transport of goods and officials. Attempts to abscond were frustrated by the introduction of a rule that the whole population of a district was obliged to perform corvee services and could, if necessary, be set to work far from their homesteads. Requisitioning them cost nothing and the distance they had to travel was also of no relevance. After all, according to the stubborn but mistaken belief of the colonial rulers, the peasants had time on their hands.

A new measure was that all colonial buildings – including offices, checkpoints, warehouses and even dwellings – had to be guarded day and night. The early-colonial government took on the characteristics of a night-watch state, a regime of surveillance that gradually extended along roads and into villages (De Haan I, 1910: 262). Of course, the process of opening up the hinterland, which was now progressing more systematically, led to greater mobility and ‘vagrants and beggars’ perhaps made these regions less safe than before. But the new measures were not so much aimed at assuring security as equipping the colonial apparatus with a whole corps of guards, orderlies, messengers and other servants who made the lives of their colonial white masters more comfortable. A substantial part of these services were provided without payment. The Governor-General was permitted to requisition local people by the hundreds to work in his palace in Bogor, the Resident was allowed several dozen personal servants, while lower officials had to rely on a handful of guards and attendants to dignify their status. As mentioned above, Daendels was planning to alleviate the burden of corvee services and meant to use the records now kept by his subordinates to find out why and how to do this. They were full of complaints about the ease with which native chiefs obliged their subjects to displays of servitude. The rancour expressed in these reports mainly focused on the wastefulness of using subjects purely to satisfy a desire for prestige and finery, a contempt rooted in the perpetually severe shortage of labour for the coffee gardens. There was not a word, of course, about the free services enjoyed by the colonial officials themselves. Rather than contributing to economic growth, a large number of idlers and layabouts hung around the abodes of their masters of whatever complexion.

Beyond the reach of the government

Reducing the burden of the corvee services seems to have been commonly interpreted as restricting the entourage with which the landed gentry were accustomed to surrounding themselves. As early as 1804, Pieter Engelhard had tried to persuade the Regent of Bandung to call only on clients living in
the immediate vicinity of the headquarters to perform corvee services. All such attempts foundered on the obstinate refusal of the chiefs to abandon the displays of servitude by their clientele, which were so closely related to their prominent status. Out of desperation, the colonial authorities gave up trying on condition that ‘following the chiefs around for no purpose’ did not occur at the expense of coffee cultivation. Of course, it was the peasantry which paid the price for this uneasy compromise. Besides the greatly increased pressure of forced cultivation and the range of services performed for their own chiefs meant that the peasants were now faced with a staggering assortment of new corvee obligations that they had to fulfil for the government (Schoch 1891). The early-colonial state, of which Daendels was the architect, succeeded in turning the Priangan peasant into a coolie.

The Governor-General continued the policy of cordoning off the Sundanese highlands with great zeal. The increased insecurity in parts of the region fuelled fears that threats to law and order had to be prevented by reducing contact with the outside world to a minimum. Robbery, extortion, theft, looting and murder were the order of the day throughout the lands surrounding Batavia, a vast and unsettled area stretching out from the coast to the hills. Those with any form of property were the main victims of threats and bribery. Cockfighting, gambling and organized prostitution were accompanied by a great deal of violence. This was contrasted with the image of peace and security of which the inhabitants of the highlands were assured under their regents. Along the intermediate zone between the colonial headquarters and the hinterland, illegality and crime reached unprecedented proportions. Consignments of coffee that had been stolen or smuggled changed hands, there was a lively trade in stolen cattle, and small traders offered their wares, including opium, to customers who took these products with them on their long journey home. Around 1810, the south coast suffered from pirates from Riau, who penetrated the Priangan Regencies by sailing up the rivers from their base at Cilacap. Their raids, during which they abducted many hundreds of inhabitants to be sold into slavery, led to large-scale flight from Sukapura and Galuh.19 Surrounded by these areas of persistent unrest, including the plain around Cirebon, the Priangan was sealed off to ensure the maintenance of law and order. Europeans, too, were permitted to travel through the region only if they

19 Piracy had reached alarming proportions by the second half of the nineteenth century and was closely connected to the political turbulence in the regions of the archipelago where these pirates-cum-traders came from: the islands in the Strait of Malacca and the adjoining coastal areas (Ota 2006: 124-8).
had a permit. The reluctance with which these licences were issued made it difficult to receive permission to enter the Priangan without connections high up in the colonial apparatus. It was even more difficult for Chinese because, as traders and moneylenders, they were considered to have a corruptive influence on the local inhabitants. An additional argument for restricting them in particular was that their economic activity distracted the peasants from growing coffee. The punishment for violating the ban was at least physical chastisement or even a year’s imprisonment. When, under British rule, the ban on small traders settling in the region was less strictly enforced, it was the regents who insisted on the expulsion of all Chinese. Discouraging economic activity therefore took place partly at the insistence of the native aristocracy. The reason they gave for not holding markets was that it would encourage the peasants to grow crops for trade at the expense of growing coffee. Summing up the available intelligence, De Haan said that a Priangan pasar gave a rather run-down impression. Where they were held, they were little more than a small collection of stalls for sirih (betel) and fruits, with a few others selling pots and pans, a little ironware and cheap linen. Only towards the end of periods of fasting, which the Sundanese people celebrated with meals that included buffalo meat, was trade a little more lively (De Haan I, 1910: 482). The freedom of movement of the local population was also restricted. When they were not at home, the only other place they were at liberty to be was in the coffee garden. They had no business going anywhere else. This restriction on movement was accompanied by an instruction that ‘alien’ natives – people whose place of origin was unknown – could not be offered accommodation without the regent first being informed. This was only the most recent in a long line of bans on ‘vagrants’ and ‘deserters’. Establishing the Priangan as a reservation where the presence of outsiders was seen as a disruption of public order meant that the peasantry had contact only with the government through their local chiefs. This state of quarantine constituted an excessive reduction in their social life, even by the standards of the time.

