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Between fear and power : Kompas, Indonesia's most influential daily newspaper, 1965-2010

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Chapter 3

Jakob Oetama and the 'Kompas Way'

"Sailing on the foam is our way. 'To criticize while at the same time expressing empathy', 'Strong in principle but flexible in the way of delivering the message', 'There is no angel in this world' –these are some excerpts of wisdom which blend together with Kompas. It is Kompas, a newspaper which has positioned itself as a communicator, which is never explosive, but instead, always polite and aware of itself."

~Jakob Oetama, 50-year Kompas anniversary speech, June 28, 2015

It was my first day in the newsroom as I officially started my fieldwork. The newspaper was kind enough to give me a press card, which I wore on my chest for identification. With this card, I could easily pass the front desk as well as the security check at the main entrance on the first floor. The card also functioned as a key in which I could slide open the glass doors into the newsroom, located on the third floor. Once the doors opened, I faced a huge square room flooded by a sea of chairs and tables. From my previous visits I knew that the political division (*desk politik*), where I would be focusing on my fieldwork, was just a few steps away from the newsroom entrance. This division consisted of around a dozen journalists seated in a cluster, all equipped with a computer on each table. One of the chairs and tables was for me. So was the computer; I knew

that this meant that I was to be treated as one of the journalists. Full of enthusiasm, I arrived very early on that morning of February 5, 2014. So early, in fact, that no-one else was around. It was on that day that I started to learn what working as a journalist for the biggest newspaper in the country was all about.

As the day wore on, one by one the journalists entered the newsroom. It went without saying that I eagerly introduced myself each time a journalist of the political desk arrived, except to the head of the political desk, as we had met on my previous visit. However, one of the most memorable events of that day happened later, in the afternoon. When the time came for lunch, I decided to explore the building that would be my new office. On the left side of the newsroom, close to the entrance, there was a smoking room, and it was here that I encountered two young journalists. They had both just graduated from university: one held a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from a reputable university in South Sulawesi; the other had a degree in History from the most prestigious university in Jakarta. As our conversation went on, I learnt that they had not yet been officially accepted as journalists at the newspaper. In their own words, they said that they were still "*cawar*", which is abbreviated from "*calon wartawan*", meaning journalist candidate. With a smile they added that *cawar* also means "*calon kelelawar*" (candidate of a bat), as they were currently being trained to stay awake late into the night in order to accomplish their journalistic tasks, becoming nocturnal like a bat. Impressed by their sense of humor, I began to enjoy the conversation with them. Unlike their senior fellows who were mostly polite and serious, these young men were sincere and talked easily. It was their sincerity that made me feel comfortable enough to ask them a more personal question: "*Why did you choose to become a journalist?*" To my surprise, Tituk, the historian, spontaneously answered: "*Journalism is not a profession, rather, it is a vocation...a personal calling.*" Perhaps he noticed the look of surprise on my face, so he supplemented his answer with a laugh: "*That's not my own words...that is what Pak Jakob always teaches us.*" This comment drew the three of us together in laughter.

Everyone in that smoking room knew who *Pak Jakob* was. He was the founder, general director, and owner of *Kompas*. As I spent time in the newsroom, I soon learnt that referring to Jakob in all journalistic matters was a daily habit of not only the young, but also the senior journalists of the paper. Jakob's views were quoted in the elite editorial meeting during disputes over the title of a headline. He was quoted in discussions about how the discipline of self-censorship should be practiced in the news-making process. Jakob's name was brought up in a meeting with the ombudsman board of the newspaper in a debate on the kind of watchdog function the news should adopt. His views were also cited when the paper was deciding their position amid the political polarization of the Indonesian presidential election in the middle of that year, 2014. The name of Jakob Oetama was even mentioned by a senior journalist as he was introducing himself to me. He amused me and all the other journalists present by pretending he was *Pak Jakob* himself. On many occasions, I found there was more than one journalist who could imitate the gestures and voice of the old man. Hence, my encounter with those two eager young journalists on the very first day of my ethnographic fieldwork gave me one of the most important insights into *Kompas*: that of the strong influence of the founder, Jakob Oetama. Indeed, in the one-year training for new journalists, an essential aspect they learnt was to internalize the values of *Kompas*, which also meant the values of Jakob Oetama.

Back in early September 2016 when I was visiting the *Kompas* office again having finished my fieldwork, I was once again surprised by the pervasiveness of his influence. Jakob was born on September 27, 1931, and there was a birthday celebration already underway when I arrived. I could smell the palpable air of celebration. The bust of Jakob had been moved to a prominent spot in the *Kompas* building. Masks with the face of Jakob Oetama had been specially made for the birthday celebration, so that journalists could wear them and take photographs. Dozens of paintings of the founder were hung on the wall to make the office more colorful. However, the gesture that struck me the

most was the publication of two books written by some senior journalists in commemoration of the man on his 85th birthday.

The first book was entitled the “*Kompas Way; Jakob’s Legacy*”, written by Sularto and Santoso (2016). They adopt the term the “*Kompas Way*”, which they explain as being the legacy of Jakob Oetama to future generations of *Kompas* journalists. In the foreword of the book, they explain the phrase as follows:

The phrase the Kompas Way or ‘the Way of Kompas’ is a phrase which refers to Jakob’s legacy, which he has developed, practiced, and finally left (as a legacy) for future generations. This is seen not just in the way he writes the editorials, but also in the way he has sailed the ship (of Kompas) to navigate the journalistic seas over 50 years, the way he writes and develops a story based on events and facts, the way he realized the independence of Kompas, and no less importantly, also in the way he developed Kompas as a business entity. All of these teachings are conveyed to his journalists and workers. (Sularto and Santoso, 2016: IX¹⁵)

In the view of Sularto and Santoso, the journalistic values of *Kompas* journalists is very much inspired by the journalistic values of Jakob Oetama. In line with this argument, Ninok Leksono emphasizes the important influence of Jakob in his book entitled: “*85 Years of Jakob Oetama; Let’s Listen to What He Says*”. In this book that compiles 80 aphorisms of Jakob Oetama, he suggests that *Kompas* has become so synonymous with its founder that “*eventually people*

¹⁵ It is interesting that Sularto acknowledged in his introduction that the phrase the “*Kompas Way*” was inspired by his discussion with me. During my personal meeting with him in August 2, 2016, he admitted that he took the phrase from part I of my dissertation draft, which was entitled the same. He politely asked for my permission to use the term as the title of his book, which I gladly gave.

see Kompas as Pak Jakob, or on the contrary, Pak Jakob as Kompas." (Leksono, 2016: XXV).

From the illustration above it is clear how important Jakob Oetama is for the newspaper, as almost all journalists, from the novices up to the most senior journalists, all acknowledge his influence on *Kompas*, seeing him as the personification of the paper. This observation raised some questions for me: why is Jakob so influential at the paper, despite the fact that *Kompas* was founded not solely by him, but also by another journalist, PK Ojong? What are the ideals and values of Jakob, as both a man and journalist, which have shaped the specific journalistic style of *Kompas*, and in which all *Kompas* journalists are socialized? Finally, how is this journalistic style socialized among, and internalized by, *Kompas* journalists across generations?

This chapter will be dedicated to answering the questions above, and will be structured as follows: first I will draw a brief historical trajectory to explain why Jakob Oetama played a more dominant role in guiding editorial policy at *Kompas* than Ojong. Then, I will trace the biography of Jakob, focusing on the most important aspects of his life which have shaped his ideals and values as a man, as well as a journalist. Next, I will examine the specific kind of journalistic style that has been developed by Jakob, and how this journalistic style has been internalized by *Kompas* journalists across generations. Following this section, the challenges from within the newsroom on the influence of Jakob will be discussed. Finally I will sum up the main findings of this chapter in the conclusion.

