
REVISITING “RURAL” JAVA: AGRARIAN RESEARCH IN THE WAKE OF *REFORMASI*: A REVIEW ESSAY

Jan Breman and Gunawan Wiradi. *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java*.
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Introduction

Inspiration for this article came from an invitation by the editor of *Indonesia* to one of us (Gillian Hart) to review *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java* (2002) by Jan Breman and Gunawan Wiradi.¹ In their volume, the authors engage with the debates over the distributional consequences of *krismon* (*krisis moneter*, monetary crisis), the financial crisis of 1997-98 that wrought economic havoc and toppled the Suharto regime. They do so by revisiting two villages on the coastal plain of West Java that they and others—notably Yujiro Hayami and Masao Kikuchi,² and Jonathan Pincus³—had studied intensively in the past.

The timing of the invitation to review the book was fortuitous, since Hart was just about to return to rural Java after an absence of more than twenty years, together with Nancy Peluso, who had not been back since 1992.⁴ This trip in July 2004 was part of a comparative project entitled “New and Resurgent Agrarian Questions in Post-Soeharto

¹ We are grateful to Suraya Afiff, Noer Fauzi, and Dianto Bachriadi for their guidance in the field and for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Denise Leto’s editorial assistance was, as always, much appreciated.

² Yujiro, Hayami and Masao Kikuchi, *Asian Village Economy at the Crossroads: An Economic Approach to Institutional Change* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

³ Jonathan Pincus, “Review of *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java: Case Studies of Socio-Economic Dynamics in Two Villages Toward the End of the Twentieth Century*,” *Development and Change* 34,4 (2003): 772-74.

⁴ Hart conducted research in 1975-76 in a village on the north coast of Central Java for her book *Power, Labor, and Livelihood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986). The results of Peluso’s fourteen months of field research between 1984 and 1986 in two forest villages of Central Java were published in Nancy Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

Indonesia and Post-Apartheid South Africa," an ongoing collaboration with Suraya Afiff and Noer Fauzi in Indonesia, and Lungisile Ntsebeza in South Africa.⁵ The rise of agrarian movements demanding access to land in the era of *Reformasi* formed the central theme of what we called a "traveling workshop." We focused on the SPP movement (Serikat Petani Pasundan, Sundanese Peasants' Union) in West Java and its relationship to KPA (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, Consortium for Agrarian Reform), a national network based in Bandung that advocates for agrarian reform agendas.⁶ We also met with activist student groups in each of the three Pasundan districts (Kabupaten Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis) that support the SPP. The highlight of the trip was two days in "Cisau," a West Javanese village in which SPP members have occupied a former plantation and part of a state forest tract, torn down rubber and cocoa trees, planted bananas, built houses, carved out rice fields, and, through the electoral process, taken over village government.⁷

At the end of the traveling workshop, the two of us (Hart and Peluso) together made brief revisits to our former field sites—a teak forest village in the eastern part of Central Java where Peluso had worked in the mid-1980s, and Sukodono, a village on the north coast of Central Java in which Hart had worked in 1975-76.⁸ On the trip to Sukodono, we were also accompanied by Gunawan Wiradi and Sediono Tjondronegoro, senior academics at the Institut Pertanian Bogor (Bogor Agricultural Institute), who had been major figures with the Survei Agro Ekonomi (SAE or Agro Economic Survey) with which Hart had been affiliated in the 1970s.⁹

Good Times and Bad Times exemplifies renewed interest in Java in the era of *Reformasi*, or "Transisi," as many scholar-activists in Indonesia today prefer to call this period. From the mid-1980s until the end of the New Order, scholarship in the field of agrarian change largely shifted to focus on Indonesian islands outside Java, in part

⁵ Suraya Afiff and Noer Fauzi are both affiliated with KARSIA Institute (Institute of Rural and Agrarian Change) in Yogyakarta; Fauzi was also a founding member of KPA and is still active on its board. Lungisile Ntsebeza is associate professor of sociology at University of Cape Town, South Africa. Our visit to Java in July 2004 was part of a Ford Foundation-funded "Crossing Borders" project at University of California, Berkeley, entitled "New and Resurgent Agrarian Questions in Post-Soeharto Indonesia and Post-Apartheid South Africa." See Suraya Afiff, Noer Fauzi, Gillian Hart, Lungisile Ntsebeza, and Nancy Peluso, "Redefining Agrarian Power: Resurgent Agrarian Movements in West Java, Indonesia," <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cseas/CSEASWP2-05/> for a detailed account of the "traveling workshop." See Gillian Hart, Nancy Peluso, and Lungisile Ntsebeza, "Resurgent Agrarian Movements: Land Occupations in Java and Comparative Reflections with South Africa" (manuscript, n.d.) for an effort to situate the rise of agrarian movements in Java in relation to those in South Africa.

⁶ The Indonesian word *petani* translates into English as either "peasant" or "farmer." According to Noer Fauzi, members of the Expert Council of KPA and the Teaching Council of SPP discussed how the "*petani*" in "Serikat Petani Pasundan" should be translated into English, given its different political connotations. They decided that the term "farmer" encompassed agri-business, to which they saw themselves in opposition. The "peasant" connotation connects to a nationalist image of a rural smallholder tied to the land, an image deployed by President Sukarno in the immediate post-independence period.

⁷ "Cisau" is a pseudonym.

⁸ Due to time constraints, we visited only one of Peluso's villages. Both village visits were very short and our comments here are somewhat impressionistic.

⁹ See Ben White, "Between Apologia and Critical Discourse: Agrarian Transitions and Scholarly Engagement in Indonesia," in *Social Science and Power in Indonesia*, ed. D. Dhakidae and V. Hadiz (Jakarta: Equinox, 2004), which places SAE in a larger historical context.

because of the increasing attention of scholars and activists to the environmental and social consequences of the massive "Development" projects proceeding apace in Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and "Irian Jaya." These "Outer Islands" were primary sites where World Bank and bilateral aid sources funded and implemented projects related to transmigration, dam construction, forestry, plantation crops, and coastal resources. The tremendous amount of land and other agrarian resources enclosed by these projects made "the environment" a critical site of struggle throughout the second half of the New Order—and the dispossession of millions of people in the name of "environment" or "development" became an important focus of scholarship in the social sciences and both local and international activism.¹⁰ At the same time (though not related only to the fields of agrarian/environmental change), many funding sources for doctoral and postdoctoral research explicitly or implicitly favored studies located outside Java and Bali.¹¹

In this article, we take Breman and Wiradi's provocative book as a starting point from which to revisit long-standing debates about trends in poverty, inequality, and social differentiation that have been heavily focused on the lowland rice regions of rural Java. The book and its themes have encouraged us to put into comparative perspective some of our observations about poverty, livelihoods, differentiation, and agrarian movements in upland and forest areas of Java. Drawing on insights from our own revisits in mid-2004, we call attention to widely divergent dynamics in different regions of Java, and raise questions about the forces that enable and constrain the emergence of organized political forces demanding access to land and other resources.

