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

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*Orang ajar* and their radio network

We have seen in the first empirical chapter that neither a low risk cognition, nor radically deviant cultural constructs of risk, nor a 'culture' of poverty could explain for the specific risk-handling style of *orang antisipasi*. Instead, it was shown that these people's practices are largely affected by unequal power structures both within kampong society and in wider society. It became clear that the social norms that justify these unequal power structures are internalized by these riverbank settlers through what we may call a habitus of poverty. As a consequence, the habitus of *orang antisipasi*, which reflects their marginalized position, further propels the cycle of hazard that increases their vulnerability towards risk. It was concluded that this habitus is produced not only by unequal power structures but also in turn reproduces such structures.

This chapter investigates in more depth the complex topic of power in relation to risk. Most specifically, it examines the range of ways in which unequal power structures can affect people's behaviour in the face of floods and other risks that shape the 'normal uncertainty' in Bantaran Kali. For this aim it analyzes the risk-handling style of a group of residents with a much higher social status in kampong society than the *orang antisipasi* from chapter 3.

Here I introduce the risk-handling style of people who are nicknamed the *orang mengajar keamanan* in Bantaran Kali, or, shorter, the *orang ajar*.<sup>120</sup> *Mengajar* is the Indonesian verb for 'teaching' or 'lecturing' and is abbreviated to *ajar*; *keamanan* means 'safety'. Hence, an *orang ajar* might be described as a person who lectures fellow resident about the topic of safety.<sup>121</sup> In contrast with the *orang antisipasi* who handle risks in relative autonomous ways, the practices that *orang ajar* exhibit in relation to flood risk most often involve others. Not only do these relatively powerful residents of the kampong cooperate with political actors involved in the flood management of

<sup>120</sup> 18 out of 130 respondents could be categorized as having an *ajar* risk-handling style in Bantaran Kali. That is the equivalent of nearly 14 per cent of the participants in this study. See Figure 3 for a visual representation of the most common risk-handling styles that are exhibited by residents in Bantaran Kali.

<sup>121</sup> As noted, this analysis was made on the basis of 1) narrative analyses of in-depth interviews, 2) observations and 3) a quantitative survey on risk-handling practices. The outcomes of the two first methods are referred to throughout this chapter. See Appendix D for the outcome and an interpretation of the quantitative survey, and Figure 4 for a comparison between the main risk-handling practices per style. Most importantly, the outcomes show that *orang ajar*, in comparison with people representing any of the three other risk-handling styles, show extremely high on the following items: 'discussing best response plan with neighbours'; 'gathering information about flood risk from the government'; 'contacting the sluice-gate keepers in Bogor or Manggarai to receive information about water levels'; 'helping other people evacuate'; 'warning other people about floods'; 'socializing politicians involved in flood management'. *Orang ajar* also score higher than other people on 'figure out the best response plan'; 'teaching children how to swim' and 'emphasising personal skills'. Finally, it is relevant to note that *orang ajar* score extremely low on 'blaming self for floods'. This indicates that they do not consider their own settlement on the riverbanks nor their own behaviour a cause of the flood-problems. Instead, they blame others for the flood-problem – something that became clear in interviews and from observations. I return to this point later in this chapter.

Bantaran Kali, but they also collaborate with political actors in the maintenance of social order in the neighbourhood (for example by informing against potential opposition to the government). Finally, their risk-handling style involves the lecturing, monitoring and disciplining of their fellow residents. The loyalty of the *orang ajar* to the authorities, and their role in facilitating implementation of the Jakarta government policies in Bantaran Kali has, I will claim, an enormous effect on both their personal safety as well as on the safety and well-being of their fellow residents.

After I have described the risk-handling practices of *orang ajar*, I explore the effects of their practices for social dynamics and power hierarchies both within and beyond the borders of the kampong. Finally, I examine to what extent the notions of material vulnerability, risk cognition, cultural risk constructs and habitus are helpful for an interpretation of an *ajar* risk-handling style.

To become familiar with the *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali, let us again continue the story of the flood that was first described in the introduction to this dissertation, and pick up the storyline at about five o'clock in the morning. At this point in time, Ambran, his grandmother and his baby sister Melisa are assisted in their evacuation by a neighbour called Yusuf. It is this man – amongst others – who we will get to know much better in this chapter. It is no coincidence that Yusuf offers his neighbours a hand during this flood: Yusuf's risk-handling style typically circles around the assistance of – and interference with – fellow residents. Yusuf is regarded, by himself and by his neighbours, as one of the inhabitants who helps fellow residents to stay safe. Yusuf feels obliged to do so, because he is widely known as an *orang ajar*.

### **Safety in a flood-prone environment**

After he has helped Ambran and his family members to install in the *kelurahan* evacuation shelter, Yusuf (twenty-seven years old) leaves them behind again and runs back towards the kampong to help yet other flood-victims evacuate. The water splashes around him when he enters the inundated streets of Bantaran Kali and he quickly disappears in the labyrinth of narrow hallways. Only six hours later Yusuf returns to the evacuation shelter. Finally, he can sit down to rest. He rubs his sore muscles and hastily eats two full plates of rice, as he took no time to eat during the past hours of the flood.

While most evacuees in the shelter indicate overtly that they are grateful for Yusuf's assistance, behind his back some of them appear somewhat critical of his dedication. The grandmother of Ambran comments:

With all respect, because I know I must be thankful that he is always helping others, but he has been *too* diligent this time. This was only a medium-sized flood, so other than children and the elderly, people could have survived it without his help.

Ambran agrees:

The water eventually only rose two meters high or so. It was a false alarm. Grown-ups don't drown in such low water. Yusuf could have just stayed here with us to rest and eat, until the water receded. But he does not want to do that, because people such as Yusuf always feel responsible for our safety. They help – that is just what they must do.

Yusuf does not overhear these somewhat skeptic remarks about the usefulness of his efforts, but his narratives indicate that he would disagree with them. In the shelter, passionate in tone, he underlines again and again that helping others during floods is not some arbitrary choice for him, instead, it is his moral and semi-official 'duty' (*tugas*) in Bantaran Kali:

All residents of this kampong can tell you that I have a duty to keep things safe on the riverbanks. That is because I devote all my time and energy to our safety. My money, even! Everything that I once possessed I have used to buy a HT.

HT is the popular abbreviation in the kampong of a 'Handie Talkie'; a hand-held two-way radio receiver which can be used by ordinary citizens to receive information from the sluice-gate keepers about the water level in the sluices in and nearby Jakarta, or to alarm KORAMIL (Komando Rayon Militair), the sub-district military command involved in Jakarta's flood management and the city's security unit, in case of a large flood.<sup>122</sup>

If residents in Bantaran Kali want to gain access to the valuable flood information that can be received via a HT, they must themselves invest in the device, which costs on average 2.5 million Rupiah.<sup>123</sup> Despite the fact that this is a very large financial investment for most inhabitants of the riverbanks, later in this chapter I show that even the poorest among them are sometimes able and willing to make it.

Including Yusuf, eight people in Bantaran Kali possess a HT. Together these people participate in a self-supported flood-warning system.<sup>124</sup> According to riverbank settlers, the first HT entered the kampong in 2002, after a large flood had inundated Bantaran Kali. This first radio device was provided to a kampong leader by the *kecamatan* (administrative sub-district), to serve as a kind of flood-warning mechanism.<sup>125</sup> That plan, however, did not work out: the device was lost in the next flood that inundated the kampong, in 2003. The *kecamatan* never replaced this flood-warning

<sup>122</sup> Handie Talkie is the original name for portable receivers, but in Europe the device has become popularly known as a Walkie Talkie. Retrieved 20 October 2013, from <http://searchmobilecomputing.techtarget.com/definition/handie-talkie>

<sup>123</sup> That is approximately 165 euro.

<sup>124</sup> Remember from the introduction that Ambran walked into the kampong late at night and met a man with a radio device who warned him that the kampong would soon be flooded? That radio device was a HT, and that man – as is Yusuf – is called an *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali.

<sup>125</sup> The *kecamatan* is positioned between the municipality (*wali-kota*) and the kampong administration (*kelurahan*). All three institutions serve under the Provincial Government of Jakarta.

device, but residents themselves did. Over the past years, eight people personally invested in the radio equipment, thereby functionally expanding the flood-warning system in Bantaran Kali.<sup>126</sup> Before introducing the residents who participate in the flood-warning system and who are all known as *orang ajar*, let me explain briefly how the flood-warning system works.

The *kecamatan* provides users with a private radio frequency which can be used to receive information about potential floods. The *kecamatan* also facilitates the radio contact between KORAMIL, the sluice-gate keepers and the riverbank settlers who possess a HT.<sup>127</sup> When users of a HT hear sluice-gate keepers speak of 'phase 3' over the radio, they know the implications for their neighbourhood: the water in the sluice uptown has risen to 110 centimeters, which means that the water in the nearby sluice in Jakarta will soon rise to 750 centimeters at least; thus, within hours, the river in Bantaran Kali has a fair chance of flooding.<sup>128</sup> In the words of Yusuf's wife: 'then, my husband needs to get everyone out of here.' Whenever owners of a HT expect that such immediate action is needed, on the basis of their information, they feel responsible to 'contact the [kampong] leaders, bang on doors, shout out loudly spreading the news, ask the military for assistance, order people to evacuate, tell them what to do and where to go...'

Inhabitants of Bantaran Kali generally agree that the residents who own a HT are obliged to keep fellow residents safe during floods by sharing the relevant information that they receive over the radio with neighbours. Ambran: 'That is why people often call them *orang ajar*. Because *orang ajar* know how we can stay safe, they should share that knowledge with neighbours.' Ambran's quote indicates that, as was the case with the nickname *orang antisipasi*, the informal title *orang ajar* is widely recognized in Bantaran Kali. I discuss its four main characteristics below.

### ***Orang ajar***

First, the nickname '*orang ajar*' refers to each of the eight people in Bantaran Kali who possess a HT, as well as to the many more inhabitants of the kampong who regularly assist these people carry out their duties. Regarding the nickname itself, it is relevant to note that, even if, as I posed above, the nickname *orang ajar* is commonly used in Bantaran Kali to describe selected residents, people sometimes also used descriptive variations of this nickname. For example, Memen and Lestari, whom we will meet later in this chapter, prefer to describe themselves as 'a person that wants to

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<sup>126</sup> It is relevant to note here that it is absolutely not uncommon for poor members of Indonesian society to cooperate with elite actors in safety management; see, for example, Barker (2009) for an historical analysis of similar cooperation between inhabitants of Indonesian villages and neighbourhoods, and authorities. I will later in this chapter elaborate more on this phenomenon.

<sup>127</sup> See Figure 5 for a visual representation of the political institutions and other actors involved in this flood-warning system.

<sup>128</sup> See Table 2 for an overview of the flood alert levels.

teach safety' (*mau mengajar keamanan*), as a 'guru' or 'mentor' to their fellow residents, or as someone who is obliged to 'help' (*orang yang harus membantu*).

Second, if we compare the risk-handling practices of the people with an *ajar* style with those of the *orang antisipasi*, large differences become notable.<sup>129</sup> While *orang antisipasi* mainly try to handle risks autonomously, the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* always involves other actors. They maintain contact with external flood-management institutions of the Jakarta government and offer assistance to potential flood victims, often ordering them to follow their instructions. *Orang ajar* help neighbours to evacuate during floods, they participate in a local pre-warning system, they help to spread flood-risk warnings in the community and, most typically for their risk-handling style, they engage in 'teaching' or 'lecturing' (*mengajar*), by which they share knowledge with fellow residents about flood-risks and safety. In these 'lectures', *orang ajar* tell fellow residents, in accordance with the safety instructions of the *kecamatan*, that they should not remain in or atop their houses after a flood-risk message has been spread, but evacuate to *kelurahan* shelters; that they should not return to their houses before the water has receded until one of the *orang ajar* has declared it safe to do so; that after floods they should get themselves medically checked, wash themselves and clean their houses with clean water to prevent disease. According to *orang ajar* Memen, an enthusiastic organizer of such 'lectures' in Bantaran Kali:

Our knowledge must be continually repeated to all of our neighbours. Otherwise people do not understand how dangerous floods are. They don't know what to do when a flood comes, and they cannot survive the large floods that we nowadays experience in this kampong. So we need to teach them.

These 'lectures' do not take a formal nor a fixed shape, but some examples are enlightening here to give an impression. Memen, while sipping from a mug of caramel-flavored coffee in a local *warung* shares romanticized memories with three other regular customers about past times when the river was still wide and clean and the sluices in Jakarta were not yet obstructed with garbage as they are nowadays:

When I was a young man, me and my friends used to swim in the river, and bamboo was transported over water by large boats...Then more and more [people] settled in and started living on the riverbanks. Now the river has become very shallow and narrow. It is because of people like that, that this community suffers from floods nowadays. Therefore it is important to learn from us [the people who have radio contact with the sluices], so that we can still stay safe on the riverbanks.

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<sup>129</sup> See Figure 4 for a visual overview of the main differences between the risk-handling practices that are most often used by representatives of the four risk-handling styles.

Similarly, *orang ajar* Yusuf tells fellow residents again and again during informal conversations in the street that *they* cause floods in the neighbourhood by 'taking up space that is meant for the water' and by 'polluting the river'. *Orang ajar* Lestari shouts her 'lecture' loudly for all in the street to hear, as she points to a man who crouches down to defecate in the river: 'If you continue to pollute the river like that, your house will be inundated by another flood any time soon!' Whatever the precise form or content of their 'lectures', all *orang ajar* have in common that they share their insights on risk with children as well as with elderly; with locals as well as with newcomers; with looked-down upon drug addicts as well as with highly respected kampong leaders.<sup>130</sup> For them, active involvement in fellow residents' practices is an important aspect of the way in which they handle risk.

Underlying the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* is a feeling of trust or at least the positive expectation that the Jakarta government will ensure the safety of local residents.<sup>131</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, *orang ajar* expect that they will be helped by the *kecamatan* or KORAMIL in times of disaster in return for their cooperation. Hence, their *ajar* practices are seen as an investment: one that will be earned back in the form of safety. As we saw in chapter 3, *orang antisipasi*, by contrast, do not trust the governmental institutions involved in the flood management of Bantaran Kali at all and hence prefer to exhibit autonomous practices whenever faced with risks.

