

# *Voices From The Kelantan Desa* 1900–1940

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‘I am of course opposed to the driving out of the Malay, but would rather have the land occupied and planted with rubber than lying absolutely uncultivated as it has been’.<sup>1</sup> J. S. Mason, British Adviser Kelantan, 21.7.1911.

‘It is not our intention to quit our home and country and go in quest of new lands to live in because some people are trying to avail themselves in our ignorance and to out the whole kampong with a view to reap future profits from it . . . Our earnest pray[er] is that we may be left to live peacefully in our home and country where we have lived nearly a century’.<sup>2</sup> Hj. Ibrahim, Hj. Awang and Hj. Unus, Ulu Kelantan, 3.12.1912.

This paper intends to tell the peasant’s story. It will focus its attention on that subjective area of verbal human action which embodies feelings, attitudes, thoughts and perceptions as opposed to that indestructable fact—physical action. The central theme is the attitudes and other subjective feelings of the peasantry as they experienced the crushing of the natural economy by twentieth-century capitalist penetration backed by a pervasive colonial administration.<sup>3</sup> The movement

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<sup>1</sup> Minute, J. S. Mason, 21 July 1911, in British Adviser Kelantan, Miscellaneous [BAK(M)] 159/1911.

<sup>2</sup> Hj. Ibrahim Hj. Awang and Hj. Unus to British Adviser [BA], 3 December 1912, in British Adviser Kelantan [BAK] 657/1912.

<sup>3</sup> In recent years there have been several articles which deal with the problem of capitalist penetration in the countryside. For background information see Shamsul Amri, ‘The development of underdevelopment of the Malaysian peasantry’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 9, No. 4 (1979), pp. 434–54; Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, ‘Capitalist penetration and the reconstitution of the Malay peasantry’, Paper presented to the Third National Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Griffith University, Brisbane, August 1980; Amarjit Kaur and Shaharil Talib, ‘Ulu Kelantan 1900–1940: The extractive economy and the peasantry’, Paper presented to the Eighth Conference, International Association of Historians of Asia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, August 1980; and Wan Hashim, ‘The political economy of peasant transformation: Theoretical framework and a case study’, *The Journal of Social Studies*, 10 (October 1980), pp. 47–79.

through time from one synchronic framework to another synchronic picture is a painful experience for those who have lost their cultivated land, lost their rights to fish ponds, lost their access to forest produce, faced new rules and regulations and confronted new rural officials bent on hammering in the colonial administrative grid. Such twentieth-century processes cut deep into the sinews of peasant lives. The evidence cries out against the proposition, long established as historical fact, that twentieth-century Malay society remained neglected and little changed from the previous century.

The innumerable *surat rayuan* (petition letters), *surat layang* (poison letters), anonymous letters, complaints, demands, protests and other such letters in similar vein make it possible for us to document the peasant's verbal action as they responded to the significant changing processes that occurred at the grass roots level. This rich corpus of material embedded in the archives breaks the myth of silence that is often ascribed to people living in the countryside. The Kelantan peasantry, to whom this discussion will confine itself, amazed colonial officials by their frequent petitions to the authorities.<sup>4</sup> Even on what might seem to be a trivial matter they would complain. For example, in May 1922 one Cik Mek Mas of Kampong Kijang addressed a letter to His Highness Sultan Ismail I of Kelantan (1920-44) complaining that neighbouring rubber trees overshadowed a part of her land. Their shadow, she contended, adversely affected the growth of her padi, causing much loss. She was told in no uncertain terms by the Land Office officials that she would have to deposit a sum of five dollars if she wished the case to be considered. Henceforth she suffered in silence.<sup>5</sup> In most other cases the financial cost of complaints was not all that forbidding to the peasantry. All it required was a four cents' stamp on a letter addressed to the relevant authorities and the case would be heard. Often if the stamp was faintly marked it would be removed and reused in another petition.<sup>6</sup> If the services of a petition-writer were used his fees, which in the 1930s amounted to one dollar<sup>7</sup> for the first page and two cents for every line after the first page, would be an additional cost. It is through the use of documents such as these that this paper will keep in fine tune the voice of the peasantry experiencing change.

The central concern of the peasantry in this period of transition was

<sup>4</sup> Minute, 7 April 1914, in BAK 918/1913.

<sup>5</sup> See Awang Kechik and Mek Mas to H.H. the Sultan, 13 May 1922, in BAK(M) 124/1922 and minute, 17 June 1922, on the same file.

<sup>6</sup> Minute, 22 March 1914, in BAK 918/1913.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Kelantan notification No. 64 of 1930 'Petition writers', in BAK 624/1931.

over the factors of production, its rules of appropriation and its use. In brief, the peasants' preoccupation was with the total operations that aimed at procuring for themselves their material means of existence in the natural economy. The pre-colonial economy of the peasants was one which combined food-gathering, hunting, agriculture and craft work. It was an economy that transformed nature and had also elements of human activities which used resources found in nature. The peasants combined the factors of production—resources, labour power—with their knowledge and skills, to produce their subsistence. The single underlying threat faced by the peasants as they were absorbed into the capitalist commodity economy was the crushing of the natural economy. It is no surprise then that the bulk of letters written by the peasants in the twentieth century was on this subject. These documents will be examined under three broad categories. The first speaks about the peasants and the colonial state. The second deals with the experience of the peasants in their relationship with local officials and the third group of letters outlines the conflicts between peasants and the plantations.

Land for cultivation was an important resource to the peasantry. There was confusion and apprehension in indigenous society as the colonial state extended the Torrens system of land administration, which demanded among other things productive use of land. What was once a natural resource was now transformed into a commodity. Even the ruler found the process difficult to accept in the early years of colonial administration. In 1910, for example, he applied to the Land Office for a very large piece of land covering 3,000 to 3,500 acres at Gong Kulim in which cattle formerly used to graze. The British Adviser's offer was either for the ruler to own the land personally and pay the rent on it or alternatively for the land to be kept as a state reserve. This the ruler could not accept since the land in former times was owned by Raja Perempuan, who had transferred it to the father of the ruler who in turn eventually inherited the land. Throughout, the land was used continuously for cattle grazing. The ruler regarded the land as *tanah pusaka* (ancestral land) and had never recognized it as state land. The British Adviser's reply to this was that he did not think cattle grazing could make anyone the owner of the land '... for in countries like this people graze their cattle anywhere and neither the State nor private people should lose their land because of this'. The colonial state, he explained, could only gain revenue by collecting fixed rents, and by collecting them properly and this was not possible if the ruler asked for blocks of land without rent. On the matter of land rent (*sewa tanah*) the Sultan could

not comprehend how as a ruler of the state—the fount of all authority—he had to rent his own land. Eventually he gave up on the matter.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in another instance of misunderstanding the Raja Muda of Kelantan was rapped on the knuckles for ordering the Toh Kweng of Kusial to appropriate *binjai* fruits growing at Tebing Tinggi, Ulu Kelantan. The trees were deemed to be government fruit trees and the fruits should have been auctioned to the highest bidder. He was informed that the colonial state gave ‘. . . him his pension in exchange for the old rights which he had. . . .’<sup>9</sup>

To the peasants the changing situation was even more desperate. The natural environment was the crucial resource base for their subsistence living. The process of Land Settlement brought into relief the conflict between what was claimed by the Land Office as state land and land that was claimed by peasants as ancestral land. It is in this twilight area where all cats are grey that most of the conflict between the colonial state and peasantry occurred. When the colonial state claimed land that was disputed the victims’ position was clearly expressed in their petitions. The following extract will serve to illustrate this point.

