

The Sacred Grove : Founders and the Owners of the Forest in West Java, Indonesia

Robert Wessing*

In traditional West Java, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, areas of forest associated with hamlets were often set aside as sacred, excluded from exploitation and from ordinary access. Well known in West Java are the Arca Domas of the Baduy and the *hutan larangan* (forbidden forest) of *kampung* (hamlet) Naga near Tasikmalaya, now a popular tourist attraction¹. Although much has been written about especially the Baduy grove, these treatments have in the main failed to address the reason why this and other groves should exist. Some discussion centered on whether the Baduy's grove is an ancestral burial place, something denied by the Baduy.

This paper addresses the purpose of these groves and in so doing also raises the larger questions of the place of the forest in the perception of the Sundanese, and the relationship of the people to the spirit world, because it is in this connection that the groves and the fact that some few of them are still maintained can be understood².

I will mainly focus on the Baduy, because the data about their grove, Arca Domas, is most complete, as is the mythology associated with it and other aspects of their lives. This data is then placed in the context of further, though incomplete data from other areas of West Java, creating a general, if occasionally fragmentary picture of the relationship of the Sundanese with the groves and the spirits.

* Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Leiden. P.O. Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands

¹ The Baduy are a subgroup of the Sundanese people of West Java. They are said to practice the oldest and purest form of Sundanese culture. For an overview of the extensive literature on the Baduy see Wessing (1977) and Bakels and Boevink (1988). On *kampung Naga* nothing, to my knowledge, has been published in the anthropological literature.

² In this paper I shall not discuss the rulers' *taman sari* which may be interpreted as the ruler's private grove, a bounded, tamed area of forest at the center of the realm (Veldhuizen-Djajasoebrata, 1972 : 39-40 ; Falk, 1973 : 3-5).

Forests

While ecologically forests are a dynamic set of relationships between plants, animals, soil, climate and such, within which humans are but one factor, in the human view both remote tracts and forests near human settlements are part of the social landscape, modified by human activities, and often part of people's mental maps as places different from the hamlet where they live (Olson, 1997). A people's image of a forest with which they interact is socially constructed from factors including both its useful products and spiritual forces perceived to inhabit it. Such perceptions are not necessarily the same for all ; rural people may see things differently from urban officials (Wessing, 1994) and even local people need not all believe things in the same way (Beatty, 1996).

In Java generally, forests are perceived as ambiguous places of danger. While at one level forests are part of people's reality, with which they commonly interact and which shares a higher order with them, at another level they are quite different, even antithetical to people's settlements (Lehman, 1966 : 4-5)³. Villages are places of orderly, civilized human life while forests harbor forces that can be inimical to this (Wessing, 1986). This does not mean that forests are places of chaos but rather that they may well have their own order with rules different from human ones, which is one source of their danger (Schefold, 1997).

Forests were places to which to banish antisocial persons, or to which a ruler might flee in the face of conquest, both often leading to a change in the exiled person (Wessing, 1997 : 319-320 ; 1993). Mythology has people entering forests to meditate, to gain power to establish or conquer a kingdom (Oetomo, 1987 : 39-42), or after relinquishing the throne, preparing themselves to meet their ancestors (Eringa, 1949 : 21) or, like the Buddha, to gain enlightenment (Falk, 1973 : 11), all of which are also forms of change. In brief, forests were, and are, places of power, with rules that differed from those in the settled areas. Yet, they were part of the rulers' realm of the context of rural life⁴.

Spirits

One locus of a forest's power are the spirits thought to reside in it. Throughout what Mus (1975 : 9) has called "monsoon Asia", the land is thought to have originally been inhabited and owned by spirits. Their names vary⁵, but their relationship to people is remarkably similar ; they are thought to reside in or beneath sacred trees in the center or on the

³ Thus Wibowo (1971 : 5) says of a previous center of civilization that it had returned to forest (*hutan belantara*).

⁴ Today little remains of the extensive forests of Java (Wessing, 1994).

