The Osing Agricultural Spirit-Medium

Le médium des esprits en milieu agricole osing

Robert Wessing
The Osing Agricultural Spirit-Medium

WESSING Robert *

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the performance of various agricultural rituals in East Java, e.g. the seblang dance (Wessing 1999) or the keboan ritual (Siswanto & Prasetyo 2009), one person that takes center stage, but at the same time remains in the background, is the pawang or dhukun, the man who mediates between the community and the spirits of both the community’s founder and the nature spirit(s) that are thought to control the fertility of the soil, and thus the community’s welfare.¹ His functions include not only the leadership of those annual rituals, but often also the conduct of smaller, but no less important rituals conducted at various times at the rice field. In fact, in the literature he is often known under various titles that relate to these latter functions.² Among the Osing of the Banyuwangi area he is most often called the jaga tirta or modin banyu, the guardian of the waters.

In both the seblang and the keboan rituals, the pawang must be a descendant of the founder of the community. The reason for this is that the rituals originated in an agreement between the nature spirit-owner of the land and the founder of the community: in exchange for permission to use the soil, the spirit-owner was given certain privileges and guarantees, the latter including the annual rituals described here.³ In return the spirit-owner became the community’s tutelary spirit (Jav. dhanyang) that guaranteed the fertility of the fields and the welfare of the community. Thus, although in many places this role is now in decline, the pawang ideally represents the founder, and his or her descendants, vis-à-vis the spirit world.

* Robert Wessing (ret.) received his PhD in anthropology in 1974 from the University of Illinois in Urbana, IL (USA). His research, conducted in West and East Java, Aceh, and Madura, has dealt primarily with symbolism, as well as with the social implications of belief systems. He has published numerous articles, as well as the books Cosmology and Social Behavior in a West Javanese Settlement (1978) and The Soul of Ambiguity: the Tiger in Southeast Asia (1986) and a lengthy article “A Community of Spirits. People, Ancestors and Nature Spirits in Java”, Crossroads (2006: 11-111). His curriculum vitae can be found at www.robert-wessing.com. He may be reached at robertwessing@yahoo.com.
SOUTHEAST ASIA

An important article on the role of the founder’s line in Southeast Asia was written by F.K. Lehman:

[...] the original and ultimate owners having dominion over the face of the land are the spirit lords commonly associated with more or less prominent features of the landscape. What is rather more particular to this part of the world is the idea that when the first human settlers began to clear any given tract of land, they had to make a contract with these spirit lords. This contract ensured that there would continue to be communication between the two parties as long as both sides lived up to the requirements of that contract. The exclusive right to serve as mediators between the lords and human settlers is supposed to pass to the hereditary heirs and successors of the original founders of the settlement, in perpetuity. This is the very essence of the founders’ cult. (Lehman 2003: 16.)

As Bellwood (1996: 25) observes, especially the leaders of the founder’s line, sometimes characterized as the “Source of the Domain”, tended to occupy central political positions in the community. Thus, Hayami (2003: 134) writes of the Karen of Thailand that the hi kho or village head is the exclusive mediator with the spirits, though as we will see this does not everywhere mean that he is the administrative leader. Rather, she emphasizes (2003: 136, 139-40), his is a ritual claim as he was the first man (or the patrilineal descendant of the first man) to open the forest in that location, and establish a relationship with the “Lord of the Water and Land,” the guardian spirit of the place. It was this man’s ritual capacities that brought fertility and prosperity. Similarly among the Akha of Northern Thailand, the village ruler (dzôma) is a man close to the source of the community’s potency, who is “responsible for the channeling of proper fertility [...] to the village” (Tooker 1996: 332-3). Further afield, e.g. in India and as far away as Madagascar, similar relations exist (Stutley & Stutley 1984: 345; Bloch 1985: 640).