3.1 Some Historical Turning Points

As described in the previous chapter, *Kompas* was actually founded by two people: PK Ojong and Jakob Oetama. However, since the very beginning, there has been an agreement between the two founders that the editorial policy of the newspaper would mainly be the remit of Jakob Oetama, while Ojong would focus mainly on managing the business aspect of the newspaper and its

development. One of the main considerations behind this was the fact that Ojong was still seen as a political outcast by Sukarno's regime in June 28, 1965. Therefore, in order to avoid the paper being banned by the regime, Ojong decided not to be conspicuously involved in the editorial policy. In fact, in the first issue of the newspaper, there was not even a mention of his name on the list of journalists at *Kompas*, let alone on the list of editorial staff.

Even though there is no formal or written account which explicitly explains this division of labor between the two founders in the early period, it is common knowledge amongst the journalists in the newsroom, and has been shared orally from generation to generation. In a three-part documentary officially released by *Kompas TV* entitled "50 Years of Kompas",¹⁶ part one: "*The Two Kompas Founders*", narrates how since the beginning, there was a clear job division between the two founders, whereby Jakob was in charge of the editorial policy while Ojong managed the business matters (Kompas Video, 2015). In part two entitled: "*The Limited Movement of Kompas*", there is an interview with Hellen Iswara, *Kompas* journalist and biographer of Ojong, where she explains that it was a new role for Ojong to act as the director of a newspaper, as all his previous roles were as editors (Kompas Video, 2015). However, he still managed this role well, according to Iswara, as he was focused and meticulous which was conducive to managing financial matters.

Therefore it is clear that since the very beginning, Jakob was the central figure in the newspaper for editorial matters. Furthermore, a dramatic event in 1978 made his influence even stronger, when the paper was banned for the second time on January 21, 1978 and *Kompas* was forced to apologize to the regime before being allowed to operate again. A serious debate was had between the two founders, in which Ojong refused to fulfill the regime's requirement. He

¹⁶ This interview was broadcast in a three-part documentary released by *Kompas* to commemorate its 50-year anniversary, entitled "50 Years of Kompas" (YouTube, July 24, 2015). It is no longer available.

believed it was better to let *Kompas* close down forever now, as they could be threatened with closure again at any time in the future. In his words: *“Jakob, pleased don’t apologize...sooner or later, they will close us down again anyway”* (Sularto, 2011: 9). Jakob, on the contrary, agreed to meet the regime’s demand. He also agreed to fulfill another requirement of the regime by signing a letter of promise that *Kompas* would never again publish any kind of news that criticized the regime. He believed that the struggle to fight the authoritarian regime must continue, and this could not be done with a dead newspaper. In his words: *“You can’t make a corpse your ally”* (Sularto, 2011: 10). As a consequence of these differing positions, Ojong fully withdrew from all editorial matters and fully delegated that job to his colleague.

Another dramatic event that changed the course of *Kompas*’ leadership once and for all was the death of PK Ojong in 1980. Since then, Jakob has been the sole manager and founder. He took full responsibility for *Kompas*, both as Chief Editor as well as General Director of the newspaper. In a video broadcast by *Kompas TV*, it is clear that Jakob was terribly sad when Ojong passed away, as this meant that he now had to take over the managerial aspect of *Kompas* as a company. He describes that moment, eyes overflowing with tears:

My colleague, Swantoro, who acted as the Vice Chief Editor, told me the sad news about the death of Ojong. He said: ‘brother, it will be hard. You will be the one who has to take care of the company’... and it turns out that Pak Swan was right. It was hard, but fortunately, my Pastor convinced me that I could handle it, as I have an ability for ngemong (a Javanese term which means ‘to take care of’, and usually refers to a mother’s ability to take care of a baby). (Kompas Video, 2015)

Jakob Oetama stayed in the position of Chief Editor until 2000, a position he held for 35 years. From the explanation above, it is clear that *Kompas* was mainly directed by Jakob Oetama. In the words of Randu Rahardjo, *“Jakob*

Oetama is the DNA of Kompas” (Personal communication with Rahardjo, vice chief editor of *Kompas*, 9 July 2014). This strong influence of Jakob was described perfectly by Daniel Dhakidae, who acted as the Head of the Research Division of *Kompas* and is the current Head of *Kompas* ombudsman, as follows, “The influence of its Chief Editor, Jakob Oetama, has been unchallenged. Since the day Ojong passed away, Jakob has been the personification of *Kompas* journalism.” (Dhakidae, *Kompas*, June 28, 2015).

From the historical background above, it is clear that Jakob has been dominant in directing the editorial policy of *Kompas* since the founding of the newspaper, and became increasingly dominant due to various historical events that changed the course of the newspaper’s history. The question then is: what are the ideals and values of Jakob himself, and how has the socialization of these values been achieved in the newsroom? The next part will be dedicated to discussing these questions.

3.2 The Habitus of Jakob

To understand the strong influence of Jakob at *Kompas*, it is important to investigate the figure of Jakob Oetama: his origins, his childhood, his educational background, as well as other important life experiences that shaped his ideals and values as a person, as well as a journalist. In this case, this research will borrow the concept of habitus as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu, who believed that every person has a habitus, which is a set of values that is internalized, and created through a long process of socialization which then influences a person’s way of thinking and behaving. Bourdieu defines the concepts as being:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations

necessary in order to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977: 72)

In the quotation above, Bourdieu argued that habitus is both structured and structuring. By the term “structured”, he wanted to suggest that habitus is the result of someone’s past life, meaning that sets of experience happening in the earlier life of a person will contribute to form the habitus of a person. Furthermore, by the term “structuring”, he wanted to suggest that even though habitus is a product of the past, it shapes the way people perceive social reality, and therefore how they then act based on this perception. That is why he also suggested that habitus is a system of dispositions embodied in a person which influences his practices, without him even being aware of this influence. That habitus generates spontaneous action within particular social contexts, which he theorized as ‘field’, is described by people as having a ‘feel for the game’ (Maton, 2008: 54). Thus, habitus is the product of the past, which influences the practices of an individual in the present, as well as in the future. It links the individual with the social, the subjective with the objective, and structure with agency (Maton, 2008: 53).

In line with Bourdieu, in order to understand the habitus of Jakob, it is important to understand the life of Jakob Oetama. While it is impossible to delve into all of his life experiences here, I would argue that there are four distinguishing life experiences that very much shape his habitus as a person, and more importantly, as a journalist. These are: that he was born a Javanese; he is a Catholic, having been formally education in the gymnasium (*sekolah seminari*) which are schools intended to create pastors; he worked as a teacher in an elementary and junior high school; and he had formal training and experience in journalism.

Born and raised as a Javanese man

Jakob was born on September 27, 1931, in a village named Jowahan, located near Borobudur Temple, Magelang, Central Java. It is noteworthy that Jakob was not born as a common Javanese, but rather into an aristocratic family, marking him out as an elite in Javanese society. This can be inferred from the fact that his father was an educated man named Raymundus Josef Sandiyo Brotooesiswo (1911-1975), and the headmaster of the Kanisius elementary school (*sekolah rakyat*) in a village named Wates, Kulonprogo. He was born in the time when Indonesia was still occupied by the Dutch; a period in which only the Indonesian elites might enjoy school. Meanwhile, his mother, Margaretha Kartonah Brotooesiswo (1914-1999) was also of the gentry, so it can be said that Jakob grew up in a culture of Javanese refinement and aristocracy. It is therefore no surprise that when Jakob Oetama was a child, he was usually addressed by the aristocratic term *Raden Bagus* (Sularto, 2011: 38), a term only used to address the son of a Javanese aristocrat who still has blood ties to the Javanese king.

As is typical with Javanese men, Jakob was very close to his mother. This can be seen from the fact that at the most crucial moment in his life -when he wanted to leave the *Seminari* school, a special school for training priests- he sought his mother for advice. Interviewing the younger brother of Jakob, Sularto wrote:

Mas To (Jakob's nickname in his family), went to our mom who lived in Mangkuyudan, Yogyakarta. He told her that he was confused with life. He wanted to leave (Seminari School). Mas To was very close to our mom, Ibu (mom) Kartonah. Whatever my mom said would always be obeyed by him (dipatuhi). He was ajrih (afraid) of, and also asih (loving) to, our mom. (Sularto, 2011: 4-5)

In the interview above, it is interesting to see the use of the Javanese word "*ajrih*", which is the refined version of *wedi*, which actually means "fear". However, in the quotation above, fear is mentioned not as a negative connotation, but instead as a demonstration of virtue in which a son shows

respect to his mother. As suggested by Geertz (1960), *wedi* is an emotional feeling which demonstrates a person's ability to show the principle of respect, which is fundamental in Javanese social interaction.¹⁷ Furthermore, *wedi* usually comes as a response to threats arising from social interaction, which can also refer to a physical threat. A Javanese child would be praised if he could apply this feeling in the right social settings, such as showing this feeling to his parents due to their ability to punish. The punishment itself, however, is also seen positively as a way of disciplining a child to respect their elders.