⁵ Van Hien (1912) lists many of them, the most important being the *dhanyang* and *dhemit* (tutelary spirits). Elsewhere they are called *nat* (Burma), *phi* (Thailand), *yaksha* (India) and the like. In Java the latter were recast as demons (Zoetmulder, 1982 : 2355), perhaps reflecting this process in India (Dowson, 1972 : 173), while the native Javanese forms persisted as tutelary spirits.

edge of hamlets and are said to protect the fertility of the land and the general welfare (Wessing, manuscript ; Stutley and Stutley, 1984 : 345).

When people came to clear and settle the land, they had to invade these spirits' territory, for which their permission and to some degree their cooperation were needed. This involved the spirits' passive compliance with the invasion, followed by their being coopted by involving them in offerings or a cult, obliging them to make counter prestations in the form of their protection. Thus, my fieldnotes from West Java describe how at the founding of a new hamlet a boundary point was marked, separating the people's area from that of the spirits. When the spirits did not object, construction continued and a shrine (*tukuh lembur*) was set up at the boundary point, removing the spirits into an area said to be especially reserved for them. Having been honored with a shrine, the spirits then owed their protection to the new community (Domenig, 1988). The resulting cult relationship usually involves an annual ritual during which the spirits are invited and feasted.

The person who is able to manipulate the spirits in this way is no ordinary person. Rather, such a "founder" (Lehman, 1997) was considered to have extraordinary powers, often able to enlist the aid of wild animals, like tigers, in clearing the area (Wessing, 1998). Such founders are usually depicted as either very pious Muslims or scions of a ruling house who were not in the line of succession. "Who else but such a person," said one informant, "would have the power to deal with the spirit world ? This is not given to just anyone" (Lehman, 1981 : 104). It were these extraordinary spiritual powers that made possible the spirits' agreement to the new situation. This person then became the leader of the new community, a position usually passed on to a son, who was thought to have inherited the founder's powers and his obligations to the guardian spirits, including the annual feast⁶.

That the main concern in this relationship with the spirit was the maintenance of the fertility of the land can be seen in the title *pu'un* held by Baduy *kampung* heads, and perhaps in the past by other Sundanese ones as well⁷. The Baduy say these *pu'un* are the descendants of the founders of their hamlets (Van Tricht, no date : 48). The office is an honored one, the holder, possibly male or female (Geise, 1952 : 68), being the most sacred person in the *kampung*, who leads the people in their observation of the Agama Sunda Wiwitan, the original religion of the Sundanese (Doddy Putranto, 1988 : 57). Kern (1924 : 584) writes that the word *pu'un* is equivalent to *puhun* which he glosses with "cause", "reason" and "origin", to which Prawirasuganda (1964 : 126) adds *pokok* (basic, fundamental), making the *pu'un* a person connected to the origins.

The Sundanese also have the office of *wali puhun*, an expert in agricultural matters who brings the offerings at the rice field at various stages of

⁶ Such a pivotal position regarding access to land and the spirits also bolsters the authority and power of the ruling line or faction (Lehman, 1996 : 3, 8).

⁷ This does not reflect the modern Indonesian bureaucratic titles. Kern (1924 : 584) writes that the title is *girang pu'un*, extending the title of the *pu'un* of the primary Baduy hamlet of Cibeo to the heads of the other eight hamlets (Koorders, 1896 : 338).

the growth of the crop. Kern (1924 : 584) connects *wali* with *balian* or *walian*, shaman, a person who deals with the spirit world (*dukun* ; Prawirasuganda, 1964 : 126⁸). Elsewhere he was known as *dukun nurunan* (Kern, 1924 : 584), the shaman who makes spirits descend into himself, and the crop. *Wali puhun*, then, could mean “most basic shaman” or “shaman who deals with the origins”.

Among the Muslim Sundanese *wali* can also mean representative or guardian of a bride. Since rice and women are symbolically identical (Sasmoyo, 1988 : 22 ; Rikin, 1973 : 13, 22), *wali puhun* can be understood as guardian of the rice (spirit) (Wessing, 1998) as well as of the offering, *puhun*, made at the rice field⁹. Perhaps he also represents vegetation generally, because the Baduy *pu'un* is responsible for the welfare and maintenance of the surrounding forest, lecturing those who offend against it during special rituals (Djoewisno, 1987 : 36, 39 ; Lehman, 1996 : 2).

