paidi now serves as the chairperson of the *becak* association in Yogyakarta.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on pedicabs often focus on the issues concerning transportation dynamics, urban spatial planning and congestion (Singh and Ludhiana 2015; Addina and Keman 2015). However, the issue of how *bentor*'s drivers struggle as *homo sacer*, who fight against neo-liberalism remains relatively unexplored. A number of existing published works tend to explore the legal status of pedicabs, the propagation of stereotypes towards pedicabs, the role of pedicab associations and the circumstances of pedicab drivers in several countries such as India, Pakistan, Ghana and Thailand (Priye et al. 2021; Khan 2006; Obiri-Yeboah 2021; Wongthon and Sriwanthana 2007).

In India, the pedicab typology is divided into two forms, namely traditional pedicabs and modern pedicabs. Traditional pedicabs are pedal vehicles that still rely on human power as the main driver. The main problem frequently encountered by traditional pedicab drivers is their physical well-being, as health services regulations for them have not yet been integrated into the existing health insurance system (Pradhan et al. 2008). Meanwhile, modern pedicabs have two forms: those powered by a motor engine and those utilizing an electric drive (known as electric pedicabs). Unlike the challenges encountered by drivers of traditional pedicabs, drivers of modern pedicabs encounter various issues, including legal requirements such as driver's licences, vehicle registration numbers and operational permits, as well as infrastructure concerns such as access to fuelling stations and parking facilities (Priye et al. 2021). Both classic pedicabs and contemporary pedicabs encounter similar challenges in establishing transportation service rates. As pedicabs are public transportation stemming from grassroots efforts, the regulations concerning cost rates remain convoluted, leading pedicab drivers to set rates based on their discretion.

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In Pakistan, most pedicab drivers use motorized rickshaws. However, a common problem encountered by these drivers is that the carbon emissions from their motorized vehicles fail to comply with the regulatory standards set by the government's Standards Quality Control Authority for Smoke Emissions (Khan 2006). This situation leads to the prohibition of pedicab motorcycles that fail emission testing, rendering them unable to operate due to the ban on their vehicles. In Pakistan, the pedicab motorcycle workforce is primarily composed of underprivileged families with numerous dependents. Consequently, these drivers have united in a union to challenge government policies that adversely impact their livelihoods.

In the Ghanaian setting, pedicab motorcycles have become an alternative mode of public transport, predominantly in the Kumasi area. Most pedicab motorcycle drivers in Kumasi are migrant workers who are not absorbed into the formal job market. Consequently, a common problem encountered by pedicab motorcycle drivers in that area is ensuring the safety of their transport services, which involves adherence to established traffic regulations (Obiri-Yeboah 2021). The study conducted by Obiri-Yeboah (2021) reveals that safety factors and adherence to traffic regulations are frequently overlooked by pedicab motorcycle drivers whose literacy and riding education are inadequate. Therefore, given that pedicab motorcycles serve as a popular mode of public transportation in Ghana, it is important to provide training and guidance to the drivers.

In Thailand, the iconic pedicab, also known as the tuk-tuk, serves as a mode of public transportation and a popular tourist attraction (Wongthong and Sriwanthana 2007). However, tuk-tuk drivers in Thailand face several problems, including a lack of awareness about road safety while driving (Criddle 2016), and issues related to unregulated fare rates, leading some drivers to exploit passengers or tourists (Bangkok Post 2022). Additionally, tuk-tuks have been identified as contributors to carbon dioxide emissions, accounting for 33 per cent in 2022 (Asian Development Bank 2024). Consequently, the Thailand government is considering transitioning to electric-powered tuk-tuks to address environmental concerns.

THE HISTORY OF BECAK (PEDICAB) AND THE EMERGENCE OF BENTORS IN YOGYAKARTA

Becak has a long history in the city of Yogyakarta. This transportation mode has been widely used since the beginning of Indonesian independence. *Becaks* themselves have a long history. In 1920, *becaks* were initially brought to Yogyakarta by Chinese traders to aid them in their commercial activities (Akbar 2010).

Becaks grew in popularity from the 1930s to 1940s, leading many locals to use them as a means of transportation for mobility (Manggasari 2020). In addition to being passengers, individuals also took on roles as *becak* drivers or operated *becak* rental services. Along with the massive use of *becaks* in the independence era, regulations governing their operation were established by the Yogyakarta City Government, which included the conditions for operating *becaks*, fare structures and legal protection for both *becak* drivers and owners.

