Living together with ancestors: cultural heritage and sacred places on West Java

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On Java (Indonesia), sacred places (tempat keramat) are powerful and contested sites.[1] Historically they have served as important pilgrimage sites and more recently have also become major tourist attractions. In this paper, I will explore three ways of 'past presencing'[2] - the nationalist, the Islamic and the traditional - and how groups representing each of these challenge one another at different sites. Today, sacred places in Indonesia are caught between the political ambitions of some who wish to create national cultural heritage, the aspirations of religious revivalists who want to cleanse the sites of what they consider superstition, and the desires of others to perform local traditions of ancestor veneration. The sites are therefore subject to claims by politicians, tourists and pilgrims as well as by ancestor spirits. The main ethnographic material in this paper deals with a pilgrimage to Mount Sunda, a pilgrimage site at which people meet with ancestors to ask for help to improve their living conditions. The concluding discussion focuses on how the transformation of sacred places into either Islamic or national heritage sites deprives pilgrims of this opportunity to establish direct communication with ancestors. I argue that in order to avoid the public gaze that dominates Islamic and cultural heritage sites, where mundane political and religious powers have control, local pilgrims create a shared 'living room' with the ancestors. This keeps them beyond the reach of power holders and keeps the authority of the ancestors intact.

Key Words: anthropology, Indonesia, ancestors, sacred sites, cultural heritage

Introduction

The point of departure for this article is the fact that in Indonesia ancestor spirits have become marginalised in public space. This observation is in agreement with those of Ricklefs' (2012) and Reuter's (2010), who have noted that Islamic values dominate public space on Java and the ancestors are prohibited from taking an active part in social life. There is also substantial literature covering the long period of heritagization of Indonesian traditions and the way in which this has forbidden people from engaging in transcendental communication during cultural performances held in public spaces. By contrast, the ethnographic data from Mount Sunda show how pilgrims nevertheless manage to meet the ancestors by creating a shared 'living room' with them outside of public space. The intimacy of the selected places also helps reduce the risk of them being transformed into cultural heritage sites or tourist attractions or being dominated by Islamic values that deny ancestors a role as agents in everyday life.[3]

Java is part of Indonesia and is the historical site of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic kingdoms. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the island has undergone a long process of Islamisation and the majority of Java's more than one hundred million inhabitants now adhere to this religion. The long history of different civilisations is evident in the numerous archaeological remnants and religious sites scattered over the island and these attract pilgrims as well as tourists *en masse*. The most spectacular and well known sites are the Buddhist and

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1. In this article the concept of sacred places is used for sites referred to by interviewees by the Indonesian term *tempat keramat*. Transcendental forces are believed to be more accessible here than at other places. These forces may be represented by graves or ruins, but even a tree, river or peculiar rock may be a favourite place for spirits to manifest in the mundane world.

2. That is, 'ways in which people variously draw on, experience, negotiate, reconstruct, and perform the past in their ongoing lives' (MacDonald 2012, 234).

3. The article builds on material collected during periods of fieldwork totaling 24 months conducted on West Java between 2002 and 2016. While conducting fieldwork, I lived in the semi-urban area outside Bandung, took part in pilgrimages and other ritual events such as fasts, weddings and the commemorations of deaths. For a more extensive description of the material see Hellman (2006; 2011).

Hindu temples of Borobudur and Prambanan. The burial sites of nine saints (Wali Songo) alleged to have spread Islam on Java have also become popular pilgrimage sites and they attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, with numbers peaking after the fasting month of Ramadan. At the local level, the landscape is dotted with graves, mountains, caves and rivers that are ascribed special powers. People visit them to meditate, fast, pray for strength and spiritual or material boons.

Graves and Pilgrimages on Java

Pilgrimages occupy a crucial positon in cultural imaginaries about power and empowerment on Java. In a compilation of oral histories from Java that was published in the nineteenth century known as the Serat Centhini scripts, making a journey to a number of sacred places is described as the way to become Javanese (Santoso *et al*. 2006; Laksana, 2014:2). More recently, Presidents have visited particular graves before making important decisions (Bruinessen, 2002; Chambert-Loir and Reid, 2002:xv; Doorn-Harder and Jong, 2001:329). Laksana (2014:2) reports on the huge and increasing number of visits to graves of the Wali Songo, people known to have spread Islam on Java. Apart from these more official sites, Java also has a bewildering range of burial sites, *petilasan* (where people known to have had extraordinary powers have dwelt), and abodes of ancestor spirits from the Javanese mythological and historical pantheon to which people turn with hopes of empowerment (Chambert-Loir and Reid, 2002; Wessing, 2006). These places have become destinations for pilgrims as well as tourists. Some sites are well preserved while others have only traces of the graves left but they remain popular places for people to sleep, meditate and pray at. Modern transport, improved infrastructure and economic development have made it possible for growing numbers of tourists to pay visits to these sites and this has meant that prayer has tended to take over from sleeping or meditation.

