Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market

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of administrative will and carelessness had prevented a rapid expansion of coffee cultivation outside the Priangan Regencies. According to them, it would not have succeeded there without resorting to naked coercion. In 1810, Lawick once again made it clear that none of those involved in coffee cultivation, from the regent down to the most lowly cultivator, would have chosen to do freely what had been imposed on them as an obligation. This piece of information was not new; in his last annual report as Commissioner in 1800, Nicolaus Engelhard had stated that ‘the Javanese, with very few exceptions, plant coffee unwillingly and have to be driven to work at it with the use of violence’ (De Haan III, 1912: 628). Daendels did not appreciate or accept these assessments from his subordinates. He claimed that the Javanese peasants had never owned the land they tilled and had always had to pay tribute to their chiefs. In his view, the system of coffee cultivation was simply a continuation of a form of tribute through labour that the peasants had traditionally paid to their monarch, who was also the owner of the land (Daendels 1814: 104). Lawick was one of those who did not shy away from disagreeing with Daendels. In a memorandum he reported that the paddy fields in his jurisdiction, the Cirebon Priangan lands, were privately owned. Daendels put forward other arguments to justify his policy. The Governor-General admitted that the lot of the common man was pitiful and needed to be improved but blamed this on the extortion of the indigenous chiefs, having nothing to do with the system of forced cultivation and delivery. He alleged that it was little effort for the Priangan peasants to do what was required of them. Moreover, their anything but heavy burden was richly rewarded with a wage equal to eight stuivers a day. Daendels made no secret of the fact that, since he had appeared on the colonial scene, the poverty-stricken lives of the local people had much improved. This was a conceit that not only later critics, but also many of his contemporaries, were not inclined to accept. There was no basis for Daendels’ statement that, under his regime, the coffee growers were paid the official rate, which was, moreover, fixed at an extremely low level. The man who actually created the Priangan system undeniably succeeded in increasing coffee production but, as before, coercion was the lever used to achieve it.

**Strengthening the government apparatus**

When he left the Netherlands, Daendels was given strict orders not to introduce any reforms. That would have to wait until peace had returned to the European continent now in a state of turmoil. The new
Governor-General adhered to his mandate to mind the colonial shop until better times arrived and not to make any radical changes. His tenure was characterized by tightening up the regime as it existed. Nevertheless, the avalanche of instructions he issued did lay out the contours of a new system that brought to an end a long period of makeshift arrangements, indecisive muddling through and a general lack of direction. The process of standardization entailed restructuring the Priangan Regencies. Although he further bifurcated the ties between the lands around Batavia and the highlands, Daendels chose to retain those between the highlands and the coastal plain more to the east. This administrative division in turn came to an end with the abolition of the sultanate of Cirebon, the demotion of the royal family in rank, and the reduction of this old principality in size to little more than the coastal belt. The border changes were not restricted to the re-demarcation of regencies but, strikingly, also extended to designating districts as well-bound territorial units. The introduction of new powers for the police and the judiciary resulted in both a widening and deepening of the power of the colonial state. These changes signified the end of the much less structured and more fluid rule practised under the old regime. After the reorganization, each regency formed a geographical entity and the enclaves of the native chiefs in each other’s domains disappeared. But this process of administrative streamlining went even further and led to the random abolition and merging of old administrative landscapes – not once, but repeatedly (De Haan IV 1912: 870). The nonchalance with which this policy was put into practice was accompanied by a government apparatus that remained at a distance and operated through the mediation of the native aristocracy. The Governor-General’s order to produce maps, keep statistical records and gather information on the economy was intended to furnish the government with more and better knowledge of the land it was governing. The colonial hierarchy was reformed by defining administrative competences and by better coordinating the tasks of European officials, placing them within a streamlined top-down structure. The instruction to submit accurate reports on the implementation of assignments served to build up an institutional memory that would improve the quality of governance and policy. When Daendels asked in 1809 about the size of each Priangan regency and district, he was told that this was impossible to determine because there were no accurate maps of these lands. A year later, his staff informed him that the population of these areas was much larger than the regents, fearing an increase in taxation, were accustomed to claiming. The need for more knowledge about the land and
its people grew as the government’s involvement in indigenous society deepened. Gathering this information was not only an end in itself, a condition for more effective government, but was primarily inspired by the desire to increase colonial profits. The embedding of the early-colonial state apparatus in indigenous society left much to be desired. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, for example, an order came from the headquarters in Amsterdam to increase coffee production to 100,000 *pikul*, but the preconditions for achieving this were not in place. There was no capacity to store experience that had been gained or to make use of what had happened or been decided before. A good example is how the coffee manual designed by Rolff was simply lost in the badly kept records. When Pieter Engelhard tried to find the document in 1806, he did not come across a single copy in the archives. The revised version he drafted did not last long either as, in 1808, Lawick felt compelled to issue an instruction that was a compilation of the two previous documents. Nor was this the last time; in 1819, after searching in vain for the manual on coffee cultivation, the Inspector of Finances again had to draw up a new set of guidelines, which in their turn soon disappeared from sight (De Haan II, 1911: 633-5).

