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## **Agricultural Involution among Lampung's Javanese?\***

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Transmigration programs first launched by the Dutch in 1905 and since continued by the Indonesian government have achieved negligible results at considerable expense. The resettlement of Javanese in less densely populated areas throughout the archipelago under the auspices of transmigration programs has done little to relieve population pressures in Java nor led to an improvement of the economic prospects of either those remaining in Java or the transmigrants.

Lampung was the initial testing ground for Dutch colonial transmigration programs, although these efforts remained limited until the 1930s. Through government sponsored transmigration, both Dutch and Indonesian, the population densities that have bedeviled policy-makers in Java have been transplanted to Lampung. Subsequent generations of Javanese living in Lampung have found it increasingly difficult to gain access to land; too many people are forced to scratch out a subsistence living on land which is exhausted from overintensive cul-

tivation.

This article focuses on the pre-World War II antecedents of the grim conditions obtaining in the transmigration communities and whether they are in fact a result of the inclination of Javanese towards recreating the pattern of agricultural involution as elucidated by Clifford Geertz with reference to rural society in Java [Geertz 1963].<sup>1)</sup> Here it is argued that the emergence of rural stagnation in the Javanese communities is a legacy of poorly conceived transmigration policies rather than an intrinsic proclivity towards involutionary behaviour. The analysis features discussion of Dutch efforts to articulate their transmigration efforts in the idiom of tradition and the consequences this held for the lives of the transmigrants and their prospects for success. The acceleration of transmigration in the mid-1930s transplanted Javanese population densities to Lampung that could not be sustained on the basis of dry rice cultivation, leading to widespread indebtedness and a fragile economy from the outset. These consequences were quite at odds with the noble intentions that inspired the architects of the Ethical Policy; transmigration was designated as one of the three pillars of 20th century Dutch colonial policy intended to help reverse the

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1) Geertz's thesis has been used to explain the poverty prevailing among contemporary Javanese settlements in Lampung. See Gerd R. Zimmermann [1974; 1980a; 1980b].

apparent decline in the welfare of the Javanese. The following discussion elucidates the manner in which these policies were implemented and the unintended consequences which ensued.

## I Evolution of Dutch Transmigration Policies

### *The Javanese Paradigm*

Javanese emigration can only be successful by establishing "little Javas" (in Lampung) [Heijting 1939: 341]<sup>2)</sup>

Heijting, who in 1905 planned and implemented the initial establishment of the Gedong Tataan transmigrant complex in Lampung, clearly articulated the strength that the "Javanese paradigm" exerted on official thinking regarding emigration. (To avoid confusion, emigration, pioneer resettlement and transmigration are various terms used in the literature to refer to government schemes to resettle Javanese on other islands in the archipelago.) In order to attract Javanese and keep them happy once there, the Dutch went to great lengths to create "little Javas" in the wilderness of Lampung. It was with much difficulty that the government was able to recruit pioneers in Java, even well into the Depression, and only the promise of a *sawah*, and the attendant social status and economic benefits, could lure the

2) Heijting wrote the article in response to criticism of just this aspect of emigration carried in the *Locomotief*, a leading newspaper at the time, in the context of an ongoing debate whether it would be possible to support mass migration without incurring the enormous expenses associated with introducing irrigation and wet rice cultivation as prevailed in Java.

Javanese from their traditional village communities.<sup>3)</sup> In recreating the Javanese landscape, the government allotted about 1.5 *bouw* (1 *bouw* = 0.709 ha.) of land per family and encouraged wet rice cultivation by subsidizing irrigation.<sup>4)</sup> The government intended that the pioneer settlements engage in food production and did not encourage export commodity crop production; the Dutch image of what Javanese villages ought to be like overshadowed what they could be like.<sup>5)</sup> It was the ideal type of Javanese village, conveyed by the village elite and embraced by the colonial officials, that defined the manner in which transmigration was implemented on the ground.<sup>6)</sup>

Heijting, in basing transmigration on the apparent village and tenure structure prevailing in Java, reasoned that,

- 3) See Joachim Hurwitz [1955: 21]; Karl Pelzer [1945: 192]. Pelzer laments the fact that such a high proportion of the colonization budget had to be devoted to propaganda.
- 4) The data on land size is somewhat misleading and confusing. Initially the settlers rarely cultivated more than .5 *bouw* so that they could protect it from the ravages of wild animals. As families rapidly grew, the entire parcel was exploited and soon proved inadequate to support the second generation. In the new colony established in 1932, Sukadana, settlers were promised 2.5 *bouws* of land and were permitted, initially, to clear up to 5 *bouws* if they were able. Conflicting reports suggest that many settlers received only about 1.5 *bouws* as they had in the other colonization settlements and by 1940 may have only received 1 *bouw*. The parcels in all the colonies did not allow for natural population increases, leading to land scarcity and exhaustion of non-irrigated soils.
- 5) See Eduard J. Burger [1927: 127-134]. Burger discusses the imposition of Dutch concepts of rural Java on the pioneer settlements.
- 6) For related discussions see Benjamin White [1983: 21-22]; W. F. Wertheim [1975: 191].

The unique Javanese village community spirit must be transplanted to ensure that the virtues of the Javanese farmer, which make him peaceful, industrious and helpful to others, will also take root in the new setting so that when a solid Javanese settlement is established, government subsidies (i.e. free transport and premiums), can be reduced to a minimum and it will stimulate continuing emigration of Javanese, secure in the knowledge that they can rely on provisional shelter, support and advice from a Javanese community. [Heijting 1938: 1107]<sup>7)</sup>

Heijting's rationale for recreating "little Javas" in Lampung remained a basic principle of government sponsored emigration. The government adopted a very paternalistic attitude towards the pioneers as reflected in the retention of de facto communal tenure, subsidy of irrigation works to promote *sawah* (irrigated wet rice) cultivation and various restrictions on cash crop production, rice selling and wage employment on the plantations. In addition, the government supported a Javanese way of life by exempting the three largest settlements from incorporation into the local Lampung government system. The Javanese reservations were allowed to live according to their own *adat* (customary practices especially as a source of law) and according to their own social organization.

The stagnating influence of government paternalism was critiqued and blamed for many of the problems evident in the colonies during the mid-1920s by a graduate student, E. J.

Burger, who later was employed in the Central Colonization Committee which was responsible for transmigration programs. Burger argued against Heijting's notion of transplanting Javanese conditions to Sumatra and saw little potential therein.<sup>8)</sup> In his opinion, government policies were designed to keep the Javanese pioneers subsistence oriented and in a relatively primitive state. The paternalistic policies, and the small plots of land, ensured that the Javanese would never attain a level of living exceeding that in Java precisely because they shielded the settlers from the invigorating influence of economic stimuli. He took issue with Boeke's famous thesis that the problem of Javanese communities lay in their exposure to, and involvement in western economic structures and relations, arguing instead that the limited involvement of Javanese conditioned by misguided government paternalism had ensured their fate. The problem was not that they were involved in the capitalist economy per se, but that they were only permitted such involvement peripherally. Burger pointed to the positive stimulating impact of trade in Gajoland (northern Sumatra) and argued that the government should encourage trade and cash crop cultivation among the transmigrants as a means to break the subsistence pattern ingrained in Java and reinforced in Lampung. The problems plaguing the colonies reflected misguided paternalistic policies that undermined the viability of the villages they sought to protect by insulating the Javanese from the stimulus of change.

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7) This and subsequent translations are the author's.

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8) The following discussion is based on E. J. Burger [1927: 128-140].