Like elsewhere in Indonesia (Hatta, 1982 : 13 ; Dominikus Rato, 1992 : 18), the graves of founding ancestors are often located beyond the edge of the hamlet, preferably on a wooded hill (Roxas-Lim, 1983 : 108). In fact, in one dialect of Sundanese, one word for the grave of the common ancestor is *leuweung* (forest) (Rikin, 1973 : 17, 40). Mountains have long been recognized as powerful places in Southeast Asia, the abodes of gods, spirits and ancestors. It may be wondered whether being buried in such a place is an indication of the sanctity of the deceased or an attempt to associate the departed with the sacred - a kind of burial *ad sanctos*, although the two ideas are not mutually exclusive. Thus, the graves of the founder of *kampung* Dukuh near Garut, and three other local notables, are located on a mountainside, in a grove of large trees, above and to the north of the hamlet, beyond a bamboo fence separating the houses of the *kampung* elite from the mountainside (Singgih Wibisono, 1972 : 6-7). The Baduy say that the spirits of their ancestors, rather than their physical remains, gather at Sasaka Domas on a nearby mountain, where they unite with their ultimate ancestor, Batara Tunggal¹⁰ (Nurhadi Rangkuti, 1988 : 12 ; Bakels, no date : 8) or Ambu Luhur, the Great Mother¹¹.

⁸ A quite old informant in 1970-71 said that the *wali puhun* used to be called *punuh*, a title appearing neither in the dictionaries nor in descriptions of the Sundanese. He may have meant *punduh* (elder) (Prawirasuganda, 1964 : 126).

⁹ This offering consists of the shoot of a *cau manggala* (a kind of banana), a section of *awi tamiyang* (thin bamboo) and a *hanjuwang* (*Cordyline fruticosa*) plant. About the *wali puhun's* role in agriculture, see also Moestapa's (1946 : 104-105) notes on *huluwotan*.

¹⁰ Similarly, the mountainous Priangan region of West Java is the abode of the spirits of the Sundanese ancestors (*para hiang*) (Judistira Garna, 1990 : 312). Deceased Madurese nobles were buried on the hill Asta Tinggi (Dominikus Rato, 1992 : 41). In East Java Mt. Bromo is the home of a deified ancestor of the Tengger people (Hefner, 1985 : 266), while in Central Java ancestral spirits gather in the palace of Mt. Merapi, under the care of Eyang (grandparent) Merapi (Triyoga, 1991 : 45-46, 49, 51-52), a term that seems to “ancestralize” the mountain, to use Hefner's term (1985 : 75).

¹¹ Sasmoyo (1988) discusses Ambu Luhur as the ancestress of the Baduy (Bakels and Boevink, 1988 : 49). She may be a female counterpart to Batara Tunggal : Geise (1952 : 68) writes that the Baduy tell how in the beginning there were only two people who were *pu'un*. These two had a child who became Sultan of Banten. All the Inner Baduy (Wessing, 1977) are descended from the female *pu'un*. On the other hand, Batara Tunggal and Ambu Luhur may be male and female aspects of the same entity, much like the Javanese Semar (Woodward, 1989 : 223).

Ancestral groves, sometimes called *kabuyutan*,¹² commonly may not be approached by just anyone. If such a grave may be approached at all, one has to be brought to it by a *kuncen* (lit. keeper of the key ; intermediary), a person who introduces the visitor or pilgrim to its inhabitant. Often, however, ordinary people may not enter there, access being restricted to the hamlet's leaders, descendants of the buried founders.

Thus, both the nature spirit¹³ and the *pu'un*, descended from the hamlet's founder, are concerned with the maintenance of the fertility of the lands occupied by the hamlet¹⁴ and both the original spirits and those of the founding ancestors often inhabit forested groves on hills or mountain sides¹⁵.