. . . we, the villagers of Chetak, Kelantan, at present find ourselves owing to the introduction by the new administration of a certain policy in connection with our properties, such as rice fields, orchards, coconut and betel-nut plantations etc. which we have owned for a long time, some of them having been inherited from our forefathers who have successively planted them. Now the land officers have placed flags on these lands and declared them to be State Lands and we, in our deep ignorance of the rules and regulations, are plunged into grief, each finding himself deprived of his property, although we have always been their owners. These lands are all planted with coconut trees, betel-nut trees, etc., and some of them are kept for planting vegetables, such as pumpkins, brinjals and peas, because they are close to the land on which each lives; some are used as rice fields and pasturage for cattle, and some are allowed to be without any cultivation for two years if the nature of the soil demands it so as to make the land fit for rice-planting. In short, none of these lands are left without cultivation on account of laziness or neglect to work, because it is a well-known fact that it is by such employment alone that the poverty-stricken subjects of Kelantan living in the interior earn their daily food, and this condition has obtained from times immemorial. In the past there has been no difficulty with regard to the cultivation of these lands, but since the advent of the present regime which we had hoped would bring us more liberty and which it was popularly supposed was being introduced in the interest of the community and with a view to a general improvement, our misery has only been increased and our lands taken away from us by the government who demand payment from us

<sup>8</sup> See minutes and enclosures in BAK 154/1910.

<sup>9</sup> Draft Desp., BA to H.H. the Raja Muda, 13 September 1914, in BAK 1008/1914.

before the lands can be restored to our control. The villagers have ceased to work, as they dare not infringe the government order.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly the colonial state regarded land as a commodity which was a source of potential revenue. The principles of land administration were described as '... a new and extraordinary idea. . . .'<sup>11</sup> Any use of land without reference to the Land Office was seen as illegal occupation and loss of revenue. The local officials who failed to report such matters faced severe censure and even dismissal.<sup>12</sup> When illegally occupied state land was discovered often it was seized and sold by auction.

Resumption of land by the colonial state was another way in which cultivators could lose their land. This occurred when rent was not paid or no cultivation was done. During the Depression years many rubber smallholders lost their land by rent default. In 1933 the peasants of Ulu Kelantan appealed that rubber land which was resumed by the government should be returned to them.

They state that they have been greatly affected by the bad times in the past but they now have hopes of being able to discharge their obligations in view of the slight gradual improvement in the rubber business.

It is said that, although most of these lands are planted with rubber, they are also occupied as dwelling places. That being so, they are afraid that they may be regarded as committing an offence against the law of the state by occupying lands which have become state land.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned previously, non-cultivation even when rent was paid did lead to resumption of land. This feature was rampant in Ulu Kelantan. The victim often pleaded ignorance as to what *dosaan* (offence) he had committed.<sup>14</sup>

Ada-lah suangan tanah padi chedungan, hak saya duduk meliki perintah tiap-tiap tahon lama kurang anam belas tahon dengan 1340 ini tempat-nya di-Temangan serta saya bayar hasil sebanyak tiga belas ringgit \$13/00

<sup>10</sup> Tukang Ali bin Omar and others to High Commissioner, January 1913, in BAK 84/1912.

<sup>11</sup> Desp., District Officer [DO] Ulu Kelantan to BA, 16 February 1917, in BAK 172/1917.

<sup>12</sup> See minutes in BAK 178/1931.

<sup>13</sup> Minute, 7 June 1933, in Land Office Pasir Puteh (LOPP) 211/1933.

<sup>14</sup> Minute, 31 July 1922, in BAK(M) 164/1922.

Loosely translated, this statement says that the petitioner has owned a piece of wet padi land at Temangan for the last 16 years. He has paid land rent amounting to \$13.00 annually and without reason the Land Office, Kuala Kerai, Ulu Kelantan has seized his property. He had heard that peasant land which paid annual dues in Kelantan was never seized. Forfeiture only occurred when payment was not made for two to three years and even on those occasions when the land was auctioned it was returned to the original owners.

tiap-tiap tahun tiba-tiba Kerajaan Office Tanah Kuala Kerai Ulu Kelantan rampas ambil kepada-nya tiada dengan suatu sebab.

Maka yang saya telah dengar dan biasa-nya di-dalam Negeri Kelantan ini apabila tanah ra'aiat-ra'aiat isi Negeri ada membayar hasil tiap-tiap tahun Kerajaan tidak boleh rampas ambil harta benda tanah-tanah ra'aiat-ra'aiat itu melain-kan tidak bayar hasil sampai dua tiga tahun pun dengan jalan lelong yang lebih itu di-pulangkah kepada ra'ait tuan ampunya tanah itu.

Once again he concluded, like the others who lost their land, that if he did not secure the land then '... susah besarlah tuan saya dan ahli anak bini saya tidak buat padi dengan sebab tiap-tiap orang ulu seperti saya ini di-sendiri uleh tuhan kita hidup dengan memakan nasi jika tanah saya. Kerajaan apa saya hendak di-buat mendapat padi'.<sup>15</sup>

There was a marked conflict of purpose over land between the peasants and the colonial state. Increasingly, as the twentieth century wore on, the colonial state extended its control into the countryside. All land applications for cultivation were regulated by the Land Office. Even when peasants applied for what was recognized as state land by proper procedures there was no guarantee that their request would be granted. Their application could be turned down for a number of reasons little understood by them. Thus, for example, the District Officer of Pasir Puteh in 1920 strongly felt obliged to discourage migration in large numbers from one neighbourhood to another within his district. The lack of an administrative machinery also made it impossible for him to process such applications. He was especially wary of joint applications, fearing that a few leaders might profit from the venture.<sup>16</sup> The disappointed applicants could well exclaim under these circumstances:

... saya sekalian telah berulang pergi balek berbulan-bulan lama-nya dengan membawa ringgit hingga hilang-kan masa yang sia-sia jua.

