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In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, On the road The social impact of new roads in Southeast Asia 158 (2002), no: 4, Leiden, 691-705

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The impact of modern traffic and traditional life on informal traffic rules The example of Yogyakarta

Roads in non-industrialized countries are more than just a system of transportation; for a significant part of the urban population, they are a place of business and other daily activities. Without doubt, the development of modern roads and traffic has greatly influenced people's behaviour, but people's traditional values also have a great effect on roads and on how they are used. On roads, people from various social classes are forced to interact. Roads are places of communication, not only for drivers, pedestrians, and vendors, but also for institutions promoting political campaigns or commercial products. People are very creative in using roads for the pursuit of individual fortune.

Modern roads and traffic in non-industrialized countries have expanded very quickly and modern traffic regulations have been 'imported' along with Western vehicles. The first big road in Indonesia was built during Governor General Daendels's reign (1808-1811). The road system developed quickly and the first asphalt roads were constructed in the 1920s. With the development of roads and traffic, clear traffic regulations became a necessity. The first set of compulsory public traffic regulations (*Wegverkeerswetgeving*) was introduced in 1933 (Feith 1941:137). These traffic regulations were obligatory for all road users, even for farmers' bullock carts (*plankin-sapi*), horse carts (*andong*) and other traditional vehicles. The rule that dictates driving on the left side of the road stems from colonial times.

In the 1930s, the Dutch colonial administration made some efforts, in cooperation with the KNIMC (Koninklijke Nederlandsch-Indische Motorclub, Royal Dutch-Indies Motor Club), to introduce lessons on traffic regulations in schools and it published the first teaching books. At the time, few people had the opportunity to attend school and textbooks were mostly in Dutch. Knowledge of traffic regulations was limited to a very small part of society. After Indonesian independence, schools were opened to all citizens, but less attention was paid to traffic regulations. Formal traffic regulations

have changed little since their introduction, but traffic itself has increased amazingly. Due to the colonial origin of the traffic rules, road traffic is regulated by laws that do not differ significantly from the regulations in European states. The police are authorized by the government to enforce traffic regulations and to maintain order on roads, and traffic signs direct and offer orientation to road users, just as they do in Western countries.

However, a German traveller stuck in traffic on a visit to a country like Indonesia would strongly deny any similarities to the meticulous traffic law and order he knows in his own country. In Indonesia everything in traffic seems to be chaotic, with motorbikes riding on the pavement, pedestrians walking on the road, traffic signs being used by street vendors to fix their tents, while the police seem to do no more than passively observe this chaos. But of course there is order and clear rules exist, otherwise accidents would occur all the time. This order is based on informal rules that differ significantly from the formal rules, yet are nevertheless effective. Acquaintance with formal traffic regulations is not common and people fill this vacuum with their own rules, making roads an arena for competition involving conflicting interests and power.

This article deals with these informal rules, based on my observation of interaction among road users. I have used notes on the interaction observed during several stays in Yogyakarta in recent years. In many ways, Yogyakarta is a good place for studying not only traffic behaviour but also Indonesian culture. Yogyakarta can be seen as the melting pot of the Indonesian nation. As a well-known university city, Yogyakarta is *the* place for students from almost all regions of this large archipelago. Founded and designed in the eighteenth century, influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and traditional philosophies, with the sultan's palace (*kraton*) at its centre, Yogyakarta is a traditional town, still linked to its feudal past. At the same time, Yogyakarta is a modern town, a centre for education and administration, offering many Western facilities such as shopping malls, hotels, cinemas, and discotheques. Though I gained most of my knowledge through experiences in Yogyakarta, I believe that traffic in Yogyakarta differs little from traffic in other parts of Indonesia, or at least Java.

What I will do is describe some general rules I discovered while observing traffic in Yogyakarta. First, I will describe the hierarchical order of road users in Yogyakarta. In the next section, I will give examples of the way these road users communicate. In the last section before the conclusion, I will discuss some informal traffic rules to show how creative this group of people can be, complementing this with some observations of police attempts to cope with the informal rules.

