

# Of rice and revolution

## The politics of provisioning and state–society relations on Java, 1945–49

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**Abstract:** Using newspaper sources published in Java, this essay analyses the politics of provisioning from 1945–49. Java was suffering from a severe food shortage when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945. As the author argues, Indonesian state leaders intended to retain the Japanese system of provisioning, but were only partially successful. The breakdown of state power in August 1945 encouraged local groups to seize local power and resources. Indonesians rallied to support the Republic, but they also made significant claims on state élites. The outcome was a post-colonial state that had the ambitions of the Japanese totalitarian system, but with little central control of local agencies and with an unusual sensitivity to rice as a symbol of authority. Focusing on the interaction between state formation and subsistence politics, this essay aims to contribute to further thinking on Indonesia's dynamic state–society relations.

**Keywords:** provisioning; rice; revolution; state formation; Indonesia

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The period from 1945–49 was a watershed in the history of modern Indonesia, witnessing the end of Japanese rule and the failed Dutch attempt to re-colonize the country. The literature on this period is voluminous, but most works have concentrated on the politics within

<sup>1</sup> Research for this essay was conducted during 2000–02 at the National Archive and the National Library in Jakarta, and at University of California libraries in Berkeley and Los Angeles. I am indebted to research support from a Fulbright fellowship and from the Institute of Population and Manpower Research (PPK-LIPI) in Jakarta, and to helpful comments from Christian Lentz, Victor Peskin, John Sidel and an anonymous reviewer. Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the American Political Science Association's Annual Meeting (August 2002) and at Cornell's SE Asia 5th Graduate Student Symposium (April 2003). I thank the participants at these events for their comments and criticisms.

the Indonesian nationalist movement related to the quest for political power and national independence.<sup>2</sup> Relatively few works have focused on the struggles over economic resources during this period and on how the politics of these struggles transformed the post-colonial state–society relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Using newspaper sources published on Java,<sup>4</sup> this essay analyses the politics of provisioning, especially that of rice collection and distribution, from 1945–49. Java, the main island of Indonesia, suffered from a severe food shortage under Japanese rule, and a crisis of subsistence was looming large when the nationalists declared independence in August 1945. The politics of provisioning during that period reveals important changes in state–society relations as both the state and society were changing. In their professed beliefs, Indonesian nationalists were committed to overthrowing the colonial system and building a new, free country. Nevertheless, it is not obvious that individual or social autonomy vis-à-vis the state was strengthened when power was transferred from the foreign colonial to the indigenous post-colonial state. Indonesian leaders, like their counterparts in many colonized countries, were exposed to various versions of modern interventionist ideologies, from Japanese/German fascism to European socialism to Soviet Stalinism. On the one hand, the new state might have been able to penetrate much more deeply into villages and neighbourhoods where its colonial predecessor had either dared not or had simply neglected to tread. State power might also expand as its policy scope widened in accordance with a more activist state ideology. On the other hand, state expansion was not without constraints. Commitments to an ambitious policy agenda might lead to the overextension of state capacity and vulnerability to fiscal crises. Furthermore, society did not stand still while the state expanded; penetration was often not a one-way street.

As I argue, Indonesian state leaders intended to retain the Japanese

<sup>2</sup> For example, see George Kahin (1952); Smail (1964); Anderson (1972); Reid (1974, 1979); van Langenberg (1982); Audrey Kahin (1984); Frederick (1989); and Cribb (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Major exceptions are Volume 2 of Sutter (1959), Pelzer (1978, pp 127–141) and Cribb (1981).

<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Republican newspapers, which were devoted almost completely to the independence struggle, those owned by ethnic Chinese, such as *Min Pao*, *Keng Po* and *Star Weekly*, provided very informative analyses of daily economic activities in Java's main population centres. As rich as these sources are for today's researchers, however, it is important to note that they by no means captured the complete picture and the full range of variations in all local contexts.

system of food control in a less brutal form, but they were only partially successful. The breakdown of state power following the Japanese surrender in August 1945 encouraged many local groups to seize local power and resources. Indonesians rallied to support the Republic, but they also made significant claims on state élites. The struggle with the Dutch brought additional pressure on the Indonesian state to incorporate rather than repress social demands. The outcome was a post-colonial state that had the ambitions of the Japanese totalitarian system, but with little central control over local agencies and with an unusual sensitivity to rice as a symbol of authority.

By examining provisioning politics in the context of state formation, I hope to show that this form of politics presents a fresh angle from which to study changing state–society relations during this crucial period in Indonesia. The absence of scholarly interest in this topic, as noted above, is perhaps not a coincidence. Provisioning is a daily struggle; the politics of provisioning is mundane politics. The period between 1945 and 1949 in Indonesia has been called ‘a time of revolution’, when by definition daily routines were disrupted. Writing about the politics of food riots and state control during the French Revolution, R.C. Cobb (1970, p 317) writes apologetically,

The problem [of subsistence] was an ancient one, arousing ancient fears and imposing ancient remedies. Though no word occurs more often than that of *subsistancés* in the minutes of popular institutions...it would be hard to describe the topic [of provisioning politics] as revolutionary.

But Cobb’s work, and also Steven Kaplan’s study of provisioning politics under Louis XV prior to the French Revolution, have shown that food could be intimately linked to state–society relations.<sup>5</sup> In the conclusion, I will discuss how provisioning politics may still be relevant to post-colonial state–society relations in Indonesia.

<sup>5</sup> There is a large body of literature that focuses on the connection between taxation and state formation and between the exploitation of primary commodities and rebellions (eg Tilly, 1990; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001). This connection indicates a quite ‘rational’, if also predatory, mode of state or élite behaviour: the need for revenues to finance wars drove élite efforts at state building; similarly, élites’ greed for natural resources led to popular grievances and civil wars. In contrast, the irony of provisioning politics is that sometimes states have an obsession with control over foodstuffs *even though there was little need for such control*. As Shigeru Sato (1994) points out, the Japanese did *not* consume or ship out of Java any significant amount of rice, as commonly believed by both Indonesians and foreign scholars. Japanese rulers had little need for Javanese rice, and yet ironically, they enforced a total control over the commodity that starved thousands of Javanese to death.

## Rice under colonial rulers: from Dutch limited management to Japanese total mobilization<sup>6</sup>

Rice for the Dutch colonial administration was simply a commodity. It may have required some special attention at times, but there was neither any obsession with it nor any substantial effort to control its production, circulation and consumption. An occasional intervention aside, the dominant economic doctrine of Dutch administrations during much of the nineteenth century was *laissez-faire*. As Hugenholtz describes it,

Free movement of the rice trade and free disposal of the rice production, this was the [colonial] government's new creed. With the abandonment of all interference [mostly into export crops under the 'Cultivation System'<sup>7</sup>], the government had . . . deprived itself of any substantial contact with the rice trade and rice cultivation. As a consequence the activities of the rice peasant and the rice trader more than before came to belong to a world in which colonial authority played no part and in which a colonial official very rarely happened to pass by.<sup>8</sup>

With 'the Ethical policy',<sup>9</sup> Dutch rule at the beginning of the twentieth century became more interventionist, but the primary tools of control were still large-scale and indirect. For example, when the worldwide depression of the early 1930s caused international rice prices to fall steeply, the colonial government restricted imports through licences to prevent a glut of cheap imported rice that would hurt peasants' income and tax-paying ability. Later, when favourable domestic prices led to excessive growth in the milling sector, the government again turned to licensing to limit the number of mills. At the beginning of the Second World War, the threat of a shipping breakdown forced the colonial government to become more directly involved. To ensure food self-

<sup>6</sup> Vandenbosch (1942), Day (1966), Wertheim (1969, pp 90–132) and Booth *et al* (1990) discuss colonial politics and economy under the Dutch in different periods. The essays in Bayly and Kolff (1986) provide a thematic comparison of Dutch and British colonial systems. Boeke (1953, pp 278–285) and Mears (1975, pp 18–21) offer overviews of the Dutch rice policy. Sato (1994, pp 115–152) presents a detailed analysis of the Japanese system. Indonesian perspectives and several important Dutch documents can be found in Bulog (1970).

<sup>7</sup> The Cultivation System (1830–70), which imposed forced labour and a tight control of trade in these crops, was applied on about 5–6% of total agricultural land (Day, 1966, p 259).

