

## Chapter 2: Signs in the Valley

This village was formerly a wild forest. No one lived here. Then came 'animist' urang Hindu<sup>1</sup> who performed witchcraft. Finally our holy man (wali) came here and defeated Batara Karang, the Hindu. These places become prosperous. Pilgrims come here without being invited because of the blessing of the holy man radiating from this place. (Custodian of Pamijahan, 1996)

In the Pamijahanese view, various signs significantly 'tow' the past into contemporary Pamijahan culture. Both verbal and non-verbal signs emerge as a configuration of propositions regarding ritual practice, ancestors and identities. They create cultural arguments subscribed to by the villagers. An example is given by the quotation above, made by an ordinary man as he chatted with pilgrims in a cafe stall outside the sacred space in the centre of Pamijahan. In the view of the people of Pamijahan, this space which was initially empty, was then crisscrossed by, borrowing Pannell's term (Pannell 1997:165) "various collective ordered representations".

All Pamijahanese share the same narrative regarding the early period of settlement in their village. The quotation mentions three important key words representing three episodes in the myth of Pamijahan, namely 'the wild forest', 'the animist', and 'the wali'. The climax of the narrative is in the third episode in which the wali brings Islam and grace to the people. He is a protagonist who is able to clear the land of its wildness and give the villagers identity and a moral foundation. This fragment of narrative refers to the conversion of Pamijahanese by Sufis in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The villagers, accordingly, are very proud to be descendants of a Sufi saint. They established a cult springing from the family of the founding Sufi. Later they were able to extend this family cult incorporating into it the popular tradition called *ziarah* (pilgrimage to a holy man's gravesite). These phenomena clearly involve a process of transformation that needs construction and creativity.

According to one of the custodians in Pamijahan village, some time in the 1660s, a wali (holy man) from Mataram, at the end of a sacred journey, made a clearing in a wild forest in the southern area of West Java. In the course of doing this the wali, Shaykh Abdul Muhyi, fought with a local animist ruler known as Batara Karang who surrendered to the wali and was converted to Islam. He then continued his mission to find a sacred cave for meditation as his guru had instructed. After trekking through the forest, he found the cave in a hilly area. He called the place Safarwadi.

Today the custodians of Pamijahan say that the term Safarwadi<sup>2</sup> or 'walking in the valley' has a metaphorical meaning, namely that a human being should follow

the right path as if traversing a muddy sloping riverbank. If he takes a wrong step, he will slide into deep misery. The metaphor in fact has become an important motif in Pamijahan culture, a motif which will be discussed in later chapters. After the death of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi people began to call the village after its river, Pamijahan. *Pamijahan*, according to them, means a natural fish hatchery (*lauk mijah*).<sup>3</sup> After the *wali* settled in the valley, his fame was such that his followers swarmed to the valley like hatching fish.

In contemporary terms, *Pamijahan* refers to two different concepts. The first is a cultural concept referring to the area believed physically to be the place of various historically important artefacts (*patilasan*) and narratives of the *wali*. According to one of the custodians Pamijahan in this sense includes the area of the valley of Pamijahan and the surrounding mountains.

The second is a modern political concept. In this sense, Pamijahan refers to a village or *kelurahan*, the smallest unit of government. This area in turn consists of various sub villages (*kampung*). The villagers themselves use 'Pamijahan' for the first concept and 'Desa Pamijahan' for the second. Pamijahan is led by the chief custodian (*kuncen*) of the tomb of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi, while the Desa Pamijahan is administered by the village head (*kepala desa*). Following this distinction, in this study I use the term Pamijahan to refer to the first concept and Desa Pamijahan to the second. To complicate matters, there is also a Kampung Pamijahan which refers to one of the neighbourhoods or hamlets, a 'sub-village', within Desa Pamijahan.

Desa Pamijahan is in the southern part of the regency (*kabupaten*) of Tasikmalaya in the Priangan Timur area of West Java. Tasikmalaya is a prosperous regency covering an area of 2,751 square kilometres, and is divided into seven subdistricts (*kacamatan*).

