

Polite Citizenship

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Polite Citizenship

Everyday Informal Claims-Making in Rural West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

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This article discusses the ways in which citizens have enhanced agency through informal and polite claims-making. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a village in West Java, this article argues that citizens tend to pressure the authorities in polite, personal, and highly informal ways to deal with state institutions and gain access to public services. Such forms of informal and polite citizenship signify a reasonably effective communal culture of consensus-formation that defines the predominantly complex character of state institutions in Indonesia. Consequently, citizens have become more capable in claiming their rights and positioning themselves vis-à-vis the authorities. These everyday practices have affected the balance of power between village authorities, informal community leaders, and citizens. By taking examples from rural West Java, this article unveils the everyday informality and the politics of politeness that may also take place in other rural areas of Indonesia and possibly the larger non-Western world.

Keywords

polite citizenship – informality – claims-making – democratization – rural areas – West Java, Indonesia

1 Introduction

Classical scholarship on citizenship relied heavily on Thomas H. Marshall's influential work *Citizenship and social class*, which was largely grounded in Western experiences of state formation, democratization, and formal state-

citizen interactions. Marshall identified formal aspects of citizenship in order to define the status of the individual within a state (Marshall 1950). Likewise, subsequent literature tended to discuss citizen participation and civic culture that prioritized formal dimensions of rights-based citizenship over informal interplays (for instance, Almond and Verba 1963). In addition to participation, citizenship is often defined as the membership of an individual in a political community in which the individual has certain universalistic rights and obligations at a specific level of equality; it is described mostly as a set of political, economic, juridical, and cultural practices that define a person as a competent member of society (Turner 1990, 1993; Janoski 1998).

These classical ideas of citizenship highlight the key position of political dimensions, such as political struggles and conflicts, and for the most part focus on the formal rights and duties citizens enjoy vis-à-vis the state. However, they neglect the informal dimensions of citizenship, despite their actual importance in the realization of citizen rights. Such a view, which is mostly explored in the context of Western, high-capacity, and liberal welfare states without paying adequate attention to states with weaker institutions, is now being questioned. An increasing number of authors have proposed that a non-Western lens be used in order to develop an understanding of citizenship from the viewpoint of the marginalized. This can be achieved by defining citizenship not only as the individual's status, rights, and privileges formally granted by the state but also as a multi-layered, constantly changing, interactive, and local process that is contingent on informal institutions and everyday practices (Chung 2017; Sadiq 2017).

In the Indonesian context, a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* on informality and citizenship¹ and an edited volume on citizenship and democratization² are essential in conceptualizing informal dimensions of citizenship. The studies in this special issue and in the edited volume pay much attention to, and emphasize, the importance of the underdiscussed personal and informal relations and pressures that are actually necessary for realizing citizen rights. I concur with the studies' identification of neglected features in state–citizen interactions as responses to socio-political developments. Nonetheless, their research generates multiple unanswered questions that will be discussed in this article, such as: what are the actual implementations of informality in

1 For example, Berenschot and Van Klinken 2018; Berenschot, Hanani, and Sambodho 2018; Van der Muur 2018; Chaplin 2018.

2 For example, Berenschot, Schulte Nordholt, and Bakker 2016; Ito 2016; Gibbings 2016; Kloos and Berenschot 2016.

rural areas? How do citizens respond to shadowy public-service delivery and accountability mechanisms? How and under what circumstances do informality and politics of politeness succeed or fail to engender forms of citizenship?

The aim of this article is to contribute to this emerging literature on citizenship in the non-Western world, particularly on informality as a crucial element in everyday citizenship in rural Indonesia. This article focuses on informal dimensions of citizenship neglected in the classical scholarship of citizenship; indeed, the importance of citizenship in the non-Western world, such as Indonesia, is fundamental to measure the development of global democracy. In doing so, I use materials collected through ethnographic fieldwork consisting of extensive interviews, casual chats, hangouts, and observations in a village in Kabupaten Sukabumi (Sukabumi Regency), West Java Province, between 2014 and 2015.

My fieldwork shows that forms of claims-making not only entail informal and personal interactions among different socio-political groups and between them and the state. Indeed, citizens also show how rights-claiming is negotiated through courteous compromise and gentle protest in the socio-cultural contexts that appear as a continuation of the Indonesian past. To these, therefore, I add a key element to complement the ‘personal’ and ‘informal’ features of claims-making in Indonesia as described in the above literature: ‘politeness’.

Politeness forms a central aspect of the etiquette of the Sundanese (Indonesia’s second-most populous ethnic group after the neighbouring Javanese, whose ancestral home is West Java). The importance of etiquette, for instance, was demonstrated in D.K. Ardiwinata’s 1908 book entitled *Tatakrama oerang Soenda* (Sundanese people’s etiquette), which mentions that etiquette has three aspects: language, dress, and behaviour. In terms of the first aspect, Sundanese aristocrats cultivated different levels of vocabularies for the Sundanese language. People of lower rank were obliged to use deferential language when speaking to their superiors, creating an obvious distance between them.³ To address the second aspect, details of dress also provided opportunities to situate oneself within society. The final dimension of etiquette was a careful consideration of one’s behaviour, or, more specifically, one’s bodily

3 Robert Wessing differentiates between four language levels of Sundanese, from high to low: 1. *lemes pisan* (very polite, used only by persons with very high rank, such as a resident in colonial times or a governor today); 2. *lemes* (polite, used when speaking to persons who cannot be addressed in the familiar (*kasar*) register owing to rank, age, or status considerations); 3. *kasar* (ordinary or colloquial, general conversational speech, or the level used when speaking to inferiors); and 4. *kasar pisan* (vulgar, used mainly in curses and insults) (Wessing 1974).

department. For Sundanese aristocrats, the elite could use etiquette to distance themselves from people of lower status (Lubis 1998:172–3, quoted in Spiller 2010:145).

My findings indicate that the significance of politeness as a structuring feature of the Sundanese is most striking in the encounters between rulers and the ruled. It is important for the ruled to become reticent and meek because the Sundanese do not appreciate unruliness and obstreperousness in everyday affairs. As a result, impertinent behaviour has consequences, such as being excluded from daily affairs. However, my findings also demonstrate that beneath the informal forms of state–citizen interactions lies an arguably effective communal culture of consensus-formation that defines the predominantly complex character of the authorities.