The heyday of *becaks* as public transportation for the people of Yogyakarta was in the 1980s (Jain and Srivastava 2018). During that period, *becaks* became part of the grassroots community's valuable revenue source as they offered promising opportunities. This condition was supported by several facts: first,

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only a few people had private vehicles; second, *becaks* served as public transportation for various social strata; third, *becaks* could be a means of community mobility for work and leisure purposes. Furthermore, in this era, *becaks* have become one of the icons of the city of Yogyakarta, prompting *becak* drivers to engage in a creative competition to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their vehicles. This includes adorning their *becaks* with decorative ornaments and paintings, aiming to make them both visually attractive and distinctive.

Several important developments have influenced the usage of *becaks*. First, there has been an increase in private motor vehicle ownership in Yogyakarta since the early 2000s. According to the latest data from BPS, the number of privately owned motorized vehicles (including motorcycles and cars) increased by 1,000,000 units for private cars and 6,000,000 units for motorcycles between 2015 and 2016 (BPS 2020).

Second, the waning popularity of *bentors* is attributed to the rising significance of environmental concerns. Local government regulations are promoting the concept of a green city by prioritizing public transportation as a means of community mobility (Ames et al. 2014). Consequently, the local authorities are advocating for the populace to use government-provided transportation services such as the Trans Jogja Bus. Apart from that, the city government of Yogyakarta has also established a low-carbon programme through the promotion of the *sego segawe* movement (*sepeda kanggo sekolah lan nyambut gawe* – bike to school and work). This programme has a philosophical basis that emphasizes the use of bicycles as a sustainable means of commuting to school and work.

Third, the rise in popularity of online ride-hailing platforms is significantly impacting the status and presence of *bentors*. This has led to an uneven competitive landscape between *bentors* and online transportation services. One key factor driving passengers towards online transportation over *bentors* is the cost of service. Online transportation typically offers lower and fixed rates compared to *bentors*. For example, a 2-km ride on an online platform may cost around IDR 15,000, whereas the price of a *bentor* ride can vary and at times be more expensive, contingent upon the circumstances and mood of the *bentor* driver. As a result, *bentors* are increasingly facing marginalization due to the economic advantages, practicality, efficiency and convenience offered by online applications.

Fourth, the adjustment of regulations regarding the operation of public transportation in Yogyakarta involves permitting pedal pedicabs (*becaks*) and carriages (*andong*) to operate with explicit legal protection. Specifically, pedal pedicabs (*becaks*) and carriages (*andong*) are restricted to operating solely within small route tourist zones, with a prohibition on operations on primary routes and main roads aimed at alleviating traffic congestion issues in the city of Yogyakarta. On the other hand, *bentors* encounter ambiguity in the regulations concerning their operation (Conway and Khallouki 2014).

Nevertheless, *bentors* have undergone a lengthy evolution and adaptation to keep up with the changing times. Despite encountering regulatory challenges over the years, *becaks*, particularly *bentors*, persist in adapting to an evolving urban landscape marked by intense competition in the free market.

HOMO SACER, STEREOTYPES OF BENTOR AND MARGINALIZED VOICES

The transformation from pedal-powered to *bentors* did not go smoothly. Its existence often faces negative stereotypes from the community and

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authorities. According to Durante et al. (2017), stereotypes are constructed on the hegemonic power of the social classes in the lower strata – stratified by their differential access to material, social, economic and cultural resources. As a result, subjects with dominant power can determine views and perceptions on particular objects widely accepted by society. Thus, the power over views and perceptions can construct specific stereotypes. At least several negative narratives are associated with the existence of *bentors* as public transportation.

The most frequently discussed issue is the comparison of air pollution between pedal-powered *becaks* and *bentors*. Motorized *becaks* are perceived as environmentally unfriendly vehicles. This assumption is based on conditions that compare the carbon emissions produced by pedal *becaks* and *bentors*. The community considers *becaks* as more environmentally friendly because they do not burn fuel oil, while *bentors* produce carbon emissions that are very difficult for the community to tolerate.