The hierarchy of road users

When I visited Yogyakarta for the first time I was amazed by the crowded, noisy, chaotic roads. I had had a driving licence for years, I even had a permit to drive trucks, and I had had much experience in road traffic. But my knowledge of traffic regulations did not correspond with traffic in Yogyakarta. After buying a handbook on Indonesian traffic regulations, I was surprised to learn that these regulations were almost the same as those I knew in Europe. I decided to forget all these formal rules, and step-by-step I learned to understand the informal rules of the road and to acclimatize myself to them.

Roads provide limited space for vast numbers of various kinds of road users. Dutch administrators took the different features of vehicles into consideration and, using concrete barriers, divided, as far as possible, each lane into two lanes for vehicles with differing speeds. One lane (*jalan lambat*) was reserved for slow vehicles and the other (*jalan cepat*) for fast vehicles. Even where physical separation of roads was not possible, road users were still supposed to respect the differentiation between the two lanes (De Ven and Sandbergen 1939). Today, there are still some roads with lanes separated by concrete, but the roads I focus on are not divided in this manner.

Because the roads are too narrow and crowded, there is no space for high-speed traffic, and speed is no longer the major factor determining the position of a road user on the spectrum from the roadside to the middle. Instead, road users are part of a hierarchical order based on size and weight, or, in other words, their power. The position of a road user in this hierarchical order of power corresponds with the lane one predominantly occupies and with the right-of-way rules. The hierarchical order goes from the pedestrian, to the bicycle, motorbike, *becak* (pedicab), *andong* (horse cart), car, bus, and truck, with the police at the top of the hierarchy.

The pedestrian

On the far left side of a road we find the road user with the least power, the pedestrian. He or she cannot use the pavement, the space formally designated for pedestrians, since pavements are occupied by traders, occupants of the dwellings that line the street, motorbikes, or pedicabs. Walking on pavements is also difficult because of obstacles like big potted plants, street lighting, and garbage, and it is dangerous because of holes opening up into the drainage system below the pavement. Pedestrians are seldom seen outside the shopping centre of Yogyakarta. The heat of the sun and the difficulties and dangers of using the pavement are understandable reasons why people avoid walking.

The bicycle

The bicycle comes after the pedestrian in the hierarchical order. A bike is very flexible and its driver can easily handle obstacles that emerge on the road suddenly. In the 1960s and 1970s Yogyakarta was known as a city of cyclists. Bikes dominated the roads. Bikes are used to carry a wide variety of goods. Apart from transportation of up to three persons, bikes equipped with special holders can load goods much bigger than the bike itself. Formerly, the bicycle was the favourite means of transportation for students, because of the low cost. For the same reason, bicycles are low in prestige. City officials would even like to keep bicycles out of Yogyakarta.

As I experienced often, parking guards do not like bicycles, because they can only be charged half the price, though requiring the same amount of space as motorbikes. Nowadays, bikes have been replaced by motorbikes. Bikes have become a rare sight in town, but they still dominate the villages on the outskirts. Using a bike requires good health, because the roads are hot and dusty.

The motorbike

Riding a motorbike instead of a bike is not only more comfortable; a motorbike is also a symbol of modernization, and as such related to social status. Someone riding to work on a motorbike can wear heavy office dress without sweating; since sweating is a symbol of hard work, it is detrimental to personal prestige.

Although motorbikes are expensive, today they dominate the streets of Yogyakarta. It is becoming more and more difficult to find a parking place for a motorbike. Once one has found a parking lot, it is difficult upon return to find the parked motorbike among masses of similar bikes (Figure 1). The most popular motorbike is the so-called *bebek* (duck), a motor scooter, with the petrol tank under the seat. This design leaves more space for transporting goods. The empty space in front of the tank can be used, for instance, to store one or more sacks of rice or concrete, or shopping bags. The design of a *bebek* also enables women wearing a skirt to use motorbikes.¹ On the passenger seat, women normally sit with both legs to one side as if on a bench. This is less safe, but comfortable. In terms of transportation of goods, a motorbike is as useful as a bicycle.