Tasikmalaya has been shaped by various Islamic movements in the course of its history. It was touched by Islamic rebellion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century promoted by the followers of Bantenese and Macassarese religious leaders who retreated there from the north coast. In 1945, there was a rebellion there instigated by the *Ajengan*<sup>4</sup> of Sukamanah in which hundreds of unarmed young Muslims were killed by the Japanese. Later, between 1956 and 1962 Tasikmalaya was a base for what is probably the best known of Indonesia's post-independence religious rebellions, that of the *Tentara Islam Indonesia* or *TII* (the Islamic Army of Indonesia) which fought for the realisation of *Darul Islam* or *DI*, a 'place for Islam' or an Islamic state in Indonesia. DI/TII was established by Kartosuwiryo, a Javanese who gained considerable support from the Sundanese elite in the more remote areas of West Java. Kartosuwiryo was able to combine Islamic spirit with a political and military movement. (Jackson 1980:27) In the late 1940s he took advantage of the conflict between the Dutch administration, which controlled the main cities of West Java, and the Indonesian army which

ultimately retreated to Central Java. DI/TII controlled the territories abandoned by Indonesian army and promoted Islamic rule in these areas. Consequently, the DI/TII had to face two enemies, the Dutch, and the Indonesian army.

At the time significant ideological polarities emerged among the people of the region. Later, after the Dutch left Indonesia, the Indonesian army succeeded in wresting control of West Java and capturing the rebel leader, Kartosuwiryo. In some areas of Tasikmalaya, Kartosuwiryo is today still regarded as a legend and a hero of the people. Even now, some people are still trying to promote Kartosuwiryo's concept of Islamic rule, particularly in the area where the DI/TII first proclaimed its message.

In 1997 there were deadly riots caused by conflict between the police and students (*santri*) at Islamic boarding schools. The riots caused destruction of police installations, Chinese shops and churches in Tasikmalaya. The people of Pamijahan share a similar language and religious identity with people from other subdistricts of Tasikmalaya. Almost all claim to be descendants of the holy Sufi saint, Shaykh Abdul Muhyi. They have, however, given this claim a uniquely spatial form (see Chapter 4) which makes them slightly different from the rest of the people of Tasikmalaya.

Desa Pamijahan is situated in a hilly area some 70 kilometres to the south of the city of Tasikmalaya, or around 400 kilometres from Jakarta. It is administratively subsumed under the Bantarkalong subdistrict, which consists of fourteen villages scattered across undulating terrain. In the Dutch literature (Haan 1912, 462), the Desa Pamijahan was a part of the Karangnunggal subdistrict, which is why Shaykh Abdul Muhyi was also called the '*Haj* from *Carang*' or '*Hadje Carrang*'. Since the 1980s, Karangnunggal has been divided into two subdistricts: Karangnunggal and Bantarkalong. Desa Pamijahan is located in the western part of Bantarkalong, which lies between the latitudes 7° 3' and 7° 35' South and the longitudes 1° 15' and 1° 20' East. The village stretches across the valley and the hills some 120 to 200 metres above sea level.

The terrain of Desa Pamijahan is dominated by a garden area, a grazing area, mahogany and albasia forests, as well as paddy fields. The mahogany forests are on the hills surrounding the village. In the garden area villagers plant coconut, albasia, bananas, bamboo and betel. The paddy fields are mainly scattered in the foothills. The main river is the Ci Pamijahan that flows through the village. Desa Pamijahan has enough water for daily activities and farming, particularly after the government built a tertiary irrigation system across the foothills. Previously, durian and mangos were the main commodities. Now, due to changes in land use, these expensive and exotic fruits are rarely found in Pamijahan. Compared to other parts of the southern area of Tasikmalaya, Desa Pamijahan gets little rain in the wet season. The daytime temperature is around 25-27° C,

three degrees hotter than in the northern part of Tasikmalaya, which is close to the high mountains of Galunggung and Sawal.