Throughout Java's history, sacred sites have been important for conducting ascetic practices to access power. In his seminal paper on Javanese power (*kasektén*), Anderson (1990) noted the importance of accumulating it. Power, he observed, was understood as a substance (like energy) that had to be acquired and contained (in objects or the body) through asceticism. Certain places, such as rivers, mountains, curious natural phenomena and graves were regarded as especially fruitful for conducting these practices. This personal acquisition of power could provide leaders with a form of legitimacy that was based not on morality or popular support but on ascetic competence in gathering power. A successful individual would be endowed with extraordinary capacities (Anderson, 1990:28 ff).

Anderson describes how, in traditional Javanese cosmology, power was a substance dispersed throughout the cosmos while in the modernist Islamic exegesis that are now dominant on Java, a sharp distinction is made between God and humans, and God is all powerful, 'Thus power is, in a sense, removed from the world, since it lies with God …' (Anderson, 1990:70). This produces a 'gap between the profane and the sacred' (Gottowik, 2010:17); which means that transcendental transactions no longer have to do with the accumulation of power (since all power lies with God) but with how best to convey wishes and receive rewards across the gap between humanity and God. One of the core issues regarding pilgrimage and sacred places concerns the control and transcendence of this 'gap'.

Although many sacred sites in Southeast Asia have lost importance and been 'purified' of spirits by the practitioners of the world religions (Allerton, 2009:246), graves on Java still hold a strong attraction as powerful places (Pemberton, 1994:274, 276). Nature spirits may be on the decline but ancestors persist and graves are their primary earthly symbol. Some approach the dead as messengers to God. Others believe they need prayers to help them safely reach the other side and some simply see graves as places for remembrance. However, these sites are important for communication across the 'gap' between the mundane and transcendental worlds.

Conceptualising Pilgrimage in Anthropology

Two of the most influential scholars of pilgrimage are Durkheim (1964), who saw religion as a way to strengthen social norms, and Turner (Turner, 1974; Turner and Turner, 1978), who, in contrast, treated pilgrimages as a way of creating a sense of 'communitas' that could dissolve social structure. Criticising both of these somewhat categorical positions, Wheeler argues that research should take note of ' . . . the private and fractured quality of pilgrimage . . .' (Wheeler, 1999:26). By paying attention to the pilgrims' own motives and interpretations, she questions the appropriateness of making divisions between the profane and sacred, or between a structured and unstructured social environment. Coleman is similarly sceptical about

'essential' claims (2002:362) and argues that the meaning of pilgrimage changes over time, as political and religious powers intertwine with everyday experiences to define it in ever-evolving ways.

Morinis notes that the meaning of pilgrimage emerges as a 'composite process' (Morinis,1992:2) in which pilgrims combine different features of it into particular configurations. Pilgrimage may be about deep existential experiences but they are often also driven by wishes to solve concrete everyday problems with the help of powers ' . . . somewhere beyond the known world' (Morinis, 1992:1). Eade and Sallnow explain how these complex processes take place at pilgrimage sites, which are like voids that constitute a ' . . . ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices' (Eade and Sallnow, 1991:15). The combination of a chance to have profound experiences, to receive help with problems, to access extraordinary powers and sites that may be continually filled with meaning all make pilgrimage attractive to people seeking assistance, wealth or political success and also to religious organisations.

I find it analytically promising to consider sacred places as voids that are open for diverse interpretations and claims. However, the cases presented below nevertheless show a number of regularities in these claims and interpretations and these speak of power relations in Indonesian society. On Java, the void of the sacred site is being 'claimed' by three different 'voices'. Although all three are present to a greater or lesser extent at all sites, some dominate at particular places. They also express different interests. The nationalist voice is trying to create cultural heritage in order to build solidarity among Indonesia's diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. The Islamic voice is striving to create an Indonesian *umma* with a shared narrative of the past that is often intertwined with the history of the Indonesian nation. Finally, the voices of ancestors represent an alternative resource from established religious and political powers for people to turn to in times of distress. Since they belong to neither the Islamic nor the political establishment, they are barred from public space and from sacred or heritage sites that have become incorporated into public space.

