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Pilgrimage and Ancestors: the importance of return

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Drawing on ethnographic material from pilgrimages on West Java I argue that understandings of pilgrimage will benefit from including the return home in order to fully appreciate the meaning it holds for pilgrims. If we include into the study an extensive period after coming home, it facilitates situating the practice in a specific socio-cultural context and helps to understand how a pilgrimage partakes in these settings rather than being a ‘“one off” transient and extraordinary’ event (Reader 2005:249). The meaning of pilgrimage described in the paper is formed by deep seated cultural notions about ancestors and descent. In the paper this perspective is used to describe how a moral community founded upon shared experiences of pilgrimage and contact with ancestors emerged after the pilgrims returned home and how it sidestepped formal religious and political leadership.

Key Words: pilgrimage; return; West Java; ancestors

Introduction

In Indonesia, heated debates about traditions (Davidson and Henley, 2007; Henley and Davidson, 2008) and spirits have engendered ambivalence and anxiety among citizens regarding contact with ancestors (Buband, 2014). Despite these anxieties, personal pilgrimages to graves and tombs are becoming increasingly popular (Laksana, 2014). According to Pemberton, personal pilgrimages vary in two respects from traditional supplications to village spirits. First of all, they reflect ‘individual desires rather than community interests’. Secondly, pilgrims travel ‘to sites *outside* their own neighborhoods ... far from everyday life’ to acquire blessings and powers (Pemberton 1994:269). Although Pemberton’s observations are valid, some qualifications may be made using ethnographic material not only from the pilgrimage itself but including the period after coming home. After return, pilgrims followed on West Java tended to focus less upon their individual desires and possible rewards for undertaking a pilgrimage and more upon community and family interests. And, although they do travel to sites far from their home, the advices they receive from the ancestors are closely related to everyday social and economic life in their neighbourhoods. Since they no longer have the protection of village spirits and are sceptical of present day religious and political leadership, after coming home, some of the pilgrims in this study consolidated

the solidarity established during the journey into a new form of community. Individual experiences and desires became woven into a ‘community interest’ expressed in a collective relationship to a particular ancestor. Using this broader methodological lens on material from West Java, the article illustrates how we may better appreciate the way in which ancestors at pilgrimage sites are now taking over some of the protective and supportive features of the traditional village spirits (*dhanyangs*) and how they influence people’s everyday strategies when political and religious leaders fail them.

Methodology

The paper builds on intermittent visits to Java conducted between 2006 and 2018 with an approximate total of six months of field work. I participated in pilgrimages to several local places and also visited more popular sites, such as the tombs of the saints alleged to have brought Islam to Java. The specific case described in the paper builds on material collected together with a group of pilgrims with whom I visited Sancang on the south coast of Java. The group consisted of people from the villages around where I lived, so I conducted both formal interviews and took part in everyday conversations with the participants before and after the pilgrimage.

Argument and theoretical framework: The absence of return in the Anthropology of pilgrimage

Turner and Turner noticed the 'liminoid' character of pilgrimage as early as 1978. It is a social institution but voluntary. It has similarities with ritual activities and although having social ramifications an important goal for many pilgrims is to reach a 'deeper level of religious participation' (Turner and Turner, 1978:15) on an individual level. The importance of individual commitment is a recurring image in more recent studies as well (see e.g. Wheeler, 1999). However, few researchers have developed any sustained interest in how these experiences are managed after returning home.

The mobility turn is a development in pilgrim studies which carries with it a promise for a more extensive research not only on the path to pilgrim sites but also the return home. Gale places the mobility turn in pilgrim studies inside a broader 'post-disciplinary paradigm' (Gale *et al.*, 2015: 7) concerned with mobile practices ranging from cycling and walking, to tourism, transport and migration (see also Sheller and Ury, 2006). One way this new paradigm may influence the understanding of sacred journeys (such as pilgrimage) is a 'more (explicit) consideration of the *outcomes* of being on the move' (Gale *et al.*, 2015:8) and the 'moorings' of the pilgrim to, for example, 'home or "family"' (Gale *et al.*, 2015:9). However, when describing these concepts - moorings, home, etc- the empirical examples are taken from journeys searching for 'home or some other marker of identity (family, nation)' (Gale *et al.*, 2015:12) rather than an actual home or village. Although the importance of movement in the understanding of pilgrimage has been brought in, even after the publication of *Reframing Pilgrimage* (Coleman and Eade, 2004), seminal in introducing the mobility concept to pilgrim studies, neither preparations for, nor aftermaths of these movements have been systematically documented.

