PART 2

Partial Accommodation

Rückert and Hoesni Thamrin

Bureaucrat and Politician in Colonial Kampong Improvement

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Introduction

One of the activities through which the modernization of the Indonesian city became manifest was the large-scale improvement of substandard housing districts. Usually referred to as kampongs, by the early twentieth century these areas came to be widely considered as unregulated and unplanned housing areas inhabited mostly by lower income people. Some kampongs originated from a village located close to a city's urban boundaries and were subsequently absorbed as the city expanded. Other kampongs had evolved within the city boundaries, for instance, from original settlements of squatters occupying vacant land. Whatever the exact origin, most kampongs had developed gradually in a haphazard way since the late nineteenth century as the colonial economy and its urban centres expanded.

As interest in town planning and public health developed, it became increasingly apparent that the conditions in these unplanned and unregulated housing areas, exacerbated by an ever increasing population density, were unacceptable in a number of ways. Streets and alleyways were mainly unpaved and meandered amongst indiscriminately placed dwellings making access by strangers almost impossible. No two houses were the same and many occupied houses were considered derelict and unsuitable for living. Non-existent or inadequate water supply and sewerage facilities compounded these chaotic and unhygienic conditions. Local medical officers convinced city administrators that these kampongs were not only unacceptable in appearance but also downright dangerous to the health and prosperity of the city as a whole.

In the eyes of residents, however, the historical and village-like arrangements within kampongs provided a secure sense of familiarity, with established points of orientation linking them to the mosque, the *pasar* (market), *warung* (food stalls), and other landmarks. Kampong residents may have cared less about the poor physical condition of their living environment: in any case, if they did there was little they could do to change it and they had learned to make do. However, to the city administrators, intent on modernising and improving

¹ We are very grateful to Joost Coté for his translation and English corrections.

their city, these chaotic and uncontrolled kampongs were blots on the landscape.

The city administrators as well as the central colonial government considered the apparent chaos of the kampongs a problem for at least two reasons. First of all, the ostensible disorderliness represented the opposite of the ideal of modernity; kampongs not only challenged their aspirations of being enlightened administrators of modern, rationally planned towns, but also their ability to regulate the behaviour of their inhabitants. Secondly, these inaccessible kampongs with their unhygienic environment were considered breeding grounds not only of epidemic diseases but also of criminal behaviour. For these reasons, the administration at all levels considered kampong improvement both a necessity and a public interest. It was also self-evident that the authorities had to take the lead both because of the massive financial costs involved and the perception that 'natives' would not understand the rational and epidemiological factors underpinning their intentions. Thus kampong improvement became a policy characterized by a strong top-down approach typical of colonial reform policies.

The Netherlands Indies has been characterized as *Beamtenstaat*, a society in which political decisions were taken by leading civil servants based on allegedly rational and technocratic evidence: 'the state as efficient bureaucratic machine' (McVey 1982). The development of this *Beamtenstaat* was fostered by the perceived need to implement and control what was considered as desirable change, unchecked by any democratic representative bodies. Although the Decentralization Act of 23 July 1903, gradually established forms of local government, beginning with municipal councils, these only extended and deepened the role of the *Beamtenstaat* as municipal councils, at least initially, began with only appointed councillors and a civil servant acting as chairman. While councillors were gradually selected by elections (in which, however, income and other qualifications restricted active voting rights), as late as 1916 the mayors, who replaced local civil servants as head of the municipal administration, were still being appointed by the central colonial government.² At the central level, the Volksraad, which first met in 1918, as a colony-wide representative body, could merely advise the colonial government, and did not have the competence to approve a budget or issue laws. Moreover, members were largely a mix of bureaucrats, and civil servants, a majority of whom were at first appointed by the central government. Nevertheless, despite the considerable

2 Active and passive voting rights were restricted to persons with a minimal annual income of 600 guilders, and this criterion restricted the electorate to a minority.

level of state control of the local and central representative councils, heated debates did often take place.

Kampong improvement was one of those topics that attracted vociferous exchange of opinion in these emerging political arenas since kampong improvement was not merely a technical expression of the modernization of the city but directly facilitated the ability of colonial authorities to increasingly penetrate the lives of the kampong people. It also involved a new process in how administrative decisions were made and implemented. Equally significant, as it drew on a range of modern sciences, kampong improvement opened up new venues for ambitious men to exert political influence in an expanding state. These represented the new class of educated, professional, and public-minded individuals who articulated a modern future.

On the question of kampong improvement, there was no better example of one who embodied the *Beamtenstaat* than Johannes Jacobus Gerardus Everwijn Rückert. Rückert was a first rate bureaucrat who also fulfilled political functions. He came to the Netherlands Indies in 1913 to start his colonial career in Semarang as director of the Department of Public Works. Later he became chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen (Association for Local Interests), an association of professional people working for local governments and broadly supportive of decentralization of government. Rückert was appointed member of the Volksraad in 1927, while holding a position as civil servant at the Decentralisatie Kantoor, the office of the central government overseeing decentralization affairs.

It was generally assumed that elected members of municipal councils and the Volksraad – and professionals – would speak for the ‘common interest’ and not defend the interest of specific groups. This assumption that such men – and of course there were only men – because of their public or professional positions, and more generally, that appointed European colonial officials, would best interpret the common interest legitimized the gross over-representation of Europeans in municipal councils and the Volksraad. The same criterion determined that the selection of representatives of the Indonesian population to be appointed, both at the central and municipal level, was carefully controlled. However, as Indonesian political organizations evolved, and municipal councils became more representative, councillors increasingly came to consciously and openly defend the political interests of specific groups. This development was personified by Mohammed Hoesni Thamrin. He was elected councillor to the Batavia municipal council in 1919, and in 1927 became the first indigenous alderman (*wethouder*) in Batavia. In the meantime he had also been appointed member of the Volksraad, which provided him with a platform for espousing his moderate nationalist political ideas.

Combining his municipal and Volksraad responsibilities, he used his dual positions to promote the interests of Indonesians. In doing so, he was particularly outspoken in his views on the question of kampong improvement.

In this chapter, we wish to compare the ways these two men, Rückert and Thamrin, a European bureaucrat and an Indonesian politician, approached the question of how the kampong should be improved. Rückert's natural allies were civil servants, including the persons gathered in the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, where he served as chairman. Hoesni Thamrin found supporters among the Indonesian community in his constituency, although as his position in the Volksraad was as an appointed, rather than elected member, it could not be said he represented them. One could have expected that their different functions and support base would have influenced their way of operating: Rückert, a strong technocratic approach and paying much attention to financial aspects; Hoesni Thamrin, the politician, politicizing discussions and making emotional appeals. Moreover, in beginning our research, we assumed that Indonesian politicians like Hoesni Thamrin would have been most keen on dealing and seeking compromises with potential allies to achieve their goals. In the end, however, we found the bureaucrat Rückert just as much successfully employing strategic alliances to achieve his goals as Thamrin. Regardless of the strategies each adopted to improve the kampongs, however, an examination of their efforts is instructive in providing insight into the processes underpinning the modernization of the Indonesian city.