As Anton Lucas and Carol Warren have shown in an important article, these mobilizations have enabled the rise of new rural political forces—not only in the form of farmers' organizations, but also in the election of members of these organizations to important positions in village and district governments as village heads, village council members, district officials in the executive branches of government, and district parliament members.¹² Yet these movements are heavily concentrated in upland areas—especially in the Pasundan region of West Java that was the focus of our traveling workshop. It is striking that in the very places where differentiation appears most extreme (lowland rice villages) and coercive structural controls on access to land most heavily fortified (teak forest villages), agrarian activists seeking to redress huge inequalities have been unable to gain an effective foothold. One of the leading activists in KPA put it this way:

¹⁰ This literature has become quite extensive, and a list of relevant works and authors is beyond the scope of this paper. A short history of social science scholarship on forests in Southeast Asia is presented in Nancy Lee Peluso, Peter Vandergeest, and Lesley Potter, "Social Aspects of Forestry in Southeast Asia: A Review of Trends in the Scholarly Literature," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26 (1995): 196-218. Other edited volumes include Phillip Hirsch and Carol Warren, *The Politics of Environment in Southeast Asia: Resources and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Michael J. G. Parnwell and Raymond L. Bryant, *Environmental Change in South-East Asia: People, Politics, and Sustainable Development* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1996).

¹¹ Also during this period, two new international research institutes, CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research) and ICRAF (International Center for Research in Agroforestry) were established in Bogor.

¹² Anton Lucas and Carol Warren, "The State, the People, and their Mediators: The Struggle over Agrarian Law Reform in Post-New Order Indonesia," *Indonesia* 76 (October 2003): 87-126.

The bias towards uplands conflict remains central in KPA. We have very limited knowledge and ideas about how to change conditions in the lowlands through organizing local people. This is our weakness.¹³

It is with these questions of the regionally uneven character of agrarian mobilization in mind that we turn to a review of Breman and Wiradi's book and to accounts of our brief return visits to the sites of our earlier research.

Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java: Debating the Impact of Krismon and Beyond

In the immediate wake of the financial meltdown of 1997-98, the International Labor Organization (ILO) regional office in Jakarta predicted a massive increase in the incidence of poverty in Indonesia. The World Bank and other international agencies unleashed a flood of studies that contested these claims by invoking the labor-absorptive capacity of the urban informal sector and agriculture. In other words, Geertzian forms of poverty sharing—extended, in this more recent incarnation, from agriculture to scraping a living from the streets of cities and towns—were allegedly acting as protective buffers. Some analysts also maintained that the brunt of the economic contraction was being borne by relatively well-educated and better-paid workers, and that the boom years had enabled even those in the lowest income strata to build up reserves.¹⁴

Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java vehemently disputes this optimistic scenario. The prologue, written in the first person by Breman, who delivered it as the "Dies Natalis" Address at the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague in 2000, posits four key claims: that even prior to *krismon* official statistics underestimated the magnitude of poverty; that the effect of *krismon* was to intensify poverty and inequality; that poverty sharing and other coping mechanisms were being grossly exaggerated; and that negative effects of *krismon* were still being felt in 2000.

In fleshing out these claims, the authors draw on their earlier research to portray economic conditions in the two villages in 1989-90, and follow with chapters on the impact of *krismon* in each of the two places between 1998 and 2000. Located on the coastal plain of West Java (one in North Subang, the other in East Cirebon), the two villages differ in terms of size, density, proximity to Jakarta, and the importance of agriculture in the local economy. Yet neither bore any resemblance to the model of a "traditional corporate village community" often associated with notions of poverty sharing—if indeed they ever had.¹⁵

¹³ Interview with Dianto Bachriadi, July 2004.

¹⁴ In addition, dependence on perennial export crops such as coffee, cocoa, and cloves was predicted to bode well for upland farmers growing them, a prediction that held true for only a year or so before prices on all three dropped precipitously.

¹⁵ Notions of poverty sharing made famous by Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963) remain a topic of heated debate in the literature on Java; see for example, White, "Between Apologia and Critical Discourse." Breman and Wiradi join with Jonathan Pincus (*Class, Power, and Agrarian Change: Land and Labor in Rural West Java*, [Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 1996]) in taking aim at Hayami and Kikuchi's characterization in *Asian Village Economy at the Crossroads* of North Subang as a "traditional

At the time of the baseline studies, agrarian differentiation was far advanced in both villages, with landownership heavily concentrated in a few hands. At least 70 percent of households did not own cultivable land, and relatively few of these gained access to land through renting or sharecropping. In common with studies in these and other villages, the authors point to the importance of nonagricultural incomes that reinforced the inequality in landholdings.¹⁶ Many large landowners were also engaged in lucrative forms of accumulation outside agriculture, such as trade, transport, and money lending. At the same time, large numbers of men from landless households were engaged in insecure, poorly remunerated forms of labor circulation between the villages and the Jabotabek megalopolis.¹⁷

Processes of agrarian differentiation and labor circulation have long been in train, the authors argue, but they appear to have accelerated during the boom years of the 1990s, particularly in North Subang, where agriculture is relatively more important. In 1990, a third of all North Subang households had one or more members working exclusively or predominantly outside agriculture. By 1998, the proportion had risen to 65 percent at the same time as the number of households grew from 216 to 261. The local economy of East Cirebon is more diversified, but even so Breman and Wiradi point to large and growing numbers of households dependent on the income earned by male migrants to Jabotabek. These "labor nomads" bore the brunt of the sharp contraction of economic activity following the collapse of the rupiah in the second half of 1997. Driven back from cities, many of them continued to make desperate (and largely unsuccessful) forays to urban areas in search of livelihood.

Women pursued work through a different kind of labor migration, as opportunities for domestic and factory-based female labor opened up overseas. Whether to Saudi Arabia, Singapore, or Korea, young women were traveling away from home on two- and three-year contracts, particularly from North Subang. One striking aspect of this trend is that this long-distance female labor force (called *Tenaga Kerja Wanita*, or TKW) consisted of the daughters and wives of well-off villagers as well as women from the poor and middle classes.¹⁸ In what is perhaps the most original contribution of the book, the authors provide a compelling account of the systems of labor brokerage, how aspiring workers must pay to attend courses to prepare them to give their labor, and the hardships and abuse many of these women endure. At the same time, the

village." Breman demonstrated in an earlier, landmark article that many "corporate" villages in Java were constructed by the Dutch; see *The Village on Java and the Colonial State*, CASP Series 1 (Rotterdam: Erasmus University, 1980). Village consolidation was also a tactic for forest consolidation in teak areas, as shown in Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*.

¹⁶ For example, Hart, *Power, Labor, and Livelihood*; Chris Manning, "Review of *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java*," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 39,3 (2003): 369-81; Benjamin White and Gunawan Wiradi, *Agrarian Reform in Comparative Perspective: Policy Issues and Research Needs* (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies; Bogor: Agro-Economic Survey Foundation, 1984); Paul Alexander, Peter Boomgaard, and Ben White, eds., *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-Farm Activities in the Javanese Economy, Past and Present* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1991).