Groves

Turning now to the two types of groves, Veth (1896, I : 219) observed that open places of prayer, made up of several terraces, with traces of altars and statues are numerous in West Java, especially high in the mountains. The literature, however, a convenient summary of which may be found in de Haan (1911, II : 758)¹⁶, overwhelmingly concerns ancestral graves or the sites of their spirits. The reason for this may be that graves, often decorated and surrounded by ritual objects, were more interesting places to the various travelers that described them than undisturbed patches of forest were. Furthermore, given the advance of Islam in West Java, shrines to spirits would tend to become less obvious.

Some of the sites reported on in the literature are not presented as either nature or ancestral spirit groves. However, when nature spirit groves are explicitly mentioned they are described as totally undisturbed (Kompas, 1989a : 8). It would thus be easy to assume that sites described as having terraces, upright stones and the like must in some way relate to ancestral spirits. Yet, in the light of some data presented by Junghuhn (1852 : 91-93) this is not quite satisfactory. I have, therefore, opted to classify sites that specifically mention ancestors and/or graves as in some way ancestral, and those clearly indicated as spirit groves as just that. This leaves a residue of difficult to classify sites which, because ancestors and nature spirits sometimes merge (Wessing, manuscript), may have served for both.

¹²From *buyut*, a relationship between ancestors and descendants, three generations apart (Wessing, 1979). *Buyut* also means taboo.

¹³Coolsma (no date : 111) lists *dangijang* or *danyang*, though *siluman* is more commonly used.

¹⁴Hamlet heads in the rest of West Java seem no longer to specifically have this function, while the agricultural aspect of the role is now performed by the *wali puhun* if at all.

¹⁵As Mus (1975 : 16) indicates, the two spirits may merge, leading to what in East Java has been called a *dhanyang-leluhur*, an ancestor-*dhanyang* (Hefner, 1985 : 75).

¹⁶Additional information can be found in Lekkerkerker (1938 : 236-237), Van Oort and Müller (1836 : 89-90), Pennings (1902), Pleyte (1905a : 90-92, 1905b : 43-5, 49-50), Raksakusumah (1966), De Roo de la Faille (1893 : 66), Van Tricht (1932 : 181) and De Wilde (1830 : 28).

Ancestral Groves

Most often mentioned is the Arca or Sasaka Domas of the Baduy (plate 1), most descriptions of which, since access to the area is severely restricted¹⁷, rely on a description by Koorders (1896 : 336 ; Van Tricht, no date : 53). Koorders writes of a series of thirteen roughly paved terraces (*petak*), descending from North to South. The top one Koorders clearly considered to be a grave¹⁸, possibly because of the large stone pillar standing there, which we now know is the place where Batara Tunggal descends.

Plate 1 : The terraces at Lebak Sidedug, near the Baduy area. Photo Jet Bakels.



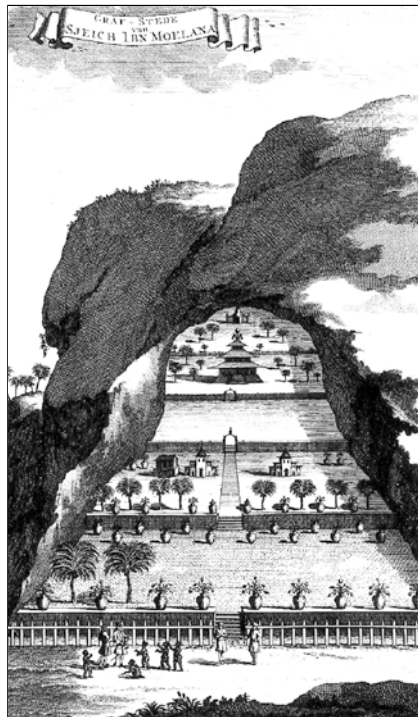
The next terrace, called *lemah bodas*, which contains nothing, is said to be the place where the spirits of the deceased gather before being united with Batara Tunggal. The third contains the seats of the grandchildren of Batara Tunggal, the ancestors of the *pu'un*, (hamlet heads). The next nine terraces function variously as pilgrimage sites and places where notables

¹⁷ This restrictedness is reflected in the names of these places. Thus some of the groves are called *Buni Buana* (hidden world), *sideman* (from *sidem*, secret ; Eringa, 1984 : 700) and *kabuyutan*, which includes the idea of taboo as well as 'place of the ancestors'(Judistira Garna, 1990 : 312). A forest mentioned by Van Tricht (1932 : 182) is called *Buyut Cendana* (forbidden ; Coolsma, no date : 668) and one near Cirebon is called *kabayan*, which Eysinga (1842 : 443) erroneously glosses with sacred. Berg (1929 : 471) correctly derives *kabayan* from the Sanskrit *bhaya* (danger, something to be respected), something often associated with the sacred and the reason for the restriction.