A third characteristic of the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* concerns their long-term strategies. As the above paragraphs about their 'lectures' already indicate, the nickname '*orang ajar*' refers not only to the actions that are taken during a flood, but also to 'duties' that are performed throughout the year – be there floods or not. Here we touch upon another big difference between the risk-handling practices of *orang antisipasi* and those of the *orang ajar*. If the former exhibit *short-term* risk-handling practices during and after floods, mostly based on survival and recovery; *orang ajar* put considerable energy into prevention and mitigation of flood-risk. For instance, they actively gather up-to-date information about flood-risks throughout the year through the use of their HT (or, if they do not possess one themselves, through their contacts with *orang ajar* who own a HT), and they put much time and energy into the development and maintenance of reciprocal relationships with *kecamatan* bureaucrats or employees of KORAMIL involved in the flood management of Bantaran Kali. Most importantly, *orang ajar* feel that they have the permanent task of 'teaching' or 'lecturing' residents who they consider to have less knowledge about the flood

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<sup>130</sup> I will later discuss the ways in which the people who are lectured by the *orang ajar* perceive these lectures, and also how they perceive the *orang ajar* themselves.

<sup>131</sup> This feeling of trust in the government was not only visible in the practices (e.g. the cooperation with bureaucrats) but also in the measured risk-perceptions of *orang ajar*. For example, while most respondents in Bantaran Kali indicated in the survey on risks that they fear that the government will soon evict their neighbourhood, the *orang ajar* were the only ones who seemed not at all to share this fear. Their answers to questions posed in this survey in fact indicated that they dismissed even the possibility of eviction, that they – much more often than others – reinvest their money in their house despite threat of eviction, and that they do not at all fear their future in this neighbourhood. See Figure 4 for a relative comparison of rates in this survey per risk-handling style; Figure 6 for a comparison of risk perceptions per style.

hazard than they do. For this aim, after they return home from work, or early in the morning while buying a plate of *nasi goreng*, day in, day out, *orang ajar* 'lecture' neighbours on the risk of floods and the best ways to handle it. This is regarded by *orang ajar* a preventive risk-strategy that decreases flood-risk for the whole community, thereby also decreasing the personal risk that *orang ajar* themselves run by living on flood-prone riverbanks. At the same time, their practices are a way for them to prove their support for the Jakarta government.

Fourth, the 'duties' that *orang ajar* have taken up in kampong society do not concern only flood-risk, but in practice a much broader array of safety issues – most notably those associated with a potential threat to social order. As the attempts of *orang ajar* to handle these risks form perhaps the most fundamental aspect of what defines an ajar risk-handling style, these will be discussed separately in the next section.

### **Managing floods, managing safety**

Although the *orang ajar* generally underline only the usefulness of their HT during flood hazard events, observations of actual usage of the radio system in Bantaran Kali show that there are many different situations in which the HT is used. In fact, during my fieldwork, *orang ajar* hardly ever reported to KORAMIL or the *kecamatan* on the water level or on other subjects that have to do with potential floods. Instead, *orang ajar* regularly reported about people or situations that they considered a threat to the social order and safety in the kampong. Interviews with *orang ajar* indicate that this was not only the case during the time I happened to live in Bantaran Kali, but it has been like that ever since *orang ajar* cooperated with the *kecamatan*. *Orang ajar* Lestari, Yusuf and Memen described these aspects of their 'duties' as follows in a group-interview with me:

Yusuf: 'In Jakarta, public order is taken care of by the police, but safety issues are the responsibility of the military. Now, I already told you that this radio system belongs to the military. So together with the military, we are responsible for safety here...That can concern floods or other problems with safety (*masalah keamanan*) in the kampong.'<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> It needs be added here that most governmental actors described these 'problems with safety' in a rather evasive manner during interviews with me: 'People along the riverbanks told you that they report on safety with a HT? Well, yeah, on floods, but maybe sometimes there is something else at hand...if you see something dangerous, then why not use the HT to report on that, right? But mostly their reports concern floods,' says one policy maker involved in flood-management. And another: 'They report on floods.' [Roanne: 'but you can monitor floods from your own radar, so are they not always too late with their reports?'] 'Well, yes, but they don't know that, so those people keep informing us about floods.' [Roanne: 'so they report on useless information?'] 'Yes, but that makes them feel important. That is why we allow them to talk to us over their HT.' This interview extract is interesting because it highlights the way in which the Jakarta government tries to socialize poor inhabitants into 'loyal citizens' and collaborators. Finally, the exclamation of a highly positioned civil servant in the army underscores in rather direct terms the actual value of the reports of *orang ajar* for the Jakarta government: 'Why would we be interested in information about the river? We can monitor the river in much more detailed ways from our own radar! The people at the riverbanks know nothing about the river that we don't know. If they talk to us, they are like the newspaper, bringing us the *news*, you know.'



Lestari: 'We are actually like the intelligence, you know...<sup>133</sup> So, if we see that people here act stupid, we must always try to correct them. We can warn people ourselves, but if they don't listen we might report on them. If there is a problem with safety, we report about that.'

Roanne: 'To the same people to whom you report on floods?'

Memem: 'Yes. We call in every evening and we speak to the operator at the military. He is an official from the *kecamatan*, but he works at KORAMIL, so everyone at KORAMIL receives our reports.'

Roanne: 'But those are powerful people to whom you report, why do they not take care of safety in this neighbourhood themselves?'

Yusuf: 'That is not an option! [laughs] They do not live in a slum like this, no, they would not even dare to enter this neighbourhood! They are not acquainted with poor people...So how can they find out what they are doing? Because of me and my friends! If people here start to make problems, we distribute information about them to all people in the radio network.'

Memem: 'We can always contact KORAMIL with our HT because we have so many floods here, right...So now, because we already have contact with them anyway, if there is another safety-problem here, we can share information about that with the military, and then the army can stand by to help us solve it.'

These quotes indicate two interesting aspects of the role that *orang ajar* play in kampong society. First, they suggest that the 'flood-warning' system that the HT's supposedly form in Bantaran Kali is in reality used for a broader range of safety issues, with *orang ajar* helping to maintain social order in Bantaran Kali. We will discuss this later in more detail.

Second, the narratives already shed some light on the many advantages that this 'flood-warning' system offers the *kecamatan*: political actors receive information about perceived 'problems' from an urban slum which would have otherwise remained hard to access. These problems concern potential social unrest, or people challenging or protesting against the government. It is hard for political actors to derive such information from poor and 'illegal' citizens, but *orang ajar* clearly have less difficulties in finding out what they deem relevant enough to report about. Often, *orang ajar* simply visit their fellow residents in their houses to question them about

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<sup>133</sup> It is interesting that Lestari says that *orang ajar* are 'like the Intelligence', because this quotation already implicitly shows that they are alike in some ways - but certainly not precisely the same. For reasons of clarity, it is important to briefly elaborate this difference here. In Bantaran Kali, with 'Intelligence' or 'Intel', people generally referred not to Indonesia's state Intelligence service but instead to average people spying for the local police. There were several people in Bantaran Kali - one among the *orang ajar* and two among the people representing one of the other risk-handling styles discussed in this paper - of whom I learned that they were 'Intel'. These people received small amounts of 'pocket money' from the police in Jakarta to report via text messages from their cell phones on potential 'terrorists' or 'criminals' who entered the neighbourhood. In contrast, *orang ajar* generally did not cooperate with the police but instead with the military (KORAMIL) and bureaucrats in the *kecamatan*. Also, as I will soon show, *orang ajar* do not spy on terrorists or tough criminals as would Intel do, but instead *orang ajar* spy on potential 'trouble makers' that oppose the authorities. The one *orang ajar* who also worked as Intel, was thus playing an exceptional double role.

seemingly relevant 'safety' issues, or they sit down at a shop (*kios*) where other inhabitants group, to overhear the latest gossip that they will later report on. Other times they autonomously search for situations to be reported on during what they call their 'patrols' (*patrol*). Late at night, one can see them walking around at a slow pace, looking around carefully as they zigzag their ways through the riverbanks alleys.<sup>134</sup>

Memem feels that he is especially well able to recognize potential 'problems' during such patrols, as he is the only *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali who was once personally instructed by a military officer living outside the neighbourhood. This informal training made such an impression on Memem that he scribbled the advices down in a pink notebook of his granddaughter which he has kept with him ever since. Every now and then he reads them over. His notes remind Memem that he, as the owner of a HT, has several duties that go far beyond flood-management, such as 'protecting the community', 'functioning as a source of information', 'avoiding lawlessness' and 'functioning as the eyes and ears of those who know and understand the law'.<sup>135</sup>

But which 'safety problems' in Bantaran Kali can possibly be so dangerous that they need to be reported about by slum residents to Indonesia's army? What type of 'lawlessness' is concretely referred to in Memem's notes? The narrative description of *orang ajar* on their 'duties' is illuminative here. Let us consider the following quotes of *orang ajar*, derived from the group interview mentioned above:

Lestari: 'If I hear gossip about a possible gang fight, I report. If I see someone walking around with weapons, I report. If I suspect someone wants to make trouble for the government, I report. Of course! It is the only way to keep our neighbourhood safe. If this would happen in all neighbourhoods in Indonesia, I tell you, our country would be the safest in the world.'

Yusuf: 'When I first made use of a HT, the man who gave me the membership card of KORAMIL explained to me that the *kecamatan* and the military like to cooperate with us because they do not want troubles in this neighbourhood. No anarchy (*anarki*)! It must remain peaceful and safe...And we have the responsibility to maintain that [social order].'

Asked for an example of potential social unrest, *orang ajar* consistently refer to former instances of public protest where citizens overtly challenged dominant classes in society. Most of the concrete examples provided by them refer to the political protests that took place in 1998, after which then-President Suharto resigned. According to the *orang ajar*, the social order has remained unstable ever since. Memem says about this:

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<sup>134</sup> I discuss these and other political benefits later in this chapter.

<sup>135</sup> Similar cooperation between the state and local security groups was also found by Joshua Barker in Bandung (2009). For a detailed account of the functioning of Indonesian's intelligence services in the twentieth century, see Conboy (2004).

People in Indonesia nowadays no longer listen to the government. People used to obey the President. Many things were bad with the government of Pak Suharto, but at least society was safe and orderly back then. Nowadays, as soon as people disagree with something a politician says, they start making troubles and fights...If a city governor takes an action that people do not like, immediately, they want to protest! Especially the poor people in this city tend to behave like that.

And *orang ajar* Lestari adds:

Poor people in Indonesia are hot headed. That is just how they are born. They have proved that already when they protested Pak Suharto. And there are still many poor people in this country because there is not much employment nowadays. So that is why there can always be uprisings in slums like this. Even though you know that we no longer have criminals here [since the *Petrus* killings, see chapter 3], still, there are many hotheads who like to make troubles against the government, because they think the government should provide them with food and jobs. Or because they are angry that our houses get flooded all the time.

The above quotations show that many of the ideas of *orang ajar* on the protesting tendencies of the poor masses point back to 1998. In the narratives that I present next, it becomes clear that *orang ajar* also base their examples on potential social unrest that point back to even more recent instances of protest. The following quotations all tell the story of how some inhabitants of the riverbanks in Jakarta participated in two different protests in 2002 and 2007 that were focused against the flood-management policies of the Jakarta government:

Yusuf: 'There have been protests at the sluice in Jakarta against floods. Some people from this neighbourhood participated in those...They were complaining that the government should stop flooding in our kampong, even though they have no knowledge about this complicated problem [of flooding]. They only protest because they are overly emotional...hot heads...therefore we need to keep an eye on them! We must educate them and keep things safe here.'

Memem: 'During past floods people here started making trouble. But now we have the task to maintain safety here, so I can predict that during the next flood, there will be no more problems in this neighbourhood.'

Lestari: 'If I would ever heard people talking about protesting against floods again, *wah*, I would become angry! First, I will visit their house and explain to them that they should be neutral, not anti-government. Because the problem of flooding is too complex for them to understand anyhow, so why blame the government if they don't even know what the governor should do? If I find out that people try to organize a protest, despite my warnings, for sure I report them to the military. I would be ashamed if there was another protest of the stupid people (*orang bodoh*) here against the government.'<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Note that Lestari and her fellow *orang ajar* speak of 'the government' (*pemerintah*) both when they refer to the Jakarta government and also when they speak about the national (central) government of Indonesia. In this specific quote, Lestari refers to the governor and the Jakarta government, while in some of the other quotations above, she used the same word

I will shortly elaborate on the advantages that the political institutions in Jakarta enjoy through the cooperation of *orang ajar*, as well as the benefits of cooperation for *orang ajar*. But first, let me offer some concrete examples of the ways in which *orang ajar* have tried to maintain 'order and safety' during my stay in Bantaran Kali.

### How the social order is maintained in Bantaran Kali

One time, a group of immigrant chicken butchers was reported on by *orang ajar*, and as a result they were expelled from the kampong. These chicken butchers had come to live in the kampong four years before but did not intermingle much with their neighbours. Instead, they spent all their time working and ran a successful business in Bantaran Kali. However, after multiple complaints from *orang ajar* about these newcomers to KORAMIL and the *kecamatan*, the chicken butchers were expelled from the kampong by the kampong leader. The formal reason for their expulsion was that *orang ajar* said that these chicken butchers 'pollute the river' with meat-residue, which, according to the *orang ajar*, caused an increase of flooding. In reality, however, several *orang ajar* independently told me that they wanted the chicken butchers to move away from the kampong because they had seen them gambling – a practice which is illegal in Indonesia.<sup>137</sup> It thus seemed that this report had more to do with *orang ajar's* disapproval of these outsiders' behaviour, and with their mistrust of potentially 'risky' outsiders and newcomers. Hence, the report that was made by them can be seen as a practice that serves, at least in the eyes of *orang ajar*, the maintenance of social order.<sup>138</sup>

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to refer to the President and the national government. Such quotes suggest that *orang ajar* are principally loyal to both these local and national authorities. In practice, however, I would argue that their loyalty remains most with local authorities. This becomes clear from the fact that not all *orang ajar* voted for national elections in 2004 and 2009, as many of them indicated that they did not feel that a change of President would matter for their personal situation. Typically, *orang ajar* would frame their reasons for not voting in national elections as follows: 'I do not care about [national] politics,'; 'it does not matter which President is ruling the country, because I have nothing to do with him anyhow.' Such opinions seemed not at all to count whenever it concerns local politics. *Orang ajar* were all extremely active when, during my fieldwork, new leaders were elected for the *kecamatan* and the *kelurahan*. For these elections, the *orang ajar* arranged many practical aspects, such as ordering food for the audience and politicians, urging residents to come and vote, setting up chairs for the audience, arranging a microphone to be set up and checked.