Tabek tuan adalah saia sekalian ada setengah langsung tiada mempunyai tanah padi dan setengah ada juga tetapi tidak-lah menchukopi tetekala beranak berchuchu tadapat tiada-lah berpindah-pindah dan telah kekurangan-lah beras padi sebab ramai dibiarkan-nya menjadi raayat negeri.

... maka oleh itu bimbangan-lah saia sekalian dengan tiada kepandaian yang lain melainkan itu-lah sahaja turon temurun bertanam padi tambahan tanah kerajaan didalam daerah Peringat tiada? Seperti jajahan Pasir Puteh lagi dapat ayer kerana berhampiran dengan Bukit bukit demikian-lah harap dapat

<sup>15</sup> Osman bin Munar to BA, 12 July 1922, in BAK(M) 164/1922.

The petitioner concludes by expressing the enormous difficulty he and his family would face if they could not plant padi. Others like him in Ulu Kelantan also depend on the will of God for their rice. If the government confiscates his land how will he find rice to live on?

<sup>16</sup> Minute, 23 May 1920, in BAK(M) 110/1920.

saia membayar dengan seberapa segera kerana musim bangga yang bermaalom oleh yang berhormat tuan jua serta iringi dengan berbanyak tabek adania.<sup>17</sup>

Besides land for cultivation, problems arose between the colonial state and the peasantry over other aspects of the natural environment. Forest produce, fishing rights and water resources were among the more salient issues. The supervision of forest resources proved over the course of time a formidable task to the colonial state. This was plainly stated by the State Forest Officer in 1936. He contended:

According to the strict letter of law, any landholder wishing to remove timber in Class I from State Land, or from alienated land owned by someone else, must obtain a licence before cutting (in State Land) or removal (in alienated land), and must pay royalty on all timber removed thereunder at the usual State Land rates.

In practice no land-holder ever does apply for a licence, and on removal of the timber commits a technical forest offence (Rule 2 and 20 of the Forest Produce Rules 1934, G.M. 48 of 1934). Such offenders are not usually brought to court, unless they refuse to pay the royalty due. If they refuse, and are taken to court, they nearly always plead guilty, and are usually ordered to pay royalty and summons costs only. This obstructive attitude by the rayat wastes an enormous amount of my time and that of my staff, in collecting evidence (always a difficult matter, as the neighbours are always hostile) and I am only waiting to get a really flagrant case to press for the maximum penalty, which will, I hope act as a deterrent to others.<sup>18</sup>

He found out that the peasants had adopted ingenious devices ‘. . . in order to do Government down for a trifling sum’. He concluded that ‘. . . this timber-running is a playful pastime so deeply beloved of the Kelantan nature that I fear it will not be stamped out until it is definitely shown in a number of cases, that the game is not worth the candle’.<sup>19</sup>

Besides the little games that were played by the State Forest Department and the peasantry there were more serious matters at stake,

<sup>17</sup> Ali bin Abdul Samad to BA, 13 May 1920, in BAK(M) 110/1920.

Briefly, the applicants state that they have for months been unsuccessful in making payments to the authorities. They have to travel back and forth. They state that some of them do not own padi land, while others do not possess enough land to feed growing families. They are uncertain of the future because they know no other way of life except the ancient practice of planting padi. The district of Peringat where they reside does not have any more state land left for use. However, there is available land in Pasir Puteh district where irrigated water is easily available from the neighbouring hills. They hope that they will be allowed to make the necessary payments quickly because the *musim bangga* (season for ploughing) is about to begin.

<sup>18</sup> Desp., State Forest Officer, Kelantan to Suptd. of Lands, undated, encl. 2 in LOPP 344/1936.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

especially when the colonial state declared areas used by the peasantry as state land. There were uncultivated lands within the ecological system from which peasants extracted the resources essential for their livelihood. On the ground there will not be any evidence of settlement, cultivation or other forms of human activity. However, declaration of what appeared to be untended land by the Land Office as state land often brought forth a flood of verbal protests. The claim of Hj. Idris bin Hj. Salleh, Kampung Lubok Jambu and two others clearly demonstrates some of these problems.

Akan hal satu wangan tanah saya-saya bertiga ini tempat-nya di-Mukim surau Pendik. Maka tanah itu hak zaman Datok nenek saya lagi berzaman-zaman saya-sayalah memerintah-nya akan tetapi-nya kadang-kadang setahun perintah setahun tidak sebab tanah kubang kerbau apabila musim hujan jadi dalam ayar, bila kurang hujan dapat-lah dibuat padi-nya di-kubang itu, dan telaga ikan pon ada dan pokok anak sago pon ada didalam kubang itu hak datok nenak saya tanam buat atap rumah di-kubang itu, ya-itu bukan-nya sungai bukan-nya padi alor asal-nya kubang kerbau datok nenak berkampong berkubang disitu berpuluh-puluh ekor jadilah dalam sedikit Tuan daripada darat itu, dan pada masa compass tanah-tanah itu ada saya tanam batu-batu mentara-nya 4 tapangan tanah-tanah itu.

Adapun telaga ikan itu pon hak orang tua-tua dahulu kala-nya thabi'at orang-orang darat tempat saya disitu telaga itulah tempat ambil ikan tiap-tiap tahun menulong nasi tidaklah seperti orang tepi pantai laut memukat ikan, dan sago itupon hak tok nenek saya tanam digunakan buat atap rumah saga itulah jika orang kuala atap nipah jika orang kaya-kaya atap bata jika miskin seperti saya ini atap sagulah Tuan disama-nya.

Maka yang saya bergaduh gendah sangat ini Tuan tanah kubang tempat saya-saya buat padi dan telaga ikan tempat anak chuchu saya makan lauk, dan pokok sago tempat menedoh rumah anak bini saya dudok dikatakan hak Kerajaan itulah saya-saya bertiga ini susah hati sangat diatas tanah dan sago telaga ikan saya itu tuan. Dengan sebab saya pikir Kerajaan Tuan sangat-sangatlah 'adil-nya dan Tuan boleh menentukan hak rayat-rayat-lah punya hak Kerajaan. Kerajaanlah punya adakah telaga ikan buloh dalam tidak dengan gali gali adakah pokok sago buloh tumbuh dengan sendiri jika tidak datok nenak saya tanam tidaklah Tuan seperti pokok-pokok keladi tumbuh dengan sendiri maka terlebih dahulu daripada ini surut saya-saya menulis sepuchok surat kepada Office Tanah maka tiada menjadi apa-apa-nya.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Hj. Idris bin Hj. Salleh and 2 others to BA, 8 March 1924, encl. 1 in BAK(M) 115/1924.