<sup>8</sup> Hugenholtz (1986, p 168). Indeed, in most aspects Dutch rule was more intensive than that of its counterparts elsewhere in South/South East Asia (Bayly and Kolff, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Under this policy, Dutch rulers professed more concern for and undertook some measures to improve the welfare of Indonesians (Ricklefs, 1981, pp 143–154).

sufficiency, a new agency, the *Voedingsmiddelen Fonds* (VMF), was established to stockpile food reserves and to distribute rice if necessary. Rice millers were encouraged to organize themselves to procure paddy for the VMF, with maximum retail and minimum purchase prices set by regulations. Government intervention was limited at the macro level and rice millers financed their own purchases.

In comparison with later regimes in Indonesia, the pattern of state–society interactions under Dutch rule was in essence an indirect and limited engagement. As far as food crops were concerned, access to the colonial state was limited to a few small groups such as millers and traders, and the state’s ‘infrastructure power’ did not reach far beyond a few centres of administration and economic resources.<sup>10</sup> The preparations for war encouraged a higher level of engagement, but the colonial state appeared reluctant to venture out of its traditional role as the caretaker of the colony for Mother Netherlands.

Under Japanese military rulers from 1942–45, the pattern was reversed. After defeating the Dutch, Japanese authorities sought to control the amount of surplus rice in the market in an attempt to prevent inflation and secure a stable distribution of rice in the territory. Thus a compulsory delivery system was established that forced peasants to sell their surpluses to the government, often at prices that were only a fraction of black market prices. Procurement quotas to fulfil government needs were allocated top-down through the administrative hierarchy to each peasant household on Java, ranging from 10–90% of their crops.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, rationed distribution was carried out in the cities. While the Japanese retained the VMF under a new name and management, they significantly expanded its mission and integrated it into all administrative levels.

Rice was part of the Japanese total mobilization approach to win the war. In order to mobilize all the potential human and material resources, Japanese military rulers introduced the totalitarian political system of their homeland to Java.<sup>12</sup> Neighbourhood organizations (*tonarigumi*)

<sup>10</sup> Michael Mann (1986, p 114) defines ‘infrastructure power’ as ‘the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm’.

<sup>11</sup> The average amount of crops under the government’s control was only about 20% of total paddy production, however.

<sup>12</sup> The Dutch Indies was divided into three administrative zones under Japanese rule. The Japanese 16<sup>th</sup> Army governed Java, while the Japanese Navy controlled other islands, apart from Sumatra, which was under the command of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army.

were set up to spread propaganda, increase surveillance, engage local populations, extract contributions, recruit labour, and train personnel for local defence. With the help of Indonesian nationalist leaders who cooperated with them, the Japanese launched many campaigns to encourage peasants to sell paddy to government agencies.

Although coercion and propaganda were extensive, the Japanese met significant resistance from Javanese peasants. Procurement consistently fell far below targets, while production declined and violent peasant rebellions broke out in Java. Even though local governments monopolized rice sales and enforced a strict ban on rice transportation in and out of their administrative areas, the black market thrived and hoarding was common. The delivery system in theory allocated a heavier responsibility to richer peasants, but in practice, they were often the ones who were able to evade their quotas. This added to the burden on poorer peasants, and deaths due to starvation were common as Japanese rule neared its end.

In this context, several *Sanyo Kaigi* meetings to study the rice problem were convened in December 1944–January 1945 at the request of the Japanese.<sup>13</sup> The *Sanyo Kaigi* was an advisory body composed of prominent Indonesian nationalists and established to help the Japanese mobilize indigenous resources and manpower for the Pacific war. The *Sanyo Kaigi* discussion probably for the first time exposed nationalist leaders to the dilemma with regard to the needs of the state to ensure adequate food supplies for consumers on the one hand, and the anger of peasants whose crops were being taken away on the other. Most participants in the meeting empathized with peasants, but none of them questioned the violation of peasants' property rights by the forced delivery system. People might starve if prices were high and supplies thin; therefore, the state had to intervene. In any case, in intention if not in practice, it would ask only the landowning peasants to turn in their surpluses for the sake of 'social solidarity'.

Since paddy delivery was viewed as a legitimate claim on peasants, *Sanyo Kaigi* members focused mainly on how to minimize their resentment against the government. To this end, a number of approaches were suggested. They ranged from a totalitarian policy that would buy up the entire paddy crop in the country and distribute fairly to everyone,

<sup>13</sup> The *Sanyo Kaigi* first sent a team to many provinces to study the problem, then convened to discuss the team's reports and make recommendations for the Japanese authority. Anderson (1966) provides a translation of some of the meeting notes. Sato (1994, pp 138–144) also discusses in depth the content of the meetings.

to a minimal policy by which state agents would come into the village and collect the surplus paddy only *after* villagers' needs had been fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> In between were suggestions to improve propaganda, to ban the transport of rice out of local districts, to have peasants more involved in the process of collection, and to raise government purchase prices. To most participants, however, the distributive imperative necessitated and legitimized a large, and if necessary totalitarian, state. The minimal approach was thus voted down (Sato, 1994, p 141). The *Sanyo Kaigi* meeting report reveals that, even though all of them had received a Dutch education, most Indonesian leaders shared with the Japanese many basic assumptions about what constituted appropriate state–society relations.<sup>15</sup> This affinity was to be further exposed after these leaders rose to power.

### The contest for rice I: central state and local groups

Once the Republic had been proclaimed on 17 August 1945, its leaders moved quickly to assert their authority over state apparatuses and resources left by the Japanese.<sup>16</sup> Less than two months after the proclamation of the Republic, on 4 October, the government established the People's Food Agency (PMR) to handle food procurement and distribution.<sup>17</sup> A week later, the Ministry of Welfare ordered the dissolution of all local 'cooperatives' set up under the Japanese and

<sup>14</sup> The former approach was suggested by Oto Iskandardinata (Anderson, 1966, pp 114–115), the latter by Hatta (Anderson, 1966, pp 105–106).

<sup>15</sup> The most prominent example is Professor Supomo, a legal scholar, a member of the *Sanyo Kaigi* and the principal author of the 1945 constitution. Supomo admired German and Japanese totalitarianism, which he thought fitted in with Javanese traditions (Supomo, 1970, p 189).

<sup>16</sup> My focus in this section is on provisioning, but politics in other aspects of state-building generally confirm the picture here; see Kahin (1952), Anderson (1972) and Reid (1974). To create a functioning state in the shortest possible time, Republican leaders built on the advisory bodies, such as the *Sanyo Kaigi*, set up under the Japanese. They also reluctantly retained local officials or bureaucrats who had served both Dutch and Japanese masters. Leadership struggle at the top soon led to a parliamentary system that incorporated numerous political parties spontaneously mobilized at both central and local levels. These groups had diverse followings and were led by intellectuals, religious leaders, local élites or underground political activists. The government at first had no coercive force: it took months for its leaders to assemble a small national army based on regrouped Japanese-trained militias.

<sup>17</sup> PMR stood for *Jawatan Pengawasan Makanan Rakjat*. The document that established the agency is not available, but the move was reported in an announcement three weeks later. See 'Maklumat Pemerintah' and 'Penjelasan Maklumat Pemerintah tanggal 24/10/1945 tentang makanan rakjat', in Bulog, 1970, pp 31–32.

'not aimed at benefiting the people'.<sup>18</sup> Other peasants' organizations were allowed to continue, but would 'have to serve the people better'. In subsequent months, many local food agencies emerged. These had Indonesian names, but most were probably just the old unpopular Japanese rice-collection agencies renamed.<sup>19</sup> An announcement made by the district chief of Besuki in East Java, for example, ordered all foodstuff traders with more than 50 kilograms to sell all their stock to the newly established Food Distribution Bureau.<sup>20</sup> A note at the end of this announcement said that the former name of the new bureau was *Syuu Shokuryo Haikyū Kumiai*, or the Japanese rice-collection agency. In Surabaya, the city government announced in early October that it would begin distributing rice together with coconut oil and cigarettes to residents with rice ration cards received under the Japanese.<sup>21</sup> As these examples show, Japanese apparatuses continued to police the market, collect paddy from peasants and distribute rice in some urban areas.<sup>22</sup> The difference was that they were now acting without any central control.

