Putting families together in one house, rent control, and the requisitioning of buildings during the housing crisis did not solve the fundamental problem: the large shortage of houses in cities. The construction of new houses is, of course, always an important way to provide shelter, but during the housing crisis of the late 1940s the need for new houses was more pressing than ever.

The government of the Indonesian Republic recognized the importance of developing its capital city, and a town plan for Yogyakarta had already been drawn up during the struggle for independence. The Minister of Public Works, engineer Putuhena, was the principal author of this plan, building on a plan conceived by Karsten from 1936. The development of a second centre in the north of city, around the newly established Gadjah Mada University, as counterweight to the Sultan’s palace in the south, was the most important element in this plan. Other features were a ring road and a large sports stadium (Van Bruggen and Wassing 1998:96; Yunus 1991:5-8). Supporters of the revolution throughout Indonesia sent remittances to Yogyakarta to help build the Republican capital.¹ There is no evidence that urban administrators knew how to allocate these funds. At the end of the War of Independence Rp 300,000 was still unspent; this sum was used to start a foundation, Jajasan Pantjasila, to give scholarships and pay for textbooks (Stichting voor de Opbouw 1949).

The Netherlands Indies government put an enormous effort into reconstruction and development. Reconstruction work started in eastern Indonesia immediately following on the Japanese surrender. The cities of eastern Indonesia had suffered the most damage from Allied bombing and were the first places where the Dutch resumed administration (December 1945-January 1946). The Dutch were initially optimistic about their work in

eastern Indonesia, because their presence there had not yet been called into question by the Indonesian Revolution and a noble task seemed to lie ahead. Cities like Kupang and Ambon and the Chinese quarter of Makassar needed to be rebuilt from scratch and urban planning was imperative. The pre-war debate about the direction urban planning should take was resumed after the Japanese surrender. The ultimate challenge for town planners was the development of a new town, Kebayoran Baru, south of Jakarta. As a new town, Kebayoran Baru was strictly speaking not a case of reconstruction, but the administrative methods applied to realize the project and the aim of lessening the acute housing shortage in Jakarta places this topic firmly in the years of post-war reconstruction.

The frantic activity of Dutch engineers turned out to be the final convulsions of colonialism and yet it illustrates some interesting social dynamics. One thread that connects the three topics of this chapter – reconstruction, urban planning, and Kebayoran Baru – is the state’s efforts to keep the emergent chaos of the built environment after 1945 under control. Although not everybody agrees that planners generally do a good job (Lefebvre 1986), city administrators and planners in Indonesia perceived themselves to be the ‘directors of urban change’ (Nas 2005), who had a crucial role to play. Yet reconstruction work slipped into chaos and seemed to be developing without any regard for planning, and the question is why.

A second recurrent theme is the tension between the federal government in Jakarta, the government of the constituent state (negara), and the local government. Reconstruction and urban planning show the difficulties the central government had in carrying out its own intentions as a federal state. When it began to think about reconstruction, the central government concluded immediately that it had to take the leading role, not only in providing funds, but also in distributing building materials, which were in short supply, and skilled workers. Standard phrases that were repeated in the plans like a mantra were: ‘to use local material as much as possible’, ‘to keep the buildings as austere as possible’, and to refrain from ‘perfectionism’. The need to distribute scarce resources as efficiently as possible was a sensible argument

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2 From the moment the Dutch conceived the idea of a federal state, I use the terms central and federal government interchangeably.