In reality, there is a paradox associated with this issue. When we look at the carbon emissions produced, what differentiates a *bentor* from the privately owned motorized vehicles currently owned by the community? When people criticize the argument for carbon emissions, it seems unfair if they compare it to *becaks*. Why not compare it to the carbon emissions generated from motorcycles and passenger cars used also by online transportation? If the goal is to reduce air pollution, then restrictions on motorized vehicles must also be implemented so that carbon emissions can be equally controlled. It feels even more unfair when we observe the reality of how public transportation provided by the government (like the Trans Jogja bus) and other online transportation owned by various platforms can operate freely without receiving stereotypes.

Besides causing air pollution due to fuel usage, *bentors* are also considered to have generated noise pollution due to the vehicle's engine being quite noisy (Addina and Keman 2015). The noise is attributed to using old engines on *bentors*, which tend to produce loud sounds. Moreover, currently, the government is intensively raising environmental issues by promoting the reduction of fuel oil and optimizing the use of electricity in conventional vehicles. For example, electric motorcycles and electric cars, there is even talk of producing electric *becaks*.

Another stereotype is that *bentors* are also considered unsafe as a means of transportation. This statement departs from the physical condition of the *bentors*, which is perceived to lack ideal protection for the passengers. As a means of motorized transportation, *bentors* have speeds equivalent to or approaching the speed of other motorized vehicles (e.g. motorbikes). It means that the safety of both passengers and drivers must also be taken into consideration. The absence of safety guarantee equipment under safety standards (SNI), such as safety belts and/or helmets for passengers, makes *bentors* considered unsafe.

Not only that, from the public's point of view, *bentors* are also considered to be frequently negligent and reckless in carrying their passengers. One common occurrence is carrying several passengers by exceeding the load capacity. However, this is not entirely the fault of the *bentor* drivers but rather due to the request of the passengers who insist on it. For example, one of the informants experienced the following case:

If there is an accident involving a *bentor*, the *bentor* will definitely be blamed. For example, when passengers force them to ride a *becak* with their entourage to save on fares. *Bentor* is ideal for two people, but well,

the passengers always want to get the most out of it, with two sitting on top and two on the bottom.

(interview with Joko, 6 April 2023)

The case experienced by Joko serves as an example of the vulnerability of *bentor* drivers when dealing with passengers. If they refuse the passenger's request, they will lose their income. On the other hand, they find themselves also in a hazardous condition, jeopardizing the safety of both passengers and themselves. Therefore, *bentors* are also considered illegal transportation. Moreover, the laws on road traffic and transportation explain that using machines in non-motorized transportation (intentionally) is prohibited because it can endanger the passengers and the driver.

On 24 July 2023, TikTok social media were enlivened by viral content which recorded a video of a *bentor* driver crashing into a cilok cart. The TikTok video records the driver's reckless action when carrying his *bentor*. The implication is that the video circulated in cyberspace and became a very popular conversation. It did not just stop there, local media also reported on the accident caused by the driver's collision. Moreover, several media did not hesitate to frame that the *bentor* worker was drunk. After that incident, the image of *bentor* drivers became even worse, plus local media reports framed it as if *bentor* drivers liked to get drunk.

Another reason which also classifies *bentors* as illegal transportation is related to the source of the motorbike engine they use. In this case, the engines are often sourced from a private vehicle that lost its documents, is no longer valid or was the machine from a fraudulent vehicle (stolen). Moreover, from an economic standpoint, makeshift motorbikes are cheaper than motorbikes with complete paperwork. In fact, most of the *bentors* drivers do not possess valid registration documents for their vehicles. It is not without reason. The problem is that even those who own documents on the vehicle's engine cannot also prove that the paperwork specifies the type of vehicle as a '*bentor*'.

Harian Jogja

HOME NEWS PEMILU 2024 JOGIAPOLITAN EKIBS OTO-TEKNO WISATA SPORT

Viral Malioboro Geger, Sumbernya Pengemudi Bentor Mabuk hingga Tabrak Pedagang Cilok

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Rabu, 27 Maret 2024

Langganan Masuk

SOLOPOS JOGJA

NIS SOLORAYA SPORT LIFESTYLE INDEX BERITA KORAN CONTEST JATENG JATIM JOGJA OTOMOTIF TEKNOLOGI HITS KOLAM

Home - Jogja - Kota-jogja

Viral! Sopir Becak Motor Dikejar Warga di Malioboro, Ternyata Ini Penyebabnya

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Figure 3: Local media screenshot framing bentor. Source: Harian Jogja (2023) and Solopos Jogja (2023).

