Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market

Breman, Jan

Published by Amsterdam University Press


Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66310.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66310

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2321936
tasks between them? These were questions with no conclusive answers. The hierarchy was not necessarily arranged in a clear-cut vertical ranking, with superiors and inferiors. Chiefs could belong to the entourage of the same higher lord, alongside or even in conflict with each other. They were rivals competing for power, not officials with clearly defined mandates within an administrative apparatus.\(^6\) They had no qualms about transferring their loyalty to another patron or poaching clients from their rivals. Their room for manoeuvre contracted, however, as the Priangan started to lose its frontier character. Nevertheless, out of sight of the colonial administrators, defections to another lord continued until deep into the nineteenth century.

**Rendering servitude**

The introduction of territorial demarcation did, however, reduce this tendency to switch loyalties. It was no longer possible to achieve upward mobility by seeking the protection of another regent or moving somewhere else with your entourage and cultivating new land. The head of a cacah could work his way up to become what was known in the colonial records as a ‘minor chief’, just as notables in higher echelons tried to gather more clients around them so as to strengthen their standing with their own, or perhaps another, lord. The important issue was not how many clients a regent needed to fulfil the duties of his office, but how he could bind his clientele – a hard core of trusted followers with a looser and more fluid group of less trusty ‘hangers-on’ – in servitude by rewarding them for the services they performed for him. These included an endless flow of goods and services from below, a sizable proportion of which had to be set aside for redistribution. The collection of ‘donations’ was widespread (De Wilde 1830: 188-9). The seizure of goods and corvee ran from above to below, imposing the heaviest burden on the landless peasants at the base of the hierarchy. De Wilde described this situation succinctly: ‘In all these respects, the chiefs follow the example of their regents; and, as such, each is in his rank a greater or lesser oppressor of the common man.’ The top of the pyramid was linked to its base not directly but through a profusion of intermediaries over which the colonial administration had little oversight and even less control. Yet it was here that the hierarchical order was most dynamic – continually

---

\(^6\) Hoadley describes the situation in similar terms: ‘A chain-of-command, a hierarchy of power, or even the delegation of authority existed only to a very limited extent in Javanese governmental practice.’ (Hoadley 2004: 148)
expanding and contracting, rising and falling. This was partly due to the
tendency of the notables not be content with their legal due, but to make
deals with smart operators working at their own expense and risk. In these
transactions, the *jago* as handyman or troubleshooting for the elite long
played a prominent but underexposed role.

Servitude was primarily expressed through the obligation of landowning
peasants to relinquish a part of their paddy harvest to their lord. The district
chief was responsible for collecting this *cuke* (harvest) tribute. In the set-
tlements in his district, it was collected directly by the *camat* or one of his
officials. The village priest was also involved, as part of his responsibilities
for checking the schedule of agricultural operations, which also included
when to sow the seeds, how to maintain the irrigation system, etc. A third
part of the *cuke* went straightaway to the minor chiefs, who were closer to
the peasants. The share destined for the regent did not leave the village
immediately, but was stored until the order came for it to be transferred
to the *dalem* or the main settlement in the sub-district. In earlier times,
this tribute would have been limited to only a twentieth part of a harvest,
but that was when rice was grown by shifting cultivators on dry soil that
had been only roughly cultivated and would only be used temporarily
(De Roo de la Faille 1941: 422). Both the low yield and ease with which the
nomadic peasants could up and leave made it impossible to increase the
tax. Generally, the owners of *sawah* fields had to relinquish a tenth part of
their harvest. Newcomers and those cultivating new land, however, were
entitled to a temporary exemption, usually for three years. For reasons that
remain unclear, after an inspection tour of the Priangan, Daendels decided to
increase the *cuke* to a fifth part of the harvest. The chiefs would be entitled to
the full tenth part that they received, rather than sharing it with the religious
leaders, who would now also be entitled to a tenth part for their involvement
in the agricultural process. This unexpected doubling of the tribute would
fuel the unrest that was already widespread around that time, especially
among the people of Cirebon. As well as having to hand over a larger share
of their food production, the peasants had to fulfil a large number of other
obligations, the most important of which was working in the chief’s fields.
Although the landed gentry used sharecroppers to cultivate their land, they
also demanded that all *cacah* provided labour. The households belonging to
a lord, *juragan*, would provide these services in turn, sending one of their
members to perform this work, known as *tugur*, for perhaps one day a week.
All those holding a position of authority were exempt from this obligation, as
were the elderly, the disabled, and the needy. Newcomers were also exempt
for the period that they did not have to pay the *cuke*. 
Servitude occurred in two forms. The *panukang*, peasants who owned no land themselves and were permanently employed by a lord as sharecroppers, represented the most onerous form of servitude. They received a share of the yield from the land they cultivated and also had to work in the stables and households of their *juragan*. The second group consisted of the *rahayat*, peasants who sought the protection of the lord voluntarily (De Waal 1866: 367). This lighter form of servitude required a show of ritualized deference and was known as *mengawula*. The relationship between the lord and the peasant was one of patronage. Van Rees discussed the concept of servitude in his report, explaining what it entailed in great detail. Peasants chose subordination to seek ‘shelter from the rain’ by entrusting themselves to the protection of a man of standing (*ngali dung*). In other words, they preferred subordinating themselves to a lord, in the expectation that he would not overburden them with obligations, to exposing themselves to the arbitrary forces that threatened them from all sides if they remained unattached (Van Rees 1867: 47). Moestapa defined the concept in similar terms: ‘serving a Lord with labour and other impositions, in exchange for being released from more general burdens’ (Moestapa 1946: 114, note 3). A client could rely on his lord protecting him from claims to his livelihood resources from others. From this perspective, the bond was not imposed from above and by force, but from below and willingly. It was an honour to be a client of a powerful man and perform services for him, while the lord could increase his prestige by expanding the size of his retinue. Territorial proximity was no consideration in the attachment of peasants as clients.