*The Bawon System and Large Scale Colonization 1932-1941*

During the 1920s transmigration fell into disfavor and an air of pessimism prevailed in government circles about the potential of continued emigration, primarily due to the negligible results achieved at considerable expense. Mounting deficits and opposition from Sumatran plantation recruiters after WWI (who wanted to bring over Javanese as estate workers) led the government to place transmigration on the back burner. However, the severity of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, particularly in the crowded plantation districts of Java where so many workers had been retrenched, led officials to revive transmigration.

Government officials had noted that several thousand Javanese emigrated to Lampung on their own initiative and largely at their own expense prior to 1932, generally friends and relatives of already settled Javanese transmigrants (also referred to as colonists and pioneers). Upon arriving they would engage in the rice harvest and earn a share thereof under the *bawon* system prevailing in Java. These *bawon* shares of rice and available wage labor opportunities enabled the new arrivals to subsist until their own first crops could be harvested from newly cleared fields. Resident Rookmaaker estimated that a family could earn about 5 *picols* of rice from their harvest labor, deemed enough to tide them over during the three to four months prior to their own first harvest.<sup>9)</sup> The beauty of this system in the eyes of the officials lay in its financial appeal; the costs of transmigration were almost entirely borne by the settlers themselves.

On the strength of these optimistic reports from local officials about prospects of promoting transmigration on the basis of the *bawon* system, in 1931 the bureaucrats in Batavia dispatched an investigator to determine how many of the Javanese transmigrants in Lampung wished to take relatives from Java into their homes and employ them as harvesters [Pelzer 1945: 202]. Of the approximately 7,000 transmigrant households in Lampung, little more than 1,000 responded in the affirmative, but this rather underwhelming response did not daunt the bureaucracy. Indeed, the fact that less than 15% of the settlers supported the introduction of the *bawon* scheme is lost among official accounts and the general literature. The subsequent tidal wave of emigration into Lampung during the 1930s is misleadingly portrayed as a response to an overwhelming demand for, and shortage of, harvest labor.

In the 1930s, the *bawon* system became compulsory for all government sponsored transmigrants and was closely regulated by the colonial administrators. After two years the new settlers were obliged, in turn, to sponsor a new wave of emigrants. It was arranged that the *bawon* settlers would arrive in Lampung as close as possible to the rice harvest (March/April) so that they could assist in the cutting of the *padi* soon after their arrival and thus entail less government support for subsistence needs. The established settlers had to house and victual the new arrivals during the harvest season until they could relocate to their own parcel. The harvesters earned shares somewhat higher than in Java, between 1/4 and 1/8 of what they harvested, although there is some disagreement in the various reports as to what the

9) See H. R. Rookmaaker [1937: 422].

proportions actually were.<sup>10)</sup> It is agreed, however, that each family was able to earn 5 *picols* (1 *picol*=61.76 kg.) of *padi* by the end of the harvest. There was one functionary assigned to every ten migrant families with special responsibility to monitor the *padi* earned by the new settlers lest they fritter it away. Every night the *bawon* share had to be deposited with the authorities and at the end of the harvest season the total amount was delivered to the family at their ultimate destination.

The incorporation of the *bawon* system into government sponsored emigration of Javanese to Lampung reflects two distinct elements of continuity relevant to an analysis of colonial transmigration policy: 1) the shift from subsidies (1905–1911) to credit (1911–1927) and finally to *bawon* (1932–1941) was a process involving decreasing government outlays and increasing burdens on the pioneers, and; 2) the continuing Dutch belief that the success of transmigration lay in closely recreating the conditions prevailing on Java, i.e., the emphasis on *sawah* cultivation, Javanese architectural and spatial planning, small plots, *ambtsvelden*, etc. or at least their hybrid version thereof. The gradual process whereby the Dutch transferred the costs of transmigration to the precariously situated pioneer settlements proved extremely shortsighted and onerous, accelerating the debt cycle already wreaking havoc in the *desas*. However, I will leave the issue of indebtedness

10) See MVO Rookmaaker 1937, pp. 33–35 for a detailed description of the *bawon* system. In this report he suggests that the *bawon* share was 1/5 to 1/8 of the amount of *padi* a laborer had harvested. In Rookmaaker [1937] he suggests that the share was between 1/5 to 1/3. C. C. J. Maassen [1937: 7] suggests that the *bawon* share was between 1/4 to 1/5.

aside for the moment and focus on the *bawon* system as implemented by the Dutch, presumably in accord with Javanese custom.<sup>11)</sup>

#### *Gotong Royong*

Underlying the Dutch concept of Javanese practices involving the particular form of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance) known as *bawon*, was the notion that it involved a voluntaristic, fixed relationship based on payment in kind; *bawon* was viewed by the Dutch as strictly the share of the crop earned through harvesting. It is significant for our analysis that bureaucracies require a certain degree of uniformity somewhat at variance with Javanese concepts of *gotong royong* and the mobilization of harvest labor based on the *bawon* system. It was these fundamental misconceptions on the part of the Dutch about the Javanese custom of *gotong royong* which undermined the economic viability of the transmigration villages in Lampung. As an Indonesian social scientist has argued,

In many respects the concept “gotong royong” is far too perfected in the imagination of those who do not directly participate in it, so that this expression often becomes a technical term for cooperation, without regard for the underlying motivations on the part of the direct participants. [Rifai 1958: 2]<sup>12)</sup>

In this regard it is important to emphasize the flexibility and variability of *bawon* as practiced in

- 11) There is an assumption in the literature that the *bawon* system implemented in Lampung was indeed a faithful reflection of Javanese custom, e.g., K. Pelzer [1945: 202]; J. Hurwitz [1955: 16].
- 12) As translated and cited in Koentjaraningrat [1961: 2].

Java which sharply contrasted with the ideal and rigid notion of *bawon* seized upon by the Dutch bureaucrats in their efforts to reduce the government's share of transmigration costs.

Koentjariningrat conducted field research in two villages of Central Java between 1958 and 1959 in an attempt to record the actual practice of *gotong royong* in its many forms in order to shed light on a cultural concept that has often been vulgarized. He and his assistants recorded no less than six variations of *gotong royong*, each of which evinced quite different attitudes among the participants [Koentjariningrat 1961: 17-23]. Some forms were voluntary and spontaneous, illustrating the general perception of *gotong royong*, while others, including harvesting on the basis of *bawon*, were carefully gauged acts of reciprocal labor exchange.<sup>13)</sup>

Hamlets within the village formed semi-permanent work groups, usually based on the proximity of landholdings rather than residence, and contributions of labor (and harvest shares) were strictly calculated for purposes of *reciprocal* exchange. Thus, the Dutch view of *bawon* as an act in accord with the Javanese way of doing things failed to grasp the flexibility and variability inherent in the system. Significantly, in the village where communal relations had weakened considerably, Koentjariningrat noted the absence of any *gotong royong* arrangements and the prevalence of wage labor.<sup>14)</sup> *Gotong royong* harvesting arrangements were prevalent in the more isolated village where the traditional

village community was less involved in the cash economy and had experienced less disruption.

In describing the fluidity of harvesting arrangements and compensation, Koentjariningrat [1961: 42] relates that,

The villagers are aware of which expenses are lower at a given time — the cost of meals for *gotong royong* workers or the wages of an agricultural laborer; and whichever of the two systems is cheaper at that time is the one they choose.<sup>15)</sup>

Apparently, in Java, the specific context and the degree of village unity determine the prevalence and nature of *gotong royong* practices.