Indeed, Indonesian bureaucracy does not operate as a Weberian, rule-bound institution which applies its laws and regulations impersonally and universally. The true nature and experience of citizenship is shaped by everyday informal relationships (Berenschot and Van Klinken 2018). This is not surprising, given the fact that Indonesian democracy is unique and complex; it has been influenced by particular sets of historical circumstances that have shaped the emergence of its specific socio-political state of affairs. The historical process of Indonesian state formation has particularly hindered the emergence of an impersonal bureaucracy that is bound by rules. As a result, a historical legacy is still visible today, namely the relative absence of formal rights-claiming behaviour, which has in turn made the citizens attuned to informality. In fact, informality has generated a particular form of political agency in which identifying and claiming rights through formal mechanisms play a relatively minor role.

This article argues that village citizens tend to demonstrate polite citizenship in everyday state–citizen interactions. I define polite citizenship as a particular form of informal claims-making, indicated by the citizens' pressure towards the authorities in polite, personal, and highly informal ways as a means to claim rights. This article shows that politeness is a key part of informality. This informal claims-making is an effective mechanism that citizens use as a result of the intricacy faced by them to use formal mechanisms in order to claim their rights and to sanction failures of unsatisfactory implementations of state regulations and duties. Through informality and the politics of politeness, citizens have become more capable in claiming their rights and positioning themselves vis-à-vis state institutions. By taking examples from rural West Java, this article unveils everyday informality and the politics of politeness that may also take place in other rural areas of Indonesia and possibly the larger non-Western world.

This article follows the following structure. The next section presents a review of the informal dimensions of citizenship, which is followed by a section sketching out the processes of democratization and decentralization in rural Indonesia. The text then offers details of the setting and the context. The subsequent section discusses various forms of informal claims-making. Next, this article conceptualizes the character and significance of polite citizenship. Finally, in the last section, I conclude my argument.

2 Informal Dimensions of Citizenship

Formal, rights-based citizenship as a Western concept does not make much sense in the non-Western world, except for an urban middle-class minority. Most poor people have to deal with informality and illegality, which force them to overcome everyday difficult circumstances by building alliances and entering patronage relationships with better-positioned people and the authorities. Consequently, patronage and personalized informal networks appear to be genuine forms of citizenship in the non-Western world (Chatterjee 2004; Robins et al. 2008, quoted in Schaffar 2016).

The ways in which citizenship is understood and practised by ordinary people in the non-Western world are contingent on people's conception of citizenship rights, which does not necessarily draw on the liberal-universalist notions of citizenship that provide them with formal and fixed rights and obligations so much as on context-dependent entitlements (Jung 2016). In non-Western contexts, substantive practices and acts of citizenship are emphasized over formal legal aspects of citizenship. Substantive citizenship refers to practices that foster inclusion and belonging in order to strengthen claims to rights that do not require one to be a member of the polity (Isin and Turner 2002), while the emphasis on acts of citizenship is put on 'acts' rather than 'habitus', enabling the citizens to create a scene rather than follow a script to claim rights and entitlements from the state (Isin 2009). By investigating citizenship in the non-Western world, we can explore performative acts of claims-making in traditions and understand how these traditions have been transformed by the right to claim rights. In this sense, new sociologies of citizenship beyond the Western contexts that incorporate struggles for recognition are complementary political and cultural developments (Isin 2017; Isin and Nyers 2014; Isin and Turner 2002).

Such views are bringing to light the significance of informality, which implies that social connections—namely, informal and personal relations beyond one's formal, legal status—shape the relationships between citizens and

the state. In non-Western countries, informality is shaped by particular historical trajectories and the present-day characters of these countries, which in turn influence the norms, attitudes, and practices that citizens adopt vis-à-vis power holders. Informality is defined as a particular mode of state–citizen interaction marked by the use of informal and personal connections as a means to influence the implementation of state regulations. Informality, however, is not just a pragmatic response to the existence of weak state institutions. It is not a deviated form of citizenship. Instead, it is an integral, constitutive dimension of citizenship that shapes the capacity of citizens to realize their rights (Berenschot and Van Klinken 2018; Berenschot, Schulte Nordholt, and Bakker 2016).

Informality often operates in informal institutions that include personal connections and a variety of legislative, judicial, and bureaucratic norms. These norms are often referred to as ‘informal institutions’. Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky (2004:727) define these as ‘socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels’. Such examples of informal institutions include patron–client relationships and norms of reciprocity. So why, given the existence of formal rules and rule-making mechanisms, do citizens and political actors resort to informal institutions? First, they do so because formal institutions are incomplete. As a result, actors operating within a particular formal institutional context, such as bureaucracies, develop norms and procedures that expedite their work or address problems not anticipated by formal rules. Second, informal institutions may be a ‘second best’ strategy for actors who prefer, but cannot achieve, a formal institutional solution. A third motivation is the pursuit of goals not considered publicly acceptable. Because they are relatively inconspicuous, informal institutions allow actors to pursue activities that are unlikely to stand the test of public scrutiny. Even where bribery, patrimonialism, and vote-buying are widely accepted, prevailing norms of universalism prevent their legalization (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Informality depends on different local (or national) historical contexts and cultural variations in which it serves as an important aspect that assists citizens to become political beings. In many Asian countries, for instance, the boundaries between formal and informal rights are frequently blurred, or at least they lack the legal certainty typically associated with formal notions of citizenship in many Western countries. For the most part, instead of citizens participating in the processes through which decisions regarding a basic set of rights are made, the relationship between state officials and the citizens is mostly that of giver and receiver, in which elites and their subordinated officials strengthen their positions, while ordinary citizens become more dependent as their position weakens (Miller 2011).

In rural Philippines, many of the interactions between the state and its citizens depend on informal linkages across socio-hierarchical borders. There, everyday politics includes considerable resistance by ordinary village citizens to the claims made on them by better-positioned people and the state. Their resistance is often non-confrontational, indirect, and hidden from the superordinate target (Kerkvliet 1990). For poor citizens, relationships of accountability for service delivery are often embedded in informal and personalized social relations and political pressures. Naomi Hossain suggests that informal accountability in Bangladesh might draw on shared norms about the state or operate through public performances. Informal accountability mechanisms are used by the citizens to negotiate service access and to sanction failures through some kind of informal negotiation that occurs on the frontline of public-service delivery between public officials and the citizens they are mandated to serve. When accountability systems fail, it may be worth looking at which informality is in fact operating, and learning from how poor citizens actually attempt to claim their entitlements (Hossain 2010).