The Emergence of the Kampong Question

Initially, municipal administrations had very few options to intervene in urban kampongs, due to the limitations set by the 1903 Decentralization Act and existing colonial laws protecting the administrative autonomy of so-called *autonome desa's* or *inlandsche gemeentes* (villages with their own administration) located within the municipal boundaries. However, the autonomy of these *inlandsche gemeentes*, with their traditional rural characteristics located within the boundaries of modern urban centres, was perceived as standing in the way of efficient urban management. This, and the insalubrious conditions in the kampongs, formed an administrative challenge that was dubbed the '*kampongvraagstuk*' (the kampong question) by colonial administrators. The abolition of the principle of kampong autonomy was considered a necessary condition to tackle the other half of the *kampongvraagstuk*, the chaotic appearance and the perceived unhygienic conditions of the kampongs (Reerink, this volume).

The condition of kampongs was in the first place discussed at the local level, in the respective municipal councils, but there were also a number of supra-local institutions where ideas about kampung improvement were exchanged between representatives of relevant professions increasingly employed by the newly established municipalities and concerned colonial bureaucratic figures. Of prime importance in this regard was the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen. This association organized an annual congress (Decentralisatiecongres) to discuss issues related to local government and published a bi-weekly journal, *Locale Belangen*, in which new ideas were canvassed and old 'chestnuts' regularly debated.³ A considerable degree of consensus on these issues was also achieved through decisions and reports emanating from the office of the Regeringscommissaris voor Decentralisatie (Government Commissioner for Decentralization, later called Adviser – Adviseur – on Decentralization). The position of Adviser responsible for advising the central government in matters of local administration was a powerful civil service post in an era of colonial reform. The two, the professional lobby group, the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, with its journal and annual Decentralization Congress, and the government appointed Government Commissioner for Decentralization, contributed significantly to the emergence and definition of a colonial kampung improvement policy. The so-called Kampongverbeteringscommissie (Commission for Kampung Improvement) published its first, and as it turned out, last, survey on kampung improvement in 1939.

The abolition of the autonomous kampongs was not only prevented by juridical constraints, but also by financial limits. Already in 1907 D. Tollenaar, the then Government Commissioner for Decentralization, had pointed out the enormous amounts of money that would be required if urban authorities had to take over administration of autonomous kampongs once these were abolished and remarked that these high expectations could not be fulfilled. Tollenaar had made this observation in response to a request from the municipality of Batavia for a subsidy for the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply, and street lighting in the kampongs located within its city boundaries. At the time the central government rejected the request on the grounds that the municipality did not have the authority to intervene in these kampongs. In 1915 Tollenaar, this time in his capacity of head of the Binnenlandsch Bestuur (Department of the Interior), again pointed out the costs that would have to be incurred if kampung autonomy were abolished and

3 The literal meaning of Decentralisatiecongres is Congress pertaining to the decentralization (of central state competencies to local administrators); in practice the congresses could deal with any topic relevant for urban (and sometimes regional) administrations.

the central government held accountable for the cost of improving the kampongs.

A revision of the 1903 Decentralization Act solved at least in theory the juridical aspect of the kampung question in 1918. The 1918 revision amended the Decentralization Act and henceforward the autonomy of individual kampongs situated within municipal boundaries could be abolished by central government ordinance, with the kampongs being placed under the authority of the municipality. In practice however, the actual abolition of autonomous administration of kampongs, so long advocated, was not so easily achieved in individual cases. As H.J. Bussemaker, Mayor of Surabaya, stated in a paper for the Decentralization Congress of 1929, when kampung improvement would result in the abolition of the kampung autonomy, the loss of such autonomy should be compensated. He argued that this would mean giving a greater say to indigenous people in municipal politics, including the extension of voting rights in council elections. A similar point had already been made by the Mayor of Semarang in 1921 (Coté 2011).

Meanwhile, scepticism about the financial aspects of the kampung question continued. In October 1921 the Resident of Surabaya, S. Cohen, stated that nothing prevented the solution of the kampung question 'but simply and solely and absolutely nothing else then the lack of money' (Flieringa 1930:38).⁴ He held the opinion that it was not the abolition of the kampung autonomy that was the stumbling block, but the financial costs required to improve the kampongs, particularly if this were done on a large scale. Gradually, however, and even before the official changes to the law, the central government began to furnish money on a case by case basis from their annual budget to this end. In 1916 it contributed for the first time 8,500 guilders to costs for improvements in a kampung in Malang. The following year the central government granted a total of 102,000 guilders for the improvement of kampongs in Surabaya, Bandung and Malang. The view of the colonial government was that as a rule the municipality and central government had to share the costs of the public works in improved kampongs unless the municipality lacked the financial means (Flieringa 1930:43–45).

During discussions on the 1929 budget in the Volksraad, the colonial government decided to commit 500,000 guilders annually to finance kampung improvement. This amount would be available to meet half of all annually approved kampung improvement costs, the other half being the responsibility of the municipalities.⁵ The central government stipulated that a local

4 *'maar enkel en alleen en ook absoluut niet anders dan: gebrek aan geld.'*

5 Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta (ANRI), Departement Binnenlandsch Bestuur (BB) 1683, Memorie van Toelichting op de ontwerp-begroting 1929: Volksraad Zitting 1928–1929, Ond. 1/ Afd. IV / st.5, p. 72, post 463, onderdeel 500.000 guilders.

government needed to have sufficient income of its own to be eligible for central state support. If, for instance, a municipality did not levy *straatbelasting* or *opcenten*,⁶ it would not receive a subsidy for kampong improvement. Contrary to previous views of the government, a note to this item in the budget explained that the question of funding kampong improvement was detached from the question whether or not the kampong concerned was still autonomous or part of the municipality (Kampongverbeteringscommissie 1939:53–64).

The discussion concerning the kampong question circulated within and beyond professional European circles. In 1927 the moderate nationalist organization Boedi Oetomo held a conference in Semarang in an attempt to involve kampong inhabitants in the question. Mohammad Yoesoef, chairman of the Semarang branch of Boedi Oetomo and member of the municipal council pointed out to the meeting that the question of kampong improvement had been dragging on for many years and had still not been resolved. He spoke enthusiastically about the intention of the Governor General, De Graeff, during an impending visit to Semarang, to also visit some kampongs. The meeting concluded that, in daily practice kampong autonomy no longer had much significance: they had ineluctably become part of the city, no longer owned property such as *ambtsvelden* (agricultural land owing to the position of village head) and their boundaries had become indistinct. The meeting then endorsed a motion proposed by Yoesoef, which was subsequently communicated to the Governor General, the Voksraad and the council, that

the kampongs should, as soon as possible, be transferred to the municipality of Semarang, and that, in anticipation of this being formalized, remediation of the worst conditions [in them] should be undertaken immediately by the municipality.⁷

In a further minute, however, the meeting also added that the kampongs should be allowed to retain their autonomy.

A little earlier the Surabayan Indonesische Studieclub, a local Indonesian forum to discuss social and political issues, had reported in its periodical, *Soeloeh Indonesia*, the results of its survey on the development of housing in

6 *Straatbelasting* (literally street tax) was a direct tax levied from house owners depending on the length of their frontage along the street, and the quality of the street; *opcenten* were surtaxes on the income tax.

7 'de kampongs zoo spoedig mogelijk behooren te worden overgedragen aan de gemeente Semarang en dat in afwachting daarvan, reeds onmiddellijk door de gemeente de aller-ergste toestanden dienen te worden verbeterd' (*Locale Belangen* 1-10-1927:760–761).