On his arrival, Daendels had described the condition of the people of the Priangan as pitiful. But it is arguable whether this changed under his rule. Yet the Governor-General himself was proud of the progress he had achieved. He was convinced that growing coffee took up less than one-sixth of the peasants’ time, and that they received a handsome reward for

20 Resident Macquoid explained why: ‘... from a conviction, they assure me, that their free intercourse with the Javanese inhabitants would in time be fatal to the tranquillity and happiness that has prevailed throughout the Regencies for so many years’ (De Haan IV, 1912: 879).
their efforts. As a result of his benevolence, the natives had become ‘much happier’. The proviso that he added to this – ‘as happy as they could be in such an uncivilized state’ – said more about the defects of Priangan man than the shortcomings of colonial rule. Daendels’ opponents, however, held a different opinion. Van den Bosch spoke of the ‘cruel and inhuman force’ suffered by the coffee planters to ensure that ‘these unfortunate wretches performed the hard tasks imposed upon them’, which – not counting the transport of the coffee – meant that they were not able to do any other work for six months of the year. This harsh judgment reflected the disdain of Van den Bosch for the Marshall. It was, after all, on Daendels’ orders that he had to leave the colony. In the light of the practices that took place 20 years later under his responsibility as founder of the cultivation system, his withering criticisms of Daendels – ‘the rule of Robespierre was neither more cruel, nor more bloodthirsty’ – are not very convincing. But there were other eyewitnesses, such as Nicolaus Engelhard. The former Commissioner, with his long service record, denounced in a retrospective the arbitrary and brutal regime that Daendels had pursued. The belated condemnation by this veteran in colonial service – made in 1816 when he had decided to take on the role of private landowner – rather detracted from what he had stated in a memorandum in 1805, questioning whether the further advancement of the Javanese people was in the interests of the home country. Back then, he had expressed the opinion that the Javanese had to be ‘driven to work by force and with beatings, as though they were beasts’ (De Haan I, 1910: 428). Are we then to assume that the founder of the early-colonial state did little more than act according to the spirit of the times? That he can be accused of nothing more than ensuring the preservation of an already existing regime simply because it generated the greatest profit? As compiler of the colonial archives, De Haan weighed up the merits of the different standpoints and came to the damning conclusion in which nothing remained of promises to improve the lot of the Javanese. On the contrary.

Daendels wittingly lied, and out of self-interest, to re-enter state service. To achieve that, he not only had to make excuses for the way the people of the Priangan were treated, but also portray the coffee garden as a Sundanese heaven on earth. (De Haan I, 1910: 459)

The decision of the restored Dutch rulers in 1815 to maintain the land rent tax introduced by Raffles as the cornerstone of colonial policy, while introducing a different system in the Priangan Regencies, was grounded in the desire to continue coffee production on the old basis and to expand it
with a view to meeting the growing demand in the Atlantic world. In 1818, only a few years after Dutch rule had been restored, the price of a *pikul* of coffee had risen to more than double that of 1815 (Van Deventer 1891: CLXII). This robust position on a competitive and growing global market assured a golden future for the black beans. By 1822, worldwide consumption of coffee had risen to 225,000 tons, 100,000 tons of which came from the East Indies (Wild 2004: 99). This was nearly half of the total demand, and the major part of that was grown in the Sunda highlands. What measures were required to allow this staple product of the colonial economy to expand even more? Seasoned officials, with experience reaching back to long before Daendels, again held high-ranking positions in the government apparatus and their judgment carried a lot of weight now that it was necessary to set out a new course. Lawick was one of this small circle of adepts. The report he drew up in 1818 together with his deputy Van de Graaff focused on the question of how to proceed further with coffee production in the Priangan. Considerable attention was devoted to whether it might be better to abolish the system of forced cultivation and replace it with free labour. And if not, whether the peasants should be paid a better price than the pittance they currently received. The authors of the report acknowledged that this was an arguable proposition, given the enormous profits being made by the government. But this would mean abandoning the fundamental principle of the Priangan system, namely excluding all other options for securing the supply of coffee than paying the growers a minimum wage. They also claimed that there was no reason to increase the price because there was no pressure to do so (Lawick and Van de Graaff 1818). Developing these simple folk to the higher level of existence found elsewhere on Java would take time. Paying the peasants a higher price without reason to do so would only arouse the greed of the regents and chiefs. After all, they argued, the essence of the Priangan system was to acquire as much coffee as possible at the lowest possible price and supply it exclusively to the government (Lawick and Van de Graaff 1818: 5). The subordinate conduct displayed by the people of the Priangan was even more reason to assure the regents a good income and treat them with respect. Increasing the commission they received for supplying the coffee would also discourage them from taking part in the clandestine transport and sale of coffee. The people would however stand to benefit from the immediate abolition of the head tax. This annual monetary tribute had been imposed in the past, but was lifted when coffee was grown on an increasingly large scale. The tax had been reintroduced under British interim rule to replace the compulsory supply of coffee but was now abolished.