In the context of Indonesia, the focus on only 'good governance' in terms of everyday citizenship neglects the importance of informality (Aspinall and Van Klinken 2011). Despite the omnipresence of clientelist networks at the local level, they are actually not merely oppressive but can also fulfil integrative functions by connecting people and building social capital (Van Klinken 2014). It is clear that everyday forms of citizenship are closely linked to the political strategies of ordinary citizens. While the establishment of rights, legal status, and a citizenship regime depend primarily on state capacity, everyday forms of citizenship are contested and shaped by interactions between various actors with varying degrees of access to power and resources through formal and informal institutions such as rights, voices, and patronage (Ito 2016).

The access to important resources is frequently not obtained by virtue of one's national citizenship, but often by virtue of one's ethnicity, religion, social status, age, gender, and membership of a community, organization, or political party; hence, through informality. In short, many forms of citizenship develop through interaction with the relatively weak state institutions. Therefore, the ideas and practices that citizens employ vis-à-vis the state are often shaped by pragmatic calculations of how to deal most efficiently and effectively with the state institutions that provide public services (Berenschot, Schulte Nordholt, and Bakker 2016). In sum, we may agree that informality is a vital dimension of citizenship in everyday state-citizen interactions due to Indonesia being a state with weaker institutions. The following section highlights continuities and changes in the process of democratization and decentralization in rural Indonesia.

3 Democratization and Decentralization: From the New Order to the Post-New Order

The New Order was an era of *pembangunan* (development, modernity). It was during this period that *pembangunan* became a hot topic in the Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun (Five-Year Development Plan). In the plan, rural development programmes were textbook examples of a centralized and top-down modernization approach (Antlöv 1995). In the first decade of the New Order, the government relied upon semi-independent officials at the village level. This policy was successful in preventing them from opposing government plans. Simultaneously, however, it did not turn them into qualified officials (Hüsken 1994; Sidel 2004).

The co-optation of the village heads and the construction of patron–client relationships between them and the state did not always mean that they were merely puppets who could be manipulated by higher authorities. Regency and sub-district officials often tolerated self-interested political manoeuvring by village heads. It was common knowledge that, as soon as the village heads assumed their office, many of them did not serve public interests properly and instead abused their position for their own interests. Those who were lucky would not be confronted with people's protests or the government's fury. Those who were unlucky would become a target for removal by the government (Pribadi 2013).

Nonetheless, the government always had strategies to exercise state control at the local level. The most noticeable was patronage. During the New Order, patronage could be seen, among other things, as an effort by the government to co-opt local figures. The process was an intricate strategy of patronage by the state to recruit village leaders as state clients. As a result, the loyalties and aspirations of these leaders changed. The local population's concerns were no longer the basis of village rule. Instead, aligning to government priorities became more important (Antlöv 1994). Consequently, village citizens hardly participated in the processes through which decisions regarding service delivery or the allocation of funds were made. Village links to NGOs or social movements were actively repressed. Repression made it much easier for the state to impose its development programmes and silence public protest or resistance (Bebbington et al. 2006).

The position of village heads as state clients during the New Order helped maintain political stability. The village heads acted as intermediaries who disseminated the government's messages directly to the citizens. In reality, the village heads were often trapped between the higher authorities' demands and the citizens' hopes (Keeler 1985). Despite the prevalence of development pro-

grammes enjoyed by village citizens, undemocratic approaches were exercised by village officials to reach the goals. In fact, the village heads and the groups of personal and familial interests they represented used their positions as intermediaries in enforcing local order, playing a decisive role in the allocation of government resources and the enforcement of government programmes and enhancing their strategies of political entrenchment and private capital accumulation (Sidel 2004).

In principle, the New Order administration was dependent upon the production of capital in order to ensure that the administration had sufficient funds for the continuation of its rule. These funds were distributed to supporters through patronage or bribery, including at the local level. Although the local administration also provided the poor with some economic benefits, this could be seen as either a compromise to avoid confrontations or as an effort to maintain a viable labour force to serve the capital in rural areas (James 1990).

In the post-Soeharto period, fundamental reforms have been adopted, including the devolution of political power to regional governments through the establishment of several laws on regional government, such as the Law No. 22/1999,⁴ the Law No. 32/2004,⁵ and the Law No. 23/2014.⁶ Under the new circumstances, a great deal of administrative and budgetary authority of the central government has been devolved to regency/city governments, except for foreign policy, defence and security, monetary policy, the legal system, and religious affairs. Therefore, regency/city governments have virtually become the frontline service administration that directly affects the quality of public services.⁷

Decentralization is closely bound to the wider politics of democratization. The flourishing of the local in Indonesian politics has fundamentally been a product of the breakdown of the New Order's centralized authoritarian system (Aspinall and Fealy 2003). The idea of democratic decentralization, which attempts to make the government more accountable, transparent, and responsive not only begins at the national level but is also driven by innovations at the regional level. It is expected that citizen participation will lead to the inclusion of wider popular preferences in the formation of policies, thereby increasing accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of both national and sub-national governments (Ito 2006).

4 Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 22 Tahun 1999 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah.

5 Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 32 Tahun 2004 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah.

6 Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah.

7 Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Ito 2006; Barker 2008; Mietzner 2010.

However, despite the introduction of democratization and decentralization at all levels of governance, citizens have not automatically experienced a more democratic process. The process of decentralization can be accompanied by authoritarian rule under certain conditions (Schulte Nordholt 2004). Moreover, the devolution of power in a previously strong, centralized state can also lead to exclusion, conflict, and even authoritarianism at the local level (Henley and Davidson 2008). Decentralization and the fall of Soeharto shook the old power structure. New Order elites did not disappear, however; rather, they were supplemented with new groups of elites seeking to control valuable offices (Allen 2014). Nevertheless, in addition to enabling patronage to continue, decentralization has generated many beneficial effects, including a greater sense of participation in governmental affairs and service delivery for citizens.

At the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy, the village appears to be accepting the spirit of decentralization with less enthusiasm. Despite a number of laws and regulations that have favoured the position of the village, such as the laws and regulations that stipulate the presence of a Badan Permusyawaratan Desa (BPD, village council) and allow it to establish its own village regulations (*peraturan desa*), the political circumstances in the village have been instrumental in perpetuating forms of patronage that were institutionalized during the previous administration (Pribadi 2018). These forms of patronage have, however, evolved, as they have been affected by state-building processes and, by the same token, have influenced these processes. At some point, this patronage was inherited from the New Order, while its roots can be traced back to pre-colonial times. What we see here, then, is a 'changing continuity' that will help to explain the problems connected to Indonesian democracy and the devolution of power (Schulte Nordholt 2004).