The Voice of the Nation: creation of cultural heritage

All human groups have culture; not all have heritage if we mean it as the selective, self-conscious packaging of cultural material (Cameron, 2010:211).

Tourist sites such as the grand temple complexes of Prambanan and Boroboudur are, of course, prime examples of national cultural heritage. Not only do they attract tourists but they also place Indonesia on the global map and tell of the nation's glorious past.

The heritagization of Java's pilgrimage sites

There is also a large body of research (e.g. Acciaioli, 1985; Foulcher, 1990; Hellman, 2003; Jones, 2013; Pemberton, 1994) that documents the obsession of the Indonesian regime of 1966-1998 with creating national identity by heritagizing local culture. The regime, usually referred to as the Orde Baru (The New Order), initiated numerous projects designed to make local traditions fit with Cameron's definition of cultural heritage. The objective was to create a national identity

> held to be the outcome of a harmonious blend between 'those values remaining from ancient times' and such positive influences as may be drawn from foreign cultures and the 'effects of modernization' (Foulcher, 1990:301 the citations are from Soebadio, 1985:12).

Efforts included protecting, preserving, revitalising and developing traditions. Through nationwide research programmes, local cultures were mapped, delineated and stereotyped (Jones 2013).

This ambition to heritagize is mirrored in the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), and is considered part of the national Pancasila ideology. Pancasila promotes nationalism as an overarching value and favours a particular form of democracy (or decision making) that is modelled on ideas about traditional norms and portrays the nation as a family. This effectively sidesteps voting and the majority opinion as decisive for decision making (Davidson and Henley, 2007:121).

The development of museums

One example of how Pancasila and the motto of Unity in Diversity were implemented is in the development of the museum sector (Krepps, 1994, chapter 3). As early as 1973, the ministry of education was emphasising the importance of 'national culture in awakening nationalism' (Krepps, 1994:129), and in the first five-year development plan (1969/70 - 1973/74) museums were identified as important vehicles for this awakening and were defined as centres for 'cultural education' (Krepps, 1994:133). By 1991, each region (except East Timor) had its own regional museum. The Pameran Keliling Wawasan Nusantara (a traveling exhibition) is a case in point. It presented the richness

of regional cultures and the ways in which they were affected by influences from other parts of the archipelago. It also showed how basic 'cultural elements' from the different regions could be appropriated by the state and recombined into a national culture. The state was given the role of acting as the ultimate power, capable of collecting and forging these differences into a new, collective Indonesian whole (Jones, 2013:166-167; Krepps, 1994:141-142).[4]

From these politics the nation became what Krepps eloquently describes as 'museum-minded' (Krepps, 1994, Chapter 4). Since museums were not part of an indigenous tradition but had been introduced by the colonial rulers, the museum planners decided that they had to cultivate a 'particular kind of mentality or way of thinking about museums and cultural heritage preservation' (Krepps, 1994:298). The museums were going to introduce an agrarian society to 'modern technology, scientific explanations, and rational thinking' (Krepps, 1994:301) by gathering and displaying artifacts and art that were supposedly disappearing (Krepps, 1994:309). Constructing and visiting museums would become ways of being modern by gazing upon history through the lens of the diorama or exhibition showcase. People were to become museum-minded.

While the museums focused on art and artefacts, places, such as graves and monuments, also became part of this process (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002). One example of how sacred places have become incorporated into the national agenda of heritagization is the grave of Prabu Hariang Kancana, King of Panjalu. I revisited Panjalu in 2016, about 15 years after my first visit. At the beginning of this (21st) century, Panjalu was a small, sleepy village with an almost forgotten but revered grave located on an island in Lake Lengkong. In 2016, the scene had changed. There were stalls selling clothes and T-shirts with Panjalu and Situ Lengkong written on them. A string of

boats was lined up at the small harbour ready to take the casual visitor or larger tour group on a round trip to the island. An impressive entrance had been built and on the plaque by one of the statues was an inscription made by the regional government, promising to revitalise the 'traditional village' of Panjalu. It had been signed by the ministers of culture and education.

