

Ann Kumar, 'Citizenship' and Java.

1.The Javanese states

Before addressing the question of 'citizenship', it would perhaps be helpful to get some idea of the nature of the Javanese state, on the assumption that different types of state with different histories may produce somewhat varied modes of citizenship.

Java is quite a small place – around 128,000 square kilometres compared to Thailand's c. 513,000. And Ricklefs¹ argues that a single Javanese polity was the dominant ideal. Yet in reality, Java's geography seems to have militated strongly against unification, and whatever the *ideal* commitment to a single kingdom, in fact states were, in a global perspective, relatively small and short-lived. After the first kingdom from which records survive, the west Javan kingdom of Taruma, the dominant kingdom was sometimes in central and sometimes in east Java. It is not clear why these geographical shifts took place, though perhaps Java's mountainous terrain and active volcanoes were contributing factors.

Yet, as Wisseman Christie² points out, this pattern of political fragmentation does not appear to have constituted a bar to the formation of complex societies. Javanese society had rather robust and lasting socialization practices. And somehow Javanese leaders were able to mobilize military forces of sufficient strength to enable them to exercise power overseas, for instance in the region of present-day Cambodia and Vietnam.

¹ M.C. Ricklefs, *Jogjakarta Under Sultan Mangkubumi 1749-1792: A History of the Division of Java* (London Oriental S.) 1974.

² Jan Wisseman Christie, 'State Formation in Early Maritime Southeast Asia: A Consideration of the Theories and the Data', *BKI* 151/2, 1995, pp. 235-288; p. 245.

And finally, the relative lack of continuity of Javanese states did not prevent the development in Java of a long, strong written tradition of political and social thought. This paper focusses on socio-political literature from 18th-19th century Central Java to see if it provides material relevant to the concept of citizenship.

2. Western analyses of the governance of the Javanese state

The Javanese state was a rather puzzling thing, and has sometimes been uncomfortably and distortingly shoe-horned into models developed for different polities. In traditional scholarship there has been a tendency to idealize Western political arrangements, focussing on Athenian democracy and the adoption of citizenship as a key aspect of the French Revolution, rather than on periods when the divine right of kings – a point of contact with Java – played a prominent role. (Somewhat surprisingly, the divine mandate of the king, or queen, is still an integral part of the English coronation ceremony, and well into the 20th century the term ‘British subject’ was much more used than ‘British citizen’.) The reverse face of this idealization of the West has often been the demonization of Asian societies, notably by Karl Wittfogel in his *Oriental Despotism*³. Wittfogel used Marx’s ‘Asiatic Means of Production’ to develop the concept of "hydraulic empire". This was intended to describe societies, mainly in Asia, that relied heavily on the building of large-scale irrigation works, requiring forced labour organized by a centralized administration. This, he argued, made bureaucratic despotism inevitable in Oriental lands, producing a state that would be powerful, stable and wealthy. Such a state would be able to crush civil society and any other force that might have been capable of mobilizing against it. During the 1970s and 1980s a number of scholars, such as Benda and van Naerssen, adopted Wittfogel’s model for Java. Van Setten van der Meer also pays

³ Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism; A Comparative Study of Total Power*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

homage to this interpretation although she cannot help but notice the evidence for the presence of *subak*-type irrigation societies in early Java – which would obviate the need for centralized direction of irrigation⁴. Wisseman Christie has convincingly argued that actually control of trade rather than centralized control of irrigation was the foundation of Javanese states from early times, removing the basis of the argument for ‘Oriental Despotism’. And historical records reveal that in reality rulers were often far less powerful than they pretended to be. We know that aggrieved subjects had the option of flight [until the ‘filling up’ of Java due to population growth in the nineteenth century]. And court records (such as the Mangkunĕgaran diary) reveal that retainers/soldiers often shifted allegiance from one kingdom to another where a better deal was on offer. We also know that there were procedures and protocols for forms of protest such as *pepe* and *nggogol*, not really what one would expect in an Oriental despotism.

Another influential attempt to characterize a group of Southeast Asian states was Geertz’s *negara*⁵. He considered Java and other Southeast Asian states to be structurally similar, judged by their use of the same word, *negara*, for the polity. He projects feature of contemporary Javanese society centuries into the past. Wisseman Christie comments “Although this vision of the traditional *negara* has elements in common with the picture of later Malay states presented by Gullick, and may be accurate to a degree in describing some Balinese polities at the end of their beleaguered careers, there is no reason to believe that it provides more than a distorted and blurred image of a functioning *negara* of earlier periods”⁶. And in the case of Java, the paradigm, there is really no evidence for Geertz’s picture of limp-wristed fin

⁴ Wisseman Christie *State Formation*, p.242.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: the Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton U.P. 1980.