The reinforcement of the government apparatus was accompanied by a new system of appointing, promoting and paying European staff. The introduction of fixed salaries was intended to impose restrictions on all kinds of fringe benefits, such as gifts in exchange for favours. The hierarchy of official ranks meant that the system lost the mercantile character that harked back to the VOC period and increasingly took on the characteristics of a proper government bureaucracy. The administrative reforms were of course not unrelated to the advent of the Napoleonic state in Europe. Much more radical than the change in the position of this rather thin upper crust of expatriate administrators was the incorporation of the regents in the colonial bureaucracy. From now on, these indigenous chiefs would enter the service of the Dutch state when they were appointed and were no longer their own bosses but subordinate to the prefect. The latter would nominate them – and the *patih* who acted as their substitutes – for appointment or dismissal to the Governor-General. The prefect himself would decide on the continued services or not of lower chiefs. This new step towards establishing a hierarchy of authority restricted the free room for manoeuvre that the Javanese nobility had enjoyed and should be seen in the light of persistent complaints in the preceding years about the large numbers of lower chiefs, the retinue of hangers-on with which the regents surrounded themselves. As before, the
indigenous authorities were obliged to collect taxes from the peasants in the form of products and labour services. For this mediation, they did not receive a fixed salary, like their European counterparts, but a modest share of the tribute. By strictly regulating the distribution of the costs of mediation, Daendels endeavoured to bring to an end the discretionary powers of the aristocracy to redistribute part of the emoluments among their subordinates as they saw fit. A provision from 1808 prescribed that, for every rijksdaalder that the regent was paid for a pikul of coffee, twelve stuivers were to be paid to the lower chiefs. These chiefs and the remuneration they were entitled to were specified in minute detail (De Klein 1931: 50). It was a cash reward for their involvement in the cultivation of coffee and possibly other export crops. The regents and, through them, the lower chiefs received even more in kind, in the form of a share of the paddy harvest. These indigenous officials were treated as subordinates, as nothing more than the executors of the orders issued to them by their white bosses. The loss of the less constricted power they had enjoyed until then also led to the disappearance of the respect they were entitled to in the past. Daendels himself set the tone for this new form of governance. The harsh and crass way he treated even the most high-ranking chiefs meant that his name became a legend in the Priangan lands (De Haan I, 1910: 469). The undisguised contempt with which the colonial officials treated the indigenous aristocracy was bolstered by their suspicion that this intermediate administrative layer was guilty of extorting their people. At the same time, Daendels was fully aware that, without the voluntary cooperation of the regents, his attempt to increase colonial revenues was doomed to failure.