Political struggles at the village level show complex circumstances. At the village level, 'power-sharing arrangements, contestation between rival families and factions, and high turnover appear to be the norm' (Sidel 2004). In many cases, the prevalence of informal and personal connections, including in elections, indicates the existence of strong patronage (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016). The village is a microcosm of the political dynamics that exist at higher levels of government. Village elites have to allocate major financial and political resources in village elections. At higher levels, 'money politics' (the distribution of cash and other gifts to voters) has made elites nurtured under authoritarianism entrench themselves within the new democratic order. Ironically, vote-buying is often more intensive in village-head elections than elsewhere (Aspinall and Rohman 2017:32–3).

The prevalence of 'money politics' and other forms of bribery is unsurprising, because many villages are yet to fully institutionalize practices of good

governance. We often hear about the misappropriation of village funds or the abuse of power. Most cases show how village officials are disliked by citizens because, among other things, they allegedly take illegal payments (*uang rokok*, lit. cigarette money) from people requesting administrative papers, and because they are accused of illegally keeping government aid for themselves or selling it on. This shows that formal affairs in villages have been arranged more through personal relations and informal arrangements than following the rule of law. Consequently, this has become a crucial reason why citizens have to rely on informality in order to claim their rights. The following section focuses on the setting and context of this article: West Java and its people.

4 West Java and Its People: Islam and Identity

Due to its inland location, the Priangan (highland West Java) is mostly absent from accounts of global commerce and religion. Nevertheless, the dissemination of Islam throughout the Priangan from the neighbouring coastal areas of Banten and Cirebon was rapid. The impact of this process remains visible today: it is well known that the Sundanese possess a cultural self-identity that corresponds with their religious identity. They often say *Sunda teh Islam* (Sunda is Islam) as a statement of personal identification that positions Islam as the foremost referent in the construction of the self (Millie 2009:5). In fact, the primordial Sundanese identity was the template upon which Islam was so firmly embraced (Millie 2014:109).

Since the downfall of the Hindu-Buddhist Sunda kingdom in the sixteenth century, the Priangan has been ruled by various non-Sundanese political powers. The Javanese Mataram empire, for instance, delegated governing authority to the existing Sundanese aristocracy. The Dutch followed suit and infiltrated their political agendas into the existing Sundanese feudal system under the *Preangerstelsel* (Priangan System) (Spiller 2010:144). The indigenous elite of the Sundanese formed a large number of minor lineages dispersed evenly around the Priangan (Millie 2009:5).

In 1808, Herman Willem Daendels reorganized the administration of the Dutch East Indies. The colonial government placed kings and their families under the Dutch colonial system and converted them into bureaucrats. Under this direct rule, the village head was considered the lowest official in the native civil service. It was not uncommon for the office of village head to be handed down within a single family or cluster of families (Hüsken 1994).

The Dutch preserved the great prestige of the local Sundanese aristocracy (*bupati*, or regents). As the twentieth century proceeded, the Dutch implemen-

ted various changes in the system to recruit talented non-aristocrats into the bureaucracy (Sutherland 1973:76, quoted in Spiller 2010:144). In doing so, the Dutch governed by enlisting local elites as representatives in commercial and security matters. In this way, the authority of the noble families was more or less supported by the colonial government (Millie 2009:11). These elites developed a sense of overriding loyalty that was necessary to perform the tasks of administration required of them. In this way they brought about the *Beambtenstaat* (Bureaucratic State), which determined the character of all subsequent polities (Watson 2002).

The influence of different political groupings was reversed after the coming of the Japanese in 1942. During the Japanese occupation of Java, they formed a regime with populist elements in order to appease and involve an already politicized public. The Japanese territorialized the villages in Java, turning them into intensely governed units. Instead of the population of the village constantly moving around, the villagers settled in one place and were controlled by established village leaders (Van Klinken 2018).

The surrender of the Japanese at the end of World War II left a political vacuum in the archipelago. In West Java, for instance, revolutionary youths established their own struggle organizations, such as the *Majelis Persatuan Perjuangan Priangan* (Priangan United Revolutionary Council). After winning formal independence from the Dutch in 1949, Kartosuwirjo, the leader of the Islamic movement *Darul Islam*, proclaimed the *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic State) (Ito 2006). Operated mostly in rural areas, the *Darul Islam* rebellion of the 1950s/1960s has since contributed to the slow but steady wave of Islamic conservatism in West Java (Lanti and Dermawan 2021).

During the New Order, many villages in West Java, like so many villages in other areas, were heavily dominated by the influence of Golkar. In terms of religious matters, Soeharto's stance towards Islam was paradoxical. While restraining political Islam, which was seen as a threat to the regime, the administration endorsed religious activities that encouraged Muslim piety in the whole country (Hefner 2000). As a result, for instance, 78% of village citizens in West Java in the mid 1970s were members of devotional associations. The popularity of devotional groups reflects the strongly Islamic orientation of the Sundanese (King 1983). Of these devotional groups, the *ṭarīqah* (a school or order of Sufism) formed one of the most prominent (Millie 2009:5).

Today, about 92% of West Java's population of 44 million (2019) self-identify as Muslim. It is not surprising that Islamic symbols and doctrines have a predominant presence in West Javanese public life. There are historical explanations for that. The most commonly expressed of these explanations suggests that the spread of Islam in West Java did not have to contend with any

rival, indigenous set of spiritual functionaries and concepts (Millie 2017). In sum, Islam has stood out as the most important element of identity for the Sundanese for hundreds of years.

5 Informal Claims-Making

The village of Sindang Sari is located in a strategic position. Some parts of the village are crossed by a state road connecting the city of Bogor (Kota Bogor) and the city of Sukabumi (Kota Sukabumi).⁸ Despite being the smallest village in the sub-district of Cibodas (Kecamatan Cibodas) (covering an area of 178 hectares of the sub-district's total area of 3,841 hectares), in terms of location, the village serves as an important hub for seven other villages, as indicated by the presence of a state-owned bank and a private bank on the state road. Most residents of the village rely on agriculture for their income. The total area of paddy fields in the village is 40% of the total village area. In addition, many citizens work as small and medium-scale traders. With a population of 7,293 people and 1,815 households, Sindang Sari ranks fourth in the sub-district, making it the most densely populated, at 41 people/hectare (BPS Kabupaten Sukabumi 2017).