¹ Especially in Bali, where men wear wrap-around skirts (*sarong*) similar to the ones worn by women, such *bebek*-scooters are the only two-wheel transportation solution.

Figure 1. Motorbikes parked on Jalan Malioboro

The becak

Nevertheless, for the transport of big and heavy goods most people still prefer a *becak*, a three-wheeled pedicab. A *becak* is not as flexible as a motorbike. On the move, a *becak* does not use the far left part of the road even though it is very slow, because the asphalt there is usually in bad shape, with dangerous

holes. Moreover, on the far left side parked cars or buses hamper a *becak*'s movement. Therefore, a *becak* normally uses the same lane as bikes and motorbikes, causing traffic jams. When the *becak* driver waits for customers, his *becak* occupies the pavement or the roadside; in front of terminals or other crowded places, *becak* gather by the dozen.

The number of *becak* has steadily increased, while the number of bikes has decreased. Nowadays, motorbikes present a threat to the future existence of the *becak*. But the *becak* is still very popular in Yogyakarta and with its colourful design it is even a tourist attraction and one of the symbols of Yogyakarta. Until now there are no restrictions for *becak* in Yogyakarta as there are in other towns.²

The andong

The *andong* is a traditional horse cart mainly found in the area near the Sultan's palace. It has been common in Yogyakarta for about three hundred years. Similar horse carts are used in other parts of Indonesia too. In Yogyakarta these carts are driven by male drivers wearing traditional Javanese costume, including a *kris* (dagger) and a *blangkon* (headgear). The *andong* is still part of the transportation system, but it is slow and occupies a lot of space on roads, causing traffic jams.

The car

The next means of transportation in the hierarchy is the car. Automobiles are very expensive and not very useful because they offer only limited space for goods and passengers. They are mostly used as taxis. A taxi forms an alternative to a *becak* when the intention is to transport only passengers and no goods. Hiring a taxi can even be cheaper than a *becak*, and of course is faster and more comfortable. However, at night and close to bus terminals, taxi drivers turn off the taxi metre and charge higher prices than the standard fare.

Private cars are strongly associated with social status. The more cars one owns, the more status one has. The car's brand is not irrelevant, but more important is its size. In order to convey prestige, a car should be driven by a chauffeur, with the owner riding in the back seat. Big is beautiful. Sports cars like Ferrari or Porsche are seldom seen in Indonesia, since there is no room for the owner to sit in the back seat. These sports cars are driven mainly for fun by the owners themselves, but then, there is no space for high speeds. People prefer to have big jeeps, which are more comfortable on roads with

² In Surabaya, the use of *becak* is restricted to certain operating times, each *becak* sporting a different colour indicating which part of the day it is allowed on the street. In Bandung and Jakarta the use of *becak* is obstructed because many roads have been closed to the pedicab (Kartodirjo 1981:36).

potholes and which can easily carry the whole family, along with maids and purchases.

The bus

A bus is bigger and more powerful than a car. Its size and behaviour are frightening to all other road users and this gives it priority compared to most other forms of traffic. There are different kinds of buses, but in behaviour they all have one thing in common: they compete for passengers who have to be picked up at the roadside. A city bus does not follow a strict timetable and there are no bus stops. A bus driver has as many assistants as the bus has doors. These assistants hang out of the doors to look for passengers or to yell at other road users in order to force them to make way. A city bus driver accelerates rapidly to high speed, or steps on the brakes suddenly in order to stop wherever passengers are waiting to jump on the bus or wherever they want to be dropped off. Buses swing from the left side of the road to the middle or even into the opposite lane.