In Indonesia the relationship is widespread as well. Among Sakuddei of Mentawai humans make offerings to the spirits and request their permission to exploit the jungle “in accordance with the primordial agreement” (Schefold 2002: 427), while according to the Kerinci of Sumatra the founder even married the forest spirit (Bakels 2000: 114, 172). In South Sulawesi spirits own the land and assure its fertility in exchange for offerings (Buijs 2006: 45, 112). Similarly among the Toraja the indo padang is a “rice-priest” or “mother of rice,” who is the ritual specialist in charge of the fertility of the rice, and whose ancestors are said to have originated the rituals for rice (Coville 2003: 87, 89, 95). Finally, nearer to Java, in Bali, an official called the pasek is in charge of the “cult of the earth” on which the success of the harvest depends (Bertling 1955: 27). An especially important part of his tasks is making sure the people obey the prohibitions on felling trees and unlawful harvesting, as well as controlling the use of water. This last makes this man the equivalent of the Osing jaga tirta mentioned earlier. Examples from other areas of Indonesia could be added, but it should be clear that throughout the area the relationship between a representative of the founding line and the tutelary earth spirit was seen as vital to a community’s welfare. However, before considering the data from East Java and the Osing, I want to first look at the discussions concerning the wali puhun of West Java. The position
of the **wali puhun** is among the better documented in the literature, and can be seen as paradigmatic for the problem I am discussing here.

### Wali Puhun

Among the Sundanese of West Java, the expert in agricultural rituals is called **wali puhun**, a person who is in contact with the spirits and the origin of rice⁵ ([Prawirasuganda 1964: 126](#)). Kern (1924: 585) calls him the “original agricultural priest,” the man who knows the proper formulas and offerings, and when these must be made (Hardjadibrata 2003: 880). The first part of his title, **wali**, is both interesting and convenient. According to Prawirasuganda (1964: 126) and Rosidi et al. (2000: 692) in Old Javanese (Kawi) this word indicates a shaman or ritual specialist (*dhukun*). Furthermore, as Kern (1924: 584) writes, in several Indonesian languages **wali** also means spirit, while **walian** indicates a shaman or priest. Thus, Kern continues, **wali** can also indicate the person who is temporarily possessed by a spirit, or who is him or herself temporarily a spirit. At the same time, however, in today’s Islamic context the term **wali** means guardian (Dutch: *voogd*),⁶ especially of a bride at her wedding, which returns us to one of the various names the **pawang** is given in the literature: *grondvoogd* ([cf. Bertling 1955: 27, 40](#)). However, as Ter Haar (1946: 67) observes, because this person “is, as it were, the embodiment of the magic-religious relationship between the group and the land, he often functions as the magician during land [agricultural] ceremonies,” i.e. the **pawang**.

The second term of the **wali puhun**’s title, **puhun**, is interesting as well. Coolsma (1911: 480), Eringa (1984: 600), and Hardjadibrata (2003: 643) gloss **puhun** with origin, source, or cause, which is similar in meaning to **wiwitan**, which also means beginning or origin (Eringa 1984: 843; compare Robson & Wibisono 2002: 814, Hasan Ali 2004: 492, and Zoetmulder 1982: 2345).⁸ An interesting light is shed by the Iban usage of the word, which next to source or origin includes the notion of the trunk of a tree.⁹ As Sather (1996: 81-2) writes, “**pun** typically describes the person who […] originates an action [and] […] reflects an image of Iban leadership. [It] […] represents the locus of continuity, the ‘stem’ through which the continuing life of any permanently constituted social group is thought to flow” (see also Fox 1996: 6), e.g. a founder or founder’s line. The term **puhun**, then, includes the notions of elder, origin, and spiritual leader, especially in connection with agriculture, and mainstay of the social group, which, as an informant in West Java suggested, brings us to the term **pu’un**, the leader of the most sacred, inner settlements of the Kanekes of Banten (West Java).¹⁰

As proposed by Wessing and Barendregt (2005), the people of Kanekes see themselves as the guardians of the relationship between ruler of the ancient state of Pajajaran and the nature spirit and the forces of nature with whom the ruler of this state had a “founding” agreement. As part of these duties, they guard against indiscriminate felling of trees and other infractions against nature, the **pu’un** haranguing occasional offenders, especially where it concerns the spirits’ grove ([Djoewisno 1987: 36](#)).¹¹ In other words, the **pu’un** is the Kanekes version of the *grondvoogd* or **wali puhun**. He is indeed said to be a lineal descendant of Batara Tunggal, the male apical ancestor