Surabaya between 1900 and 1925. Over this period it concluded the population had doubled but that proportionately, the availability of housing had declined tenfold. Recognizing that much had already been done in terms of improving hygiene conditions, it emphasized that the situation in the city's kampongs was deplorable. Life for the indigenous residents was described as '*moordend*' (killing):

[These conditions] not only represent a danger for the lives of indigenous people, but for society in general which must draw its labour force from the kampongs. Nursemaids who must care for the children, and cooks who are responsible for preparing meals, come from such environments and the danger of contamination from numerous diseases is no figment of the imagination.⁸

Improvement in kampong conditions meant not only reducing the chances of contamination but especially in 'increasing the life expectancy of the better-off sections of society'.⁹ The same survey also concluded that over the last quarter century the position of the indigenous person had declined from one where he was a property and homeowner to one where he had become merely a tenant and day labourer.

The elevation of kampong improvement as a major policy issue was confirmed by a Conferentie inzake Kampongverbetering (Conference on Kampong Improvement) convened by the Government Commissioner for Decentralization, A.B. Cohen Stuart, in the Lodge of the Freemasons of Batavia in 1928. The participants included city mayors, municipal secretaries and directors of municipal services. The central government was represented by Rückert, who at the time was seconded to the Government Commissioner for Decentralization. The invitation list included only one Indonesian name: that of Hoesni Thamrin, who at the time was an alderman in the Batavia city council.¹⁰ In the following sections we will see in detail what these two men, Rückert and Thamrin, achieved in this conference.

8 'Voor den Inlander niet alleen levert deze toestand gevaar, ook voor den samenleving in 't algemeen, die haar werkrachten uit die kampongs betrekken moet. Baboes, die de kinderen verzorgen moeten, kokki's, die 't eten hebben klaar te maken, komen voort uit dit milieu en besmettingsgevaar voor vele ziekten is niet denkbeeldig' (Soeloeh Indonesia cited by NRC 29-6-1926).

9 'verhooging der levenskansen van 't betere deel der samenleving' (Soeloeh Indonesia cited by NRC 29-6-1926).

10 ANRI, BB 1395, Verslag Conferentie inzake Kampongverbetering, 11-2-1928.

The Bureaucrat: Rückert

During his colonial career in the Indies, Rückert had occupied many – often overlapping – positions in government departments and commissions. After being educated in the Netherlands, he began his career in the Indies in 1913 as assistant director for Public Works in Semarang. In 1927 he was appointed to the Volksraad and seconded to the Decentralisatiekantoor (Office for Decentralization Affairs) of the central government and later for a brief time he was mayor of the city of Meester Cornelis (Jatinegara). Central to his career, however, was his involvement in the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen.

Rückert found a progressive environment in Semarang. Semarang, the third largest city of the Netherlands Indies at the time, had the reputation of being a pioneer in urban development, planning, public housing, and kampong improvement, and it was no coincidence that the board of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen resided in that city. There was indeed an unusual concentration of people with advanced ideas and professional interest in urban development in Semarang. The entrepreneur H.F. Tillema, while resident there, galvanized attention on the conditions of the city's health and hygiene conditions and on his return to the Netherlands in 1914 spent much of his fortune on compiling and publishing his masterwork *Kromoblenda* on housing problems and sanitation (Tillema 1915–1923). Earlier Dr W.T. de Vogel, the regional health authority and like Tillema member of the municipal council in Semarang, had sought to address the city's health problems by convincing the council to engage an architect to draw up plans for an extension of the city. J.E. Stokvis, a socialist and editor of the influential progressive daily *De Locomotief* from 1910 to 1917, used his paper to advocate colonial reforms, including improvement to the condition of indigenous housing. In recognition of his interests and influential position, Stokvis was elected as the first chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen and held this position from 1912 to 1917. In 1923 he was elected to represent the ISDP (Indische Sociaal-Democratische Partij, Indies Social-Democratic Party) in the Volksraad. The activities of these two 'amateurs in urban development' was reinforced by the arrival in 1914 of Thomas Karsten, a private architect soon to gain a colony-wide reputation for his ideas on town planning. The activities of men as these ensured that in the first decades of the twentieth century, a climate had evolved in Semarang, which favoured the activities of reformers. Many of their progressive ideas were incorporated in municipal planning and implemented. Rückert was certainly able to make use of these progressive forces in Semarang and he himself, while not a member of a political party, was later associated with the progressive think tank, De Stuw. He even signed a petition organized by this group of

colonial progressives, dated 12 January 1930, calling for a Commonwealth of the Netherlands and Indonesia (Jonkman 1971:71–75).

Rückert's rapid rise to prominence was in part due to one of the first major projects he was assigned to as the bureaucrat responsible for overseeing the major urban development projects: the planning and construction of a vast new housing development in the hills overlooking the city, Nieuw Tjandi, on which he worked closely with the architectural firm headed by Thomas Karsten. In 1919, after having been appointed director of the city Department of Public Works two years previously, he was promoted to chief city engineer with responsibility to prepare a development plan for Semarang's future expansion. Working again with Karsten, Rückert was responsible for integrating the various sectional plans into one organic whole. These were implemented in stages in the years after 1925 and the main elements of this blueprint remained the guide for the city's growth even after Independence.

In the meantime, after a reorganization of the city's technical services, Rückert was appointed director of Municipal Housing Service, a multi-faceted role which included responsibility for city expansion, overseeing housing and business development, and supervision of building construction. This new position provided him with the power to oversee and implement the broad vision that he had earlier developed for Semarang.

Rückert became an important national opinion leader when he became member of the board of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen in 1921. He was elected chairman the following year, a position he held till 1931 when he resigned after a serious disagreement – more of which later. As chairman, he not only led the organization but was also member of the editorial board of its fortnightly publication, *Locale Belangen*. This periodical, because of its practice of including relevant government documents, such as advisory reports, and regulations, was widely seen as a mouthpiece for the government. Although on occasions the journal did discuss state policy critically, this perception was especially generated by the prominence given to articles on decentralization written by government officials and advisers, which were regularly included without editorial comment. Rückert, however, in his capacity as chairman but no less in his capacity as editor expressed his criticism of policy or policy proposals at times, even in areas in which he himself was involved.

Rückert obtained another key function in 1923 when he was appointed to chair a commission to enquire into reorganization of the financial relations between the central and local governments following plans to extend the principle of decentralization. The commission was dubbed Commissie Rückert (Rückert Commission). Whether Rückert owed his position to the fact that he was chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, or because of his

prominent role in local government is not clear. The commission was disbanded in 1925 when new regional governments were created at the provincial and sub-provincial (regency) level and a new commission – *Commissie voor de financieele verhouding tusschen het Land, Provincies, Regentschappen, Gemeenten en andere Locale Ressorten* (Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships) – was established to deal with the new circumstances. Rückert was however retained as adviser to this new enquiry. In this capacity he complained in *Locale Belangen* that the work of the commission was hampered by a lack of manpower given its task to report on the affairs of the entire archipelago, and to attempt to standardize all local budgets in order to make them comparable. Rückert was publicly praised for his work on these commissions in the pages of *De Locomotief* by his friend, the former paper's editor J.E. Stokvis who by then was a member of the Volksraad representing the Indies Socialist Party. In the meantime Rückert had also become chairman of the Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging (STV, Social-Technical Association) which, amongst other things, organized two very influential public housing congresses. The first congress was held in 1922 and was held, appropriately, in Semarang. This congress discussed a series of position papers amongst which was an influential paper by Thomas Karsten, in which he called strongly for the adoption of guidelines for kampong improvement. Rückert's work in leading this influential gathering of experts was warmly praised by Semarang's mayor, D. de Iongh. After the conference, Semarang's public was invited to inspect a housing exhibition, which had formed part of the congress. The exhibition drew 142 European, 52 indigenous and 29 Chinese visitors (Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging 1922:48).