At the end of October, Vice President Hatta officially announced that the government had decided to 'suspend' the Japanese forced delivery system because 'it was resented by the people'.<sup>23</sup> What he really meant, however, was a reduction in scope but not the abandonment of forced delivery. Rice procurement was to continue, although only in surplus areas such as Cirebon, Pekalongan, Besuki and Jakarta.<sup>24</sup> Also to be maintained was the distribution of rice rations to utilities workers, police personnel and small traders in the cities. Hatta called on local governments to respect central authority over state assets, especially paddy or rice kept at warehouses or mills, and not to obstruct the transport of foodstuffs in and out of their areas.<sup>25</sup>

Hatta's call for local governments to respect central authority indicated the limited reach of the central government beyond Jakarta. In the most extreme form, outbursts of mass violence were driving away local

<sup>18</sup> 'Maklumat No. 1 Kementeri Kemakmuran', *Suara Rakjat*, 13 October 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Examples are Bondowonso (*Ra'jat*, 19 December 1945), Penjaringan (*Ra'jat*, 31 December 1945), Bogor (*Ra'jat*, 25 January 1946).

<sup>20</sup> *Suara Rakjat* (Mojokerto), 11 October 1945.

<sup>21</sup> *Suara Rakjat* (Surabaya), 18 October 1945.

<sup>22</sup> Kurasawa (1988) offers a similar observation.

<sup>23</sup> 'Penjelasan Maklumat Pemerintah', *supra* note 17.

<sup>24</sup> Jakarta at the time was a food surplus area.

<sup>25</sup> 'Penjelasan Maklumat Pemerintah', *supra* note 17.

officials to seize rice and clothing warehouses.<sup>26</sup> More common were the unauthorized activities of agencies earlier organized by the Japanese but now acting on their own, as well as spontaneous moves by local residents to handle their own food distribution. In December 1945, a frustrated Ministry of Welfare issued a statement denouncing such moves and requiring all local organizations to obtain its approval before engaging in the rice business.<sup>27</sup> Another form of unauthorized action involved newly formed mass political organizations such as the Front of Indonesian Peasants (BTI) or the League of Indonesian Peasants (STI). In East Java, the local branches of these organizations were actively involved in collecting rice to distribute to the public and to resell to any governments willing to buy.<sup>28</sup>

In March 1946, the central government announced a comprehensive rice collection and distribution plan that was reminiscent of the Japanese paddy delivery system.<sup>29</sup> Overall, the plan did not differ greatly from the Japanese system, with a top-down quota allocation scheme and with the transportation of paddy or rice between administrative regions placed under the regulation of local governments. On the consumers' side, the groups to receive rations were the same: members of national or local militias, residents in district capital cities, government employees, workers in key sectors and needy people. The new plan was certainly less coercive and exploitative than the Japanese system, a point that the announcement emphasized.<sup>30</sup> In this new plan, peasants who produced only enough for their own use were exempted. Those who sold their paddy would receive a price equivalent to the cost of production, plus a 20% margin. The government also promised to distribute to peasants such necessities as lamp oil, salt and sugar.<sup>31</sup>

The earlier debate at the *Sanyo Kaigi* between the totalitarian and

<sup>26</sup> See Lucas (1977, pp 109–120).

<sup>27</sup> 'Pengumuman Menteri Kemakmuran', *Ra'jat*, 24 December 1945.

<sup>28</sup> 'Makanan Rakjat', *Berjuang*, 25 February 1946. BTI stood for *Barisan Tani Indonesia* and STI for *Sarekat Tani Indonesia*. Both were set up in October 1945. The BTI was to be affiliated with the communist party PKI, whereas the STI was with the conservative Muslim party Masjumi (Kahin, 1952, p 284).

<sup>29</sup> 'Rancangan pembelian padi oleh pemerintah', *Ra'jat*, 7 March 1946; and 'Penjelasan rancangan pembelian padi oleh pemerintah', *Ra'jat*, 8 and 9 March 1946. The timing of this decision was not coincidental. March was also the final month of the Japanese rice collection planning year.

<sup>30</sup> 'Penjelasan rancangan pembelian padi. . .', *supra* note 29.

<sup>31</sup> The BTI was to work for the government in distributing to peasants farming tools produced by factories under the Republic's control. '173 perusahaan industri seluruh Jawa dipusatkan dan dipimpin oleh BIN', *Antara*, 27 March 1947, p 3.

minimal approaches still echoed in this plan. Some leaders apparently wanted a totalitarian scheme in which *all* paddy produced nationwide was collected and distributed by a *single* government agency to *every* Indonesian. The announcement began by stating that such a scheme represented 'perfect justice' and was feasible, given the age-old tradition of mutual help (*gotong royong*) among Indonesians. Yet, it was argued, existing collection organizations were not up to the task and the implementation of such a scheme would only cause chaos. The government therefore settled for a smaller programme that would collect only 20% of total production from each of the three provinces on Java.<sup>32</sup>

A key departure from the Japanese scheme, which the announcement did not mention, concerned the authority given to local governments to appoint 'appropriate agencies' to handle collection and distribution. We have seen that under the Japanese local administrative agencies, but not mass organizations, carried out procurement. Many among these agencies, however, had reconstituted themselves with Indonesian names and now no longer submitted to the newly established central authority. With this announcement, the involvement in food collection and distribution at local levels by these reconstituted agencies, other self-established agencies and autonomous mass organizations had been officially acknowledged. These agencies and organizations, like those affiliated with the BTI or the STI, were soon 'adopted' by political parties. The ground had been laid for various political interests to be vested in the rice distribution and collection system.

The paddy collection plan was announced just as the Republic was facing a looming fiscal crisis. Its revenues from various taxes and sales met only one-quarter of its expenditures, and the Japanese money stocks that it had seized from the banks on Java were running out.<sup>33</sup> After trying several fiscal measures without success, the government eventually launched its own currency in October. Unable to cut its expenses and to defend the rapidly sinking value of its currency,<sup>34</sup> the Ministry of Welfare turned to price controls, issuing a series of decrees in October and November to fix floor prices of paddy and the ceiling

<sup>32</sup> This percentage was close to what the Japanese actually collected during their reign over Java. See Sato (1994, pp 116–117).

<sup>33</sup> Confiscated Japanese money amounted to f600–700 million; from October 1945–March 1946, government expenditures amounted to f400 million and revenues to f120 million (Cribb, 1981, p 126).

<sup>34</sup> Cribb, 1981, pp 133–134.

prices of rice and other necessities.<sup>35</sup> Peasant groups immediately protested against these decrees. In some places, peasants hid what they had and refused to sell to the government.<sup>36</sup>

By February 1947, the director of PMR admitted that the government's paddy collection results for 1946 'were not satisfactory', achieving only 24% of the planned target, or 6% of total paddy production on Java. Most of the paddy collected was distributed to the army and government employees, with little going to other groups.<sup>37</sup> This was the last report available on the Republic's collection activities. In a few months, the Dutch would launch a military campaign that seized large chunks of the Republic's territory, including almost all the rice surplus areas on Java. Much of the collection activity in the last two years of the struggle was to be carried out by bypassed Republican troops with little central coordination.<sup>38</sup>

The drive for control over paddy and rice generated intense competition between the central state and local groups. Many of these groups had been mobilized and organized under the Japanese; others spontaneously formed in the chaos of August 1945. All now sought incorporation (for the Japanese agencies that had broken loose, re-incorporation) into the new state *as autonomous agents*. The central government, which had intended to retain the Japanese control system in a less brutal form, had to yield to pressures from urban residents, peasants and local groups. The outcome can be likened to a man thinking with a Japanese head but walking with Javanese legs: a big and ambitious central government with little control over its local agents.

## **The contest for rice II: the state and its image**

The Dutch military campaign was partly motivated by a desire to seize food-producing territories under the Republic. Yet physical fighting was not the only front where the contest for rice took place. Diplomacy,

<sup>35</sup> Decree No 2 (26 October 1946) set the guiding ceiling price of rice at f0.15, but this was superseded by Decree No 6 only a month later (18 November 1946). The latter raised the price to f0.25 in response to popular protests. See *Antara*, 26 October 1946 and *Suara Rakjat* (Mojokerto), 18 November 1946.

