

A mischievous young rogue and a dwarf': Reflections on the role of the panakawan in the Age of Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855)

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1. Introduction

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century world in which the young Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855) grew up was a deeply traditional one. In the Yogyakarta court of his grandfather, Sultan Hamengkubuwono II (reigned 1792-1810/1811-12/1826-28), and father, the third sultan (reigned 1812-1814), there were special categories of court servants (*abdi-Dalem*) who served the ruler and provided his close protection. These included the *para Nyai* (personal female retainers), in particular the elderly *Nyai Keparak*, who carried the ruler's betelnut (*sirih*) box and spittoon (Carey 2008: 366, 403); the *prajurit èstri* (*pasukan Langenkusumo*) or Amazon corps who acted as the personal bodyguards of the ruler and were renowned for their skill on horseback (Carey 2008: 76-77); the *polowijo* or *nonok* (royal dwarves, the hydrocephalic and those with other unusual physical deformities) who acted as the court jesters (*hansworst*) and warders against evil; and the *panji* or young noblemen who formed part of the ruler's intimate circle much like the bachelor knights of the European medieval courts (Carey 2008: 179-80).



Figure 1. A Javanese regent (bupati) in full dress, drawn between 1830-1850.

Amongst these intimate court servitors none were important than the *panakawan*. As intimate assistants of the nobility, they combined many roles: tutor, servant, bodyguard, clown, adviser, masseur, herbalist, interpreter of dreams. Their pithy wit deflated pomposity and re-connected the high-born with the world of the Javanese village. As in the *wayang* clown-servitor figure of the renowned senior *panakawan* of the Pandawa brothers – Semar – they might even be gods in disguise. This mix of the demotic and the divine reflects the paradox at the heart of Javanese culture – the seemingly misshapen being the vehicle of ultimate wisdom: *Een Gedrocht en toch de Volmaakte Mens* (a monster but still a perfect man) as the title of a famous study of the *Suluk Gathotloco* has it (Akkeren 1951).

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Diponegoro's *panakawan*: The Exile Years (1830-55)

In Diponegoro's autobiographical *babad* (chronicle) (1831-2) (Rusche 1908-9) and other sources relating to his life, in particular the diary of the German officer, Justus Heinrich Knoerle (1796-1833), who accompanied him into exile in Manado in May-June 1830 (Knoerle 1835), there are several references to the prince's *panakawan*. It appears from Dutch official sources (Carey 2008: 816-21) that at least eight of those in Diponegoro's 25-strong party transported on the Dutch corvette, Pollux, from Batavia to Manado were 'intimate retainers' (referred to in Dutch as '*volgeling*' or followers), their rather higher monthly allowance (5-7 guilders - present-day equivalent of USD60-80 or Rupiah 700,000-900,000) marking them out from the rest of the group – referred to as 'servants' (*bediender*) - who were paid just 3 guilders (USD40 or

Rupiah 450,000). Some of these were still very young: Rujakbeling, alias Sahiman, a lad who had joined Diponegoro at the end of the Java War, was just 15. One of the few allowed to stay on in Makassar with the prince after the Dutch purge of his entourage in June 1839, he was tasked with looking after - and assisting with the education of - the Java War leader's seven children born to him in exile. These offspring were both from his official wife, Raden Ayu Retnoningsih (circa 1810-1885), a daughter of the Yogya *bupati* of Keniten (Madiun), and various Javanese women in his entourage, some of whom may have been the wives of his *panakawan* (Carey 2008: 741, 768-9).



Figure 2. Bantengwareng with Diponegoro in exile in Fort Rotterdam (Makassar) (1833-55) warning one of the prince's children named 'Pangéran Alibasah' while Diponegoro studies a Javanese mystical text (*tasawuf*)

We know from the Dutch sources that servants (*bediender*) could, if they showed intelligence and capacity, be promoted as followers (*volgeling*) and enjoy a higher status and greater responsibility. This was the case with another young man, Teplak (alias Fikpak, alias Rujakgadhung) – the variety of his names indicating his intimacy with his master – who was promoted as a follower (*panakawan*) in 1837 (Carey 2008: 741, 817). Unlike Diponegoro's ordinary followers, his intimate retainers were permitted a degree of social licence in their conversation and dealings with him. This was especially the case with his two long-standing *panakawan*, Joyosuroto (Roto) and Bantengwareng (c. 1810-58), the last of whom the prince described in his *babad* as a 'mischievous young rogue and a dwarf'¹. Roto, in particular, appears to have had a punning wit.