The three petitioners refer to a piece of *kubang* (shallow water-hole) in mukim Surau Pendik. They claim the land as ancestral land. On occasions they leave the land untended, especially when the area is flooded over. However, when the hollow ground collects water it is used to plant padi and serves as a natural fish pond. The area has also been planted with sago trees by their forefathers for roof-making. They emphasize that the area is not a river nor a padi *alor* (water canal) but was originally a *kubang kerbau* (a shallow water-hole used by buffaloes) claimed by their ancestors, who raised many



The point of fishing rights has been touched on earlier but it needs some elaboration here. Inland fishing was an integral part of peasant activity. Rivers, rice fields, *kubang* (shallow water-hole) and ponds were sources of supply. It was stated that fish ponds were of great antiquity in Kelantan. These were often older than the cultivation of the land on which they stood. There is little information as to whether the fish pond owner had precedence in *adat* (custom) over the cultivated land owner. However, fish ponds were a source of constant friction when they were located on other people's land or on state land. In 1919 a decision was made that when a dispute arose, the fish pond owner should sell it to the owner of the land on which it stood at a price fixed by the Collector of Land Revenue.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless friction persisted. The petition of Bilal Ibrahim and 40 others reflects the changing process as inland fishing gave way to agriculture.

Dengan beberapa hormat-nya saya sekalian yang tersebut nama dibawah ini mengangkat-kan ma'alom ke-sisi pengtahuan Tuan sunggoh-nya barang sedia ma'alom di-pengtahuan Tuan: yaitu mimang dari orang2 tua saya dahulu kala lagi bahawasa-nya membelat ikan didalam baroh padi itu ialah suatu jenis pencharian yang sangat di-pandangi-nya oleh anak-anak kampong daerah itu dan juga ia suatu pertolongan bagi menerebit-kan sekurang2 nafkah bagi diri masing2 dan daripada ke-fa-edahan belat itu juga saya sekalian dapat membayar hasil2 Kerajaan.

Maka sekarang ini membelat itu telah di-tegah dan di-tutup oleh pejabat Tanah dengan perintah menchabut semua sekali mana2 belat yang ada didalam tanah padi dan didalam alor tanah masing2 sama ada yang ber-licence atau tidak ber-licence dengan tidak dibenar-kan ber-tempoh lagi kerana kata-nya me-rusak-kan padi. Maka pada per-hatian saya sekalian selama-lama-nya bukan-lah padi itu rusak kerana belat bahkan yang me-rusak-kan padi2 itu ialah kerana tikus2 dan keparan2 dan penyakit2 yang mimang ter-jadi daripada-nya.

buffaloes there. They had planted boundary stones to mark their claims. The fish pond also belonged to their ancestors. It is customary for inland dwellers to obtain from such places fish that is necessary to accompany rice as their food. People living by the coast, on the other hand, obtain fish from the sea. The sago trees were also planted by their forefathers and provide material for roofing. River-mouth dwellers, on the other hand, use material from the *nipah* plant for thatching. The petitioners being poor use material from the sago tree. They are annoyed that the *tanah kubang* which serves to plant padi and provides fish as food and materials for shelter is now claimed as state land. The three of them feel heavily burdened by this decision. They appeal to the sense of justice of the British Adviser who has the power to make decisions regarding state and peasant land. Furthermore, they point out that a fish pond and sago trees do not simply exist on their own without human intervention. The sago tree is a cultivated tree, unlike the *keladi* which grows on its own. Prior to this letter addressed to the British Adviser they had written unsuccessfully to the Land Office.

<sup>21</sup> Desp., Suptd. of Lands to BA, 18 May 1918 and Desp., Suptd. of Lands to BA, 11 October 1918, in BAK 613/1918.

Maka oleh sebab belat<sup>2</sup> itu telah di-tegah dan di-perintah-kan chabut buang, bilang-lah suatu jenis pencharian yang menjadi-kan suatu ke-susahan dan ke-sempitan sara hidup saya sekalian yang mimang tha'aif ini.<sup>22</sup>

Water resource and management was also another critical concern in peasant society. Conflict arose amongst cultivators or between cultivators and the rural authorities invested with powers by the colonial state. The following petition arose because of the denial of vital water for rice cultivation. It speaks of the changing circumstances in the countryside.

- (1) Parit itu lamanya zaman Almerhom Raja Muda tua Penambang lagi sudah 4 Penggawa Kweng daerah itu tiada siapa berani kambusnya 1 Penggawa Mamat Pengkal Kalong 2 Kweng Drahman anaknya 3 Kweng Selaman bapa' Penggawa Drahman sekarang ini. Maka sakat Penggawa Drahman bharu menjadi susah kambus parit itu. Maka susah saya-saya yang amat besar tak boleh menchedong padi lagi.
- (2) Tanah-tanah saya-saya yang digala sudah lumat maka ta'boleh lagi hendak dikedong padi sebab ayer kring dikambus parit ayer itu.
- (3) Semai-semai padi yang sudah dichabut kring punah habis kerana parit dikatup kambus parit itu. Maka saya-saya nama tersebut mengadu ini meminta' yang berhormat Tuan segera pereksa jangan lambat minta' janglah sebab musim orang menchedong buat padi sekali setahun tidak bilek bertanam macham pokok-pokok yang lain jikalau lambat ta' boleh makan nasi sama sekali nanti mati ahli anak bini saya-saya kasemuanya sebab tiap-tiap manusia ini hidup disandari Tuhan kita memakan nasi.
- (4) Tuan jikalau lapar dengan tidak boleh makan nasi nanti huru hara keluar negeri mana-mana tidak berketahwan agaknya saakan-akan burong merata-rata kemana-mana tempat saya-saya sekalian ini.
- (5) Tuan satu daripada Penghulu kampung Merah itu dan adik daripada Penggawa bukan-kah ianya diharap oleh Pegawai Kerajaan dan tahu adatnya undang-undang diperbuat juga pekerja-an semacham itu, sepatut-patut-nya dikalau ada ra'aiait-ra'aiait membuat pekerja-an semacham itu patut dianya ditegahkan juga, ini sekarang ia sendirinya membuat pekerja-an halir kahengisan khianat pada ra'aiait-ra'aiait hendak buat padi sekiranya jikalau Kerajaan tidak suka patit itu hak yang lama-lama telah tentulah terlebih-lebih dahulu lagi dibuat tempat yang lain tidak juga dibuat thalim tengah-tengah ra'aiait-ra'aiait menchedong padi ini masa mana hendak menchedong masa mana pula hendak gali parit ayer ditempat lain itu sebab ini parit panjangnya lanjutnya didalam 500 dena

<sup>22</sup> Bilal Ibrahim and 40 others to BA, 1 January 1938, encl. 1 in BAK 13/1938.