¹⁷ "Jabotabek" refers to the geographically and economically interlocked urban-industrial areas of Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang, and Bekasi.

¹⁸ Although there are some opportunities for men, they are far fewer and seem to require relatively high levels of skill. In mid-1998, according to Breman and Wiradi, fifty-seven women and eight men from North Subang were working abroad.

plummeting value of the rupiah meant that, despite the fraudulent practices of many labor brokers, workers could often command substantial resources on their return. Breman and Wiradi were unable to explore the implications of these processes for gender relations, but observe that this is a crucial question for future research.

Illustrated with fine photographs of everyday life in the two villages, *Good Times and Bad Times* conveys a vivid sense of the harsh conditions in which millions of Javanese struggled to secure a livelihood even at the height of the economic boom, and of the widespread dislocation and suffering brought about by the sharp economic contraction of the late 1990s. It also confirms earlier studies that pointed to the advanced state of differentiation in lowland rice regions, and calls into question claims that workers expelled from jobs in cities and towns were simply reabsorbed into the agricultural economy through “poverty-sharing” mechanisms.

No doubt there are those who will maintain that the two villages are not necessarily “representative” of rural Java, that the quantitative evidence could be made to tell a different story, and that the more optimistic scenario suggested by official statistics cannot be dismissed so readily. Chris Manning (whom the authors explicitly take to task) makes some of these arguments in his review of *Good Times and Bad Times*, in which he finds fault with their use of quantitative data and the conclusions they draw from it.¹⁹ In contrast, Jonathan Pincus contends that “in their salient characteristics these locations are more illustrative of present-day conditions than the view of the Javanese village as a tightly-knit, insular rural community still common in policy circles.”²⁰

The debate provoked by the book evokes a powerful sense of déjà vu—indeed, it is yet another iteration of a debate that has been going on since the 1970s between those who invoke aggregate statistics to present a generally optimistic picture, and those who draw on village studies to make far more pessimistic claims. “Macro optimists” frequently dismiss “micro pessimists” on the grounds that they are unrepresentative—and, to the extent that village studies ground their claims simply or primarily in quantitative indicators, they are vulnerable to this accusation. Yet statistically “representative” indicators can often be interpreted in different ways, depending on the assumptions about social relations and institutions. For example, Hart²¹ showed how the interpretation of aggregate survey data on trends in employment, income distribution, and poverty in Java during the 1970s hinged crucially on assumptions about labor markets—and that one could tell very different stories depending on which “model” one used.²² The strength of the Breman and Wiradi volume lies in its historical depth and detail and its firm grounding in local studies that shed light on and give substance to underlying processes linking “rural” and “urban” areas.

¹⁹ Manning, “Review of *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java*,” pp. 369-81.

²⁰ Pincus, “Review of *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java*,” p. 773.

²¹ Hart, *Power, Labor, and Livelihood*.

²² In Gillian Hart, Andrew Turton, and Benjamin White, eds., *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), a group of scholars—including Wiradi—who had been engaged in intensive longitudinal studies in different lowland rice regions of Southeast Asia grappled with precisely the question of what sort of claims could be made from these studies.

Yet it is also the case that, like the earlier literature on agrarian change in Java, *Good Times and Bad Times* remains resolutely focused on the lowland rice regions, and the broad claims in Breman's "Prologue" ignore conditions in—and connections to—upland and forest regions. Partly in reaction to the lowland rice-centric character of work in the 1970s and early 1980s, there has emerged a significant literature pointing to some quite different social and environmental processes in upland and forest regions of Java. For example, an important volume edited by Tania Li²³ explicitly addressed many of the issues of land, labor, and state interventions raised by Hart et al.²⁴ The authors in that volume demonstrated that political economic conditions and livelihoods in Indonesia's uplands have developed not separately but through *interactions with* lowland peoples and processes, state practices and programs, and national and international markets.²⁵ It is partly in relation to these "other" rural Javas that we address our comments in the remainder of this paper.

First, however, we discuss some of our own impressions on revisiting the coastal plain in relation to the picture painted by Breman and Wiradi. Then, after a brief examination of teak forests and West Java's mountain uplands, we return to the larger question of how an expanded view of "rural Java" helps shed light on the limits on political mobilization in lowland rice-producing regions, even in the wake of major changes to the political landscape.

Power, Labor, and Livelihood: Sukodono Revisited²⁶

Officially Sukodono is no longer a "village" (*desa*), but an "urban" *kelurahan*. According to Wiradi, this shift took place in the 1980s when the old *lurah* (by definition, a strong supporter of Suharto's ruling Golkar party) lost the election, and a *lurah* from outside the village was brought in. There are now fourteen full-time

²³ Tania Murray Li, ed., *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands* (Halifax: Harwood Academic Publications, 1999).

²⁴ Hart et al., *Agrarian Transformations*. Besides authors included in the Li volume (see n. 23), others debating agrarian change in Java's uplands include J. G. L. Palte, *The Development of Java's Rural Uplands in Response to Population Growth* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1985); Lucas and Warren, "The State, the People, and their Mediators"; Robert Hefner, *The Political Economy of Mountain Java: An Interpretive History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Noer Fauzi, *Petani and Penguasa: Dinamika Perjalanan Politik Agraria Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Institute for Social Transformation (INSIST), KPA with Pustaka Pelajar, 1999); Dianto Bachriadi, Erpan Faryadi, and Bonnie Setyawan, *Reformasi Agraria: Perubahan Politik, Sengketa, dan Agenda Pembaruan Agraria di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penerbit FE-UI dan KPA, 1997). On agrarian change in forests in Java, see, e.g., Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*; Hasanu Simon, *Pengelolaan Hutan Bersama Rakyat: Teori dan Aplikasi di Hutan Jati Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Bigraf, 1999); San Afri Awang, *Dekonstruksi Sosial Forestri: Reposisi Masyarakat dan Keadilan Lingkungan* (Yogyakarta: BIGRAF Publishing and Program Pustaka, 2004); and I. Nyoman Nurjaya, *Magersari: Dinamika Komunitas Petani-Pekerja Hutan dalam Perspektif Antropologi Hukum* (Malang: Universitas Negeri Malang, 2005).

²⁵ Li, *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands*, p. 5.

²⁶ The discussion in this section is a summary of Gillian Hart, "Power, Labor, and Livelihood: Notes and Reflections on a Village Revisited," University of California International and Area Studies, Global Field Notes, Paper no. 2, December 2004, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/ucias/gfn/2>

government officials installed in a large set of offices at the entrance to Sukodono, attesting to what appears to be a heavy bureaucratization of local government.²⁷

From one perspective, Sukodono can now be seen as a suburb of Kendal, which has expanded from a sleepy coastal town to a major commercial center in what has become a heavily industrialized section of the north coast. The most striking visual change is the dramatic improvement in the housing stock. In the 1970s, the size and physical condition of a house provided a fairly accurate indicator of a household's landholding—large brick and tile houses for large landowners, wooden structures with concrete floors for small landowners, and woven bamboo walls and mud floors for the landless. A very large proportion of houses have been rebuilt with brick and tile, and several mansions now adorn the entrance to the village. Yet the residential area is still surrounded by large expanses of pristine *sawah* (rice fields), on which yields have more than trebled since the mid-1970s. Any dividing line between “the rural” and “the urban” has, in other words, become totally blurred.