The village is headed by Nanang Kosim, a 55-year-old medium-scale entrepreneur, who succeeded his father in the office. He resides in the hamlet of Hegarmanah. The village is also home to *Ajengan*⁹ Idris (63), who runs a small *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Bojong Hamlet, which houses fewer than a hundred pupils (*santri*); delivers religious sermons in the village's mosques; and organizes *ziyārah* (pilgrimages to sacred graveyards) in Sukabumi and towns across Java and Madura. There are, in total, sixteen *pesantren* scattered throughout the villages in Cibodas (BPS Kabupaten Sukabumi 2017). Another important figure is Toha (49), a well-known healer-*ustadz* (a healer who also acts as a religious teacher), who lives in Sukawening Hamlet. Toha frequently receives invitations from people in Sukabumi and neighbouring towns to deliver religious speeches at wedding parties or to heal the sick through alternative medicine. People like Ajengan Idris and Toha can be commonly classified as informal community leaders outside of the formal bureaucracy, whose important position enables them to actively contribute to the com-

⁸ The name of the village and the sub-district where the village is located, as well as the names of the people, are fictitious in order to protect their identity.

⁹ *Ajengan* (religious leaders/teachers) is a term widely used in West Java, similar to *kyai* in Central and East Java.

munity. The intricate interactions between the three constituent groups in the village (the village authorities, informal community leaders, and village citizens) have become the central aspect of everyday socio-political interactions in rural areas. To explain why such intricacy has become common, we must take a closer look at what happens in the village. However, a brief overview of recent legal processes of decentralization is first sketched.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the sixth president of Indonesia, passed a fundamental law in January 2014 that signified the importance of villages: the Law No. 6/2014 on Villages. The law introduced a number of key points, including accountability mechanisms, through the introduction of a village assembly;¹⁰ improved transparency, through the use of an information system; and substantially greater funding for villages. In terms of village funds, the passing of the law signalled a substantial increase for the villages (up to five times as much). For instance, in 2015, each of the 74,000 villages in Indonesia received an average of IDR 1.4 billion per year (US\$100,000). Nonetheless, the use of village funds is not thoroughly detailed in the village law. The law only prescribes that 30% of the village funds provided by higher authorities are to be used for village government operations and 70% for development. In addition, the use of funds is rarely monitored, which may have allowed village heads to use them to renovate village offices or buy official cars, rather than to prioritize their use for the development of the village (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016; Vel and Bedner 2015).

Though smallest in size, Sindang Sari is quite important, as is evident from, among other things, the total length and condition of its roads (comprising 6.5 kilometres of the total 83.7-kilometre-long sub-district road network). Compared to other villages, the condition of the roads in Sindang Sari is slightly better. Half of the total length of the roads is in a good condition, while the rest is either in a fair or quite damaged condition. Like in four other villages, the main village roads in Sindang Sari are covered by asphalt concrete. In the meantime, the main roads in three other villages are covered with different types of materials and thus vary in quality. In addition to asphalt concrete surfaces, these three villages also have gravel roads (BPS Kabupaten Sukabumi 2017).

Road construction has become a top priority in village development programmes in many villages across Indonesia. In West Java, for instance, the regional government has targeted road construction as the main village development programme. In 2017, in addition to the IDR 800 million (US\$57,335)

10 The assembly is the highest decision-making body at the village level, and it must approve crucial decisions, such as the village plan and expenditure reports. Under the Law No. 6/2014, the assembly must be convened at least once a year by the BPD.

in village funds (*dana desa*) received from the central government, villages in West Java also received funds from the provincial government amounting to IDR 100 million (US\$ 7,166).¹¹ In 2019, the total amount spent on village funds in West Java was IDR 5.7 trillion (US\$ 408,675,000), up from IDR 4.7 trillion (US\$ 336,916,000) in 2018.¹²

In Sindang Sari, with many locations needing good and accessible roads, it is a difficult task for the village head to decide on the location of road construction in the sub-villages, the hamlets.¹³ An average official like Nanang is unable to make a fair and proper decision. A number of informal community leaders, for instance those in the hamlet of Sukawening, together with the village's citizens, took the matter into their own hands. Rather than filling out a claim form—for which most villages have no such process—or staging a demonstration, they persuaded Nanang in a highly polite and informal way to provide road and building materials for their hamlet roads, while proposing that the labour to build the roads should be provided by the hamlet residents (volunteerism). In Sindang Sari, the labour to build the hamlet roads was expected to be provided by the village office. The allocation of village funds was, however, discussed briefly in the village assembly, which ultimately resulted in decisions being made that were not clear to the citizens.

In principle, the village assembly aims to create a participatory planning mechanism in order to accommodate village citizens' voices. The village assembly is organized by village officials and attended by them, informal community leaders, and village citizens who are invited by formal letter. Village citizens feel uncomfortable attending if they do not have an invitation letter. In addition, even if they want to, most citizens are unable to attend the assembly because it is usually held on a weekday during working hours. Certainly, village citizens have internalized their secondary role and calibrate their rights to participate in communal affairs based on their socio-economic status in the village (Ito 2011).

In Sindang Sari, only a handful of citizens attended the assembly. In addition to the reasons mentioned above as to why citizens did not attend, certain informal community leaders were neither invited nor able to come to the assembly. So, why are certain informal community leaders not invited? Because they are largely seen as people who will cause trouble for the village office. In

11 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2017/11/21/pemprov-jabar-prioritaskan-dana-desa-untuk-saluran-irigasi-dan-jalan> (accessed 15-7-2019).

12 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2018/12/20/kabupaten-bogor-2019-dapat-dana-desa-terbesar-rp-488-miliar-ini-kabupatenkota-lainnya-di-jabar> (accessed 15-7-2019).

13 Hamlets are geographic units in villages.

fact, those who are invited are usually either close allies of the village head or are considered to have neither the willingness nor the capacity to interfere with the intentions of the village office.

In the case of the hamlet of Sukawening, the hamlet residents informally and politely asked the village head to provide only the road and building materials for their hamlet roads. This was the case, primarily, because it was not clear whether the village office would provide the labour to build the roads, because the matter was only briefly discussed by the village assembly. In fact, the hamlet leaders who had been expected to be involved in the matter were neither invited nor able to attend the assembly. Hence, the hamlet residents were largely uninformed about the matter. Secondly, for many hamlet residents, being provided with the road and building materials only was sufficient. They were not encouraged to investigate the matter further. The citizens have a tractable mentality, partly inherited from the New Order era. They did not question the decision not to provide labour as this appeared to be the norm; development has long been conceived as a gift rather than a right by both village authorities and village citizens. Thirdly, the use of village funds was simply not well monitored.

