

THE JAGO IN THE SHADOW:
CRIME AND 'ORDER' IN THE COLONIAL STATE IN JAVA*

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"In Java, the business of a thief is an occupation which is part of the municipal service, which provides many people with a job, some with an investment, and which provides many benefits to its protectors... No desa headman considers his desa complete and in good order if it does not have at least one thief—often several who are under the command of the oldest or cleverest thief, who is called Djago..."¹ With these words a private tobacco planter at Kediri—a district in East Java—informe the colonial government in 1872 of what at first sight seemed to be a local incident but what apparently occurred all over Java.

The correspondent, C.A.A. Amand, sketched a situation in the Javanese countryside where cattle rustling, intimidation, arson, fraud involving land taxes and physical violence occurred daily and where the colonial administration had lost its grip completely. Judging from the astonished or even horrified reactions from the colonial authorities, most European administrators were unaware of these practices.² The resident of the district concerned received an order from the alerted Governor General to investigate the case. The Resident subsequently had to acknowledge that, "the story told by Amand, though sounding very odd and unpleasant to our ears, contains a lot of truth, previously unknown to our officials".³ Obviously, there was, in the shadow of the colonial state of "Order and Peace", yet another world the existence of which was only suspected by the white officials; a world governed by rules other than those from the *Indisch Staatsblad*. The "palladium of peace" as the Javanese village order was once described by J.C. Baud, one of the architects of the colonial establishment, was in reality little more than a society in which the

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1 Letter by Amand dated 17.4.1877 in Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA) The Hague, Ministerie van Koloniën (MvK) Verbaal (V) 3.7.1872, No.30. This material was found by Rob van Lunteren whom I thank for making these facts available.

2 Minister for the Colonies to the Governor General, ARA, MvK, V 3.7.1872, No.30.

3 Resident of Kediri Bosscher to the Governor General 25.3.1874, ARA, MvK. V 1.6.1874, No.36.

right of the strongest was the rule and intimidation and violence were common.

What forms did this type of local violence take in Java, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century? To answer this question one must consider the existence side by side of the colonial state and the local rural order. I will illustrate these matters particularly with the "Kediri case" in mind, paying special attention to the *jago* figure. "Jago" means literally "fighting cock" but when used with reference to persons it may mean "brawler", "daredevil" or other words with similar connotations. In order to understand better the way in which physical violence operated within the political system in Java and what drastic changes occurred as the bureaucratic colonial state gradually took shape, it is appropriate to give first a short description of the pre-colonial political order.

Pre-colonial political order: struggle for people and means

Although in pre-colonial times emphasis was always put on harmony, unity and the divine origin of the power of the ruler, which was supported by grandiose public rituals, the political reality was in sharp contrast with this image: internal divisions, fragmentation of power and insecurity marked the daily routine in the Javanese states. Although regal power was supposed to be a God-given extra-human phenomenon, in reality it was founded on direct control over a large population. In fact every strong person, whether invested with princely dignity or not, was a man of prestige if he was capable of attracting followers, if he had the necessary resources at his disposal and if at the same time he could legitimise his position by ritual.

The "contest state", as this precolonial polity in Southeast Asia has been called, was an early phase of the evolutionary process of a form of government in which the monopoly of power of the sacred ruler was contested by various elites at various levels.⁴ It was a struggle for control over comparatively scarce resources such as manpower, food, access to trade, wealth and protection. Particularly the latter, temporary and relative security, was one of the scarce commodities a powerful man could offer. These elites contested one another's subjects and sources of income, with the result that social bonds between patrons and clients had to be re-established repeatedly.

In this dynamic play of forces the religious rites surrounding the princes and rajas were not illusory adjurations to the chaos but they served also as messages to the wider surrounding areas that this raja

4 Regarding the term "contest-state" see Adas 1981:218.

could do much more than his competitors.⁵ Wars between themselves were mostly waged not in order to waste precious manpower but as a means to impress and to damage the opponent's prestige as efficiently as possible and thus increase the number of one's own followers. Skirmishes, raids, cattle rustling, and the sabotage of neighbouring irrigation works all had the same purpose.