Part of what is significant about Sukodono's having been designated a *kelurahan* is that it released twenty-seven hectares of highly productive *sawah*, the salary lands (*tanah bengkok*) that were formerly used to compensate village government officials (*pamong desa*). We were told that the land is now auctioned by district (*kabupaten*) officials for what appeared to be relatively low rental rates. On a visit to Kendal in 1990, Gunawan Wiradi observed *kabupaten* officials openly divvying up the proceeds of *tanah bengkok* rentals among themselves. In the course of our recent visit, one of our informants spoke about the emergence of a *mafia tanah* (land mafia) in Sukodono, comprised of about twenty individuals, all local residents, who prevent others from bidding on the land at auction, and then rent it out at a profit to other Sukodono residents. The *mafia tanah* and its connections with supragovernment officials seem to represent a new twist on the close connections between large landowners and supravillage officials to which Hart drew attention in her earlier work—a point to which we return below.

What, then, of broader patterns of differentiation? In the mid-1970s, the landowning structure of the village was more or less as follows:²⁸ (a) relatively large landowners—those with a hectare or more of rice land—constituted 9–10 percent of households and controlled in the vicinity of 60 percent of the land, as well as most of the lucrative *tambaks* (fish or shrimp ponds); (b) small landowners (those who owned at least 0.2 ha) formed 36–40 percent of the population and controlled less than 40 percent of the village land; and (c) landless and near-landless households accounted for over 50 percent of households. At that time, a fairly large number of small landowning households had fallen into debt—mainly as a consequence of pest infestation of high-yielding rice varieties—and many had entered into complex relations of indebtedness with large landowners. Especially common in this village was a system through which a small landowning household would pawn its land to a

²⁷ “*Kelurahan*” is the term for the smallest administrative unit in urban areas; “*desa*” is the term for the smallest administrative unit in rural areas. The significance in the change of Sukodono from a *desa* to a *kelurahan* is in the selection and politics of its leadership. *Desa* heads are elected by villagers, while heads of *kelurahan* (*lurah*) are appointed by district heads (*bupati*). The word “*lurah*” however is still used in some rural villages to refer to their administrative heads.

²⁸ See Hart, *Power, Labor, and Livelihood*, p. 96, for a measure of control over land that included ownership, renting, and sharecropping arrangements.

large landowner, and then pay back the debt by working on the land and handing over a large share of the crop—typically in the vicinity of two-thirds. Yet, at the same time, what often happened was that small landowners would gain preferential access to wage labor on the other *sawah* and *tambaks* of large landowners. There emerged what Hart called a system of exclusionary labor arrangements: lacking the means to enter these interlocking relations of land, labor, and indebtedness, many men and women belonging to landless households frequently earned lower wages—particularly in periods of off-peak demand for agricultural labor.

Differential access to, and control over, nonagricultural income sources also fed into growing inequality. Several large landowners were expanding into lucrative activities such as trading and transport—often by parlaying their close relations with supravillage government officials into licenses and contracts—while many desperately poor landless households got by through supplementing their agricultural wages with long hours spent in activities such as gathering snails, wood, and grass, weaving mats, and petty trade that yielded extremely low returns.

While it is both impossible and irresponsible to make any sort of definitive claims about social differentiation in Sukodono on the basis of our very brief visit, there were several indications—in addition to the presence of the *mafia tanah*—of the consolidation of the large landowning class. Consider first the statistical “facts” with which we were presented. Official population data suggest a population increase of around 45 percent since the mid-1970s, from 2,149 to 3,169. According to a village government official, some 70 percent of the approximately six hundred-plus households do not own any rice land—an increase of 20 percent since the mid-1970s. Of those who do own land, he estimated average landholding to be 0.5 ha. We then pointed out there are at least 250 hectares of rice land in Sukodono—excluding the *tanah bengkok*—and that if 180 to 200 households still own land, the average for the village is over one hectare. At that point he conceded that there is a smaller group of perhaps twenty to thirty households that own considerably more than a hectare, and that several of them have extensive landholdings in other villages.

Although several people complained that farming became less profitable after *Reformasi*, the indications are that rice production remains a lucrative source of accumulation, as well as a major source of employment—despite its becoming increasingly mechanized.²⁹ At the same time, nonagricultural income sources outside the village appear to have expanded significantly—along with the fairly sharp rise in the number and proportion of “landless” households.

There has been a massive expansion of industry and urbanization in this region of Java, and many of the people with whom we spoke attested to large numbers of younger men and women from Sukodono having been drawn into nonagricultural employment outside the village. What also became clear, however, is that industrial

²⁹ A back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that, on an annual basis, mechanized land preparation in Sukodono has replaced 11,200 male labor days—amounting to a total wage bill of Rp. 224 million (about \$25,000). Transplanting is still done by women workers, but pesticide use means that there is relatively little weeding. Harvesting is organized by brokers who bring in labor gangs, each comprised of about ten men, who are paid in cash. In dollar terms, agricultural wages seem to have increased from less than \$1 a day in the mid-1970s to around \$2 a day. The differential narrows if one takes account of food supplements to the cash wage, which were fairly common in the 1970s, but seem to be rare nowadays.

jobs in the region have become increasingly scarce and insecure in recent years. Several different conversations suggested that two large factories in the vicinity have been the major source of industrial employment for young men and women from Sukodono—PT Kayu Lapis Indonesia, a plywood factory that processes logs rolled in from Kalimantan, and Texmaco, which is a large producer of synthetic textiles—both of which have shed large numbers of workers.³⁰

In short, industrial capitalism has turned out to be a very shaky proposition for the incipient industrial proletariat of Sukodono. In the face of shrinking jobs in the regional economy, working abroad seems to have become the major source of nonagricultural income for many younger women and smaller numbers of men—precisely the process of *Tenaga Kerja Wanita* (TKW) documented by Breman and Wiradi in North Subang. Estimates of how many Sukodono villagers had entered into these contracts varied between thirty and one hundred. We were told of women going to Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Taiwan, and Korea to work as domestic servants, as well as men working in some of these places as drivers and factory workers. The official version of the story that we were told at the *Kelurahan* office emphasized that many women have achieved “*sukses*” (success), returning to Sukodono with millions of rupiah that they use to rebuild houses, and in some instances to rent or purchase rice land; indeed, several people noted that much of the housing renovation had been financed by TKW. Another informant presented a more critical assessment of TKW, pointing to instances of sexual abuse as well as the recruitment and “training” fees that workers have to pay to brokers—precisely the issues that Breman and Wiradi raise.

Obviously these brief impressions raise many more questions than they answer—especially in terms of the possibilities and limits on political mobilization. Taken in conjunction with insights from Breman and Wiradi’s book, however, the Sukodono revisit does suggest some avenues for further inquiry.