⁶ Wisseman Christie *State Formation*, p.240.

de siecle aestheticism and his claim that, unlike the rest of the world, in Java power served pomp, rather than pomp power. On the contrary, there is ample evidence of the highly militarized character of the Javanese state as recently as the nineteenth century, and the word *bala*, soldier(y) was sometimes used as a synonym for *kawula* or *abdi*, subjects.

3. Translating the concept of ‘citizenship’

‘Citizenship’ is a complex, culturally-bound concept that has evolved in the West over a long period of time. So it is not surprising that there is no single word with the same definition and associations in the Javanese lexicon. Therefore, instead of focussing narrowly on the lexeme ‘citizenship’, I hope I may be permitted to look at the larger semantic field of political norms and rights pertaining to the relationship between ruler and ruled, which, it is hoped, may throw some light on the subject.

We could perhaps agree that the concept of citizenship pertains to three things: a polity, its population, and the relationship between ruling and being ruled.. The explicit or tacit nature of this relationship will be affected by current norms and expectations regarding rights and duties. If ‘citizenship’ in this *sensu largo* was an important or relevant concept to pre-colonial Javanese we would expect to find some mention of it (or of some semantically close term) in the language and literature. We need to ask what *concepts* those performing *pepe* may have thought justified their actions. I hope that the following material, giving voice to two historical figures whose careers focussed on political relationships and ideology, may prove illuminating.

4. Divine kingship

Java does indeed have a tradition that looks like the polar opposite of western ideas about citizenship. In this tradition, kings occupied a higher position than they do in

the Indian caste system (where brahmins outrank ksatriya). The Javanese king was divinely ordained: he had assumed the mantle of Nawang Wulan, the highest legitimising deity, in the enthronement ceremony, and laid claim to being one of her descendants. In addition, in the Javanese version of Hinduism, the king was considered to be an incarnation of a Hindu deity in his life and become one with this deity on his death⁷. The highest form of religious observance was service of the king, leading to the oft-cited *manunggaling gusti lan kawula*, the union of master and servant. In such a unitary state, is there any room for the concept of citizenship? The following sections provide a place for some *Javanese* opinions on socio-political norms.

5. The prince and the moral philosopher: their testimonies

The celebrated political analyst B.R. O'G. Anderson writes: 'The kings of old obviously didn't think much about the opinion of the people, who were mostly illiterate, lived in isolated villages, and died soon after 30. Javanese kings never consciously considered the public interest'. *Inside Indonesia* 54, Apr-Jun 1998, <http://www.insideindonesia.org/a-javanese-king-talks-of-his-end>. This section provides a small selection of the voluminous didactic literature on governance and the rights of the people that Anderson has failed to note.

Dipanagara was a Javanese prince from the principality of Yogyakarta and led the last major Javanese war against the Dutch and their lackeys, the Java War of 1825-30. The moral philosopher, Yasadipura II, is one of the most famed court literati or *pujanggas*, writing in the early nineteenth century. Dipanagara provides a narrative of his life clearly stating his values, beliefs and motivation. Yasadipura wrote the

⁷ See R. Soekmono, *The Javanese Candi: Function and Meaning*, E.J. Brill, Leiden/New York/Köln 1995, p.9.

ultimate Javanese work on governance, the Sasana Sunu, which provides guidance to the *priyayi* (the governing élite) concerning correct and incorrect behaviour in all aspects of their life, from manners and deportment to the exercise of governmental authority.

Both of them reveal quite a lot about the relationship between ruling and being ruled.

*Dipnagara's apologia*⁸

The prince's personal account is both rare and extremely interesting. He makes his claim to rule on the basis of two different things: a divine mandate *and* custodianship of what we might perhaps summarize as the 'rights of the population'. So he reveals a surprising blend of the full-blown ecstatic, visionary warrior and the careful steward of the budget and the limits of tax to be paid by the common people.

The divine mandate is demonstrated in his account of a number of supernatural visitations. There is a visit from the *wali* Sunan Kalijaga (one of the nine *wali*, apostles of Islam in Java) announcing that Dipnagara would be a king. There is also a visit of equal or arguably even greater importance from Ratu Kidul, the Queen of the South Seas, one of the two great indigenous goddesses who legitimise Javanese kings. He also hears a voice saying he would play the chief part in a forthcoming 'disturbance' and returning to the mundane world finds that he has been given the arrow Sarotama, which in Hindu mythology belongs to Arjuna. Finally he meets the Ratu Adil, the 'Just King', who says to Dipnagara that he has to be his soldier, and that his mandate is the Koran. 'Adil' is an Arabic loan word, and it is significant that this *particular* word was not just borrowed into Javanese but spread like wildfire. Dipnagara - who has already said that it is better to be a poor and lowly santri

⁸ Part of Dipnagara's autobiography is translated in Ann Kumar, "Dipnagara (?1787-1855)", *Indonesia* No.13, April 1972, pp.69-118.