Not only rajas and local potentates were at loggerheads with one another in this state of "hostile co-existence" but also the inhabitants of villages and hamlets disputed one another's land, water and cattle. This resulted in a permanent state of insecurity: highly variable harvests, intimidations and violence affected daily affairs in the villages. The need for protection was great and strong leaders who were able to build up a network of followers had a good chance on the pre-colonial market. They could guarantee a fairly great measure of safety in exchange for work by the population.

The population was however not entirely helpless since it held a relatively strong bargaining position. If a patron or raja did not fulfil his obligations, the chances were great that the customers would seek their safety with someone else, and ultimately there was always the effective weapon of a quiet departure to hopefully safer regions.

In this situation hybrid forms of private and public violence could develop easily. The jago is the best example of this.

Rural leadership

The Indonesian historian Ongkokham has drawn attention to the jago as rural leader in the Javanese political order: the local brazen brawler who also possessed "magic" qualities and who stood in contact with the regional lords. The jago was rarely part of the official government. He had *kekebalan* attributed to him, that is he was invulnerable in a literal sense and at the same time he was thought to possess the power to get things done through people higher up. His actions resembled those of a local "bouncer" who protected his territory against unwanted elements from outside.⁶ He often gained his reputation from the fear he inspired in the local population. Once he had proven his power—and with that his "magical" attributes—people would think twice before getting too much under his feet. For the official regional rulers the jago was the prime instrument to reinforce their grip on their district. Thus, besides the official hierarchy of regional rulers, an indispensable informal circuit operated, in which the jago operated as agent for the higher authorities. Rather than

⁵ For Javanese state ideology, see for example Moertono 1968; concerning the state rituals as "theatre", see Geertz 1980. For a critique on Geertz see Schulte Nordholt 1981.

⁶ See Ongkokham 1976, 1978 & 1979.

being the local "hero" the jago was mainly a key figure in the local interplay of forces. He could prevent a worse fate, but he did nothing to improve the lot of the population (Onghokham 1976:119).

The colonial state and the local order

It was only in the course of the nineteenth century that the role of the jago changed. The introduction of the *Cultuurstelsel* meant in fact the establishment of a monopoly of force by the Dutch that was not seriously threatened from its inception in 1830 until the Japanese occupation ended it in 1942. The Dutch government at the same time introduced an hierarchic, above all bureaucratic, administrative apparatus that was set up from Batavia, but which did not find acceptance everywhere in Javanese society. Thus, throughout the entire nineteenth century the European colonial administration did not reach down further than the regional level. Consequently this resulted in a curious double role for the Javanese elite: the "traditional" popular heads who had been entrusted by the Dutch with the authority over the population transformed themselves into regents or district administrators but in actual practice remained dependent on their white superiors. In other words, "the Javanese war chiefs who lived off tribute from the population became Malay speaking clerks, land inspectors and colonial stewards" (Sutherland 1979:16). A clearer break with the precolonial system can barely be imagined. Instead of the local supporters as the principal power base of the ruler, came the principle of *asal-bapak-senang* ("as long as the boss is satisfied") which henceforth became decisive for success.

Ironically, the colonial ideology presented the regents with the means to perpetuate their "traditional role as chiefs" and to reinforce this status by means of titles and ceremony. With the development of the "theatre state" as a by-product of the colonial order, the "contest state" disappeared and the relationship between the general population and the local "head" changed radically.

The myth of the Javanese village fitted in with this colonial ideology (Onghokham 1975; Breman 1979:187-215). Basically this myth consisted of an image of closed, more or less harmonious communities of farmers and non-agrarian specialists within which internal conflicts were controlled by the village councils. Although the colonial rulers maintained the fiction and for instance did not interfere with the composition of the village council, they forced the local population to hand over taxes and products and to render services. The most appropriate instruments of this policy appeared to be the regents and the village chiefs, who could command an unprecedented power, provided they satisfied the colonial interests. Hence the local population no longer had the influence they once commanded simply by leaving or choosing other patrons. It was the colonial state which

decided what was to happen and which created obstacles so as to put the chiefs under pressure (Adas 1981:240).

In brief, the development of rural society in Java boiled down to a confinement within narrowly defined local communities, a process that can best be described by the term "enclosure". The system of organisation of the colonial administration on a territorial basis in districts and villages was the most prominent example of this but the population had also in a general sense little chance to escape this "enclosure". Thus, collective violent protests against the increasingly heavy tax burden had little chance of success against a modern armed opponent. That, however, even the colonial government was unable to establish its authority at the lowest level can be deduced from the development of new forms of violence that were partially hidden from the sight of the Dutchmen. In this shady area a new role emerged for the jago.

