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Get ready for the flood! Risk-handling styles in Jakarta, Indonesia

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Acknowledgements

About half a year after I had begun my fieldwork in the flood-prone riverbank settlement that I describe in this dissertation, I e-mailed some photos of a recent flood in the neighbourhood to my parents, back in the Netherlands. Prior to that day, my mother had always been able to hide away her concerns about my job from me as best as she could, but this time she could not help herself from calling me on my cell phone and bluntly exclaiming: "I wish I could take you away from there and bring you back home, now!" The urge to protect her child from the poverty and riskiness that she associated with this specific fieldwork area had at that point in time defeated her other wish for me – the wish to feel free to pursue my anthropological work, on a topic that I deemed academically and socially relevant.

Luckily for me and for my mother, I was not alone during my fieldwork in Jakarta. In fact, I was surrounded in the kampong by people who were perhaps as equally concerned about my safety and well-being as my biological parents. These people were my neighbours and my study participants at the same time, and, more than that, they often jokingly referred to themselves as my *orang tua adopsi* – my adoptive parents. My new neighbours did not take on an easy task when they 'adopted' me. They soon noticed that I was so inexperienced and ignorant that I needed to be supervised in nearly all of the daily practices that they deemed crucial for a safe and comfortable life in their kampong. My neighbours decided that I had to be taught how to bargain on the local market; how to sell a rice meal to bypassing customers on the street; how to attach the mattress to the ceiling in case of a medium-sized flood; where to evacuate in the case of a more severe flood; how to treat stomach aches; and how to take care of a baby – just to name a few examples of the topics on which they lectured me tirelessly. 'Tell your parents in the Netherlands not to worry', they encouraged me, 'tell them that we take care of you now'. It is thus my neighbours, my *orang tua adopsi*, whom I should thank in the first place for enabling me to carry out this research project in a safe and comfortable manner. Without their lessons, this dissertation could not have been written. And without them, my mother could not have trusted that I would be healthy and well. Now she did – or at least she acted as if she did.

But how does one thank people who live in a neighbourhood that is not registered, and who are therefore considered 'illegal' residents of Jakarta by their government? They will, for instance, not find their names or even the name of their kampong in this dissertation: I have had to anonymize all of these names to avoid increasing the many problems that this marginalized group of people already have in their daily life in the slums of Jakarta, and hence I cannot honour them personally in this dissertation. And, most problematically, how does one thank people whose houses

are evicted by the city government any time soon as part of a larger 'development' or slum-clearance project in Jakarta? The next time that I plan to visit my informants, it is likely that the riverbank settlement that I describe in this dissertation may no longer exist. So, to my great regret, the following sentence might be the best I can do to thank my neighbours for their help, their care, their tips and advice, and their participation in this study: teman-teman, orang tua adopsi saya, terima kasih banyak: buku ini tentang anda dan untuk anda semua. Or, for those youngsters who so diligently followed my weekly English classes in the kampong: thank you, my dear friends, this book is about you and for you.

There were also other people in Jakarta who have helped me greatly to carry out my fieldwork: Charina Chazali proved to be an intelligent and skillful research assistant; Dr. Erwiza Erman and Yetti Rochadiningsih helped me to get through the lengthy, bureaucratic process of obtaining a research permit; and Amis Boersma and Melanie Miltenburg, both Dutch and long-term Jakarta residents, introduced me to the wider city and its inhabitants.

When I left the kampong, I did not only leave behind the helpful residents of the riverbanks, but I also exchanged the many risks and problems that are inherent to their kampong life for a radically different, and on many levels no doubt easier, life in the Netherlands. Back behind my university desk, my main concern was no longer how to stay dry from floods or how best to collect data; from then on, my mind was mainly occupied with writing a dissertation that would do justice to the complexities and realities of my former neighbours' lived experiences, but at the same time it would still have to be coherent enough for readers to grasp my findings and academic arguments. Although academic work is of course absolutely incomparable to the daily dilemmas of riverbank settlers, it needs be said that this seemingly simple 'problem' of analyzing and writing provoked a fair amount of worrying and pondering. I was therefore happy to learn that I was – again – not all alone in facing this problem. Instead, there were many colleagues and friends who helped me out. At the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR), there were, first of all, my two supervisors Professor Mario Rutten and Doctor Gerben Nooteboom who supported me. They challenged me to go beyond the empirical data and find my own position as a social scientist. While they constantly pushed me to take further steps in my thinking and analyses, they also always gave me the idea that they had faith in me as an academic researcher. That combination of criticism and support is precisely what I needed during my PhD-trajectory, and in fact, it seems to me that every PhD student needs precisely that.

There were also other academic colleagues, both from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and beyond, who have been incredibly helpful in the process of my PhD trajectory. Professor Gregory Bankoff and Professor Willem van Schendel read and commented upon the research

proposal that I wrote in the first year of my PhD trajectory, which greatly helped me to prepare for my fieldwork. Professor Ben Wisner inspired me through many e-mail discussions about his and my work, and never became tired while he critically yet enthusiastically reflected upon whatever I wrote. At AISSR and UvA, several colleagues read early drafts of individual chapters and helped me to improve them by discussing them with me: Tina Harris, Christian Broër, Bart van Heerikhuizen, Bowen Paulle, Ward Berenschot, Laurens Bakker: thank you for sharing your experience and insights with me. I look forward to exchanging many more ideas with you in the future! Jonna Both, Anick Vollebergh, Sanneke Kloppenburg, Sylvia Tidey – a special thanks to you for the coffees and conversations about the ups and downs of doing PhD research. Dr. Michel Handgraaf and Marije Cornielje of Wageningen University have helped me tremendously with carrying out statistical analyses of my data. In later stages of the statistical analysis, my sociology colleagues Marc van de Wardt and Elmar Jansen have also been of great help.

On a personal level, there were my friends and brother who always reminded me that there is more to life than work. They stubbornly kept on inviting me for dinners and birthday parties and a glass or wine (or two) over the past years, even though they must have been annoyed by the fact that I looked at my agenda in panic each and every time they did, muttering that "I had to work," or that there was "a deadline coming up that I..." Luckily, they were not impressed at all by these panic attacks, and in fact, whenever we finally met, they usually managed to distract me from all my anthropological dilemmas and concerns.

There are two reasons why I want to thank my parents especially. For one, thank you for not taking me away from the kampong, and for acting as if you actually like the fact that I am already planning new anthropological fieldwork. Your efforts are much appreciated ;-). Secondly, and most fundamentally: thank you for letting me feel that you would be proud no matter what - whether or not I had ever finished this dissertation.

My final thank-you goes to Benno: my colleague and my love. You were close by, even when we could only communicate through the lousy internet-connection that the kampong had to offer. You have helped me collect and lose and collect again the courage and lust to write, and saw me struggle with field work experiences both in Jakarta and back home again. If I may ever continue research in Jakarta or another place in the world, it can only be with you beside me.