In turn, this value of fear as a Javanese virtue influenced Jakob in carrying out his journalistic work. In his speech at Gajah Mada University in 2003, when he was granted *Doctor Honoris Causa*, he used the word "fear" to illustrate his discretion in taking crucial editorial decisions. Fear is translated into the journalistic style of the newspaper, which is characterized by a strong sense of cautiousness. In a recent editorial piece, Jakob suggested that this journalistic style was intentionally chosen in response to the newspaper ban by Suharto in 1978:

The experience of being banned between 20 January 1978 and 5 February 1978 was a great lesson for Kompas... in practicing journalism, many issues and events which are extremely sensitive need to be, quoting the words of philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, conducted 'in fear and trembling'. (Oetema, Kompas, June 28, 2015)

From the quote above, it is clear that even though fear is a key virtue in Javanese values, its adoption as an integral part of the *Kompas* journalistic style has been driven by the specific political circumstance under the New Order

¹⁷ Two other feelings which also demonstrates a person's ability to show the principle of respect are *isin* (shy); and *sungkan* (hesitant). *Isin* is a complex reaction which includes not only fear but also lowered self-esteem, and refers only to social interaction rather than to any physical threat. A child, for instance, will feel *isin* if he gets caught doing something wrong, like stealing food. Meanwhile, *sungkan* is a lighter version of *isin*, and means feelings of respectful politeness. A guest will feel *sungkan* if offered more food by a host, except if the host insists.

regime, which kept very tight control of the media. Swantoro, a senior journalist who also witnessed the ban, confirmed the argument by suggesting as follows, *“Jakob, in the period of Suharto, was the only one who capable of writing editorials, because his Javanese style worked. So he could, mmm, say something indirectly. That was why his editorials were always of great length.”* (Swantoro, personal interview, July 21, 2014).

During the commemoration of *Kompas*’ golden anniversary, Jakob proposed that this journalistic style is part of the secret of the newspaper’s success in enduring authoritarian periods and surviving to the current era, making it the oldest national newspaper in Indonesia. Furthermore, the adoption of fear as a demonstration of respect to the power holders, who were also capable of generating physical threats, has confirmed the Geertz’s theory on the function of fear in Javanese culture as outlined earlier.

As one of the principle values in Javanese culture, respect is based on the belief that all social relationships are hierarchically ordered, and maintaining this social hierarchy is a moral imperative. Therefore, another principle in Javanese culture is the maintenance of harmonious social appearances, which is summed up in Javanese as *rukun*. This notion is based on the belief that emotional balance, and emotional stasis, is the highest virtue, therefore it is a moral imperative to control one’s own impulses, or at least leave them unexpressed, so as not to set up reverberating emotional responses in others. The value of respect is a guide to social behavior in many different contexts, from respect towards neighbors to respect towards government officials. Even though in modern Java the bases for social status is changing, the traditional view persists that men are created unequal, and that respecting those in a higher social status to maintain social harmony is a must.

This book argues that it is for the sake of establishing the principle of respect as well as conflict avoidance that Jakob developed his specific journalistic style, which involved a strong sense of indirectness, politeness and cautiousness

towards those of a higher status in the social hierarchy in order to maintain social harmony. This was stated clearly by Jakob in an interview during the *Kompas* golden anniversary commemoration, in which he says:

*I am a person with a Javanese background. Haha... This means, of course, to be **indirect**. The tendency to be **less direct**. Sometimes people yell at me for being **too indirect**. Of **not being to the point**. But...this is because I don't see problems in a black and white sense. (Oetema, *Kompas* video in its 50th anniversary, 2015, bold emphasis added by author).*

This statement of Jakob emphasizes the indirectness in his way of conveying messages, and his specific journalistic style was the result of long exposure to Javanese values, which were internalized as he grew up. Kees De Jong, a researcher who studied *Kompas* in 1990, said:

Jakob told me that as a Javanese, he always learned to communicate in an indirect way. One day, Jakob wished to go out on a Saturday night date and wished for permission from his father. However, it would be considered impolite to put this directly to his father. So, he merely sat in the chair near his father, staring longingly out the window, and said: "the night sky is bright. I can see a lot of my friends going out on dates." He did this in the hope that his father would understand that he, too, wanted to go out for dinner, and that his father would give him permission to do so. (De Jong, personal interview, March 22, 2015)

The statement above is also confirmed by Ashadi Siregar, a member of the ombudsman board of *Kompas*, who sees it as the unique selling point of the newspaper. He further argues that this is the secret behind the newspaper's survival under authoritarian rule:

Kompas has developed a specific kind of journalistic style in delivering its message, in which it conveys the message indirectly, but the readers know what *Kompas* means. For instance, under the New Order, when they wanted to criticize the corruption of the regime, they reported the practice of corruption in foreign countries (Ashadi Siregar, personal interview, March 2, 2015)

Underlying the journalistic style of Jakob lies the concept of *rasa*, a spiritual element in Javanese culture which connects the outer aspect of life with the inner one, and links together three major teachings of the Javanese gentry's religious life: etiquette, arts and mystical practice. More about this concept and how it is implemented into journalistic practice, as well as how it is shaped by political and economic forces outside the media, will be explained in chapter 4.

Surprisingly, while the impact of Jakob's Javanese values and ideals on his work as a journalist are recognized and understood by *Kompas* journalists, his private life has always remained a mystery to them. During my observations within the newsroom, there was very little discussion about Jakob's family. I got the strong sense that discussing the private life of this most respected of figures was taboo. All articles or books about Jakob, whether written by *Kompas* journalists or by outsiders, have hardly discussed his personal life (Djaeng, 2013; Leksono, 2016; Sularto 2011 & 2013; Sularto & Santoso, 2016). Even in the book written by Sularto, a senior journalist who was commissioned by Jakob himself to write his biography, this matter is hardly discussed. Whilst the book touches briefly on Jakob's childhood, there is no single mention about his family life: neither the name of his wife, nor how many children he has.

When I put this matter to the *Kompas* journalists, they were always reluctant to answer. One of the very few pieces of information they could share with me was an open secret: that Jakob had been married twice. The first wife was believed to be a villager from a humble family. Junior and senior journalists alike revealed that Jakob almost never brought his wife into the newsroom, nor to any official events. Some informants believed that this was part of the

reason why Jakob got married a second time, this time to a woman from the upper class. Yet, her public appearances in front of journalists were also very rarely witnessed. Interestingly, it is common knowledge that Jakob converted from Catholicism to Islam in order to secure his second marriage, as marrying more than once is forbidden in Catholicism. However, many journalists also witnessed that Jakob had started visiting the Catholic Church again in recent years.

Equally mysterious are the number of children Jakob has from each wife. Some of the journalists confessed that they really had no idea about this matter. However, all journalists shared a common observation that Jakob hardly ever brought his children to the *Kompas* office, giving the impression that Jakob did not intend to make any of his children his successor. That is why it was to the surprise of many when Jakob appointed his own son, Lilik Oetama, as the Chief Executive Officer of *Kompas Gramedia Group*. Whilst it is unknown from which marriage Lilik is from, some journalists believe that he is the eldest son of Jakob's first wife. The fact that Lilik was a relatively new face on the media scene and had never worked as a journalist before, unlike his father, cast doubt over his ability to handle the newspaper successfully, especially at such a crucial time when the newspaper's circulation is in decline. Some even believed that he might sell the newspaper if he thought that it would no longer be profitable.