The jago in the shadow of the colonial state

Although there was no longer any official position for the jago in an administration that was organized along European bureaucratic lines, he remained an indispensable factor in the maintenance of local order. The regional and local administration was after all not really capable on its own of fulfilling all the administrative business with which it was charged by the colonial authorities. The traditional networks of patron-client relationships were breached and there was no reasonable alternative (Breman 1979:208-9). Notwithstanding the increased powers of regents and village chiefs, their districts were never fully under their control because of a lack of staff and of a regular police force. The maintenance of peace and order weighed heavily in the conduct record of a Javanese official, and if they could not really control unrest and disorder they had to keep this from the attention of the Europeans, particularly if the means used were illegal (Sutherland 1979:26). The regent, as the officer responsible, was therefore forced to come to an agreement with the jagos operating in his district. The latter, in turn, made grateful use of this since their domain had also been endangered when they were placed outside the (colonial) law. The jago in this way became the eyes and ears of the regent in this district and he would not be afraid to accept the role of the strong arm of the law (Ongkokham 1978:133). Apart from the advantages which his relations with highly placed clients and patrons offered, the jago could also amply exploit the ineffective exercise of government authority at the local level.

Kediri around 1870

C.A.A. Amand, the tobacco planter quoted above, told the story of a horizontal network of jagos. The situation in Kediri from around 1870 can easily be reconstructed from this and other sources. Various sources indicate that a network of jagos was not confined to the Kediri area, but that it was probably spread over the whole of Java. A contemporary, who was well informed of what happened in the Javanese country side, was of the opinion that "the gangs of criminals and robbers are spread over the whole of Java and that they form a single society as it were, whose members are known to each other, at least with regard to their name and domicile..."⁷

Besides the extensive sugar plantations which could be found in Kediri in the nineteenth century, the boom in tobacco merits special mention. In 1853 the first European tobacco planter established himself in this region, and since then the cultivation of tobacco had increased enormously. Within a few years the sub-district of Blitar alone numbered fifteen Europeans. These entrepreneurs bought the tobacco from the population and looked after its treatment in the drying sheds, of which there were about three hundred in Blitar. The tobacco boom not only brought large amounts of money within reach of the local population but also brought workers from Central Java, between twenty and thirty thousand every year, at harvesting time. European reports mention a "greater prosperity" in Kediri which could be deduced from a growth in livestock amongst the population.⁸

The people therefore seemed to fare well under these circumstances. Appearances were shattered however when in the early 'Seventies tobacco sheds repeatedly went up in flames and cattle rustling took on such proportions that even colonial officials could no longer ignore it.⁹

7 P.C.C. Hansen (1867-1930) wrote under the pseudonym Boeka. The citation is from Hansen 1901:332-33. Anyone who is interested in a sober description of the life of ordinary people in the Javanese countryside around 1900 can do worse than look at Hansen's books. Indeed, the Indonesian historian Sartono Kartodirdjo indicated the importance of Hansen's work in 1968.

8 Concerning tobacco in Kediri, see Huyser 1868; Staverman 1868; Huyser 1874; de Mol van Otterloo 1859; ARA, MvK, V 11.9.1873, No.29. The tobacco production in 1874 had a magnitude of 2400 (metric) tons per year and it covered approximately 4900 ha (appr. 12000 acres). Approximately 11000 plants could be grown per ha for which entrepreneurs paid fl 120,- to fl 150.-.

9 See *Koloniale Verslagen* 1870-1874. The burning down of the drying sheds had probably nothing to do with local protests but was the work of the supervisors of the companies. These supervisors committed extensive frauds regularly, resulting in enormous discrepancies between the bookkeeping and

The cause was not so much poverty or colonial economic exploitation, but rather the absence of a stringently enforced colonial administration. This showed how in a rural community under pressure the stronger can turn against the weaker.

How, or for what reason, someone initially became a jago, is not known, nor whether jago qualities were considered hereditary within a family. Nor do we know whether more jagos came from one particular social group than from others. I suspect that individual physical strength, guts and mystical tendencies were the prime factors in becoming a jago.