---

⁵ [Prawirasuganda 1964: 126](#).
⁶ [Kern 1924: 585](#).
⁷ [Cf. Bertling 1955: 27, 40](#).
⁹ [Sather 1996: 81-2](#).
¹⁰ [See also Fox 1996: 6](#).
¹¹ [Djoewisno 1987: 36](#).
Robert Wessing

Moussons n° 22, 2013-2, 111-124


Although the pu’un is said to be the leader of the Kanekes community, he is so more in a ritual than in an administrative sense (cf. Rosidi et al. 2000: 533; cf. Ter Haar 1946: 63, 67). Administrative matters, including relations with the world beyond Kanekes are handled by another man, the jaro tangtu or jaro gupernemen, who is, in fact, also said to be a village head (cf. Hardjadibrata 2003: 348-9). The tasks of the pu’un, then, are internal to his community and encompass relations with the spirit world and with nature, especially agriculture (cf. Berthe 1965: 220). Since these powers of fertility lie outside the community, the location of the shrine to the tutelary spirit is most often on the edge of the hamlet (see Wessing 2003: 438-9).

Throughout Southeast Asia, then, we find ritual leaders, either the community’s founder or a successor, whose task it is to maintain relations with the world of the spirits on whom the welfare of the community is perceived to depend. There are, of course, many local variants, but generally they conform to the parameters sketched here. One reason for this variation, aside from cultural differences between communities far removed from each other, is that the spirits involved tend to be quite local. This means that even neighboring communities will have different tutelary spirits with their individual, idiosyncratic preferences and demands—except for daughter settlements, which often maintain an allegiance to the tutelary spirit of the mother-village (cf. De Stoppelaar 1927: 31; Hayami 2003: 138). In addition, the local founder is, of necessity, a local figure as well, again with his or her individual eccentricities.

Given that the agreement between these two individuals shaped local rules of behavior, we can speak of customs (adat) as being specific to a place (Wessing 2001: 53 note 12; compare Hayami 2003: 140; Bertling 1955: 26). Thus, although there is, of course, a broad similarity between the customs of different communities, the local specifics define each one and its members as belonging together, creating “a world ruled by its own specificity and attuned to possibly unknowable logics […]” (Pemberton 1994: 237). These local specifics include sacred rules of conduct laid down by the ancestors, the observance of which tends to make the participants into local, religious communities, the boundaries of which are ritually guarded by the descendant of the founder (cf. Korn 1932: 79-86, 196; Hayami 2003: 134). It is his and his community’s responsibility to ensure that the territory within the community’s boundaries remains pure, e.g. that deviations from the adat (custom) are prevented or punished (Korn 1932: 80-81; Wessing 2010: 61-3).

This community unity importantly included agricultural activities, this being the ritual leaders’ area of expertise. The initiation of ploughing for the next planting season was not something a farmer would decide on his own. Rather, the time for it was determined by the ritual expert who mediated between the people and the gods (Kreemer 1956: 173). Planting, and thus also the harvest, was a coordinated community effort. As Hall (1999: 205) notes, it was advantageous to coordinate the planting of the fields of farmers who depended on the same water source. This would distribute demand for water over time and space and avoid unnecessary conflict. Those in charge of this coordinated distribution, whom Hall (1999: 205) characterizes as “members of special lineages” were influential and powerful people in their
communities as it was not just the water but also access to the local spirit powers\textsuperscript{17} that fell under the jurisdiction of these people.

This coordination continued into colonial and post-colonial times. According to informants in the Priangan area of West Java,\textsuperscript{18} until the early 1940s agricultural activities, including the supply of water, used to be regulated by government officials. Individual fields were part of blocks that performed the agricultural rituals together. Elsewhere, e.g. in Bone, Gowa, or Aceh, local rulers (\textit{raja} or \textit{sultan}) would take precedence and have their fields ceremonially ploughed, after which the commoner farmers would follow (Kreemer 1956: 178; Wessing 1988: 179). Similar coordination by the \textit{jaga tirta} of planting (and thus also of the harvest) took place in the Banyuwangi area of East Java, where it was said to have lasted until the mid to late 1960s.\textsuperscript{19}