In 1927 Rückert attempted to further expand his network of influential contacts by applying for one of the seats in the Volksraad. However, both the municipal council of Semarang and De Iongh, Mayor of Semarang, at first refused to nominate him on the grounds that he could not be missed from his office in Semarang for any length of time. During subsequent negotiations, the Semarang council eventually dropped its opposition, coming to see the advantage that might accrue from having a strong spokesman in favour of decentralized government in the Volksraad. Eventually Rückert was also offered the opportunity to be seconded to the office of the Government Commissioner for Decentralization, headed by A.B. Cohen Stuart. The creation of this new, and costly position that Rückert would occupy, that of *Hoofdbambtenaar ter beschikking van de Adviseur voor de Decentralisatie* (Principal Officer responsible to the Adviser for Decentralization) evoked considerable debate in the Volksraad, but ultimately also the Volksraad approved of Rückert's appointment with a narrow margin of 22 to 20 votes. His position would involve

responsibility for the technical aspects related to the financial relations between the central and local governments, kampong improvement, and the abolition of kampong autonomy in urban areas (*NRC* 25-11-1927, 7-12-1927).

Half a year after this appointment, Rückert tabled a motion in the *Volksraad* on kampong improvement; it was supported by Stokvis and the moderate Indonesian nationalist Soejono. The motion, put forward during the debate on the Netherlands Indies budget for 1929, urged the central government to contribute financially not only to construction work involved in kampong improvement, but also to contribute to the costs of maintaining such kampong improvement works. It proposed concretely that the central government should pay half the costs associated with local kampong improvement. In speaking to his motion, Rückert pointed not only to the poor housing conditions which he had himself seen during his travel to municipalities, but also emphasized the danger of epidemics, such as cholera and the plague, which could infect inhabitants outside the kampongs. He also pointed out that better health would benefit employers and he emphatically stressed the possibility of disorder breaking out amongst kampong inhabitants: 'Until now the kampong population has remained calm, but the source of unrest, the continuous threat to peace and order, persists to exist in the so neglected kampongs'.¹¹ It was an argument that was designed to carry weight since the colony had only recently recovered from the shock of the communist-inspired uprisings of 1926 and 1927, which, despite their actual small scale, left a strong impression on the European residents.

In fact Rückert's personal opinion was that all costs related to kampong improvement and their subsequent maintenance should be funded by the central government, not just half so that his motion can therefore be seen as a compromise. Rückert and his supporter Stokvis had earlier argued that, since kampong improvement was a new budget item for which existing municipalities did not have the means to provide, it was the central government that should pay. As it turned out Cohen Start, the Government Commissioner for Decentralization representing the government in this debate, indicated the

11 *'Tot nu toe is de kampongbevolking rustig gebleven, maar de bron van onrust, de voortdurende bedreiging van rust en orde blijft bestaan in de zoo verwaarloosde kampong.'* ANRI, BB 1395b, 26. It is worth noting that the year before Stokvis had written critically about the argument that kampong improvement was necessary to reduce the risk of infection of Europeans by their indigenous servants. Such a motivation was painfully selfish, according to Stokvis (*Locale Belangen* 16-5-1927:349-50). The argument had originally been advanced by councillor Tillema in his early publications on health and sanitation in 1911 and 1913.

government was prepared to favourably consider the proposed principle were it not for the fact that the dire condition of the colony's finances made this impossible. The proposal should therefore first be sent for advice to the Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships.¹²

When the motion was put to a vote it did not, as was often the case in the Volksraad, divide along racial lines. It was accepted with 28 votes in favour and eleven against, but did not gain the unanimous support of the council's indigenous members. Hoesni Thamrin voted in favour but like the other Indonesian members, had not participated in the discussions. Why Thamrin had stayed on the sideline is not clear. One possible reason was that he did not want to further divide the Indonesian group on this issue more than it clearly already was. It was also likely that he fully shared the political views of the motion's seconders, Stokvis and Soejono, and had nothing further to add to what they had presented.¹³

The debate on this motion shows perhaps better than anything else how Rückert's various roles had become totally mixed up. The Volksraad member, Rückert, debated with the representative of the government, Cohen Stuart, to whom civil servant Rückert was seconded as principal officer. The principle of freedom of speech in the Volksraad also applied to Rückert, so in principle he was free to criticize the state policy; in reality this double role of civil servant-member of the Volksraad gave rise to awkward situations (Jonkman 1971:60). During the debate among the Volksraad representatives, the motion was opposed by Fruin, representative of the Politiek Economische Bond. Fruin deemed Rückert's motion premature pending a proposal to be formulated by the Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships, the more so as, according to Fruin, that commission 'has a highly competent member in the person of our fellow representative, Mr Rückert'.¹⁴ When the Volksraad reconvened Rückert thanked Cohen Stuart, in daily life his direct superior, for his preparedness to accept the principle but pointed out that it remained unclear from Cohen Stuart's reply when this would be implemented if they had to wait

12 ANRI, BB 1395b, 32–33.

13 Hoesni Thamrin had a good relationship with Stokvis and corresponded regularly with him until Stokvis returned to the Netherlands for health reasons. It is known that Soejono, although he was a senior member of the Volksraad, greatly admired Thamrin as Chairman of the Comité voor de Inlandsche Meerderheid in de Volksraad (Committee of the Native Majority in the Volksraad).

14 *'een zeer bekwaam werkend lid heeft in de persoon van ons geacht medelid, de heer Rückert'*. ANRI, BB 1395, Handelingen van de Volksraad, zittingsjaar 1928–1929, Onderwerp 1, Afd. IV, Stuk 34, Begroting van Nederlandsch-Indië voor 1929:45.

for an advice from the Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships. With fine irony he suggested that, even the most optimistic person could see that it would be some time before the Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships would have its report ready. Rückert of course knew what he was talking about because he was adviser to the very commission that was investigating these relations! The upshot was that civil servant Rückert, as member of the Commission on Central-Local Financial Relationships, gave advice to the government about a Volksraad motion, tabled by representative Rückert (Rückert 1930:172).

In the end, despite the fact the motion received a positive reception from Cohen Stuart during the debate in the Volksraad, the central government failed to act on it. The final regulation related to subsidies for kampong improvement only included costs for construction, and not maintenance as the motion had proposed. A decade later, around the time of the Kampongverbeteringscommissie, F.H. van de Wetering (1939) observed that people could not count on the government to maintain improvement works. This commission had recommended that the costs and maintenance of improvements should, as far as possible be left in whole or in part to those who would benefit from them, alluding to the so-called '*profijtbeginself*' or the principle of self-interest. (Kampongverbeteringscommissie 1939:24). Thus, despite his best efforts and wide connections, the inevitable conclusion in this respect must be that there was a limit to the power of Rückert.