One of these is the question of how gender and class are being rearticulated in relation to one another, especially in the context of growing numbers of women and men moving back and forth between “villages” such as Sukodono and other places within and beyond Indonesia. Breman and Wiradi argue that the rapid expansion of employment niches, at short or longer distances away from home, helped to lower pressure building up in the rural economy. They also note that those working outside the village have become less susceptible to the economic and social power of village elites. Yet the potentials for—and limits upon—political mobilization among, what appears to be, an increasingly mobile working class remain open questions in the era of *Reformasi*.

A closely related question concerns the character of the large landowning class, especially in the lowland rice regions. Hart argued that, in Sukodono in the 1970s, the large landowning class was increasingly being incorporated in supravillage structures of state power, and Breman and Wiradi reiterate the importance of state patronage during the New Order in the villages where they worked. A key issue is how these relations are changing. While Breman and Wiradi do not explore this issue in any detail, they do observe that

³⁰ See Hart, “Notes and Reflections,” for a fuller discussion of what has happened to these two companies.

the campaign in favour of *reformasi* in the two villages was not led by representatives of the land poor and landless majority, but by leaders from the dissenting faction among the local elite who saw an opportunity to turn the table against those who had kept them out of power and who used to monopolize the gains attached to it...What seems to be at stake is fierce competition among the local power contenders in a continuation of rivalries that have existed for generations.³¹

Not surprisingly, we left Sukodono with many more questions than answers—including whether and how old political rivalries are playing out in the context of the transformation of Sukodono into an urban *kelurahan*, along with the rise of the *mafia tanah* and what seems to be the expansion of lucrative forms of nonagricultural accumulation. What did seem clear, though, is that a powerful and well-connected class of local capitalists remained firmly in place—and would represent a powerful local force against activists seeking to organize the landless.

Rich Forests, Poor People: Twenty Years Later

In contrast to the visit to Sukodono, a return to the teak forest village "Sukawana" and the hamlet of "Pinggiran," where Peluso lived and conducted research in the mid-1980s, revealed few changes in the formal structuring of the village.³² The current *lurah* had been a young teacher in 1985, while the current hamlet head is the son of the hamlet head or *kamituwo* of that time. The old *kamituwo* was unusually beloved and respected by his fellow villagers, largely because he defended them against forest authorities when conflicts and forest *operasi*³³ took place.³⁴

The drive to Sukawana, in the heart of the prime teak forest zone that straddles the dry limestone hills of Central and East Java, took us off the paved road from Blora down a hardened forest road for ten kilometers or so. We traveled another few kilometers to Pinggiran. Pinggiran's persistent poverty seemed all too familiar, if not worse, despite changes in political regimes. Unlike Sukawana's central hamlet, Pinggiran still has no electricity and experiences severe water shortages every dry

³¹ Breman and Wiradi, *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java*, p. 304. In Sukodono, at the time of Hart's research, there were similarly fierce contentions between the family of the old *lurah* and that of the *carik* (village secretary), a supporter of NU (Nahdlatul Islam) whose son had played a key role in setting up a popular health program in the village that the old *lurah* managed to undermine. As mentioned earlier, a *lurah* from outside the village was brought in when the old *lurah* lost the election for Golkar. The sons of both the old *lurah* and the *carik* remain in Sukodono—although only the latter has become a civil servant (*pegawai negeri*) in local government.

³² "Sukawana" and "Pinggiran" are pseudonyms. Note that in Peluso's book, *Rich Forests, Poor People*, she could not identify the teak forest villages with detailed ethnography because of security issues.

³³ "*Operasi*" is shorthand for the SWAT-team-like sweeps of forest villages suspected of teak theft. They were organized by Perhutani (the State Forestry Corporation—see below) and included armed riot/internal security police from BRIMOB POLRI (Brigade Mobile Polisi Republik Indonesia, Police Mobile Brigade). Members of local government were also supposed to be involved, but many managed to avoid direct participation, or, even better, to pay off the foresters to stay away. See Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*, pp. 226-29.

³⁴ His son was elected recently, almost unanimously, by the hamlet residents after a short period under a less well-liked leader.

season. The hamlet is separated from all the other hamlets in Sukawana by forest, although it abuts two hamlets administratively located in East Java districts. The East Java hamlets have fared better over the years, boasting electricity and paved access roads. Even in this brief visit, we saw that Perhutani (The State Forestry Corporation)³⁵ still shaped local capacities to survive and even to imagine—or mobilize around—alternative local livelihood strategies.

Housing stock was about the same; there were a few newly tiled roofs and a few more TVs and DVD players, powered by homemade electrical (battery) generators. The predominant housing material was still teak wood and, like before, not of the fine quality seen in yachts, parquet floors, and Perhutani's regional branch offices. There were also considerably more houses. As we walked around with old friends and informants from the village, they pointed out some forty new houses squeezed into the well-defined borders that separate the village from the state-managed forest. The *kamituwo* told us that the number of households had nearly doubled, from seventy-five in 1985 to 140 in 2004. Even the *kamituwo* did not live in an opulent manner, despite his two years' working in a photo shop in Malang. His large but sparsely furnished house had a dirt floor, and his salary lands included no *sawah*, consisting instead of 1.5 hectares of dry fields (*tegalan*)—the only dry fields in the hamlet.

Strikingly absent from this teak forest were the great trees of twenty years ago. In 1985, travelers on these roads from Blora or Cepu were surrounded by huge teak trees. They filled the horizon, hiding the undulating hills. On this trip, we passed an occasional large tract, but many more were in early stages of reforestation or were apparently abandoned. The extremely young age of most of the teak forest was now typical, according to Edi, a forestry student and member of the NGO ARuPA (Aliansi Relawan untuk Penyelamatan Alam, Volunteer Alliance for Saving Nature), who accompanied us to Pinggiran. The trees surrounding Sukawana and Pinggiran had been sixty-years old in 1985, slated for harvest at the usual eighty-year rotation, which had taken place more or less on time in 2000. But in addition to the planned cut, many other trees—and whole tracts—had been cut “illegally.”

Our first thought was that the loss of these forest resources resulted from the explosion of a time bomb of repression and forbidden forest access.³⁶ Not long after Suharto was forced to resign, the newspapers and internet were filled with stories of massive cutting (illegal logging) throughout the teak zone and other forests of Java. But with first-class teak logs valued at over \$800 per cubic meter in 2001, and mature trees consisting of four-five cubic meters or more, the trees Perhutani cared most about were in the teak forest.³⁷ In 2001, Perhutani was bankrupt, due to the losses of thousands of teak trees and forest damage.³⁸ Surpluses from teak production and

³⁵ Perhutani is a type of Indonesian state-owned enterprise. Under the Ministry of Forestry, Perhutani foresters directly manage the majority of state forests on Java—some 2.5 million hectares.

³⁶ See the discussion of this in Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*.

³⁷ This estimate comes from CIFOR *News On Line*, no. 33, August 5, 2003, http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/docs/_pf/1/_ref/publications/newsonline/33/hardwood.htm.