¹ *Babad Dipanagara* (Manado) IV:229, XXXVIII (Mijil) 150. *Laré bajang apan kang satunggil/ sanget beleringon/ pinaring nama Banthèngwarèng/ kang satunggil pun Rata namèki/ [...]*.

Noticing during their journey into exile that his master was developing a taste for Dutch foods, in particular freshly baked white bread and potatoes, the latter standard fare on long sea voyages on European vessels at this time, he began to make a play on words – referring to the less than appetizing shipboard '*kentang Welanda*' (Dutch potatoes) as '*kentang sabrang*' (exile's potatoes) (Carey 2008: 700). He was also not averse to telling tales. As the Corvette Pollux made its slow journey through the eastern archipelago in late May and early June 1830, past the northern coasts of Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores, he spoofed the prince with accounts of islands which were home to man-eating ogresses.

Such licence came with responsibility. Roto alone of all the prince's followers shared every stage of his master's journey into exile. After Diponegoro's arrest in Magelang on the morning of Sunday, 28 March, he climbed aboard the Resident of Kedu's carriage with his prince's treasured betel-box as it bore Diponegoro and his Dutch officer escorts off to the Semarang Residency border at Bedono (Carey 2008: 697, 699).

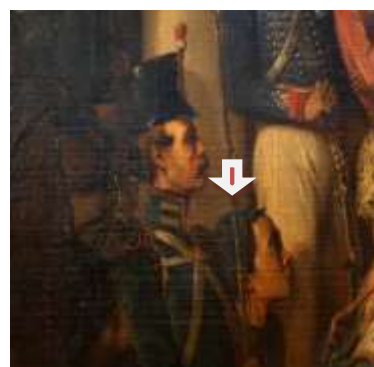


Figure 3. Jopyosuroto (Roto) in Raden Saleh's famous 1857 painting of the Capture of Diponegoro at Magelang, 28 March 1830

Tasked with guarding his master at night, he slept just outside the prince's door. Only the presence of the senior Dutch officer escort, Major F.V.H.A. de Stuers (1792-1881), in the prince's bedroom each night (he had been ordered not to let the Java War leader out of his sight) disturbed this usual nocturnal ritual (Carey 2008: 700 note 127). Unlike with the prince's close family and wives, at least one of whom – said to be Diponegoro's favourite – chose not to accompany him into exile (Carey 2008: 700), the loyalty of his *panakawan* was never in question. They owed everything to

him. As his most intimate and trusted followers, they saw it as their duty to stand by him through thick and thin. This meant accompanying him into battle (Carey 2008: 120 note 80) and sharing the privations of the prince's life as a fugitive in the mountain fastnesses of Bagelen, Banyumas and Southern Kedu in the penultimate months of the war (November 1829 – January 1830). Even the supreme Dutch commander, General Hendrik Merkus de Kock (1779-1845), would speak of the prince and his two *panakawan* in awe-struck tones as 'being made of iron' going on to tell his chief engineer officer, Colonel Frans David Cochius (1787-1876) that 'when one reads the descriptions of the terrain in which [they are] holding out and the shacks in which [they] rest [their] weary bod[ies] – [one sees that] everything is utterly desolate' (Carey 2008: 116). This was how the Dutch military historian and Royal Military Academy (KMA Breda) lecturer, George Nypels, put it in his lecture notes for his privately printed history of the Java War (Nypels 1895:153):

[Following the defeat of Diponegoro's forces at the battle of Siluk in the limestone hills (*gunung kapur*) to the west of Yogya (17 September 1829) and the prince's crossing of the Bogowonto River into Bagelen on the night of 26-27 September] the last stage of the war played itself out: constantly harried and pursued, Diponegoro was able to keep the flying columns of Captain Rinia van Nauta, Captain Lambertus Gennet, Major Buschkens and Major Michiels as well as various locally raised *barisan* (troops) busy from October 1829 to February 1830. Over mountains and through forests, into wildernesses and caves, seeking help wherever he could in the rains of the west monsoon, he often escaped when one thought he was nearby.