The combination of multiple functions may have helped Rückert to gain power, but ultimately it also created an insoluble conflict of interests, which finally forced him to resign as Chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen.¹⁵ The government had announced a salary cut of five per cent for all civil servants as one of the measures to meet the budget deficit caused by the Depression. Rückert supported the decision because he thought it a reasonable response to the current economic difficulties. The majority of members of the association of city mayors and secretaries of which he had been a member since 5 May 1931 due to his appointment as acting mayor of Meester Cornelis, were, however, opposed to the economy measure. The Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen also did not share his opinion, influenced no doubt by the fact that

15 For a complete overview of Rückert's position it should be added that he also exerted influence in two precursors of the Commission that drafted the very influential Town Planning Ordinance of 1938. These precursors were the Bouwbeperkingencommissie (1930) and the Grond- en Woningcommissie (1932), together with among others Karsten and Hoesni Thamrin. Rückert had pleaded to appoint a commission for urban development in the Volksraad.

there were two mayors in its executive. Given this opposition it seemed to Rückert that it was best if he resigned from the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen before discussion on the 1932 budget began so that it could more clearly represent the views of the majority of its membership regarding the economy measures (*Locale Belangen* April 1931:344–345; May 1931:447; *Het Vaderland* 17-7-1931:344–345). In any event, he had already decided to return to the Netherlands in 1932. Rückert did however retain his membership of the editorial board of *Locale Belangen*.¹⁶

To sum up it can be said that Rückert was an important figure in the decentralization process in the Netherlands-Indies, in particular in relation to its financial aspects. He made effective use of his extensive ‘old boys’ network in his bureaucratic and administrative functions. In the decision-making processes related to kampong improvement he played a significant role and here too he exploited an extended lobby network. Although as member of the Volksraad it might have been expected that he would have played a more political role, here Rückert chose to act more in line with his bureaucratic and administrative function, emphasizing the technical and practical aspects of issues. In this he contrasted to Hoesni Thamrin. The calm, business-like orations of Rückert, apparent, for instance, in his address in relation to the motion on the funding of the maintenance of kampong improvements, were in sharp contrast to the heated speeches of Hoesni Thamrin in which he regularly described the scandalous conditions in urban kampongs and in so doing severely criticized colonial government policy. This might explain why Thamrin did not participate in the debate on the Rückert motion: there was little political emotion to be generated from this technical approach to the issue.

The Politician: Thamrin

One reason why the municipal administrations found it difficult to work in the kampongs was the lack of communication with the indigenous residents, the majority of whom had little formal education. Culture and language barriers stood in the way of smooth communication. On their side, many indigenous residents found the town hall somewhat intimidating when they had to do business there, or with its agents. As Bob Hering (1996:61) remarks, kampong people knew the municipality mostly through ‘*soesah* [nuisance] measures’,

16 Rückert later pursued a successful career as mayor of Enschede in the Netherlands. He left office in 1946 and died in 1949.

like building lines and the building inspection. Kampong people nevertheless were quick to request the technical services of the municipality to solve minor problems. Cultural differences hampered mutual understanding, and the municipal administration, based on urban Dutch models, was much more comprehensible to European and wealthy non-European residents acculturated in Western ways than to the majority of Chinese and indigenous residents. Thus those individuals who could act as intermediary between the town hall departments and the kampong people played a crucial role. Hoesni Thamrin was an important, arguably the most prominent, of these intermediaries. He fulfilled a crucial role in explaining the administration's intentions to the kampong people, but equally, played a key role in translating the feelings of the kampong people to policy makers.

One occasion where Thamrin's role as the voice of the kampong people was evident was in 1925, at the second of the two congresses organized by the Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging focusing exclusively on kampongs. Together with two other indigenous councillors from Batavia, Thamrin presented a paper, in which they explained why the kampong population expressed not the least interest in municipal affairs. More directly, he argued that the kampong community regarded the intervention of the municipality as contributing to their financial burdens. Thamrin had made the same point in the Batavia council on various occasions (Flieringa 1930:116–119).

Hoesni Thamrin's upbringing made him ideally equipped to act as an intermediary. He was born on 16 February 1894 in Sawah Besar in Batavia, where his father, Mohamad Thabrie, was *adjunct-hoofdjaksa* (assistant public prosecutor). Already in 1919 Hoesni Thamrin had been elected to the Batavia city council at the youthful age of 25 by the small political party, the Kaoem Betawi, which participated in the elections of the city council in 1917 for the first time. The Kaoem Betawi, of which Hoesni and his father were leading members, was a small political party of well-to-do people, which took its name from that of the original population of Batavia. Although Hoesni Thamrin was legally categorized as an '*Inlander*', in the colony's legal tripartite division of the population, he also had European ancestors. This, and his father's prominent position, ensured that he was raised in a European oriented environment, which included a European education. After attending a Christian pre-school in Pasar Baroe, he was sent to an exclusive Dutch elementary school in Mangga Besar (Instituut Bosch), at which time he took on the name of Jacob. Following this he went to an even more prestigious school, the Koning Willem III Gymnasium in Salemba to complete his secondary school education. Here as in his previous schools, teaching and learning were entirely in Dutch and he mixed with well-off Dutch and Eurasian schoolmates.

After a short period as apprentice at the office of the Resident of Batavia, Thamrin moved to the accounting department of the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM, Royal Packet Navigation Company). During this period he came into contact with Daan van der Zee, who encouraged him to go into politics. Van der Zee, a member of the ISDP, worked at the town hall of Batavia and in 1920 was appointed to the position of town clerk one year after Thamrin became member of the municipal council. Van der Zee put Hoesni Thamrin in touch with his social-democratic friends, including Schotman and Stokvis. Their regular meetings were held in the Maison Versteeg & Rikkers, a well-known restaurant in Noordwijk, Batavia, noted for its wide garden and terrace in a French style. Thamrin did not become member of the ISDP, but sympathized with the social-democratic aims of this party. His relationship with Stokvis, the former chief editor of the newspaper *De Locomotief* in Semarang, alongside whom he sat in the Volksraad, was particularly important to Thamrin and remained of great influence to Thamrin even after Stokvis left to stay permanently in the Netherlands.

Thamrin's political position was that of a 'cooperative nationalist'. This position was entirely acceptable to the progressive groups in the European society such as the membership of the ISDP who were also strong proponents of the need to improve the conditions of the Indonesian population. He was, moreover, financially independent and thoroughly at home in European society, and could afford to devote all his time to politics. Although his party had only one seat in the Volksraad, Thamrin himself played a very active role as he was a member of many of the Council's advisory committees including the Technische Commissie (Technical Committee), the Belasting Commissie (Taxation Committee), the Commissie voor Begraafplaatsen (Cemeteries Committee), the Kampongcommissie (Kampong Committee), and the Financiële Commissie (Finance Committee).

In the beginning of his term, Thamrin more often than not supported proposals put forward by other members rather than presenting proposals of his own, while he sharpened his political skills during question time. After a cautious beginning however, Hoesni Thamrin gradually developed an eloquent style of debating which impressed both political friends and opponents. He was very polite in his addresses, his voice was soft but emphatic, but he could also be sarcastic; for instance in April 1923 he called the meagre municipal resources made available for kampong improvement so far merely an amount to appease the municipal conscience (Hering 1996:53). He consistently stood up for the interests of the *'Betawi wong tjilik'*, the original ordinary inhabitants of Batavia. His concerns were to get improvement in methods of rice distribution, the maintenance of drainage systems, the supply of fresh drinking water,

and action to prevent the constantly reoccurring floods, which annually attacked Batavia.