Regarding Javanese father-son relationships, literature suggests that Jakob's relationship with his own biological children was typical. As described by Geertz (1960), the typical father-son relationship in a Javanese family is distant and formal. What is emphasized in this relationship between father and son is respect rather than a demonstration of affection. The figure of the father is expected to be, above all, the patient and dignified head of the family (*kepala keluarga*), leading his wife and children with a gentle and firm hand, not involving himself in the quarrels between them, and acting as a fair judge to disobedient children. The distance between father and son does not decrease,

even when the son becomes an adult, so that an aging man in need of a sharper brain in business or a strong pair of hands in the rice fields would more likely turn to his son-in-law than his own son (Geertz, 1960: 121).

From the evidence gathered above, I argue that the Javanese aspects of Jakob have shaped not only his journalistic style, but also the way he managed *Kompas*. In terms of journalistic style, Jakob's Javanese upbringing formed his indirectness and politeness in conveying his message, especially towards those in authority. The sense of fear in conveying the message is in accordance with the value of a Javanese child towards a person in authority. Similarly, Jakob's Javanese background also influenced the way he managed *Kompas*, building a close relationship with his journalists and treating them as if they were his own children. Indeed, he played the role of a father for the journalists, of one who is unfailingly caring but at the same time, demands obedience and loyalty. As he showed fear, or *wedi*, towards his own mother to show respect, he also demanded his subordinates to be fearful of and respectful to him. In contrast, it seems he treated his wives and his own biological children in a more distanced way when it came to his work as a journalist. Despite the irony here, this is actually also in accordance with Javanese values, where the separation between business matters and private family matters is considered a virtue.

Raised as a Catholic believer

The second most prominent feature about Jakob is that he is a Catholic. From the names of both his parents, it is clear that they both were Catholics, and the name 'Jakob Oetama' is also a Catholic name. During his teenage years, Jakob dreamed of becoming a priest, and he publicly admitted this in the video of the 50-year *Kompas* celebration: "I went to an elementary school, called Boro. It was bit far from Jogja. Then I wanted. I had a dream to be a priest. A father. So I went to a Gymanisum in Jogja." (Oetama, *Kompas* anniversary speech, 2015)

Jakob attended elementary school at *SD Pangudli Luhur* and continued his junior high school there, graduating in 1945. Afterwards, he pursued his dream

of being a priest by attending the medium school of theology (*sekolah seminari*) for six years, which specially prepared students to become priests, before graduating in 1952. During his studies at the *Seminari*, Jakob moved from one place to another: Jogjakarta, Ambarawa (Semarang), Ganjuran (Bantul City) and Muntilan (Magelang). During that period, he lived in the special dormitory of the school (*asrama pastor*), which reflects how intensive the training to be a priest was. After finishing the medium school of theology, Jakob continued further to the high school of theology to show his commitment to becoming a priest.

However, he resigned from this school after only three months. Despite the fact that he dropped out, the experience at the *Seminari* heavily influenced Jakob's way of seeing life. One of the lessons he learnt was about humanism, which he generally defined as respect for humanity. He believed humanism should be the essential spirit of journalistic work. In his own book entitled "*Indonesian Press, Communicating in an Insincere Community*", he wrote:

Humans and humanity, and therefore people's problems and sufferings, their aspirations and passion, their glory and humiliation; these are the central factors of the vision of Kompas daily newspaper. Therefore, humans and humanity have to always be the essence of its content. (Oetama, 2001: 147)

The spirit of humanism in *Kompas* is also reflected in the credo of the newspaper's saying: "*Menghibur yang Papa, Mengingatkan yang Mapan*", which means "entertaining the poor and reminding the have-gots". For Jakob, a deep understanding of humanism is a key element to being a good journalist. Based on his experience, he believed that senior journalists who had experience in studying philosophy and who had studied the concept of humanism had a more comprehensive journalistic view, a more civilized political view and were able to write deeper and more colorful journalistic pieces. Furthermore, he believed that the journalists who had been studied

philosophy and humanism were also more capable of controlling their personal political interests, because they had more concerns for and solidarity with humanity (Oetama, 1987: 207). Accordingly, Jakob suggested that all of his journalists should attend a school of philosophy either formally or informally, especially the philosophy of logic and anthropology. In 2006, he even conducted a short course of philosophy for *Kompas* journalists by inviting Franz Magnis Suseno, Professor of Philosophy from Driyarkara High School of Philosophy (Sularto, 2012: 41).

Kompas' strong endorsement of the idea of humanism was also captured in the study of De Jong (1990), who suggested that the spirit of "transcendental humanism" has been at the heart of the newspaper. By the term "transcendental humanism", he referred to a humanism that also believes in the existence of God, or at least of the existence of something transcendental. He elaborates by suggesting that this is not the same kind of humanism such as socialism or communism, which does not believe in the existence of God. Instead, this is a humanism which believes in the existence of a Creator, and suggests that in this way, humanity will reach a state of complete realization. Based on interviews with Jakob Oetama and thirteen *Kompas* journalists, de Jong argues that it is this very idea of transcendental humanism which is the spirit of these journalists in doing their job. This spirit, however, cannot be separated from the broader ambient of the Catholic Church at that time. The Second Vatican Council's new doctrine that Catholic believers should strive to be a blessing for all mankind, regardless of their religion, is viewed as the inspiration of this *Kompas* ideology, as it provided inspiration for *Kompas'* founders, who were mostly Catholic.

If Jakob's Catholic background is placed against the backdrop of Indonesian society as a country, which has the biggest Muslim population in the world (95% of its citizens are Islamic believers), there are several consequences. It highlights that Jakob grew up as part of a minority group in Indonesian society. In fact, PK Ojong, the other founder of *Kompas*, was also a Catholic, as were

most of the first generation of journalists at the paper. Living as a minority made him aware of the importance of promoting pluralism in Indonesia; it is only within a plural and harmonious society that the minority Catholic group had a place and position. Jakob's commitment to pluralism is manifested in his company, where he ensured diversity in his newsroom by recruiting journalists from various different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In his writings, Jakob described as follows:

The big family of Kompas Gramedia grows to be a little Indonesia (Indonesia Kecil). Here, through collaboration and interaction, we are building a new Indonesia, we continue to realize our nation and build its character. Together we build mutual understanding and a common vision, through the culture of an open company (perusahaan yang terbuka) that carves out a creative and respectful place for pluralism. We try to breathe dignity and transcendentalism (nafas yang mulia dan transcendental) into our works. (Oetama, 2001: 14)

With the term "open company", Jakob does not mean selling *Kompas* stock to the public, as *Kompas* is actually a family business. He meant that everyone from any background can be a journalist at the newspaper.

Aspired to be a teacher

The third significant life experience that has formed the habitus of Jakob is his teaching experience. For more than five years (1952-1956), Jakob worked as a teacher before changing career to become a journalist. Between 1952-1953, Jakob was a teacher at Mardijuwana junior high school in Cipanas, West Java, and then between 1953-1954, he taught at a vocational school at Lenteng Agung, Jakarta. Finally, between 1954-1956, he taught at Van Lith Junior High School, Jakarta. In his interview, Jakob confessed that he had actually dreamed of being a university lecturer and was planning to pursue his Master's degree in the Netherlands. He was even offered a position as a lecturer at Parahyangan University in Bandung, and got a scholarship to continue studying in The

Netherlands. However, instead, he resigned from his position as a lecturer and canceled his plans to study abroad. This decision was inspired by his conversation with a Catholic priest, JW Oudejans, who suggested he become a journalist instead of a teacher or lecturer. Jakob describes this incident as such:

When I was teaching in Junior High School, I took a course to get a teaching certificate (B1) in history. Since I passed with cum laude, I won a scholarship to study in the Netherlands. But at that time, this Dutch priest, Oudejans, said to me: "Jakob, there are too many teachers already, but not enough journalists. (Oetama, personal interview, February 27, 2014)

Despite changing career, Jakob saw journalism as a way to continue his mission to educate by using his newspaper as a way to enlighten people, and to enlighten the nation:

I think both professions have something in common. I feel that they have same basic essential motivation and spirit. Writing is conveying ideas to people; so is teaching. But through writing, we can teach students far beyond the boundaries of the classroom. (Jakob Oetama, personal interview, February 27, 2014)

Indeed, his previous background as an educator has influenced his journalistic values. For Jakob, one of his missions as a journalist is to educate and enlighten the nation. This is an unusual perspective, as in most countries, journalists see their mission as that of a watchdog, holding to account those in power, or else they act as opportunist facilitators for the power holders (Hanitzsch, 2011).