Perhaps it was with this in mind that Daendels decided to increase the share of the paddy harvest that the peasants had to relinquish to the regent and his entourage. The cuke was traditionally no more than a twentieth part of the harvest. At the end of a tour of the Priangan region in 1809, which took him from Batavia via Cianjur, Bandung and Sumedang to Cirebon, Daendels offered to double the share of the harvest destined for the chiefs. On top of this came the zakat, the share that went to the clergy, which was also set at a tenth part. This brought the total share that the peasants had to surrender to no less than a fifth, much more than what they previously had to give up. Unfamiliarity with or confusion about prevailing customs most probably had little to do with the granting of this generous remuneration to the landed gentry, at the expense of the peasant population. After all, the tenth part of the harvest that the chiefs were formerly entitled to explicitly included the share of
the clergy. An important consideration for Daendels in attributing the
regents a higher share in the paddy production was the state of debt in
which they continued to find themselves, also after the bankruptcy of the
VOC. Their continued cooperation in the cultivation of crops for export
could only be assured by rewarding them more generously and in a way
that did not cost the colonial state a cent. There was no money to give
the native chiefs a fixed salary and the discovery that they had to incur
a wide variety of previously unknown costs for the coffee cultivation
contributed to this material generosity towards them. Daendels did not
consider it a problem that the peasant population had to bear the costs of
this greater generosity by surrendering a much higher share of their food
production than before. Increasing the local chiefs’ share of the peasants’
food production gave new impetus to the restructuring of society along
hierarchical lines under early-colonial rule in the early nineteenth century.
In sparsely populated regions, however, where much of the land had not
yet been cultivated, the gentry was more reserved in collecting the share
of the harvest to which they were entitled. High-ranking officials were
sensitive to this accommodating attitude and proved equally willing to
be flexible in imposing obligations on the chiefs. This changed, however,
once the colonial bureaucracy began to acquire a better understanding
of peasant society on the ground. The landed gentry proved to have a lot
more people at their disposal than had previously been assumed, meaning
that a large part of the potential surplus labour remained underutilized.
In this light, it is not surprising that, parallel to the restructuring of social
relations along strict hierarchical lines, there was also progressive trend
towards structuring the administration on a territorial basis.

Knowledge of the landscape in which the colonial government operated
was still superficial and the chiefs were instructed to meet the urgent need
for more information (Daendels, 20 September 1808, Bijlagen Organique
Stukken 1814). The administrative instruction introduced by the Governor-
General signified a break with the inadequate, incomplete and slapdash
way in which acquired knowledge had previously been handled. On the
other hand, however, his reform can be seen as a logical continuation and
streamlining of the policy that the VOC had initiated much earlier. Atten-
tion to indigenous social life, if it existed at all, was also based solely on
utilitarian considerations. To solve the scarcity of labour, Daendels issued
orders to discourage people from roaming from place to place without a
permanent address and to encourage marriage as a way of stimulating the
persistently low population growth. In an instruction issued in 1808, he
imposed this responsibility on the regents.
One of the main concerns of the regents should be to ensure that the common inlander does not remained unmarried and to encourage all marriageable young men and women to enter the state of matrimony, so as to prevent aimless drifting around and many other undesirable tendencies, and to ensure that the population grows in a regulated manner. (Van Deventer I, 1865: 32 footnote)

A final new development was recognition of the role of the clergy in imposing agrarian discipline on the population. The village priests supervised the preparation of the fields for cultivation and told the peasants when they should perform the various operations and kept a calendar of rotation for this purpose. In addition to their religious duties, such as leading prayers, reading from the Koran, attending family celebrations and sacrificial feasts, and performing rituals on holy days, they kept records of births, marriages and deaths in the peasant communities to which they were attached. Besides collecting the religious taxes, the clergy also helped to collect the *cuke*, the share of the harvest destined for the chiefs. This task was a form of recognition of their involvement in civil governance. Cianjur in particular was a bulwark of piety, and the ruling nobility made a significant contribution to this reputation. In the early-colonial period, the Priangan experienced a process of Islamization, which received remarkably little attention in the annals of the VOC. It was no coincidence that the new religion spread particularly quickly in the region that owed allegiance to Cirebon. In 1778, the regents of Cianjur and Bogor submitted a request for permission to each send a priest to Mecca and in 1802 five *radêns* from Cianjur likewise expressed the same wish. Completing this pilgrimage was incidentally not recommended for those wishing to be eligible as regents. Fear of unrest provoked Daendels in 1810 to order that Mohammedan priests were permitted to travel only if equipped with a pass and, a year later, the English authorities distributed a circular warning that the Saids ‘or native priests’ were firebrands (De Haan IV, 1912: 747). The large groups of village priests, especially those in Cianjur, were referred to as ‘parasitic plants’ and the Governor ordered in 1809 that the excessive numbers of priests in Sukapura should be reduced and their exemption from coffee cultivation rescinded.

**Social restructuring**

Western authority gradually moved closer to the workfloor of the colonial enterprise, or at least attempted to do so. One indication of this