The regional government has clearly defined the place as an '*objek wisata*' (tourist site), and this is stamped onto the official ticket one now has to buy at the gated entrance. The ticket includes the insignia of the regional government (*Pemerintah Kabupaten Ciamis*), the official national tourist symbol (Wonderful Indonesia) and a logo for domestic tourists, *Kenali negerimu, Cintai negerimu* (Get to know your country, Love your Country).

When I spoke to the local *Juru Kuncen* (caretaker), he acknowledged that there had been a huge increase in public interest in the place after the president-to-be, Gus Dur, had visited it in 2002. It was after this that the local government had increased their support for it. However, he added with a sigh, nowadays people just pay short visits but very few sleep over (to meditate).

Heritage, museums and tourism

Cameron awards Indonesia the dubious honour of being one of 'the best examples' of state-controlled development of heritage and tourism (Cameron, 2010:209). Together with Singapore, Malaysia and China, Indonesia is one of the countries in which almost nothing 'is left to chance or private development' (Cameron, 2010:208).

However, in this process, ancestors appear in museums or spheres of national heritage only as examples of historical objects and part of a lost tradition. Cultural heritage addresses tourists as well as schools and a broader audience that is interested in learning about the nation. It is a pedagogical device used for teaching about unity and cultural diversity, but in the public space it no longer has the ritual power of enabling transcendental communication. For example, when traditional ritual performances such as *Kuda Lumping* (Christensen, 2010) and *Singa Depok* (Hellman, 1998) are staged in national celebrations, spirit possession and transcendental communication are now omitted. The process of transforming culture into heritage effectively cemented the 'gap' between the mundane and transcendental worlds.

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4. TMII (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature) theme park was established as an illustration of this capacity of the state-cum-nation to subsume ethnic diversity within a larger totality, Indonesia. In the park, each of the ethnic groups that is acknowledged by the authorities has been allocated a place at which to display a selection of cultural artifacts and the whole comprises the Indonesian nation (Schlehe 2011, 154). The park also includes a museum (Museum Indonesia) that houses an exhibition of a royal wedding. This is meant to represent the marriage of diverse ethnic groups into a single, harmonious Indonesian culture (Hellman 1999: Jones 2013, 261).

The heritagization of culture not only cultivated a museum-minded 'public gaze' but it also created a cultural space that enhanced state power. In public space the New Order was supposed to be the omnipotent and legitimate actor keeping the diverse parts of the nation together.

Although it slowed after the fall of the regime in 1998, this long tradition of ideologically grounded heritagization and museumification did not stop (see e.g. Christensen, 2010:99-101). The following period was marked by radical decentralisation and the enthusiasm of central government for regulating cultural politics waned. Instead, regional efforts to promote local culture as a marker of regional identity strengthened (Jones, 2013, chapter VI; Henley and Davidson, 2008). Decentralisation is also one of the reasons that Islamic influences became more prominent in public space - it was here that promoters of Islamist agendas could influence regional bylaws and create a normative imperative (Jones, 2013:197-200; Ricklefs, 2012).

Islamic Voices: sacred sites

Islamic traditionalists, modernists and revivalists (Ricklefs 2012) in Indonesia are engaged in a complex, longstanding debate on how to interpret and implement Islam. This debate touches upon all fields of human activity such as law, morality and ritual. Discussion about the role of ancestors tends to be heated (Bubandt 2014) although opponents often to some extent agree. Most concede that ancestors may be revered and remembered but not all agree that they should be worshipped. The main Islamic organisations in Indonesia (*Nadlathul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*) adopt different positions regarding visiting graves. *Muhammadiyah* is more sceptical and restrictive, while *Nadlathul Ulama* encourages pilgrimage but stresses that it should be conducted with the correct intentions (Doorn-Harder and Jong, 2001:347). Praying, burning incense or sprinkling flowers at gravesites may all be considered acts of *shirk* (idolatry). So, although pilgrimage may be permitted and even encouraged, devotional practices should be directed solely to Allah. There is widespread concern to avoid the risk of being seen to be performing *shirk*. Some, therefore, avoid visiting gravesites altogether. Others, avoid praying at them or they may simply abstain from using incense and flowers or make it clear that offerings are for Allah alone. However, there is broad agreement that one should avoid asking any other favours of the ancestors than that they act as messengers to God.