³⁸ Although accounts vary, one source (CIFOR) claims that “log thefts in Central Java amounted to 880,000 teak trees in 1998, 2.4 million in 1999, 2.1 million trees in 2000... In the Sukabumi, district the level of 1999 log thefts equalled the entire planned production for the period 2000 to 2002.” See, “Leveling the Playing Field,” CIFOR, August 31, 2004, at http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/lpf/_ref/lpf/project/fieldsites.htm.

processing in Central and East Java had subsidized management of the protection and lower-value production forests of montane Java, including their more recently acquired forests of West Java.³⁹

Pinggiran villagers explained the tree cutting differently—and they were backed up in their assessments by NGO and activist research.⁴⁰ Although centuries of enclosure and exclusion contributed to the underlying causes of the timber-cutting riots, the killing of several villagers by forest rangers triggered the rush to cut the trees. One victim of Perhutani violence was from an adjacent village.⁴¹ His killing was notorious for having happened on privately held village land, that is, not on state forest land. Upon hearing of this abrogation of the local "rules of engagement," villagers joined in the violence against state property, destroying both the "legal" and "illegal" sources of their livelihoods. The village was hit the hardest, not by the loss of formal logging opportunities, but by the loss of "informal" ones. Logging only once every eighty years provided relatively few laboring opportunities at long intervals, whereas occasional illegal cutting or "appropriation" could take place any time.

On the other hand, reforestation opportunities increased when production eventually started up again. Reforestation entailed the allocation of plots, or *persil*, to villagers for two years at the beginning of the trees' life cycle. In a kind of sharecropping called *tumpang sari*, farmers were allowed two years' access to land to plant field crops between the rows of teak seedlings they planted for Perhutani. They could farm until the canopy of the broad-leaved teak trees blocked the sun.

Clearly, what differentiates these forest villages from lowland rice villages such as Sukodono, North Subang, and East Cirebon are the forest and the unique form of state presence. State forestland takes up 80 percent of Sukawana's village territory, dramatically illustrating the notion of the state as landlord.⁴² This percentage is high even for Bloro district—which has some 44 percent of its land under state forest. Perhutani is not only the biggest landlord, but also the successor to the colonial institutions of dispossession and enclosure. These forests were demarcated and mapped as far back as the 1880s. Even in the face of bankruptcy, Perhutani has hung onto its landholdings in Java—a whopping 19–21 percent of the island's land (depending on how it is counted). Our interviews with foresters and forest village advocacy groups suggested that the "independent" state enterprise is being subsidized by the Ministry of Forestry's revenues from other parts of Indonesia.⁴³

A second form of differentiation of land holdings in Sukawana is geographic. Among the five hamlets of Sukawana, Pinggiran is the most land poor.⁴⁴ The hamlet has only thirty hectares of *sawah* and no *tegalan* except the salary land of the hamlet

³⁹ Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*.

⁴⁰ See, for example, "A Letter to Perhutani" *Down to Earth*, No. 60, February 2004.

⁴¹ Pinggiran villagers identified him as being "from here," however.

⁴² Jiken Subdistrict Office, Bloro, Central Java, *Kecamatan Jiken Dalam Angka* (2002), typescript of report held in Jiken Subdistrict Office, Bloro, Central Java.

⁴³ The symbolic power of Perhutani's relatively strong legal controls on land, particularly in the teak areas, appears to be worth a great deal to the Ministry of Forestry.

⁴⁴ This extreme dependence on both the forest and the forestry establishment led Peluso to select Pinggiran hamlet for research in 1985.

head, a fact that is often cited as evidence of the hamlet's poverty.⁴⁵ Sukawana, in total, has 195 hectares of *sawah*, most of which is in the central hamlet, and some rich farmers own three or more hectares of this land. A hectare in 2004 was valued at about Rp. 100 million. Farmers still use cattle to plow their *sawah* (rather than the hand tractors seen in many parts of the coastal rice zone).⁴⁶ Differentiation in landholdings among the residents of Pinggiran was impossible to investigate in this short trip. Several informants told us that most of the thirty hectares of *sawah* are still held in one-quarter to one-half hectare holdings, as was the case in 1985. Although among landholders differentiation may be less than the general pattern, by any accounting, many households remain landless.

Obviously, off-farm employment must supplement livelihoods, and both the forest itself and Perhutani dominate the opportunities for employment. Reforestation by *tumpang sari* is conceived of as "agricultural" and likely accounts for the large numbers of people who call themselves "farmers" rather than "agricultural laborers."⁴⁷ Men work at logging, dragging logs with draft animals, loading and driving trucks, and other heavy work. Women in this area not only weed, plant, and harvest, but also hoe (*cangkul*)—hoeing is backbreaking work that in many other regions is reserved for men. Following Perhutani, wages and hours worked are the same for forest labor and agricultural labor, with women's labor valued less than men's. Women's wages were currently Rp. 10,000 a day compared to Rp. 15,000 for men. Working hours had not changed; everyone worked relatively long days from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., with an hour off for lunch. The loss of forest and the subsequent shortage of logs, added to gendered wage discrepancies, have made women more employable both on private land and in forest work. More women than men now work for Perhutani, as day laborers in nurseries and seedling plots. In addition, women generally applied for access to *persil* and did the bulk of the work. Every one of the eighteen women who sat talking with us in the evening currently worked a *persil* ranging in size from one-quarter hectare to one hectare at Perhutani's nearby reforestation site.

As in the lowland rice villages, labor migration, particularly by women, supplements local livelihoods. Some young women have become TKW in Singapore, Medan, and Kalimantan. Sending girls away to labor elsewhere was not entirely new to this area. In the mid-1980s, labor brokers or "relatives" from Jakarta and Surabaya showed up in the village several times seeking young girls for domestic help. As young women in the 1980s, some of the now-married women of Pinggiran had worked as prostitutes in the towns of Blora, Cepu, and Bojonegoro—forest district centers—or as decoys for the forest rangers while village men were appropriating teak. Many others collected nontimber forest products during the dry season and sold them in the markets or to middlemen who came to the village.

Social relations between higher-level officials and poor villagers—particularly those in Pinggiran—had not improved much. On our way out of the village, we

⁴⁵ One of the adjacent hamlets, on the East Java side, provides its hamlet head with some three hectares of *sawah*, and he lives ostentatiously.

⁴⁶ Moreover, the *bocah angon* (young boys who are cattle herders), an institution that forestry professor Hasanu Simon has reported as disappearing (personal communication, 2004), is still alive and well in this village.

⁴⁷ See, for example, *Kecamatan Jiken Dalam Angka* (2002).

stopped to talk briefly to the new *lurah* and some others. Sitting on the veranda of his house, constructed (of course) of teak, with roof tiles *and* floor tiles, he told us of an impending harvest of a tract of mature teak remaining in the village territory. He said he had negotiated with Perhutani for two "concessions" that formerly would have been unheard of: a percentage of the harvest value paid to the village, and access to the land between the trees for *persil* during at least one year of the girdling period. Girdling—a practice where the bark is cut off in a circle around the bottom of the tree—kills the tree and enables the teak to dry standing. This renders straighter wood fibers, logs that are easier to mill, and higher prices. Girdling lasts for two years and is a time of high risk for theft. Perhutani considers parking villagers in *persil* under the girdled trees risky as well. This concession was thus something of a coup.