To reach Desa Pamijahan from Tasikmalaya you may use a private car or public transport. Taking a bus, you can reach Desa Pamijahan in about two and half-hours. Approaching Desa Pamijahan from Tasikmalaya, you pass through the subdistrict of Sukaraja (the old city of Sukapura), the subdistrict of Karangnunggal, and finally the subdistrict of Bantarkalong where Pamijahan is situated. The government has recently built a sealed road to connect Pamijahan with the city of Tasikmalaya, but ten years ago the area was still regarded as remote and backward by city people.

As in other districts of Tasikmalaya, statistics on religious affiliation show clearly that Pamijahan is one hundred percent Muslim. The *kabupaten* of Tasikmalaya is known as a major religious centre in West Java, ranking only after Cirebon and Banten in importance. Statistics on religious affiliation bear this out. According to data from the Tasikmalaya branch office of the Department of Religion, in 1996 there were 800 registered traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) scattered around its villages.

In general, these *pesantren* are affiliated with Nahdatul Ulama (NU), the huge, traditionalist Islamic organisation. The Cipasung *pesantren*, for example, is the biggest of NU's traditional boarding schools in Priangan Timur. Only a few *pesantren* belong to Muhammadiyah<sup>5</sup> and Persis,<sup>6</sup> the modernist organisations, and these are mainly to be found in the city of Tasikmalaya. There are also *pesantren* which focus on Sufism. The Surialaya *pesantren*, for example, about hundred kilometres to the north of Pamijahan, is the best-known Sufi *pesantren* in Tasikmalaya and is also known internationally as a centre of the Sufi order of *Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyyah*. Another is the Pagendingan *pesantren* which follows the Idrisiyyah order.<sup>7</sup>

According to data from the Department of Religious Affairs, thirteen of the *pesantren* in Tasikmalaya are located in the subdistrict of Bantarkalong, and three of these are situated in Desa Pamijahan. However, based on data from Desa Pamijahan itself, there are 385 *pesantren* there, as well as 715 smaller, traditional elementary-level Islamic schools (*madrasah*), and 85 other traditional and informal religious education centres (*Pendidikan Keagamaan*).<sup>8</sup>

There is some confusion in the Department of Religion with regard to data on Sufi orders. The Department has not compiled a list of the Sufi orders in Tasikmalaya. However, complete data on Sufi orders is available from the local office of the district attorney (*Kejaksaan*). The Suharto government, in power from 1966 until 1998, sought to control all religious movements within a political framework. In this period Sufi orders were regarded not as religious movements to be registered with the Department of Religion, but as *kebatinan* (mysticism)

movements. *Kebatinan* groups were defined not as religions or religious movements but as groups merely engaged in spiritualist exercises which consequently had to be registered in the district attorney's office.

In Desa Pamijahan, in 1996, there were 1155 households and 4,624 people scattered through six sub-villages (*kampung*): Pamijahan, Panyalahan, Parungpung, Karanji, Pandawa and Cicandra. Only in Kampung Cicandra and Kampung Karanji are there no sacred sites. Each sub-village is headed by a village chief called a *punduh*. However, the *punduh* only acts as a land and building tax collector or *Pengumpul PBB* (*Pajak Bumi dan Bangunan*). For this reason traditional leaders such as the custodians of sacred sites (*kuncen*) and religious leaders (*ajengan*) are more popular among the villagers. (This will be further discussed in Chapters 4 and 8.)

Kampung Pamijahan emerges as an important point in Desa Pamijahan. It has attracted settlers from the neighbouring villages. This is shown clearly in the population figures. Compared to the neighbouring villages, Kampung Pamijahan has the biggest population. This is a consequence of the role Pamijahan plays as the site of the shrine of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi. The sub-village with the second biggest population is Panyalahan with 216 households and 921 people. Panyalahan also has an important sacred site, but it is less popular than that of Muhyi in Pamijahan. The third in size is Cicandra (704 people), followed by Karanji (504), Pandawa (492) and Citapen (489 people), respectively. All the villagers from the six *kampung* claim that their ancestors had close ties with Shaykh Abdul Muhyi. However, the villagers in Pamijahan claim that they are related by blood with Muhyi and therefore are closer to him than the people in other *kampung*.