In his three-volume series on Islam, Ricklefs concludes that Islamic norms dominate public space on Java, with traditionalists, revivalists and modernists all competing for the right to define what correct Islam in fact is (Ricklefs, 2012:498). Similarly, Reuter describes Indonesia as a country torn between two cosmologies - a far stronger revivalist, 'literalist interpretation' (Reuter, 2014:176) and a weaker 'cultural nationalism' (Reuter, 2014:177), which is based loosely upon the Pancasila ideology and the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Reuter notes that cultural nationalism has more or less lost its foothold in Indonesia today as it no longer has the support of the former Orde Baru regime and it lacks a self-ascribed or charismatic leader.

The development of mass tourism to the graves of the Wali Songo brought with it aspects of the museum mindedness described by Krepps (1994) and it fits well with Reuter's and Ricklefs' descriptions. The graves have become major tourist attractions with all the attendant paraphernalia. They have been absorbed into the general trend

> to organize pilgrimages to Muslim holy places in order to Islamize what is syncretistic and 'nationalize' what used to be local (Doorn-Harder and Jong, 2001:329).

This produces a new kind of tourism, 'wisata ziarah", the tourist pilgrimage' (Doorn-Harder and Jong, 2001:349).

In Cirebon, one of the Wali Songo, Gunung Jati, is buried. The place is run by five families of *Juru Kuncen* (caretakers) and the local royal house (which keeps the key to the inner courtyard of the tomb). On arrival, the visitor finds large parking areas, stalls selling souvenirs and beggars as well as caretakers asking for donations. Incense and flowers are plentiful at the gravesite but these are considered to be part of local practice that the caretakers have incorporated into their routines. The caretakers stress that Gunung Jati had a Chinese wife and that the site includes pottery and ceramics from China as well as Holland. In this way, the site incorporates the diverse history of Indonesia (tradition, trade and colonialism) into the story of the Wali and thereby into the history of Islam on Java. When I asked the caretakers specifically about the flowers and incense, they insisted that all offerings are for Allah. This is a strictly regulated environment. In order to make sure that pilgrims and tourists do not perform acts of *shirk*, the caretakers guide them through the prayers. Although they are acknowledged as venerable, the ancestors, even the Wali Songo, are

treated only as messengers while the power to influence the lives of humans remains strictly with Allah. It is the duty of the caretakers and the local royal house to control this communication.

It is possible to purchase an information booklet at Gunung Jati's memorial site. Here, it is clear that the regional government is promoting the site as an '*obyek pariwisata*' (tourist destination). However, the author distinguishes between '*penggunjung*' (visitors) who simply come to experience the milieu (*suasana*) and pilgrims (*peziarah*), and notes that the groups are almost equal in number (Basyari, 1989:29). The booklet reminds visitors to follow the regulations, directing their prayers only to Allah and not to engage idolatry – they must not ask favours of the ancestors or worshiping them in ways reserved for Allah (Basyari, 1989:29). Aslan (2014) has noted similar processes of museumification at Rumi's tomb in Konya, Turkey, where there is also competition between the Islamic *umma* and the state, though in the Turkish case the state seems to have the upper hand.

It is, of course, impossible to know what goes on in the mind of each pilgrim. The polyphony of practice and theological differences is well documented (Laksana, 2014; Doorn-Harder and Jong, 2001; Jamhari, 2001). However, the caretakers do their utmost to patrol the 'gap' between the mundane and transcendental world and ensure that people do not commit heresy or idolatry by worshipping ancestors. Praying at the grave may entail asking the ancestors for help but according to Laksana (2014:84) all pilgrims are aware that only God can grant their wishes, while the ancestors simply help mediate (*tawassul*).

National cultural heritage and Islamic sites of reverence are both forms of public space. They are intertwined with national and regional political interests in a process of 'packaging of cultural material' (Cameron 2010). Worldly powers, such as Islamic organisations, royal houses and state agencies, gain legitimacy by controlling both the tomb of the Wali Songo and national cultural heritage sites.

However, the ancestors may avoid becoming incorporated into cultural heritage or Islamic sacred space by remaining outside of public space, in a sort of living room that they share with their pilgrims.

5. The participants were mainly middle-class and all defined themselves as Muslims who were neither critical nor-adherents to radical interpretations of Islam. They seemed to represent a random selection of 'ordinary' Muslims living in the semi-rural vicinity of Bandung.