More suggestive of other agendas and continuities with the past was his "plan" for the Rp. 17 billion (approximately US\$1,700,000.00) he anticipated as the village's share of the harvest. He would not use it toward paving the road to Pinggiran, or toward extending electricity to outlying hamlets, or to digging wells for the many people in the outlying hamlets who could not afford them. His idea, which he said came from conversations with "his people," was to have a big celebration with music and other performances for August 17 that year (Indonesian Independence Day). He had no comments about how the money left over after (even a large) celebration would be used.

Given the dearth of new employment opportunities and the change in the contents of the "forest" landscape, it was even more striking that there was no evidence or hint of organizing or activism to create alternative patterns of management or ownership of these areas. Long-term land occupations had not followed the cutting of teak trees. When we tried to broach the possibility of there being alternatives to Perhutani management, villagers met our suggestions incredulously. No activists had tried to organize these villagers, nor had any foresters tried to establish a working community management or social forestry scheme with these heavily forest-dependent villagers. Rather, the land lay unworked for several years following the mass cutting. One day several years later, a planting foreman from Perhutani came through and asked if anyone was interested in taking *persil*—the time had come to reforest. Most Pinggiran villagers jumped at the opportunity.

We now turn to a short discussion of agrarian change in the uplands of West Java, where political and economic conditions have taken a radically different turn than in either the teak zone or the northern coastal wet-rice-growing regions.

The Rise of Agrarian Movements in the Pasundan Region of West Java

Like other regions of Java, the upland areas are plagued by increasing land concentration, intensifying pressure on resources, and under- and unemployment of a growing labor force. In a twist more reminiscent of the teak forest than the lowland rice areas, the most prominent landlords in these uplands are state and private plantation companies and Perhutani. Although some old plantation lands were redistributed under land reform initiatives in the early 1960s, the Suharto era brought back dispossession with a vengeance to the uplands. Old plantations were reallocated to new state or corporate managers, and Perhutani took over the management of the state

forests from a weaker, regionally based state institution.⁴⁸ Similar to the scenarios on the North Coast presented by Breman and Wiradi, and to what we observed in the vicinity of Sukodono, industrial factories and industrial agriculture are taking over increasing tracts of the uplands. Circular migration to Bandung and Jabotabek has also become common for men from the relatively nearby upland areas of West Java that we visited in July 2004 (specifically in Garut and Ciamis).

Strikingly different in these uplands, however, was the prominence of land occupations by thousands of landless and near-landless people—what Wiradi has termed “land reform by leverage.”⁴⁹ Land occupations began before 1998, but picked up speed later that year when Habibie, as interim president, replaced Suharto. KPA facilitated the early occupations by convening a meeting of local leaders in 1997, where both land occupations and post-Suharto political possibilities generated heated debates.⁵⁰ After Suharto’s fall, peasant organizations emerged in many areas of Indonesia, especially in Java.⁵¹ This growing agrarian movement swept the uplands of West Java and acquired greater legitimacy in the wake of President Abdurrachman Wahid’s comment in March 2000 that people should not be accused of wrongly seizing land because, “in fact, the plantations have stolen the land of the people.” He went on to say that “if all this time the nation has become rich from controlling and managing land and natural resources, then for the future the people should enjoy the same benefits.”⁵² The Director General of the Department of Forestry and Plantations estimated that, as of September 2000, some 118,830 hectares of national estate land had been seized, along with 48,051 hectares of private estate lands.⁵³

Of the places we traveled, only the upland villages of West Java had mobilized long-term land occupations (some having lasted over three years by the time of our

⁴⁸ Until 1978, West Java’s forests were largely managed by Dinas Kehutanan, or the Forest Service. For details on the histories of forest management institutions in Indonesia, see Tim Penyusun Sejarah, *Sejarah Kehutanan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departemen Kehutanan, 1986).

⁴⁹ See Gunawan Wiradi, “Pembaruan Agraria: Sebuah Tanggapan,” in *Reformasi Agraria*, ed. Bachriadi et al.

⁵⁰ Dianto Bachriadi and Anton Lucas, *Merampas Tanah Rakyat: Kasus Tapos dan Cimacan* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Gramedia, 2001).

⁵¹ These include FSPI (Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia, Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions), SPP (Serikat Petani Pasundan), and SPJB (Serikat Petani Jawa Barat, West Java Peasants Union). We spent time with the founders and current leadership of SPP and some of its affiliated youth activist groups. For an excellent discussion of the rise of these new agrarian movements in West Java, see Lucas and Warren, “The State, the People, and their Mediators.”

⁵² Quoted by Imam Kuswahyono, “Mencari Format Hukum dalam Menuju Reforma Agraria dalam Kerangka Otonomi Daerah,” <http://www.otoda.or.id/Artikel/Imam%20Koeswahyono.htm>, and cited in Noer Fauzi, “The New Sundanese Peasants’ Union: Peasant Movements, Changes in Land Control, and Agrarian Questions in Garut, West Java” (paper prepared for “Crossing Borders” Workshop: “New and Resurgent Agrarian Questions in Post-Soeharto Indonesia and Post-Apartheid South Africa,” Center for Southeast Asia Studies and Center for African Studies, Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, October 24, 2003, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cseas/CSEASWP1-03/>). The transcript of the workshop can be found at <http://ias.berkeley.edu/cseas/Events/AgrarianReformWorkshopA2-MINUTES.pdf>.

⁵³ Dianto Bachriadi, “Land for the Landless: Why Are The Democrats In Jakarta Not Interested In Land Reform?” *Inside Indonesia* 64 (Oct.-Dec. 2000).

visit) on Perhutani or plantation land.⁵⁴ In some cases, peasants on these occupied lands had sustained resistance to violent eviction by teams of national and regional police, forest police, and hired thugs. This recent history of organized agrarian movements in upland Java not only provides a stark contrast to histories of the lowland rice zones and the teak forest. It raises the question of why agrarian organization, mobilization, and movements have occurred in these uplands and not elsewhere, even though differentiation and a coercive state presence are more heavily felt in the lowland rice-producing zones and the teak forests. The state-as-dispossessor/landlord seems like an obvious explanation, but is insufficient on its own—as the section on the teak forest has indicated.

Although more research is needed, there are at least six conditions that may have contributed to the strength of agrarian organization in this region, and that work best in combination with one another. First, the NGOs and activists who connected with these upland villages were based in and around Bandung-Bogor-Jakarta and were comprised largely of middle-class student-intellectuals who generally professed a moderate, secular Islam, and were inspired to activism by the excesses of the late New Order state. Their initial field of focus was rural West Java. While their work was not limited to this region, there were site-specific contingencies that encouraged their continued local/regional engagement.⁵⁵

Second, opportunities to organize may have been related to Islamic political and cultural configurations specific to the Pasundan region of West Java. The upland areas of Garut, Ciamis, and Tasikmalaya districts have a long history of rural Islamic schooling and practice.⁵⁶ This region would have been positioned differently than the north coast rice villages and the teak forest during the PKI-led land reforms of the 1960s and the subsequent agrarian violence of 1965-66, although PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist party) and BTI (Barisan Tani Indonesia, Indonesian Peasants' Front) did some organizing in this region as well.⁵⁷ In addition, these upland areas—also known as the Priangan—historically had ambivalent relationships with national and colonial governments.