The truck

Maybe the most powerful vehicle on the road is the truck. This heavy monster forces its way straight down the middle of the road and nothing can stop it. Most trucks operating on the roads are very old patched-up trucks that operate until they break down. These vehicles carry an amazing amount of goods; truckloads can have dimensions of up to twice the size of the truck itself. The weight of a freight is not important; I have seen trucks breaking down while being loaded.

The police

The police are an important part of traffic and they wear their uniforms with pride. At many crossroads policemen are present in a guard post (*pos polisi*). They sit watching the road and sometimes get out of their cabin, using a whistle to stop road users, accusing them of traffic violations, and checking drivers and vehicles. Not all policemen are real; at many crossroads all over the country I have seen strikingly real-looking police figures made from plaster.

People are afraid of the police, as the police have the power to fine people for violating traffic regulations. But what is right or wrong is unclear to road users. Most of them have never learned about traffic regulations, or only as much as they were taught at school, if that happened to be part of the curriculum. However, the reality of informal traffic rules is a long way from the formal rules the police pretend to enforce. According to traffic regulations, anyone driving a motor vehicle is obliged to possess a driving licence. But driving schools have already mutated into service offices, mediating between

people who want to obtain driving licences and the police who issue these documents. The police are known to be corrupt, making illegal money at least twice. First, they hand out driving licences for money without any teaching or testing, leaving road users ignorant on the subject of traffic regulations. Secondly, they accept bribes when people violate traffic regulations. People are prepared to pay bribes. They know that it is impolite to open an envelope in the presence of the giver. So the police have no choice but to accept even an envelope containing worthless bank notes.

Means of communication

Because the roads in Yogyakarta are sometimes incredibly crowded, it happened to me once that when I stopped my motorbike at a crossroads, another motorcyclist stopping beside me stepped on my shoe. Road users make optimal use of a small road's limited space. Vehicles float close to each other on the roads, like swarming fish. They seldom touch. Drivers have learned to predict each other's movements by observing little clues, and they rely on all road users to move slowly and avoid sudden changes. Road users have developed a complex and highly sensitive system of communication and they have the obligation to watch for signs from other road users. In communicating with each other, arms and hands, voices, sounds, lights, colours, and everything else that can serve the purpose is used.

Hands are very important instruments for communication. When pedestrians want to cross a road, they move their hands up and down to urge vehicles on the road to make way.³ The up-and-down movement of hands by persons in vehicles signifies that the vehicle beside or behind them should decrease its speed in order to make way. Assistants or bus drivers, for instance, use these signals to force other road users to make way when they want to pick up passengers or overtake other vehicles. Of course, the use of hand signals is only possible in 'open' vehicles; cars and buses using air-conditioning, with closed doors and windows, have to use other forms of communication instead. Hand signals are also used as 'secret signals' to inform other road users of police checks, as described by M. Karjadi and R.M. Sosroharjono (1964:50-1). The up-and-down hand movement had a completely different meaning under Dutch traffic regulations. As explained by B.A. Lacroix (1939:27), cyclists had to move their hands up and down if

³ In Surabaya there is an interesting solution for pedestrians who want to cross the road. At some places signalling disks have been set up on pavements. A pedestrian can take a signalling disk, raise it over his head so that every driver on the road can recognize it, and when he has reached the other side he puts it in its place.

they intended to slow down their own speed – not in order to force other road users to slow down and make way for them.

Motorized vehicles offer their drivers the technology of horns, flashing lights, and direction indicators. In general, a horn is also used to force others to make way, and not only in cases of emergency. To flash one's lights does not mean one is granting priority to other road users, but again, this is used to force others to make way. To express this intention sometimes the right indicator is used as support. Indicators are normally not used to show the intention of turning left or right. People do not rely on indicators as long as the vehicle has other ways, like hand signals, simply because on too many vehicles the indicators don't work.