The Voices of Ancestors: Mount Sunda

The following description is based on three visits I made to Mount Sunda between 2006 and 2015.[5] Mount Sunda is a collective name for nine different places believed to attract important ancestors of West Java. The mountain is located close to the impressive Tangkuban Perahu volcano, which is a popular tourist attraction. Mount Sunda, however, does not have a spectacular silhouette or conspicuous height. On the contrary, our guide on the mountain stressed its invisibility when telling us its story. Saying it has the capacity to conceal people and it was a place at which resistance fighters used to hide. There are even the remains of a crashed aeroplane somewhere on the mountain, she said, that do not show up on radar.

This invisibility has been threatened recently because a waterfall at the foot of the mountain has become a popular picnic spot for locals. However, it seems that few if any of the casual visitors take the time to make the three-hour trek up the hill to the pilgrimage site. This is perhaps understandable because although it is a beautiful place, it offers no particularly spectacular views. If one has no special interest in the place, there is little reward to be had from making the ascent.

A common reason pilgrims cite for climbing the mountain is to ask the ancestors for help to improve their living conditions. At the pilgrimage site ancestors possess the pilgrim leader and thus communicate directly with the pilgrims. The atmosphere at these events tends to be casual and straightforward rather than sacral or esoteric. The ancestors like to socialise, have a smoke and drink coffee. This form of pilgrimage - villagers meeting with ancestors at specific places - has been under heavy contestation for a long time, mainly by Islamic organisations that consider it to be a form of heresy. As described above, such pilgrimages have also been marginalised as a side effect of the growth of a national cultural heritage in which religious monuments and sacred places have become tourist attractions, where tickets are sold, regulations apply and souvenir shops are plentiful.

On ascending the mountain, the first structure that marks one's arrival at the pilgrimage site is the grave of Eayang Sepuh. When I accompanied a group of pilgrims, we settled for a while in a small hut before gathering at the grave to pray. Along with the prayers was a host of offerings consisting of incense, food, coffee, tea, biscuits, fruit, meat and rice. Our guide explained that the prayers and recitations from Al Quran were directed to Allah as prayers for the dead.

The offerings, on the other hand, are specially selected for the individual ancestors. Each ancestor has their preferences, such as a favourite sweet tea or particular kind of fruit, and it is important that the guide is familiar with these. Personal belongings, such as wallets, small bottles of oil, powder and make up were placed among the offerings to be blessed and bring good fortune, beauty, a fiancé, or whatever it was that the pilgrim was beseeching the ancestor for.

As we prayed, our guide asked Eayang Sepuh to help each of the pilgrims to achieve their goals and also mediated the voice of Eayang Sepuh to the gathering. Interaction with the ancestor seemed everyday and familiar. Although the pilgrims made their approach respectfully, the ancestor responded in an individual and intimate manner. For instance, during the initial prayer (*permohonan*) that was offered on our arrival, Eayang Sepuh paid special attention to me and guaranteed that although I was not a Muslim, it was alright for me to be there. Since he spoke only Sundanese but not Indonesian, he asked the congregation to translate for me. Communication throughout the rest of the séance was interspersed with jokes and asides by both the ancestor and the pilgrims.

Our guide told me that when she mediates the voice of Eayang Sepuh, she is no longer conscious (*hilang*) of what she is doing and her body becomes empty (*kosong*). Afterwards, she cannot recall any of the interaction with the ancestor. She also asked me to record a session in which one of the ancestors sang through her, using her voice. She wanted to hear herself singing since she was unable to sing in normal life.

Later that evening, I was invited to watch the ancestors eat. We hid in a small cabin and peered out between the planks. In the moonlight, civet cats came out from the woods and nibbled at the offerings placed at Eayang Sepuh's grave. People noted that the animals did not just throw themselves at the food indiscriminately as one might expect but made careful selections, thus revealing which ancestor was visiting by its special tastes. When I asked about the fact that these looked like animals, I was told that the ancestors choose to show themselves in forms that are familiar to us so that we will not be frightened.

In the morning, the group hiked further up the mountain and in less than an hour we arrived at the cave of Sang Kuriang, a mythological figure of great power from West Java. We all stripped down to our underwear (both men and women) and ventured into the cave to shower in the freezing cold water that was dripping from the ceiling and to collect mud and water to bring home because it has the power to heal, beautify and enhance the growth of crops. Although the pilgrimage included visits to other sites as well, this part was the peak of the experience for most of the pilgrims. Sang Kuriang was supposed to have meditated here and this made it one of the most powerful places on the mountain.