⁵⁴ We heard about occupations of forest and plantation land in upland areas of Central Java from both KPA and ARuPA activists. Land occupation of Perhutani's forest by local people in Wonosobo Central Java, for instance, is explored in Dianto Bachriadi and Anton Lucas, "Hutan Milik Siapa? Upaya-Upaya Mewujudkan *Forestry Land Reform* di Kabupaten Wonosobo, Jawa Tengah," in *Berebut Tanah: Beberapa Kajian Kampus dan Kampung*, ed. Anu Lounela and Yando Zakaria (Yogyakarta: INSIST Press, 2002.)

⁵⁵ See Lucas and Warren, "The State, the People, and their Mediators" for a more detailed explanation of the rise of these groups. Afiff et al., "Resurgent Agrarian Movements" discusses one set of recent activist-movement configurations in West Java. See also, Noer Fauzi, *Memahami Gerakan-gerakan Rakyat Dunia Ketiga* (Yogyakarta: INSIST Press, 2005).

⁵⁶ Tasikmalaya has more than nine hundred Islamic schools (*pesantren* and *madrasah*)—many times more than the number of secular government schools. It was also an important site during the Darul Islam rebellion in the late 1950s and early 1960s. On a history of the Darul Islam rebellion, which hoped to establish an Islamic state in early postcolonial Indonesia, see Cornelius van Dyke, *Rebellion Under the Banner of Islam: Darul Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981). For a recent account of rural Islam in West Java, see Lynda Newland, "Under the Banner of Islam: Mobilising Religious Identities in West Java," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (August 2000): 1-11.

⁵⁷ See, Newland, "Under the Banner of Islam." Darul Islam areas also had very different relations with the forest than PKI regions. See Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People*, pp. 103, 191-92.

Third, compared to lowland rice villages, West Java upland villages were characterized by *somewhat* less differentiation. Nevertheless, differentiation was a significant process and proceeding apace, particularly where state or corporate entities had appropriated large tracts of land.

Fourth, the location of a subset of upland villages directly adjacent to tracts of upland forests and plantations provided them some potential (though inevitably temporary) relief from land hunger: through occupations. Further enabling these occupations is the fact that many of these upland forests in West Java are categorized as *protection* not *production* forests and Perhutani has historically paid less attention to these forests (by providing lower budget allocations and fewer forest guards) than to major production forests. Perhutani is also a relatively new landlord in this part of West Java, taking over from the provincial Forest Service (Dinas Kehutanan) only since 1978. Perhutani thus had less power, less historical presence, and even less institutional legitimacy here than it enjoyed in the teak areas.

Fifth, having a weak state agency or a distant corporate entity as a local landlord/land concentrator is a less personal relationship than a situation where one's neighbor—possibly a family relation—is the landlord, so confrontation on these state-controlled lands was easier to mobilize and sustain in West Java than it was in the North Coast rice lowlands and teak forest areas.

Finally, activists and NGO leaders and organizations in this region themselves were inspired by and collaborated with national and international activists, NGOs, and academics focused on agrarian problems and poverty. Comparison with the teak areas is instructive. In the teak areas, NGOs tended to emerge from the ranks of either professional foresters-in-training or environmentalists. Although these committed individuals may have been concerned about the social inequities of forestry on Java and elsewhere in Indonesia, the philosophical and political tools they brought to their mobilization efforts were quite different. In particular, few of them were willing to mobilize people for radical land reform (for example, in the sense of redistribution) on state forests.

In addition, the specific histories of dispossession and agrarian change play hugely important roles in contemporary movement politics (or their absence). Although Perhutani is a relatively new and violent presence in West Java's uplands, in the teak areas, Perhutani continues a centuries-old history of a powerful state landlord with deep pockets and complex relations with local people. For a short historical moment, the agency was considering more inclusive management options even in the teak forest due in part to its bankruptcy and lack of immediate control in the early *Reformasi* years. Though not powerful enough to preclude rioting and the appropriation of its most valuable resources, the Perhutani foresters have otherwise disciplined people's everyday practices and acted to preclude real options for alternative management. Thus, despite the efforts of young forest activists to organize teak forest communities to manage these forests, in most cases, teak forest villagers have remained uninterested, returning to their own farms and forestry-controlled *persil* after the riots and rampages. In the few instances where the foresters have considered community management options, the financial benefits of these changes have not reached the villagers.

This difference raises some difficult questions about the long-term potential for mobilization, particularly in comparison with the agricultural and forest areas in upland regions like Pasundan. It also highlights the persistence—yet with different forms and histories—of structural constraints on the rural poor observed by Breman, Wiradi, Hart, and others in the lowland rice areas.

Concluding Observations

What have we learned from situating Breman and Wiradi's arguments about ongoing differentiation in the lowland rice regions in relation to our brief (and undeniably) superficial impressions of changes going on in other regions of Java? Breman and Wiradi's book came out at a very particular moment—a time of tremendous change and speculation about Indonesian life after Suharto, appearing amid a flurry of questions about the long- and short-term consequences of *krismon*. Their study also coincided with the reemergence of peasant movements demanding access to land in other regions of Java—an enormously significant development, given the history of the PKI, the massacres of the 1960s, and the New Order's fierce repression of anything smacking of agrarian organization. The rise and at least the temporary achievements of these nascent agrarian movements in particular parts of Java, but not others, indicate active reworkings as well as continuities in historical processes.

In the 1970s and 80s, futurists predicted Java's eventual transformation to an urban island, but the persistence of rural spaces, livelihoods, and longings imply that such a future remains a fair way off. In this essay, we have pointed out a few of the connections between the diverse sites where "rural Java" has been located and positioned by a sampling of scholars and activists writing and operating in the area of agrarian and environmental change. The development of agrarian movements in particular parts of Java and not others cries out for new research, as do the diverse ways in which local and translocal forms of power and access to resources are playing out in the context of the decentralization of local and regional government. Also of great importance are the complex and changing relations between so-called rural and urban areas, and between Java and other regions of Indonesia. The transformations that have accompanied the movement of young women and men to workplaces in other regions of Indonesia, Asia, and the Middle East form another key area of research.

What we found perhaps most significant in our recent journey is the emergence of a new cadre of scholar-activists in Indonesia, intensely engaged in bringing together theory and practice and forging new understandings that bear directly on illuminating the possibilities of—as well as the limits on—agrarian change. Any effort to chart these developments has to acknowledge the absolutely central role of rural sociologist Gunawan Wiradi, together with his colleagues, Professor Sediono Tjondronegoro and Profesor Sajogyo, now retired, at Institut Pertanian Bogor. Through the dark days of the New Order, they remained firmly committed to principles of social justice and provided mentorship, protection, and inspiration for the new generation of scholar-activists.