Another means of communication in traffic is sound. Informal traders make use of sounds to attract attention. Walking on the roadside, they use specific signalling tunes depending on what they are selling. *Bakso* (noodle soup) food traders can be recognized by a wooden knocking sound, satay sellers in Yogyakarta use hundreds of little bells fixed on the wheels of their vehicles, and Walls Ice Cream sellers, for instance, can be recognized by a striking electronic melody.

In times of election campaigns and rallies, motorbikes compensate their lack of size by increasing the sound of their engines in order to dominate the roads. Having taken off the exhaust pipes of their engines, groups of masked motorcyclists fill the air with a terrible noise, forcing all other road users to get out of their way. The police give up their position as representatives of the law during such campaigns, and close down roads temporarily to provide space for campaigners.

In addition to the above means of direct person-to-person communication, there are also symbols that convey a message to nobody in particular. Uniforms and road signs are the most important symbols. As symbols representing state control on roads, policemen wear uniforms. The presence of police uniforms makes road users nervous, as the police have nearly unlimited power. In order not to be punished by the police, road users avoid obvious violations of formal traffic regulations in their presence; they stop at red traffic lights and refrain from driving on the pavement, but that's about all. For the rest, people carry on using informal rules in front of uniformed policemen, as they would outside their presence. Some informal groups use or misuse uniforms as symbols of power. Dressed in self-made uniforms, they pretend to be part of formal power systems in the hope that their private business will perform better. To mention one example, parking guards attract attention with their strikingly coloured orange uniforms. In fact, using hand signals and whistles as the police do, parking guards gain control over pavements and roadsides (Gunawan 1999:58-9).

In reality, road signs have no meaning at all to road users. The roadside next to a 'no parking' sign can be crowded by parked vehicles; one-way streets are used in both directions; lanes reserved for *becak* and bicycles are also used by motorbikes, cars, and sometimes even trucks; a red light is seldom seen as a reason for stopping; pedestrians who naively believe they have the right of way at a crosswalk risk their lives; and so on. Road signs indicating directions are rarely found; they are fastened in hidden places and are small, rust-eaten, and difficult to recognize.

Some roads have white stripes marking lanes, but I have never observed any respect for these stripes amongst road users. Only during an election campaign in 1996 was there a big debate on lane stripes, because in Surakarta (Central Java) state officials had introduced a change of the stripes' colour from white to yellow – the colour of the state party Golkar. Stripes painted yellow during the daytime were replaced at night by activists using white paint.

Informal rules for driving and ways to cope with them

Road users' behaviour deviates significantly from formal traffic regulations. One conspicuous example is the matter of turning right from a main road onto a side street. Since traffic moves on the left side, this manoeuvre means crossing traffic coming from the opposite direction. The formally correct way would be to drive forward until arriving at the side street, then move the vehicle to the middle of the road, wait until the opposite lane is clear, and make a right. On crowded roads, where big buses and trucks occupy the middle of the road, this is fairly impossible for less powerful road users. Usually a vehicle with the intention of turning right looks for its first possible chance to cross into the opposite lane and continues there, following the right roadside, until reaching the side street. The side of the road is occupied by the weakest road users and, according to the concept of power in traffic, they must make way for vehicles that use their lane in the opposite direction.

Road users coming from a side street never pay attention to traffic on the main road, they just make the turn. Those on the main road must always be prepared for vehicles that turn in suddenly or that come from the opposite lane intent on turning into a side street.

Most crossroads do not have traffic signs regulating priority, and approaching vehicles are equal in rank. According to the formal traffic regulations, vehicles coming from the left have priority. However, in Yogyakarta priority depends heavily on the habit of the mainstream of road users. If the mainstream on a particular crossroads has the habit of turning right, road users following this habit get priority and all others must wait. To give an

example, a motorcyclist (low ranking in hierarchy and normally occupying the left part of a lane) wanting to go straight on a crossroads where the mainstream turns left, must move to a far right position in the lane in advance, to avoid colliding with vehicles who turn left with the mainstream. He then has to watch out for other road users not expecting a motorcyclist going straight.