<sup>137</sup> This example emphasizes again that the *orang ajar* are generally not working for, or cooperating with, the police but instead with the military and the *kecamatan*. I say this because it was widely known in the kampong that local policemen were often gambling along with the chicken butchers, or earned 'protection money' from them. Such practices were disapproved of in public discourse, most loudly by the *orang ajar*.

<sup>138</sup> I discuss this topic later in this topic, but it is relevant to note already that *orang ajar* are generally much more concerned with social risks such as gambling, drinking, drugs, youth gangs, lack of 'decent' religious values among people, than are other inhabitants of Bantaran Kali. This is visualized in Figure 6. That having been said, it must be emphasized that *orang ajar* believe that 'social problems' concern both natives and immigrants, and they are not necessarily less fond of the latter group of inhabitants. In fact, some of the *orang ajar* are newcomers to Jakarta themselves and have only lived in the neighbourhood for several years. Their disapproval and mistrust is focused on people who they feel cannot be trusted because they hold themselves aloof from kampong society. This seemed certainly true for the chicken butchers, who only had time to work, eat and sleep in the kampong – but not to interact with fellow residents. They were therefore seen by other inhabitants of Bantaran Kali as 'living by themselves', 'different from us' and 'isolated'. Several *orang ajar* used similar words to describe these people, but also added that they believed the chicken butchers to be mysterious and

A second example concerns a fight between two men, one of them generally known to be a 'trouble maker' and a 'hot head'. He was reported on by *orang ajar* to KORAMIL, after which he was imprisoned for four months. According to *orang ajar* Lestari:

I heard screaming and then I saw [name of this man] throwing a rock at his brother. [That man] is a dangerous man- he likes to protest and fight. I am not happy that he lives here. How can we ever feel safe with such people around us? So I asked my friend Memen what to do, and we decided to call up the military on his HT. Few days later, that man was put to jail so were safe again.<sup>139</sup>

A final and most relevant example for this study concerns the reports that were made against seven young riverbank settlers who organized a citizens forum to discuss the problem of flooding. During two meetings, both of which I attended, the members of this forum discussed possible solutions to floods: people themselves clear away the garbage along the sides of the river, demand better flood management from the Jakarta government and demand financial compensation for flood-victims from the Indonesian government. According to these riverbank settlers, flooding was 'unfair' (*tidak adil*) as poor riverbank settlers are much more disadvantaged by floods than are the people in the less flood-prone elite neighbourhoods. They suggested that it would be good for the many riverbank settlers to 'become unified' and 'form a strong group'. The possibility of yet another protest at the sluice was also mentioned several times, although no concrete plans were made for such an event. In the weeks after these meetings, two of the *orang ajar* told me that they had reported on the forum-members because 'they make problems' and 'they can create anarchy'. Eventually the forum fell apart without forced intervention, as hardly any residents appeared interested in participating with the organizers. None of the residents explicitly expressed fear of joining in towards me, but several of them did mention that although the organization of a forum would 'actually be good because floods are a big problem', it was perhaps better to quit as it would also 'upset some neighbours.' Therefore, they deemed it better for residents to 'just mind their own business', 'be neutral' and not to 'cause problems'. It seems likely that these 'problems' concern a conflict with *orang ajar* or the authorities.

Each of the three above examples of instances in which *orang ajar* have reported their fellow residents to political institutions, highlights the powerful position that *orang ajar* have in

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vicious, and that 'they might be planning to cause problems here and we cannot know because we do not really know them.'

<sup>139</sup> He returned after my fieldwork ended. Respondents told me that there have been no further conflicts between this man and his neighbours, but that the man's health has severely weakened in prison and that his family struggles to pay for medical costs ever since. Even if this man and his family are aware who reported on them, to my best knowledge no further fights have occurred. None of the family members seemed eager to talk about what happened either. The son of the man told my assistant in an interview that took place after I'd left the field that 'we just want to be left in peace. My father will do no harm anymore - no more fighting, we told that our neighbours as well. He just wants to spend his old life with his children in this neighbourhood.'

kampong society. If, for some reason, they perceive a fellow inhabitant as a threat to social order or safety, they are able and willing to discipline or punish this person through the use of their HT and their contacts with elite actors in the *kecamatan* and the military.<sup>140</sup> But what drives them to exercise such power against fellow residents?

It seems unconvincing that a group of newcomers, a sole 'hothead' or a small group of potential protesters would indeed form a serious threat to the safety of the social environment. Rather, it appears that *orang ajar* sometimes report on people for personal reasons, and sometimes for fear of protests against their collaborators in the Jakarta government. This explains why the *orang antisipasi*, many of whom as we saw in chapter 3 are involved in illegal businesses, have never been reported by any of the *orang ajar*. The illegal practices of Edi and Ida are apparently not perceived of as threatening enough by *orang ajar*. Besides, we saw that these *orang antisipasi* pay 'safety money' to several powerful residents in the kampong, among them some of the *orang ajar*. We might thus say that these *orang antisipasi* have a reciprocal relationship with the *orang ajar* – albeit in a rather asymmetrical way. This argument is further strengthened if we consider that *orang antisipasi* offer valued services to riverbank settlers (including the *orang ajar*), which hardly makes it attractive for *orang ajar* to expel these useful actors from society. Yusuf has borrowed money from *orang antisipasi* Edi more than once; at least two *orang ajar* whom I got to know have made use of Ida's 'matrass' service.<sup>141</sup> We might then conclude that who is considered a 'trouble maker' has not so much to do with acting against the law, but more with *orang ajar*'s interests in community harmony, and the perceived potential of a person engaging in protest against the government. The *orang ajar* are much more concerned with the fight against the risk of disturbance of the social order, eventually of 'anarchy', than they are of the fear of floods and the fight against floods.

Clearly, perceptions of who poses such risk or who can be trusted are highly subjective and contested in the neighbourhood. In contrast with the mass of 'stupid' (*bodoh*), the 'average' (*biasa*) and the 'low' (*rendah*) people in Bantaran Kali, the relatively small group of *orang ajar* can turn their opinions and preferences into action via their reciprocal relationships with governmental actors.<sup>142</sup> While *orang ajar* have the power in Bantaran Kali to expel unpopular newcomers, to get a perceived 'hot head' imprisoned and to sabotage citizens' potential protest against the local government; the

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<sup>140</sup>My own presence was actually also communicated via the HTs. Only months after I had settled down in the neighbourhood, I learned that I had been reported on to the *kecamatan* by *orang ajar* because 'we did not know you yet, so we could not be sure whether we could trust you. Therefore it was better to tell our friends that a stranger had settled in.'

<sup>141</sup>As noted in chapter 3, I have never done an interview with male customers of Ida about their visits to her. Even if I often suspected and sometimes felt sure about who was a customer, I never dared to question these men as I feared that this would embarrass them (and myself) and hence disturb our friendly relationship. I know that these two *orang ajar* have made use of Ida's services because Ida told me, and because both spouses of these males openly talked to me about the behaviour of their husbands.

<sup>142</sup>See chapter 2 for a description of the social rankings of these groups of people in the hierarchy in Bantaran Kali.

best that less powerful fellow residents can do is try *not* to be reported about, by obeying or at least not agitating *orang ajar*. It now becomes more clear why both Edi and Ida (chapter 3) silently agree to pay 'safety money' to local, powerful inhabitants (as remarked above already, among these are the *orang ajar*) and why Ida sometimes feels forced to 'offer the mattress' to these same men 'for free'. I put the words 'for free' between inverted commas here, because even if it is true that Ida was never paid for her service by *orang ajar* in the form of 'presents' nor 'cash', we might argue that she is 'paid' with favours by them: the 'favour' not to be reported about, and the 'favour' to remain tolerated and protected in kampong society despite of one's illegal practices.

I will later in this chapter explore further the effects of the powerful position of *orang ajar* for the safety and well-being of fellow residents. Yet first it is useful to zoom in on the social position that the *orang ajar* themselves occupy in kampong society. To do so, I will now turn to discuss the personal benefits that *orang ajar* enjoy in return for their 'duties', after which I show how residents can acquire this powerful *ajar* position in Bantaran Kali.

### **The benefits of being an *orang ajar***

People in Bantaran Kali who have a socially recognized position as *orang ajar* enjoy various personal benefits. First of all, their risk-handling style creates and maintains vertical bonds and linkages between selected slum inhabitants and more powerful actors in Jakarta society. The following interview extracts with *orang ajar* highlight that they are keenly aware of this benefit, and that the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* offers them access to a social network of elite actors that would otherwise remain out of reach for poor riverbank settlers.

Yusuf: 'It is funny...We are slum-inhabitants! We are the lowest of the lowest people in Indonesia's society! And still, we can be partners of the military.'

Memem: 'I like to teach people about the safety here (*mengajar keamanan*), even though it costs me a lot of time....But I get to correspond with the army and the people in the [city] government...Yeah, even though they do not like people to live on the riverbanks, they approve of me anyhow. I know that because we chat over the radio like we are friends...'

Their contacts offer *orang ajar* an increased sense of personal safety. *Orang ajar* expect that, during future flood-emergencies or other severe disasters, their family-members will be advantaged because of their relations with elite actors. This belief is expressed in the following interview extracts with *orang ajar*:

Lestari: 'If my house gets flooded, the military will first search for me in this neighbourhood, because they know I assist them.'

Yusuf: 'Normally the [Jakarta] government is not interested in poor people living in slums. They don't pay attention to them, even not when they are flooded. In Indonesia, honestly, the government would usually just let us drown, you must realize that. If there is a flood in Jakarta, politicians look on a computer radar to see which neighbourhoods are flooded, so that they know where their aid is needed. But this neighbourhood does not even pop up on their monitor. That is because...this neighbourhood is illegal, remember? So *orang politik* feel that we deserve no help but instead we should be chased away. But for me, it has become different now because I have the HT. If there is a problem in my life, like a large flood [...] for sure I will get help from my friends in the military and the *kecamatan*. Because even though I live in this slum, they know I am cooperating with them.'

Memem: 'I am never afraid during large floods anymore because I know that I will be rescued by the military anyhow. They know my name, so if there is a flood here, they will shout out my name and search for me.'

Next to relations with elite actors and an increased sense of safety, another benefit of exhibiting an *ajar* risk-handling style in Bantaran Kali has to do with the increasing social status of *orang ajar* within the neighbourhood. *Orang ajar* generally enjoy high social status in Bantaran Kali, both because of their possession of a radio device that is widely in demand, and also because of their access to elite contacts in wider society. The increase in social status that an acknowledged *orang ajar* earns in return for their financial and time investments became visible immediately after Yusuf bought his HT.<sup>143</sup> He grins continuously while he shows off the black radio device to anyone who wants to see it. And there are many indeed. Visitors stand in front of the house and ask to hold the radio set or turn its switches, but nobody is allowed to do so. He carefully holds the device in his own hands, protecting it from admiring hands. His father, watching the row of visitors in front of the house, is clearly proud: 'My son has become a leader.' His mother agrees: 'Only powerful people can use a HT.'

The increase of the social status of *orang ajar* furthermore translates in the alteration of social norms in Bantaran Kali. This is visible most clearly in the looming crisis of a flood. In the face of flooding, *orang ajar* can act autonomously from the kampong leader, or order around co-residents who might in other cases not have accepted this subordinate position. According to *orang ajar* Memem:

Normally, citizens go to the kampong leader if they have a problem and *he* decides whether or not to contact the district authorities. But now that I have become an *orang ajar* here, I can directly contact them directly myself. So during floods, me and my friends basically become the leaders of the kampong and we decide what needs be done.

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<sup>143</sup> Yusuf bought a HT during my stay in the field, in October 2010.



This increased power of *orang ajar* during and right before flood-events is widely acknowledged by fellow residents in Bantaran Kali. As one inhabitant explains:

The kampong leader, well, there is not much he can do to help residents during floods. He is just a poor man, like us. Only the army and the people with HTs can keep things safe here, so if there is a flood, I follow up only their orders. Not those of the kampong leader, because he doesn't know anything about floods! He cannot know where we will still be safe, or where the water is running. So it would be unwise for me to obey him during floods. While in normal circumstances, of course, we must all obey the kampong leader, because he is in charge and I accept that.

In line with this inhabitant's view, kampong leader Hussen himself underlines that he is the only one who can give people legitimate orders during 'normal' times, but that the legitimate power shifts towards *orang ajar* during flood events. Then, the kampong leader accepts *orang ajar* as his advisers for 'safety reasons'. As this kampong leader does not possess a HT, he feels that 'they are in charge during large floods, even though I am the formal leader, because they have the information that my neighbourhood needs, while I don't.'<sup>144</sup> Another kampong leader once had a HT, but – how ironically – lost his in a flood and never replaced it:

Now my residents inform me about the floods, and instruct me to inform the others. It is the world upside-down...Normally I am in charge, but I must admit that during floods, they have better capabilities to manage safety here. So I can only be grateful for their help.

The quotes above raise questions about the workings of kampong rule and democratization processes in Indonesia. Under President's Suharto's authoritarian regime, neighbourhood associations *Rukun Tetangga* (RT) and *Rukun Warga* (RW) had an important role in maintaining political stability.<sup>145</sup> The RT and RW were imposed from above by the state to control inhabitants by keeping them under the close supervision of the RT head; by transmitting messages from the government to them at regular meetings; and by mobilizing them for political and ideological purposes, such as elections (Kurasawa, 2009). In the post-Suharto period, it was widely believed that such top-down control measures would come to an end. Many Indonesia scholars have since then

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<sup>144</sup> This kampong leader is relatively poor. He has not been able nor willing to invest in a HT, because he doubts that he would be acknowledged as *orang ajar* by the people in the *kecamatan*. For example, he told me in an interview that 'a HT is very expensive and there is a fair chance that I would not get the radio frequency needed for it. That is because I have no friends at KORAMIL, and I am not very close to politicians here either.... only friends of them get to communicate with them.' Nowadays, this kampong leader thus assists the *orang ajar* in their 'duties', and follows up their instructions rather than the other way around.