However, important exceptions such as Frey (1998), Gold (1988) and Fedele (2013) do exist. In her book *Looking for Mary Magdalene: Alternative Pilgrimage and Ritual Creativity at Catholic Shrines in France*, Fedele devotes a full chapter to the subject of Ending The Pilgrimage And Returning Home (Fedele, 2013:243-264). The experiences in many cases turned out to have profound repercussions in the personal lives of pilgrims and by that on others in their immediate vicinity as well. Yet, the effects of the pilgrimage were mainly conceptualised by the pilgrims

in terms of a deepened individual spiritual engagement.

Gold (1988) situates pilgrimage in village practices and the everyday life of the pilgrims she joins. Gold lived in a village before, during and after making pilgrimages with its inhabitants. In that way she is able to interfoliate narratives of pilgrimage with how symbolic and ritual behaviour resonate with cultural notions of death and rebirth spelled out in the everyday life and ritual occasions in the village. She describes the whole pilgrim circle from departing, until reaching the place and coming home, emphasising the importance of bringing boons and blessings in the form of mementos and relics from pilgrimage to the village. Showing how pilgrimages are connected to death, Nordin also notes the importance of bringing home supernatural blessings in Hindu Pilgrimage (2006:94, 186-187). In this way the quality of sacredness is brought home and distributed in the community.

Frey (1998) devotes a specific chapter to the return. As in Fedele's work, most of the stories told about going and coming home are personal, centred on individual experiences and transformations, although pilgrim associations are also established to exchange experiences of pilgrimage and to help future pilgrims. Written ten years after Gold's publication, Frey repeats that 'Oddly, most narratives, both academic and personal, end when the goal is reached ...' (p. 177).

Some years later, Ian Reader (2005, especially chapter 8) makes a similar observation in his critique of pilgrim studies being dominated by an engagement with pilgrimages as goal oriented and transient. Reader describes cases where people become permanent pilgrims and where the pilgrim experience had such a profound effect on their life that it became a life changing event. In order to better understand the reasons and the transformation of certain pilgrims into permanent pilgrims Reader invites scholars to consider

the extent to which pilgrimage is entrenched in the cultures that produce pilgrims and how it impacts on and influences the lives of those who become pilgrims (Reader, 2005:250).

Sallnow (1987) makes a similar analysis describing how pilgrimages in the Andes are integrated into communal conflicts, networking and ethnic status, where the 'divisive aspects' of pilgrimage are not a perversion of a 'fraternalistic ideal' (Sallnow, 1987:205) but part of the socio-cultural and religious structures the pilgrimage is situated in.

Pazos (2014) relates the focus on journeys to sacred sites 'rather than on the aftermath' to a tendency in scholarship to focus on the Christian context in which it developed, bringing with them a view where the sacred and the everyday are strictly compartmentalised. However, instead of the 'sacred' and the profane being differently sorted depending on cultural context, Pazos suggests that scholars have asked the wrong questions. Asking new questions about the 'aftermath' may help to understand not only more about pilgrimage in a general sense but also specific configurations in how the pilgrimage and the everyday, the sacred and the profane are compartmentalised, related and integrated.