Background as an educated and professional journalist

The last significant life experience that shaped the habitus of Jakob is his educational and professional background in the world of journalism. Jakob was formally trained at the high school of publishing at Gadjah Mada University, and graduated in 1961, making him one among the very few numbers of

Indonesian journalists who has enjoyed a formal journalistic training. Furthermore, alongside his university studies, Jakob also worked as a journalist between 1956-1963 at *Penabur Weekly*. Here, he developed his journalistic skills, progressing to the position of editor. This long track record as a journalist reached its culmination when he met PK Ojong in 1963, and the two of them finally founded *Intisari Weekly*. This combination of formal journalistic training and professional journalistic experience, as well as being the founder of *Intisari* weekly, provided a strong foundation for Jakob to act as Chief Editor when he finally founded *Kompas* with PK Ojong on June 28, 1965.

Considering Jakob's background above, it is unsurprising that *Kompas* is considered as having one of the highest standards of journalism in the Indonesian media. David T Hill, Professor of Media from Murdoch University, comments on this:

The English term which is often used to describe Kompas daily newspaper, is "the newspaper of record" or "the newspaper that records" the actual situation. It is Kompas coverage which is considered as the most accurate, objective and complete in comparison to other media....for 50 years Kompas has created a specific journalistic style which is accurate, neutral, without prejudice, and unbiased." (Hill, Kompas, June 28, 2015)

In the quote above, Hill used the words accurate, objective, complete, without prejudice and unbiased, to describe the high quality of *Kompas* journalism. In line with Hill, Bagir Manan, who is also the Chairman of the Indonesian Press Council, shares the same opinion, "*Kompas* has been recognized by many levels of society as being 'well written' journalism, comprehensive, carefully researched and often seen as too cautious". (Manan, *Kompas*, June 28, 2015). It is clear that this seal of quality that *Kompas* possesses is in no small part down to Jakob.

3.3 The Socialization of Jakob's Values

The question is how have the values of Jakob been socialized amongst *Kompas* journalists, to the extent that the newspaper became the manifestation of Jakob himself? As mentioned earlier, from 1965 until 2000, Jakob acted formally as the Chief Editor of the newspaper. Therefore, he had the power and responsibility to ensure that the newspaper content conformed to his journalistic values. After 2000, despite Jakob no longer acting as Chief Editor, he still attended editorial meetings at least once a week until 2010. During these visits, he would give a weekly evaluation of the content of the newspaper and supervised the editorial team. Many *Kompas* journalists have observed that on each visit, he would give a lecture to the journalists like those of a teacher lecturing his students. In this weekly pep talk, the socialization of journalistic values according to Jakob was disseminated, so that all journalists could understand what the '*Kompas Way*' meant.

Despite no longer regularly attending weekly meetings in the newsroom after 2010, it did not mean that Jakob's teachings and journalistic values became forgotten or abandoned, as there are still many other ways for the socialization of *Kompas* values to occur. In the course of my on-site observations in the newsroom, I identified two general ways that the socialization of Jakob's values persisted. The first is the formal way, which takes place through the daily processes and procedures of news production, and the second is the informal way that occurs through the daily social interaction among the journalists. Both shape the dynamics within the newsroom.

3.4 The Daily News-Making Process

The formal socialization of values which occurs through the daily news-making process in the newsroom consists of a cycle of activities, starting from editorial meetings, to news reportage by journalists in the field, news editing, and finally, to the printing of the news on the day (*naik cetak*).

The editorial meetings at *Kompas* consisted of four meetings: the monthly meetings, the weekly meetings, the daily meetings in the morning and the daily meetings in the afternoon. The monthly meetings were held within a certain desk or division in the *Kompas* newsroom, where all the journalists of that desk would attend. One of the monthly meetings that I joined during my fieldwork was the meeting for a special issue focusing on the legislative election on April 9, 2014. This meeting, led by the editor of the political desk (*kepala desk*), was also attended by Chief Editor Arif Subangun, and it was here that the editorial position of the newspaper towards the election was decided, in line with *Kompas* values. Every journalist was free to speak and raise their points as to what kind of editorial position the newspaper should take. However, the final decision was made based on the journalistic values of the newspaper. In the meeting, for instance, one of the journalists raised a question which triggered a debate as to whether the newspaper should side with Prabowo or Jokowi. The debate was brought to a close when Arif Subangun suggested that *Kompas*' position should be neutral and should that the newspaper should not side with either presidential candidate during the election. This is because according to the values which have been practiced by the newspaper since its inception, *Kompas* has always been neutral. Arif suggested, more specifically, that a neutral stance was the default position of the founder, Jakob Oetama, and that this position had become the editorial policy of the newspaper which all journalists must comply with.¹⁸ In this way, the Chief Editor, who was relatively more senior than anyone else in the room, functioned as a caretaker of Jakob's values.

The role of the caretaker of Jakob's values was taken up not only by Arif, but also by other senior journalists who had experienced the period when Jakob was still Chief Editor. It is important to note that at *Kompas*, the Chief Editors as well as all members of the editorial boards were selected by Jakob himself.

¹⁸ This will be discussed more in chapter 6, about *Kompas*' neutrality during the Indonesian presidential election.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the values of Jakob are very much disseminated in every editorial meeting, and the weekly editorial meetings which are intended to make an evaluation of the week's news coverage are no exception. To illustrate this point, I observed a debate over a headline which stated the name of a prominent elite: *The Name of Boediono Is Mentioned 67 Times* (*Kompas*, 7 March 2014). There was disagreement between the editor of the political desk, who had written the title, and the Chief Editor, who insisted that the title did not reflect the values of the newspaper.¹⁹

The daily editorial meetings, which are held every morning and every afternoon in the newsroom, displays another illustration of how the values of *Kompas* are socialized. The meeting is only attended by the elites of the newspaper, which consist of the members of the editorial board and editors of each desk. In this regard, there are around 11 desks²⁰: the politics and law desk (responsible for news on national politics and laws); the article desk (responsible for selecting and editing the opinion columns); the economy desk (produces news on economic affairs); the humanity desk (responsible for news on humanities); the international desk (covers news on foreign affairs); the metropolitan desk (responsible for local news on Jakarta city); the regional desk (responsible for local news from all over Indonesia); the multimedia desk (produces news content on multiple platforms, including online and video content); the sports desk (covers sport), the Sunday desk (produces news for the special Sunday edition), and the Muda desk (covers lifestyle news).

¹⁹ This case will be further discussed in chapter 4 on self-censorship.

²⁰ The number of desks can change over time according to what is considered important at any given moment. For example, around 2004, there was a Swara desk which focused on covering women's issues. However, this desk no longer exists as it is no longer considered relevant.

The morning editorial meeting which is held at 9 am every day, except Saturday and Sunday, functions as a brainstorming session to discuss the general issues in Indonesia and identify any pressing events which have news value. In this meeting, editors of every division are asked one by one about the most acute issues in their division on that day. The meeting usually runs slowly and leisurely. The conversation is quite often mixed with jokes and laughter, like that of families who have known each other for a long time. However, in the afternoon meetings held at 4 pm, the atmosphere is more serious as they have to list all of the coverage for every desk in more detail, and also decide the headlines for the next day. It goes without saying that all of these elites were seasoned *Kompas* media workers, who know and have internalized the journalistic values of the newspaper. It is this meeting which theoretically has the biggest impact on the shaping of every editorial policy.