<sup>145</sup> Jakarta is subdivided into five *kotamadya* or municipalities: Jakarta Utara (North), Timur, Selatan, Barat & Pusat. Each *Kotamadya* is divided into several *kecamatan* (administrative sub-districts) which in turn consists of different *kelurahan* (kampong administrations). Each *kelurahan* is again divided into a number of RW (*Rukun Warga*, community). Each RW, in turn, consists of a number between 5 and 20 RT (*Rukun Tetangga* or neighbourhood). Every RW as well as every RT has a locally elected voluntary representative of the city called *Kepala RW* or *Kepala RT*.

observed that the democratization process in Indonesia has been progressing steadily: for example, Abdulbaki notes that 'within one decade, Indonesia has developed the main attributes of a democratic country, according to most theories of procedural democracy' (2008, p. 151); similarly, Webber writes that Indonesia has 'made a remarkable transition from an authoritarian to a democratic political system' (2006, p. 396). At the same time, these scholars have also critically remarked that the extent to which Indonesian democracy has been consolidated and institutionalized remains another issue, and that there still exist several persistent problems that challenge the development of effective democracy in Indonesia.<sup>146</sup> One crucial example of such 'problems' is the need for more popular involvement and participation 'of all Indonesians' in decision-making processes (International IDEA, 2000, p. 5).

Without negating the fact that Indonesia has experienced a remarkable shift from a purely authoritarian regime towards a form of governance that has several characteristics of a political democracy, my data also suggests that, at least in Bantaran Kali, rather little has changed in terms of kampong politics since Soeharto's regime. I argue that power and influence is still very much exerted in a top-down way, via direct vertical lines that run from bureaucrats to selected residents. Only now, in Bantaran Kali, the formerly powerful role of the RT head seems partly replaced by the role of *orang ajar*. These local actors now function as a means of control for the Jakarta government, and hence there can be no speaking of widely popular participation of inhabitants in decision-making processes nor of an effective democratic politics at kampong level.

This argument is strengthened if one realizes that it is not only during floods that *orang ajar* can bypass kampong authorities. As was mentioned above, they give 'lectures' about flood-risk to kampong leaders as well as to ordinary residents. These lectures are given at every opportunity and not during flood-events. It was shown already that these lectures reproduce governmental narratives of cause, blame, and safety. Over and over again, kampong residents are indoctrinated by these narratives, and no kampong leader ever overtly disputes the 'lectures'. Kampong leader Hussen put it like this to me: 'It may seem strange for an outsider that a leader like myself is tutored by one of the residents, but I have to be humble and acknowledge that they have information that I don't have.' Another kampong leader expresses a similar opinion:

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<sup>146</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate on the observations and analysis of political theorists on Indonesian democracy and I therefore only briefly summarize some of their main arguments. In short, Webber's main argument holds that what has developed in Indonesia since 1998 is a patrimonial democracy, in which, irrespective of the staging of regular free and fair elections, holders of public offices exploit their positions primarily for their personal rather than 'universalistic' ends. Louay Abdulkabi, in contrast, is more positive, noting that despite the persistence of a number of problems challenging Indonesian democracy, the steady progress of the Indonesian democratization process and the consistent commitment of the principal political actors to the democratic rules of the game will likely lead to more institutionalized, policy-driven party politics and a gradual democratic consolidation in the foreseeable future.

People usually listen to me, but perhaps they listen even better to *orang ajar*. It is not that they are kampong leaders, like I am. I have been chosen as a kampong leader by the people because they believe that I want to care for them. But *orang ajar* educate them. They also educate me, in fact, because they have more knowledge than I have and they are very close to the people in the *kecamatan*. So it is not up to me to contradict them, even though I may sometimes disagree with what they say.

These quotations strengthen the argument that was made earlier, namely that by becoming an *orang ajar*, one is able to rise in the social hierarchy to a respected and more powerful position in Bantaran Kali. As a consequence of this rise in status and hierarchy, *orang ajar* can adapt certain associated social norms, such as by-passing the formal kampong leaders.

A final benefit of the *ajar* risk handling style is that it may, in the longer run, help *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali to increase economic capital. Memen, for example, often expressed in conversations with me the hope that his grandson, who was at the time of fieldwork five years old, may later enter the military without having to pay the obligatory application cost. Memen deems this a fair expectation because 'at KORAMIL they will clearly remember how this grandfather has always helped them during floods'. Likewise, *orang ajar* Yusuf also has great expectations for the future:

If my son becomes ill, the people in the army will pay for his treatment, because we have become friends now. When he grows up, I am quite sure that he will be offered a job in the army, because his father used to be an assistant of the military. That is how it works in Indonesia.

Whether these expectations are fulfilled, only the future will tell – they are only *potential* benefits and not guaranteed rewards. In fact, no *orang ajar* has yet been financially rewarded for their duties, and none of their children has ever been offered a high-status job. Despite the lack of evidence, all of the *orang ajar* indicated in interviews that they believe that they will eventually enjoy financial benefits by performing the duties associated with an *ajar* risk-handling style.

What is more, it even appears that the material vulnerability of *orang ajar* increases as soon as they start to exhibit this risk-handling style, due to the financial sacrifices that they must make in the process of becoming an *orang ajar*, elaborated further in the next section. I will first describe the personal situation of *orang ajar* Yusuf to show to what demands he must live up to in his role as an *orang ajar*, and then relate his personal situation to a broader analysis about the investments that residents must be able and willing to make in order to become recognized as *orang ajar*.

### **What it takes to become an *orang ajar***

As his spouse awaits her turn in line to fill a bucket with water from the public well, she loudly complains that Yusuf, ever since he bought his radio device few months ago, has 'become useless as a husband. He wants to have more children, but he is always too tired to have sex because he is continually busy with that radio. And he wants to earn money, but all he does is educate other people free of charge!'

Yusuf acknowledges that his *ajar* 'duties' exhaust him. 'I am continually tired,' he remarks in one of our interviews. 'I work day and night and I am always occupied with my HT.' On this particular cloudy evening he is seated outside in a squatted position, his back leaning against his house, his elbows resting on his thighs. With his right arm, he firmly holds his son who whines and struggles to get free. The radio device lies on the floor next to his bare feet. It produces a loud rustling sound. Using only his left hand and his lips, Yusuf imperturbably rolls a clove cigarette. He tells me that ever since he bought the HT, he carries it around in the pocket of his trousers during working hours, and he shares his mattress with his wife, their youngest son, and the HT. With every crack or beep that the device produces overnight, Yusuf wakes up startled. During the day, he walks around the kampong with puffy eyes and in a grumpy mood. Neighbours gossip that it is better to avoid him, as he is continually sleep-deprived and resultantly snaps at anyone for nothing.

To make things worse for Yusuf, his boss at the cleaning company has recently become dissatisfied with Yusuf's performances and threatens to fire him if Yusuf continues to prioritize his 'duties' as an *orang ajar* over his cleaning job. He explicitly complained about the fact that Yusuf never shows up at work whenever there is a flood in his kampong. Yusuf has a ready answer:

He wants me to come to the office anyhow during floods, but that is impossible for me. I have the duty to help my neighbours! If my neighbourhood is inundated, I cannot just neglect my responsibilities here and clean buildings in other parts of the city as if nothing is at hand! My friends at the military would be upset if I'd do that.

Yusuf's boss is however hardly impressed by such arguments. When Yusuf came to work a day after the above described flood, he received a final warning from his boss: one more failing to work during a flood, and Yusuf will lose his job as a cleaner. Losing his job would be problematic for Yusuf indeed. Even if both him and his wife have a job (she offers a laundry service to fellow residents), their salaries provide hardly enough for their family. With their wages, Yusuf and his spouse take care not only of their one-year-old son Rudi, who suffers from diabetes and is in need of expensive medicines, but also of Yusuf's old and unemployed parents, who came to live with the couple a few years ago. Yusuf and his wife pay for all their meals and other costs, such as clothing or medicines in

times of illness. As a result of these high expenses, the young couple has little financial room to maneuver.

This is apparent from their living situation. The five family members share a small one-roomed house in Bantaran Kali without windows or running water. Rusty pots and pans hang on the plywood walls; a rickety gas burner is placed in the center of the room. Its single pit carries a large pan with cooked rice of which small handfuls are eaten throughout the day by family members whenever they feel hungry. One light bulb dangles from the cardboard ceiling, and a large shelf that is nailed horizontally to the wall provides a little extra space for sleeping. The door is permanently blocked by a smelly pile of garbage that washes ashore from the river, and ill-looking cats with watery eyes and wounds on their skins scavenge there for anything edible. After the rent for their house has been paid, there is Rp 600,000 per month left – an equivalent of about forty-eight Euro- to be spent on the needs of all five family members. That is not much, but at least there always used to be enough for all of them to eat a hot meal two times a day, to pay for the medical needs of Rudi, and even to accumulate a little amount of saving money for future needs. But if Yusuf would be fired, the economic situation would become more pressing. The possibility of getting fired therefore is a major concern to Yusuf:

I was already constantly worrying about the floods the past years, and also about my son's health. Now I have yet another problem in my life to worry about. If I lose my job, I cannot feed my family. You know how poor we are already. These worries give me a headache.

When I suggest that he could perhaps solve his financial problems by selling the HT, and by giving up the *ajar* practices, Yusuf seems agitated:

No, that is impossible! What do you think: that I like doing this [being an *orang ajar*]? You must understand that it is my duty to help others here, because safety [in Bantaran Kali] is my responsibility. So therefore I need the radio. I think the only solution for my problems is to work even harder at the [cleaning] company from now on and convince my boss not to fire me. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what to do. But I cannot give up my responsibilities in regard to safety in the kampong either.

How, one might ask, was this relatively poor inhabitant of Bantaran Kali ever able to acquire an expensive HT in the first place? He could not have been *that* poor if he has been able to accumulate the 2.5 million Rupiah to buy a HT, could he? In fact, he *is* that poor, as are several of his fellow *orang ajar*. Nevertheless, they were determined enough to scratch together the money. The example of how Yusuf managed to get access to the radio frequency helps to strengthen this argument.

Yusuf managed to make the initial investment in his HT by borrowing money from three acquaintances in the neighbourhood and by selling the television that his parents liked to watch during day time.<sup>147</sup> His wife was not exactly pleased when she discovered that he spent the savings that she had regularly put away underneath their mattress since the birth of their son for his later education – Rp 20,000 per week, adding up to about one million Rupiah after a full year of saving. ‘That was meant for your son, not for you!’ she was heard screaming out one evening in the kampong, to the amusement of neighbours.

This example shows that the social rise in status which *orang ajar* eventually enjoy does not necessarily accord with their economic status. Indeed, many *orang ajar* spend their last Rupiahs on the HT’s and most of their time and energy on their ‘safety duties’. As a consequence, they tend to get deeper into financial struggles in the process of becoming an *orang ajar*. A historical analysis of the life-stories of other *orang ajar* shows that many experience similar financial problems as does Yusuf. A relatively high number of them is currently unemployed, and in interviews they mostly claim that this is the case because they prioritized their ‘duties’ over an actual paid job and were fired (or quit) as a result.<sup>148</sup> I was unable to check the veracity of these stories with former bosses, but I was able to check these stories with partners and spouses of *orang ajar*, as well as with fellow residents. In most cases, these people confirmed the interpretations of *orang ajar*. Hence, we might tentatively infer that the current, relatively low, economic status of *orang ajar* is often a consequence of their *ajar* risk-handling style. In other cases, however, my data indicates that *orang ajar* were poor beforehand developing this risk-handling style, and we might in these cases only conclude that their *ajar* risk-handling style has not changed that situation for the better. In any of these cases, it is clear that lack of money is not a prerequisite for the *ajar* risk-handling style in Bantaran Kali, and it is therefore interesting to look beyond aspects of income and economic status.

I wish to emphasize here that money, or the capacity and will to accumulate it, is certainly not all it takes to become a *orang ajar*. A talent in social skills seems to be of equal importance. This becomes clear if we return to the example of *orang ajar* Yusuf. While Yusuf may not have possessed much financial capital that could help him become an *orang ajar*, he is certainly blessed with the social skills that are useful for potential *orang ajar*. Just as many other *orang ajar*, Yusuf is typically described by fellow residents as a ‘social person’ (*orang sosial*) and a ‘smart person’ (*orang pinter*). For Yusuf is known to have ‘a good ear and always knows what happens around him’ as well as ‘many friends so that he always knows what to do when we are flooded.’ That these opinions are accurate is shown by the fact that Yusuf managed to get access to the radio frequency via his social

<sup>147</sup> He borrowed Rp 75,000 and 100,000 from average neighbours without an interest rate, and another Rp 150,000 from a moneylender, against an interest rate of 40 per cent.

<sup>148</sup> Table 3.1 shows that *orang ajar* are relatively often unemployed, compared with other riverbank settlers. I return to this topic later in this chapter.

contacts with existing *orang ajar* who had already established social networks with KORAMIL employees, and who recommended him again to these elite contacts as a new 'friend'. Although, as remarked above, Yusuf is among the poorest in the riverbank settlement and got into deeper financial problems after he made the investment in a HT, from the moment he formally became recognized as an *orang ajar*, he was known as one of the highly regarded people 'with friends' among residents – one with useful contacts and access to valued information. This example underscores that a potential *orang ajar* must not only be able to gather sufficient capital to invest in a HT, but that one must first and foremost have sufficient social skills to establish and maintain vertical reciprocal relationships with elite actors.

The story of Memen is also evidence of this. In his story I highlight how he was able to get access to a relevant social network of powerful actors from the *kecamatan*. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, that institution decides whether or not an owner of a HT may make use of the secret radio frequency to receive information about potential floods. For a marginalized group of residents, it is not usual to establish trustful relationships with political elite, but kampong residents who are creative or skilled enough are able to do so. Memen, for example, used to sell satay at a market that was located next to a military compound and decided to offer passing soldiers his dishes for free, in order to 'make friends'. He recalls:

Some of them were surprised with my kind offer in the beginning, and others laughed at me because they considered me too bold for a poor man, but they liked my satay and eventually they behaved kinder to me. Many greeted me by name when they got to work.

When Memen wanted to invest in a HT, he asked these acquaintances to say a good word for him in the *kecamatan*: 'I asked them: "pity me, I am a flood-victim and I am not stupid, otherwise why would you even talk to me? You know that I am a good man, that you can trust me as a friend."' Two months later, he received the code for the radio frequency from a bureaucrat at the *kecamatan*.

