Chapter IV

Life in the kampongs

Colonial European administrators and laymen considered kampongs ‘indigenous neighbourhoods’, which they contrasted to European streets and Chinese quarters. Many post-colonial urban experts have adopted this view. The equation of kampongs with indigenous neighbourhoods strongly helped to shape the hegemonic colonial idea that the urban population lived racially segregated. This equation certainly became obsolete after independence, when the indigenous share began to dominate the urban population so much that just about every neighbourhood had a predominantly indigenous population. But was the assumption that kampongs were inhabited exclusively by indigenous people a correct description of the situation in colonial times?

Four arguments support the designation of colonial kampongs as indigenous neighbourhoods: the association of poor living conditions with indigenousness; the actual ethnic composition of the kampongs; the equation of ‘indigenous dwelling’ with ‘kampong dwelling’; and town planning and zoning based on racial segregation. In this chapter I explore these four arguments one by one, looking at living conditions in kampongs, quantifying the social composition of kampongs, analysing the use of the terms ‘indigenous dwelling’ and ‘European dwelling’, and reviewing the use of racial categories in urban planning. As an alternative to viewing kampongs as indigenous neighbourhoods, I shall argue that even in colonial times it is more accurate

---

1 See, for example, Cobban 1993:874; Dorléans 2000:245; Frederick 1989:7, 12; Gill 1995:81, 208-10; Jackson 1975:47; McGee 1967:139; and the Beeld van een stad series of Broeshart et al. 1994; Loderichs et al. 1997; Van Schaik 1996; Voskuil 1993; Voskuil et al. 1996; contemporary voices are Kampoengrapport 1924:64-5; Nix 1949:213; and Wertheim 1956:171. The book by C. Swaan-Koopman (1932:11, 97) and the article of Radem (1933) in Onze Stem are examples of popular works where the difference between indigenous kampongs and European neighbourhoods is stated plainly; see also Sullivan (1992:31). People living in one kampong could have a much more narrowly circumscribed common origin than ‘being indigenous’: migrants coming from one village were inclined to live together in one kampong, or one alley in a kampong, and sometimes had a similar occupation (Abeyasekere 1989:92; Tinia Budiati 2000; Frederick 1989:13-4; Gill 1995:207; Jellinek 1991:27; Pelly 1983; Sullivan 1992:23; Tesch 1948:67; Volksstelling 1930 1933, I:29).
to think of kampons as lower-class neighbourhoods. Consequently, the analysis of kampong life elaborates on the ‘class-segregation-throughout-decolonization’ thesis presented in the previous chapter.

Kampons: chaos or order

What did kampons look like? The exact meaning of the term kampong is elusive, but the persistent use of the term in academic works suggests that kampons had and continue to have something unique. I shall define a kam-

---

2 Jan Newberry (forthcoming) makes a similar argument, although on different grounds, for kampons today.

3 In the same vein the words _favela, bidonville, and bustee_ are used for lower-class neighbourhoods in Brazil, francophone North Africa, and India, respectively, highlighting their uniqueness, although the structural similarities may be more important than the differences (Drakakis-Smith 1987:93; Gilbert and Gugler 1983). Various authors have attempted to define or characterize kampons, for instance as (urban) villages (Hasselgren 2000:359), or simply a ‘section of a village or city’ (Jellinek 1991:xiii). Gerald Krausse (1978:11) distinguishes three types of kampons, but argues that no generic definition is acceptable. Nas, Boon, Hladká et al. (2008)