¹⁸ Van Tricht (no date : 52) mentions that all authors then writing about the Baduy spoke of graves and grave stones, even though the Baduy themselves stubbornly denied this.

stay, while the thirteenth and lowest terrace is the place where the spirits of the deceased gather on their way to the *lemah bodas* (Bakels and Boevink, 1988 : 51-53)¹⁹. Similar, though smaller terraced sanctuaries, such as Kosala and Lebak Sibedug, may be found throughout West Java (Van Tricht, no date : 51, 55 ; 1932 : 180-183 ; de Quant, 1899 Prive, 1896 : 3-5). Where sloping terrain was not available, the terraces might be constructed next to each other (Van Tricht, 1932 : 182). Even though access to this ancestral sanctuary is restricted, even among the Baduy themselves, this does not mean that no one ever enters this area of forest, variously called *taneuh* or *leuweung larangan* (forbidden land or forest) (Van Tricht, no date : 71 ; Doddy Putranto 1988 : 56). Annual pilgrimages are made there during the fifth month of the lunar year, honoring the ancestral spirit, Batara Tunggal. Nine men stay there for two days, cleaning the terraces and gathering moss and other substances that are later offered to a descendant of the Sultan of Banten (Koorders, 1896 : 336). Batara Tunggal is thought to descend to his pillar at this time to indicate the fortunes for the coming year.

Plate 2 : The grave of Sunan Gunung Jati (Syech Ibn Mulana) near Cirebon. From Valentyn (1724 : facing page 15).



¹⁹ Djoewisno (1987 : 38) adds to this that about 10 meters distance from the 13th terrace, on a steep slope, there is the Goa Keramat Arca Domas, the sacred cave of Arca Domas, with a large stone in the shape of a water buffalo, surrounded by many similar stones in the shaped of domestic animals. Widi Yarmanto and Riza Sofyat (1990 : 63) say that these are reminders to the Baduy that such animals are taboo.

Prominent though the terraces are at Arca Domas and other sites not directly discussed, they are not an essential, defining feature of ancestral groves, nor are these the only place that terraces are found. Eysinga (1842 : 443), for instance, mentions terraces in a forest at Raja Galuh near Cirebon, describing stones that may have served as altars in Buddhist times²⁰. Terraces are also found in Cirebon at the grave of Sunan Gunung Jati (plate 2), the person who is credited with Islamizing West Java (Eysinga, 1842 : 445). This would indicate that the use of terraces was not limited to either ancestors or pre-Islamic rituals commemorating the founders or ancestors, even though Sunan Gunung Jati has been argued to have shamanistic connections (Wessing, 1993).

On the other hand, the ancestral grove in *kampung* Naga, located to the west of the hamlet and which, like Arca Domas, is open to only certain residents (Kompas, 1989a : 8), is but one of seven terraces making up the hamlet. The ancestral graveyard of *kampung* Guradog, a Baduy-like community, lies on flat land at the edge of the hamlet, across the river Ciwulan, and in the past might only be approached by the hamlet's leaders (Sufia Isa, 1971 : 33).

Nature-Spirit Groves

As I pointed out, there are far fewer mentions of groves for nature spirits. One clear occurrence is in the above mentioned *kampung* Naga where Kompas (1989a : 8) mentions a second wood, called *hutan* Biuk, located to the east of the hamlet, saying of this forest (*leuweung gangong*) that “*if the graves’ forest is considered sacred (dikeramatkan) because of the ancestral graves, the Biuk forest has for centuries been left a jungle, because there isn’t a person who dares to enter it. Not only will no one go there to cut firewood, just picking up fallen branches there can bring about calamity. [...] This wood is described by the inhabitants of Naga as aya nu ngageugeuh, there is a spirit owner (or guardian) there.*”