The amount of respect shown for traffic lights depends mostly on the presence or absence of police. Since there are some traffic lights that allow a left turn on red, people tend to turn left at any traffic light. If road users stop at a red traffic light, they will try to bring their vehicles to the front line stretched across the whole road, in the hope of gaining a good starting position. In this way, when the light turns green, they block the road for traffic coming from the opposite direction. To stop drivers from occupying the whole road, the police in Yogyakarta have placed concrete barriers in front of traffic lights.

Drivers tend to overtake other vehicles in all possible ways; during traffic jams, motorbikes even use the pavement. Bigger vehicles, like buses and trucks, use the opposite lane of a road to overtake others, even with heavy oncoming traffic, as long as they aren't facing another big vehicle of a similar size. In reclaiming their place in the left lane, these vehicles force other road users to give way, by means of the signals described above.

Law prescribes the use of a helmet. But helmets are uncomfortable; they are heavy and unwieldy, tend to fall off, and besides, good helmets cost a lot. Helmet producers have adapted their products for users' comfort rather than safety concerns. The most common type of helmet I observed looks very much like helmets worn at construction sites (that protect workers from falling tools), and costs approximately one US dollar. It is a one-size-fits-all model fixed to the head by a simple rubber band. This helmet is far from safe, but meets formal requirements and is enough to ward off the police. Because of its weak rubber band, which often is not even fixed, this type tends to fly off, causing dangerous situations. To keep them from flying off, motorcyclists often hold onto their helmets with their left hand. This may be one reason why nearly all motorbikes sold in Indonesia are equipped with automatic transmission, which allows free use of the left hand.

The set of informal traffic rules has one general rule by which accidents are avoided; this is by adhering to the hierarchical order. This concept, however, does not prepare people for solving conflicts when accidents do occur. When an accident happens, people don't know what to do. In small accidents they avoid involving the police and try to discuss the question of who is responsible and bargain about the reimbursement. In the case of anyone being injured, calling an ambulance is complicated and takes more time than transporting the victim to the nearest hospital by car. The driver of the bigger vehicle involved in an accident causing badly injured victims, regardless of

whether it was his fault or not, runs the risk of being lynched and must try to escape the collective punishment of the people. According to an official interpretation, Article 27 of the present traffic regulations (UU 14/1992) takes this fact into account and allows drivers to escape (Marsoedi 1994:33).

To slow down traffic in densely populated *kampung* (urban wards), local residents intervene by constructing their own traffic barriers (*polisi tidur*, 'sleeping policemen'). They also set up hand-made traffic signs urging road users to drive slowly, *dilarang ngebut* ('do not speed'), *pelan-pelan* ('slowly-slowly'), or even threatening road users: *ngebut benjut, ngetril antil* ('if you speed, we will strike you'). The police let *kampung* residents have their way. Interestingly, road users respect such unofficial traffic-slowing measures.⁴

The police have also found their own means for regulating traffic. To prevent road users from occupying the full width of the road, including the opposite lane, the police have erected cement barriers that divide roads into two lanes, at least for the fifty metres before a crossroads. The same strategy is used to force road users to pass road barriers built to slow down traffic. But I noticed that in such situations people still use the opposite lane until they pass the stretch with barriers, and then move back to the left lane. The police learned their lesson and later built road barriers that stretch over the entire width of the road. This is why traffic barriers are not only in front of some level crossings but also behind them.

Conclusion

To the casual Western observer, traffic in Indonesia looks like chaos, but on closer inspection it is not disorderly.

Formal traffic regulations exist but are not very effective. The majority of road users do not know or care about them. In managing traffic on congested roads, road users have developed efficient informal rules and a complex system of communication. They have been ingenious in finding ways to deal with transportation problems and evade the formal rules.