Not only should potential *orang ajar* establish vertical relationships with elite actors from the *kecamatan* and KORAMIL, but they must also make sure to become part of the inner circle of *orang ajar* who are already acknowledged in Bantaran Kali. That is because bureaucrats working for the *kecamatan* base their eventual decision about who may participate in radio communication mainly on information that they receive from other *orang ajar*. A civil servant explained it in this way to me:

We don't just give the radio frequency to everyone who asks for it. If someone wishes to get access to it, our friends from the riverbanks first tell us what kind of he is, where his family comes from, what his religion is, how he earns his income. Then we check with the military

whether they have ever had troubles with the person. So we monitor them to be sure that only trustworthy people use a HT.

Hence, the *kecamatan* decides on the trustworthiness of potential *orang ajar*, based on and tested through social circulation of detailed information about him or her. In the words of a high official of the *kecamatan*: 'only our friends and *their* friends can use the HT'. It is clear then that the *orang antisipasi*, in their social designation as the 'bad' people in kampong society, have little chance to become included in such a strictly monitored, closed social network. 'Smart' and 'social' Yusuf and Memen were apparently regarded as good candidates.

Next to their ability to accumulate money and the required talent in social skills, wannabe *orang ajar* must live up to another demand of this specific risk-handling style. Namely, they have to be willing and able to invest a lot of time and energy in developing an *ajar* risk-handling style, before they can be recognized fully as *orang ajar*. Yusuf, for instance, had assisted other *orang ajar* for the previous four years with their 'duties' before he was finally able to obtain a HT himself. He would, for example, help people to evacuate after *orang ajar* had spread the news about an upcoming flood. Other inhabitants who have no access yet to elite actors from the *kecamatan*, or who cannot yet afford a HT, must in turn assist Yusuf and his fellow *orang ajar* while they await their chance to rise in the social ranks:

When I was younger, I saw other people with the HT and they were helping me and my neighbours during floods. I was jealous of them at first, I can tell you this honestly. The first time I saw a HT, I thought "wow, I would like to have one of those," because I realized that with a HT I could predict when a flood comes, and I could talk to the people from the military...It seemed interesting to me.

We already know where this interest led him. Over the following years, Yusuf collected relevant information about what was needed to acquire the radio device; he established social relationships with relevant elite actors; he collected enough money to buy a HT; he started giving *ajar* lectures and he began monitoring the practices of his neighbours – all practices he had perhaps never done before in his life, but to which he would soon grow accustomed. And nowadays, Yusuf has become convinced that he has the responsibility to maintain safety and social order in Bantaran Kali. Memen and Lestari also have invested similar like Yusuf.

It may cost *orang ajar* a lot of time, money and energy to finally acquire their current position in kampong society, but as we have seen, they expect returns for their 'duties' that will give even greater rewards. This explains why, despite of the apparently large sacrifices (both in time and money) that *orang ajar* must make in order to eventually adopt their particular risk-handling style,



they are generally eager to maintain their duties and position as *orang ajar*. However, I already remarked that it needs be critically considered whether an *ajar* risk-handling style actually improves riverbank settlers' personal safety in relation to floods, or whether it instead increases their vulnerability.

In chapter 3 it was already shown that an *antisipasi* risk-handling style is insufficient for residents to escape the cycle of hazard in which they feel trapped. Here, a similar argument may be made for the situation of *orang ajar*. Next to the fact that some of them make large financial investments in order to acquire a HT, or that they get deep into financial struggles in the process of becoming an *orang ajar*, it was also demonstrated that many of their expected returns for these investments are based on hope and trust rather than on guarantees or realistic expectations. If we consider the possibility that their positive expectations are disappointed in the future, we might posit that their economic risk *increases* as a result of their risk-handling style. Hence, it might well be that their flood-risk has somewhat decreased because of their access to relevant information, but, at the same time, it seems that the economic risk that their households run has increased. For instance, if Yusuf's child were to become ill, there is no money left in his household to pay for medical treatment, because he has gone into debt (and used up their savings) in order to buy the HT. Moreover, if he continues his *ajar* practices, he may lose his formal job and hence his fixed income, further increasing his family's financial struggles. Similar unstable financial situations are to be found among other *orang ajar*. It can therefore be concluded in this chapter that the discussed risk-handling style is not sufficient to escape the cycle of hazard.

Such a conclusion, however, seems to suggest that 'escaping the cycle of hazard' would be the ultimate goal of inhabitants of Bantaran Kali. Let me emphasize that such view is both simplistic and normative. Departing from a bottom-up perspective, I try to show in this chapter precisely that an *ajar* risk-handling style is much more than just a way to handle flood-risk. It is a way for slum dwellers to become part of the political elite, to have power and contacts that may help in future times of need. This observation underscores the usefulness of this study's 'normal uncertainty' perspective over the more commonly used 'disaster lens' view in studies of risk and its handling. If the latter might suggest that the practices of *orang ajar* are to be seen as a specific response to floods, this study's normal uncertainty perspective shows that their risk-handling style is a response to several hazards and problems that characterize the daily life of riverbank settlers: floods as well as political and economic marginalization.

At this part of the dissertation, new questions arise that revolve around what determines an *ajar* risk-handling style. We have already seen that social skills and the ability to invest time, money and energy into the developing of this style are prerequisites, but, building upon the sensitizing

concepts that were defined in the theoretical approach, it needs yet to be examined to what extent the factors of risk cognition, material vulnerability, cultural constructs of risk, or habitus underlie the *ajar* risk-handling style. The following sections address these topics.

### **Factors underlying**

It was already mentioned that people's material vulnerability does not necessarily hamper their pathway towards becoming recognized as an *orang ajar*. This becomes even more clearly visible in the quantitative analysis of the material vulnerability indicators for the people exhibiting an *ajar* risk-handling style. Let me consider a few of the factors that are typically related to material vulnerability, and that are often believed to impact risk behaviour (see chapter 1 for a discussion of the vulnerability-literature, and chapter 2 for more information on this study's vulnerability-analysis): wealth, employment, age, gender, educational background and length of residence. I emphasize these factors specifically because these are often hypothesized in vulnerability literature as being the most crucial determinants for people's risk behaviour, and it is thus remarkable that my data indicates differently.

The material vulnerability analysis that was carried out for this study shows, most importantly, that *orang ajar* are not wealthier compared to other residents but rather represent a mix of very poor to mid-level poor members of society. Hence, the factors 'income' and 'material assets owned' were not significant in this analysis. This was also the case for the factor 'education': it appears from the analysis that *orang ajar* are not more or less educated compared to average in the kampong. Neither have they lived shorter (or longer) in Bantaran Kali than is average. These are interesting outcomes because they counter pose the assumptions that are typical in the vulnerability-literature.

From all the material vulnerability-factors that were taken into account in this study's analysis, only the factors 'occupation', 'gender' and 'age' proved to have a significant impact on the chance of being categorized in a *ajar* risk-handling style. Despite of this statistical significance of these factors, it needs be remarked that the associations between any of these factors and the behaviour of *orang ajar* did not always confirm the assumptions typical for the vulnerability-literature. I elaborate briefly on each of the factors to explain this argument.

In this literature, as noted, it is typically expected that people with fixed incomes and stable jobs have more means to cope with risk, and accordingly they will respond to risk in an active, autonomous manner. Vice versa, people whom are unemployed or who do not enjoy a fixed income, are expected to exhibit more passive behaviour in the face of risk – as their portfolio of risk-handling practices is probably more limited. This assumption needs be rejected in the case of the *orang ajar*:

despite of the fact that many of them are unemployed or lack a fixed monthly income, they exhibit a very active risk-handling style.

Regarding gender and age, then: the vulnerability analysis shows that in comparison to other inhabitants of Bantaran Kali, *orang ajar* are relatively often male (75 per cent), and relatively often older than sixty (80 per cent).<sup>149</sup> According to the material vulnerability-literature, such outcomes would be relevant for our analysis of risk behaviour because females are often more vulnerable to natural hazard, as are elderly (or children, but no children participated in this study). It is typically assumed that the female or elderly members of the population have more difficulties in protecting their physical safety and well-being; hence, it is often expected that they might exhibit less active or less autonomous strategies than others in the face of disaster. In the case of Bantaran Kali, however, such hypotheses need at least partly to be rejected. Let me consider first the issue of age. In this case, the fact that a relatively large number of people over sixty years of age exhibit an *ajar* risk-handling style does not mean that these people are passive or take no autonomous action. On the contrary, these older inhabitants take active, preventive action in the face of natural hazard. They even help others survive floods, instead of being helped by other, perhaps younger, residents of Bantaran Kali. Hence, it would be inaccurate to consider these people more vulnerable to floods than their fellow residents on the basis of this one factor (age). At utmost, one could hypothesize from this outcome of the analysis that perhaps older people have had more time to accumulate the money and to establish and maintain the contacts that are needed to become recognized as an *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali. It seems likely that old age has an effect on people's vulnerability and risk-handling practices, but that may be only the case when people become physically unfit due to their old age. This is not so with any of the current *orang ajar*.

Regarding gender, the fact that there are relatively more males than females engaged in an *ajar* risk-handling style seems to me not a consequence of increased vulnerability of females towards natural hazard (as the vulnerability literature suggests), but rather an effect of gendered relationships in the patriarchal society of Indonesia, where men more often than women take up authority positions. Related to this argument, we may consider that *orang ajar*, in order to develop their risk-handling style, have to maintain relationships with people in KORAMIL and bureaucrats from the *kecamatan*, and I observed that most of these contacts are males. Despite of the fact that I believe my sample of female *orang ajar* (five out of eighteen *orang ajar* were female) was too small to draw large conclusions from it, it seems to me probable that such relationships are more easily developed by male riverbank settlers than they are by females. I therefore hypothesize that for women in Bantaran Kali to approach male KORAMIL employees or male bureaucrats, this might be

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<sup>149</sup> See Tables 3.2 and 3.3

considered inappropriate behaviour by local norms and values. This hypothesis clearly would need to be explored in a study project with a larger sample of female study-participants in order for me to be able to test it; however, the proposition is strengthened by the fact that all the five female *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali have family members working in either KORAMIL or the *kecamatan*. This indicates that it may have been easier for them than for other female residents of Bantaran Kali to establish friendly contacts with males in these institutions. In sum: I propose that it is relatively harder for females than for males to develop this particular risk-handling style. This does however not tell us much about the overall vulnerability of females towards floods, because, as we will note in the other empirical chapters, women can still exhibit alternative risk-handling styles that can be just as effective or ineffective as an *ajar* style.<sup>150</sup>

Now that we have discussed which material vulnerability factors underlie an *ajar* risk-handling style, we must consider whether risk cognition, cultural constructs of risk and habitus – the sensitizing notions that were defined in the theoretical discussion – also have an impact on the risk-handling style of *orang ajar*. It is especially relevant to explore these notions, because the differences between the two styles discussed so far (*orang antisipasi* in chapter 3; *orang ajar* in this chapter) appear enormous. For instance, it was argued in the discussion about the *antisipasi* risk-handling style that the ironic or skeptical and pragmatic future expectations of *orang antisipasi* (or, as these expectations were also called in chapter 3, their ‘humble aspirations’), in combination with unequal structures of economy and power, propel the cycle of hazard. This chapter, by contrast, has shown that *orang ajar* seem to have rather positive and hopeful expectations for the future, perhaps even in a somewhat naïve way. It was also shown that, through the risk-handling style in which *orang ajar* engage, they enjoy a relatively high social status within kampong society, and are able to maintain potentially useful contacts with elite actors in wider society. Regarding these differences, to what extent can we maintain that structural forces (through the intermediary force of a habitus of poverty) impact these actor’s risk-handling practices? If the theory of habitus seems to offer a rather convincing explanation for the risk-handling practices that *orang antisipasi* typically exhibit, is the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* not a perfect and contrasting example of the ways in which actors can use their *agency* to reflect upon and alter structures? And has it not become clear that their risk cognition, highly impacted by the information that they derive through the HT, plays a huge part here?

Concerning the notion of risk cognition, I argue that, while it is certainly true that *orang ajar* have better access to some information about floods than do most fellow residents, it cannot be

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<sup>150</sup> The other three risk-handling styles that are distinguished in this thesis were exhibited by slightly more females than males. See Table 3.3. This could suggest that these risk-handling styles are more easily available to females than for males, but to me it seems more likely that the imbalance between males and females in these cases has to do with an overall gender bias in this study: more females (N = 80) than males (N= 50) participated.

assumed that their overall risk cognition about floods is much higher or different from fellow residents. Put differently, other than the few circumstances in which the water level in the Jakarta sluices rises so quickly that a flood-warning message is given out via a HT, it is not actually true that *orang ajar* know much more about floods than do fellow residents. My study shows that the cognition of floods is equally high among the people who are known as *orang ajar* as among their fellow residents. Chapter 3 already touched upon this topic, by showing that *orang antisipasi* are keenly aware of the causes and effects of floods. It was therefore concluded in that chapter that objective flood-risk cognition could not explain the risk-handling style of *orang antisipasi*. Here, I elaborate on this conclusion by demonstrating that the same applies to the total research population.

Let me break down this important argument into three smaller outcomes of the surveys and interviews about flood-risk cognition that were carried out for this study. First, from interviews with informants I learned that nearly all study participants are very well able to mention the different causes of floods. Second, all 130 study participants were able to sum up precisely the formal safety advices that are communicated by the *kecamatan*, such as evacuating in time, investing in a rubber boat, saving money to be used during evacuation or for restorations, and following up the instructions of *orang ajar*. Third, the large majority of this study's participants indicated in a survey on risk-perceptions that they consider floods one of the most threatening aspects of their daily lives.<sup>151</sup> Put differently, they generally do not underestimate the risk. Even if the material damages of floods are their main concern and fear, the risk of drowning and contracting water-borne diseases are mentioned as possible consequence of floods by more than 65 per cent of respondents. It follows, then, that it is not the content of the information about floods that *orang ajar* receive from their contacts that is valued most in kampong society (as their fellow residents basically know the same), but rather, it is the access of *orang ajar* to the *providers* of this information that offers them high social status.