It seems likely that in the past most Sundanese hamlets had such spirit groves. A recent survey in West Java found clear indications of them in a number of places, ranging from full fledged wooded hills to a designated spot fenced by *hanjuwang* plants (*Cordyline fruticosa*), a common boundary indicator (Heyne, 1927 : 442). Only one hamlet checked, founded by a pious Muslim, lacked such a place, the nature spirit being replaced by a Muslim *jin* who, not being a place spirit, roamed through the community. There are some indications that the Baduy may have a second grove next to Arca Domas, though this is not absolutely clear. Van Tricht (1932 : 180) writes of a Tajur Sakete as a second sanctuary, north of Arca Domas, covered with a sacred forest said to be a remnant of the *Leuweung Cawene*, the sacred virgin forest in which the Baduy originally settled. This may be the forest that Djoewisno (1987 : 36-37) calls *hutan* Kendeng,

²⁰ Similarly Junghuhn (1852 : 91-93) writes of a clearing in the forest on the plain between Sumedang and Bandung in which stands an oblong stone that may have served as an altar, perhaps in pre-Hindu-Buddhist times.

also known as *leuweung kolot* (ancient forest), which has long been forbidden to people.

On the other hand, Mr. Agus Saladin of Trisakti University in Jakarta, told me that just to the south of the Baduy hamlet of Cibeo there is a *bukit larangan* (forbidden hill), while the grave yard lies to the north of the hamlet, placing the hamlet between the two. Such a location between two groves was typical of all the *kampung* where spirit groves were found. While neither the founder's grave nor the spirit's locality lay in any specific compass direction, where they occurred they always lay precisely opposite each other, like a diameter bisecting the community and, as it were, defining the boundary around it.

Finally, Kusnaka Adimihardja (1992 : 34) writes of various kinds of forest recognized by the Kasepuhan people of West Java, including the ancient forest (*leuweung kolot*), and a sacred forest (*leuweung titipan*), given in their care (*dititip*) by the ancestors. These are not to be exploited without ancestral permission in the form of a sign. While in neither the case of the Baduy's Tajur Sakete or the Kasepuhan's *leuweung titipan* it is completely clear that these are set aside for the nature spirits, the fact that they may not be entered or exploited is reminiscent of *kampung* Naga's *hutan biuk*, and points at the possibility that in the past both were part of Sundanese hamlet cosmology generally²¹.

Water

During the annual pilgrimage to Arca Domas, Batara Tunggal gives indications concerning the welfare of the Baduy in the coming year. One indication of this is said to be the growth of moss on certain stones. Mosses and lichens are very sensitive to moisture (Kendeigh, 1961 : 102-104)²², and thus the relative abundance of mosses is an indication of the relative availability of water in the area. The concern, therefore, is not so much with the moss as such, but rather with what it indicates about the available moisture for agriculture. Indeed, in the area covered by Arca Domas lie the sources of the water that the Baduy depend on (Saleh Danasasmita and Anis Djatisunda, 1986 : 112 ; Djoewisno, 1987 : 36). Similarly, the ancestral graves above *kampung* Dukuh lie in between two ditches that channel water from springs near the summit to the hamlet and its fields (Singgih Wibisono, 1972 : 7).

However, it is not only the moisture of springs and the mosses they engender that are important. Sites without such springs are often

²¹ Kohlbrugge (1901 : 131) describes how Tengger communities lie between two sacred sites, much like *kampung* Naga between its two groves : 'on one side of the village, underneath high trees, lie the two sacred graves of the village's founders while on the opposite side (*der entgegengesetzten Seiten*) the village's tutelary spirit (*Dorfgeist*) is located, so that the village is surrounded by protective spirits.'