The exchange aspect of *bawon* and the attendant variations which characterize harvesting relationships among villagers are featured in Stoler's study of rural Java. Regarding the *bawon* system, she explains that,

. . . it is cited by Javanese as the stronghold of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and by students of Javanese society as the prime example of 'shared poverty'. However, closer examination reveals a delicately balanced set of exchange relationships which determines both differential access and returns to harvesting opportunities. [Stoler 1977: 80]

The *bawon* system acts to ensure reciprocal employment opportunities and the *bawon* share varied according to the amount of land owned by the harvester's household and the social

13) See Koentjariningrat [1961: 34, 40]. Here Koentjariningrat describes the sixth type of *gotong royong*, involving agricultural harvesting, *grodjogan*.

14) Koentjariningrat indicates that it was easier to give orders if wages were paid.

15) These findings are corroborated by Bachtiar Rifai's research in the province of Pati, Java [Rifai 1958].

proximity of the labor employing and supplying households. Harvesters within the close network of reciprocal labor exchange enjoy much higher shares than those received by distant or non-villagers [Stoler 1977: 81].

The key aspects missing from the Dutch hybrid *bawon* and at the basis of the Javanese concept of *bawon* were reciprocity and strong communal ties. In Java, a portion of the *bawon* was indeed simple payment for labor, but there was an expectation that the amount paid out in the form of *bawon* could be recouped; land owning households would hire harvesters from each other's families and the *bawon* shares in effect balanced out. *Bawon* was used to mobilize labor and was not predicated on a unilateral transfer of wealth as it came to evolve in Lampung.

In Lampung the social context embodied in *bawon* work arrangements was wholly absent and *bawon* constituted simple payment rather than reciprocal exchange. Communal ties had been disrupted by the uprooting of Javanese families from their village communities and migration to newly created *desas* in Lampung. By the 1930s, when the *bawon* system was implemented, even in the oldest transmigrant villages there was a lack of communal unity and in the new villages there was none at all [Maassen 1937: 33; van der Leeden 1952: 179]. Moreover, between the new arrivals and the established settlers there was no social basis for *gotong royong* as practiced in Java. The fact that the government compelled established settlers to support new arrivals indicates that a certain degree of *staatkunde* had to be substituted for the lack of *gemeenschap*.<sup>16)</sup>

16) For an illuminating discussion on the ideology of

Commenting on the social background of the Javanese colonists, the Dutch sociologist, D. H. Burger [1957: 15], observed that,

The agricultural colonization by Javanese of the other Indonesian islands reflected to a high degree the influence of communal village ties . . . The people in the poor regions with bad land appeared the least willing to emigrate, while those from the prosperous regions were the most ready. The explanation lies, in my opinion, in the fact that in the richer areas a money economy, thanks to Western plantations and the cultivation of cash crops, was most developed. Here the village ties were weakened and the people were less tied to the village and therefore less stay-at-home.

Bearing in mind Koentjaraningrat's observation that *gotong royong* harvesting practices were wholly absent in the *desa* more exposed to the money economy, the presence of large numbers of migrants from these villages must certainly have undermined the strong communal basis necessary for *bawon* harvesting arrangements.

Returning to the *economic* basis of the *bawon* system, there was limited opportunity for reciprocal labor exchange. Once the harvest was over the new colonist left his employer's household and relocated to a new settlement, often at a great distance. There was no opportunity to recoup the *bawon* share allotted to the harvesters as there was in Java. Rather than a recip-

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*gotong royong*, the construction of tradition and the manner through which the State articulates its demands in the vernacular of tradition see John Bowen [1986: 545-561].



rocal labor exchange system based on strong communal ties, the new *bawon* tradition unveiled in Lampung involved a strict economic relationship with payment in kind driven at the government's behest.

By framing the new transmigration policy in the familiar Javanese paradigm, the Dutch drew on a strong record of adapting Indonesian traditions to government purposes. In detailing the rise of the contractual economy in Java during the 19th century, Burger [1957: 11] notes that mobilization of native labor and production was effected through traditional hierarchical structures.<sup>17)</sup> While the profits gained from the Culture System attest to the effectiveness of such a strategy, it imposed onerous burdens on a majority of those involved. Similarly, by drawing on a hybrid version of Javanese concepts of *gotong royong*, the Dutch successfully mobilized indigenous resources, extolling the virtues of tradition while further retreating from the philanthropical and humanitarian impulses embodied in the Ethical Policy. In the next section we examine the consequences of these transmigration policies for the Javanese settlers as a means to explain the historical origins of the involutory hothouse apparent to observers today.

## II Agricultural Involution Among Lampung's Javanese?

Clifford Geertz [1963: 82, 95] has analyzed the poverty and social organization of Javanese villages in terms of agricultural involution, ". . . the overdriving of an established form in such a way that it becomes rigid through an

inward over elaboration of detail. . . [characterized by] increasing labor inputs into an already hyperintensive productive system." Critics have argued that agricultural involution is not characteristic of Java's rural economy, maintaining that his hypothesis tends to place relatively more weight on the characteristics of Javanese than on colonial policies in elucidating the reasons for stagnation and poverty.<sup>18)</sup>

Recent research notes the replication of poverty and stagnation in Lampung's transplanted communities of Javanese, suggesting that there is an inclination among Javanese towards advancing such a pattern of underdevelopment [Zimmermann 1974; 1980a; 1980b]. It is maintained that the involutory behavior of the Javanese as well as their proclivity to shared poverty explain, in large measure, the low living standards currently evident among the Javanese transmigrants. This cultural value explanation, or the use of such concepts as tools of analysis rather than objects of analysis, has been criticized elsewhere [Kahn 1978: 103-122]. Similarly, the historical genesis of Javanese poverty in Java and the role of colonial policy therein has been substantially analyzed (e.g. [Elson 1984]). In this section, I sketch the historical background of the Javanese transmigrant settlements in Lampung and changing colonial policy relevant to an analysis of whether involutory behavior explains the evident poverty and to what extent other dynamics of rural change have been operative.

17) Also see B. White [1983: 7].

18) Geertz has generated a cottage industry of criticism and launched a few careers with his fanciful portrayal of Java's rural economy. For a sampling see B. White [1983]; Alexander and Alexander [1982: 597-619].

### *Land*

Geertz's analysis of Java pointed to the existence of a crystallized pattern of land use wherein the vast tracts of land and irrigation facilities used by sugar plantations limited the amount of land available to villagers, compelling intensification of cultivation techniques in the wake of rapid population growth. Such a situation was not evident in Lampung where the plantation sector remained limited during the colonial period. Even until the 1930s, there was still a considerable land frontier in Lampung.<sup>19)</sup> In what sense, then, were the transmigrant settlements hemmed in by a crystallized pattern? To what can we ascribe the involutory response of the Javanese in Lampung?

The pioneer settlements were established as islands of "little Javas" in Lampung with definite boundaries. It can be argued that the government created a crystallized pattern by administrative fiat, allocating a limited sphere which was soon filled to the saturation point by the mass transmigration of the 1930s.<sup>20)</sup> It appears, however, at least in the pre-WWII period, no such crystallized pattern was evident and indeed the strategy of survival for the second generation of pioneers was to seek land outside the boundaries of the pioneer settlements which they did in great numbers. Only subsequently did the transplanting of Java's population problems limit the room for maneuver, creating a crystallized pattern, and this was not due to involutory behavior. Rather, the short term approach of the Dutch artificially recreated extreme land pressures on a par with Java inside the transmigrant sites and forced subsequent

generations to resort to swidden culture on lands beyond the original borders of their communities.