<sup>36</sup> Projo Mangunsumo, 'Mempertinggi derajat petani', *Suara Rakjat* (Mojokerto), 18 November 1946. 'Beras dan Uang', *Star Weekly*, 10 November 1946, pp 1–2.

<sup>37</sup> The plan aimed for 1.3 million tons of paddy, but the amount collected was only 285,000 tons. 'Menyempurnakan pengumpulan dan pembagian bahan makanan', *Antara*, 12 February 1947.

<sup>38</sup> Kahin, G. (1952, p 221).

which would eventually decide the outcome of the struggle, had offered a parallel front much earlier, ie as soon as British forces landed on Java in November 1945.

The diplomatic front involved the Republic, the British (on Java), and the Dutch.<sup>39</sup> For complex reasons, the British command that landed on Java to disarm the Japanese limited their mission to maintaining order. They refused to intervene in political issues between the Dutch and the Republic. Until mid-1947, British/Dutch forces were mainly confined to urban enclaves along the northern coast of Java and cut off from food supply sources in the hinterland. To starve their enemies, Indonesian militias launched boycott or blockade campaigns in all the occupied cities.<sup>40</sup> Clashes over food took place almost every day in these cities, as British and Dutch troops looted warehouses or forced local merchants to open their shops.<sup>41</sup>

Whenever possible, however, the British applied diplomatic pressure on the Republican central government to restrain militant groups. In Semarang, the British command warned the Sukarno government that Indonesian residents might starve if Indonesian 'extremists' continued to block the shipment of rice into the city.<sup>42</sup> In Bandung, the British requested help from the newly established Indonesian army (TKR) to escort the trains carrying foodstuffs from Jakarta.<sup>43</sup> Militias in Sukabumi and Cikampek had earlier raided these trains.<sup>44</sup> The Republican government gained a great deal of prestige and authority after the TKR successfully carried out the mission. *Ra'jat*, a major pro-Republic daily in Jakarta, quoted British sources with an implicit sense of pride that 'this was the test of the authority of the [Indonesian] government in stopping the extremists'.<sup>45</sup> In early May 1946, the government reached an agreement with the British command in Jakarta to exchange rice for fabrics and imported goods.<sup>46</sup> The British needed rice for their troops,

<sup>39</sup> For discussions of British and Dutch diplomatic policies, see Oey (1981) and Yong (1982). For the internal splits within the Republic on diplomacy v struggle, see Kahin, G. (1952).

<sup>40</sup> See Smail (1964, pp 64–65) for the boycott campaign in Bandung.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *Ra'jat*, 12 November 1945 and 1 December 1945.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ra'jat*, 13 December 1945. TKR stood for *Tentara Keselamatan Rakjat*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ra'jat*, 13 December 1945.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* The TKR also escorted trains carrying Dutch internees from Malang to Jakarta several days later. This was touted as a sign of 'Indonesian courageous, cooperative and humane attitude', and as 'a clear evidence of Indonesians' maturity [to rule their own country]', *Ra'jat*, 23 January 1946.

<sup>46</sup> *Ra'jat*, 9 May 1945.

and the Republic needed fabrics and other goods for its people in the hinterland. A dozen political groups met on the outskirts of Jakarta to sign a statement that threatened to obstruct such exchanges, but central government went ahead with the deal anyway.<sup>47</sup>

While the British engaged in diplomatic deals that ultimately enhanced the status of the Republic, the Dutch used diplomacy for the opposite purpose. In a press conference in Jakarta on 17 November 1945, the Dutch Lieutenant Governor-General van Mook proposed to meet the new Indonesian Prime Minister Sjahrir to find a solution to the Indonesian conflict.<sup>48</sup> During the conference, van Mook also announced a survey by the Dutch (colonial) Department of Economic Affairs, according to which two million Javanese were in danger of starvation due to inadequate means of transportation. As he claimed,

We believe cooperation between Dutch and Indonesians is the only way out of the present difficulty. Java by itself cannot come out of the economic spiral as it is in... The Netherlands wanted to distribute food and medicine, but insisted upon safe conduct and restoration of order to guard against the falling into the hands of bandits.<sup>49</sup>

Van Mook denied that the Netherlands wanted to use food and medicine as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Indonesian leaders, but the move was clearly an effort to portray the latter in the international lime-light as a disorganized gang of irresponsible men unworthy of ruling the archipelago. With an economic survey in the background, van Mook not too subtly gave the impression that the Netherlands' technical and scientific knowledge would make them a better ruler. Indonesians were predictably furious with van Mook's charge. *Ra'jat* used pre-war population and production data to declare that, in 'fertile Indonesia', starvation would never happen.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, as Europe itself was suffering from a food shortage, the Dutch would not be able to help Indonesia. Van Mook, the newspaper pointed out, was merely a 'greedy colonialist' who wanted to plunder Indonesia as much as possible.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 'Menuntut pembatalan perjanjian beras dengan Serikat', *Ra'jat*, 31 May 1945. For the government's reaction, see *Ra'jat*, 3 June 1945.

<sup>48</sup> Van Mook had earlier refused to meet Sukarno and Hatta, who were accused of collaborating with the Japanese.

<sup>49</sup> *New York Times*, 17 November 1945, p 2.

<sup>50</sup> 'Tidak akan ada bahaya kelaparan di Indonesia', *Ra'jat*, 8 December 1945.

<sup>51</sup> The contest here parallels the struggle in England in the eighteenth century between believers in laissez-faire economics and supporters of government intervention in provision. E.P. Thompson's pejorative comment that the laissez-faire economic model

Not to be outmanoeuvred, the Republic announced four months later that Indonesia would offer India 500,000 tons of paddy as food aid.<sup>52</sup> The Dutch immediately dismissed this offer as propaganda and repeated their view that the Republic itself was facing a famine and could not be so generous.<sup>53</sup> Yet the decision received much praise in the Indonesian press, 'as a gesture of thanks to humanity',<sup>54</sup> as a move that 'caused a stir in the world',<sup>55</sup> and as 'a powerful slap' at the Dutch who were still 'dreaming about their sovereignty over Indonesia'.<sup>56</sup> To dispel concerns that the offer might lead to a food shortage in Indonesia, *Ra'jat* calculated that, for Indonesia to fulfil its offer, each Indonesian would have to sacrifice only 27 grams of rice per day. This would still leave them with 211 grams, which was more than the 200-gram ration distributed at the time.<sup>57</sup> East Java's *Berjuang* praised the decision, but hinted at peasants' unfavourable reactions. It warned that the paddy to be offered was still in the field and would need to be harvested, collected and transported.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Indonesians could not be said to have enough to eat. There were still collection and distribution problems, and peasants still did not understand how their 'responsibility' to deliver paddy to the government under the new Indonesia was different from that under the Japanese.<sup>59</sup>

At any rate, the offer was bold, given that Indonesia had proclaimed independence only eight months earlier, that its government had only a partial and precarious control over its territories, and that its sovereignty was bitterly contested. What motivated Indonesian leaders to make such a daring offer? In his lengthy radio speech to justify the move two months later, Vice President Hatta elaborated on the principles of Indonesian foreign policy and the political calculations behind the decision. In principle, Hatta advocated a foreign policy that was not

carried 'a specious air of empirical validation' can be aptly applied to Van Mook's presentation here (Thompson, 1971, p 91). The Dutch had no means of conducting an economic survey at the time, given the conditions on Java.

<sup>52</sup> *Ra'jat*, 25 April 1946.

<sup>53</sup> 'Penawaran beras dari Republik pada India', *Ra'jat*, 30 April 1946. The Dutch eventually consented when India assured them that no arms would be exchanged for the rice and that the deal did not imply any recognition of the Republic (Yong, 1982, p 124).

<sup>54</sup> 'Penawaran beras . . .', *supra* note 53.

<sup>55</sup> 'Tawaran Beras kepada India', *Berjuang*, 30 April 1946.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> 'Penawaran beras . . .', *supra* note 53.

<sup>58</sup> 'Tawaran beras . . .', *supra* note 55.