The writers wish to impress upon the British Adviser that the area located in the padi fields was previously used to *membelat* (trap) fish. The people in the area are experts in this activity, from which they acquire food and income to pay government dues. However, recently fish trapping has been stopped by government order on the grounds that such activities spoil padi cultivation. However, they are of the opinion that rats and not fish trapping disrupt cultivation. The order to remove all fish traps would adversely effect their meagre subsistence income.

- sakat 4 tapis Penggawa Kweng salah tidak siapa-siapa berani katupnya.
- (6) Saya-saya ramai-ramai ini mengadu kepada tuan sukakah boleh Penghulu. Kampong itu kambus dan katup parit itu maka buka luas parit itu satu depa lebih-lebih yang dikambusnya lapan depa lebih-lebih sepanjang-panjang parit itu. Maka saya ramai-ramai ini tidak kuasa hendak diperbuat satu-satu pekaranya jikalau sekiranya jikalau bolehnya patut nasihatkan sebabnya pikir saya tiap-tiap Keraja-an meletakkan Penghulu-penghulu kampong hendak suroh menjadi penawa kepada ra'iait di kampong negeri itu jikalau menjadi rachun yang amat bisa bolehkah lagi hendak menyelamatnya tuan-tuan sukakah anak bini saya lapar mati dengan tidak boleh makan nasi yang boleh Penghulu Kampong buat sebegitu.<sup>23</sup>

The rules and regulations of the colonial state radically transformed the economic conditions of livelihood in the countryside. These colonial state controls over human activities were little understood by rural society, although their ultimate impact was profound. Earlier references have been made to petitions about this problem. Forms, documents, permits, licences, passes, stamps, thumb-prints and signatures were part and parcel of the process of colonial extension. The Mentri Besar in 1925 drew attention to the problem of misunderstanding which was aggravated when parts of these documents were written in the English language.

<sup>23</sup> Abu Bakar and 15 others Kota Lanas to BA, 7 September 1920, in BAK(M) 172/1920.

- (1) The writers state that the irrigation canal was opened during the time of the late Raja Muda Tua Penambang. Since then, 4 *Penggawa* (circle-headmen) have served the area and none have dared to close the canal. It was during the time of Penggawa Drahman that the water course was *kambus* (blocked) and this caused problems in wet rice cultivation.
- (2) They had already dug the earth but planting could not proceed because of the blocked water course.
- (3) The padi seedlings had dried up because of the closure of the canal. They hope that the authorities will take immediate remedial measures and will not delay any more because the planting season has arrived. Further delay will cause serious lack of food and the consequent death of members of the family, as all God's people eat rice.
- (4) If they are left hungry for lack of rice there will be chaos as people will leave the country and become like birds travelling aimlessly.
- (5) They ask whether it is not the responsibility of the penghulu Kampung Merah to know the customs of the area. If the common people did what the penghulu had done they would be punished. The penghulu is irresponsible. The government could have chosen another site for the project and not closed the water course when cultivators were planting.
- (6) They appeal to the British Adviser to instruct the village headman to widen and extend the existing canal. They are powerless to do anything. The government in appointing a village headman entrusted that person with the task of protecting and not of destroying the village like poison. If the village headman continues his actions then families will starve to death.

Pada masa saya ada disana ada satu orang kampong itu tunjok tiga keping permit getah kepada saya yang ia mintak saya baca kerana hendak mengatahui berapa bulan lagi habis timpoh nya, maka amat-lah duka chita saya melihat tulisan didalam permit itu semua-nya dengan bahasa Inggeris dan terpaksa-lah saya menerangkan kepada-nya yang saya tiada mengatahui bahasa ini.

Saya bertanya lagi orang itu, jikalau sekiranya permit lain-lain orang tulis semacam ini juga, jawabnya semua orang didalam jajahan K. Kerai ini begitu-lah hingga setengah-setengah orang itu sampai setengah hari menchari orang yang pandai baca tulisan itu dengan beberapa susah dan penat menjajan kesana kemari bahrु dapat dibaca.

Uleh hal yang demikian termenonglah saya sejuruh memikir-kan hal perintahan Negri Kelantan ini tersangat pelik, dan saulan-ulan-nya Ulu Kelantan itu suatu Negri yang bukan Negri Malayu, atau bahagian daripada Kelantan.<sup>24</sup>

In more serious cases misunderstanding of the rules did lead to grave miscarriage of justice. In 1933 it was discovered that the magistrate in the Central Criminal Court had sentenced 4 peasants for falsely testifying that a *penghulu* (village headman) had been fined by the Superintendent of Lands. In actual fact the *penghulu* was made to pay \$25 as compensation for compounding an offence. The peasants as witnesses were unable to distinguish between a fine of \$25 and the payment of \$25 as compensation to compound an offence. The court in this instance used the word *denda* (fine) to mean the latter.<sup>25</sup>

Another area of dispute between the peasants and the colonial state was the extension of transport facilities. There was little sympathy when it came to transforming the natural economy into a capitalist commodity economy, especially when roads and railways mowed down cultivated fruit trees in their path. The authorities showed little concern towards peasants who demanded compensation. In these cases the colonial argument was that the value of land would rise because of the new transport facilities. It was felt that if the colonial state were to pay compensation it would mean that rent on land should be proportionally increased. A compromise decision was reached at the State Council meeting in 1911 by which the amount of compensation would be made

<sup>24</sup> Desp., Datuk Perdana Menteri to BA, 30 September 1925, encl. 1 in BAK(M) 303/1925.

When the Mentri Besar was in Ulu Kelantan he was shown three rubber permits by a villager who wanted him to explain for how much longer the document was valid. The Mentri Besar could not give an answer as the document was in the English language. He was informed that all other permits in Kuala Kerai were in the English language and many people spent half a day trying to get someone to read them to them. As a result of this incident, the Mentri Besar wondered whether Ulu Kelantan was a Malay country or even whether it was a part of the state of Kelantan.

