From Autonomous Village to ‘Informal Slum’
Kampong Development and State Control in Bandung (1930–1960)¹

Gustaaf Reerink

Introduction

‘In the colonial period, Taman Sari was so different. You wouldn’t recognize the place’. Ibu Darsum throws me a meaningful look. She is not happy about the current condition of her kampong, Gang Bongkaran, located in kelurahan Taman Sari in the northern part of Bandung.² Like so many people her age, she is full of appreciation when she speaks nostalgically about the past, as if everything has been deteriorating ever since she was born.

We sit in front of her house over a cup of tea. Her house is impressive neither because of its size nor its quality, but it is by far the best in the neighbourhood. It even has a small flower garden in front. People in the kampong insisted that I should talk to her. She could assuage my curiosity about the history of Taman Sari. At eighty-four, she is one of the oldest residents in the neighbourhood. More importantly, no one has resided in Taman Sari as long as she has: Ibu Darsum was born, raised and has grown old here.

Indeed, Taman Sari must have been a very different place before the Second World War. Today it is a settlement of precarious substandard buildings, suffering from a lack of adequate infrastructure and proper access to public services, and tends to be rather informal in terms of land tenure and land use. Most residents live in one of the many small houses built alongside the

¹ The research conducted for this paper was part of a PhD project on Tenure Security for the Urban Poor in Post-New Order Indonesia, which is funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and an earlier version was published in my PhD thesis (Reerink 2011). I am grateful to the Treub Society for Research in the Tropics, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Adat Law Foundation and the Leiden University Fund, which gave financial support for my fieldwork in Bandung. I also wish to thank Dr Selly Riawanti, Denny Riezki Pratama and Anindya Praharsacitta for their valuable assistance in the research conducted for this chapter. Finally, my gratitude extends to the informants in Taman Sari and other kelurahans for their willingness to provide data and the kampong communities in these kelurahans for receiving me. Naturally, I take full responsibility for the content of this chapter.

² The concept ‘kampong’ has different meanings, depending on the area in Indonesia in which and by whom it is used (Krausse 1975:31–35). In West Java the word means low-income, urban or rural settlement (Silas 1983:214). A kelurahan is the lowest administrative unit in Bandung, usually consisting of several kampongs.
Cikapundung River. Their dwellings can be reached by alleys, some of which are so narrow that they are called ‘gang cinta’, love alleys, because people have to get pretty intimate to pass one another.

My curiosity about the history of Taman Sari was triggered when I saw a map of Bandung dating from the 1930s. At the time the area was already covered by small kampongs, but it was primarily depicted as a city park. Informed of the contemporary conditions prevailing there, I was struck by this radical change in land use. Spurred on by this curiosity, I settled in Gang Bongkaran in Taman Sari for a period of participant observation. Later I conducted oral history research, in close collaboration with two students from Universitas Padjadjaran, among a number of the older, well-informed residents. Finally, I organized a survey in kampongs in Taman Sari and six other kelurahan. This chapter is the result of this oral history research, the survey, as well as literature research. Although this chapter draws on data mainly acquired from Taman Sari, the purpose is to reach some general conclusions about kampongs and their dwellers in Bandung.

This chapter is a discussion of the factors underlying the development of kampongs in Bandung in the twentieth century. It analyses the legal, spatial, and socio-economic characteristics and dynamics of these settlements from the colonial times, through the Japanese occupation and Indonesian Revolution to an independent Indonesia. Finally, it assesses the impact of the main policies on kampongs adopted by consecutive colonial and Indonesian governments. Consequently, the paper explains how and why kampongs in Taman Sari and other kelurahan in Bandung have developed into the settlements they are today.

The basic argument informing this chapter is that neither colonial nor Indonesian governments ever succeeded in exercising effective control over kampongs and therefore could not develop, standardize, and regulate these settlements to conform to their policies. During the colonial period, this lack of state control was a consequence of village or kampong autonomy (desa autonomie), which formed part of the official colonial policy of legal dualism. After Independence, kampongs actually retained their autonomy, despite the effort to decolonize. Taken in combination with various historical events

---

3 I settled and carried out participant observation in kelurahan Taman Sari from September 2004–February 2005 and in kelurahan Cibangkong from September–December 2005. Oral history research was conducted in kelurahan Taman Sari from September–December 2005. In total, about twenty residents were interviewed in five neighbourhoods. The survey was organized between September and December 2005 among 420 households in seven kelurahan in Bandung, including sixty households in Taman Sari.