²² Mosses develop especially well in the higher altitudes with continual high humidity, in West Java at ± 2000 to 2500 meters above sea level where layers of moss covering tree branches give the forest a peculiar look (De Graaf and Stibbe, 1918 : 791 ; van Tricht 1932 : 182). As Iskandar and Iskandar (1994 : 30-1) point out, the Baduy are keenly aware of the nature of their environment.

reported to have water jugs that never run dry ; such an extraordinary jug is reported near an alleged grave of Kean Santang (Pleyte, 1905a : 92)²³ as well as on the fourth terrace of the sanctuary on Mt. Arca in the Buyut Cendana forest (Van Tricht, 1932 : 183). Elsewhere, shallow hollows on the roof of the sanctuary of a Muslim saint on Mt. Munara are said to always contain moisture, used for ritual cleansing and healing (Pleyte, 1905b : 49-50). A jug is also reported present on the sixth terrace at Arca Domas, its water used for ritual and as a predictor of the rains for the coming season (Bakels and Boevink, 1988 : 51).

Interestingly, these “eternal” sources of water are reported not from the spirits’ groves, but from ancestral ones - counting the Muslim *kiai* on Mt. Munara as “religiously ancestral.” This makes the ancestral spirits, in the Baduy case ultimately Batara Tunggal, guardians of the water and thus the fertility of the soil, rather than the nature spirits that might have been expected to play this role. It may be (Lehman, 1996 : 3) that the founders, here Batara Tunggal, agreed to serve the spirits, tasks inherited by the present *pu’un* or elsewhere the *wali puhun*. This is the price paid for access to the land : those who work it are responsible for its care²⁴.

Lehman argues (1996 : 1) that this is ultimately done under the stewardship of an overarching monarchy. One might expect in such a case that, where the power of the ruler fades, local adherence to the taboos also diminishes. This seems to have happened in Sunda generally, with the exception of places like Naga and the Baduy area where, as in the case Lehman (1996 : 2) discusses, the *pu’un* publicly “harangues” those who have offended against the grove (Djoewisno, 1987 : 36). The ruler, in this latter case, is probably the current scion of the Djajadiningrat line, traditionally the Regents of Serang and descendants of Batara Tunggal (Van Tricht, no date : 49), to whom the samples of moss and other materials gathered at Arca Domas are presented after the annual pilgrimage²⁵. The *pu’un* here combines the voices of the ruler and the ancestors, Batara Tunggal and the spirits who have gathered with him in Arca Domas. The *pu’un girang*, then, the most sacred person in the *kampung*, mediates between the nature spirits, Batara Tunggal and the “royal” line of the Regents of Serang²⁶.

²³ Kean Santang is celebrated as a bringer of Islam to West Java. About his relationship to Sunan Gunung Jati, see Wessing (1993).

²⁴ Korn (1932 : 180) notes that in Bali the community is responsible for the maintenance of its own moral purity. Not to do so would influence the “magic involved with the land” which would affect agriculture.

²⁵ The relationship with the Regents of Serang leaves open the question of the Baduy’s relationship with Prabu Silihwangi, the ruler of Pajajaran. According to some myths, this royal house disappeared into the forests when the palace was overrun by Muslim forces. There they all turned into tigers and civet cats (Wessing, 1993). The Baduy themselves assume their ancestors to be tigers (Geise, 1952 : 62).

²⁶ The role of the Regent of Serang vis-a-vis the Baduy would, at least since colonial times, have been largely ceremonial as real power and authority over the forests and the way they were and are used lay in the hands of the V.O.C., the colonial authorities and following them the Indonesian ones (Boomgaard, 1992 : 41-42, 48). The latter, for some reason, chose to do little to protect the Baduy’s forest, perhaps preferring to try to remove these people from their isolation (Cavanagh, 1983 : 18-19 ; Saleh Danasasmita and Anis Djatisunda, 1986 : 113-115).

Conclusion

Clearly, Sundanese hamlets were thought to flourish owing to the cooperative care of both ancestral and nature spirits through the agency of the *pu'un* or his equivalent, and the tutelary spirit-owners of the land. The domain of the nature spirits was sacrosanct, except when the ancestors gave permission to enter it, if we may generalize from the Kasepuhan data. In return, the nature spirits maintained the fertility of the community's soil, aided by the ancestors under the supervision of a more or less enlightened ruler who had his own relationship with the spirit world (Lehman, 1997).