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Most documents only identify that it was a two-wheeled vehicle (motorcycle). Consequently, the basis for this vehicle document is essential in determining the type of vehicle. Another issue is that the Road Traffic and Transportation law explicitly prohibits vehicles like *bentors*. This condition reinforces the stereotype that *bentors* are illegal vehicles.

Additionally, another stereotype states that *bentors* do not obey traffic rules. This stereotype often arises due to unscrupulous *bentors* drivers who break through road traffic, then park carelessly and drop off passengers in places where the traffic is congested, causing traffic jams. As a result, accidents involving *bentors* drivers and/or their passengers tarnish the reputation of other *bentors* drivers (Doucet et al. 2011). They are considered reckless, negligent and arrogant.

In general, the stereotypes mentioned above are the implications of phenomena that have occurred and have been internalized by authorities and the public that *bentors* are unsafe transportation. This stereotype is detrimental to other *bentor* drivers who have tried to comply with all the existing rules. Therefore, the *bentor* association serves as a platform that helps regulate the *bentor* drivers in traffic and ensures the safety and comfort of the passengers. Again, this stereotype has been firmly entrenched in the public's and authorities' minds, making *bentors* a marginal group that needs to voice their aspirations. Even so, until now, *bentors* have continued to operate against stereotyping and become a source of livelihood for grassroots communities amid the challenges of free market competition.

REGULATIONS OF BENTOR IN THE DARKNESS

As public transportation serves as a source of livelihood for many people, *bentors* should be regulated under clear regulations regarding their operation, fares and legal protection for drivers and owners. *Bentors* are types of vehicles not recommended under the Road Traffic and Transportation Law (LLAJ) No. 22/2009 Article 22 Paragraph 1. According to this law, non-motorized vehicles are prohibited from deliberately allowing their vehicles to be towed by motorized vehicles at speeds which may endanger safety.

Based on the above, *bentors* are often considered illegal because they fail to meet the technical legal requirements set by the government through the Traffic and Road Transportation Law (LLAJ) No.22/2009. Generally, the requirements in Article 22 Paragraph 1 have technically regulated the types of vehicles prohibited from operating as road transport. These technical requirements prohibit non-motorized vehicles – in this case, pedal-powered *becaks*, from being operated by a motorized vehicle engine (motorcycle engine). This technical legal requirement also correlates with several other things, such as the absence of a special driving licence (SIM) for *bentor* drivers, the lack of a clear Vehicle Registration Certificate (STNK) on *bentors*, the absence of an official vehicle number plate, and the insufficient presence of safety equipment that meets the required by SNI (Indonesia National Standards).

Not stopping there, in 2019, the Yogyakarta City Government issued Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2019 concerning the Implementation of Road Traffic and Transportation. In this regulation, there are several operational rules for public transportation allowed to operate in Yogyakarta. For example, Article 10, Paragraphs 1–4, mentions provisions regarding the types of public transportation. Referring to this law in Article 1, what is meant as public transportation is divided into two categories: using motorized vehicles

and using non-motorized vehicles. On the one hand, Articles 2 and 3 state that motorized vehicles include motorcycles, passenger cars, bus cars and goods cars that technically fulfil roadworthiness. On the other hand, Article 4 states that vehicles that fall into the category of non-motorized vehicles include vehicles driven by human power or animal power.

Explicitly, this regulation is also clarified in Article 31, where the types of non-motorized vehicles permitted to carry passengers are *becak* ('pedal-powered pedicab') and *andong* ('horse-drawn carriage'). This regulation seems problematic because it clearly grants operational permits for *becaks* and *andong*. In other words, *bentors* are illegal vehicles that do not have operational permits. In fact, some *becak* drivers have already modified their *becaks* with the help of motorized vehicle engines. Please read the following excerpt from an interview with the Paguyuban Becak Motor Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Motor Becak Association):

The transformation of pedal *becaks* to motorized ones is not just a mere accessory but our effort to adapt to the changing times. We realize that we are getting older, meaning that we can no longer pedal for long distances. On the other hand, given our current age, it is challenging to get another job. So, whether we like it or not, we must continue driving *becaks* to support our families.