One became an "acknowledged" jago after having completed an apprenticeship period. This period consisted on the one hand of assisting fully qualified jagos with their thefts and other enterprises, and on the other hand—more importantly—the candidate was apprenticed with a *guru* or *kiai* (teachers) who taught *ngelmu* (secret knowledge). To be apprenticed with masters was anyway common amongst young men and, so far as I know, special jago teachers did not exist. It was also very common at that time for young men to train themselves in fighting methods such as *pencak silat*. One could however acquire special *ngelmu* that a jago needed, for instance when evoking evil spirits in order to plunge inhabitants of a house that one wished to rob into deep sleep, or the *ngelmu* enabling one to disappear suddenly or to become invulnerable. The apprenticeship of a future jago was concluded with a period of asceticism and solitude in the jungle, followed by a *slametan* (a ritual meal). The apprenticeship was not necessarily spent with one teacher, since often young men moved from one teacher to another.

Wandering about in foreign areas formed the next phase. One thus gathered experience and learned to stand on one's own two feet. At the same time contacts were established with jagos from a greater area. These taught their younger brethren further tricks of the trade.

This process reveals the network of jagos and the guild mentality that dominated them. For, when the first careful contacts were established, a mutual bond was sealed with a reciprocal promise or oath. They drank together from a jug of water—sometimes mixed with a few drops of blood—and promised to help one another. The oath could encompass as much as one liked. The sanction consisted of the water drunk turning into a burning poison if one of the sworn men should commit treason. Dependent on the extent of his contacts and alliances under oath and his fame as an experienced and feared jago, such a person could have connections over a large area. From these contacts he could recruit the required helpers for a particular job and if desired, he could engage specialists. Permanent bands of jagos did not exist. They

the contents of the tobacco sheds. They therefore burned down the shed in order to let the evidence of their fraud go up in smoke.

mainly worked individually. Occasionally they worked together on a contract basis. However, a jago had assistants and pupils under him.

This network of mutual contacts worked so well that the government appeared incapable of penetrating it in Kediri. The jago world was a closed world; one avoided getting under someone else's feet, outwardly one closed ranks (Poensen 1878:99-146, 127-28). Thus Amand concluded that the network of jagos cast its shadow over the whole of Java. Breaking into houses at night (through digging a hole under the wall) and particularly cattle rustling formed an important source of income for the jago. People often kept their cattle on the grounds surrounding the house, but jagos appeared to be very skilful in misappropriating goods and cattle—practically without a sound. The sleep *ngelmu* was obviously effective. In many cases the victim would wisely keep quiet for fear of reprisals and for fear of the jago's power. The jagos sometimes acted so brazenly that they stole cattle in broad daylight. Besides these forms of theft, opium smuggling and the retail of this "comfort" proved a lucrative area in which jagos often were involved.¹⁰

For those who still hoped to recognize in the jago a kind of Javanese Robin Hood, it may be disconcerting to hear that the small farmer was the main target of the jago.¹¹ The great advantage of cattle theft was that the loot could walk by itself and that it brought in a lot of money when sold elsewhere. Furthermore, the victim of the robbery would do a lot to get his animals back. His cattle were after all crucial for the cultivation of his sawah and without cattle there was little to plough and in the end little to eat.

It was striking that during the months of October to December in particular the number of cattle thefts increased dramatically. The explanation for this must be sought in the relationship between the jago and the village chief. As mentioned before, in the nineteenth century the position of the village chief was one-sidedly strengthened. At the same time the regional government was so depleted that it was unable even to keep up the appearance of police duties.¹² On the one hand, one tried therefore to keep criminality outside the field of view of the European colonials; on the other, the practical concern for "peace and

¹⁰ For a marvellous analysis of the opium trade and opium smuggling, see Rush 1977.

¹¹ It was Eric Hobsbawm who introduced "the noble bandit" to the scientific literature (1959, 1972). I have not been able to find similarities on a single point between his bandits and the Javanese jagos, except that both jagos and bandits had connections with wider trade networks (1972:86).