Most interesting, observations prove that *orang ajar* must be aware of the high risk cognition of their fellow residents. Floods, especially their causes and possible ways of handling them, are frequently discussed in the street by kampong residents - also in the company of *orang ajar*. Whenever afternoon rains pour down in the kampong, people speculate out loud whether or not the river will flood, and whether or not they should start pulling up their mattresses and clothing to second floors or covered roof tops to keep them dry. These observations serve again as strong indicators that the flood-risk cognition of river bank settlers cannot explain for the heterogeneity of risk-handling styles in Bantaran Kali. *Orang ajar* do not have a radically different risk cognition of

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<sup>151</sup> See for a visual representation of the survey outcomes per risk-handling style Figure 6.

floods then do their fellow residents and they know it, but yet they do have a radically different risk-handling style. A similar conclusion was established in the previous chapter in relation to *orang antisipasi*.

Even though the objective flood-risk cognition among all residents is comparable, this is not to say that there are no differences between the subjective perceptions that *orang ajar* and their neighbours have of other risks in Bantaran Kali. For example, comparing riverbank settler's answers from the survey on risk-perceptions, it is clear that *orang ajar* have a somewhat deviating view on who they believe can be blamed or held responsible for floods. Most people in Bantaran Kali believe that floods are caused by external factors, such as 'mismanagement by the Jakarta government'; 'overbuilding of the environment'; 'garbage from the city's inhabitants that clogs the river'; 'Allah', or 'excessive rain' or other natural causes; *orang ajar* also acknowledge that these factors play a role, but, at the same time, express an additional opinion that reproduces government rhetoric. According to *orang ajar*, it is the residents of Bantaran Kali who are to be blamed for floods. Floods in Jakarta are mostly caused by riverbank settlers, and no one else.

This idea is, however, inaccurate. Besides the fact that the inhabitants on the riverbanks form only one aspect of the complex flood problem in Jakarta, the blaming narratives of *orang ajar* obscure the fact that they themselves bear no less 'guilt' in the flood problem than the 'stupid people' (*orang bodoh*) who are openly blamed by them.<sup>152</sup> While blaming others for their residence on the riverbanks, *orang ajar* Yusuf himself lives in a house that was built directly on the riverbanks. Moreover, just as nearly all inhabitants of the kampong do, *orang ajar* dispose of their garbage in the river.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, in Bantaran Kali, *orang ajar* teach their neighbours over and over again that *they* are to blame for the floods. By reproducing governmental narratives, *orang ajar* show their loyalty to the government.

This points to an important topic in my analysis, namely the cultural constructs of risk. If we took from the risk-society perspective and the cultural risk perspective that human perceptions of risk are not objective reflections of a threat, but rather must be regarded a political interpretation of what is perceived as 'dangerous' or 'safe' in a given social environment, then the risk perceptions of *orang ajar* provide an insightful example of how risk is culturally constructed and contested in kampong society. Besides their deviating ideas of who and what is to be blamed for floods, their survey scores also indicate that they perceive rather different types of risk as threatening their personal safety than do their fellow residents. Just as most inhabitants, *orang ajar* consider floods among the top-three greatest risks in their lives. However, unlike other residents, *orang ajar*

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<sup>152</sup> To repeat from the introduction to this thesis: there are many different reasons that together create the problem of flooding in Jakarta. These reasons are natural, infrastructural, technical and political (Texier, 2008; Brinkman, 2009).

<sup>153</sup> I met one exception to this rule: one of the inhabitants regularly took her trash by public transport to a disposal site in Jakarta. She paid for the transport costs herself and did so out of 'worries about our environment'.

consistently consider 'social problems' an equally large or even larger risk to their personal safety.<sup>154</sup> By 'social problems', *orang ajar* mean problems that concern their social environment, hence, their neighbours. These people may be risky not only because they are considered 'stupid' and 'hotheaded', as we have read before, but also because they are believed to 'take drugs', all too easily 'start a fight', or 'raise their children in an immoral way.' In contrast with these risk-perceptions of *orang ajar*, other residents more often considered evictions, fire and poverty-related risks as the most serious threat to their well-being. They much less often recorded social risks among these in the top three, and even if directly asked about social risks in interviews, they generally indicated that they were not really worried about these problems.<sup>155</sup> So what, then, can possibly explain these differing subjective constructions of risk in Bantaran Kali?

In order to answer this question, it is relevant to explore more deeply the idea that the construction of risk that is maintained and reproduced by *orang ajar* is highly beneficial for the local government.

### Benefits for the political elite

The political elite in Jakarta benefit in three main way from the practices that *orang ajar* exhibit in Bantaran Kali. First, the local government benefits from the risk-handling style of the *orang ajar* because these river bank settlers help to reproduce governmental narratives of cause and blame that serve elite interests. We saw before that *orang ajar* tell fellow residents that *they* create floods by living on the riverbanks and by polluting the river. These narratives of cause and blame echo the ideas that circulate in the political institutions that carry formal responsibility for Jakarta's flood-management. A bureaucrat of the *kecamatan* put it like this: 'They built their houses on flood-plains! Of course they are flooded all the time! That is what flood plains are supposed to be for! We have floods because of those stupid *people*, not because of the river!' Another official in the *kecamatan* says that 'They are not just flood-victims. They are actually more the *creators* of floods'. A final example of the 'blaming of the victim' is offered by the quotes of a policymaker in the Department of Public Works, the institution which formally manages Jakarta's flood-problem:

The real victim of floods is the Jakarta government. That is because we are forced to spend a large part of our budget on those stupid riverbank settlers, preventing them from drowning, trying to convince them to move away from the riverbanks. Without them, we wouldn't even *have* floods, and we could concern us instead with other priorities in our city.

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<sup>154</sup> See Figure 6.

<sup>155</sup> This counts most strongly for the *orang antisipasi* (chapter 3) and the *orang siap* (chapter 6), but somewhat less for the *orang susah* (chapter 5). I elaborate on their risk perceptions in the next chapter, but here I can already note that their perception of social risks differs from those of *orang ajar*. While the *orang ajar* blame their neighbours for bad behaviour; *orang susah* merely fear their neighbours because they are very unpopular in the neighbourhood.

It is clear that the reproduction of such narratives by *orang ajar* is advantageous for the local government: by 'blaming the victim', responsibility for finding a solution for the structural problem of flooding remains not with bureaucrats, but is shifted towards the inhabitants of the city's riverbanks.

Second, this shift in responsibilities is further legitimized and institutionalized by the pre-warning system that is managed by *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali. In an interview, an official at the *kecamatan* applauds the advantage of the risk-management practices of *orang ajar* for the Jakarta government:

They serve like a pre-warning system. Free of charge! [laughs] We, as a government, cannot stop the enormous problem of flooding in Jakarta. Due to the people who use the radios, riverbank settlers can nevertheless survive floods. It is not really a problem for us anymore. We just assist the people with the radios, so that they can help their neighbours.

While it can be argued that the informal pre-warning system (the usage of HTs) in Bantaran Kali advantages the riverbank community in the sense that it provides residents with flood-risk warning messages, this quote also indicates that the facilitation of the radio communication system appears a cost-effective way for the Jakarta government to decrease the negative consequences of flooding. Instead of demanding from the Jakarta government an effective and costly pre-warning system, the flood victims along the riverbanks now invest in radio devices. As a result, political actors who are formally responsible for Jakarta's flood-management can simply wait until they are alarmed by riverbank settlers in potential times of emergency. As a result of this institutionalized shift in responsibilities, if a flood-alarm in Bantaran Kali is false or too late, it is not considered the fault of the Jakarta government or the *kecamatan* but of the *orang ajar*, who apparently did not perform their duties well.

Hence, the facilitation by the *kecamatan* of the HTs of *orang ajar* does not necessarily aim to decrease the objective risk of flooding, but rather, it serves to institutionalize the shift in *responsibility* for flood-management from political institutions towards flood-victims. This shift in responsibilities from the local government towards the flood victims in Bantaran Kali is legitimated in the narratives of political actors by their consistent emphasis on what they call cooperation between some of these flood victims with the *kecamatan* through the radio system. The word 'cooperation' is however misleading in this situation. Not only are the *orang ajar* overwhelmed by their 'duties' in Bantaran Kali's flood management while the Jakarta government accepts little or no responsibility, but the local government also seems to get much more tangible benefits out of this 'cooperation', then do the *orang ajar* themselves.



A third way in which the Jakarta government benefits from the risk-handling style of the *orang ajar* was demonstrated earlier already and concerns the assistance that they get from *orang ajar* in the monitoring and controlling of social order along the riverbanks. This, I argue, is the main reason for the *kecamatan* to facilitate the usage of HT's in Bantaran Kali and to stimulate cooperation between selected slum dwellers and bureaucrats. A policy maker in the *kecamatan* expressed his satisfaction with the risk-handling practices of *orang ajar* reporting potential protestors:

The people in your neighbourhood, they have nothing, they are very poor. So when they become angry about a flood, they are ready to sacrifice their lives! They are stupid enough to bleed and die when they are angry! Therefore it is good that some of our friends live there and educate them, so things remain calm.

A manager at Public Works expressed a similar opinion about the riverbank settlers in Bantaran Kali: 'They have already tried to create protests at the sluice, they were ready to fight because they were dissatisfied with the floods... But nowadays we cooperate with people in the neighbourhood so that we can avoid such anarchy.'

These discourses about social order and stability resemble paternalistic ideas on the 'stupidity' of poor masses from the authoritarian regime of former president Suharto's New Order, when 'poor people' were looked down upon by elite classes and when patron-client relationships were characteristic of Indonesian society.<sup>156</sup> The *orang ajar* seem to have internalized such ideas about their fellow residents from their political authorities. Consequently, they watch out for floods in their neighbourhood - but also, and especially, for 'stupid people' who are accused of being potential 'trouble makers' and 'hotheads'. Hence, in the name of the government, *orang ajar* hunt after any individuals that may create 'anarchy' or protest against the government.

Such practices of *orang ajar* make it even harder for river bank settlers to alter the unequal structures in which they live. As soon as they express dissatisfaction with their marginalized position, they run a risk of being reported upon by their fellow residents. Hence, we might say that *orang ajar* help to reproduce unequal power structures in Jakarta society, by making it extremely complex for fellow residents to challenge these. In a way, we could even say that the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* is counterproductive for their own safety situation. Because the *orang ajar* have taken over responsibility for flood-management, the Jakarta government is not at all stimulated to take their own flood-mitigation measures in Bantaran Kali, such as installing a pre-warning system for the

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<sup>156</sup> See for more information about patronage relations McLeod (2011, pp. 45-65), and see van Leeuwen (2011) for an ethnographic account of how middle and elite class citizens in the 1990s both looked down upon and feared the poor masses.

whole neighbourhood or building houses for the poor in a neighbourhood that is less flood-prone. Rather than enabling them to break away from a cycle of hazard, the *ajar* risk-handling style thus reproduces riverbank settlers' material vulnerability towards floods. My explication here suggest that, what until now might have been interpreted by the reader as *orang ajar*'s autonomously created, deviating, interpretations of risk – in the above analyses of the risk-perceptions – is heavily impacted by the hegemonic structures surrounding these actors. I now turn to discuss further this reproduction of power structures by *orang ajar*.

### **Reproducing perceptions and practices**

While the risk-handling styles of the *orang antisipasi* and *orang ajar* differ in many ways, I wish to emphasize here that they also have something in common: both styles are largely determined by what I call a habitus of poverty, which is again influenced by power inequality in wider Jakarta society. There are two reasons that underlie this claim: first, as I have shown above, while the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* is not sufficient for them to escape the cycle of hazard, it serves the interests of the Jakarta government. Second, the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* does not lead to less humble 'aspirations' of residents with regard to the future. And as chapter 3 showed, such aspirations are one of the crucial conditions that are required to break out of the cycle of hazard.

While *orang ajar* may have acquired a high social status within kampong society, the same cannot be said for their position in wider society. Despite their cooperation with elite contacts, in reality they remain subordinate to more powerful actors in society. Their 'friendship' with bureaucrats or actors in KORAMIL is, for example, not at all symmetric. Whenever I observed *orang ajar* interacting with these elite actors (most often over the radio and few times in personal meetings), their behaviour indicated inferiority to the bureaucrats: in their gestures which indicated respect, for example, by bowing their heads and being silent as long as the other is talking; in the way they followed up their instructions without questioning or commenting; in the language in which they addressed these people – always indicating that the other is in a highly respected position.<sup>157</sup>

The fact that *orang ajar* are very much aware of their marginalized position, is furthermore reflected in their future expectations of their own position in society. If these perceptions appear hopeful at first sight, closer examination reveals that their aspirations remain located in the risky environment of Bantaran Kali. Admittedly, I demonstrated above that, once inhabitants of Bantaran

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<sup>157</sup> For example, the time I observed between a female, middle-aged, married *orang ajar* and a young, female, unmarried bureaucrat from the *kecamatan*, it struck me that the *orang ajar* always called the bureaucrats '*Ibu*' (madam), while in return, the bureaucrat called the *orang ajar* '*mbak*' (older sister). The latter term is more informal, and would generally not be used for this *orang ajar* in the kampong. There, she was always respectfully called '*ibu*' – whereby people emphasized her age, her marital status, and her high social status.

Kali have acquired a higher social position in kampong society by becoming a *orang ajar*, they commonly establish future expectations or aspirations that no longer objectively reflect their present circumstances. We saw, for example, that Yusuf expects future loyalty from elite actors who would probably have remained outside his social network if there had been no floods to connect their interests. Likewise, Memen more than once remarks in interviews that he is still 'confused' (*bingun*) that elite actors are willing to cooperate with him, as he is not used to such relationships with 'high people' (*orang tinggi*):

Normally, high people like that do not have friends in the slums. But for me, it is different because I help them, right? They know they can trust me and that I am a good man, only handling safety here. So therefore I can call in on the military and report on things. If I do, they act like we are friends. We make jokes and all...But sometimes I am still confused by this myself! When I was younger, I would have never dared to think that I would assist such people. I was only a slum-boy, right...I am still just a low man (*orang rendah*) but they like me to help them anyhow.