During the 1930s there was ample room for the settlements to expand onto adjacent areas and pioneers had a variety of opportunities to acquire land. When the first settlement, Gedong Tataan, reached its saturation point in the early 1930s, thereafter its surplus population cleared new land in adjacent areas nominally under the jurisdiction of local Lampung communities. By yielding a share of the harvest to the Lampungers who inevitably materialized claiming vague rights of ownership, the Javanese were able to secure new lands. The presence in 1940 of some 40 small villages of Javanese interspersed throughout Lampung outside of the transmigration sites further attests to the rather less than crystallized pattern in the pre-WWII period.<sup>21)</sup> It was also possible for established pioneers in older, crowded settlements such as Gedong Tataan to move to newer, less crowded transmigration sites. By resettling, transmigrants could escape the strains of overpopulation that were already eroding the prosperity of Gedong Tataan in the early 1930s.

The largest pre-WWII transmigrant complex, Sukadana, was established on a government forest reserve in 1932. The remaining forest reserves in the vicinity offered further opportunity for Javanese squatters. The government carefully patrolled the reserves to prevent Lam-

19) MVO Junius 1933, p. 133.

20) For a discussion supporting this view see van der Leeden [1952: 166-167].

21) Th. M. Metz and P. C. Klomp [1940: 155]. MVO Junius 1933, appendix, indicates about 35 Javanese *desas* were administered within the *margastelsel* and 14 *desas* totaling 7,567 Javanese were independently established outside the confines of the official transmigration sites.

pungers from harvesting forest products or using the land for swidden cultivation, but apparently looked the other way when Javanese colonists "liberated" a portion for their own use.<sup>22)</sup>

The Javanese could also acquire access to land through intermarriage with a Lampung, which was rather rare, or under local *adat* arrangements whereby they were adopted by a Lampung family, primarily in consideration of the material benefits attendant thereto.<sup>23)</sup>

There were, thus, a variety of opportunities and strategies for the Javanese settlers, government and self-sponsored, to acquire access to land in the pre-WWII period. It is true that the original settlements were already replicating the pattern of involution evident in Java, taken in a broad and general sense to mean overintensive cultivation by too many people on too little land, but the historical, social and economic characteristics associated with the concept of agricultural involution developed by Geertz with respect to Java are not borne out by the available evidence for Lampung's Javanese communities.

### *Ecological Transformations*

There is considerable evidence that the Dutch emphasis on recreating the Javanese paradigm in Lampung bore fruit with respect to transforming the contours of Lampung into a Javanese landscape, at least in the relatively small area of Lampung occupied by the three main settlement areas. In 1931, as a young

22) MVO Beeuwkes 1935, cites one case where the government permitted the colonists to develop 60 *bouws* of forest reserve in this manner.

23) Personal communication, Hilsman, University of Lampung.

assistant in the judicial service stationed in Lampung, W. F. Wertheim [1958/59: 186] expressed his surprise upon encountering,

Irrigated rice fields . . . stretching at our feet, fenced off by a chain of mountains far away. It was a typical Javanese landscape, amidst the inhospitable Sumatran wilderness. And it was migrants from Java who, under a government scheme, had settled in the Gedong Tataan area and built a new life in accordance with the pattern of their homeland.

Or at least, in accordance with Dutch notions about that pattern. However, the reality of the settlements was not wholly consistent with the hopes of the officials.

At that time Wertheim may have been impressed with the appearance of the settlements, but one of his colleagues, Lampung's Assistant Resident Zwaal, who had special responsibility for the settlements, was not deceived by the breathtaking transformation accomplished by the pioneers of Gedong Tataan. He noted that many of the colonists were deserting the transmigration sites because they were disappointed with their limited access to irrigation.<sup>24)</sup> Many sought employment on the nearby plantations or established themselves on Lampung's lands that had not yet been exhausted by prolonged dry crop cultivation. Apparently, the original irrigation aqueducts constructed in Gedong Tataan were not large enough to deliver sufficient water to all the transmigrants and it was judged prohibitively costly to enlarge these.<sup>25)</sup> To Zwaal, it was

24) MVO Zwaal 1934, p. 45.

25) MVO Zwaal 1934, p. 46.

clear that the insufficiency of irrigation was a major problem looming on the horizon which jeopardized the future of the settlements.

From the beginning, Dutch policymakers had based the success of the pioneer settlements on subsistence oriented, wet rice agriculture.<sup>26)</sup> When the foremost expert on Lampung, Roelofs Broersma [1916: 146–148], suggested that the introduction of *sawah* culture was an unwise and unnecessary expense, Resident Craandijk (1913–1919) reacted sharply and dismissed Broersma's reasoning as unfounded.<sup>27)</sup> He believed that irrigation was not only necessary for the economic viability of the pioneer settlements, but also maintained that it would have a beneficial impact on the swidden oriented Lampungers. If Lampungers also became *sawah* farmers they could generate a larger rice surplus on less land while facilitating increased export commodity crop production. The extent of the government's continuing commitment to *sawah* based emigration is attested to by the F1.5 million spent on irrigation related expenses between 1905 and 1930 [Boeke 1953: 180]. With the advent of the Depression and the accumulation of government debt, the results of such a large investment were not encouraging; by 1929 little more than 4,100 *bouws* of technically irrigated *sawah* were cultivated by the Javanese settlers in Lampung.<sup>28)</sup> Even though there appears to

have been a rapid expansion in the area cultivated in technically irrigated *sawahs* during the tenure of Resident Junius (1930–1933), there was still only 7,000 *bouws* of such *sawah* for 32,455 colonists.<sup>29)</sup> It was a year later in 1934 that Assistant Resident Zwaal raised his concerns about the fast approaching problem of too many pioneers and too little irrigation.

Problems with irrigation also were a stumbling block for the establishment of the new Sukadana complex in 1932. In that year about 6,500 pioneers began to clear land on the former forest reserve. The government managed to recruit 9,000 new colonists for the following year, but abruptly had to cancel these plans because its engineers had misjudged the difficulty of providing irrigation.<sup>30)</sup> Initially, engineers believed that 30,000 *bouws* could be irrigated through cheap and simple irrigation sluices, but actually this method was feasible for only 2,000 *bouws* and a prohibitively costly, large scale project was necessary to irrigate the remainder of the complex.<sup>31)</sup> In 1933 and 1934 no new government sponsored migration to Lampung occurred out of concern that adequate irrigation was absolutely essential to the viability of the colonies. As late as 1936, C. C. J. Maassen of the Central Colonization Committee lobbied for continued investment in irrigation,

26) See Heijting [1939]. Perhaps the small size of the transmigrants' plots was related to the popular Javanese saying that a family can be happy with 1 *bouw* of *sawah* or 2 *bouws* of *tegalan* [Hasselman 1914: 296].

27) MVO Craandijk 1919, p. 4.

28) Kommissorial 4 Jan., 1928, (1929 Annual Report of the Javanese Colonies in Lampung is bundled in with this file.)

29) MVO Junius 1933, p. 64. Of Gedong Tataan's 17,200 *bouws*, a total of 11,000 *bouws* was cultivated in *sawahs*, but 4,000 *bouws* of *sawah* were rainfed. The figures in Junius are somewhat more optimistic than those in the 1932 Report of the Central Colonization Committee (V 18 Oct., 1932) where 6,600 *bouws* of the total 9,400 *bouws* of *sawah* were reported to be of the rainfed variety rather than technically irrigated.