¹² Kediri with, at a guess, 560,000 inhabitants (1870) was divided into five regencies and thirty districts. The administration disposed over only 170 Javanese personnel. Of these, half consisted of so-called *oppassers* (messengers and policemen).

order" rested upon the shoulders of the village chiefs. The latter solved this problem by coming to an agreement with the jago.

This relationship between village chief and jago was of mutual advantage and it resulted in a *modus vivendi* that gave both partners the necessary elbow room, whilst the costs were shifted to the shoulders of weaker villagers. As Amand stated: "The more thieves live in a desa, the greater the advantage to the *kepala* (head)". Hence jagos lived in virtually every desa in Kediri "as ordinary desa people, unrecognizable amongst the population but very much feared and respected".¹³

Strangers would not have been able to point out the jago, but everyone in the village knew who he was. He was not necessarily born or brought up in that village but he could "settle" there. This settlement became definite once the jago concluded an arrangement with the village chief. The jago promised never to undertake any actions against the village and to protect the area to the best of his abilities against theft and violence. He could do this through his contacts with his oath brethren whom he could prevail upon to stay away from his village. Those with whom he was not connected through an oath could however freely try to take their chances. In exchange for his services the jago received exemption from land tax and a minimal part of the compulsory work for the government from the village chief: he became "exempt". The jago could therefore, in that sense, become a local hero because he usually left his own people in peace. When he travelled he would steal from villages whose jago he didn't know or that did not have a jago. This latter class of villages with "incorruptible" village chiefs quickly became the target of attacks from all directions. They were after all "unprotected". Hence, in a short time a network of jagos arose, since every village needed one in their midst. Amand writes: "I have been assured that there is no desa where this situation doesn't apply".

The relationship between jago and village head was subtle. The village head also profitted from the relation. He could for instance insist on a share of the stolen goods which the jago wanted to sell in the village, for instance one hindleg for each stolen cow that was slaughtered. If, however, someone in the village was robbed and the jago had not been able—or willing—to prevent the theft, then the jago was asked to ensure—for a hefty fee—that the cattle were returned. The jago received from the victim money and opium for his trip and he visited the opium dens in the neighbourhood, put his ear to the ground and, when convenient, established at the same time new contacts. In most cases he returned without success. The cattle had long since disappeared or the jago did not want to have an argument with a

¹³ Amand Report 17.4.1872.

colleague. Sometimes the jago managed to find the culprit and he mediated then between thief and victim over the payment of a ransom from which he himself received a commission. With an important theft the investigation was officially done by the proper authorities but this had mostly the character of a compulsory bureaucratic ritual than of an effective action. The village head in such a case reported the theft to the head of the district who then sent the village head out "to investigate". The latter would receive a letter which he had to show in the offices of the neighbouring districts for endorsement. Eventually the village head would return with the signed letter but otherwise empty handed and the district head could submit to his superiors the proof that he had done everything in his power to apprehend the culprits. In this way he did not jeopardize his own record!¹⁴

The jago could be of service to the village head in one important aspect, and this was related to the increase in cattle rustling towards the end of the year. Land tax was collected from the district once a year during the month of December. The village heads had already collected this tax much earlier; hence they had ready cash to pay off debts, to gamble, to speculate, etc. Although as a rule the village head collected twenty to thirty percent more than was legally determined (this could run up to one hundred percent) and this extra amount disappeared into the pockets of the village head and his family, towards the end of the year there often appeared to be shortfalls. These had to be made up quickly because if shortfalls were discovered, great problems could arise with the district authorities and the European officials. At this point the jago became useful. He made good the shortfall by stealing cattle. The jago profited from this as well because the booty was divided on a fifty-fifty basis between the village head and himself.

The greatest and possibly the most important *quid pro quo* which the jago exacted from the village head in exchange for his presence in the village was that he would be protected in every way if the colonial government should begin an investigation. Nobody was allowed to betray the jago. How this worked in practice is shown by the following story.