Despite Thamrin's eloquence, multiple public positions and connections, Batavia's, indigenous community had limited clout. In municipal elections, each ethnic category (*Inlanders*, *Vreemde Oosterlingen*, and Europeans) had a specific number of seats assigned to them in the council but it was not until the elections of 1938 that the municipality introduced the so-called '*pariteits*' or parity principle. This finally gave the indigenous community an equal number of seats to those of 'other Asians' and Europeans combined. In fact, of course, this still left the indigenous people heavily under represented given their majority share in the total population (De Vletter, Voskuil and Diessen 1997:21). Moreover, because the indigenous councillors often did not vote as a block, they typically did not make the most of the fact that they occupied half of the council seats.

Thamrin himself, however, often succeeded in gaining support from European councillors in his battle to gain improvements in urban kampongs, in particular from social-democratic councillors who shared his view that the municipality's responsibilities extended to their maintenance. In pursuing his declared role in the council of looking after the interests of the kampung people, he questioned why it prioritized the development of the elite neighbourhood of Menteng at the expense of the kampongs such as Kramat and Kwitang. One of the specific issues he raised was the question of the municipality's responsibility for kampongs located on private estates (*particuliere landerijen*). At the meeting of 21 March 1921 Thamrin proposed that owners of private estates had to financially support the improvement of kampongs on their estate. It had been common practice for such landlords to provide and maintain the drainage systems in their estate kampongs in earlier times, but this custom had been lost (*Gemeenteblad* 1921/77). Unable to force private estate owners to undertake this responsibility, Mayor Meyroos also resisted the idea that the council – or indeed the central government – could be held accountable for the improvement of roads and drainages in the kampongs on the private estates.

In this debate Thamrin found strong support from councillor Van Marle. According to Van Marle the Council could not eschew responsibility for the kampongs simply because they were located on privately owned land. The might of this small group of landlords, he argued, had to be broken because their neglect threatened the health of 80 per cent of Batavia's population and made it impossible for them to lead a decent life. Van Marle further drew attention to the glaring contrast between the condition of the main thoroughfares of Batavia and the roads and footpaths in the kampongs: the former he

declared, acted as camouflage for the dirty kampongs and impassable kampong roads. At a council meeting in February 1922 Hoesni Thamrin supported Van Marle's demand that work on improving Batavia's kampongs was an urgent necessity. Van Marle had compared Batavia to a painting in a beautiful frame, which depicted fine villas and broad avenues while the kampongs represented the worthless canvas on which these beautiful scenes were painted. Thamrin immediately proposed that a budget of 100,000 guilders be set aside for kampong improvement by introducing economies in other budget items. He proposed that this money could be spent on 'flying brigades' of a hundred coolies, which would travel from kampong to kampong. Amongst other things these brigades would be required to clean out drains to ensure better drainage (Hering 1996:52).

Initially Thamrin's proposal was rejected. The mayor argued that tax revenues raised in the kampongs were insufficient to pay for the kampong improvement, and he was not prepared to use more than 30,000 guilders out of the municipal budget for kampong improvement. In 1923 however the council approved the introduction of a new tax on real estate that made more funds for kampong improvement available. A list of kampongs that needed to be improved was immediately drawn up – including Sawah Besar, an area where Thamrin owned property – but the central government disallowed the introduction of the new tax. In the end Thamrin's earlier motion to spend 100,000 guilders on kampong improvement was unanimously accepted, in part in an attempt to demonstrate to the central government the need for new taxes. The council also voted to establish a special commission to draw up plans for kampong improvement, which, would draw on the knowledge and experience of indigenous officials (Hering 1996:51–55).

At the end of 1923 Thamrin was again successful in diverting funds for kampong improvement. His proposal was to spend the so-called Jubileumfonds (a fund reserved to mark the silver jubilee of the reign of Queen Wilhelmina) on kampong improvement instead of on a memorial statue. The existing Kwitang-Kramat fund (created to help victims of a blaze in the Kwitang and Kramat kampongs in 1913) was added to the Jubileumfonds and the municipality also voted further money to this fund. In 1924 it was agreed that the target of the combined funds would extend to the whole of Batavia (and not just the two kampongs that had burnt down) and the scope enlarged to include public housing in general.¹⁷ Another of Thamrin's initiatives to raise funds ultimately failed. The council had endorsed a proposal by Thamrin to contract a loan of 2.5 million

17 From 1927 the Jubileumfonds was under control of Mayor and Aldermen, to whom Thamrin belonged by then (Eggink 1930:91).

guilders, of which 740,000 guilders would be devoted to kampong improvement and 600,000 guilders for road repairs. However, elected deputies in the West Java provincial council rejected this loan on technical grounds. The term of the loan was 46 years, deemed too long, and it was uncertain the project would be able to finance the repayment.

An unintended consequence of Thamrin's original proposal to devote the Jubileumfonds for kampong improvement was a process of gentrification and the gradual expulsion of the original kampong population. Kwitang, which before the fire had been an ordinary kampong, had in the process of rebuilding become too 'beautiful' (*mooi*) – hence too expensive – for the kampong inhabitants themselves. The former mayor, Meyroos, commented in an interview in 1933 that the new houses were being rented out to the '*kleinen man*' (little people) in the European community and thus Kwitang had become a European neighbourhood. He added, however, that perhaps this was not so bad as there was also a need for cheap housing for the European community (NRC 11-5-1933). Meyroos might have had a point, but he ignored what may have become of the original inhabitants of the kampong.

It is unclear what Hoesni Thamrin thought about this replacement of kampong people by a predominantly European, lower middle-class. However, he definitely pleaded against overly expensive works where he argued a balance should be struck between sustainability and permanence. So for instance, in relation to kampong Sawah Besar where he himself owned property, he pointed out that roads that had been constructed without the appropriate foundations nevertheless remained perfectly serviceable after sixteen years. Although roads were later much better made, using for instance coral as foundation, which ensured better drainage and general serviceability, these were much more expensive to construct and thus limited the reach of the budget expenditure (Hering 1996:61).

A new opportunity to exert influence opened up for Thamrin after the government of Batavia introduced the position of aldermen (*wethouders*), and, in October 1926, proposed to appoint Thamrin to one of three such positions. Ironically, it was precisely in this month that Thamrin had elicited a great deal of criticism from European councillors for his suggestion that a connection existed between the endless stream of complaints by indigenous residents about housing and living conditions and the communist uprising of that month. This analysis did not go down well with his European colleagues who believed that the indigenous kampong residents loved law and order and were loyal subjects of the Dutch colonial state and that Thamrin's suggestion slandered them. Mayor Meyroos attempted to soften the effects by asserting that while he endorsed Thamrin's view on kampong improvement, he judged the

recent communist uprising not a suitable subject to be discussed in the municipal council. Thamrin clarified (or perhaps adjusted) his point by saying that he had not suggested a connection did exist, but that communists might find supporters in the kampongs if nothing was done about the living conditions. On an earlier occasion he deplored the fact that there was so little contact between the kampong community and the municipality. He pointed out that for the vast majority, that is the constituency of the Kaoem Betawi, the whole contact it had was through the imposition of taxes and the '*soesah*' (nuisance) occasioned by the directives of Rooiwezen (Building Line Surveyors) and Bouwpolitie (Building Inspectors). Only indigenous intellectuals, Thamrin argued, had frequent contact with the municipality. Whatever the European councillors may have thought about Thamrin's explanation, he was elected as the first indigenous alderman in Batavia. He took up this new position in November 1926 and received, as his portfolio, responsibility for kampong improvement and public housing as well as supervision on the operation of markets, cemeteries, slaughterhouses, food inspection, fish auctions and Indigenous affairs.