So, bringing 'coming home' into pilgrim studies is not a new endeavour, but it is constantly identified as under-researched and under-theorised. In this paper I build on previous research to develop an analysis of how pilgrimage after coming home is integrated into collective efforts and how this can sustain a discussion and theorisation of pilgrimage as a cultural and socio-economic phenomena embedded in everyday life. I am taking my theoretical point of departure in the understanding of pilgrimages as part of a broader cultural context. My argument is that following the pilgrims back into their villages, homes and everyday life is where we can make the connection between the individual view of pilgrimage, and how specific cultural and social models influence and become part of the pilgrim experience. That way allows one to compare how pilgrimages in different societies are imbued with different meanings and experiences, guiding one how to 'use' and practice pilgrimage in a long term cycle. In Fedel's case it was the individual spiritual engagement that became strengthened and developed (similar to Reader's case). In the case described in this paper it is the community and solidarity in establishing a joint project that is the main outcome of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimages I attended were flavoured and formed by a specific relation to ancestors while the Christian pilgrimages described by Fedele are imbued with experiences of 'the sacred' and spiritual. These notions of a spiritual journey are neither a dominant feature nor an alien one to the Indonesian pilgrims I followed. Instead, they 'embedded' their experiences in a socio-cultural grammar structured by notions of community and family. Hence, comparing the 'outcome' and management of pilgrimage after coming home provide us with additional material to understand cultural differences in construing, practicing and using pilgrimage. I will return to this in the final discussion.

Political and Ethnographic Contexts

Ancestors (known, for example, as *karuhun*, *nenekmoyang*, *leluhur* or *eyang*^[1]) constitute an important part of political and social life in Indonesia.^[2] They are approached by politicians seeking political legitimacy as well by people seeking advice in personal matters ranging from economic problems to family and health issues. Bruinessen (2002) and Chambert-Loir and Reid (2002) describe occasions in which presidents have visited graves and shrines to pray before making important decisions. In 2015, the online journal *Intelijen* (Intelijen, 2015) reported that President Joko Widodo and his wife, Iriana, conducted ritual services at graveyards and on the south coast of Java (the residence of the mythological Queen of the South Sea).

At the same time, the very existence of ancestor spirits is questioned in religious as well as modernist discourses (Bubandt, 2014). There are strong forces that silence ancestor spirits either by condemning communication with them as heresy (see e.g. Bubandt, 2014:54) or, less directly, by converting pilgrimage sites and shrines into national cultural heritage sites (Hellman, 2013). Although traditions have become a cherished trope of national as well as regional identity, the presence of ancestors in rituals, festivals and communal events is declining.^[3]

This has deprived the village tutelary spirits (*dhanyang*) of their former responsibility for maintaining 'the welfare of the village' (Wessing 2006, p. 37). The military regime 1966-1998 (popularly known as Orde Baru, the New Order) orchestrated a 'shift in orientation' from tutelary spirits to the village administration as the primary focus for communal rituals as well as for hopes of safeguarding prosperity and well-being (Pemberton, 1994:240).^[4]

1. Non-English words in italics are Indonesian.
2. They are not necessarily ancestors in a strict genealogical sense but people of prowess one can turn to in times of distress. Ancestors are considered to be people who continue to be able to influence life after they have died.
3. They may be represented but are not invited through offerings, incenses or rituals of possession.
4. Discussing the ritual of *bersih désa*, Pemberton writes that, 'in former times it was a village's tutelary spirit(s) that provided a sense of well-being and gave the *bersih désa* its primary focus. Along with the shift to administrative concerns comes ... the relocation of the *bersih désa* from the site of the village's tutelary spirit to the seat of the sub-district administration, the village hall proper' (Pemberton, 1994:240).

Hopes of prosperity were no longer to be directed to the spirit community but to the nation state, whose duty it was to solve socio-economic problems. Hefner (2011:77, 87) testifies to the continuous demise of tutelary spirits and celebrations of village ancestors after the fall of Orde Baru. This political infringement upon the realms of the ancestors was reinforced by efforts to bring ritual practices and religious sentiments into the fold of the Islamic community (*umma*) (Sakai, 2002:114-115; Ricklefs, 2012:136-137, 169).

However, these processes have not stopped people from seeking advice and protection from spirits and ancestors. Indeed, pilgrimages to sacred sites are proliferating (Laksana, 2014:2) and

Unlike the increasingly marginalized practices associated with village dhanyang, ... many Central Javanese regularly perform vigils at sites considered spiritually endowed (Pemberton, 1994:269).

Consequently, although traditions are on display at rituals, festivals and in museums, the presence of ancestors in public life has become less pronounced.