The colonial government suspected that stolen goods were present in a certain village. The Assistant Resident and the district head together with some of their men came to start an investigation in that village. When the village head saw the gentlemen coming, he ordered—as was proper—the *kentong* (a hollow wooden block) to be beaten in order to call his fellow villagers together. "The police and

¹⁴ Poensen 1878:111. See also *Onderzoek* 1912:121 where it is stated that the district head is only concerned with drawing up a report of the offence, then packs his bags and leaves the village head with the job.

their assistants heard nothing special in the sounds of the beats. Every desa inhabitant concerned would hear from certain agreed peculiarities that an investigation was to take place."¹⁵

There were even special signals to indicate the type of goods that were to be investigated. It was one great conspiracy against the authorities. But at the same time it was also a conspiracy against the population itself. If a jago was denounced to the authorities and was subsequently arrested, the chances were that the home of the "traitor" was burnt down and all his goods were stolen. "One knows that the punishment is meted out, but nothing will be done," writes Amand; "nobody would, out of a sense of duty, dare to bring an action against them. One knows that the brothers of a caught villain would take revenge".

A government study of the composition of village councils in Java in those years showed that in a number of cases jagos managed to become village heads. Older families of village heads were put aside and a new generation of jagos took control.¹⁶

The local population appeared unable to defend itself against this organized force—one could at most buy it off. Complaints to the district authorities and the Regent (if one dared to do so) usually didn't help much. These authorities even discouraged the complainants from taking further steps since it was in their interest that these cases should get as little official publicity as possible. They didn't want to disturb the shaky balance that mostly existed between themselves and the jagos and village heads. Considering the understaffing of the regional police force "they finally concluded that the Government obviously wanted everyone to help himself".¹⁷ Amand and the newly appointed resident of Kediri, Bosscher, mention a number of cases where the houses of village heads went up in flames. They had unilaterally broken off their relations with the jagos and were therefore punished. It could even happen that cattle were stolen in broad daylight and that the jago called out to the bystanders that this was an *ular api* (fire snake). It was a warning not to say anything if one wished to be free from arson. Should a jago be arrested and brought before a magistrate, it would prove very difficult to find people prepared to bear witness against him. Only after assurances that the accused would not be free for some time and only if his friends were not considered dangerous was this sometimes possible. As a rule the official administration of justice was mislead by false testimonies from people who, at the behest of the village head, exonerated the arrested jago

15 Letter from Amand 1.12.1872.

16 "Historische Nota" 1877.

17 Letter from Amand 1.12.1872.

and, if need be, accused completely innocent villagers of being the culprits.¹⁸

An additional handicap lay in the fact that the regional administration of justice was often dominated by the Regent. It was also in his interest to acquit some accused for "lack of evidence". The jago was after all still useful as a *weri* (spy) and accomplice of the Regent. In this way, by means of a well balanced system of coalitions, intimidations and violence, the jago succeeded in remaining outside the reach of the European administration and creating his own power base in the shade of the colonial state. Hansen concluded: "To be able to sleep quietly, that was the great advantage of being poor: one need not fear thieves".¹⁹

The trade in stolen cattle entailed also a whole separate network of contacts. In this regard the relationship between jago and trader [popularly known as *toko* (shop)] was important. Stolen cattle that were slaughtered and sold in the immediate neighbourhood did not fetch much since the market was limited. It was more advantageous to take the stolen animals to a neighbouring district to sell them there for a good price and without danger of recognition.

The transport went via intermediate stations in remote places—often still uncleared country where one slept during the day—in order to continue the journey during the night. The final destination was the *tokos*, the buyers who also provided cash advances to the jagos and who often had one or more jagos in their permanent service. Here there was also some indication of a link between opium traffic and the traffic in stolen goods.²⁰

The *tokos* often lived on the borders of districts. The jagos delivered their stolen cattle there, whereupon the *toko* crossed the border with forged papers on his way to a cattle market. The forged papers were obtained illegally from *magang* (apprentice public servants) at the district office, who could in this way earn a little bit extra.

Tokos formed a typical intermediate group in colonial society. Chinese, Javanese who had not been able to cope in the colonial bureaucracy or had been unable to make the jump, failed sons of Javanese officials and "fallen" Indo-Europeans are named as fences. How far regents were actively involved in these wheelings and dealings is not quite clear. There was great suspicion that, for example, the Regent of Blitar knew much more than what he told the European government officials. This regent, Raden Adipati Ario Adinegara, served from 1851 until 1869 and he saw many residents and assistant residents come and go. There is a story that he was the illegitimate

¹⁸ See Rush 1972:129 and Hansen 1901:249ff. & 358ff. for a more detailed description of the judicial process in those days.