(interview with Paidi, 6 May 2023)

The above interview excerpt shows *bentor* drivers' difficulty due to government regulations that do not favour them. In reality, using motorized engines in *becaks* is intended to enable them to continue working and transporting passengers more efficiently. Their usage of motorized vehicle engines is not intended to violate road traffic. At the same time, the current number of *bentor* drivers is also higher than that of pedalled *becaks*. Based on data from the Yogyakarta *Bentor* Association, the number of registered *becak* drivers at the Association and the Department of Transportation currently reaches 1700 drivers. This number does not include *bentor* drivers who are part of the association but are not registered with the Department of Transportation due to incomplete administrative requirements, such as photocopies of ID Cards (KTP). In addition, many *bentor* drivers do not join the association. The latter types are often called seasonal *bentor* drivers. It means that the population of *bentor* drivers is now huge. This condition requires serious attention from the government to formulate regulations that are inclusive for them.

Based on the data gathered in the field, *bentor* drivers do not object if there is a regulation in the future that requires them to pay taxes for their *bentors*, similar to the case with other motorized vehicles.

I don't mind if I have to pay taxes. Even during the meeting at the Association, we also agreed that if we are required to pay motorbike *becaks* tax, we are ready. The most important thing right now is that there are clear regulations for us so that we can make a living in peace, not chasing those in power.

(interview with Toro, 22 March 2023)

At this point, the above interview excerpt is sufficient to illustrate how the position of *bentor* drivers is amidst regulatory uncertainty, causing them a sense of insecurity when they have to make a living. The statement from

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the informant is not without reason, as in Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2019 Article 33 Paragraph 1 states that motorized except those mentioned in Article 10 Paragraph 2 (motorcycles, passenger cars and bus cars) are prohibited from operating to carry passengers. In Paragraph 2, it is also emphasized that motorized vehicles that violate the provisions referred to in Paragraph 1 will be subject to administrative sanctions in the form of a maximum fine of Rp500,000 (five hundred thousand rupiah).

Regulations clearly position *bentors* in precarious. On the one hand, *bentors* cannot be classified as passenger transport vehicles because they have adopted motorized engines. On the other hand, *bentors* are also not legalized as a type of motorized vehicle used to transport passengers. This condition is very problematic for *bentor* drivers. The current regulations are also not enough in their favour. The use of motorized engines on the rickshaws they use is intended because of the limited power and age factors. In addition, welfare for *becak* drivers (both pedals and motorized) is also not guaranteed (Rizal et al. 2021). Thus, they must transform into *bentors* to continue supporting their household.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that there is regulatory anarchism where the state has difficulties in overcoming security issues. As a result, *bentor* drivers – as *homo sacers* – are allowed by the state to deny their rights and are neglected from juridical protection. Actions like this cannot be justified. However, the state must start formulating appropriate regulations by addressing safety-related issues. For example, the state cooperates with the private sector (*bentor* manufacturers) and listens to *bentor* drivers' aspirations to solve existing problems. This effort can be made by determining permissible standards for *bentor* production – for example, limiting the maximum speed of *bentors* and providing protective equipment for drivers and passengers (seat belts, helmets and front bumpers).

Not only that, but the Yogyakarta Provincial Government also has an urgency to prepare a Transportation Master Plan (RIT) to map the transportation facility needs and infrastructure in Yogyakarta, considering that Yogyakarta has many supporting sectors, such as tourism and education. With the RIT, the government will be able to determine future steps, whether *bentors* should be maintained or not. If so, what steps need to be prepared to support the plan? However, if not, what alternatives must be prepared so that thousands of *bentor* drivers do not suffer more in accessing economic resources and obtaining their welfare as citizens?

SURVIVAL STRATEGY OF BENTORS DRIVER AS A HOMO SACER: DEVELOPING RESILIENT STRATEGIES IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Amidst unclear regulations regarding *bentors*, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a real threat to *bentor* drivers, not only because of the lack of tourists visiting Yogyakarta but also other limitations have contributed to their unfavourable conditions. For example, Anto (54 years) has three children. His first son is married and lives with his wife, while the second one, a daughter, has just graduated from university, and the other son is still in the first grade of Junior High School. With the burden of its dependents, Anto relies on his *bentor* as his primary occupation. He has no other job besides working as a *bentor* driver. Even so, he cannot depend on the fate of his family life and his children's education only from his *bentor*. His wife is a driver in a laundry kiosk. Initially, Anto's wife was a homemaker, but due to the challenging

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economic conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, his relative offered her a job to look after a laundry kiosk.