The numbers of his close followers had almost completely melted away. He suffered from every kind of want: often without a roof over his head and frequently without sufficient food, he found the local population loath to help him. In January 1830, even his loyal *patih* [Raden Adipati Abdullah Danurejo] left his side. Although suffering from a wound in his leg and sick from all his physical privations and exhaustion he bore with these conditions through until 9 February 1830 [when the first negotiations with Colonel Cleerens started].

During all this terrible time, his two *panakawan*, Roto and Bantengwareng, were by his side. Acting as his guides and counselors,

they endured all his privations. In May 1830, they would make the ultimate sacrifice of leaving Java forever with their families, accompanying the prince first to Manado (1830-1833) and then to Makassar (1833-1855). Indeed, they would have both stayed with Diponegoro until his death in the South Sulawesi capital on 8 January 1855, had Roto not been sent by the Dutch authorities to join Kyai Mojo's exile community in Tondano in North Sulawesi in June 1839 as part of a larger group of the prince's followers who were detached from his entourage at that time – a sanction imposed after the prince was found to have engaged in forbidden correspondence with the senior Dutch officer – Colonel (later titular Major-General) Jan-Baptist Cleerens (1785-1850) tasked with arranging his surrender in western Banyumas in February 1830 (Carey 2008: 740-2, 816-21).

Bantengwareng on the other hand appears to have stayed with Diponegoro in Makassar until the prince's death on 8 January 1855 was one of those tasked with the education of the prince's children born in exile. Indeed, he was buried in 1858 just outside the inner wall of the Diponegoro family burial plot in Kampung Melayu, Makassar, his child-sized grave indicating his dwarflike stature and loyalty even unto death (*teguh-pati*) to the Diponegoro family (Carey 2012:471; visit to Makam Diponegoro, Kampung Melayu, Makassar, 16 April 2011).

Diponegoro certainly appreciated these sacrifices. When he came to reflect on his relationship with his *panakawan*, he even took the example of the *wayang* hero, Arjuna, as his personal ideal, drawing a close parallel between himself and the handsome Pandawa brother during the closing stages of the Java War when he tramped the rhinoceros' paths of the Bagelen mountains with his two faithful *panakawan*. Even his description of Bantengwareng as a 'dwarf' recalls the deformed servitors of Arjuna and the other Pandawa brothers, who also followed their masters off into the jungles after Yudistira had lost the kingdom of Ngastina to the Kurawa in a game of dice. The analogy is made even clearer in the prince's *babad* when the names of Semar, Gareng and Petruk were given to three local *bekel* (village tax-collectors/heads) from the surrounding area who had temporarily attached themselves to his party. The Java War leader adds the detail that the names suited the physical appearance of the

respective *bekel* and the latter found them good.²

2.2. Diponegoro's *panakawan*: The Tegalrejo Years (1793-1825) and the Java War (1825-1830)

Before the Java War, during his years at Tegalrejo (1793-1825), the estate his great-grandmother had built just three kilometers to the north-west of Yogyakarta in the early 1790s, Diponegoro had *panakawan* in his immediate entourage. During these years, as the prince deepened his mystical and religious practices, departing for pilgrimages and periods of retreat at his cave in the Selarong hills in the Bantul district to the south of the sultan's capital, these intimate retainers accompanied him. We know, for example, from the account of the former Netherlands-Indies army officer turned writer, Willem Adriaan van Rees (1820-1898), that Diponegoro's cave complex at Guwo Secang in the Selarong hills had a kitchen (Van Rees 1867, II:66-68; Louw and De Klerck 1894-1909, I:436). So we can perhaps surmise that it was there that the prince's food was prepared by his *panakawan* who kept him company during the fasting month (*Puasa*) when he would reside at Selarong. The names of these intimate retainers given in the prince's autobiography for these pre-Java War years were Bocah-Becik (literally 'the good lad') and Pututlowo, the latter recalling the epithet - '*puthut*' - used in Javanese to refer to the personal retainer of an ascetic or the follower/pupil of an adept. This moniker perhaps tells us something about how the prince saw himself in these pre-Java War years as more of a *resi* (recluse, ascetic) than a *bangsawan* (Gericke and Roorda 1901, II: 332; Carey 2008: 568 note 180). On another occasion, at the time of the eruption of Mt Merapi on the night of 28-29 December 1822, these selfsame *panakawan* had awakened Diponegoro with their screams as they ran out into the *pelataran* (yard) at Tegalrejo to witness the night sky turned livid red by the force of the eruption (Carey 2008: 513).