Our guide's exegesis on transcendental communication was based on a view of the ancestors as messengers who inform Allah about the pilgrims' wishes. However, the ancestor's identity is important. Different ancestors are approached depending on the nature of the wish and each dwells at a particular place on the mountain. The pilgrim leader knows the tastes of each ancestor and helps the pilgrims find the right spot to pray. It is therefore sometimes unclear as to whether it is an ancestor or Allah who is rewarding the pilgrims.

At the mountain, all the pilgrims - both men and women - live together in one room in a house. Although they may not have known each other prior to undertaking the pilgrimage, they cook, eat and sleep in the same house, far from the racket of everyday life. However, although this place is outside of domestic space, it does not belong to public space. Nor does communitas*,* in Turner's sense, prevail with no hierarchy or social structure. The atmosphere is more like that of a 'living room' that is shared with the ancestors. It is intimate but there is still respect and deference, as in a family.

The arrangement of the site roughly corresponds to the structure of a Sundanese house. Houses on West Java tend to have a reception room or 'living room' in the front part of the house (Wessing, 1978). This room can be used for relaxation but normally it is only used when there are guests. It is usually furnished with a sofa, armchairs and a vitrine cabinet. If many guests arrive, mats are rolled out on the floor for them to sit on. It is in this room that the famous *slametan* (also termed *hajatan* or *syukuran*) meals and *thalilan* recitations are held. The *slametans* (Geertz, 1960; Beatty, 1999) are collective ritual meals accompanied by prayers, recitations and small offerings and they are held on special occasions to ask the spirits to safeguard the local community. The *thalilan* are recitations from Al Quran that are held for seven consecutive days after a death and these too are concluded with a collective meal. In the living room neighbours, friends and family gather for important lifecycle events that begin with

recitations and prayers and sometimes offerings, and they always end with a meal. If women attend they usually wear their veils.

Further into the house are the bedrooms and the kitchen. These belong to a more informal part of the home, where women do not wear their veils. Family, close neighbours and friends wander casually in and out of this area and people take meals here, either together or when it suits them. The interaction is friendly and relaxed. Traditionally, a room called the '*goah*' (Indonesian for cave) at the back of the house was reserved for rice storage. The *goah* was associated with the rice goddess (Wessing, 1978) and with her power to provide life and livelihood (Soeganda, 1982), and offerings would be made to her in this room. This practice is no longer performed in modern homes although during rituals, such as weddings, a *goah* may be temporarily reinstated to store the large quantities of rice and other foods for the feast. When this happens, offerings are placed in the room and recitations are conducted to ensure that the feast is overseen by beneficent ancestors.

If one compares the structure of the home with that of the pilgrimage site, one finds striking similarities. The hut we stayed in corresponds well to the kitchen and interior of the house. There was a relaxed atmosphere, the women took off their veils and people cooked, socialised and wandered in and out as they pleased. The living room, in which one receives guests and holds ritual meals, has its counterpart on the mountain at the gravesite of Eayang Sepuh. This is a place for familiarity, but it is more formal and women wear their veils when entering it. Here, the '*permohonan*', recitations and formal 'presentations' are made by the pilgrims and social interaction with the ancestors begins. As in the living room of the home, here too recitations are completed and food is served and the ancestors arrive, like guests, to eat from the offerings. The grave is also positioned 'at the front' of this space and is the first 'room' in which the visitor is received.

Finally, there is the cave of Sang Kuriang. It is located furthest away from the grave and, like the *goah* (cave) in the house, is a source of prosperity and power. In both cases the caves contain life-sustaining power and house the most potent spirits.

However, the ancestors are not the only voices at the mountain. There are also Islamic voices. Each séance is introduced with recitations from Al Quran and virtually all pilgrims are adherents of Islam. During the month of *Maulud*, which is the most popular month for Islamic pilgrimages, I have been told that hundreds of pilgrims congregate at Mount Sunda.

On my last visit to the site, students from a *pesantren* (religious boarding school) and their *Kiyai* (teacher) were staying in the hut beside ours. They did not visit the graves but conducted *dzikir* recitations inside at night time. This gave rise to palpable irritation among the members of our group and one burst out, 'Why don't they stay in their *pesantren* since they aren't paying respect to the ancestors anyway'.