[mosque school student] than to be involved in court affairs - protests that he is no warrior. However, the Ratu Adil insists and, surrounded by other supernatural phenomena, Dipanagara agrees to obey his command. So he is representing himself as the chosen one of the Ratu Adil, whose orders he claims he is obeying.

But his supernatural mandate from the Just King and the Queen of the South Seas is only part of Dipanagara's justification for criticizing and eventually rebelling against the government. Consistent with the strong positive value Java's elite culture placed on restraint and even asceticism, he condemns the ruler for eating and drinking and merrymaking in the Dutch fashion. But most strongly of all he is committed to reducing the burdens on the common people, and thus outraged by the appointment of 'Collectors', describing this as a piece of absolute villainy which will certainly harm them. What, he asks, is the salary of the Collectors, and how many of them are there? And what buildings will be provided for their daily meetings? Eventually, he succeeds in persuading the Sultan not to appoint Collectors.

He also says that in the time of his late father he asked that all the *gunung* should be dismissed, on account of the burden they were to the common people⁹. He had proposed to substitute the corvée services and the money from the tolls in all the ports, which he claims should be more than enough to eliminate any shortage of resources. In other passages, he raises objections to the way tolls were levied, which we know from other sources was indeed a major burden and grievance.

Dipanagara claims that he had asked that the government of the villages should return to the arrangements existing in the reign of his great-grandfather. He says that his revered father had agreed to this, stipulating that this be done in one year's time. This

⁹ The *gunung* were police officials with some judiciary powers (for levying fines, etc.): see Kumar, *Dipanagara*, p.81.

was intended to fill the state coffers since the finances were quite depleted. Before a year had passed however, his revered father passed away.

Taken together, these statements and claims made by Dipanegara suggest a 'government based on the wellbeing of the common people' mandate, a social contract that is as important as the blessings of divinities.

Yasadipura II and the art of governance.

Apart from Dipanegara's personal account of the moral duties of rulers, there exists a large corpus of didactic treatises on government. Works in this genre supply the 'performance indicators', deriving from indigenous, Indic, and Islamic sources, by which rulers were judged. The stock phrase used to describe the reign of a good king is *murah sandang lan pangan*, 'clothes and food were cheap'. This is a much more mundane and materialistic evaluation than, say, the Malay emphasis on avoiding shame. Kings were also traditionally grouped into three categories, i.e. *nista*, 'low, despicable' *madya*, 'middling', and *utama*, 'outstanding'. The manuscript NBS 89¹⁰ explains this ranking as follows. The *utama* king is one who dispenses justice and maintains the truth. In contrast, the *nista* king, treats his subjects unjustly, and he will not be able to maintain his position: his realm will fall into the hands of an outstanding king. This implies that a king, even though he claims to be of divine descent, had no guarantee of remaining on the throne unless he treated his subjects justly. At the next governmental level down, the Bupati [regional governors] should similarly care for all their people, know their joys and sorrows, and act so as to be loved by their subordinates.

¹⁰ See further Ann Kumar, *Java and Modern Europe: Ambiguous Encounters*, Curzon 1997, pp. 382-390.

Yasadipura II (d.1844) was the chief court writer of the Surakarta principality, and his *Sasana Sunu* is probably the greatest Modern Javanese work on governance, giving extensive guidance to *priyayi*, members of the royal bureaucracy. It is a very striking contrast to Dipanagara's visionary account of his mandate, as it represents perhaps the supreme codification of the highly buttoned-up, iron discipline of Java's élite. (This self-discipline extends to all areas, including what Englishwomen of earlier times knew as 'deportment' – in the *Sasana Sunu* an extraordinarily detailed array of prescriptions and proscriptions pertaining to sitting, standing, lying down, addressing people of various categories, as well as correct moral and social responses to different contingencies.)

Yasadipura gives clear advice to *priyayi* holding official positions. It says that they should maintain law and order, know the ways of farmers, set up a mosque and see that people attend – because strong *ibadah* will decrease gambling and opium-smoking. They should not take any of the *zakat* and *fitrah* (Islamic taxes intended to assist the poor and needy). They should build a fence around the village, maintain the local *adat* and not set up their own *adat*. They should remember that poverty is the root of crime. (This seems rather similar to Bentham's belief that poverty is caused by a *situation* which is bound to produce it, rather than by individual wickedness, as had hitherto been believed¹¹).