We do not want your car and your shoes to become dirty because our road is very muddy. Things would be different if the road were paved. Our relatives and guests would notice that our hamlet was very well organized. It would be a source of pride for us, and certainly a credit to the village head.¹⁴

Eventually, faced with such polite and informal yet strong forms of demand, the village head could not help but approve the proposal. The village head was actually grateful that the hamlet residents did not ask for more. Thus, the residents of Sukawening Hamlet built their own narrow paved paths. This case shows that the village head demonstrated no serious commitment to strengthening his accountability to village citizens and illustrates how access to public

14 'Kade, pa. Bilih mobil sareng sapatu pa lurah kotor kana leutak; lébar mobil kinclong sareng sapatu sae upami nincak leutak mah. Jalan di dieu mah emang awon pisan. Mung dupi dikonblok ti kamari-kamari ku pa lurah mah moal siga kieu. Tamu sareng dulur urang sadayana ge tangtos ningali jalan nu sae mah. Urang kantenan reueus, komo deui pa lurah mah, beuki kawentar.' This was part of a public conversation in front of dozens of village citizens between a resident of Sukawening and the village head, when the latter attended a wedding party in the hamlet on 14 March 2015, which was a rainy day. This conversation was part of a series of polite and informal yet strong forms of demand to build hamlet roads in Sukawening.

services was negotiated by them through informal mechanisms. It also shows that politeness and informality were seen by the village head as simultaneously a weakness and a strength of the citizens. The village head was aware that the citizens did not ask for more due to their limited knowledge of the distribution of village funds and because they were thankful for the 'gifts'. However, at the same time, he granted the request because he knew that informality and the politics of politeness contain strong forms of demand. He feared that if he did not approve the proposal, the village citizens—and particularly the outspoken, informal community leaders—would incommode him in other matters and endanger his position.

From the above narratives, we can see that there is a common attitude at the lower level of the political hierarchy to opt for an understated process of consensus-formation. The obstacles faced by village citizens to claim their rights have made them accustomed to acts of volunteerism and consensus-formation; they also resorted to informality and polite forms of claims-making in order to actually claim their rights. All these forms of rights-claiming, as weak as they seem, have actually proven to be weapons against the authorities, typical of James Scott's 'weapon of the weak'—a mechanism used by ordinary village citizens as a weapon to express their critical assessment of and demands on more powerful and better-positioned persons or groups (Scott 1985).

In a wider context, there are success stories from the villages in West Java as a result of the correct and effective application of village funds. A story reports that a continuous three-year programme of poverty alleviation, employing village funds in the regency of Tasikmalaya, has reduced the poverty rates as much as 4%.¹⁵ Another story tells of an isolated village in a mountainous area of Subang Regency that has been able to create access to the village as a result of the construction of village roads since 2015.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there are also darker stories of the misappropriation of village funds. An example came from Tasikmalaya Regency, where a village head was involved in a village-funds corruption scandal.¹⁷ A story was also heard in Sukabumi Regency, where a village head was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for the embezzlement of village funds.¹⁸

15 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2018/05/01/pemkab-tasikmalaya-klaim-dana-desa-dari-pusat-berhasil-turunkan-angka-kemiskinan> (accessed 17-7-2019).

16 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2018/09/22/alokasi-dana-desa-berhasil-mengubah-nasib-desa-cupunagara> (accessed 17-7-2019).

17 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2019/06/25/diduga-korupsi-dana-desa-hampir-rp-1-m-kades-di-tasikmalaya-ditahan-jaksa-penyidik> (accessed 18-7-2019).

18 <https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2019/06/17/kepala-desa-divonis-45-tahun-penjara-selewen-gkan-dana-desa-rugikan-negara-rp-551-juta> (accessed 18-7-2019).

In the following story, I examine how polite and informal protests have become key to how citizens enhance emerging political agency at the village level. This story shows that informal forms of citizenship play a key part not only in matters of resource distribution but also in other aspects of everyday affairs. Among the existing seven mosques and 23 small mosques (*musalla*) in the entire village (BPS Kabupaten Sukabumi 2017), Al-Musyawaroh was home to the village's 'official' religious congregations (*pengajian*) held under the religious leadership of Ajengan Idris. Al-Musyawaroh was considered the official mosque of the village due to its location near the village office.

The village head, however, attempted to challenge the religious authority of Ajengan Idris by holding his own 'official' religious congregations in Hegarmanah. Nanang told the village citizens that Hegarmanah should be considered the most appropriate site for religious congregation due to the popular story that mentioned it as the first settlement built in the village.¹⁹ Nanang's neighbours informed me that he wanted to be respected in the religious sphere following the establishment of his reputation in the socio-political realm. The decision to hold religious congregations in Hegarmanah was unilaterally made without involving the village's citizens. This was unsurprising, given the fact that while village heads are elected by the citizens, their authority derives from patrimonial ties to the state apparatus. Consequently, village heads are apathetic about the idea of public participation.

Ajengan Idris, other informal community leaders, and most village citizens disagreed with the village head's idea and with their exclusion from participation in decision-making. They wanted to retain Al-Musyawaroh as the site of 'official' religious events. In response to the situation, they continued to hold monthly congregations at Al-Musyawaroh peacefully, without openly denouncing similar congregational routines in Hegarmanah. This was a typical performance of 'hidden transcripts' to criticize the power holders offstage without being seen or heard (Scott 1990). This response was neither merely a general preference nor a habitual action. Due to their socio-economic status in the vil-

19 No one in the village knows the origin of the story. It mentions that, in the past, Sindang Sari was an area that was still covered by thickets. People from the area around Mount Gede (about 40 kilometres from Sindang Sari) were attracted to live in Sindang Sari because it is located far enough from the volcano that they would be able to avoid eruptions should one day the volcano become active (Mount Gede is known to have first erupted in 1747, while the last eruption was recorded in 1957). Sindang Sari is a fertile area and is close to a river, and so the migrants were able to carry out agricultural activities. In Sindang Sari, the hamlet of Hegarmanah is very close to the river. It was finally chosen to be the first settlement by the migrants. Despite its wide circulation among village citizens, the story is unverified.

lage, the village citizens' mode of protest was limited. Most village citizens are accustomed to seeing their role and status in the village as secondary to those of the officials. Here we see that despite the continuous processes of democratization, power relations within the village seem to be unaffected because village citizens are seen as backward, naive, and ignorant by the power holders (Ito 2011).