<sup>25</sup> Draft Desp., BA to Datuk Perdana Menteri, undated, in BAK 403/1933.

after deducting the anticipated increase in rent to be paid to the government.<sup>26</sup> Others were less fortunate. Peasants fell victim to the fact that in reality human existence in the natural ecology seldom fitted neatly into the scheme of rules and regulations enforced by various departments of the colonial state. Thus cultivators who claimed that they had purchased a plot of land which now lay in the path of the railway track had their petition summarily dismissed as '... merely a try on'. The Superintendent of Lands reiterated that he had personally gone over the proposed route and had measured and assessed all big areas of permanent cultivation but had not come across the petitioners' site.<sup>27</sup> The petitioners disclosed that 6 years before the British Adviser had informed them that the railway would pass through their land and that they would be compensated. Thenceforth the land was used intermittently for *huma* (dry padi) cultivation amidst the growth of *lallang*.<sup>28</sup> In another instance the petitioners claimed that the previous owners had paid rent on the land. The purchase was registered in the Land Office. They had begun clearing the land for cultivation but had stopped when they heard from the Land Office that the land was considered state land and that the railway would pass through it.<sup>29</sup> The British Adviser's reply was that if the purchase was made only ten months ago '... they must have known that they were buying land which the railway wanted, and any loss they make will be a proper punishment for doing this'.<sup>30</sup>

The second major peasant problem in the changing economy centred around village officials. The situation was clearly expressed by the District Officer of Ulu Kelantan in 1917 who noted that village officials should learn '... to exercise their authority without fear of persons, and to realise that they are administrators and not merely revenue collecting machines and partners in profitable illegalities. It is not easy to steer a middle course between excessive trust in the headmen, and the removal of power from his hands. The former tends to result in oppression of the raiat, and the latter the negation of administration'.<sup>31</sup> Whether administrators or simply profiteers or even both, local officials bore the

<sup>26</sup> See Toh Kweng Hj. Omar Kebakat and 15 others to H.H. The Sultan, 29 July 1911, in BAK(M) 172/1911 and minutes on the file.

<sup>27</sup> Minute, 5 March 1914, in BAK(M) 40/1914.

<sup>28</sup> Mat Amin Tok Kweng Tua Kg. Belimbing to BA, 26 February 1914, in BAK(M) 40/1914.

<sup>29</sup> Hj. Wan Ishak and nine others to BA, 29 February 1914, encl. 1 in BAK(M) 41/1914.

<sup>30</sup> BA to Hj. Wan Ishak, 6 March 1914, encl. 2 in BAK(M) 41/1914.

<sup>31</sup> Desp., DO Ulu Kelantan to BA, 16 February 1917, in BAK 172/1917.

brunt of an incredible amount of petitions. Here again in this category of petitions we note the preoccupation of peasants with the factors of production and their control over the village economy.

Village officials who carried out the policies of the colonial state with vigour and in full earnest were usually exposed to *sakit hati* (hate) letters. Sometimes these letters were signed and on other occasions were written anonymously. Penggawa Ungku Chik, Penggawa Daerah Gunong was subjected to one such incident. He had earlier reported villagers for cutting timber without licences and had had them fined and on another occasion he had sold their land for arrears of rent.<sup>32</sup> In retaliation, he was accused of having forced peasants to clear his *padi* land and to make a road from Pauh Lima to Kedai Jelawat. It was also alleged that he made life difficult for those who were reluctant to follow his will. He would, for example, delay issuing passes for the slaughtering of animals. In another incident he even took possession of a domesticated Ketitir bird from one Esa on the pretext that the Sultan wanted the bird. The petitioners concluded that

Penggawa Tuan Kechik itu ka-adaannya sentiasa melakukan perangnya dengan kebesaran sa-olah-olah ia-lah sa-orang Raja yang memerintah daerah Gunong itu dengan bengis-nya atas ra'iait yang tidak menurut kehendak-nya sendiri.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequent investigations revealed that the Penggawa concerned had no land in Gunong on which to force the petitioners to work. The road project that was mentioned was carried out on the orders of the District Officer of Pasir Puteh.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, one of the later successors to the post of Penggawa Gunong, Penggawa Datuk Lela Jasa also fell victim to the wrath of the peasants. In an anonymous letter sent to the British Adviser it was reported that Datuk Lela Jasa was heavily in debt, had made demands on the peasants' rice produce and fowls and allowed gambling to go on at night in his own house. Such an official, it was felt, '... orang yang memechakan undang-undang negeri dan memechakan amanan dan kesentosaan negeri dan raayat-raayat dalam Dairah-nya'.<sup>35</sup> The Superintendent of Lands in his subsequent investigations defended the

<sup>32</sup> Minute, 4 February 1930, in BAK 1461/1929.

<sup>33</sup> Awang Che Da bin Biru and 17 others to BA, 1 October 1929, in BAK 1461/1929. The Penggawa Tuan Kechik always gives himself airs as if he were a Raja and rules the Gunong district tyrannically.

<sup>34</sup> Minute, 4 February 1930, in BAK 1461/1929.

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous letter to BA, undated, encl. 1 in BAK 846/1933. This describes a person who has broken the rules of the state and disrupted the peace and harmony of the people living in that district.

Penggawa. It was found that Datuk Lela Jasa had been very successful in collecting outstanding rents, a matter in which his predecessor was less energetic. Secondly, the anonymous letter could have been inspired by a number of unsuccessful applicants for the post who were disgruntled.<sup>36</sup>

Hostile reactions were not confined to the efficient collecting of rents. Strict imposition of fines for any transgression of colonial rules also brought about similar responses. In 1920 the Peggawa of Rantau Panjang became one such victim of trumped up accusations.<sup>37</sup> The petitioners declared that

... tidak suka kepada To' Peggawa Mat Salleh itu sebab terlalu-lah buat kachau kepada ra'aiat-ra'aiat dan apakala dia beri tanah-tanah kepada ra'aiat-ra'aiat dia tidak beri surat kepada ra'aiat-ra'aiat dan apakala ra'aiat-ra'aiat itu perintah chuchi bersih tanam pokok-pokok sempurna molek, maka dia buat kira ambil balik akan dia tanah itu atau dia kira jual tanah itu sabegitulah banyak-lah dia buat dan lain-lain lagi pon banyak-lah dan banyak-lah ra'aiat-ra'aiat lari kanegeri Legah sekira-nya jikalau pakai To' Peggawa Mat Salleh itu lagi barangkali pergi ra'aiat-ra'aiat disitu dan patek sekalian ramai ini pon pergi juga akhir-nya.<sup>38</sup>

The transforming economy provided rural officials with an opportunity to profit from their position of authority. They stood to gain in many ways. As officials who could read and write, they could, for example, charge fees for their services in filling in government forms.<sup>39</sup> They could gain by collecting fees from peasants for slaughtering livestock, clearing land and granting boat licences and not issuing government receipts in return.<sup>40</sup> On other occasions, local officials, as in the case of Peggawa Galas in 1914, acted as if they were responsible to no one in that district. They became a terror to the people.<sup>41</sup> The following extract of a petition written by the Residents of Pasir Mas summarizes the abuses of authority and its consequences to the peasantry

<sup>36</sup> Desp., Suptd. of Lands to BA, 2 October 1933, encl. 2 in BAK 846/1933.