On the base of such narratives, it would be attractive to conclude that the perceptions (or: 'aspirations') of Yusuf and Memen have altered along with their newly acquired social position in kampong society. Do they not consider hopes of which they had never dared to dream of before? Is it not true that these expectations are based on *new* types of experiences, instead of on a pragmatic reflection of *former*, disappointing events, as my 'habitus of poverty' notion seems to suggest? There is however an important reason to reject such conclusions. If we examine the perceptions of *orang ajar* more closely, it becomes clear that the present future expectations of *orang ajar* hardly reach beyond their current, risky kampong life. Yusuf, Memen and Lestari expect future loyalty from their 'friends' in the sense that they expect help during floods in their current flood-prone neighbourhood, but they certainly do not expect an actual improvement of their social position in wider society. While all of them expressed the opinion that moving away to a flood-free neighbourhood would solve most of their problems, none of them considered this event a realistic one for their 'types of people'. This is evident, for example, in the narratives of *orang ajar* Lestari. In the following extract of an interview, she explains that she must train her children how to handle floods, as she feels sure that her family will always remain living in a flood-prone area:

I hope that they can use this radio when I get old. In that way, they can hopefully stay safe even though we live here. Otherwise their future will be difficult, as the number of floods will increase here, I think.

Somewhat surprised by this remark of Lestari, I asked her why she believed that 'using the radio' would still be necessary in the future. Perhaps, I proposed, her children would move to a neighbourhood without floods. Lestari shook her head and replied:

No, that is impossible for my family. That is only for high people (*orang tinggi*). We will just stay here. Even though we do not like this muddy neighbourhood, we are stuck here! [laughs] We have no education and no money, so where else would we go? I do not have enough money to move house to a better neighbourhood, right. Nor can I get that in the future.

Again I was struck by the apparent certainty that Lestari felt when it concerned her future: her life would hardly improve, so she believed. I asked her why she felt so sure about that, as she has many 'friends' in KORAMIL and the *kecamatan*. Could they not help her to find a safer place, I asked?

[laughs] No, it is not like that. They are not concerned for me like that! I just help them and they will help me to survive a flood, but why would they pay for me to move house? We are not family or good friends! No, people like that are very different from people like us. They live in elite areas, while you know I am only an ordinary person, living in a slum. So we can only be thankful that they at least help us to survive here.

Similar 'humble' aspirations can be discovered on a closer examination of the narratives of *orang ajar* Memen. If I demonstrated above that he hopes that his grandson might one day be offered a job in the army in return for his *gajar* 'duties', a closer examination of his future expectations exhibits that Memen has no hopes for an radical economic or social improvement of his family's situation. This became clear to me in an interview with Memen, in which I asked him how he thought the life of his grandchildren would look like. He immediately replied that it would be 'the same like mine. Just as it is now.'

Roanne: 'Will it not become easier for the next generation? Maybe once your grandson gets his job in the army?'

Memen: 'I'm sorry to say this, *mbak*, but you don't understand how this works in Indonesia. Listen. It might be that he gets a job in the army. This is my hope because you know I have some friends over there, right? But even if he can work there, he will not become a general or an officer. No, he might become a cleaner or an average soldier. So his salary will remain very low. Maybe his parents can improve our house a little if he has the job. Maybe they can pay for a cement wall rather than the wood one they have now, that would be nice [...]. But then there will be no salary left to buy any furniture!' [laughs]

Roanne: 'But why are you so sure that he will get a low-paid position, if you also say that he might get a job in the army via your contacts?'

Memem: 'The people in KORAMIL, they know me because I report to them. But they also remember that we are just ordinary people (*orang biasa*) from the slum. Not high, not like them. So if they give my grandson a job, I can only be thankful that they allow a very poor person in. I can ask for no more than that. I cannot even be sure whether they accept him in. I already told him that, if he must clean their office, then he shall do that with a smile on his face. We can only be thankful for anything people like that want to give him.'

The above analyses of the future expectations of *orang ajar* indicate that, even though the risk-handling practices of *orang ajar* altered after they picked up certain 'duties', it seems that their perceptions about their own position in society have remained rather constant. At most, they perceive positively their own high social status and options to handle risk as compared to other residents in Bantaran Kali, but they are at the same time well aware that their social position in wider society has not radically changed.

This is clear not only from their narratives but also from the quantitative analysis on risk-handling practices that was carried out for this study. In comparison with fellow residents, this analysis shows that *orang ajar* score relatively high on indicators that concern self-efficacy. *Orang ajar* indicate in their survey-answers to this question that they have great trust in their own abilities to overcome problems and often emphasize their skills, intelligence and access to contacts. Moreover, when they are asked whether they believe that they are able to cope efficiently with floods or other risks in their daily lives in the kampong, the answer unanimously sounds 'yes'.<sup>158</sup> However, from the analyses of in-depth interviews it appears that *orang ajar* might score much lower on self-efficacy indicators when it concerns their functioning and chances in wider society. We saw in chapter 3 that this also was the case with *orang antisipasi*. For example, if *orang ajar* were asked whether they would still be able to handle flood-risk in another kampong, or whether they would still be able to overcome problems if they were to move away from the riverbanks, *orang ajar* always appeared rather sure that they would not. Hence, their perceptions or aspirations continue to reflect a marginalized position in wider society and therefore are still associated with what I have called a habitus of poverty. Consequently, *orang ajar* expect to remain living in a flood-prone slum and do not portray their future lives in any way that is radically different from the way it is now. Only within Bantaran Kali they have found pragmatic ways to get 'onto the radar' of elite actors *despite* their objectively unchanged low position.

Similar to the *orang antisipasi*, we might even note that *orang ajar* need the risky environment of the kampong to maintain their relatively high status in Bantaran Kali. Were they leave the riverbanks, they would be no longer able to participate in a flood-warning system that is facilitated by the *kecamatan*, and, hence, they would lose their elite contacts and related high social

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<sup>158</sup> This was one of the measure scales for self-efficacy and it translates in a relatively high score on self-efficacy (see chapter 2 and Table 4 for more information about this aspect of my analysis).

status. Moreover, since much of the hopes of *orang ajar* for the future are based on fragile trust rather than on guaranteed returns, *orang ajar* are basically forced to wait and see whether these hopes are ever fulfilled. Meanwhile, they continue to carry out the 'duties' or practices that reproduce the unequal structures which underlie riverbank settlers vulnerability to flood-risk.

In the final sections of this chapter, I connect the above empirical arguments about the habitual ways in which *orang ajar* reproduce power structures, to relevant theories of power. How should we understand these complex power structures in Bantaran Kali in relation to theories of dominance and resistance? Why do *orang ajar* cooperate in their own oppression, while most of their incentives are based on hope, rather than on an objective improvement in their current situation? And, just as puzzling, why do their fellow residents tolerate being 'lectured' by their fellow residents, when in fact we know that *orang ajar* generally provide residents with information that is not new to them, and sometimes even inaccurate? To explore these topics, I will discuss theoretical insights of, respectively, hegemony, surveillance and resistance.

### **Hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci used the concept of cultural hegemony in his writings to explore how the power relations underpinning various forms of inequality are produced and reproduced (Crehan, 2002, p. 71). According to Gramsci, there exists no universal answer to such questions. Rather, he suggests that unequal power structures that constitute any given context can only be discovered through careful empirical analysis (Gramsci, 1977/1980, pp. 139-140). He does, however, emphasize that power and inequality are brought about not only by political and economic differences but, most importantly, also by what he calls *cultural hegemony* (Gramsci, 1977/1980, p. 30; p. 65). This notion, I argue, is highly relevant to our understanding of the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali.

Cultural hegemony exists in a society when the values of the dominant elite have also become the 'common sense' values of all people in that society. For Gramsci, the elite is the dominant class (or an alliance of classes) in a given society that succeeds in bringing into being a hegemonic culture that appears to represent the interests of society as a whole, but in fact embodies its own elite interests. In other words, people believe that what is good for the elite is actually good for them. Such cultural hegemony, Gramsci argues, maintains the status quo of power structures and makes revolt difficult. Because this culture shapes the ways in which people see their world and how they live in it, it necessarily also shapes their ability to imagine how it might be changed and whether they see such changes as feasible or desirable (Crehan, 2002, p. 71). Hence, Gramsci's concept of hegemony claims that how subalterns perceive the world is in part a product of

their subordinate and dominated position. Following from this argument, one could say that all practices and perceptions of a subordinate actor necessarily come into being under conditions of subordination.

Let us connect these theoretical insights to the empirical observations made in Bantaran Kali to see whether cultural hegemony seems to affect the specific risk-handling style of *orang ajar*. I have demonstrated that *orang ajar* reproduce governmental narratives of cause and blame in relation to flood risk. Likewise, they reproduce the governmental discourse on the stupid masses of the poor and the poor's presumed tendency of disturbing social order and threatening safety in wider society. In sum, I have argued that *orang ajar* maintain a cultural construction of risk that is consistent with the dominant risk-perceptions of the governmental institutions involved in Bantaran Kali, while it differs from the risk perception of other inhabitants.

Following the argument of Gramsci, we might then understand this risk-construction as a result of the fact that the *orang ajar* have internalized elite perceptions. Put differently, they believe that these safety narratives are true or just, while, as I have tried to show, these narratives mainly serve the interests of the elite – they act in subordination to elite cultural hegemony. A similar argument can be made for their risk-handling style as a whole: while *orang ajar* indicate that their risk-handling style increases their personal safety, it was argued in this chapter that their practices are actually mainly beneficial to the elite. In fact, we saw that their material vulnerability often increases rather than decreases. Finally, it was demonstrated that, through their risk-handling practices, *orang ajar* help to maintain the status quo of power structures. And, just as Gramsci describes, their perceptions and actions (reflecting an internalization of governmental interests) make revolt against the unequal structures in society unlikely. For the moment, we might then temporarily conclude that the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* is impacted by a cultural risk construct (reflecting those of the government) as well as by a habitus (reflecting 'humble aspirations') and also their subordination towards the Jakarta government.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony is especially helpful here because it helps us to think about the complicated way consent and coercion are intertwined. The risk-handling style of *orang ajar* by no means reflects simple coercion of the government over poor river bank settlers. Instead, if we consider that *orang ajar* operate within a framework of government (elite) cultural hegemony, then we recognize that selected river bank settlers *cooperate* in the reproduction of unequal power structures – not because they are forced, but because they truly believe that they act in their own interest.

Yet there are two reasons why I claim that such a conclusion remains somewhat unsatisfactory. First, Gramsci's theoretical analysis of cultural hegemony does not yet take into

account the way in which this power mechanism may be structured in the specific context of Indonesia. Yet, as he himself argues, it is crucial to consider empirically the mechanisms of hegemony in a cultural and social context (Gramsci, 1977/1980, pp.139-140), as this context may impact the precise ways in which this mechanism develops. Second, if we accept that the practices and perceptions of *orang ajar* are, at least partly, influenced by unequal power structures and cultural hegemony, then how do we account for the differences in risk-handling practices between them and other inhabitants of Bantaran Kali? We saw, for example, that many riverbank settlers do not obey the formal safety instructions that *orang ajar* and the *kecamatan* have taught them. We also saw that, while sharing the same objective flood-risk cognition, *orang ajar* hold different perceptions about what poses a risk in their neighbourhood than do their neighbours. Are the cultural constructs of their neighbours then *not* subject to a cultural hegemony, and if not, why not? Or might there be something else that explains this difference between the practices of people obeying and resisting cultural hegemony in Bantaran Kali?

I will next consider the ways in which power is mediated in the local context of Indonesia by integrating into my analysis relevant work of Indonesian scholars on power and surveillance, and I will try to examine the set of questions about submitting to or resisting cultural hegemony by considering the theoretical insights of James C. Scott's on symbolic rejection of elite values.

### **The context of Indonesia: surveillance**

The works of Indonesian scholar Joshua Barker are most useful to consider the cultural-specific ways in which state power is exercised in Indonesia. He argues that state power in present-day Indonesia is exercised, for the most part, not by direct coercion, rather often it is Indonesian citizens themselves who are controlling and disciplining on another (2006, p. 202). Such behaviour is firmly institutionalized in safety systems that are cultivated by the state. Many inhabitants of Indonesian cities and villages participate in neighbourhood safety and security systems that are fostered by the government (Barker, 1999; Barker, 2009; Bertrand, 2004). Barker claims that such cooperation between residents and the Indonesian state has two notable advantages for the latter: it is a cost-efficient way to ensure social order, and it creates a citizenry that thinks and acts like policemen (Barker, 2006, p. 203). With these findings Barker not only questions the extent to which Indonesian society should be considered democratic, in the sense that rule is exerted 'bottom-up' (an argument that I have also tried to make earlier in this chapter), he also challenges the myth – according to him still popular – that the Indonesian state exercises power and control over its citizens by means of violence – thus regarding the Indonesian state as a 'machine of violence' (Barker, 2006, p. 202; compare with Anderson, 2001, p. 13). Instead, Barker pleads that Indonesian society should be



regarded 'full of small machines of violence', mostly run by ordinary citizens in close cooperation with the state (Barker, 2006, p. 204).

Hence, in accordance with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Barker's insights suggest that the *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali are not simply forced to enact specific behaviour by their *kecamatan*. Instead, they participate in a system of surveillance and discipline, which, though cultivated by the state is also actively maintained by themselves. Trying to analyze what brings about their risk-handling style, we should consider that these actors have internalized elite ideologies. In the years in which they assisted other *orang ajar* and established contacts with actors from KORAMIL and the *kecamatan*, they have been socialized to adopt perceptions of risk that largely benefit the interests of the elite. Meanwhile, people who lack the will or capability to invest accumulated money and time into the process of becoming an *orang ajar*, or who lack the social skills to become acknowledged as an *orang ajar*, or who are mistrusted for whatever reason by 'friends' of elite actors, have no alternative than to stick to other subjective perceptions of risk. These people have no interest in blaming themselves for the causing of floods and instead blame external factors. Likewise, these people do not perceive their own actions as a threat to social order, and instead they fear other risks that may threaten their well-being.

Though this analysis appears convincing, I also want to consider a different perspective on what is going on along the riverbanks, namely one that is provided by political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott. Interested in the ways in which subaltern groups may or may not resist authorities, Scott warns that what may seem, at first sight cultural hegemony – in which subaltern people seem to have completely internalized the values of the elite – can in fact obscure hidden forms of resistance against these elite values. He argues that an apparent passive compliance with elite values needs not to reflect what Marx has called a mystification or what Gramsci seems to refer to when he speaks of cultural hegemony. Rather, Scott counterposes these ideas with another argument: he states that people may well reject elite values, only they dare not to do so *overtly*, because they fear the negative consequences of such resistance, or, as he calls it, the 'risks of rebellion' (Scott, 1977, pp. 194-195).