After the outbreak of the Java War, when Diponegoro began to establish his own personal court, first at Selarong (20 July-5 October 1825) and then at Kemusuh in the Kulon Progo area (November 1825-August 1826) (Carey

2008: 631), the social relationships governing his connections with his immediate entourage began to change. Henceforth, his *panakawan* were no longer his sole intimates. Instead, the prince's social milieu began to resemble that of the Yogya court where young unmarried noblemen or *panji* formed the core of the inner circle around the sultan. This was remarked on by Colonel Cleerens during the prince's stop-over in Menoreh on his journey to Magelang in late February and early March 1830, when he was struck by the 'young men' (namely the prince's own son, Pangeran Diponegoro the Younger (born circa 1801-died Ambon, circa 1865), and the two sons of the late *patih* of Yogyakarta, Danurejo II (in office, 1799-1811) – namely Basah Gondokusumo (born circa 1810-circa 1885; in office as Danurejo V, 1847-79) and Basah Mertonegoro (born circa 1808; post-1830, Colonel Raden Tumenggung Mertonegoro I) who formed the prince's inner advisory group. He feared they were misleading him due to their lack of political knowledge and he tried in vain to persuade Diponegoro's official first minister (*patih*), Raden Adipati Abdullah Danurejo (in office, 1828-30; post-1830, Raden Tumenggung Danuningrat), to play a more pro-active role. Interestingly, as in the court establishment in Yogya, there were also those in the prince's close entourage who seemed to have been tasked with playing the court jester, one such being the exceptionally able Haji Ngiso, a long-time *ulama* confidante of the Java War leader, who would later become the 'chaplain' (*pendeta tentara*) (1830-32) to Sentot's *barisan* (troop) in Ungaran after the war and was described by Cleerens as behaving like a *hansworst* or clown during the prince's stop-over in the Dutch garrison town of Menoreh (Carey 2008: 676 note 75).

Amongst Diponegoro's extended family we know that his great-uncle Pangeran Diposono (born Yogya circa 1778 – died Ambon pre-1840), who organized the uprisings in Kedu and Bantul in February 1822, was disabled, probably from childhood polio. Diponegoro describes him in his autobiography as a small, crippled man who had suffered from a form of mental sickness since childhood and whose heart was set on evil³. Apparently skilled at

² *Babad Dipanagara* (Manado) IV:229-30, XXXVIII.153-4.

³ BD (Manado), II:283, XIX (Sinom) 25-6. 25. [...]déné langkung boten rukun/ Pangéran Dipasana/ répot jompo lawan alit/ lan kelangkung kang manah remen maksiyat. 26. nanging ragi gerah manah/ duk kala timurirèki/ marma datan linegèwa / [...].

augury and well versed in *primbon* (divination manual) literature, he attempted to use his contacts in the spirit world to further his aims against the Dutch and the Chinese, and to replace the fourth sultan on the throne of Yogya (Carey 2008:495-6).

3. Conclusion

The available sources allow us only brief glimpses of the role played by the prince's intimate retainers during his lifetime. Interestingly, the most complete record can be found in the post-Java War period when the Dutch mania with accounting provides us with an insight into the rather privileged status enjoyed by Diponegoro's *panakawan* in relation to the rest of his entourage. They were 'followers' (*volgeling*) not 'servants' (*bediender*) and their role as personal advisers, family intimates and guardians – perhaps even tutors – for the prince's children was noted by the Dutch authorities. Unfortunately, while we have some insight from the vantage point of Diponegoro and his Dutch military escorts regarding his *panakawan*, we have no sources which tells us about the clown-servants themselves. How they felt about their master, what privations they experienced and what their family backgrounds were. One can only surmise that most must have hailed from families in Diponegoro's own apanage lands and the farming communities immediately adjacent to his Tegalrejo estate. What is certain is that they evinced unusual loyalty and stuck by the prince through thick and thin – enduring the unendurable and securing their own honoured place in the history of Java's Old Order.

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