Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market

Breman, Jan

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proportion with the effort involved. The producers of this commodity, which generated such high profits for the colonial rulers, were accorded absolutely no economic value. Van Gorkom concluded his calculations with an indignant exclamation.

And yet the expansion continues, and yet the population is driven further and further every year to increase the statistical tallies! ... The cancer has to be sought in the system. This system is preposterous. (1866: 400)

Non-compliance

The claim on labour rose to unprecedented heights in the mid-nineteenth century. The question is, however, whether the colonial authorities in the Priangan also succeeded in their objective of distributing the obligation to work equally across the whole population. Only those incapable of working – the disabled, the elderly and very young children – continued to be exempt. Chiefs, the clergy and others of high status, such as those held in esteem for their pious behaviour, were also not called upon to supply their labour. Furthermore, not all those registered as obliged to work actually turned up in person. Sending a substitute was permitted and occurred on a wide scale, paid or not. But did this also apply in the Priangan Regencies, where the somahan ruling of 1839 had explicitly put a stop to the composite peasant household, which also contained sharecroppers and farm servants? Resident Van der Wijck suggested that imposing the obligation of servitude on all households meant that the cacah heads would lose their control over the land-poor segment of the population, which would irrevocably led to redistribution of landownership (Van Rees 1867: 510-1). In an essay published much later, De Roo de la Faille agreed with the Resident, concluding that there had been a process of levelling off between landowning and landless households. In his view, this process of homogenizing the peasantry of the Priangan had been set in motion as early as 1789, in Rolff’s instruction, and consolidated half a century later in the household regulation. The process had broken the link between the bumi-juragan and his numpang dependants. It became impossible for the former to retain more farmland than he could tend to with his own immediate family and bujang, and he had to release the other household heads dependent on him. (See De Roo de la Faille 1941: 423-4.)
The results of a number of local surveys conducted by colonial officials in the 1850s contradicted this conclusion. Shortly after being appointed Assistant Resident in Sumedang, Kinder de Camarecq published a report containing detailed information on Sembir, a kampung not far from the main negorij. He had conducted a survey in 1856 by meeting villagers, without involving the regent. They told him that all forms of servitude were vested in land and were therefore concentrated in the cacah. The introduction of the somahan household system may have meant that the numpang were now also obliged to provide services, with the intention of distributing the cultivation obligations more equally, but this change had not had the desired effect. The replacement of the cacah by the somahan system, Kinder de Camarecq concluded, had not resulted in a radical restructuring of the peasant order in Sembir. Although the 44 numpang were now directly involved in growing coffee, they were still subordinate to the 17 landowners as sharecroppers. Study of the division of labour in the coffee gardens also showed that the cacah heads were taxed a little more heavily than the numpang and that three of the former were employed as a gang boss (patinggi), a coffee mandur (in the gardens) and a coffee supervisor (in the district). The bujang — young, unmarried, farm servants living in the cacah household — were also still exempt from all compulsory labour. They only worked on the orders of their master, as had always been the case. The last category to be exempt from corvee services (but not from growing coffee) were peasants who tended the apanage fields held by the chiefs and who were panukang, working directly under the orders of their masters (juragan) (Kinder de Camarecq 1861: 275).

Dating from around the same time is a description by Van Marle of a kaluruhan in the regency of Cianjur. Appointed as a controleur at the Land-Rent Income and Cultivation Office, he had taken the trouble to carry out a survey in 1852 on social life in a village community. He started by making it clear that desa life in the Sunda lands was different to that elsewhere on Java. A kaluruhan consisted of several kampungs or lembur, often surrounded by one or more hamlets (babakan). The obligation to provide services rested on the inhabitants, who were registered either as bumi (or cacah baku) or as numpang. Originally, only the landowners (bumi or cacah baku) were obliged to perform services, but when most of the sawah land fell into the hands of chiefs and the next of kin of the regent, there was a shortage of compulsory labour. This led to the obligation to be expanded to include the numpang, whose labour had formerly only been requisitioned on an occasional basis and who assisted the landowners if there was too much work. The bujang also did not perform forced labour unless ordered to do so by their master
or juragan. Lastly, the chiefs’ paddy fields were tended by panukang, who were also exempt from compulsory labour. All these regulations applied, however, to corvee services but not to growing coffee. Everyone took part in picking the berries in the gardens, including women and children. The regent of Cianjur, who the controleur asked to verify the information he had received, told him that all those with property and no rights of exemption were obliged to provide corvee services. He specified property as: a wife, children, subordinates, sawah, buffalo, pedati and kampung. The more of these prerequisites, known as rukun, a man possessed, the more corvee services he had to provide. Anyone who possessed all these rukun was known as gemblang (fat) and his duty to provide services was the greatest. However, all those who exercised authority in some way or another were exempt from corvee services, together with women, the disabled, children under the age of fourteen and all those without property (orang miskin). A final category was those exempt because the chiefs required their labour services. These included the orang pawong, who worked in their lords’ houses or stables, and the rahayat, who were part of his entourage. The latter had no fixed tasks, doing whatever the lord required of them. The exemption from the corvee services for all these people did not apply, however, to coffee cultivation or road repair work. They would perform this labour in turn. Van Marle noted that this regulation was not applied strictly. In the case of urgent work requiring a large number of hands, everyone capable had to help, including the elderly and young children. Van Marle’s classification suggests that the situation he found was similar to that described by Kinder de Camarecq in Sembir. Van Marle, however, also provided figures to support his argument. The first kaluruhan he surveyed had 639 inhabitants divided among 117 households. Fifty-two of the households were exempt from corvee services, 24 because their heads were chiefs and 28 because they were elderly, disabled, orang pawong or rahayat. Of the remaining 65 households, 50 were obliged to work in the coffee cultivation system, and the other 15 performed other services: six maintained the regent’s house, two worked at the brickworks, two manned the guards’ lodges, two were responsible for the security of bridges, and one guarded the pasangrahan. A second kaluruhan had 1,327 inhabitants, with 216 households. Of these, 103 were exempt from corvee services (as chiefs, disabled, orang pawong and rahayat) and 113 had to provide services, 84 cultivating coffee and the rest performing a wide range of activities.