30) MR 1333, 1932 (Sept. 24); MR 1529, 1932 (Oct. 17)

31) MR 1332, 1932

suggesting that the success of the colonies would be strengthened thereby and would rebound to the state's advantage in the form of enhanced tax revenues [Maassen 1937: 40–41].

In this context, Resident Rookmaaker's official report in 1937 in which he rejects the need for irrigation and advocates a stepped up pace of transmigration based on dry field cultivation marks a major shift in Dutch transmigration policy.<sup>32)</sup> For Rookmaaker, it was essential that transmigration be rapidly expanded and indeed much of his report focuses on the numbers migrating during his tenure; successful transmigration was now becoming a matter of numbers and cost effectiveness entailing, *inter alia*, a shift from expensive and limited transmigration based on *sawah* cultivation to cheap, mass transmigration based on dry field cultivation. Successful transmigration, defined for three decades as the transformation of Lampung's wilderness into Javanese *sawahs*, was acquiring a dramatically altered aspect.

Herein lies an understanding of the stagnation apparent in the Javanese settlements in Lampung. The coupling of mass transmigration based on a *bawon* system with a shift from emphasis on irrigated wet rice cultivation to dry rice cultivation was a crippling blow. Without large scale irrigation, the *bawon* system has-

32) MVO Rookmaaker 1937; C. B. van der Leeden [1952: 184–188] traces the discussion about the feasibility of dry field cultivation as the basis of emigration as far back as the Volksraad debates of 1932. Actually within the Central Colonization Committee this issue had been raised as early as 1930 (MR 1274, 1930). However, Rookmaaker was the first to vigorously promote and implement this radical change in government transmigration policy.

tened indebtedness while the ecological basis which supported high population densities in Java was insufficiently developed.

For Resident Rookmaaker, the world and values of the Ethici that had originally launched transmigration must have seemed alien indeed. The final break with Ethical Policies could not have been more dramatic under Rookmaaker's tenure (1933–1937). In this period transmigration was run on the basis of "*niets voor niets*" (nothing for nothing), a policy designed to tap the resourcefulness of the Javanese, conditioned as they were in the scramble to make ends meet. Irrigation cost time and money where speed was essential and rapid, mass transmigration would never be possible if the government insisted on establishing sufficient irrigation.<sup>33)</sup> Declining soil fertility due to intensive dry crop cultivation was not problematic for,

With the decline in fertility comes an increase in the Javanese resourcefulness and more intensive cultivation, inspired by their experience in Java.<sup>34)</sup>

Thus, mass migration on the *bawon* model, based on dry rice cultivation, was the government's recipe for involution. Even areas with no irrigation potential, in the jungle and in exhausted soils covered by *alang-alang* grass were deemed suitable for transmigration. In Rookmaaker's view if the land became exhausted, there was plenty more at hand and the colonists could resettle elsewhere.<sup>35)</sup>

What was important, above all, was the scale

33) MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 19.

34) MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 22.

35) MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 88. For a discussion ↗

of transmigration and the reduction of Java's population by as much as possible, albeit offering no solution. It is perhaps indicative of Rookmaaker's line of thinking when he ruminated that Lampung with only 390,000 inhabitants was approximately the same size as central Java with 12 million inhabitants.<sup>36)</sup> However, the government was not in a position to underwrite construction of sufficient irrigation to support such a high population density in Lampung.

The short term view adopted by Rookmaaker held disastrous ecological consequences for Lampung. Although irrigation expenditure figures are not available for 1933–1937, the limited expansion in *sawah* area suggests that not much money was allocated to irrigation during Resident Rookmaaker's tenure when 48,000 Javanese were resettled in Lampung. Fortunately, the government did continue irrigation efforts, but these were not entirely successful and not in proportion to the numbers of Javanese resettled between 1937–1940. While the government spent F1.6 million between 1938–1940 on irrigation in Lampung, only slightly more than the total it had spent in the first twenty-five years of transmigration, it also relocated three times as many Javanese to Lampung in these three years than in the entire pre-Depression era.<sup>37)</sup> By 1940, with a population of 47,000, Sukadana only had 5–6,000 ha. of *sawah*, a much less favorable ratio than

existed in Gedong Tataan in 1930 when officials voiced their concerns about the inadequacy of irrigation.<sup>38)</sup>

The promotion of widespread dry rice cultivation as the basis for large scale transmigration explains Wertheim's shock upon returning in 1956 to Lampung, some 25 years after his initial tour. Surveying the landscape that had previously enthralled him, Wertheim [1959: 186] described the ecological disaster,

. . . as if a swarm of locusts had come upon the country and left it barren and forbidding.

The deforestation, soil erosion and endless stretches of *alang-alang* grass were attributed by Wertheim's informants to the adoption of shifting cultivation by the Javanese pioneers. As Resident Rookmaaker had predicted, they could adapt to the new environment and after exhausting the soil on one plot, seek another parcel of land. However, the heightened competition for land between the Javanese and the swidden farmers of Lampung relying on an extensive system of cultivation led to interruptions of the crucial restorative fallow cycle.

As a result, the process ended in a victory for the tough *alang alang* grass and ensuing serious soil erosion. [Wertheim 1959: 186]<sup>39)</sup>

↘ of the dire ecological consequences of such an approach see Pelzer [1968: 269–79].

36) MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 67–68b.

37) Pelzer [1945: 264] determined that 77,740 Javanese migrated to Lampung between 1938–1940 whereas the government sponsored about 25,000 pioneers between 1905–1930.

38) Pelzer [1945: 221] notes that the Dutch had ambitious plans for eventually extending irrigation to 58,000 to 64,000 ha., sufficient for an estimated 83,000 families. However, these estimates may not be reliable as Dutch engineers had been overly optimistic in the past, leading to the suspension of transmigration in 1933.

39) Also see Pelzer [1968: 267].

By shifting the basis of the transmigration settlements from *sawah* to dry rice cultivation, the government promoted extensification rather than intensification of farming methods. The problems of the Javanese were less their involuntary behavior than a reflection of the consequences of misguided colonial policies.

### III The Debt Cycle

The story of government sponsored transmigration is the progressive shifting of the financial burden onto the shoulders of the hard-pressed pioneers, cutbacks in irrigation marking a further step in that direction, and the rapid rise in indebtedness that came to plague the transmigration settlements. The origins of this indebtedness preceded the adoption of the *bawon* system, the shift towards dry rice cultivation and the massive surge in migration between 1932-1940, but investigations into the state of the pioneer villages published in 1941 attest to the telling impact that the new policy initiatives had on the transmigrant economy.