<sup>37</sup> Minute, 20 October 1929, in BAK(M) 199/1920.

<sup>38</sup> Hj. Taib and 18 others to H. H. The Sultan, 2 October 1920, in BAK(M) 199/1920.

Peggawa Mat Salleh is disliked by the villagers as he causes trouble for them. He has given land to the peasants but failed to issue them documents when they had cleared and planted the land. He would either resume the property or sell it. He has done this often and as a result many peasants have fled to the neighbouring state of Legeh. If the Peggawa continues in his position many others will leave the area.

<sup>39</sup> Desp., Collector Land Revenue to BA, 15 July 1911, in BAK 464/1911.

<sup>40</sup> Rakyat Ulu Kelantan to BA, 5 May 1931, encl. 1 in BAK 596/1931.

<sup>41</sup> Boon Kah Chiang to Chief Police Officer, 20 June 1914, in BAK 784/1914.

... kerana saya ramai-ramai didalam ta'alok jejahan P. Mas sekarang ini seperti tiada bapa' sangatlah susah hati sebab saya pergi ka-Office tidak lah boleh tahu hari mana-mana dan bulan mana dan tahun mana-mana kerana saya ini sangat hina lagi tha'aip miskin lagi orang darat lagi tiada tahu perbahaan negri dan Undang-undang Enggris apa-tah lagi kerana sebab saya tinggal wang deposit mintak tanah kerajaan didal jejahan P. Mas kerana hendak menanam pokok getah dan menanam padi kerana masa-nya sudah lama tinggal wang deposit masa nya ada nya setahun lama nya ada nya sepuluh bulan dan sembilan bulan dan lapan bulan dan tujuh bulan masing-masing tidak tentu lah sebab kerana kawan-kawan ramai sebab nya ini tahun kesusahan padi beras takut kelaparan sekalian anak-anak dan chuchu di-Kampong maka hingga sampai sekarang tidak dibenarkan merintah lagi dan jemlah orang-orang kaya-kaya dan mana-mana ketuaan orang lekas didaftar dan mana-mana yang miskin ramai-ramai ini tidak lah dibenar hingga sampai sekarang. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Payment of rents, fees and other monies due to the colonial state was a painful experience to the peasantry. Delays were frequent and officials profited by demanding *duit kopi* (literally coffee money) to hasten the process.

Dengan hormat-nya saya dan ra'iat-ra'iat darat2 sekalian mengangkat ma'alom pasal berkena-an dengan ra'iat2 membayar hasil tanah di-Office Tanah Kota Bharu sangat-lah susah hendak membayar hasil semujor-mujor-nya sehari, jika tiada mujor tiga empat hari tiada boleh bayar, dan hak saya terima pagi petang pulang balek receipt kepada saya setengah-nya ada juga sampai menjadi hilang receipt kulu tiada wang belanja coffee atas sekeping receipt lima puluh sin susah mendapat balek. Maka sekarang pada tiap-tiap hari ra'iat2 terlampau banyak membayar hasil setengah daripada setengah bila bagi belanja coffee kepada si pemungut lekas dapat, kerana itu-lah yang kakurangan wang belanja coffee jadi lambat saya sendiri sudah empat hari berdiri di-tempat membayar hasil tidak boleh bayar hasil, macham mana saya hendak bagi belanja coffee kepada-nya. Chuba Tuan fikir mana hendak buat tambang kerita, dan mana hendak makan sendiri, dan hendak bayar hasil berhutang kerana hendak menyukopi membayar hasil, oleh kerana tertunggu saya takot terkena Notice 50 sin pada tiap-tiap satu lot, undang-undang Kerajaan, jika demikian ini sangat-lah 'azab atas ra'iat sekalian.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The Residents of Pasir Mas to BA, undated, encl. 1 in BAK 683/1926.

The people of Pasir Mas district are fatherless. They are ignorant and poor and do not even know the date, month nor the year. Being peasants they are ignorant of the ways of the state and colonial laws. Some of them have deposited money for over a year at the land office in order to obtain state land to plant rubber and padi. Others have deposited money over the last ten, nine, eight and seven months for the same purpose but no results have been forthcoming. This has been a bad year for padi cultivation and the possibility of starvation exists. The rich and influential people get their requests granted quickly but the poor are kept waiting.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous petition to BA, 25 March 1930, in BAK 559/1930.

This draws attention to the difficulties over payment of land rent at the land office, Kota Bharu. It is not possible to pay such dues in a single day. One must travel for three to four



The large-scale opening up of rubber and coconut estates also intruded into the natural economy. Peasants discovered that their once open resources were being denied to them. Jungle fruit trees, *dusun* (orchards), rice fields, fish ponds and grazing grounds gave way to the interests of plantations. It is on this problem that we find the third and final concentration of petition letters testifying to the changing process. As in the other categories, the peasants' prime preoccupation was with its economic base.

As estates consumed forest land, peasants lost their claims to *durian*, *petai*, *langsai* and other fruit trees growing in the jungles. In pre-colonial times they exercised rights over these trees by paying an agricultural tax to the indigenous authorities. Petitions in these instances were rarely entertained by the colonial state as these trees now formed part of the property of the estates.<sup>44</sup> Similarly no amount of harassment and petitions would make the colonial authorities relent and give in to the claims of owners of *dusun* growing within the boundaries of the estates.<sup>45</sup>

A more serious problem in the peasant-estate relationship concerned *huma* cultivation. Here peasants caused 'endless annoyance' to estate managers by cultivating within estate boundaries.<sup>46</sup> The loss of rice land to the estates was viewed gravely by peasants.<sup>47</sup> In most cases whenever padi cultivators competed for the same land with rubber growers, the former usually lost out. The feeling of being victimized comes out clearly in these petitions.<sup>48</sup> In 1927 the peasants of Daerah Bukit Jawa complained that 106 acres of state land which were alienated to them had been taken back by the colonial state. When they asked the District Officer concerned about the matter they were told that their request did

days and even then success is never ensured. Sometimes even after payment, receipts are difficult to obtain as it is claimed they are missing. Coffee money has to be given in advance for a fifty cents receipt. At the present moment many peasants go to the land office daily to pay land dues. Those who have paid coffee money obtain their receipts without difficulty, whereas those who have not suffer. The petitioner himself had waited for four days at the office to pay the dues without success. He appeals to the British Adviser to consider the fact that in order to pay land rent he has to meet the cost of travelling, eating and other debts. He is afraid that failure to pay will mean a fine of 50 cents for every land lot owned. The laws of the state are very *azab* (oppressive) on the peasantry.