¹⁹ Hansen 1901:48.

²⁰ See Rush 1977:115 and 119 and the letter from Amand 17.4.1872.

child of the Susuhunan of Surakarta, begotten with a "Moorish" woman during a trip, and that in his youth he had been in the service of Raffles. His model career began in Kediri under special protection of a Dutch resident. He climbed all the steps of the hierarchy and as regent appeared to have had full control over his domain. That was really necessary because, as stated above, dismissal and with it a sudden end to a shining, rich career hung continuously as the sword of Damocles over the Javanese native rulers.

He managed to extend his influence as far as the village level in Blitar since he had a hand in many of the so-called elections of village heads. Courier dit Dubekart—about whom more later—maintained that nearly all village heads owed their position to this regent and that they payed for the privilege. This is confirmed by the Resident of Kediri who wrote in 1865 that "repeatedly, magangs, attendants and stable boys of native and European officials have been appointed and chosen as desa heads."²¹ Add to this the fact that jagos also managed to gain control over the village leadership, then it is clear that little remains of the colonial illusion that the colonial government had to respect "traditional" village institutions or interfere with the composition of the village council, assuming that this guaranteed an honest election of village heads.

The Regent of Blitar knew everything concerning the jagos' behaviour thanks to his contacts with the village heads. It is also probable that he maintained good relations with several tokos, considering the size of his private life stock of some two thousand animals.

A complicated game of give and take took place in which the Netherlands colonial authorities completely lost their grip. The game came down to the rule that one allowed the other to go his own way within reasonable limits and in return received a *quid pro quo*. The Regent thus allowed the whole network of jagos and their relationship with the desa heads to continue, provided that it did not go too far, that he did not get into trouble with his European superiors, that he received a share in the profits and that the jagos were prepared to do some jobs for him. He did have the sanction of reporting notorious criminals to the European administration. Now and then he had to show his authority. In such an event, the Regent summoned the most feared jagos, lectured them seriously about their misbehaviour, then had them abjure their evil deeds in the mosque and finally gave them a team of buffaloes so that they did not have to steal anymore. During his inspection tours he would sometimes call on these people to check whether they still lived a decent life.

21 "Historische Nota" 1877.

In this way the Regent mitigated perhaps unpleasant excesses, but he also perpetuated the system. He could not do much else. In the early 'Seventies however things got out of hand. At that time the tobacco crop failed due to excessive rain. The thousands of seasonal workers from Central Java were now without income and did not want to return empty handed. Because of the failure of the tobacco harvest, the village heads were left with even greater short-falls when they had to pay their land taxes. As a result, cattle thefts took on proportions too great to be concealed anymore. On top of this, the old Regent of Blitar had retired, and consequently the last authority that could have acted to control the situation was lost.

Although Amand was generally positive in his description of this old regent, the same cannot be said of his colleague, Agathon Courier dit Dubekart. This man revealed himself to be the ethical peer of Multatuli in his fight against the world. He was without the same literary talents but at least as convinced of being right. Courier dit Dubekart went to war against the Netherlands colonial administration in general and the Regent of Blitar in particular, revealing in the *Soerabajasche Courant* the less pretty aspects of this Javanese careerist.²² In connection with these articles the Regent asked for and was granted an honourable discharge, while the exasperated author landed in prison for slander. This is not the place to decide whether Courier was right in every respect; the fact is that from this whole case it is obvious that the local population lived under great pressure. The Kediri case clearly shows how little the Javanese colonial government, out of concern for its own best interests, cared about the fate of ordinary people and how ignorant the European government constantly was. A typical example is the following. People from a desa in Blitar went to the Regent to voice their complaints about the village head. The Regent rejected their complaints and subsequently prevented them from moving to another area. When, some time later, the Assistant Resident, accompanied by the Regent, visited the village in the course of an inspection tour, the inhabitants made a last effort to make their complaints known. The Assistant Resident, unfortunately, did not understand Javanese and hence the villagers were left empty-handed (*ibid.*:174).