In order to understand the essential flaw of the *bawon* system as translated in Lampung, it is useful to consider yet another Javanese tradition, *ijon*, the selling of one's crop in advance of the harvest, usually at a sharply discounted rate to rice millers.<sup>40)</sup> Indebtedness was common in Lampung's pioneer settlements, largely resulting from advances from rice millers. The reports of local colonial officials highlight the role of *ijon* in the immiserization of the transmigrant communities. While indebtedness was not en-

demically among the colonists with good *sawah* land and high, relatively stable yields, the newer colonists with lesser yields, limited access to irrigation or cultivating solely on dry fields had a high incidence of indebtedness. The ubiquitous system of *ijon*, a particularly harsh form of sharecropping wherein the farmer takes all the risk and the rice millers claim most of the product, stifled the economic vitality of the Javanese settlements. True, the Javanese could count on the Chinese businessmen for necessary credit, but at great economic risk and cost. Alarmed by the consequences of the *ijon* system, officials expressed concern that many colonists lacked zeal due to the perception that they were merely working to pay off their debts.<sup>41)</sup>

Paradoxically, the magnitude of rice "surpluses" was consistently high and yet the signs of material prosperity so sporadic. Some Javanese settlers indeed were doing quite well in Lampung, but many were not so fortunate. As the settlements became saturated, the prospects for the second generation of pioneers and the more recent arrivals dimmed considerably.<sup>42)</sup> For many, the opening of Sukadana, where 2.5 *bouws* of land was promised, represented a new beginning and a chance to escape the debt cycle already swirling through the overcrowded Gedong Tataan complex. And for those remaining in Gedong Tataan, a brief surcease until the relentless and manifold problems of overcrowding resumed. With a birthrate of

40) See C. B. van der Leeden [1952: 174]. This dissertation contains a useful discussion of the detrimental impact of the *ijon* system on the pioneers.

41) AGS 5193 20 Feb. 1926, (1925 Annual Report on the Javanese Colonies in Lampung), pp. 8-9.

42) It is argued that indebtedness was the main reason why settlers relocated from the older settlements to the new Sukadana complex [van der Leeden 1952: 179; Metz and Klomp 1940: 155].

9.2% reported in Gedong Tataan for 1924, partially offset by high mortality rates, the expansion onto adjacent lands and into Sukadana were ineffective palliatives.<sup>43)</sup>

In the context of widespread indebtedness and the *ijon* system wherein the pioneers were obliged to deliver a substantial portion of their current harvest to service accumulated debts, the ambivalence evinced by the pioneers towards the *bawon* system is understandable.<sup>44)</sup> The strain on available resources represented by new arrivals must have been considerable and anathema to many. While more *padi* could be sown and harvested with the additional labor, there was an additional claim on the harvest which could not be recouped as provided for in the *bawon* system operating in Java. After the harvest the new pioneers were relocated to distant areas where there was no opportunity for the household that employed them to earn back the *bawon* shares provided. In addition, providing room and board during the harvest season, also at variance with the *bawon* system in Java, represented a serious burden on the precarious financial situation of the established pioneer families.

It was problematic that the pioneers had no choice in the matter; supporting new migrants and their families under the *bawon* system be-

came an obligation, for *sawah* owners and debtors alike. As Boeke [1953: 183] lamented in a broader context:

. . . the government advertised migration as though it were a new article for mass consumption which it has just brought on the market. But every mass consumption article is subject to standardization, and so was colonization: each colonist had to be treated in the same way, must be given the same amount of land, the same amount of credit. And so, since each colony must become a close replica of the original milieu, it was impossible to avoid the creation of little Java's wherever land was developed in the Outer Islands. But in this way Java's population problem was transplanted, not solved.

While Boeke's logic is compelling, in some respects the *bawon* system in Lampung differed from that implemented elsewhere in the Outer Islands and was generally considered to be more onerous. While settlers in Palembang did not have to accept harvesters until their fourth year, there was only two years grace in Lampung. There was also a difference in the ratio of harvesting families assigned to "assist" established settlers with 1:3 on *sawahs* and 1:4 on *tegalan* (dry fields) in Gedong Tataan, somewhat less favorable than the 1:5 ratio on *tegalan* in Palembang [Pelzer 1945: 221].<sup>45)</sup>

The best *sawahs* in Lampung yielded 40-50 *picols* per *bouw* and each settled family, at least

43) MVO Rookmaaker 1937; MVO Berkhout 1926. Although health and sanitation improved dramatically in the pioneer settlements, as late as 1937 the death rate was 1.5 times as great as that prevailing in Java, a staggering figure when one recalls that health and youth were two criteria for selection of recruits.

44) A local Lampung journal expressed sympathy towards reportedly disaffected Javanese transmigrants faced with heavy burdens and limited opportunities. *Lampung Revue* Vol. 1 (Feb., 1931), p. 22.

45) Although there was a heavier burden on *sawah* owners, limited indebtedness among them and higher, more stable yields suggest that their financial position was relatively less threatened by the imposition of harvesting families.



in the beginning, had roughly 1.5 *bouws* of land (2.5 *bouws* in Sukadana). For those lucky enough to have access to irrigation, the 2 *picols* earned by a migrant family represented a relatively small portion of the harvest.<sup>46)</sup> A family of four, with access to secondary food crops such as corn and cassava, could subsist on a minimum of 15 *picols* of *padi* per annum leaving a "surplus" of some 45 *picols*. However, based on a generous price of F1 per *picol* of rice, it would cost roughly 50 *picols* to cover head tax, *desa* tax, corvee ransom and other money payments to the government.<sup>47)</sup> This does not reflect the claims of additional children, accumulated debt nor the estimated F25 of cash needs for a typical family per annum.<sup>48)</sup> Thus, with a minimum of some F75 in money obligations per annum against an average total income of F90 for the wealthiest pioneers, the *bawon* shares paid out to arriving settlers were burdensome for *sawah* owners, although not unduly so ex-

cept in bad years.<sup>49)</sup>

Yet, this was the brightest prospect; families subsisting on non-irrigated land faced declining yields, a process accelerated by the more intensive farming associated with the *bawon* system. It was estimated that after five harvests, rice yields on dry land declined to approximately 20–30 *picols* per *bouw*, roughly equivalent to *sawah* yields in Java [Rookmaaker 1937: 413]. It is worth emphasizing that a *majority* of new settlers did not receive irrigated land under the *bawon* system and thus the arrival of harvesters in two years, before they could possibly have established themselves, accelerated the debt cycle. For every family in Gedong Tataan earning more than F90 per year there were nearly two families earning less than F62, substantially less than the average estimated cash needs per year (F75). In this way the colonists became beholden to the *lintah darat* (literally land leeches, but a general derogatory appellation for Chinese money lenders), borrowing just to meet minimum obligations, at estimated annualized interest rates of 440%!<sup>50)</sup>

The government cherished the vision of fueling transmigration on the basis of Javanese custom, mobilizing resources from the community in the name of tradition (and in the interests of State policy), but could never really make the system work properly. The government did save money and did move vast numbers of Javanese, but transmigration did not provide the basis for any lasting improvement in

46) Since three *sawah* owning families supported one migrant family, each family only contributed one-third of the average 5 *picols* of *padi* earned under the *bawon* system.

47) In 1936 the price of rice averaged F0.65 while in 1937 it rose to F1.10. Figures from H. R. Rookmaaker [1937: 423]. Tax obligations are drawn from the local newspaper *Fadjar Soematera* 5/17/30 #15. An earlier 1927 survey estimated average tax obligations in Lampung at F70 per annum, see *Verslag van den Belastingdruk op de Inlandsche Bevolking in de Buitengewesten* [1929]. During the Depression (1930–1933) the government imposed a tax surcharge which increased the burden in those years.

48) MR 1166, 1932. Figures for rice and cash needs are based on government estimates of what a new migrant family would need in its first year. Taking the government projection that 5 *picols* were enough to see the new family through the initial three to four months yields an annual estimate of 15–20 *picols*.

49) Income estimates from Henri Fievez de Malines van Ginkel [1929].

50) For a discussion of the corrosive influence of the *lintah darat* and the manner in which they extracted extremely high levels of interest from their clients see *Fadjar Soematera*, 5/17/30 #15.

their living standard.