These sources describing the base of economic activity produce the following picture: firstly, the greater the capacity of the household, the greater was the burden of labour imposed upon it; secondly, only those
registered as obliged to provide labour services took part in the work in the coffee gardens; thirdly, the demand for labour was flexible, in the sense that if there was little work, many were not called up, while in busy periods practically everyone had to be available. Kikir, filing or scraping, was the name given to the campaigns introduced by directors and managers to mobilize labour. Even women, ‘with their sarung tied up between their legs’, were then forced to go to the gardens and help pick the berries. Only the eldest and the youngest remained behind in the villages. Exemption was a privilege extended to all who were acknowledged as chiefs or persons of local renown and it is clear from both sources that this was a considerable number of individuals. Lastly, the strong increase in the colonial tribute resulting from the expansion of coffee production under the cultivation system did not stop the landed gentry of the Priangan from successfully preventing the entire labour power of the peasants from being requisitioned. They continued to insist on servitude by their subordinates, and refused to account for this to the colonial authorities. They could not, however, prevent peasant labour being used for corvee and cultivation services on a colossal scale. In 1867, the Resident of the Priangan Regencies informed the regents and district and local chiefs that each individual eligible for corvee services could be required to perform these services at least 52 working days a year (one day a week) and that this burden should be shared as equally as possible (Colonial Report 1869-70: 309). How heavy was the burden of labour in the coffee gardens? According to a report by Van den Bosch, a total of 471,949 individuals from 14,119 households were involved in producing coffee in 1830 while 30 years later, when the population had risen to 829,525, of the total of 108,816 agrarian households, 89,900 were engaged in coffee cultivation (Enklaar 1871: 133). While the population count submitted by the native chiefs had less than doubled in this period, the number of people active in the forced cultivation of coffee had increased more than sixfold. The increase in volume of this most profitable of colonial goods was by no means proportionate to this mass mobilization of labour. Equally disturbing was the fact that more than half of these agrarian families did not own paddy fields. This percentage of landless was higher than elsewhere on Java and, together with the drastic rise in rice prices after the departure of the English interim government, appeared to suggest that too little attention was being devoted to growing food (ibid.: 134-5). In 1818, Van den Bosch had warned against excessive expansion of coffee production because it would have an adverse effect on the cultivation of paddy. It was a crisis in more than one sense, that could no longer be denied and required resolute action. But what was the remedy?
Table 6.5 Coffee production in the Priangan Regencies, 1801-70

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pikul</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pikul</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pikul</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pikul</th>
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<td>21,348</td>
<td>1821</td>
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<td>43,866</td>
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<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>56,053</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>42,710</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>54,094</td>
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<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>53,046</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>60,186</td>
<td>1825</td>
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<td>1816</td>
<td>62,563</td>
<td>1826</td>
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<td>1827</td>
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<td>1829</td>
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<td>99,428</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>46,534</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>52,735</td>
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<td>1831</td>
<td>39,230</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>168,130</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>217,363</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>116,900</td>
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<td>53,236</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>250,598</td>
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<td>65,103</td>
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<td>1844</td>
<td>152,123</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>243,554</td>
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<td>1845</td>
<td>57,150</td>
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<td>152,274</td>
<td>1846</td>
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<td>116,300</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>126,707</td>
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<td>130,300</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>136,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>96,100</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>92,136</td>
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<td>156,200</td>
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<tr>
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<td>234,014</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>39,647</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>101,500</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>136,812</td>
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<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>109,644</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>103,132</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>162,000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>28,041</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>39,403</td>
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Source: 1800-10: De Haan I, 1910: 920-4
1810-30: Nota omtrent de Javahe koffie, speciaal die uit de vroeger onder dier naam bekende Jacatrasche en Priangan landen, December 1833. Van den Bosch Collection, 438.
NB. Between 1808 and 1821, the figures sometimes include coffee supplied by private estates in Krawang and Bogor.
1855-70: Colonial Report 1871-80
NB. The archive sources disagree on the scale of production (reporting higher or lower figures for some years). These differences do not, however, affect the general trend: strong fluctuations from year to year and, until shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, a rising trend, followed by a fall which continued after 1870.
Table 6.6  Reported population growth in the Priangan Regencies, 1808-71

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>146,700</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>701,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>188,000</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>707,890</td>
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<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>191,000</td>
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<td>713,121</td>
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<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>198,057</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>727,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>207,275</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>806,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
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<td>1860</td>
<td>829,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>471,949</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>882,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>554,771</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>998,777</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. These figures come from residency annual reports and other sources based on numbers submitted by native chiefs.