Chambert–Loir and Reid’s book *The Potent Dead* (2002) provides a good overview of ancestor relations and communication in Indonesia. In the chapters on Java, there are two notable factors. The first is that ancestors are not usually familial or personal relatives. They are people of prowess, who are ‘regarded as more potent than others’ (Chambert–Loir & Reid, 2002:xix). Hence, people do not need to have a genealogical relationship to an ancestor to ask for help and this further increases their potential for popularity. Secondly, place is of great importance. All chapters deal with the construction and the significance of graves and holy places (*tempat keramat*). These sites are essential for any practice involving connections with ancestors. The graves function as an ‘access gate to [the invisible, parallel] world’ (Chambert–Loir & Reid, 2002:xxii, parentheses in original).

According to Chambert–Loir & Reid, interaction with spirits does not end with the visit to the grave. Ancestors ‘are involved in every activity of the living’ (Chambert–Loir & Reid, 2002:xix) and are ‘omnipresent in modern Indonesia’ (p. xxvi). To understand Indonesia is to understand the interventionist role of ancestors ‘in the well being of the living’ (p. xxvi) and that ancestors are ‘part of the conceptual framework within which modern society has to be interpreted’ (Chambert–Loir & Reid 2002:xxvi). However, if the seemingly contradictory

observations of ancestors fading out of public space and yet being ‘omnipresent’ in modern Indonesia is to be reconciled, we need to explore precisely how they intervene in Indonesian life today.

Given the importance of holy places (*tempat keramat*) on Java, described by Chambert–Loir & Reid (2002), it is logical that a pilgrimage (*ziara*) to someone’s grave is a favoured way to establish a relationship with ancestors. It acknowledges the existence and power of the ancestors but also provides a means to ask for help and advice.

Pilgrimage and return

In the pilgrimages I participated, the sites had not yet been made into a public cultural heritage. They were tucked away in mountains, by rivers and near the south coast, where the remains of graves had been left to deteriorate. Curiously formed rocks, trees and caves were often focal places of worship. At these sites, people would meditate and the pilgrim leaders often established direct contact with transcendental forces by offering their bodies to be controlled by ancestor’s voices. Offerings were chosen according to which ancestors one wanted to contact, and the pilgrim leader would inform the devotees of the spirits’ individual preferences. Although they are called ancestors, these spirits were not usually relatives of the pilgrims but were deceased, knowledgeable Islamic teachers or figures from the vast historical and mythological pantheon of West Java.

When I read through my material on fasting rituals and pilgrimage (Hellman, 2006:2011) it was clear that pilgrims visited graves in order to get in touch with specific spirits and ancestors that were supposed to be appropriate for particular issues. The motivations people gave to conduct a pilgrimage varied from a desire for religious education and mystical experience, to distinctly material goals. These could be anything from desires for political and social power, landing a job, or a spouse, to become pregnant, healing, a higher salary or luck with business. Performing a pilgrimage could bring benefits for the individual but it was also explicitly acknowledged as a way to enhance the opportunities for family and relatives. It was usually a family decision to send someone within the family on a pilgrimage, since pilgrimages are costly affairs, and require resources in plenty.

Coming Home: moving from an individual quest to community interest

During one of the fieldworks, I accompanied a group of men (aged 30-60 years) and their pilgrim guide Abah, all of whom came from my fieldwork area, on a pilgrimage to Sancang on the south coast of Java. Sancang is situated inside a nature reserve and has no traceable records (archaeological finds) of graves of a lost kingdom. However, Abah told us that this is where Siliwangi, the king of an ancient West Javanese kingdom known as Pajajaran, decided to disappear after dissolving his empire and it is also the place at which he will reappear in the future. During this pilgrimage we 'met' King Siliwangi several times. He possessed Abah and then talked for long sessions with the pilgrims. After these sessions Abah usually expanded on the words of Siliwangi and explained how he thought they should be interpreted. He has also written a manuscript about Siliwangi's life, as told to him by Siliwangi himself.

Siliwangi is a very popular figure on West Java, associated with a long-gone golden era of prosperity and justice. He was the king of Pajajaran and considered to be the last Sundanese kingdom on Java. All pilgrims explicitly identified themselves as Sundanese and this made the connection with Siliwangi even more profound and strong. Abah summarised his character by explaining that Siliwangi preaches compassion, solidarity with the powerless and the poor and living in harmony with nature. The pilgrims who joined this pilgrimage meet regularly on Thursday evenings at Abah's house, where he acts as the conduit for the voice of Siliwangi.