The economic challenges are felt by Anto and other informants such as Toro (56 years), a *bentor* driver who lives in Bantul Regency and currently has two children as dependents. Toro's first daughter just graduated from SMK (Vocational High School) and is currently working (apprenticeship) in a supermarket. His second daughter was still in second grade at the State Junior High School in Yogyakarta. Toro uses his *bentor* as the only family transportation asset. He and his family use it for daily mobility, such as dropping off and picking up children from school, taking children to work, taking his wife to the hospital and so on. With his dependency on his *bentor*, since he has no other means of transportation, Toro must be able to allocate time every day to accomplish all these tasks. In the morning, he has to take his children to school and take his daughter, who has just graduated from Vocational School to her workplace. After dropping her off at school, he usually waits for passengers, where he usually gathers with fellow *bentor* drivers. In the afternoon, he has to pick up his second child from school and drive her home. Not long after that, he must also pick up his first child from work in the afternoon. After his business with his child is over, he has to return to the city to wait for passengers coming until midnight. However, if his wife has an urgent need, he must accompany her first before looking for passengers.

Like Anto, Toro cannot rely on finding passengers through his *bentor* to support his family's livelihood. Moreover, domestic responsibilities in the family consume much of his time. Therefore, his wife helps by making handicrafts to be sold. Interestingly, their children are not ashamed or reluctant of what their parents do. In fact, they are willing to help sell the merchandise produced by their mother. For example, Toro's first child, an apprentice at a supermarket, is willing to ask permission from her superiors so that her mother's merchandise can be displayed there. Apart from that, his second child often brings her mother's merchandise to school to sell to her friends.

Joko (50 years old) takes a different approach. Like Toro, he also relies on his *bentor* as his family's primary and only means of transportation. Therefore, he has to take his wife to sell clothes at Beringharjo Market every morning. Meanwhile, their young child is entrusted to their relatives or in-laws. Joko and his wife collaborate to meet their family's needs. Like the other informants, the unpredictable income from the *bentor* requires additional sources of income. That is why Joko only operates his *bentor* from morning until afternoon, as he needs to pick up his wife and take her home in the evening.

The socio-economic conditions of *bentor* drivers mentioned above provide a glimpse of how the informants in this research struggle to survive amid the economic challenges of the free market era. On the other hand, tourists are offered alternative transportation options through online transportation applications, promising comfort, safety, affordability and efficiency. It has made it difficult for *bentor* drivers to sustain themselves and earn a living. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated their situation, as the government has implemented various social activity restrictions, which have impacted many grassroots economic activities, including *bentor* drivers.

Based on the field data, it seems incredibly challenging to rely solely on one source of income, such as a *bentor*, to support a household's livelihood. The fluctuating and unpredictable earnings of *bentor* drivers necessitate contributions from other supporting sectors. Therefore, the family plays a crucial

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role in sustaining the economy of motorcycle rickshaw drivers by having the wife work, assisting in the family business and having the children help sell family merchandise and other means.

On the other hand, we can observe subsistence efforts made by motorcycle rickshaw drivers to survive amidst the whirlwind of the free market. Similar to what Chayanov (1991) stated about the moral economy of farmers, in this context, *bentors* represent grassroots individuals striving to sustain their livelihood through subsistence (Simmonds 1962). They engage in productive activities and consume the fruits of their labour. Quoting Chayanov:

Self-exploitation is an economical category which describes the behavior of a member of a peasant family who, working for his own subsistence needs, is forced to work more and/or more intensively than is required by the strict economic necessity of his situation.

(1991: 91–92)

Based on the quote, it can be understood that self-exploitation is a form of economic struggle carried out by grassroots communities (Chayanov: peasant families) who work for their subsistence needs. They are driven to work more and/or more intensively to meet their families' increasingly challenging economic demands.