<sup>59</sup> 'Tawaran beras . . .', *supra* note 55.

based on 'economic rationalism', but on 'humanism in the field of economics'.<sup>60</sup> This humanism was to be granted to all nations in the world and not just India, although India was a special nation with which Indonesians shared a 'deep sense of brotherhood' and 'close historical relations'. Principles aside, politically Hatta argued that,

The Dutch still think they 'control' Indonesia, and this 'control' is shown in the existence of various Dutch government offices in Jakarta. They will certainly lose their minds upon hearing [our offer to India]. With their control only on paper, they cannot make such an offer. But the Republic of Indonesia is able to offer paddy to India, which is facing a famine. This ability is the evidence that the Republic has a firm control over its territories. This will stop the Dutch propaganda in foreign countries that there is only chaos and starvation in the areas under the control of the Republic.

Although Hatta did discuss a promising upcoming harvest and an Indian counter-offer to exchange cloth for rice with Indonesia, economic considerations received marginal attention in his speech.<sup>61</sup> Similarly with the reported famine in India: its extent, causes and consequences were never mentioned. Overall, the offer had more symbolic value than any other effects: a diplomatic salvo to assert internationally both the Republican government's effective authority over the country and the high moral standards of its foreign policy. In the minds of Indonesian leaders, and for quite understandable reasons in the particular context they confronted, the control over rice became synonymous with control over territory, with order, and with authority itself. Furthermore, in contrast to van Mook's bland discussion of rice as a commodity to be managed, Hatta's view carried significant moral undertones, for rice was linked to the 'sense of brotherhood' among nations and the 'humanitarian' responsibility of one nation to another in times of need.

The diplomatic wrangle over rice shows many aspects of state formation and state behaviour that differed from what was observed in the struggle between the state and local groups for local resources. In the domestic struggle, real authority was sought; in the diplomatic one, the appearance of authority was the only goal. Rice came to attain such a stately obsession not only because it was in short supply, but also because the state needed to exude an image of authority.<sup>62</sup> This image

<sup>60</sup> 'Pidato Wakil Presiden tentang pengiriman beras ke India', *Antara*, 22 June 1946.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Joel Migdal (2001) defines the state as 'a field of power marked by the threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts' (pp 15–16).

was critical to state survival. Note that the Dutch and the Indonesian states had different perceptions of what constituted the appropriate basis of an image of authority. In the Dutch view, rationality and technical knowledge brought authority; for Republican leaders, only morality counted.<sup>63</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to speculate where the difference came from; it certainly did not come from education, as most Republican leaders received their education from Dutch schools. Nevertheless, the association of rice with morality and with images of authority in the minds of Republican leaders suggests that the sticky stuff was not something to be carelessly let out of control, regardless of its availability at any particular moment.<sup>64</sup>

### **The contest for rice III: state leaders and the masses**

The protracted diplomatic negotiations allowed an uneasy coexistence in the main cities for the Dutch and the Republic throughout 1946 and the first half of 1947. These urban enclaves were under the control of British (and later, Dutch) forces, and separated from Republican territories by demarcation lines. For civil employees and ordinary Indonesians who remained inside the lines, the struggle was not military but monetary. The British and Dutch seized billions in Japanese money from Japanese banks and printing facilities, and the dumping of this money in the market led to hyperinflation.<sup>65</sup> Dutch officials, for example, paid their typists f1,500, while the salary of a Republican minister was below f1,000.<sup>66</sup> Although the city government tripled the salaries of its employees and the central government followed suit with a substantial

<sup>63</sup> Again, this resembles the political contest surrounding the repeal of the Corn Law in England in the eighteenth century (Thompson, 1971). In the English case, however, the 'rationalists' (proponents of free trade) represented a new spirit, while the 'moralists' (supporters of government control of provision) represented a paternalist tradition. The fact that Hatta was a professional economist trained in Holland suggests that the appeals of state paternalism may extend beyond traditional values.

<sup>64</sup> This does not mean that Indonesians would always be well fed by state leaders. It was possible for states (although not indefinitely) to maintain a positive image of authority abroad even though millions of their people were starving. The starvation of about 20 million Chinese peasants during and after the Great Leap Forward campaign (1959–61) became known to the outside world only in the 1970s (Becker, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> The amount of money in circulation jumped from between f369 million and f2.7 billion in August to between f3.4 and 8.0 billion in a few months (Cribb, 1981, p 120).

<sup>66</sup> 'Soal kenaikan harga', *Ra'jat*, 15 January 1946.

food allowance,<sup>67</sup> morale was low and absenteeism common.<sup>68</sup> Only about 20% of civil employees in Jakarta reportedly showed up for work.<sup>69</sup>

In Jakarta, the plight of Indonesian residents further deteriorated in October. By then, the Republican army and local militias had cooperated to enforce a rather effective blockade against the flow of rice from the hinterland into the city.<sup>70</sup> The Dutch, however, had been able to secure imports from overseas and had started their own distribution programmes. The Republican blockade on Jakarta thus hurt fellow Indonesians more than Dutch residents. It was natural that Jakartans felt betrayed by the Republican leaders who had moved to Central Java, as the following bitter editorial from Jakarta's *Ra'jat* attested:

Those from the hinterland have admitted that Jakarta is the most forward front of the struggle, . . . then for the struggle to defend the Republic to the end, Jakarta needs two most important kinds of assistance: leaders and rice. . . [First,] we need leaders to lead our workers, traders, fighting units, etc. Our leaders and intellectuals who have been hiding in Central Java . . . please come to Jakarta. . . [Second,] we need rice to distribute to our citizens. We have to admit that many among our people have turned to the Dutch because of the extremely difficult economic situation. They have indeed surrendered, but they only did so after having fought their best. The Dutch distribute bread, cheese, cloths, money, while our own brothers, because of misunderstanding or miscalculation, block rice from coming into the city for us, supporters of the Republic. Our brothers nearly strangle us.<sup>71</sup>

Part of the hardship came from the chaos in food distribution that opened up many opportunities for abuses. Numerous organizations, some with dubious credentials, competed for the food distribution business.<sup>72</sup> Since food was in great demand and short supply, the competition was not in marketing or sale, but in obtaining the necessary licences from military commanders and other relevant government offices to buy food from the hinterland and transport into Jakarta through demarcation lines.

The failure of the city's Working Committee in alleviating the food crisis contributed to its downfall with a motion of no confidence in

<sup>67</sup> 'Pengumuman Badan Pekerja Komite Nasional Pusat No. 22', *Ra'jat*, 5 February 1946.

<sup>68</sup> 'Soal kenaikan harga', *Ra'jat*, 5 February 1946.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Cribb (1981).

<sup>71</sup> 'Pemimpin dan Beras', *Ra'jat*, 11 October 1946.

<sup>72</sup> For example, *Persatuan Pegawai Pembangunan Negara*, *Pusat Usaha Koperasi*, *Badan Ekonomi Rakjat Indonesia*, *Pusat Usaha Dagang*, and *Pusat Tenaga Ekonomi*.

early November.<sup>73</sup> The new Committee granted the monopoly of food supply in Jakarta to an organization called the Center of Cooperatives.<sup>74</sup> This Center, which claimed to represent 137 cooperatives with a membership of 75,000 household heads, obtained the licence thanks to inside lobbying (its director was a new member of the Committee).<sup>75</sup> The city's Council was not of one mind on this issue, however, and by December, internal fighting began to spill over into the press. Angry 'letters from readers' appeared for several days attacking city council members for colluding with black marketeers and for stealing rice received from central government earmarked for distribution.<sup>76</sup> Critics also took issue with groups that called themselves 'cooperatives' and collected money ostensibly to buy food, but in fact were only extorting from people.<sup>77</sup> There were calls for the central government to dissolve the City Council for its failure to manage distribution.<sup>78</sup> Both sides traded extremely harsh rhetoric, with critics charging officials with 'betraying the interests of the people', and officials responding with terms such as 'slanderers' and 'stooges of the Dutch'.

In Semarang, central Java, due to heavy fighting between militant youth groups and the British throughout October and November 1945, food supplies were disrupted and prices soared.<sup>79</sup> By late November, the British had gained firm control of the city, and since President Sukarno had helped broker a truce to end the fighting, the British allowed a new Republican city government to be established in early January 1946.<sup>80</sup> Food here, as in Jakarta, was a critical issue, as the following account describes:

The food situation is in chaos. . . This is causing so much suffering for the people. People have also lost their souls. Looting is widespread. Gambling is common. . . The British don't care about food for the people and they are responsible for this

<sup>73</sup> 'Beras akan datang ke Jakarta', *Ra'jat*, 11 November 1946. The city's Working Committee [*Badan Pekerja*] was elected by its Council [*KNI Jakarta*].