Three years later, on 29 October 1929, Thamrin stepped down, because he felt bypassed when a European colleague, Van Zalinge, was appointed *locoburgemeester* (deputy mayor). According to Thamrin, this honourable position rightfully fell to him, being the alderman with the highest seniority. Mayor Meyroos, however, declared in a meeting of the mayor with the aldermen, where Thamrin was of course present, that Thamrin could not be appointed to the position because it could only be occupied by a European, as the Indies municipalities were modelled on Dutch municipal administration.

The affair brought to a head a simmering discontent. In an extensive letter setting out his motivations for resigning, Thamrin declared his decision was based not only on the fact that he had been by-passed for the position of deputy mayor which was rightly his on the grounds of seniority but in particular because he felt he was not being treated with equality. Racial discrimination was being practiced in Batavia, he declared. In other municipalities indigenous deputy mayors had been appointed. In support of Thamrin, the entire indigenous fraction of the council resigned. Many councillors, and also Mayor Meyroos regretted Thamrin's decision and in the media the resignation was depicted as a great loss for the council and for the city as a whole. In the end the situation was resolved by the early retirement of Van Zalinge due to his impending return to the Netherlands so that finally, Thamrin was appointed deputy mayor and resumed his role as alderman on 14 January 1930.

In the meantime Hoesni Thamrin had also been appointed member of the provincial council of West Java, which had resulted from the administrative

reforms of 1925 and had been inaugurated by the Governor General in January 1926. This provided him with a base from which later, in 1935, he was elected to the Volksraad with the support of Boedi Oetomo to represent the West Java electorate. In 1939 he was re-elected as representative of Parindra (Partai Indonesia Raja) – in the West Java constituency. Despite his membership of the Provincial Council, Thamrin could not prevent that body rejecting the 2.5 million guilders loan proposed by Thamrin and accepted by the municipal council of Batavia as mentioned above. Thamrin could not help either that the central government rejected an appeal from the municipal government to revoke the decision of the Provincial Council.

Thamrin had of course already been a member of the Volksraad prior to his election, since 1927 when, at the age of 33, he had been appointed (not elected) representative for the Kaoem Betawi. In the Volksraad he led the Fraksi Nasional (Frani), which consisted of 'cooperative' representatives of the indigenous population. Even though the Kaoem Betawi had only one seat in the council, Thamrin was able to consolidate his position by gaining membership of the College van Gedelegeerden (Board of Delegates) on 27 June 1931. Led by the chairman of the Volksraad, this College van Gedelegeerden met on a weekly basis unlike the full Volksraad, which only met in two plenary sessions a year. Obviously the college had a significant influence on the decisions arrived at by the Volksraad. Further adding to Thamrin's growing political position was his election in 1939 by 45 of the 59 Volksraad members as first deputy chairman of the council.

For a long time Thamrin combined his work as alderman with his membership of the Volksraad. Physically this was not so difficult since the town hall, situated on the south side of the Koningsplein, was quite close to the Volksraad building located on the eastern edge of the square. But in practice, Thamrin had to juggle two quite different roles: as alderman he was an administrator while in the Volksraad he was a politician. In the Volksraad Thamrin focussed particularly on broader policy issues alongside economic and financial questions (Jonkman 1971:213). Where he saw exploitation of the indigenous population he made extensive use of his right to question and carried on extensive debates during budget discussions in which he was often supported by his socialist colleagues, such as the ISDP member, Stokvis. But here kampong improvement was not a major topic. It was in the municipal council where Thamrin made his mark in the debates on kampong improvement (Hering 1996:123).

Another forum where Thamrin exerted considerable influence was in the Town Planning Commission, which prepared the Town Planning Ordinance. This commission, installed in 1934, drafted the very influential Bill on Town

Planning and its extensive Explanatory Memorandum (Van Roosmalen, this volume). While Thomas Karsten, also member of the Commission and appointed for his established reputation in town planning, emphasized the town planning aspects, Hoesni Thamrin would have been more interested in those aspects that directly affected the poor housing and living conditions of kampong inhabitants. It is quite likely that the Commission's observation that:

the government has been unable to resolve the kampong problem; this is in part due to the fact that it has insufficient knowledge of the conditions and the existing life circumstances that pertain there

stemmed from Thamrin.¹⁸ However, Karsten and Thamrin would have seen eye to eye on the underlying problems of the urban kampong.

It is perhaps surprising that Hoesni Thamrin was not a member of the Kampongverbeteringscommissie (Commission for Kampong Improvement). However, this would have put him into serious conflict with his position as alderman since the commission had the responsibility of advising the central government how it should distribute the 500,000 guilders amongst the various municipalities. More immediately, it may have been because Batavia was already represented by its mayor, Van Heldsingen, the chairman of the commission.

From outside the commission, Thamrin must have been pleased that it had made clear that in its view, any improvement plan had to be appropriate to the existing situation: that is, the basic principles applied to kampong improvement had to ensure that the character of the kampong would be maintained. Roads, for example, had to replace existing roads and could not, 'Hausmann-like', break through a kampong at the cost of existing houses (*Stadsvormingsordonnantie* 1938:26–29). The commission argued that the period of individual experimentation had delivered sufficient evidence for best practices now to be applied, even though too little was as yet generally known about what had been done in the past and what approaches had worked. It had dawned on many people that kampong improvement had to be implemented in an austere manner. The commission was critical of negative attitudes that still persisted regarding kampong improvement, the limited interest shown in previous years, and about the fact that numerous other and less

18 *'de overheid de kampongproblemen niet beheerscht; dit wortelt voor een deel in hare onvoldoende kennis omtrent de daar gegeven omstandigheden en geldende leveenseischen'* (*Toelichting Stadsvormingsordonnantie* 1938:33).

urgent projects were given priority over the improvement of the living conditions in kampongs (Kampongverbeteringscommissie 1939:21).