Official protestations to the contrary, problems plagued the *bawon* system from the outset. The government reacted sharply to criticism of its *bawon* policy, responding to charges in a series of articles in *Bintang Timoer*, a leading daily newspaper in Java, that the harvesters were thrust upon the pioneers, a burden which led to their immiserization.<sup>51)</sup> In the first year of the *bawon* system of migration, 1,000 settlers were relocated in October, 1932, well after the harvest, and Resident Junius judged it necessary to request government assistance to support them for the 165 days before the April rice harvest. The resident was upbraided for not hewing to the new government orientation and was told that financial assistance was unnecessary as the new arrivals could subsist on secondary crops that established settlers would willingly provide them. In addition, there was concern that if the government helped the pioneers every time calamity threatened, this would sap their vitality and foster dependency. Eventually the government did provide support for one-seventh of the new arrivals, but only for those located in the new Sukadana comple which had no core of established settlers to provide assistance.<sup>52)</sup> Later

on, the government increasingly provided new transmigrants with rice advances to tide them over until their first harvest.

While the generally smooth functioning of the transport system is a tribute to Dutch orderliness, the pressures of moving so many thousands in a 4–6 week period inevitably caused bottlenecks. If the harvesters arrived after the harvest, the subsequently more lenient administrators advanced them the equivalent in rice that they would have earned as harvesters. However, from the settlers' point of view there was a considerable difference; rather than earning his initial rice he immediately became indebted and yet another claim accumulated on the forthcoming harvest. By 1940 the *bawon* system had broken down to such an extent that 2,292 of the 7,500 families settled in that year received their rice entirely on credit rather than earning it through *bawon* [Pelzer 1945: 221].

The shortcomings of the *bawon* system are also evident in the general recognition that earnings therefrom were insufficient to support the colonists in the initial few months, compelling many to seek wage labor from the outset.<sup>53)</sup> Maassen worried, however, that while there were sufficient work opportunities for the settlers at the time he was writing in 1937, there was uncertainty that such opportunities for wage employment on plantations would be available in sufficient numbers in the future to underwrite the costs of transmigra-

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51) MR 1166, 1932 mentions that there are a number of critical articles about government transmigration policy, citing *Bintang Timoer* May 29, 30, 31, 1931, but I was not able to locate the articles in question. In *Bintang Timoer* 6/22/32 #129 there is a lengthy discussion between the editors of *B. T.* and *C. C. J. Maassen* about the merits and problems of transmigration with reference to the *bawon* system. For additional critical commentary about transmigration see *Bintang Timoer*, 3/3/32, #51; 4/26/32, #95; 6/7/32, #129.

52) MR 1317, 1932.

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53) *Fadjar Soematera* 4/5/30, #5 notes the increasing reliance of the plantations on the nearby transmigrant settlements, comparing the daily trek of an estimated 2,300 colonists to estates to a file of ants, lamenting the drudgery and monotony of the Javanese settlers' lives.

tion. In his view it was wiser to provide more land to each settler, permit cash crop production and in that way stimulate labor demand within the settlements. Given the pressures to move as many as possible quickly and cheaply, however, he admitted how there was little chance for implementation of such a sensible plan [Maassen 1938-39: 188].

While the colonists tried to make ends meet by engaging in wage labor on the estates and with the smallholders, the gap was only partially closed and as noted above, they frequently became prey to the *lintah darat* and rice millers. In 1936 former Assistant Resident Zwaal deplored the pervasive incidence of indebtedness and took the government to task for failing to provide alternative sources of credit as existed throughout Java [Zwaal 1936a: 213]. Significantly, Zwaal's observations came on the heels of limited *bawon* based migration involving only 15,000 Javanese. The wave of 85,000 transmigrants that followed between 1936-1941 exacerbated this desperate state of affairs.

While the state of the older colonies was precarious, the situation confronting the new settlers in Sukadana was, in some respects, decidedly worse. They did receive more land if they could clear it, but this was easier said than done.<sup>54)</sup> In the first year the settlers were able to clear a half *bouw* and from this produce some

twenty *picols* of rice, at least one-half of which went to pay debts [Rookmaaker 1937: 419]. Under such circumstances, it is not clear how the new migrant families were able to establish themselves in two years to a degree sufficient to also provide room and board for an incoming family. With the thin margin upon which the pioneers lived, even supplemented by wage labor, the arrival of harvesters was certainly a mixed blessing, leading to a brisk business for the money lenders.

The new migrants were exempt from taxes and *corvee* (forced labor) in their initial three years, but they faced a number of other heavy demands. After 1935 all pioneers had to reimburse the government for their transport expenses (F12.50) and household tools and utensils (F10-12), were obliged to accept a new migrant family within two years of arrival and, in Sukadana alone, had to perform unpaid labor in the construction of irrigation canals totaling seventy-five days in the first three years in addition to various tasks in their villages.<sup>55)</sup> To the extent that labor had to be diverted from the clearing of fields, less land was available for cultivation. Prior to the imposition of the irrigation construction obligation, colonists typically cleared one-half *bouw* in the first year; taking account of the irrigation construction demands it would take at least three years for a pioneer family to clear the entire parcel. The arrival of new migrants after only two years perhaps hastened clearing the parcel, but also placed a greater drain on the smaller area cleared and sown prior to their arrival.

Ironically, for the 12,000 transmigrant fami-

54) There is some confusion as to how much land was made available to the settlers in Sukadana. Rookmaaker says they received 1.25 *bouws*, Pelzer suggests a figure of 1 *bouw* of irrigable land, presumably in addition to an *erf* parcel, while the Central Colonization Committee indicates that settlers received a minimum of 2.5 *bouws* and a maximum of 5 *bouws*. MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 10; Pelzer [1945: 221]; MR 1166, 1932; MR 878, 1932.

55) Irrigation work broke down to 15, 30, 30 days in the first three years.

lies in Sukadana, the average *sawah* holding per household was less than the average reported by De Vries in 1937 for Java.<sup>56)</sup> In all of Lampung, with a 1940 population of 173, 959 Javanese pioneers, there was only 11,993 *bouws* of *sawah* [Sjamsu 1960: 9–11]. Clearly the situation in Lampung had rapidly deteriorated under the pressures of rapid, ill-prepared migration and land pressures in the transmigrant settlements were on a par with Java. The problems of insufficient irrigation had grown exponentially since van der Zwaal's warning six years previous as had the extent of indebtedness.

The severity of indebtedness emerges from the *Volkscredietwezen's* (People's Credit Service) investigation into overall indebtedness in Lampung's pioneer settlements published in 1941 [Soekasno 1941].

Soekasno, who completed a number of other studies on credit problems in Java, undertook an investigation into the situation of the Javanese pioneers between 1938–1940 in Lampung. His study features the central problem of indebtedness among the pioneers and the deep roots of the *ijon* system. Significantly, Soekasno asserted that a majority of the Javanese were in a state of *permanent indebtedness*. Most severely hit were the oldest *desas*, reflected in the movement by many of their residents to the new colony of Sukadana.<sup>57)</sup> In the older *desas* of Gedong Tataan, the steady

erosion of living standards accompanying the fragmentation of land, rising landlessness and overpopulation, were reflected in lower rice consumption as many subsisted on secondary crops and sold their rice to service debts [Maassen 1937: 159–160, 173–175]. Since the farmers had borrowed against future harvests they were not able to extend help to new migrants without incurring further debts. It was the advance system that ensured the rice mills their rice and the peasants their peonage.