<sup>74</sup> *Antara*, 12 September 1946, and *Ra'jat*, 15 November 1946.

<sup>75</sup> 'POKSD dengan soal beras', *Ra'jat*, 29 December 1946.

<sup>76</sup> 'Surat Kiriman', *Min Pao*, 7 February 1947. See also J.S.F. Pangau's letter in *Ra'jat*, 9 December 1946 (Pangau was a KNI Jakarta member). For responses from city officials, see *Ra'jat*, 12 December 1946, and 'Surat Kiriman', *Ra'jat*, 16 February 1947.

<sup>77</sup> *Ra'jat*, 9 December 1946.

<sup>78</sup> 'Nasib rakjat Jakarta meminta perhatian', *Ra'jat*, 22 February 1947.

<sup>79</sup> 'Pemerintahan Republik berdiri lagi di Semarang', *Berjuang*, 12 January 1946. For the fighting in Semarang, see Anderson (1972), pp 146–151.

<sup>80</sup> 'Pemerintahan Republik berdiri. . .', *supra* note 79

sad situation. . . People no longer shout 'Freedom!' [to greet each other]. The red and white flag is nowhere to be seen. Desolate and quiet, this is Semarang now. However, it is not surprising if Semarang people will cheer up and welcome the Republican government. But the first step the new city government ought to take is to bring rice into the city, then distribute it as fairly as possible.<sup>81</sup>

The rice shortage was blamed not only for a popular apathy towards the struggle, but also for all sorts of social vices. No rice, no morals, no revolution. The masses would march to revolutionary tunes only if they were given food first.

A year after independence had been proclaimed, the gap between revolutionary rhetoric and the material concerns of ordinary people, as observed above, continued to widen. In September 1946, a lengthy article in *Berjuang* described the public meetings organized by the Republican Ministry of Information in various parts of the country as attracting fewer and fewer participants.<sup>82</sup> In the early days of the revolution, hundreds or even thousands of people would flock to these meetings, but a year later only a few dozen came. The main problem, the author believed, was the people's sense of unfulfilled expectations. First,

the common people who don't know politics cannot understand that we still face many great difficulties even though *kemerdekaan* has already been proclaimed. For them, that *kemerdekaan* means freedom from poverty and suffering. *Kemerdekaan* for them means A FULL STOMACH and A FULLY CLOTHED BODY.<sup>83</sup>

Second, people were disappointed, because what the government said was not what they saw every day, and because there was no 'social justice' in the food and clothing distribution business.<sup>84</sup> People contributed when the government needed rice for the troops, for state employees and for India. When it came to distribution, however, the government cited numerous reasons to give people only a little or nothing at all, even though the black market had plenty of rice and cloth. For example, during the *Lebaran* of 1946, only peasants who had delivered more than 50 kg of paddy to the government received a ration of cloth.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Winoto (1946), 'Penerangan dan Kepercayaan Rakjat', *Berjuang*, 23 September. This Winoto was probably Winoto Danu Asmoro, a leader of the Nationalist Party (PNI) and later Sukarno's chief of staff. His private collection is available at the National Archive in Jakarta.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* *Kemerdekaan* means both independence and freedom. Capital letters are used in the original.

<sup>84</sup> Winoto, *supra* note 82.

This group included wealthier peasants who still had some clothes to wear.<sup>85</sup> Those who had turned in less than 50 kg to the government received nothing.<sup>86</sup>

After the British left in late 1946, the Dutch took full control of the urban enclaves on Java. By early 1947, they had already started distributing food and other necessities in their areas. People eligible to receive these goods were those employed in the formal sector, and they were divided into three salary levels. Those with higher salaries received more quantities and wider varieties of goods.<sup>87</sup> This regressive scheme was attacked as 'unfair' and 'helping the rich but neglecting the poor' [*tolong orang kaya dan yang miskin biarkan saja*].<sup>88</sup> After their first military campaign in mid-1947, the Dutch expanded their ration rolls to include hundreds of thousands more who had not been eligible under the old system.<sup>89</sup> Instead of entrusting the task of distribution to local groups as under the Republic, the Dutch distributed their goods through organizations of merchants and shops.<sup>90</sup> They planned to set up a distribution shop for every 3,000 people in the villages and urban neighbourhoods.<sup>91</sup> Besides imports, they organized private milling facilities to work exclusively for the government, just as in the pre-war system.<sup>92</sup>

A more commercialized distribution scheme did not help Dutch administrators much. In West Java, there were many charges of corruption and smuggling against the rice milling organizations.<sup>93</sup> In Surabaya, the Dutch food agency granted distribution contracts to organizations that offered lower bids, even though they had never been involved in the business. This caused two established groups of Chinese merchants who received no contracts to stage a protest. A 'little war' then erupted

<sup>85</sup> Winoto, *supra* note 82. Literally, 'who [might not have adequate clothes but] were less than 95% naked'.

<sup>86</sup> Winoto, *supra* note 82. Literally, 'they had to celebrate Lebaran half-naked, or if they had no clothes, had to stay at home'.

<sup>87</sup> There were generally three categories: *Broodmenu* I and II for those with salaries above f100 and *Rijstmenu* for those with lower salaries. For Surabaya, see 'Pembagian beras di Surabaya kalut', *Min Pao*, 11 February 1947. For Jakarta, see *Star Weekly*, 20 October 1946, p 2; *Keng Po*, 25 July 1947. Coolies also received part of the distribution, although unlike the other categories, their families were excluded. *Star Weekly*, 24 November 1946, p 2.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> 'Distributie Umum', *Keng Po*, 9 October 1947.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> 'Sekitar Distributie Umum', *Keng Po*, 18 November 1947.

<sup>92</sup> 'Organisatie penggilian2 beras di Jawa', *Min Pao*, 13 May 1948.

<sup>93</sup> 'Tekateki Voedingsmiddelenfonds', *Keng Po*, 12 August 1948, and 'Harga beras naik terus', *Keng Po*, 4 October 1948.

among Chinese shopkeepers, which wounded several people.<sup>94</sup> In response, the authorities decided to revise the contracts, but this decision came on the day distribution supposedly began and created great chaos as people waited in lines for hours without receiving their rations. Small scuffles broke out in many places among angry customers, shopkeepers and police officers.<sup>95</sup>

As imports from Burma and the USA were delayed, rice prices in Dutch territories rose rapidly in mid-1948. Facing a subsistence crisis, the Dutch government resorted to coercion, ordering all merchants with stocks over one ton to report to the government.<sup>96</sup> They were given a deadline to sell their stock at official prices or face sanctions. At the same time, the government sold its rice in the markets to repress soaring free market prices rather than relying on distribution contractors. This policy change appeared to work in the first few days. In an interview, the head of the Food Agency (VMF) prematurely declared that the government would never return to the distributive system, which had generated so much public resentment.<sup>97</sup> Five days later, however, the Agency admitted that its free market operations (*vrije verkoop beras*) could not be sustained for very long and that distribution was to resume as soon as possible;<sup>98</sup> the reason: it was too easy for merchants and customers to 'play crazy tricks with government rice'.

The contrast between the Dutch and Republican rule is instructive in many aspects. Both governments faced similar problems, including rampant corruption in food distribution and a corrosion of legitimacy due to the subsistence crisis. Their coping mechanisms differed, which reflected the different relationship between rulers and subjects in each system. The Dutch were concerned about what they termed 'the heavy burden' for government officials to be involved in the business of rice distribution.<sup>99</sup> Their solution upon taking over the corrupt business from the Republic in late 1947 was to privatize distribution. In contrast, under Republican rule government involvement was never questioned; rather,

<sup>94</sup> 'Pembagian beras di Surabaya kalut', *Min Pao*, 11 February 1947, and 'Penduduk bingung', *Keng Po*, 10 February 1947. Chinese shopkeepers eventually had to ask the Chinese Consulate in Surabaya to mediate the dispute among them. See 'Bond Guru Tionghoa dapat dividend', *Keng Po*, 21 February 1947.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> 'Sekitar kesusahan beras', *Min Pao*, 7 October 1948.