The combination of different positions in one person and the existence of Old Boys networks bore the risk of nepotism and self-enrichment. Thamrin, for example, combined his political work with a business in the exploitation of land and housing. In February 1928, shortly after he had taken up his duties as alderman, the municipality published a report about one of Thamrin's transactions as businessman. He had purchased the building material that had become available after the market hall of Pasar Tanah Abang was taken apart and it was rumoured he had misused his position as alderman to strike a bargain. Thamrin had ordered a municipal civil servant to ask the Hollandsche Beton Maatschappij, which was doing the demolition job, when the building material would become available and how much the material would cost. When the Hollandsche Beton Maatschappij and the civil servant agreed on the price of 1,200 guilders, the company had erroneously assumed that it was the municipality that purchased the scrap material. In reality Thamrin had bought the building material in his capacity of private entrepreneur, intending to recycle the material to build small dwellings. The potential scandal blew over when the company declared it had not received a higher bid from any private side and did not want to make a fuss about it. Despite the fact that the whole affair was reduced to a misunderstanding and Thamrin was immediately rehabilitated, a newspaper drew the conclusion that it had become sufficiently clear 'how difficult the position of alderman is, who at the same time has an interest in land and housing policies'.¹⁹ However, in the view of European leaders so few indigenous leaders that enjoyed trust in both the indigenous and European community were available at the time, that a strict prohibition on the combination of public and private functions was impossible and therefore reputations of persons like Thamrin could not be damaged light-heartedly.²⁰

Thamrin died after a short illness on 11 January 1941. His funeral was attended by the chairman of the Volksraad, Jonkman who observed:

Thamrin was buried as a sovereign, amid great public interest and condolences on the side of the Indonesians community. They gathered at the

19 *'hoe lastig de positie is van een wethouder, die tegelijk belang heeft bij grond- en huizenpolitiek'* (*Het Vaderland* 14-2-1928).

20 Nevertheless, Thamrin definitely trespassed the limits of European forbearance when together with other Parindra leaders he met a Japanese delegation to discuss the future of the Netherlands Indies in January 1941. This move was considered treacherous during the Second World War (De Graaff 1997:321–323; Jonkman 1971:212).

mortuary, along the road and at the cemetery. I myself went to the mortuary with the secretary of the Volksraad. We joined the funeral procession and participated in the ceremonies at the cemetery.²¹

After the funeral Jonkman commemorated Thamrin and praised him for his collegial manner and his contribution to the friendly atmosphere, which characterized the Volksraad. Commenting on Thamrin's political opinions, Jonkman declared that 'A competent opposition is a cornerstone of democracy' (Jonkman 1971:213–214).²²

Hoesni Thamrin lies buried at the Karet cemetery in a place now called the Golden Triangle. Ironically it is an area where office towers have replaced kampong houses and in the process destroyed investments made in kampong improvement in the 1970s, which were named after Thamrin to honour him. The Golden Triangle is a prime example of the displacement of kampongs, against which Thamrin had fought during his lifetime. It is equally ironical that his name has been used for Jalan Thamrin, one of Jakarta's main thoroughfares, for which many kampong houses were also demolished.

Conclusion: Spiders in a Network of Relationships

The poor living conditions of the kampongs formed one of the many concerns of the late colonial government. The government's attempts to modernize the kampongs have been extensively analysed elsewhere.²³ We have focused on the strategies of two men working on kampong improvement, Rückert and Hoesni Thamrin, who were both spiders in a network of relationships. Rückert combined at one moment the functions of Principal Officer seconded to the Government Commissioner for Decentralization (but formally still in the service of the municipal administration of Semarang), chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, and appointed member of the Volksraad. This combination of functions became most apparent when he debated as Volksraad

21 'Als een vorst is Thamrin begraven. Onder overweldigende belangstelling en deelneming van Indonesische zijde. Aan het sterfhuis, langs de weg en op het kerkhof. Door de secretaris van de Volksraad vergezeld ben ik naar het sterfhuis gegaan. Wij zijn meegereden in de stoet en hebben de plechtigheden op het kerkhof bijgewoond' (Jonkman 1971:214).

22 "een bekwame oppositie [is] een steun der democratie".

23 Kusno 2000:125–135; Barker 1999:106–120; Cobban 1974; Colombijn 2010:185–206; Van Roosmalen 2008:100–101.

representative with the government representative, the Government Commissioner for Decentralization Cohen Stuart, who in daily life was his superior. Hoesni Thamrin was alderman of Batavia, member of the Volksraad, member of the Provincial Council of West Java and member of the commission that prepared the Bill on Town Planning. The combination of functions was not always successful. A Volksraad motion proposed by Rückert (and two others) that the central government would bear 50 per cent of maintenance costs of kampung improvement was accepted but not implemented by the government. Thamrin in vain tried to have the 2.5 million guilder loan proposed by the Batavia municipal council approved by the Provincial Council of West Java.

Although not always successful, the combination of functions in different state organs enabled both Rückert and Thamrin to develop a tightly-knit Old Boys network. The same names appeared time and again in these debates, even though in the course of these years some of the Europeans concerned with kampung improvement took their furlough or returned permanently to the Netherlands: Tillema, De Vogel, Stokvis, Karsten, Van der Zee and others. They did not only meet at official gatherings, and Thamrin, for instance, was a regular visitor at Maison Versteeg & Rijkers, a café where leaders of the ISDP often met in Batavia. Despite Thamrin's sociability, for the European Rückert it must have been much easier to move in high government circles and interact with European intellectuals than for the Indonesian Thamrin. Sometimes we get a glimpse of the informal gatherings at the club (*sociëteit*), on the tennis court, and around the dinner table where Old Boys networks are forged. For example, the participants of the 1922 Congress on Public Housing (organized by the Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging) went on a sightseeing tour to the hills in the hinterland of Semarang on the afternoon of the first day. A new suburb, Nieuw Tjandi, was being developed there. The trip ended at the home of Koreman, architect and member of the board of the Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging, who occupied a house at the northern edge of the area. The congress report sketches the social gathering: 'For a considerable time the visitors, while nipping from a cool drink, enjoyed the beautiful sunset, so that many found it difficult to take their leave'.²⁴

The combination of different positions in one person and the existence of Old Boys networks bore the risk of nepotism and self-enrichment. Two conflicts of interests severely damaged the position of both Rückert and Thamrin.

24 'Geruimen tijd bleven de bezoekers onder een koele dronk genieten van een prachtige zons-
ondergang, zoodat voor velen het scheiden moeilijk viel' (Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging
1922:48).

Rückert was forced to step down as Chairman of the Vereenging voor Locale Belangen when he defended a five per cent salary cut of civil servants in the Volksraad. Thamrin's cooperative stand with the colonial government finally clashed fatally with his nationalist aspirations when he met Japanese representatives to discuss the future of the colony during wartime.

The dilemma Thamrin faced was that his constituency existed of lower middle-class indigenous people, but he was a well-to-do businessman himself. Moreover, despite being a nationalist, he needed the support of Europeans in both the municipal council of Batavia and the Volksraad to gain majorities for his proposals. At the end of the day, the combination of functions that had made Rückert and Thamrin successful brokers in kampong improvement, also badly scratched their positions.

The final conclusion must be that the two men were also remarkably similar in tactics. We had started from the assumption that they offered an interesting comparison between a European appointed civil servant and an Indonesian elected politician. It has turned out that the differences between the civil servant and politician were smaller than we had envisaged. As councillor (a political function) Thamrin was elected alderman and assumed executive responsibilities, and the civil servant Rückert became an appointed member of the Volksraad and lobbyist as chairman of the Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen. The main basis of their power was the combination of various functions.

At a deeper level they shared the same view on the modernization of the city. The simultaneous decentralization of urban administration and the rise of an interventionist attitude provided scope for vigorous people to take on the question of the abolition of kampong autonomy and to address the question of kampong improvement in a top-down manner. Modernization of the city, including eradicating blots on the cityscape, had to be led by the government and be under firm control of the government. The alternative strategy, namely to empower the kampong residents, and to give them more instead of less autonomy, plus the funds to improve their neighbourhood according to their own priorities, was never even considered.

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