In 1938 Soekasno reports that 32% of the colonists of Gedong Tataan had no *sawah*, reflecting the absence of irrigable land and indicating the cause of growing penury. Of those fortunate enough to own a *sawah*, conditions were only slightly better as 73% owned less than one *bouw* [Soekasno 1941]. Moreover, fragmentation of land was proceeding apace as the average size of land holdings in Gedong Tataan declined 1.53% per annum between 1937–1940 roughly equivalent to the per annum average decline registered in Java (1.52%) between 1930–1940 [van der Leeden 1952: 168]. By the outbreak of WWII, the average household's landholding in Java and Madura was .17 ha., marginally smaller than the .23 ha. recorded for Gedong Tataan [Brand 1949: 32]. Truly the government had created a "stukje" of Java in Lampung, but hardly in the sense they intended.

Prior to WWII the situation in the Sukadana complex had not yet shown such strains, but it was only a matter of time before the same problems engulfed these Javanese pioneers as well. From the outset, land scarcity was cre-

56) H. R. Rookmaaker [1937: 419] cites E. De Vries article "Economie de Desa" in *Java Bode*, which gives an estimate of .33 ha. of *sawah* and .38 ha. of unirrigated land for the average household in Java, ca. 1936. There are no figures for number of families and the assumption that each family consisted of only four members is probably somewhat low, but remains indicative.

57) In 1937 Resident Rookmaaker also noted the rather more severe debt situation in the older *desas*. MVO Rookmaaker 1937, p. 45.

ated by government edict; by moving 47,000 people into Sukadana without adequate preparation, irrigation and support, the elements of stagnation were in place. Van der Leeden [1952: 166] points out that in the Sukadana complex, the density of pioneers to area of cultivated land (including garden plots) was 513 per km<sup>2</sup>., approaching levels in Java.<sup>58)</sup> In his opinion, by basing emigration on Javanese social organization, adapting the same intensive farming techniques as in Java and faced with such an alarming level of overpopulation, the portents were clear. Further undermining the settlements was the reliance on dry rice cultivation and lack of irrigation. Ironically, the Dutch had out "involutionized" the Javanese.

Recognizing indebtedness as the achilles heel of the pioneer settlements, van der Leeden developed an argument explaining the reasons for the plight of the Javanese that reveals more about colonial attitudes than the processes of immiserization. Following Soekasno, van der Leeden [1952: 165] explains how outlandish consumption patterns on the part of the Javanese explain, in large measure, their indebtedness. Long repressed desires and the easy availability of credit, in the form of advances, led to splurges and festivals far in excess of the norm in Java; better clothing, housing and diet characterized the "*nouveau riche*" Javanese pioneers. The high degree of "social wants" of the Javanese prevented accumulation of capital, a situation which he maintained is prevalent among poor people around the world as soon as they are freed from their subsistence exist-

tence.<sup>59)</sup>

Indebtedness, then, was due to the, ". . . not rationally motivated, bizarre . . ." [van der Leeden 1952: 165], consumption patterns of the Javanese. It is in this context that van der Leeden argues that it is essential that the government maintain active participation in the transmigration scheme to *protect the Javanese from themselves*.

The lackluster results of transmigration, according to Dutch officials, was also due to poor selection procedures; fully 30% of the recruits in 1939 were reportedly of "poor quality" [Pelzer 1945: 251]. This even after the publication of the ten commandments of transmigration and the emphasis on good selection criteria [Pelzer 1945: 209-210]. In the Dutch view, these pioneers were bad elements in the villages from whence they migrated, explaining their poor showing as pioneers.

#### IV Conclusion

It is interesting that the problem of Javanese transmigrant communities is largely conceived in terms of their shortcomings. Whether it be bizarre and outlandish consumption patterns, involuntarily behavior or merely bad eggs, the Javanese are deemed responsible for the "stagnation" or poverty that characterizes the pioneer settlements. While the attitudes and attributes of the Javanese may have contributed to the problems plaguing the "little Javas" in Lampung, it is important not to overlook the underlying problems of Dutch transmigration

58) For an excellent brief discussion of Java's population dilemma see W. Brand [1949: 28-40].

59) Van der Leeden was a student of J. H. Boeke and the notion of social needs is central to his thesis about economic dualism. See *Indonesian Economics* [1961: 8-14].

policy. As Jan Breman [1983: 2], has noted with regard to colonial policies in Java,

A broader analytical scope is also necessary in view of the fact that official reports blamed the origin of such abuses largely on overpopulation, on the non-economic behavior of the peasants, on Chinese merchants, and moneylenders who were considered to be a malignant element, and on corrupt village administrations. *In essence, this meant that the cause of the trouble was considered to be the way in which the peasantry reacted to colonial policy itself.* (emphasis added)

The Dutch tried to mobilize support and involvement in their transmigration efforts by constructing and manipulating traditional institutions, leaders and relationships, but the response was ambivalent. As traditional practices such as *bawon* or *gotong royong* were transmitted through the bureaucratic prism they assumed an artificial discreteness, a rigid and hybrid character at odds with customary practices; as a prism isolates light into discrete bands of color, the Dutch selected certain customary practices and isolated various useful aspects. In detaching, altering and exaggerating these particular elements of traditional practices which only had meaning as interrelated elements of cultural and social practices, however, these constructs became alienated from the community. In this sense *gotong royong* lost its connotation of mutual assistance and as a distorted cultural construct came to serve as ideological justification for mobilizing assistance to the State [Bowen 1986: 548].

More fundamentally, as Dutch financial support declined over the years, especially after

the introduction of the *bawon* system, rising indebtedness undermined the pioneers' efforts. After 1932, when the government sponsored mass migration largely at the pioneers' expense, it artificially recreated within a few years the very population problems that had wreaked havoc in Java and gave impetus, in the words of Boeke, to the "*noodlottige cirkelgang*" (fatal debt cycle). Even had the government successfully created widespread irrigation, the problems of overpopulation would certainly have arisen because in their haste to alleviate Java's population problem they flooded Lampung with scant regard for the consequences. However, by transplanting a population density to Lampung approaching levels in Java without the concomitant introduction of *sawah* cultivation, the Dutch created the basis for lasting stagnation. The fatal debt cycle had claimed many victims prior to the Depression, but with the advent of mass migration based on a hybrid *bawon* system, reflecting more the government's desire to save money rather than the original custom, it gained momentum with telling effect. As on Java, the problem was too many people on too little land, weighed down with high levels of indebtedness. In trying to respond to the plight of the Javanese during the Great Depression, Dutch officials were hampered by the need for strict economies; there was a need for solutions entailing minimal outlays. Thus, the Dutch articulated their transmigration policy in the idiom of the Javanese paradigm, unwittingly reproducing it intact, warts and all.

The flaw of transmigration was less in Javanese attitudes than in those of the colonial overlords. The adaptation of the Javanese to poverty in Java led the government to imple-

ment transmigration on a minimum subsistence basis with no room for economic advancement and great risk of permanent indebtedness.<sup>60)</sup> Perhaps these are the roots of the "involutionary behavior" now apparent, a legacy of poorly conceived and implemented state initiatives.

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60) MVO Zwaal 1934, pp. 51-52 reported that the Javanese are absolutely content with a small garden and a bit of *sawah*, and have no inclination to strive for more. Of course, it was not the lack of moxie standing in the way, but rather, government policies became self-fulfilling; given the opportunity for no more than a subsistence basis the Javanese were, not surprisingly, subsistence oriented.

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#### Abbreviations for Archival Documents

- MVO, Memorie van Overgave  
MR, Mailrapport  
V, Verbaal  
AGS, Algemeen Generale Secretaris