After coming home, the pilgrims talked with one another about the advice they had received from Siliwangi and discussed its relevance in their everyday lives. Many had asked for help in personal matters such as getting a new job, concluding a business deal, regaining health and so on. Their requests were not always answered with tangible gains but people often experienced that their lives improved because they began to be trusted more and they also felt they had greater opportunities and a better social life after their pilgrimage. All of those who had participated, testified in interviews that they had received some or all of what they had wished for. For many, this took a concrete form, such as job offers. One of the pilgrims was given a prophecy (*ramalan*) about his family economy that made him decide to try to continue with his failing marriage. Another noted how others had begun to view him with greater respect and this had opened up new

Fig.1. The rock in Sancang through which Siliwangi allegedly disappeared and will eventually reappear.



Source: Author

economic opportunities for him and his family. He believed this was a gift (*rejeki*) gained from the pilgrimage.

Although the pilgrimage was often talked of in relation to personal desires, when pilgrims returned home this discourse almost always became intertwined with the socio-economic life of a larger socio-economic network – the pilgrimage now became transformed into returns that benefitted the family and the broader community. Many pilgrims reasoned that pilgrimage did not necessarily reward the individual pilgrim but could bring boons in the life of anyone in that person's family or extended network and enhance their collective prosperity. A specific example of that is the greenhouse project.

The greenhouse project: establishing trust and a moral community

After we returned home from Sancang, interest in individual rewards from the pilgrimage faded from discussions and instead the idea of building a greenhouse emerged. The region in which fieldwork

was conducted is full of garden centres selling flowers and plants. Building one's own greenhouse for cultivating and selling flowers was generally viewed as a way to establish a secure income and good standard of living. This endeavour, described below, became a good example of how the experiences from pilgrimage and relations to ancestors influenced social and economic life after coming home.

To understand the driving force of the greenhouse project it is important to underline that the participants were all part of the same pilgrimage to Sancang and defined themselves in the terms of being 'The children of Abah' (*anak Pak Abah*).^[5] Abah was their pilgrim guide but also mentor and teacher. Abah is deeply engaged in Siliwangi's story and his legitimacy as a guide for the pilgrims clearly stems from his ability to communicate directly with this spirit. From these encounters, he teaches about the values of care, solidarity and equality. His influence stems essentially from his personal relation to Siliwangi and his ability to mediate Siliwangi's voice and values.

Some of those who joined the pilgrimage worked at various garden centres and they would often be found in the afternoons at one of the centres together with their friends who worked there. One day Toto, a fellow pilgrim to Sancang, stopped at my house and suggested that we visit a nearby garden centre. It turned out that several of the men who had taken part in the pilgrimage to Sancang and belonged to the pilgrim guide's network used this as an informal meeting spot. It was at these meetings I took part in not only their discussions and reflections on the pilgrimage but also their plans to build a greenhouse.

At the garden centre, we sat down to chat and the conversation soon moved towards what they had learned from making the pilgrimage to Sancang. Didin made a lengthy comment on how fanatical (his expression) Islam was becoming throughout Indonesia and he said that those who follow this trend do not feel compassion for others in the way Siliwangi teaches. He cited the example of a poor Christian neighbour, whom everyone except Didin's own family spurned and despised. Greed, envy and egoism signify our time, he said. Everyone agreed that for many Muslims and their leaders, Islam is simply professed in words without taking on board the essence of the teachings. They had learned from Abah, who in turn had been informed by Siliwangi, that Islamic values emanated from West Java and had later spread to the Arab world. They concluded that they should pay attention to and practice the teachings of Abah / Siliwangi since this

was the pure source of Islam. They reasoned that reading the Al Quran or listening to Imams was not enough to gain a true understanding of the moral and ethical implications of the teachings. They believed they must move beyond Islamic scriptures in order to understand the true values of the religion and for them this meant visiting Sancang and talking to Siliwangi.