The reaction from the colonial state

After the first news in the newspapers of unrest in Kediri, the Resident, when asked, reacted with a reassuring "exaggerated". He was obviously not in the mood for tiresome governmental exercises and denied everything. When Amand surfaced with his report that was no

²² These articles were collected and published shortly thereafter as *Courier dit Dubekart* 1872.

longer possible. A new resident had a real spring-cleaning to do for, although Amand maintained that the situation he described was the same for virtually the whole of Java, the government restricted its concern to the "Kediri case". The new resident, Bosscher, let it be known that he was going to make a clean sweep. Every Javanese official was going to be dismissed if he did not come forward fast enough with results. This action had the appearance of success. Cattle rustling declined in the whole of Kediri and forty-two people were actually arrested. Amongst these were relatively more dealers than jagos. The jagos kept quiet and waited for quieter times.²³

More generally, the colonial state reacted with the only answer that a bureaucracy can give: expansion of the bureaucracy and an increase in rules. Furthering an expansion in Javanese district government already underway the number of Javanese personnel in Kediri was increased from 170 to 360.²⁴

The "affair" eventually ended, as any student of colonial officialdom could expect it would with a quarrel over procedures. The Minister for Colonial Affairs denied the Governor General the right to take this precipitous action as there was no provision for its costs in the budget. At governmental level there had never been a proper analysis of what was actually happening in Kediri.²⁵ Theft was a crime and should be combatted by reinforcing the bureaucracy, and that was that. The government also reacted with a bureaucratic cover up. When Resident Bosscher suggested the publication of Amand's report in order to draw attention to the situation elsewhere in Java, the Governor General shelved it. He even considered mention of this business in the *Koloniaal Verstag* as "inexpedient".

Indeed, fundamentally little had changed by the time the government inquiry into the "Kediri affair" was published in 1912. The authors were hardly consistent in their handling of the topic "the law and the police". The existence of jagos and their position of power was recognized, but the chief causes of disorder were identified as being the "weak morals...dishonesty...[and] sloth of the Javanese officialdom". More insightful arguments appear elsewhere in the report. The Javanese regional government, it was stated, was too aloof from the population and too self-interested; the administration of justice was faulty, while the increase of regulations and procedures made matters worse, yielding at best simply more unnecessary forms to be filled in. What remained gaping was the chasm separating the colonial state

23 Of the 42 "exposed" criminals, ten were jagos, nineteen were tokos and eleven were village heads and tokos. The identity of two was unknown.

24 ARA, MvK, V1-6-1874, No.36.

25 The fact was noted only once that the number of "intermediate heads" between regent and village was very much reduced without anything put in its place. ARA, MvK, V 18.8.1873, No.22.

and local order. The isolation of the local population continued and the ordinary villager remained oppressed. If less notice was taken of the jago from then on, it was not because he had disappeared but because he had receded further into the shadow cast by the colonial state.

Conclusion and sequel

The jago figure cannot simply be seen as a "local hero", a "power broker", a criminal or someone who possessed "magic power". He was all four.

It makes more sense to place the jago in the general framework of state development, something Hobsbawm indicated only in passing in his study *Bandits* (1972:89-91). For that matter, in my opinion, the comparison "bandit-jago" does not fit. Jagos did not stand outside society; they did not exhibit dominant Robin Hood-like behaviour; there was no demonstrable transition from criminality to rebellion; and jagos did not aim for a restoration of the traditional social order. These are all points which Hobsbawm considers characteristic for his bandits.

The way to consider the local acts of violence, the situation in which the jago found himself, may best be compared with what Anton Blok found in his study of the mafia in Sicily.²⁶ The framework in which Blok places the mafia corresponds with what happens in Java: a process of unfinished state development, in which the local order breaks down and new groupings set themselves up violently as political entrepreneurs. They strive neither for renewal nor restoration; they only try to gain as much as possible from the situation as it occurs.

I have described two processes in Java: the inability to strengthen the colonial administration at the local level and the geographic isolation of life in the country side. These created an administrative vacuum in which the jago guild established itself. The intimidation and violence that emanated from this network turned itself primarily against its own people who, in order to prevent a worse fate, decided it was better to buy off the threat.

Although officially the jago figure is considered to have played only a marginal role, in actual practice he occupied a central position in local life since he knew how to make use of the room allowed him by the central government, room he filled with violence. Local violence was part of an almost unbroken tradition in Java since, until recently, no central state has had the power to control society completely.

²⁶ Blok 1974. See also Blok's criticism (1972) of Hobsbawm.

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