After the agenda for the next day's coverage is agreed upon and set by the editors, the reporters go out into the field, pounding the pavement to chase up leads, find sources and interview them, conduct documentary research when necessary, and finally, write up their stories. Later in the night, usually not later than 8 pm, these reporters send their stories to the editors, who read and edit them before finally sending them on to the Managing Editor for a final check. The Managing Editor has a team of editors (*penyunting*), usually consisting of three people who work until very late at night to do the final checks of the news, and more importantly, of the headlines. It is in the hands of these editors where the fate of a story is decided. To what extent a story is cut or edited, or even not covered at all, is decided by these editors. While in a technical sense, these editors function to ensure that a story is of the necessary caliber to be published by the paper, they are also ensuring that the journalistic values of the newspaper are being applied. It is in this everyday editing process that the power of an editor is almost unchallenged. They could even change a headline which had already been agreed upon in the afternoon meeting, if they think that it necessary. In the words of a journalist:

There are three institutions where hierarchical order was respected the most. The first is in the Catholic Church, the second is in the military and the last one is in the newsroom. Just like in the church and in the military, the higher the position of an editor in the newsroom, the more power he has. In the everyday editorial process, an editor has absolute power to edit, or even to completely un-publish, a story. (Dina, personal interview, February 5, 2015)

From this illustration of the daily news production process above, it is clear how the mechanism that preserves *Kompas'* values operates. How, then, did Jakob's views influence the everyday social dynamics inside the newsroom?

3.5 A Portrait of the Newsroom

While the formal socialization of the values of Jakob are disseminated through a hierarchical structure that is formally institutionalized in the newsroom, the informal socialization of the journalistic values of the newspaper occurs through an informal, but no less influential, institution, namely the everyday interactions within the newsroom. It is in these everyday interactions between *Kompas* journalists that I could sense every aspect of Jakob's habitus being lived in the newsroom. The first and most prominent aspect is the Javanese values of respect and social harmony as a guiding principle in the daily interactions among the journalists. As explained earlier, the underlying assumption behind the principle of respect is that men are created unequally and it is a moral virtue to treat everyone according to their position in order to establish and maintain social harmony.

In the newsroom, showing respect is expressed in many ways: by posture, gestures, tone of voice, term of address, and above all, by language. It is impossible for two journalists to meet and to speak each other without precisely indicating their respect for their relationship with each other; such specifications are inherent in the structure of the Javanese language, just as the indication of time -past, present, or future- is inherent in the English language.

In the newsroom, everyone calls Jakob by his nickname: *Pak*, which literally means father. It is only Jakob who is addressed in this way, to demonstrate that he is the father of all journalists. Indeed, every time Jakob came down to the newsroom on the third floor of the *Kompas* building from his office on the sixth floor, every journalist treated him with great respect. They would bow, shake his hand, and sometimes even kiss his hand. Each time a celebration is taking place, whether it is the newspaper's anniversary, the New Year celebration, or the celebration of Jakob's birthday, his presence would be expected, as well as a speech proffering wisdom and guidance. Furthermore, as all journalists are considered his sons and daughters, they address each other according in the manner of Javanese children addressing their siblings: a younger journalist will address senior or older male journalists as *Mas*, which is the nickname for older brothers in the Javanese family. Meanwhile, a younger journalist will call senior or older female journalists *Mas*, which is the nickname for older sisters.

The influences of Javanese culture are not only demonstrated by the use of such nicknames, but also by the language used in the newsroom. As a national newspaper publishing in the Indonesian language, it is understandable that people use this language in the newsroom. However, everyday conversation is very often mixed with the Javanese language. What impressed me was that everyone understands the Javanese language, even if they do not come from Java or are not Javanese themselves. Asep Setiawan, the editor of the political desk who is Chinese and grew up in a Sundanese culture, is one such example. Another example is Arif Subangun, the Chief Editor, who comes from the eastern part of Indonesia but can also speak Javanese.

Javanese proverbs are also very often cited by journalists, sprinkling their daily conversations. For instance, in a briefing before an editorial meeting of the political desk, Randu Rahardjo cited the proverb: "*yen wani ojo wedi-wedi, yen wedi ojo wani-wani*" (Randu Rahardjo, personal communication, 18 March 2014). This proverb means that if you are courageous, do not be afraid, and if you are afraid, then do not dare to try. This aims to convey a message that once

the newspaper has decided on a certain editorial position, it has to be consistent. On another occasion, Tyas Kuncahyono, a member of the editorial board, cited the proverb: “you may pinch, but don’t hurt” (Ryaas Cahaya, 12 March 2014). This aims to say that we may criticize other people, but must not hurt them. Another proverb that is very often cited is: “*ngono yo ngono ning ojo ngono, apike ngene bae*”, which means, “you are free to do it that way, but please don’t. It is better to do it this way.” This suggests that journalists can be critical of those in power, but only with moderation.

Ninok Leksono, a senior journalist at *Kompas*, provides a good example for this. If, for instance, an issue about the scarcity of fertilizer has been the headline for three consecutive days, Jakob would remind the journalists by asking: “*Sudah cukup kan Mas?*” which literally means: “It’s enough, right?” This expression usually means that he wants to politely instruct the journalists to stop covering the issues, or at least, that he wants the issue to no longer be the headline news. Instead, it is placed on another page in a much smaller space. It suggests that the journalists may, to some extent, cover an issue considered to be critical of the power holders; however, that coverage should not be too much. In this regard, covering the problem of fertilizer scarcity means addressing the government’s failure to provide the fertilizers for the farmer. In other words, putting the government under scrutiny.

Besides being manifested in verbal communication, the Javanese culture is also embodied in nonverbal communication. Body gestures are one example. On an occasion when the journalists were in casual conversation with their guest, a gesture of *Ngapurancang* was often demonstrated. This is a standing position with two hands put in front of the lower part of the body, usually demonstrated by a Javanese when he is stood next to an eminent person. I observed this gesture demonstrated by Jimmy Laluna, a journalist from the eastern part of Indonesia. Furthermore, this gesture was also displayed by Sularto, the Vice Director of the newspaper, as he was taking a picture in a standing position with the presidential candidate, Joko Widodo.

The nonverbal manifestation of Javanese culture also took place on other social occasions, such as in the seating arrangements at gatherings. A senior journalist once told me an interesting story about this. In a meeting which was attended by Jakob Oetama, a female journalist coming from a non-Javanese culture arrived late. When she came in, she took a seat in the front row, causing the senior journalists to smile pointedly at her. According to *Kompas* culture, what she did was considered inappropriate: she should have sat in the back row instead of the front, as the seating reflects the social strata in which the higher the position of a person, the further to the front they will be seated. The fact that the young journalist was late made the case even worse. However, the senior journalists did not directly voice such objections. They only smiled. This was because Javanese culture expects someone to be sufficiently self-aware without needing any direct instructions. Therefore, in this case, the smile functioned as a polite reminder.

The Javanese culture is also manifested in the performance evaluation of a new journalist. Jedi, a new journalist who was still on his probationary period, told me a story. He said that his poor understanding of the Javanese culture almost put him in danger of getting fired. In his first three-month evaluation as a new journalist, he got a poor mark. This was because he often argued with his superior, who was responsible for evaluating him:

This really made me feel shocked. In my [Bugis] culture people always put the parang (sword) in front of their bodies. This reflects an openness. It means that if you don't like someone or disagree with his argument, we will talk openly about it. In Javanese culture, people put a keris (knife) in the back of their body. They hide their weapon. It means that if they do not like someone or disagree with him, they do not immediately complain. Instead they wait until the problem becomes really serious. This is what happened to me. I got a bad mark in my evaluation because I liked arguing with him. If he didn't like me, he should have said it openly. If he preferred that I don't argue with

him, he should have said it. But don't just give me bad mark. I only found out about this after Mbak Poppy, the Manager of Human Resources, explained to me what actually had gone on. (Jedi, personal interview, February 18, 2014).

The illustration above also provides an example on how the new journalist was slowly forced to internalize the Javanese culture.