The form of interaction with spirits and ancestors that goes on at Mount Sunda is a version of syncretistic belief systems that has been described in the literature as *penghayat*, *kejawen*, *abangan*, *kebatinan* or *kepercayaan*. The present state of these belief systems is debated. They have undeniably been weakened, though while some claim that they are close to extinction (Hefner, 2011), others report that they remain prevalent in local communities on Java and elsewhere (Bubandt, 2014; Wessing, 2006; Bamualin, 2015). This article has shown that although local forms of traditional ancestor veneration may be waning, they are still practised but they have been withdrawn from public space.

Concluding Discussion

Reuter describes nationalist (Pancasila) ideology and Islamic revivalism as two cosmologies that are competing for 'the soul of the nation'. Prambanan and Panjalu are elements of the drive to create national cultural heritage in which plural cultural values are subsumed within a national notion of Indonesia. By contrast, the grave of Gunung Jati illustrates how the history of Islam may be interwoven with Javanese and thereby also Indonesian history. Here, the voice of Islam dominates in organising and regulating performance. It creates a form of Islamic cultural heritage based on and around a sacred place.

However, Prambanan, Panjalu and Gunung Jati are all public spaces in which the ancestors and other spirits have become marginalised as agents in their own right even though they may be represented. Neither Islam nor the national ideology of Pancasila deny the existence of transcendental forces. Both demand that citizens profess a religion and they recognise that Islam incudes a transcendental world inhabited by *jinns* and angels. However, there is clearly ambivalence about transcendental forces, including ancestors.

Pancasila makes no specific theological assumptions but non-governmental agents of power became marginalised in the process of forging national identity through museumification and heritagization of cultural traditions.

In the cultural heritage created by the state and at the Islamic sacred sites, the past is present as a didactic device for teaching history but also for awarding legitimacy to worldly powers.

Yet, there is a sort of continuum along which the voices of ancestors are more or less distant. At Prambanan and Panjalu, their voices are fading - the past is only evident as 'history' in a 'museum-minded' mode. The main actors here are the state and state agents, who control and therefore act as the trustees of the cultural heritage of the nation. At Gunung Jati, the wali ancestor is present but communication with him is strictly regulated. Here, the past is present as a constitutive part of today's political and religious landscape and the dominant voices are those of the Islamic *umma* and the local royal house. These are the voices that control the gap between this world and a transcendental reality and thus acquire legitimacy and power. However, at Mount Sunda the ancestors are able to engage in direct interaction with the pilgrims through mediums whose bodies become vehicles for the voice of the ancestor. Here, no worldly powers police the 'gap' between mundane and transcendental worlds and indeed there is no such distinction in the 'living room' of Mount Sunda. In this sense, Mount Sunda exemplifies a third way of 'past presencing'. The ancestors may be asked for help and their voices are heard. The past is present in the form of a social relationship through which individuals may hope for a better future though the power to intervene in mundane affairs rests with the ancestors.

The ancestors of Mount Sunda may not be competing for the soul of the nation but they help 'fulfil the cultural and economic aspirations of its citizens' (Reuter, 2014:177), and this adds a third dimension to Reuter's scheme of cosmological powers. Pilgrims may officially subscribe to Islam as well as Pancasila and they may visit both Islamic and national cultural heritage sites to learn more about religion and history. But they have little faith in the power of either of these ideologies to help them with practical problems in their daily lives. For help with these, they turn to a resource that has long been known to assist in times of distress - the ancestors.

On a mountain, 'hidden' from public surveillance, they create a 'living room' that they can share with the ancestors. This room is neither public nor private and exclusively for closest family. Both the structure of the site and the nature of the interaction between pilgrims and the ancestors illustrate this.

This article has used sacred sites on Java as a prism through which to explore contesting forms of power in Indonesia today. Two of these forms are trying to control public space while the third enables resistance not through confrontation but by remaining outside of public view. The irritation stirred among the pilgrims by the *pesantren* group's failure to pay respect to the ancestors was, I suggest, because this behaviour was read as a claim upon the site by moderate but nonetheless Islamic forces. Their actions betrayed the fact that they regarded the place as part of public space in which official Islam dominates rather than as a living room in which to engage with transcendental powers. In this way, the *pesantren* group threatened to deprive the place of the intimacy that enables interaction with spirits whose agency is no longer acknowledged in public space. If the site becomes Islamified, museumified and heritagized, it will no longer be possible to engage with the ancestors there - and this possibility evoked a strong reaction.

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