<sup>97</sup> 'Sekitar harga beras', *Keng Po*, 2 December 1948.

<sup>98</sup> 'Sekitar urusan beras dan kesukaran belinya', *Keng Po*, 7 December 1948.

<sup>99</sup> 'Distributie Umum', *Keng Po*, 7 December 1948.

state leaders bore the brunt of the blame for the shortage of rice and the corruption.<sup>100</sup>

Both sides also had different parties to blame for their loss of legitimacy due to the food shortage. When the Dutch returned to their former colony, many Dutch leaders viewed the birth of the Indonesian Republic as a disloyal act by colonial subjects to 'their Mother Country'. Yet the Dutch did not blame their Queen or the colonial government for the problem. Near the end of the war, when interviewed about the possibility of the Dutch regaining their former colony, van Mook reportedly responded, 'Ten loadships of food and textiles from Australia, and the whole population of Java will flow to the ports to unload the ships. That will be the end of the rebellion'.<sup>101</sup> The casual, matter-of-fact manner of the response indicated that van Mook accepted such mass behaviour as natural. It was thus implied that leaders could appease the masses' desire to gain their loyalty, but they themselves were not to be blamed for such behaviour. Turning to the Republican side, the subsistence crisis in the urban enclaves was also eroding its legitimacy; yet we have seen that here leaders shouldered the blame.<sup>102</sup>

Critical differences also existed between the discourse under the Dutch and that under the Republic. An example is the term 'rakjat' (the people), which so dominated the Republican discourse that it is impossible not to run into it every few paragraphs.<sup>103</sup> *Rakjat* (or *rakjat kecil* and *rakjat jelata*) as a sociological concept was diffuse: often it alluded to the masses, ie the urban poor and peasants, but sometimes it also included small traders, government employees and even the middle class.<sup>104</sup> *Rakjat* were at the bottom of the political system; they often needed help with something. Helping *rakjat*, or simply being associated with them, was at the same time a revolutionary ideal and a moral obligation. As a revolutionary ideal, the term inspired popular imagination and rallied

<sup>100</sup> 'Pemimpin dan Beras', *Keng Po*, 7 December 1948.

<sup>101</sup> Wertheim (1974), p 11.

<sup>102</sup> Winoto, *supra* note 82.

<sup>103</sup> Only occasionally, other terms denoting 'people' appeared, such as 'bangsa' (race), 'warga negara' (citizens) and 'penduduk' (residents). It is true that the term 'the people' also proliferated in other revolutionary discourses, from France [*Le Peuple*], to China [*Renmin*], to Vietnam [*Nhan Dan*]. But as I argue below, each discourse existed in a different discursive context defined by its competing discourses as much as by its original meaning.

<sup>104</sup> For a similar observation on the use of 'rakjat' during the revolution, see Anderson (1990b), p 61. James Siegel (1998) has even suggested that 'rakjat' in the political discourse often does not mean what it did originally, and that political leaders such as Sukarno created the *rakjat* and determined its membership (p 26).

popular support. As a moral obligation, it established a new sort of social contract based on which the struggle was legitimized. The proliferation of the term demonstrated its utility as a proof of legitimacy: it was attached to almost every public activity and entity: ministries', parties' and newspapers' names, the armed forces, the economy, the currency, agriculture and industry.

In contrast, in newspaper stories about subsistence problems published under the Dutch *at the same time*, the terms used to mean 'people' were 'penduduk' (residents) and 'jiwa' (inhabitants). Sometimes 'pembeli' (customers), 'penduduk miskin' (poor residents) and 'orang kaya' (rich persons) were used. 'Rakjat' rarely appeared.<sup>105</sup> When it did, the term had no moral connotation, for example, 'in Jakarta, where people required 200 tons of rice per day',<sup>106</sup> or, 'when will the people of Krawang be sold rice at government prices?'<sup>107</sup> The term 'rakjat' in these contexts can be translated as 'residents' without any change in meaning. Occasionally newspapers published under the Dutch did raise the issue of 'social justice', such as when *Keng Po* wrote that the government decision to reduce the number of ration cards by 15% would hurt those whose cards would be taken away.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, this involved a very specific issue and not the cry for broad 'social justice' often found in Republican newspapers. The rhetoric under the Dutch never even remotely approached the level of moralizing and diffuseness under the Republic, although *Min Pao* and *Keng Po*, the dailies sampled for the discourse under Dutch rule, did not lack sensational headlines or stories.<sup>109</sup>

The contrast between Republican newspapers (*Ra'jat* and *Berjuang*) and those owned by ethnic Chinese that were neutral or pro-Dutch (*Min Pao* and *Keng Po*) is striking: even though both pairs used Indonesian, the discourse in the former was as diffuse and moralizing as that in the latter was specific and technical/amoral. The disparity between the two

<sup>105</sup> In the 15 stories on the same topic found in *Min Pao* and *Keng Po* during 1947–48, the term 'rakjat' was used only three times.

<sup>106</sup> 'Di Jakarta, di mana rajat membutuhkan 200 ton beras sehari. . .', *Keng Po*, *supra* note 97.

<sup>107</sup> 'Kapan rajat Krawang bisa mendapat beras dengan harga E.Z.?' in 'Beras dengan harga E.Z.' *Keng Po*, 2 December 1948.

<sup>108</sup> 'DDB tolong orang kaya', *Keng Po*, 25 July 1947.

<sup>109</sup> An example is the headline, 'Residents are confused, angry and weeping. Because rice arrived late and its price f.10 a kilo' [Penduduk bingung, mara dan kaluar [sic] air mata. Lantaran beras telat masuk dan harganya f.10 per kilo], *Keng Po*, 10 February 1947.

pairs of newspapers published *at the same time* suggests an ongoing discursive contest as a revolutionary discourse crystallized.<sup>110</sup> The new discourse no doubt resonated with Javanese or other indigenous traditions, which probably helped its popularity. The new discourse also resonated with modern imported ideas, especially European socialism. This contest offered the evidence that the relationship between the leaders and the masses (*pemimpin* and *rakjat*) in the revolution, while bearing some similarity to the traditional relationship between rulers and subjects, was defined in new terms as the revolutionary discourse battled its rival, the Dutch-sponsored technical/amoral discourse. In the crystallizing discourse promoted by the Republican leadership, the state acquired more legitimacy, but was also bound to much higher moral standards and shouldered much more responsibility.

### **Post-colonial politics of provisioning and state–society relations**

Since the independence struggle was a time of state and social transformation, the politics of subsistence offers an interesting arena to examine changes in state–society relations. Over the course of the revolution, the Indonesian state strove to retain the Japanese totalitarian apparatus in a less coercive form. Nevertheless, it could not repress and eventually acquiesced to the demands by local groups riding a wave of mass spontaneous actions. Ironically, as reflected in the new revolutionary discourse, by the end of the struggle for national independence, a dependent relationship had emerged in which probably not a small portion of the urban population came to believe that their subsistence depended on the state.

Based on popular demand, the post-colonial state went on to fix food prices, control milling facilities, monopolize the grain trade, impose quotas on paddy deliveries by peasants, and organize rationed distribution

<sup>110</sup> The *rakjat* as a figure in the political discourse emerged as early as the 1920s, but it did so in some cases in the context of fierce competition between Islam-based and more broadly based political groups (Shiraishi, 1990, p 272). Many rice riots also broke out during this period, but these mainly exposed the contentious relationship between Chinese and other ethnic groups, not that between government leaders and the masses, as during 1945–49 (Ricklefs, 1981, pp 158–159; Shiraishi, 1990, pp 35–37).

to selected constituencies.<sup>111</sup> While the scope of state intervention vastly expanded, a population whose subsistence depended on state provisioning gradually became a destabilizing burden. What is remarkable about the Indonesian case is the reform-resistant character of its provisioning system. Since the birth of the Republic, all its leaders have contributed to expanding the system one way or another. When they were forced to implement reforms, usually during severe fiscal crises, they met significant resistance from a wide spectrum of social groups.<sup>112</sup>

A recent episode illustrates how hard it has been for state leaders to reform the system. In the first weeks of 2002, rice prices suddenly soared by 30%.<sup>113</sup> Soon the press was flooded with warnings of a looming crisis, cries for more drastic government intervention and threats of protests.<sup>114</sup> A headline in *Kompas*, the nation's largest daily, succinctly captured the popular mood: 'The rice problem: people scream, government paralyses, prices run away'.<sup>115</sup> The state was called on to protect 'rakjat' whose livelihood was apparently threatened. In panic, government officials removed rice import restrictions and ordered large-scale market operations to dump hundreds of tons of rice every day on major markets at cheap prices.<sup>116</sup> The potential crisis was nipped in the bud, and prices stabilized after two weeks.