In Indonesia, the ethnicity which is believed to be closest to Javanese in terms of indirectness, is Sundanese. However, a Sundanese editor also complained about the extreme indirectness of Javanese. He said in an interview:

I would still ask 'why?' if an editor did not publish my story. After he explained, I would understand. But my friend from Java, when I did not publish his story, did not complain or ask why. But the next day, he treated me differently. He was not as nice as before. The Javanese don't express their agreement or disagreement, but inside they hide and plan revenge. (Cecep, personal interview, August 26, 2016)

Some journalists believe that the domination of Javanese culture is a positive thing for the newspaper. A senior journalist suggested, "In the cultural diversity in the newsroom, Java becomes the umbrella. This is exactly the reason why we are strong." (Joyono, personal interview, April 23, 2015).

Indeed, most *Kompas* journalists are Javanese, or born in and raised in Javanese culture. The Human Resources department of the newspaper supplied me with information about the background of the journalists: out of 227 *Kompas* journalists, 179 of them were born in Java. This amounts to 78.8% of the total *Kompas* workforce. Those 176 journalists could be listed in more details as follows: from Central Java (46 journalists), from Jakarta (37 journalists), from Jogjakarta (36 journalists), East Java (34 journalists) and from West Java (26 journalists). While the statistics above provide a clear picture about the domination of Javanese journalists in the newsroom,

I am aware that it is problematic to homogenize them. First of all, the place where a journalist is born does not necessarily mean that he or she grew up according to the culture of that place. People who were born in Central Java, for instance, could grow up in a Minang culture if the parents are of Minang ethnicity. Second, not all the provinces in Java have the typical Javanese culture. People in West Java, for instance, grow up in a Sundanese culture and speak Sundanese in their daily lives. Furthermore, people in Jakarta usually group together in a multicultural environment, as the city is the place where people from all places, ethnicities and religions in Indonesia come together to live. Thirdly, not all provinces in Java enjoy the same degree of Javanese culture. It is generally believed that people from Central Java or Jogjakarta have a stronger Javanese culture than people from East Java. The Javanese language used in Central Java and Jogjakarta, for instance, is generally believed to be more refined than the Javanese language used in East Java.

Diversity in the Catholic leadership

As suggested in the earlier part, the Catholic-ness of Jakob, making him part of a minority group in Indonesia, influenced him to support the idea of pluralism. This idea has been also manifested in the newsroom, as seen in the diverse religious background of the journalists. This can be seen in this following table (from *Kompas* database as collected by its human resource division):

Table 1
Kompas Journalists Based on Religious Affiliation

Religion	Number	Percentage
Buddhism	3	1.3%
Hinduism	2	0.8%
Islam	117	51.5%
Christianity	21	9.3%
Catholicism	84	37%
Total	227	

From the table above, it can be seen that most of the journalists are Islamic believers (51.5%). Following Islam, in second rank were Catholics (37%). The other three religions: Christianity (9.3%), Buddhism (1.3%), and Hinduism (0.8%), are only embraced by a small minority of the journalists. From this composition, it can be seen that there is indeed religious pluralism within the newsroom. However, this composition does not quite reflect the composition of religious believers in Indonesia, in which the majority are Islamic believers and other religions only share a minority percentage. According to the Indonesian Center for Statistics Bureau (BPS), the composition is as follows: Islam (87.18%), Christianity (6.95%), Catholicism (2.90%), Hinduism (1.6%) and Buddhism (0.71%)²¹. Therefore, in contrast to the Indonesian population where the number of Catholic believers is in a vastly lower proportion than the number of Islamic believers, at *Kompas* the difference is less prevalent. This is where the role of Jakob, as well as PK Ojong, as Catholic believers, plays a role.

²¹ The complete figures of religious believers according to the Center for Statistical Bureau (BPS) in 2010 are: Islam (207.176.162/87.18%), Christianity (16.528.162/6.95%), Catholicism (6.907.873/2.90%), Hinduism (4.012.116/1.6%), Buddhism (1.703.254/0.71%), Khonghucu (117.091/0.04%) and other religions (299.617/0.12%).

The recruitment process is done in such a way so that the number of Catholic believers is not so much less than the number of Islamic believers. This can be seen from the composition of new journalists recruited in 2013-2014 when I was conducting my fieldwork, in which out of 12 new journalists, 5 were Catholics, 6 were Muslim, and the rest were Christian. Therefore, almost half of the new journalists are Catholics.

There are many thoughts about the reasons behind this. Some journalists believe that the large numbers of journalists who are Catholic believers at *Kompas* is not intentionally orchestrated. Rather, it is simply because they share a similar attitude and perspective with their senior fellows who recruited them. However, this affinity has been the subject of envy from other journalists. A Sundanese Islamic journalist told me, in a disparaging but even tone, that it would be impossible for him to ever be a Chief Editor, and the same applied to his other non-Catholic colleagues.

Moreover, it is a historical fact that most of the members of the *Kompas* editorial board were Catholic believers. In the book of Sularto (2007), which listed the members of the editorial board from 1965 until 2006, it could be deduced from their names that at least 80% of the members were Catholic believers. If we look into the names of *Kompas* chief editors from 1965-2016, they are mostly Catholic believers too, except in the two periods of Suryopratomo and Bambang Sukartiono. Consecutively, they both served as a Chief Editor of *Kompas* from 2001-2007 and 2007-2009. But since then, all the Chief Editors have been Catholic believers: Arif Subangun (2009-2014) and Randu Rahardjo (2014 until the current time). Therefore, only nine years out of more than a half-century has the newspaper been led by non-Catholic believers. While the selection of Chief Editor is under the full remit of Jakob Oetama, and only he himself knows the reasons for his choices, a senior journalist hypothesized that the selection is purely based on merit. He suggested that the journalists who have the best qualifications to be Chief Editor or board

members were only coincidentally Catholic believers (Jimmy Laluna, personal interview, May 24, 2017).

The world of well-educated men

The *Kompas* newsroom is also dominated by men. Out of 227 journalists, 160 (70,5%) of them are men. Furthermore, in more than half a century of the newspaper's operation, there has only ever been one woman who has held a position on the editorial board: Ninuk Mardiana Pambudy. In an interview with a senior male journalist, he explained that the reason for this was that female journalists usually refuse to be appointed to the editorial board as they want to avoid spending too much time in the newsroom, mainly so that they can spend more time with their family. Indeed, there were some cases where female journalists resigned from the newspaper, as their husbands wanted them to have more time at home. Therefore, while the fact that Jakob is a man must influence the gender composition in the newsroom, the scarce number of female journalists also reflects the patriarchal nature of Indonesian society, in which men are entitled to play the role of breadwinners for the family.

The composition of the newsroom is also dominated by highly educated staff, which can be seen from the statistic that out of a total of 227 *Kompas* journalists, 216 (95.1%) of them are university graduates. As Jakob is a well-educated person himself, it seems reasonable that he expects his staff to be as well.

Challenges to Jakob's influence

Although Jakob Oetama is the central figure at *Kompas*, his influence does not go unchallenged. During the course of the newspaper's history, which has lasted for more than five decades, there have been many challenges to Jakob's authority inside the newsroom. The conflict in relation to the labor union and stock ownership was arguably the biggest challenge to Jakob's influence. This conflict divided the newspaper journalists: there were those who favored the union and those who favored Jakob. Furthermore, this conflict also attracted

attention from media practitioners from outside the newspaper, both at the national and the international level.

This conflict first took place in 1988. It was triggered by an attempt by some *Kompas* journalists to build a labor union for themselves and their colleagues. One of the main initiators was Albert Kuhon, who was also supported by Irwan Julianto, Maruli Tobing, and Arif Subangun. The idea to create a labor union came after *Kompas* changed from being a foundation (*yayasan*) which is a non-profit institution, to a business company (PT) on November 23, 1983. (Nainggolan, in Sularto, 2007: 157). According to Dhakidae (1991), this transformation from a foundation to business entity was a consequence of the change in government regulation enacted in 1982, that prohibited a foundation from making a profit. In line with this shift in status, Kuhon and some other journalists signed a letter of petition demanding the creation of a labor union.