The suzerainty of each chief was comprised of the possessions of his subjects, irrespective of where they were located, such that the bond that tied the heads of peasant households was based not on where they lived but on the lord to whom they were obligated. (Eindresumé III, 1896: 129)

De Roo de la Faille summarized this principle of subordination succinctly as follows: ‘living where they were, serving where they wanted’ (quoted in De Haan IV: 415). Territorialized governance, as introduced by the Company and more rigorously imposed by the early-colonial state, put an end to this customary exercise of authority.

What was the social standing of clients? They were considered to have been among the better-off among the peasants. They owned land and, as the head of a *cacah*, had *numpang* (co-habitants) and *bujang* (boarders) who were their clients, just as they themselves were the clients of a higher lord (De Haan IV 1912: 413). The servitude was discretionary and varied
according to the claims the lord imposed on his clientele. Just as the head of a *cacah* had to be aware that a co-habitant or boarder might desert him, a higher lord who demanded too much ran the risk that his clients might transfer their loyalties to a rival. A Sundanese saying expressed this perfectly: ‘Turn your face, change your lord’ (Moestapa 1946: 210, note 6). Such switches of allegiance sometimes entailed moving to another locality, but not necessarily (De Haan I 1910: 361). Peasant and lord were separate social positions, but they depended on each other. There was no lack of lords at the tail end of the peasant order, not only because the gentry owned a large share of the agricultural holdings, which were cultivated by sharecroppers, but also because the head of a *cacah*, albeit a peasant in his own right, was himself a *juragan* to whom dependants were bonded. Society in the Priangan was therefore not divided into two segments, but a multiplicity of interdependent strata based on patronage, in which patrons had dependants while they themselves could be clients of higher lords. It was a society characterized by vertical ties, in both directions. The top and the base of the pyramid were linked through a chain of mediation. This rectifies the view that only regents practised clientelism. As De Haan correctly observes, the large majority of the *rahayat* did not serve regents, but belonged to the retinue of lower-ranking chiefs. Van Rees came to the same conclusion in his report while, remarkably, Pieter Engelhard took this view as early as 1804 (De Haan IV 1912: 411). Lords tended to use discretionary latitude in their treatment of their clients, taking account of their circumstances. If a peasant was unable to pay his full tribute because of a failed harvest or some other temporary setback, his patron would settle for a smaller share than he was entitled to. He might also demand smaller shares from new clients to keep them content. The threat of desertion or defection to another lord may also have tempered the severity of the terms of servitude. The relationship was fluid and negotiable, varied according to the situation in which both parties found themselves and with its closeness and duration. A good lord knew how to tie new clients in servitude and to keep them that way, while a good client would subordinate himself, but with reservations and always one eye open for more attractive options.

**Peasants and their lords in the early-colonial era**

Servitude is primarily seen as a form of subordination, with the emphasis on the burdens that it brought for the clients. But, as mentioned above, they consented to their dependency in the expectation that the patron would be