The author gives a fascinating definition of a key legitimizing factor for the ruler and the governing elite: *wahyu*. This highly desirable thing is in contemporary usage usually regarded as a sort of supernatural blessing. But in 19th century Javanese usage it was rather a sort of bank account of virtue that is increased or decreased by good or evil deeds. A particular example of the latter is taking food from the mouths of the

¹¹ Gilbert Geis , 'Pioneers in Criminology VII--Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* Volume 46, Issue 2 Article 1, 1955.

poor, who have so little and whose life is so hard. *Wahyu* is like a clear star; if asked to be party to a dirty deed it becomes disturbed and angry and then flees, because there is no lack of places for it to perch. [This accusation was levelled against Suharto in his last years as President.] It will seek a heart that is pure and wise, fortunate and sage, for there it will be cared for. To keep your *wahyu* is difficult but becomes easier with practice. Good deeds are a part of a shining *wahyu*, the sign of God's love. Priyayi are also advised to associate with those who may not be clever but are charitable to the poor and needy. And they should not have fine houses.

Such discourses on how *wahyu* may be won or lost clearly indicate that aristocratic claims to rule were based on *virtue* and moral conduct, and that if these were lacking a decline in worldly position would inevitably follow.

Javanese religion and ethics were classified by court writers into the 'left-hand' (Indic) and 'right-hand' (Islamic) branches. The *Sasana Sunu* draws on both parts of the Javanese heritage. Some court texts are more exclusively Islamic, like the *Taj us-Salatin*, attributed to Yasadipura 1. This has even more stringent 'performance indicators' than the *Sasana Sunu*. It depicts the king as *servant*, not lord, of his people and expects him to undertake 'menial' tasks such as going out at night in disguise carrying sacks of food for the unfortunate.

In conclusion, it is hard to see how all this emphasis on the absolute necessity for those in the business of government to take care of the *tijang alit*, the 'little people', and the consequences of failing to do so can have failed to affect the expectations of the populace concerning what they had a right to expect. This seems to me to fall under the heading of a *social contract*. But the political framework of that social contract was about to be destroyed.

6. Peasant appropriation of the Ratu Adil

After the defeat of Dipanagara and his supporters in the Java War (1825-30], the Javanese polities lost both lands and independence. The peasantry now became subjects of the colonial government, sometimes through the agency of the Chinese who worked with it. We find in colonial records from the 19th and 20th centuries a significant number of ‘Ratu Adil’ movements’ – which, however, differ strikingly from Dipanegara’s visionary encounter. The major difference is that in these cases ‘Ratu Adil’, far from being a supernatural apparition from the other world, was a *title* claimed by, or bestowed by his followers on, the movement’s leader. In these colonial-period movements we find a combination of prophetic justifications, often from the Jayabaya prophecies concerning Java’s future evolution, and demands for the redress of very specific injustices¹². This surely reveals a striking radicalization and appropriation of insurrectionary action by the peasantry, now that the courts had been reduced to the level of Dutch clients.

There were a number of common features of these charismatic, nativist, Ratu Adil movements: the element of divine revelation, the targeting of *priyayi* who had made common cause with the Dutch, and the proposed expulsion of the latter and of the Chinese¹³. It is difficult to know how to view these continuing local uprisings, ideologically and programmatically fragmented, easily repressed by the colonial government.

On the one hand, they can be called progressive in that they display peasant consciousness of their own interests, and willingness to mobilize in their defence

¹² Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/Oxford University Press, London, New York/Melbourne 1973.

¹³ Sartono, *Protest Movements* e.g. pp.74-5, p. 79, p.103.

without aristocratic leadership. We might think of Karl Marx's own famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, proclaiming that 'insurrection, in its *different* forms, is the active modality of citizenship: the modality that it brings into *action*'. But Marx was of course not talking about *localized peasant* insurrections.

The absence of a proletariat did lead the Indonesian socialist and later communist movements to take on board other classes, especially peasants, and heterodox beliefs. Local leaders and branches produced startlingly royalist and fairy tale versions of their movement¹⁴. The lack of party discipline meant that the disorganized uprising of 1928 was easily repressed by the colonial government and set the party back generations – only to make another botched attempt, widely seen as treason, after the proclamation of independence. So rather Westernized nationalists dominated the independence struggle and the formation of the state. In a way, it was one of the miracles of the twentieth century that not just a pan-Javanese but a pan-Indonesian citizenship was constructed out of such unpromising building blocks.

¹⁴ See Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1965.