This idea of creating a union was seen as a direct attack on Jakob, as the founder and main business owner of *Kompas Gramedia Group*. This is because the union demanded the right to access 20% of *Kompas* stock, as stipulated in the law. This meant that Jakob had to decrease his ownership of the paper, and consequently stood to lose his absolute and complete control of the company. However, Jakob successfully tamed this attack in a rather Javanese manner. To the union, he suggested that *Kompas* was actually built around the sense of family-ism (*kekeluargaan*), with all workers as members of the family. Therefore, a labor union would be seen as a threat to the sense of kinship and collectivity. This “polite” approach was combined with some “repressive” approaches such as not publishing the pieces by Albert Kuhon,²² one of the initiators of the union, and through sending Irwan Julianto, another initiator, to

²² Kuhon eventually resigned from *Kompas* as a result of this conflict.

work in another city. Jakob's approach successfully thwarted the challenge, and for a moment, the journalists forgot the idea.

Ten years later, in 1998, the attempt to create a labor union was revived. *Kompas* journalists Syahnun Rangkuti and Bambang Wisudo were among the initiators. Initially starting with just a handful of journalist who supported the idea, gradually the majority of journalists came to join the cause. In the early stage of this movement, the idea to build a labor union was indeed supported by most *Kompas* journalists, including that of the ownership of 20% of *Kompas* stock by the union. The fact that Indonesia was undergoing radical political change after the fall of Suharto was seen as the right time for demanding freedom to build a union for *Kompas* workers. However, just like in the previous decade, this idea was again opposed by Jakob and other *Kompas* elites. In response to Wisudo, Jakob said:

All of you are my children, aren't you?" But then we said: "Sorry sir, our position is equal. There is no father and no children here." Then, Jakob said: "Okay, then, if you don't want to be regarded as my children". (Bambang Wisudo, personal interview, June 12, 2014)

In addition to this soft approach, Wisudo was isolated at the newspaper. He was still allowed to work, but no longer got any assignments. Furthermore, any stories that he wrote based on his initiative went mostly unpublished by the editors. On top of this, he was then sent to work in Ambon in an attempt to cut him off from the union. In response, Wisudo opted to resign from the newspaper.

Unlike in 1988, the conflict with Wisudo triggered internal division within *Kompas*. The newsroom was divided between those who supported Wisudo and those who defended the company. This internal conflict within *Kompas* also attracted attention from media practitioners in the Independent Journalists in Alliance (AJI), who supported Wisudo, arguing that *Kompas* had violated the rights of its journalists. Support also came from the Legal Aid

Institute, who helped Wisudo file a lawsuit against the paper. Furthermore, academics as well press freedom activists attacked *Kompas* by sending petitions to the newspaper, and a complaint was also sent to *Kompas*' Chief Editor from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), condemning the violation of Wisudo's journalistic rights.

Interestingly, whilst Jakob and the elites of the newspaper never successfully managed to tame the conflict, there was a prevailing view among the journalists that they were, indeed and above all, members of one big family at *Kompas*. Jakob was seen as a father and Wisudo was seen as one of his children. Furthermore, when a quarrel inevitably arose between child and father, other family members should always side with the father, who has the highest position in the family and deserves to be treated with respect. While there were explicit moves of support for Wisudo by some journalists, the fact that many more favored Jakob is evidence of his influence on his staff, exercised over many years of socialization. The fact that these workers never got what they wanted – a labor union - was another piece of evidence of Jakob's hegemony. While Jakob still insisted on not sharing any form of ownership with his workers, he promised to give journalists some percentage of the profits. It is noteworthy, however, that most journalists still do not know how much the annual profit of the company is, let alone the amount that the company should share.

Surprisingly, despite the sharp conflict among them, both Kuhon and Wisudo still view Jakob with great respect and love. According to Pontoh, a journalist from Pantau, Kuhon said:

In the meeting (to discuss our dispute), Swantoro gave me no chance to speak. But Jakob said to him: "Kuhon is here. Why don't we give him a chance to have his say?" That is why I still very much respect Jakob. (Pontoh, 2013: 31)

The same sentiment was also expressed by Wisudo. Recalling his personal relationship to Jakob, he said:

My personal relationship with Pak Jakob is good. Other journalists described it as a love-hate relationship. If Pak Jakob went to the political desk, the first member of staff he tried to find was me. This lead new journalists to say: "Mas Bambang is very powerful." (Wisudo, personal interview, June 12, 2014)

Even though this remark may seem surprising, it is actually the expected outcome of a typical conflict between father and son in a Javanese family. As suggested by Jay (1969), even when a case of dispute between a son and a father takes place, a Javanese child usually still views his father with respect and admiration. The enduring dedication of Kuhon and Wisudo to Jakob suggests that the notion to view Jakob as a father has provided the most potent tool for the socialization and preservation of Jakob's values and influences.

The illustration above presents how *Kompas* is managed with a strong sense of family-ism (*kekeluargaan*) and father-ism (*bapak-ism*). Interestingly, this feature resembles the way in which the New Order state was also managed by Suharto (Bourchier, 2015; Pemberton; Reeve, 1987; 1994; Shiraishi, 2000). Therefore, while there was political pressure from the New Order regime which was the cause of fear and anxiety for Jakob, as explained in Chapter 2, the ideology of *kekeluargaan* and *bapakisme* came just as naturally to Jakob as it did to Suharto. It was something, (and not the only thing), that the management of *Kompas* shared too, and not out of fear or compulsion. In this sense, *Kompas* and the New Order government were natural bedfellows.

3.6 Conclusion

Even though *Kompas* daily newspaper was founded by two people, PK Ojong and Jakob Oetama, the journalistic practice and outlook of the newspaper was very much inspired by Jakob Oetama. The historical setting in when the

newspaper was founded, as well as the historical trajectory of the daily, has made Jakob the central figure in the newspaper. The fact that Ojong was a political outcast when the newspaper was founded pushed Jakob to adopt more functions in guiding the newspaper's editorial policy. The closure of *Kompas* by President Suharto in 1978 made the role of Jakob even bigger, as this incident made Ojong withdraw completely from the newspaper's editorial policy. Furthermore, the death of Ojong in 1980 was another significant historical event, leaving Jakob the sole owner to guide the *Kompas* ship. Therefore, it is the habitus of Jakob which has very much influenced the ideals and values of the newspaper, its journalists, as well as its journalistic style.

In summary, the habitus of Jakob can be best formulated as the habitus of a man who has been born and raised as a Javanese as well as a Catholic believer, who worked as a teacher, and who also enjoyed formal journalistic training, before gaining considerable professional experience as a journalist. Even though these various aspects of Jakob's habitus have all shaped his journalistic style, his Javanese-ness has been one of the most defining influences. It is for this reason that, when confronted with the fact of having to live under an authoritarian regime that strongly controlled the media, his Javanese background inspired Jakob to develop a particular kind of journalistic style, characterized by a strong sense of indirectness, politeness as well as cautiousness in conveying its message to the readers, especially when reporting on those in positions of power. I describe this style and ideology as being the *Kompas Way*. It is also the Javanese values of Jakob - and to a lesser degree, his Catholic-ness- that has also shaped the organizational structure and the everyday social interactions within the *Kompas* newsroom, where the hierarchical structure means that the decision-making process is very much under the control of the newsroom elites, with Jakob at the top. Meanwhile, the daily social interactions within the newsroom have been guided by the principle of respect and harmony, where every journalist is regarded as being a member of a family, with Jakob as the one and only father. These two factors

have provided the medium for the socialization of Jakob's habitus to be internalized among the journalists.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this influence of Jakob inside the newsroom has not gone entirely unchallenged. As explained in the last section of this chapter, there were indeed some challenges within the newsroom as demonstrated in the case of the labor union, as well as the question of share ownership. Although the case is not directly related to any editorial issues, it is enough to show that there is an attempt to counter the influence of the newspaper owner. Furthermore, resistance to Jakob also occurs in the realms of editorial policy, including when it comes to journalistic style. The subsequent three chapters will examine this: Chapter 4 will discuss the practice of self-censorship within the newsroom, Chapter 5 will examine the watchdog function of *Kompas* in their coverage of corruption, and Chapter 6 will investigate the position of the newspaper during Indonesia's presidential election in 2014. These three chapters will illustrate clearly the obedience as well as the resistance of *Kompas* journalists in implementing the *Kompas Way*.