The villagers from Desa Pamijahan are recorded in the Village Office (*Kantor Bale Desa*) as farmers, peddlers, labourers, and members of the military. However, in reality it is difficult to rely on such statistics. Although the villagers may have paddy fields, they do not claim to be farmers. They prefer to identify themselves by jobs that are not associated with farming activities. According to them, to call yourself a true farmer (*patani*) you should have larger amounts of land than they have. They also argue that they rarely go to their paddy field as farmers because they always hire labourers (*buruh*) to work their lands for them. This claim is partly due to their activities associated with pilgrimage (*ziarah*). Men in Pamijahan and Panyalahan, for example, are quite often involved in guiding pilgrims around the sacred sites. This provides them with money for daily needs, while their wives help by selling souvenirs and take-home gifts to the pilgrims. During my fieldwork, I hardly ever observed women in the fields cultivating their lands. This contrasts with other villages where women have to care for their own gardens. Instead of cultivating their gardens, the women of Pamijahan prefer to buy fresh produce from people who come from neighbouring areas,

particularly in the busy ritual or pilgrimage months such as Rabiulawwal (*Maulid*), the month in which the Prophet Muhammad's birthday is celebrated, or the seventh month, 'the revered month' (*Rajab*), when pilgrims come in their thousands each day.

In this setting, the practice of negotiating, creating, and interpreting the signs of the *wali* proceeds with great intensity. I use the term 'sign' as Peirce and his followers use it. As indicated in the previous chapter, according to this school there are three conditions for something to be regarded as a sign. A sign is perceivable, referential, and interpretable. As will be seen in the narratives of Pamijahan, the signs of blessing, holiness, ancestors, and mysticism are all linked. We will see that villagers try to negotiate with the tradition passed down to them by their ancestors. They do this through pilgrimage practice, mystical associations, and in the rewriting of their history.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hindus (*urang Hindu*) in this sense are not real Hindus. The term Hindu is today used by people to refer to the people or period before Islam.

<sup>2</sup> According to Rinkes *pamijahan* is derived from the word 'tree' since the names of villages in Java are often associated with the name of a tree. He also states that Safarwadi has "nothing to do with Safar, the second month of the Muslim year". (Rinkes 1910)

<sup>3</sup> In Sundanese, the word *mijah* is also associated with moving and growing.

<sup>4</sup> *Ajengan* is a title and a synonym for an Islamic scholar. In Central and East Java, Islamic scholars are called *kiai*.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammadiyah is often said to be a reformist or modernist organization. It combines religious teaching with modern social studies and activities in its schools.

<sup>6</sup> Persatuan Islam or Persis is probably the most puritan Islamic organisation in Indonesia. It promotes Islamic values in the literal spirit of 'back to the scriptures'.

<sup>7</sup> *Idrisiyyah* is a variant of the *Sanusiyyah* order. *Sanusiyyah* is the famous order of North Africa founded by Sayyid Muhammad Ali al-Sanusi al-Mujahiri al-Hasani al-Idrisi in 1787. In Tasikmalaya, the Idrisiyyah order was founded by Kiai Haji Abdul Fatah in 1932. In North Africa, Idrisiyyah is a very progressive order. It provides the local Bedouin not only with mystical teachings but also with the identity and ideology that, in the past, made it possible for them to confront colonial rule. In Indonesia, the name Idrisiyyah was adopted in preference to Sanusiyyah to disguise the order's international links.

<sup>8</sup> This difference in figures is mainly due to the registration system. The government has not registered some *pesantren* in Pamijahan. Others have been disqualified as *pesantren* because, according to the government, they lack organization and buildings.