Scott bases much of this argument on a historical analysis of dominance and resistance in Southeast Asia. In this region's colonial era, he writes, many peasants who overtly protested their exploitation by authorities had been violently repressed by the state. This, for Scott, has created what we may describe as a 'culture of fear'; a situation in which people no longer dare to protest or resist the elite – at least not overtly. He concludes that '[t]he tangible and painful memories of repression must have a chilling effect on peasants who contemplate even minor acts of resistance'

(1977, p. 226), and that 'the memory of repression is one of the principal explanations for the absence of resistance and revolt' (1977, pp. 226-227).

Scott's argument suggests that we cannot naturally assume that the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* in Bantaran Kali is a product of cultural hegemony, as long as such assumption is based only on what *seems to be* a lack of resistance against elite values. Following Scott's argument, we must consider that *orang ajar* might experience moral indignation or anger with their government about their marginalized position, but they might simply not show such emotions through acts of rebellion, out of fear of suppression by more powerful elite.

How can we be sure, then, whether the behaviour of *orang ajar* reflects cultural hegemony or instead a repressed or hidden form of resistance? Scott suggests that this is by no means an analytical *cul de sac*. The research problem can be resolved by two types of analysis. The first one is a hypothetical one: if the constraints that currently suppress subalterns were to be removed – if say power structures in Jakarta were radically altered – then we can see whether actors start to behave differently. As this experiment is clearly not feasible within the timespan of this study, we must put it aside.<sup>159</sup> Scott's second suggestion for our analysis is, however, more practical. According to Scott, if mystification or cultural hegemony is not the problem, then subalterns' disagreement from elite values should become evident from their symbolic withdrawal from elite values. Hence, if it is not true that *orang ajar* have internalized elite values, then a dissonant subculture should be recognizable and analysable. Scott suggests that a dissonant subculture or symbolic withdrawal can be recognized in myths, jokes, songs, linguistic usage or other behavioural expressions of disagreement (1977, p. 232). Hence, scholars of dominance and resistance should look for an 'alternative moral universe' among the subalterns (1977, pp. 239-240), exploring in their analyses whether the values embodied in subaltern culture do in fact accord with the dominant myths of the social order.

This study is not explicitly aimed at the topics of dominance and resistance but rather touches only sideways upon these topics, while grappling with the heterogeneous risk-handling

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<sup>159</sup> I mean to say that during the time frame of this study, there was no radical alteration of power structures and hence I could not empirically check whether in such case, the *orang ajar* would start behaving differently. At most, I could try instead to consider what has happened during past occasions where power structures were radically altered in Jakarta or Indonesia. For example, many of the *orang ajar* were adults when *reformasi* took place, and we might therefore assume that this event was a decisive moment in their lives: the most powerful political figure in their lives suddenly fell from grace, pushed aside by a deep economic crisis, and a political process towards democracy started to develop. Even if this part of my study has remained, I feel, too limited and fragmented to draw grand conclusions from it, it is interesting to note that I took from interviews with *orang ajar* that during or after the *reformasi* in 1998, none of them have ever protested the authorities. Neither do they indicate that they were necessarily more or less content with later Presidents than they were with Suharto. It seems to me, then, that *orang ajar* are not very concerned with national and ideological aspects of politics and hence are not inclined to protest authorities on the national level, but that they were and are instead merely interested in whether cooperation with specific bureaucrats from the local administrative level is strategically beneficial to them personally. More research would be needed to further explore such hypothesis, for example, by examining how the *orang ajar* have responded to the alterations in power structures on a local level. For example, have they changed their practices or perceptions after past elections for representatives of the *kecamatan*?

styles that are to be observed in Bantaran Kali. During my fieldwork, I did not recognize any signs of symbolic withdrawal among the *orang ajar* in relation to their elite sponsors – in jokes, songs, linguistic usage or other aspects of culture, though I acknowledge my limitations in relation to understanding Indonesian language and culture. Rather, I observed that their cultural repertoire largely reflects elite ideas and myths.

The practices and narratives of *orang ajar* consequently indicate that they truly believe that they live among stupid people who need to be taught about the right way to handle floods. As a consequence, they seem proud to cooperate with the Jakarta government in such aims (which becomes bodily visible by the way, for example, they flaunt their HT in the neighbourhood during patrols and ‘lectures’); but I also got the impression that they feel truly *obliged* to cooperate with the *kecamatan* in tutoring riverbank settlers. As underlined in so many of their narratives, their *ajar* duties are, to them, a moral obligation. Just like with the bureaucrats who were interviewed for this study, *orang ajar* appear convinced of the fact that the stupid, poor masses threaten the social order; therefore, they are willing to invest a lot of time, energy and money in preventing threats to safety. These observations lead me to conclude that there is no hidden, symbolic resistance amongst *orang ajar* against authorities; instead, it appears that their cultural practices largely align with the dominant culture of the elite. Hence, their risk-handling style – and specifically the way in which they construct the risk of floods and social protest reflects their subjection to dominant cultural hegemony.

A second reason why I feel uncomfortable to speak of symbolic resistance in the case of *orang ajar* has to do with the fact that we must not forget that *orang ajar* make a lot of conscious and strategic effort to become part of the inner circle of ‘friends’. As shown earlier, it is not at all easy to become *orang ajar*. It takes river bank settlers a lot of money, skill and determination to finally become considered a ‘friend’ of the *kecamatan*, while they receive only a few concrete incentives in return. If these riverbank settlers would really act only out of fear for the negative consequences of resistance against authorities - or, as Scott calls it, the fear for ‘risks of rebellion’ (1977, p. 194-195) - then it seems easier for them to do as their fellow residents do: overtly obey their *kecamatan* but follow alternative practices in daily life. A more convincing explanation for the active engagement of *orang ajar* in their specific risk-handling style, then, is that their habitus (as a product of cultural hegemony) shapes a worldview in which the *ajar* risk-handling style appears as the most attractive option for their ‘type of people’. This habitus reflects not only government ideologies and risk constructs that are the product of cultural hegemony, but also perceptions of the self-identity of *orang ajar*: as became clear throughout this chapter, they perceive their duties as very much needed by and important for society, and they have learned to perceive themselves as the best persons to

educate fellow residents, indeed with the responsibility to do so. Hence, *orang ajar* have internalized governmental ideologies to such an extent that it is reflected in their perceptions of risk and safety, and in their perceptions of their identity even.

The fact that I reject Scott's thesis in the specific case of the behaviour of *orang ajar* does not mean that I find his insights unhelpful for a wider analysis of the power structures in Bantaran Kali. Instead, I argue that if we consider the practices of the *neighbours* of *orang ajar*, Scott's remarks about hidden resistance and covert disagreement with elite values become highly relevant. If I claim above that *orang ajar* act out a habitus that reflects a cultural hegemony, I here wish to draw attention to the ways in which the other inhabitants in Bantaran Kali sometimes symbolically resisted the power of dominant elites within the kampong (the *orang ajar*) and beyond (actors from the *kecamatan*). During the time span of my fieldwork, subordinates did not resist these powerful actors overtly, but they rather did so through a subtle symbolic withdrawal from the dominant culture.<sup>160</sup> I will discuss this part of my argument in the next and final section of this chapter.

### **Symbolic resistance**

In Bantaran Kali, *orang ajar* are often overtly praised by their fellow residents for their willingness to assist others during floods. In contrast with *orang antisipasi* who are described as people who 'only save themselves', *orang ajar* are consistently described by their neighbours as inhabitants who 'always help others'. Such social behaviour is highly valued in kampong society, and *orang ajar* are accordingly characterized as 'good' types of people in public discourse; they are described as having a 'good heart' and being 'good Muslims'.

It must be doubted, however, to what extent these compliments can be considered subjectively valid. Based on my observations, I counterpose this praise with the subtle signs of resistance that were frequently expressed by the people who are lectured by *orang ajar*. People's bodily responses, especially, indicate that, more than their overt narratives suggest, they disagree with the perceptions and actions of *orang ajar*. For instance, if *orang ajar* enter a hall where inhabitants are engaged in a group conversation, the conversation often runs dry, and people quickly head elsewhere. A similar rejecting bodily response towards *orang ajar* can be recognized during 'lectures'. If fellow residents appear to politely listen to the stories and orders of *orang ajar*, one can commonly see them roll their eyes behind the back of an *orang ajar* to indicate boredom or

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<sup>160</sup> I emphasize this time-frame because we must consider that there have, of course, been instances where Jakarta's poor (among which some of the river bank settlers participating in this study) protested against the authorities very overtly. Examples are the protests during *reformasi*, about which I learned from interviews with respondents that several of them headed to the streets to show their discontent with the President, and also the more recent protests at the Jakarta sluice (mentioned several times in this chapter and elaborated in chapter 6), where several riverbank settlers joined in to demand the Jakarta government to close the sluice gates and hence protect Bantaran Kali against floods. I offer more examples of overt protest in chapter 6.

annoyance. Moreover, it has been noted several times before in this dissertation that many people disobey formal safety instructions as communicated by the *orang ajar* and the *kecamatan*. They might listen politely and nod during lectures of *orang ajar*, but during floods, most of the people in practice ignore what they have been instructed to do. For example, they do not evacuate to the shelter of the *kecamatan*, but instead, seek their own ways of survival (In chapters 3, 5 and 6 I offer more examples of how residents ignore safety instructions and instead exhibit alternative practices, see also Figure 2 for a visual representation of where people evacuate to). Finally, when *orang ajar* were patrolling, sometimes daring residents would mock them, without the *orang ajar* noticing it, by imitating their way of walking or the way in which they caringly keep a hand over the radio in their pocket. All these bodily responses and jokes of riverbank settlers may point to what James C. Scott calls a symbolic withdrawal of elite values.

As noted, negative emotions about *orang ajar* are hardly ever overtly expressed by fellow residents.<sup>161</sup> Neither are the lectures of *orang ajar* overtly challenged or questioned by inhabitants. I emphasize this lack of overt resistance, because one would expect more protest if one considers that much of what the *orang ajar* discuss in their lectures consists of incomplete and old information. Clearly, the lectured people are not at all ignorant about the problem of floods. So why do they allow themselves to be treated as such?

I argued above that the specific risk-handling style of *orang ajar* is partly a product of a habitus created by the dominant cultural hegemony. I now claim that the seemingly obedient behaviour of their fellow residents can be explained by a fear of the 'risks of rebellion' (Scott, 1977, pp. 194-195). Hence, they overtly obey *orang ajar* most of the time, because they fear political intervention as a result of overt resistance to these neighbours with connections to the power holders, but they indicate by frequent symbolic resistance that they do not necessarily share the perceptions of blame and risk of the *orang ajar* and the *kecamatan*.

This fear is concrete and based upon direct and indirect past experiences. As described in chapter 3, many residents in Bantaran Kali have memories of violent state intervention, such as the 1983-*Petrus* campaigns in which those suspected of being threats to the social order were killed. This chapter has also described how a system of surveillance is cultivated by the state and maintained by selected residents in society. It is likely that these 'small machines of violence' further feed a culture of fear in Bantaran Kali. As a result, most residents don't dare to overtly resist the *orang ajar* even if

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<sup>161</sup> The somewhat critical way in which the family members of Ambran spoke (their quotes are presented at the beginning of this chapter) about *orang ajar* Yusuf after he had assisted their evacuation to the municipal shelter during a flood, was, in fact, an exception to the rule. They suggested that Yusuf had no pressing reason to assist them, but that he merely did so anyhow because he simply *wanted* to 'help' or interfere with others. During fieldwork, I have hardly ever heard other residents speak in a similar critical fashion, while it was common for people to overtly express dissatisfaction with the behaviour of *orang ajar* in other, more covert and bodily forms, some of which are discussed in this chapter.

they may not agree with their lectures. If they were to overtly protest, they might be disciplined or punished by *orang ajar* or, worse, by their elite contacts.

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the looming hazard of flooding offers a critical conjuncture in which powerful and subordinate actors in wider Jakarta society interact. It became clear, within one risk environment – which to outsiders might seem to be a rather homogeneous unity full of flood victims and poor people – that there exists a complex system of social rankings that divide kampong society. Although people's positions in the social hierarchy seem somewhat fixated by social norms and discourses – for example, in narratives about people 'without knowledge' versus those who 'know what to do' – it also appears that the hazard of floods offers selected people within kampong society a chance to alter these social norms and conventions. This chapter zoomed in on the risk-handling style of the *orang ajar*, who increase in social status by cooperating with the *kecamatan* in the management of floods and safety. In this way, they function as one of the many 'small machines of violence' in Indonesia, run by ordinary citizens in close cooperation with the state (Barker, 2006, p. 204).

In order to develop an *ajar* risk-handling style, inhabitants have to be able to live up to several requirements. They have to be able and willing to invest much time, energy and money into the practices and means associated with this style, and they have to have social skills that enable them to become considered a 'friend' by elite actors. Moreover, they have to show their loyalty to authorities by reproducing governmental narratives of cause and blame, and by performing duties related to safety and social order in the kampong.

In return for these investments, the risk-handling style that is exhibited by *orang ajar* offers several advantages. For instance, it offers them access to valuable knowledge about floods, which might decrease objective risk. Another benefit of this risk handling style is that it allows actors to rise in the kampong social hierarchy, which might offer financial returns in the long run. However, at the same time, the practices of *orang ajar* take place within widely unequal structures in which surveillance and suppression by the Jakarta government are commonplace. Their risk-handling style has the disadvantage of generally increasing the economic risk to *orang ajar*. Hence, as did the risk-handling style of *orang antisipasi*, it propels the cycle of hazard.

Furthermore, it was observed that the practices of *orang ajar* seem not to alter wider structures, but instead *reproduce* the marginalized position in wider society of riverbank settlers. We saw that *orang ajar* help to shift the responsibilities of flood management from the Jakarta government to the flood victims; that they reproduce governmental narratives of cause and blame

that serve elite interests; and that they assist the *kecamatan* in controlling social order, thereby making it harder for riverbank settlers to organize and protest against the unequal power structures in wider society –they too are hampered and shaped by elite cultural hegemony. We might thus conclude here that the risk-handling style of *orang ajar* does not reach beyond the habitus of poverty, as actors remain unable to aspire – and this is often for pragmatic reasons – to a radical improvement of their objective position in society.

**Photo 15:** *Orang ajar* helping neighbours evacuate. This photo was made by a respondent and sent to me over Facebook