The field data show that *bentor* drivers unconsciously engage in self-exploitation to keep working and earning money. In fact, what they do may not even be enough to meet their own needs. As an illustration, Toro starts his day with Rp50,000, which he brings from home. Before taking his children, he must spend Rp25,000 on fuel for the round trip to pick them up and take them home. Additionally, he has to buy his meal for Rp12,000. However, during the wait for passengers, he only managed to get one customer that day, which means he earned only Rp20,000. From Toro's case example, we can see that he currently has only Rp33,000. This situation shows that he does not always repay the money he earns from his daily hard work with the *bentors*. Sometimes, the money he brings from home does not even cover his expenses (resulting in a loss), even though on favourable occasions, he can transport three to four passengers (with a queuing system arranged by a local association).

Therefore, the actions of these *bentor* drivers do not always yield the expected results. Their work sometimes fails to provide more for their livelihood. As a result, self-exploitation continues as they have to extend their working hours until late at night, sometimes not even going home and opting to sleep in their *becaks* while waiting for passengers to come. Toro often resorts to this situation to find passengers:

Often, I do not go home because, you know, much of my time is occupied with domestic responsibilities. So, my effective time to find passengers is at night. Sometimes, if I have not got any passengers, I wait until night. If it is urgent, I must sleep here (inside the *becak*). It is not a problem. The important thing is that I have to be back home in the morning to take my children.

(interview with Toro, 2 April 2023)

Actually, there is another mechanism used by *bentor* drivers to remain resilient in the face of difficult living conditions. They have a mutual support

mechanism if any member experiences a calamity or needs financial assistance. So, this collective mechanism is based on a sense of kinship and initiative from fellow *bentor* drivers who are part of the local association/*gemeinschaft* (*paguyuban*). There is no government intervention in this effort. However, such conditions should be the government's responsibility to ensure citizens' welfare. Nevertheless, based on this mechanism, it can be understood that the social protection mechanism employed by *bentor* drivers is through joining the local association/*gemeinschaft* (*paguyuban*):

The solidarity among fellow *bentor* drivers within the local association is strong, sir. We help each other if any member needs assistance. For example, if someone has an accident, we will contribute funds, or if someone's child is getting married, we also provide financial support. So, even though we live with limited means, we try our best to help one another as much as we can.

(interview with Anto, 22 March 2023)

Based on the above interview, the position of *bentor* drivers as citizens becomes increasingly unclear. However, this also raises significant questions for the government regarding the regulations and guarantees of welfare that should be provided for motorcycle rickshaw drivers. This phenomenon seems to portray *bentor* drivers as *homo sacer*. Agamben (1998) described that the figure of *homo sacer* is a sacred individual stripped of their juridical and political rights in Roman law. Agamben argues that in modern political life, exception (exclusion) has become something normal, leading to the disregard of civil rights by the state authorities (Agamben 2017).

CONCLUSION

Amidst regulatory uncertainties, *bentor* drivers continue to fight at the grassroots level to earn a living and survive. The obstacles they face are not only competition with the presence of online transportation platforms but also battling against stereotypes and policies that are not in their favour. Nevertheless, as *homo sacer* – citizens who are stripped of their juridical and political rights, *bentor* drivers have their mechanisms to endure amid the strong current of neo-liberalism.

The findings of this research mention two strategies employed by *bentor* drivers. First, the family plays a crucial role in sustaining the household's livelihood due to the lower income compared to the minimum wage in Yogyakarta. They can endure because of the economic support their spouses, children, in-laws and extended family members provide. Second, the *bentor* driver association (*paguyuban*) serves as a platform to support fellow members in maintaining their resilience. The mechanisms through the *bentor* association seem to play a significant role in functioning as a social security net. This role has not been provided by the state so far.

Not only that, considering the continuously increasing population of *bentor* drivers over time, the government needs to create a roadmap for an inclusive Master Transportation Plan (RIT) so that *bentor* drivers can have a clear regulatory foundation. This way, the struggle of *bentor* drivers with other grassroots transport options, such as online transportation, can proceed fairly and without mutual exclusion. Furthermore, further studies on *bentor* drivers are needed to respond to their lack of research and publications. Given

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the limitations of this study in some aspects, the author suggests conducting further research on *betor* drivers within the discourse of green economy, exploring opportunities and challenges related to this topic.

ETHICS STATEMENT

In this article, we did not require ethical clearance due to several reasons: (1) the informants have verbally confirmed their consent to participate in the research, so the data used can be accounted for by the authors; (2) in this research method, we have anonymized the informants' names to protect their confidentiality; and (3) the data is publicly accessible and verbal consent has already been obtained from the informants.

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