East Java

In the above I have sketched an ideal model of the relationship between a descendant of the founder and a place’s tutelary spirit. In the local communities, however, this distinction is not always clear and the community’s founder may occasionally be referred to as the \textit{dhanyang} (tutelary spirit), implying a merger between the founder and the tutelary spirit, something that is, again, found throughout Southeast Asia (Mus 1975: 15-6).\textsuperscript{20} Thus, as early as 1926 De Stoppelaar called the community’s founder a \textit{dhanyang} (1926: 416, note 2) something I found as well in various communities in East Java. Thus in Kampung Sagat, the focal hamlet of a village of the same name, people pointed at a grave as the location of both the community’s founder (\textit{cikal bakal} or \textit{pembabat}) and the \textit{dhanyang} (tutelary spirit). Both the founder and the tutelary spirit were unknown, and the guardian of this grave (\textit{juru kunci}) could only tell that the grave already lay there when the community was founded. The people assumed that it must belong to the person who first opened the land there, and thus it came to be venerated. In Druju, in the Blitar area of East Java some informants stated that the \textit{dhanyang} was something the old people had believed in, though others continued to venerate the old spirit. Here too the place of the founder and the spirit were the same, though this time both resided in a banyan tree.

Elsewhere too, e.g. in Aliyan, one location of the \textit{keboan} ritual, the distinction seems to have at least partially collapsed. People there still venerate and distinguish the grave of the founder and realize that there is a tutelary spirit as well, but in conversation do not distinguish between them, calling the founder a \textit{dhanyang} (compare Pemberton 1994: 263, note 30). One reason for this may be, as Heffner (1985: 75) observed in Tengger, that people tend “to ‘ancestralize’ even territorial spirits”.\textsuperscript{21} Thus in Olehsari, one of the \textit{seblang} villages, informants spoke of the \textit{dhanyang} as a person rather than a \textit{bangsa alus} (spirit). Another reason could be that daughter hamlets retain an allegiance to the mother-village’s tutelary spirit, as was mentioned above. These daughter hamlets would then have a founder but would lack their own tutelary spirit.

Change

Throughout East Java these days there is often considerable reluctance to speak of the matters outlined here, people mentioning outside influences as the cause (cf. Beatty 1999). These influences tend to be a combination of Islamic pressure to discontinue
the associated practices, and political as well as economic developments. Islam has, of course, a long history in East Java, sometimes even encouraged by the Dutch colonial powers (Sri Margana 2007: 244, 282; Beatty 1999: 14-16) in their effort to counter Balinese influence in the region. However, the process of Islamization of the East Hook was far from uniform, and even in 1923 Lekkerkerker (1923: 1030) wrote of this area’s “singular position” in that people in the Blambangan area continued to adhere to their Hindu beliefs. In 1840, Lekkerkerker continues, the village of Cungking near Banyuwangi was still fully Shaivite, while remnants of even pre-Hindu beliefs retained their foothold there longer and more pronouncedly than elsewhere. Thus, this was not a form of purist Islam, but rather existed next to or in interaction with the earlier beliefs in spirit-powers and the ability of certain people to control them. As recently as 1991 a pawang in the Banyuwangi area observed to me that with the arrival of Islam, Java had lost its yoni (female generative power; Zoetmulder 1982: 2365). Yet, Islam had a considerable impact, as can be seen in the changes of the titles of Osing village functionaries mentioned earlier (De Stoppelaar 1927: 12-4).

Since 1991 there has been considerable pressure toward a more strict observance of Islamic rules. Although some claim not to follow the old adat anymore, and to “leave everything up to God,” this pressure has not been entirely successful. Local interpretations and practices still abound, often to the dismay of both local and regional Islamic authorities that say that the old rituals are devil worship and that the ritual sites are places where the devil resides (tempat setan). Yet, others continue to ask the dhanyang and the ancestors to intercede with God: “the dhanyang is an intermediary between the people and God, like [the saint] Nabi Khidir” [Khidr], the Muslim saint associated with water.

These local practices are, of course, not all the same, because, as was mentioned earlier, the local practices depended on the interaction between the local tutelary spirit and an individual founder. Unlike Islam, these local cults do not have an overarching theology and religious literature against which local practices can be judged, even though their basic pattern is broadly the same throughout the area. This situation continues, even though since the end of the Suharto regime the voice of Islamic purism has tended to become more dominant, leading people to less openly join in celebrations of the relationship with the tutelary spirit. Again, this is not uniform, but the pressure is certainly there.