It could be said, therefore, that the traditions of the Sundanese contain a conservation paradigm, attributed to the ancestors, whose spiritual guidance is supposed to lead people into a balanced use of natural resources (Kompas, 1989a : 8). This has not been generally successful, as in most of West Java forests have long since disappeared along with the royal houses protecting them. Also, any conservation resulting from the restrictions laid down by the ancestors may well be unintended (Olson, 1997 : 9)²⁷.

Although the Baduy still try to maintain their groves, these are now entered by non-Baduy who sell the wood and farm the land, a situation the government has been unable or unwilling to remedy (Saleh Danasasmita and Anis Djatisunda, 1986 : 112-113). *Kampung Naga* is now a tourist attraction where the only grove that attracts attention is the ancestral one (Parmono Atmadi, 1996 : 180 ; 1997 : 3-4). Indeed, in Java the reverse of conservation has been said to have been the case. The founding of new states, both those based on the Indian model and Islamic ones, was usually accompanied by the felling of forests ; clearing the trees was seen as the creation of history and the spreading of civilization (Daldjoeni, 1992 : 4). Thus, even where there was an awareness of the need to protect the sources of water, conservation did not apply to the forest as a whole (Boomgaard, 1992 : 48).

It is useless to speculate what the Sundanese landscape would look like had the traditional rulers remained in power. New cosmologies have made inroads in West Java, presenting the Sundanese with new desacralized ways of looking at and dealing with the forests (Olson, 1997 : 9, 21-22). This has, increasingly rapidly, led to a decline of beliefs in the spirit world, causing the spirits to depart to isolated spaces (Wessing, 1995 : 209) and leaving the forests unprotected. Forests have been felled extensively, especially after 1870, when private landownership became law (Bryant, 1973 : 87). The current cosmology does not seem to be very effective in protecting forests ; though forestry and replanting laws exist, these are not truly enforced (Kompas, 1989b). Modern (Western ?) enterprise and a tremendous growth of population (Van Naerssen and Van Rooijen, 1980), leading to an enormous demand for land have proven stronger than fear

²⁷ The apparent conservation could also have been the result low population densities in conjunction with the fear and respect expressed for the forest's powers (Wessing, 1994 : 53).

of the spirits, especially where, once the trees were felled, nothing happened (Boomgaard, 1992 : 48 ; Olson, 1997 : 21-22). In effect, this would have returned the situation to that obtaining at the time of the founding of hamlets when, as was described earlier, if the spirits did not object in some obvious way, their acquiescence was assumed. In the context of a new, development oriented cosmology in which neither ancestral nor nature spirits are given much space, there is little room for such objections. In 1970 I was still able to record the case of a man possessed by a local spirit for felling a tree without this spirit's permission, even though the spirit was roundly chastised by that of the hamlet's founder (Wessing, 1978 : 104) ; these days even the Baduy may be violating their sacred woods (Bakels cited by Van Zanten, 1995 : 521-522). If, indeed, the Baduy's role at the sacred center of West Java is to protect the *adat* (custom), and through it the realm of Sunda (Wessing, 1977), the traditional way of life would seem to be in grave trouble, as could have been predicted from the rapid advances made by the new cosmologies.

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Résumé

Les bosquets sacrés : premiers occupants et propriétaires de la forêt dans l'ouest de Java, Indonésie

Autrefois, dans l'ouest de Java, des lambeaux de forêt plus ou moins vastes, dont l'emplacement se situait en général de part et d'autre du hameau, étaient traditionnellement dévolus aux esprits des ancêtres et de la nature. On pensait qu'ensemble, ces deux types d'esprits veillaient sur le bien-être de la communauté, en particulier sur la fertilité de la terre. Un élément de cette fertilité était la présence d'eau, indiquée soit par une plus ou moins grande abondance de mousse aux endroits rituels, soit par sa présence "éternelle" dans des récipients sacrés. Ces bosquets sacrés, jadis inviolés, sont le plus souvent en train de disparaître en raison des changements dans la cosmologie locale apportés par une domination plus forte de l'Islam et l'adoption d'une conception plus mercantile des forêts. Ces changements de croyances ont également accompagné le constant déclin des forêts à Java-Ouest.

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Serge Bahuchet, Daniel Bley,
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