However, power plays an important part in the concept of the road users' hierarchical order. This hierarchy goes up from the pedestrian and bicycles to the bus, truck, and, at the apex, the police. Respecting higher ranks has

⁴ Interesting comments by road users can be found in the magazine of the Yogyakarta-based P3M (Pembangunan Perkotaan dan Peranserte Masyarakat, Community Involvement in Urban Development) programme, *Kotakatikotakita*. People are afraid of *kampung* residents because they are known for ruthlessly taking the law into their own hands (Irwan 2001a:3). It is not only *kampung* residents who are interested in traffic-calming measures, street vendors are as well. Because it lets them gain better conditions for their business, they set up traffic barriers of their own accord (Irwan 2001b:7).

a simple practical reason: avoiding physical damage. Nobody wants to be involved in an accident with a powerful truck, and even a *becak* will always be granted priority by two-wheeled vehicles because in an accident bikes or motorbikes always lose when faced with the tank-like *becak*.

People in Yogyakarta used to live in families with a harmonic hierarchical social order (Geertz 1961:146). But on roads, where vehicles flow like fish in a swarm, the harmony of this hierarchical order is a 'forced harmony' because it lacks the 'moral guidance' and 'protection' that people experienced in the old patrimonial social relations (Mulder 1992:132). Traffic behaviour is part of the daily struggle for survival using a strategy of conflict avoidance. Road users of 'low rank' avoid confrontation with road users of 'higher rank'. In cases of conflict, for instance in accidents, people have no other means for solving this 'disturbed harmony' than punishing the 'higher rank', who people hold responsible for the accident.

Roads are arenas of competition for power. One strategy preferred by all traffic participants in this competition is pretence. By using dummy helmets, motorcyclists pretend to conform to formal rules to avoid paying a fine. The police pretend to be present by putting up fake plaster figures. People cheat the police when paying bribes. And parking guards pretend to be part of the formal power system. In this 'game' of pretending, ordinary people have found a way of resisting the higher rank's power.

As the guards of law and order, the police leave road users ignorant on the matter of traffic regulations. This ignorance is the police's source of power, because it allows them to act at will. Ordinary road users' source of power is solidarity. Acting as a collective entity can completely change the hierarchical power order. People of 'low rank' beating up someone of 'high rank' reverses the power hierarchy. Taxi drivers who monopolize public traffic at night also act in solidarity in order to gain higher fares. Another form of collective power is the behaviour of road users following the mainstream. An individual road user's power will not exceed the power of the mainstream. The mainstream's behaviour is also used as a source of orientation. People who do not know the rules, try to emulate the mainstream.

Power does not exist on its own, but must be expressed by means of communication. While an abstract road sign's language does not receive road users' attention, the language of physically present police does. People do not stop at red lights because it might be dangerous not to, but because they are afraid of being punished by the police (Gunawan 1999:50).

But in reality, the police's power is limited. On main roads the police exercise power; in contrast, off the main roads *kampung* residents are in control. Residents who see traffic in their neighbourhood as a nuisance, intervene by constructing traffic-calming measures and erecting homemade traffic signs. They do this without legal permission. The police, the guards of traffic

regulations, fail to maintain law and order on roads. They even abuse their power by taking advantage of roads for private gain and supporting misuse of roads in the interest of specific groups, for instance by safeguarding road campaigns. The lack of effective formal rules provides road users with the opportunity to fill this breach with their informal rules.

It is not enough to know the general informal rules; road users must be acquainted with specific mainstream customs too. This makes it difficult for 'outsiders' unfamiliar with such an informal system to orient themselves. The lack of bus stops, public transport timetables, and traffic signs with directions makes it necessary for people to gain personal 'insider' information. With no information on standard fares, a taxi passenger is forced to accept any price, even when the taxi is not monopolizing transport. Interactions among road users are personalized; it is not formal law that sets the standard, but personal experience with power. Traffic is a complex and sensitive part of the balance of power. Managing traffic is without danger only as long as one follows the mainstream strictly; there is very limited space for individual behaviour. It is tempting to think that the model of traffic behaviour that I have described may provide us with some interesting insights on modern Indonesian society in general.

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