It is striking to observe that the language of 2002 that called for state intervention differed little from that of 1947, as read in *Ra'jat* and *Berjuang*. Given the vast political and social changes in Indonesia in

<sup>111</sup> Both Mears (1975) and Bulog (1970) cite surveys of state intervention in the food market under Sukarno. Arifin (1974) discusses the subsistence crisis early on in the Suharto regime. Hansen (1981) is useful as an overview of rural policies under Sukarno and early Suharto. Essays in Fachry (1996) analyse various aspects of the issue.

<sup>112</sup> See below for an example. See also Arifin (1974) for the crises in 1968 and 1972. Certainly state intervention under Sukarno and Suharto was also motivated by many other political and economic concerns, among which was a fear of ethnic Chinese domination of the rice trade (under Sukarno) and a desire to win rural support for the government party (under Suharto).

<sup>113</sup> 'Pedagang yakin tak ampuh meredam harga', and 'Cadangan gabah petani sudah sangat tipis', *Kompas*, 9 January 2002.

<sup>114</sup> For example, see 'Bau apek, beras operasi pasar', 'Soal Beras: Rakjat Menjerit, Pemerintah Kejepit, Harga Melejit', 'Beras, komoditas strategis yang menyimpan bom waktu', *Kompas*, 10 January 2002; 'Strategi operasi pasar tak efektif', *Kompas*, 11 January 2002; and 'Menyusahkan rakyat, menjepit petani', *Kompas*, 12 January 2002.

<sup>115</sup> 'Soal Beras', *supra* note 114.

<sup>116</sup> These drastic measures led some analysts to criticize the government for 'overkill'. See, for example, Pantjar Simatupang, 'Kebijakan beras yang "overkill"', *Kompas*, 14 January 2002.

the last 50 years, this longevity of the revolutionary discourse appears puzzling until one realizes that the three longest serving presidents out of the five Indonesia has had drew their legitimacy more or less from an association with 'the revolution' or some parts of it. Sukarno was president throughout the struggle of 1945–49, and until his ouster in 1966 was publicly addressed as 'the Great Leader of the Revolution'. Suharto claimed in 1966 that the mission of his 'New Order regime' was to correct the 'deviations from the purity of the ideals of the struggle [for independence]' (Suharto, 1978, p 5). Under the New Order, Suharto's role as a military commander in the struggle was rewritten and exaggerated.<sup>117</sup> The current president (since 2002) Megawati Sukarnoputri, Sukarno's daughter, has also sought to capitalize on her father's association with the revolution. At the beginning of her public speeches at party rallies, she always leads the crowd in shouting several times, 'Merdeka!' (Freedom!).<sup>118</sup> This was a common practice during the revolution, which Megawati resurrected.

As can be observed from the event in 2002 and from other similar subsistence or price crises, one popular weapon for supporters of low food prices has been the diffuse and moralizing terms of the revolutionary language. The protesters of price subsidy cuts have often employed this language to draw attention to state leaders' failures in meeting popular expectations. To the extent that state leaders owed some legitimacy to the revolution, they were under pressure to comply with mass demands. Some opponents of state leaders also had revolutionary credentials,<sup>119</sup> which created even more pressure on the incumbents. These leaders may choose to ignore mass demands, but they have more often taken heed of them. Due to the uproar in the first days of 2002, the State Food Agency (Bulog) has resumed many of the functions it carried out in the rice market before the 1997 financial crisis, when the IMF forced the Suharto regime to liberalize this market.

In conclusion, by focusing on the interaction between state formation and subsistence politics, this essay hopes to contribute to further thinking on state–society relations in Indonesia. Perceptions of outside observers about state–society relations in Indonesia have historically oscillated

<sup>117</sup> An example was the attack on the Dutch by units under his command in Yogyakarta in 1949.

<sup>118</sup> Personal observation, 2002.

<sup>119</sup> This was especially true under Sukarno and Suharto when many of their opponents participated in the events of 1945 and called themselves 'Generation 1945'.

widely every time Indonesian politics underwent a radical change. Writing in the early 1960s when modernization theory was the dominant theoretical framework, Clifford Geertz (1963) expressed his serious concern about how the 'old' society of traditional groups formed by 'recalcitrant' primordial ties was resisting the efforts of the 'new', modern Indonesian state to integrate them. The cards appeared stacked against the state:

the network of primordial alliance and opposition is a dense, intricate, but yet precisely articulated one, the product, in most cases, of centuries of crystallization. The unfamiliar civil state, born yesterday from the meager remains of an exhausted colonial regime, is superimposed upon this fine-spun and lovingly conserved texture of pride and suspicion, and must somehow contrive to weave it into the fabrics of modern politics (pp 268–269).

Twenty years later, in the heyday of the Suharto regime and of the state-centred approach in American political science, Benedict Anderson turned Geertz's theory on its head with the observation that 'the amalgam nation-state is rather recent and that it often conjoins a popular, participatory nation with an older adversarial state'.<sup>120</sup> By stressing the lineage of the Suharto regime in its Dutch 'ancestor', Anderson suggested that, although at times social groups have been able to penetrate the state, the fundamental trend is for the state to triumph over and dominate society.

The politics of provisioning from 1945–49 indicates that both views need qualifications. First, there was much continuity as Anderson suggested, but at least in the matter of provisioning, the lines of continuity more clearly point to the Japanese than the Dutch. Contrary to Geertz's assertions, many post-colonial social groups traced their identities and organizations *not* back to primordial ties, but to the heady days in late 1945 when suddenly there was a power vacuum and plenty of resources were up for grabs. Furthermore, even though the traditional world of Javanese kings and their subjects that had been interrupted by centuries of Dutch rule still had some latent influence, the dependency of post-colonial urban populations on the state for provisioning appeared to have been fundamentally reshaped in the contested development of a revolutionary discourse and the Japanese-inspired model of statecraft.

Anderson similarly underestimated the breakdown of state power in late 1945. In the realm of rice collection and distribution, the Indonesian

<sup>120</sup> Anderson (1990c), p 119.

state that was created in late 1945 still employed Japanese-organized agencies. A close look, however, suggests that the relationship between these local agencies and central government had changed permanently. Many had broken loose, been adopted by political parties, and were no longer subordinate to the centre as they had been under the Japanese. Central government could have reversed the situation, but it was powerless in 1945 to do so. Thirty years later, in the 1970s, Suharto was able to restructure the state and force autonomous local agencies once again to submit to central authority. In order to do so, however, the state had to penetrate deeply into society and spent a large amount of resources in maintaining its presence down to the neighbourhood level.<sup>121</sup> In contrast, the Dutch colonial state had never grown such deep roots at local levels as the New Order state did.<sup>122</sup> The Japanese state was strong at the neighbourhood level, but it was far more extractive and coercive than the New Order state ever was. This is why the expansion of state power under the New Order should not be seen merely as a return to the long-term trend, as the triumph of state over society. Rather, the Suharto regime's distribution-based penetration, as opposed to the Japanese extraction-oriented penetration, suggests a potential weakness of the New Order state: its sustainability depended crucially on its ability to continue distributing resources.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For excellent accounts of change under Suharto at local levels, see Santoso (1986), Hart (1986), Antlov (1995) and Schiller (1996).

<sup>122</sup> A hundred years of Dutch rule (especially during the so-called Ethical period) certainly created massive changes in the politics, economy, society and culture of Indonesian villages. For insightful analyses of the colonial state in its last 60 years, see Cribb (1994); Booth *et al* (1990) also discuss the legacy of Dutch economic policy. However, since Dutch rule generally was indirect, the presence and influence of the state at local levels were far more subdued and diffuse under the Dutch than under both the Japanese and the New Order states. This is especially true in terms of provisioning – the focus of this essay.

<sup>123</sup> The Japanese extraction-oriented penetration certainly had its own problem: its viability depended on the state's coercive capacity.

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