Therefore, ordinary village citizens have to unavoidably resort to courteous behaviour if they are to resist unwanted decisions by public officials because public mortification is a serious matter to state officials. For the citizens, violating public norms towards state officials can serve as a thrilling moment of political possibility. In this case, the citizens who kept Al-Musywaroh as the site of 'official' religious events acted politically by dispatching the opposition in a hidden, concealed way. In addition to a typical 'weapon of the weak' used by ordinary village citizens, Scott's notions of ordinary people's power also include a form of 'hidden transcript', a silent protest, because the price of openly protesting means putting one's access to socio-economic resources at risk (Scott 1990).

Here we see a form of polite and informal citizenship and communality aspects in the 'contestation' of public events. Instead of confronting the village head directly, which could have triggered public commotion and, more importantly, socio-economic exclusion, village citizens imposed polite and informal pressures on the village head through gentle ways of protest. By holding religious events in the mosque, they were actually sending the clear and bold message to the village head that inclusion and participation in public events cannot be solely determined by village authorities.

We want Al-Musywaroh to be the ultimate site of religious activities. The mosque is located in the centre of our village and on the main Sukabumi–Bogor road. It will be good for the reputation of our village [...] but at the same time we do not mind if the village head holds religious congregations in his hamlet [...] but Al-Musywaroh certainly has to be the site of official religious events, not elsewhere.²⁰

20 'Kita mah pengennya Al-Musywaroh itu jadi tempat kegiatan agama yang utama di desa. Alesannya karena Al-Musywaroh ada di tengah desa dan juga ada di pinggir jalan raya. Nah, itu kan bagus sekali buat imej desa kita ... tapi kita juga nggak masalah kalo pa lurah bikin pengajian di kampungnya ... yang jelas Al-Musywaroh harus jadi tempat utama kegiatan agama, bukan tempat yang lain.' Interview, village citizen, Sukabumi, 24-4-2015.

In multiple village meetings, the village head discussed this decorous protest with other village officials. Given the fact that the village citizens imposed polite and informal pressure and criticized the power holders indirectly, the village head also refrained from engaging in direct discussions with them. At the same time, the village citizens were reluctant to get involved, because they felt out of place if they came to such meetings without having received an invitation. However, non-participation does not necessarily mean having no desire or interest. Village citizens chose not to participate in such meetings because they relied on informal channels, such as chance occasions (in the case of paved paths) and decorous and silent protest (in the case of the Al-Musyawahroh mosque). The choice of non-participation is in line with the nature of participation by the poor; it takes place in relations of power, and meaningful participation occurs outside formal processes (Gaventa 1980; Scott 1985).

In one informal meeting that I attended, some village officials encouraged the village head to not interfere with religious affairs because they believed that interfering with the religious domain and opposing a religious leader was a serious breach of etiquette, which could bring both social and spiritual consequences (*kualat*). In addition to the fear of *kualat*, the village head was actually aware that the religious leader was fully supported by the village citizens, and that openly confronting him and the village citizens was therefore not a good option. In the end, Al-Musyawahroh retained its status as the site of 'official' religious events. The case shows village citizens' resilience and agency, and it demonstrates how informality and politeness work in village politics. In the following section, I will unearth the extent, depth, and content of polite citizenship.

6 Polite Citizenship: Communal Culture of Consensus-Formation

In this article, I have demonstrated that polite and informal forms of claims-making have signified a reasonably effective communal culture of consensus-formation that confines the predominantly complex character of the authorities. In rural West Java, these forms have shaped the development of citizenship, a process that nurtures citizens' capacity to claim rights. Even though the Sundanese are well known for being very polite, informality and politeness are not simply cultural things that citizens impose on the state. Rather, their use of informality and politeness is also a response to the informalized character of the Indonesian state itself. As a result, polite citizenship as a form of informal claims-making constitutes a significant form of political agency that enables citizens to deal with the authorities.

It is true that a new democracy such as Indonesia requires a strong civil society that monitors and criticizes state institutions. However, at the village level, the presence of a strong civil society is still lacking. As a result, the tendency for using informal and polite claims-making as a basic principle of citizenship may become beneficial. In my view, polite citizenship implies that ordinary village citizens do not act only as subservient citizens. Under certain circumstances, they can also act as informal and indirect enforcers of state obligations and policies by putting pressures on the authorities to pay more attention to their claims, complaints, and suggestions. Polite citizenship also signifies that social connections shape the relationship between citizens and the state. It draws our attention to informal processes in the open conceptions of worldwide citizenship, leading to a much wider diversity of various forms of civic engagement.

As I have demonstrated, polite citizenship has useful impacts on accountability and the performance of village authorities. By stressing politeness and informality as their way of making a complaint, the citizens have situated public officials within the community's social norms and moral codes. The citizens and informal community leaders who wanted to retain the mosque as the site of 'official' religious events took personal political action against the authorities in the case of the Al-Musyawaroh mosque. In the case of paved paths, we see the power of social sanctions imposed on state officials who failed in their duties to build good and accessible roads.

Due to its informal nature, polite forms of citizenship are constituted of loose and irregular features. They are primarily but not exclusively related to informal pressures, personal connections, and polite ways of protest. Village citizens see that informally and politely speaking in person to the village authorities may generate more beneficial results in claims-making than following formal procedures such as filling out a complaint form, for which most villages have no such mechanisms; participating in village meetings, at which many decisions have already been unilaterally taken by the authorities; or protesting, which may put access to key resources at risk.

Moreover, compared to assertive claims-making, polite protests are a better means to reinforce citizens' agency. While the authorities usually see assertive forms of claims-making as a sign of disobedience and impoliteness, polite ways of protest enable citizens to better deal with state institutions. This can be because the authorities are used to being revered by the citizens, even though these forms of claims-making are still actually complaints or protests from the latter to the former.

In the case of the paved paths, we saw that at the beginning of the conversation, instead of complaining about the poor road, a village citizen politely and respectfully told the village head that he was concerned that the village

head's car and shoes might get dirty because of the muddy road. He then gently reminded the village head that his car and shoes would not become dirty if the road had been paved. Finally, he noted that if the road had been paved, the village head would take the credit for this. Here we see that the 'proper treatment' of state officials by village citizens can foster a good relationship, and that a good relationship between them is also indicative of a high degree of obedience by the latter to the former. As the recipient of both a respectful request and disguised flattery, the village head saw these approaches as polite entreaty instead of assertive claims-making, and so he granted the request.