<sup>44</sup> Mat Said bin Saman, Penghulu Kg. Pahi, Ulu Kelantan to H. H. The Sultan, 21 January 1930, encl. 1 in BAK 453/1930 and minute, 17 February 1930 on the file.

<sup>45</sup> See enclosures and minutes in BAK(M) 166/1920.

<sup>46</sup> Manager Sungei Bagan Estate to BA, 6 October 1910, in BAK 184/1910.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Bota-a and 12 others to H. H. The Sultan, 13 July 1911, in BAK(M) 159/1911.

<sup>48</sup> See for example, The Residents of Pasir Mas to BA, undated, encl. 1 in BAK 583/1926.

not constitute a serious effort to develop the land. Their plea was expressed in the following words:

Shahdan adalah saya sekalian yang meminta' tanah itu sanya berkahandak yang sebenar-benar uleh kerana sekalian ini orang orang miskin belaka bahkan ditimpa pula uleh bhaya bah besar bharu ini dan bagaimanalah upaya-nya hendak membeli didalam lelong yang sebegitu mahal seperti kata-kata Haji Sa'at yang tersebut diatas itu.

Saya serta kawan-kawan berkahandak akan tanah yang tersebut sangat segra kerana mustahak handak buat huma padi bagi tahun ini dan musim pon hampir sudah. Yang demkian sangatlah berharap limpah kasihan Kerjaan jua keatas saya serta kawan-kawan saya yang tidak ada mempunyai tanah sepaya mengornia tanah yang tersebut itu kepada saya serta kawan-kawan, akan tetapi jika tidak boleh dapat klak pada pikiran saya sekalian kawan-kawan saya dan saya jua harus mennaggong kebuluran lapar sebab padi-padi yang masing-masing ambil upah atau pawah buat bagi tahun yang lepas kadar saorang sedikit itupon telah dijahanam uleh bah besar jua, demkian lagi barangkali masing-masing akan pergi menchari tanah didalam jejahan Besut atau lain-lain jikalau masing-masing itu didapati putus harapan-nya diatas perminta'an tanah yang diminta' itu demkianlah saya berdua sangat-sangat berharap mendapat timbangan Kerjaan adanya.<sup>49</sup>

Competition for land also adversely affected other peasant activities. Thus the huge land requirements of the rubber estates seriously curtailed the raising of livestock by peasants. Cattle were once bred in large numbers by peasants who allowed them to roam on suitable grazing land. In 1927 the 500-odd villagers of Kampung Gobik, Kampung Panjang, Kampung Senor, Kampung Liku, Kampung Sat and Kampung Mala in the districts of Kerela and Temangan found that they had been enclosed by the Duff Development Company. For a hundred years or so the people of these villages had used the surrounding land for cattle, buffalo, chicken and duck rearing. Their pleas fell on deaf ears as it was ruled that the property now belonged to the company.<sup>50</sup>

Hj. Awang bin Jusoh and H. M. Yunus were more successful in their

<sup>49</sup> Abdul Rahman and others to Datuk Setia Usaha Kerajaan Kelantan, 27 April 1927, encl. 1 in BAK 841/1927.

The petitioners appeal for their request to be considered. They are poor people who have suffered from the great flood (1926) and are unable to purchase state auctioned land, which is expensive. They urgently need the land requested to cultivate dry padi and the season to plant is rapidly approaching. A failure to obtain land would mean that they would [have to] starve. The previous years' effort to plant padi under tenancy has proved insufficient to build a surplus because of the floods. They might have to consider leaving the state for Besut if they fail to obtain land for cultivation.

<sup>50</sup> Junoh bin Seri and others to BA, 28 June 1927, encl. 2 in BAK 819/1927.

plea to the colonial state.<sup>51</sup> However, they almost lost their cattle grazing land which they had used for over 40 years to rubber cultivation. The following extract serves to illustrate the special requirements of grazing land.

Tuan, sekiranya tidak boleh dapat tanah itu, telah tertentulah atau wajib tidak ada tempat lain yang chukop hendak pelihara benatang2 itu pada musim bah. Saia dan kawan2 saia tidak anggan sekali2 pada membayar harga tanah itu kapada Kerajaan bagaimana lazim Kerajaan punggot harga dan tanah Kerjaan yang lain, oleh itu, di harap kan dapat jua tanah itu sepaia senang mem-lihara lembu2 kerbau itu.

Shahdanlagi, Ketua District Ulu Kelantan telah beri tanah Kerajaan di atas permintaan saia dan sekalian itu, akan tetapi ter kena pada alor2 dan hutan besar yang bersampadan dengan tanah wangan kerbau yang sedia itu. Maka tempat2 yang di benar itu tiada berguna bagi tempat peliharaan benatang2 itu pada musim bah, bahkan musim kemarau alor2 itu tiada kring ayè nya dan lumpor dalam, istimiwa pula seblah alor2 itu sudah dapat kapada ra'yat2 bertanam getah, demekianlah saia iringi dengan hurmat tabek dan trima kaseh adanya.<sup>52</sup>

Admittedly there were several pathways into the twentieth century for the Kelantan peasant in the period of transition. This essay has deliberately singled out that passage which echoed the sufferings and general misery of a social class that experienced the destruction of its natural economy. It is abundantly clear that colonial penetration trampled on ancient peasant rights. The peasant letters discussed are historical facts presented 'inside out'. These petitions were common representations of individuals who lived and acted within the emerging colonial mode of production as expressed by the colonial state, local officials and plantations. Petition letters document, in this changing process, the verbal response of peasants to the crushing of the factors of production, and the imposition rules for their appropriation and use. An examination of these sources allows the student of history who wanders off the beaten track to hear voices from the *desa*.

<sup>51</sup> Minute, 4 October 1927, in BAK 1352/1927.

<sup>52</sup> Hj. Awang bin Jusoh and H. M. Yunus to BA, 18 September 1927, in BAK 1352/1927.

It is essential to obtain that piece of land for cattle grazing as there is no other suitable alternative site. The petitioners have never in the past failed to make the necessary payments to government for the use of the land. The district officer, Ulu Kelantan, has allocated them unsuitable land covered with jungle and *alor* (slow moving stream), which is water-logged even in the dry season, and the mud is too deep for buffalo breeding.