They also stressed the fact that King Siliwangi had consciously chosen not to leave any archaeological traces of his kingdom behind. Citing examples of famous Indonesian tourist attractions, they argued that if he had, then the site would have been targeted for restoration and ticketed access and this would have kept poor people (in which they included themselves) from visiting. They held that the lack of material traces was a sign of Siliwangi's compassion for the poor and his ability to see into the future and realise the effects of his deeds. He always cared about the poor and vulnerable, which also transpires in Abah's written manuscript about Siliwangi's life and history and in this sense he stood out as a moral role model in contrast to today's leaders.^[6]

A theme that recurred in their conversations was social inequality and the neglect of the burdens of the poor by today's political and religious leadership. This, they said, goes against the words of Siliwangi, who preaches solidarity, care and equality. They all struggled with daily trials and problems that they tried to solve and felt they had received no help from the political or religious communities. These values of caring for the poor and showing solidarity soon had a practical outcome.

Several of these ideas (about solidarity between the poor and Islamic morals as a form of practice) came together in the idea of the Greenhouse Cooperative. They repeatedly noted the significance of being Abah's children and through him connected to Siliwangi – and just as Siliwangi took care of the poor in his kingdom, they too must take care of each other. Cooperatives have a long history in Indonesia (Henley, 2007) and the members could easily have chosen to base their cooperative on ideas taken from Islam, development projects (NGO) or liberal economics. However, they chose to weave their plans into their meetings with

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5. Pak is a shorthand for Bapak, meaning father and is a way of addressing similar to Mr.
 6. This skepticism towards the ability of state powers and religious authorities to uphold order and prosperity is mirrored in research from other parts of Indonesia as well (e.g. Telle, 2011).

Fig. 2. The Greenhouse.



Source: Author.

Siliwangi at Sancang and the ethics of Pajajaran as they understood them from these encounters. During the meeting they named the cooperative Nature for All but agreed to consult Abah about this later.

A core value for the project was trust and all understood that the group members must be trustworthy. Each agreed to make a contribution but their individual economic circumstances differed so everyone had to accept that the sizes of these investments would differ. This meant that solidarity must be built on something other than equal risk taking. They also knew that the statutes and rules they applied to the cooperative would not hold in any court of law. Indonesian courts are notoriously corrupt (Hamilton-Hart, 2001) and none of the participants had sufficient resources to pay for a court process anyhow. So there had to be another base for solidarity and trust. This is why the group chose to include only people from the Sancang pilgrimage, all of whom defined themselves as Abah's children, and Abah would be the adviser (*penasehat*), of the project. They all shared this respect for the teachings of Siliwangi on the importance of solidarity.

They soon realised that each would have to contribute according to their ability rather than with a fixed sum. They decided to set aside 10% of their current salaries to contribute to the project. Hopefully, the money would be enough to build the greenhouse and buy plants. The revenues from the greenhouse would then go back to a deposit that would function as a bank for the members in the project. The gardening business was booming at the time and this led to high expectations about possible future revenues. In this way, the greenhouse came to intertwine the hopes and dreams of the members with the power and wisdom of ancestors.^[7]

All the stories people told during the weeks of working on the greenhouse project were related to Abah, experiences of Sancang and the inspiration provided by Siliwangi. Everything to do with the greenhouse project, including its name, related to Abah, Sancang

7. In the subsequent weeks, the greenhouse was completed and filled with plants. However, a few years later the market had collapsed and so too, the greenhouse.

and Siliwangi. In a sense, the pilgrimage was seen as leading to and yielding the greenhouse revenues but their narrative also concerned their own circumstances as vulnerable people with hopes and dreams about solidarity among those who are marginalised in the mainstream economy. True pilgrimage meant contact with Siliwangi, which provided the pilgrims with a sort of fictive genealogy (as children of Abah) and this implied a special bond that extended beyond the immediate experience of merely a pilgrimage.