In the case of the Al-Musyawahroh mosque, we see that even though the village citizens disagreed with the village head's idea, they did not stage a direct protest against him. Instead, they kept holding religious events peacefully without denouncing or even prohibiting similar events being held in the village head's hamlet as well. In this way, the village citizens wanted the head to see their actions as forms of indirect yet courteous reproof. Because the citizens were so indirect and subtle in their disapproval, the village head did not view the citizens' action as contemptuous of him; rather, it led him to gradually change his ideas.

Informality and politeness, however, can also be used to gain, among other things, private socio-economic benefits and protection by forming patron-client relationships with the authorities. For instance, many village officials attempt to implement state programmes in a more transparent way. However, when certain citizens attempt to politely and informally influence village officials to give them priority for their own benefit, this cannot be classified as polite claims-making. The same is true of personal connections. When a citizen comes into conflict with the law and wants to take advantage of the informal community leaders' personal relations with security forces through under-the-table negotiations, it cannot be considered an act of rights-claiming. This behaviour certainly involves 'fixers'; their appearance reflects the darker side of personal connections, because they are notorious for their use of improper or unlawful means, such as bribery (Priyadi 2015). All of these possibilities are logical yet potentially corrupt practices, although we have to note that many people do not seem to be concerned with the moral consequences. Here we can see that the distinction between undemocratic practices and informality and politeness is quite hazy, and that is how many people see it in reality.

If we take a look at the case of the paved paths, one may ask: what if hamlet A followed official mechanisms to have its road paved, while hamlet B opted to persuade the village head in a highly polite and informal way to pave its road, leading to hamlet A not getting its road paved, while hamlet B did because the

leaders of hamlet B had a better personal connection with the village head? Do we still celebrate example B as a manifestation of polite citizenship, or does the example actually fall into the category of undemocratic practices?

In conventional theories of citizenship, which have considerable difficulty in accommodating such informal dimensions of state–citizen interactions, the informal interactions on which hamlet B depended remain out of view, and, in fact, example B may also indicate a deviation from full citizenship. However, citizenship in many developing countries cannot simply be described in terms of a deviation from a Western ideal. For many citizens across the world, informal and personal connections are simply indispensable when dealing with state institutions (Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007; Lazar 2008). In fact, politeness and informality are not only used by village citizens to circumvent formal mechanisms in claims-making in ways that may erode democratic practices; they also facilitate village citizens to be able to deal with precarious formal state regulations which are governed by authorities who have control over resources and bureaucratic power.

So, why do village citizens resort to polite citizenship? Firstly, ordinary village citizens do not have confidence in the efficacy of formal bureaucracy and legal processes, and thus they resort to applying polite and informal pressure on the authorities to administer the regulations fairly. In addition, they depend not only on the capacity and willingness of the authorities to implement state regulations but also on the prevalence of social norms that serve to compel the authorities to actually deliver accountable public service. This circumstance involves norms of reciprocity or, in Scott's words, a 'moral economy'—a structure that captures the way in which social conventions and informal regulations affect how citizens' claims vis-à-vis the state are articulated and evaluated (Scott 1976) and which figures conspicuously in notions of distributional fairness. The actual outcomes of formal bureaucracy and legal processes are frequently the product of shadowy deal-making where laws are commonly violated. Therefore, the fact that village citizens expediently opted to use polite and informal ways to claim rights is hardly surprising. This situation also indicates that the limited capacity of the authorities is concealed by the tendency of village citizens to rely on informal mechanisms. This tendency is a result of the citizens' inability to respond to the authorities' inclination to implement its regulations in a personal manner.

Secondly, politeness and informality constitute integral and important dimensions of citizenship in rural Indonesia. In the relative absence of formal claims-making behaviour in rural areas, citizens ensure that the quality of citizenship remains embedded in particular forms of political agency. Here we see that politeness and informality are also classic 'weapons of the weak' in

a situation where formal mechanisms of claims-making are inaccessible or when it is unlikely that the state institutions' failure will be penalized (Scott 1985). However, polite and informal pressures performed by village citizens are not bound by official rules but, rather, by societal norms. Nevertheless, these mechanisms still matter because they are embedded in informal social relations and political pressures that may generate accountability in public-service delivery.

Therefore, polite and informal forms of citizenship constitute a subtle way to deal with the weakness of the legal system in Indonesia, which calls into question the whole notion of 'rights'. They also show the citizens' resilience and agency. As Antlöv argues, citizens are not merely observers of development programmes; they are also members of a community and agents of their own lives (Antlöv 1995). Polite and informal forms of citizenship are also a means of pressing the authorities to establish decent accountability mechanisms, further the citizens' interests, and claim their rights. This is in line with the notion that many citizenship forms in non-Western societies may be linked to existing social hierarchies, ethnicity, and residence rather than to democratic principles, resulting in informal and formal hierarchies of citizenship (Chung 2017).

7 Conclusion

Socio-political affairs in rural Indonesia have long been arranged more through informal arrangements than through the rule of law. However, the establishment of citizenship in rural Indonesia is not merely part of a post-colonial transformation that views establishing the rights of citizens as a process of the idealization of norms from the top to the bottom of society. Rather, the establishment of citizenship requires the incorporation of local socio-political norms and values into a unified vision of a nation-state with shared interests.

In contemporary rural Indonesia, issues of citizenship revolve to a large extent around the interactions among different socio-political groups and between these groups and the state. Village citizens show how rights-claiming is negotiated through courteous compromise. Nevertheless, when village citizens consistently do not follow formal mechanisms, and when state institutions do not follow accountability systems, village citizens are ultimately discouraged from engaging in formal claims-making and adopting a discourse of rights. Consequently, village citizens frequently situate rights-claiming in terms of needs and social obligations rather than in terms of rights. In this case, the widespread presence of polite and informal forms of citizenship, which may

be as common as in other developing countries, is not a helpful form of people power because it results in the process of formalizing claims-making remaining weak.

Therefore, formulating the right accountability mechanisms is key to improving good governance and public-service delivery, which includes the village office becoming both autonomous on the one hand and accountable to village citizens on the other. In addition, democratization and decentralization in rural areas must be supported by democratic principles and empowerment that facilitate the active involvement of people outside of formal state structures. In doing so, inclusive policy reforms are needed to encourage village citizens to determine their participation in communal programmes, their say in communal issues, and their supervision of village funds and public-service delivery. Despite being heavily influenced by a number of complex continuities and changes in terms of democratization and decentralization, the struggles around everyday citizenship matters in Indonesian rural areas are generating some hope.

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