Discussion: bringing the ancestors with them into social life

Although the greenhouse project was not explicitly a religious or ritual activity, the spirit of Siliwangi had a strong influence on its formulation. At first, I did not realise why the pilgrims stressed their status as *children of Pak Aba*, but after a time it became clear that they were shaping an ideal of a morally committed community – solidarity based on commitment to the norms and values communicated to them by Siliwangi through Abah. Also, the fact that Abah was so close to the powerful Siliwangi made the king too part of the project. This taken together meant that if anyone was to breach the norms of the community, the consequences would be as dire as those of breaking off a relationship with a family member. The project was a way of putting Siliwangi's words into practice, and the experience of being in a close relationship with Siliwangi created the basis of trust between the members. They saw themselves as Siliwangi's poor relatives, who must take care of each other as he had taken care of his subjects. Their project and the idea to thus implement the norms and values of Siliwangi's teachings were made possible by the comradeship they had established during the pilgrimage.

The greenhouse project demonstrated that ancestors have a presence in society that goes beyond rituals and visits to sacred places. However, due to dominant religious and political discourses, this presence is rarely spoken of openly (c.f. Bubandt, 2014). On one occasion, I mentioned to a friend my observation that the ancestors were largely absent from rituals and that they seemed to have lost their power. His response was that 'maybe they have not disappeared but people are just silent about them', which recalls how an informant had responded to Pemberton some twenty years earlier

(Pemberton, 1994:266). The ancestors are still here, although in another realm. The problem is talking to and about them. As an informant explained to Wessing:

it may be that the dhanyang has not so much been left behind, but rather that people are afraid to speak of such things due to pressure from more purist Muslims (Wessing, 2013:117).

They are a source of hope and empowerment although it becomes imperative that they be concealed. This creates an awkward situation of a hidden presence.

When economic and moral corruption is so widespread that it is generally 'known' that you cannot trust those in power, the ancestors become an important alternative. They help consolidate relationships according to known social patterns for coping with risks and challenges familiar to the pilgrims – solidarity with a guardian spirit and kin-like relations. The pilgrimage established a community of fellow pilgrims and ancestors modelled on everyday social relations, as became evident in the greenhouse project. When other forms of solidarity, through political parties, unions, consumer organisations and so on are weak and the political as well as religious leadership is distant from everyday life, the ancestor community emerges as a viable alternative for generating solidarity. This is aided by the fact that ancestors, unlike most of the typical run-of-the-mill leaders, are happy to meet with people in person.^[8]

Communication with ancestors may be ritualised, especially when establishing contact. However, once contact has been established, people present their troubles to the ancestors by bringing them into familiar social contexts rather than through communal rituals.

Pemberton pointed out that as tutelary spirits became more marginalised, building relations with spirits becomes more personalised. Personal relations with ancestors are therefore probably nothing new. In the villages I lived there were no communal rituals held for a spirit or ancestor (like the *Bersih Desa*), or communal shrines to celebrate a village founder. In this regard, my findings substantiate Pemberton's observation. However, the individualised relations established with ancestors at pilgrimage sites tend to have taken over some of the protective characteristics of the tutelary spirits. They are helping people to get jobs, start businesses and so on. The ancestors seem to be well attuned to what is necessary for prosperity,

8. Cf. Telle (2011, 58) on the way spirits of the past 'irrupt' into the present to provide protection in times of disorder when mundane powers are considered too weak to provide security.

well-being and protection in a modern world. Also, although desires were voiced in terms of individual wishes, there are no clear-cut divisions between the individual and the collective. The greenhouse project embedded individual needs in collective solidarity and the material gains of an individual would also enhance the prosperity of the whole group. Similarly, when 'personal' wishes for a job or business deal were expressed, an individual's success would inevitably influence this person's broader socio-economic networks and this kind of collective good was explicitly noted by the pilgrims.

Compared to, for example, Fedele's description of how pilgrim experiences led to a more profound view of the transcendental world which in turn led to transformations of either their personal character or appreciation of the sacred (or both), the pilgrims to Sancang 'embedded' their experiences in a different mode / idiom, more influenced by familiarity and descent. The point is, that it is not until the pilgrimage is written into everyday life that its full meaning transpires (also for the pilgrims). That is when and where they have time to reflect upon their experience and that is done in relation to cultural models and entities such as descent and solidarity in the Sancang case or personhood and the sacred in Fedele's case.

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