The influence of Islam, however, has not been the only factor causing changes in people’s relationship with the spirits. Equally important have been political developments, and changes in rice agriculture. The first of these was the necessity that the communities interact with the state of which they were part. As we saw, among the Kanekes this task was carried out by the jaro pamarentah, and elsewhere also similar functionaries existed. In dealing with colonial and later Indonesian governments, these office holders (lurah, now kepala desa) increasingly gained power, especially as the position of the jaga tirtha declined in the face of Islam. As Bowen (1995: 1066) observes, people become entangled in the identities, including religious ones, placed upon them by the political centers.

In Java this process was accelerated by the troubles of 1965 (G30S), which lead to the advent of the Suharto regime. After these troubles many traditional practices and celebrations were banned because it was feared that they were either associated with
the Indonesian Communist Party or that they might have political implications. Long breaks in these celebrations combined with Islamic pressure and the policy of the Suharto regime to “folklorize” these local events has lead to a decline in belief in their efficacy.

Perhaps equally important have been the changes in rice-growing technology since the late-1960s and the early 1970s. At this time quick growing rice varieties were introduced that increased the harvests to up to three crops a year, which in turn lead to a change in the agricultural cycle. Rather than relying on area-coordination, farmers now began to plant and harvest their fields individually as it suited them. Informants pointed out time and again that as a result the role of the jaga tirta as mediator between the farmers and the spirits went into decline (compare Buijs 2006: 118, note 2). This does not mean, however, that rituals through which to assure a successful crop have ceased. Rather, the entities addressed have changed, or at least have had their names changed. These days, rather than making offerings to the tutelary spirit or penunggu sawah (guardian of the field), the object of veneration is said to be Dewi Sri, the rice goddess who embodies fertility in general.

Yet others claim to ask God directly for rain and a good harvest, though sometimes still at the pepundhen, the dhanyang’s residence. Here and there the founder and the dhanyang are seen as intermediaries to God. At the same time, the rule that the officiant of the ritual should be a descendant of the founder has changed to “a person capable of carrying out the task,” occasionally even a kiai (Muslim elder).

CONCLUSION

As the tutelary spirit has variously merged with the rice goddess, a Muslim saint, or has been “marginalized in deference to God” (Pemberton 1994: 241), the rule that rituals must be carried out has changed as well. Many now neglect to do so, and the rule that harvests must be dislametri (ritually safeguarded), that offerings must be made at the rice field, or even that God must be thanked, is said by many to have become a matter of individual choice. With these changes the idea of the hamlet or village as a religious community also seems to have fragmented, a process that continues today (Beatty 1999; Wessing 2002). As Beatty (1999) points out, differences in conviction are mostly quietly passed over, with people displaying appropriate behavior while having their own opinion.

The marginalization in deference to God that Pemberton posits is as yet incomplete, as is clear from the various understandings outlined above. As an Osing informant put it, 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. After all, he continued, “these days much is under the control of religion [Islam].” People likely still know about these things but are reluctant to speak of them. In appropriately vague terms, the pawang may appeal to Bapa Kuasa, the one with authority in the community who often looks much like the dhanyang but also, as Rato (2007: 20) writes, like God (Bapa Angkasa; Yang Maha Kuasa) (compare Rato 1992: 69). In the words of a 40-ish Osing lady, spirits, ancestors, and God are really only different words for the same thing, They belong together and all come from God, and which one appeals to is a matter of choice and judgment (Wessing 2010: 118, note 2).
And thus, although the jaga tirtha may have become a modin banyu, appeals to the powers that control community welfare continue under various guises. In East Java, in the villages where agricultural rituals still continue to be performed, albeit sometimes under considerable stress, knowledge of ancestral and tutelary spirits continues to remain clear, and the pawang continues to be an important person, even in the face of Islamic opposition.

Notes

1. It would be tempting to gloss the terms dhukun or pawang with shaman. However, unlike the classical shaman (e.g. Rasmussen 1958), these men do not undertake soul-journeys. Rather they control and direct the powers present at ritual occasions for the benefit of the community.

2. These often seem to be descriptive titles adopted by the authors of the various books and articles. Thus Van Akkeren (1970: 13) speaks of a dukun sawah or dukun tani (rice field or farmer’s ritual specialist), while Bertling (1955: 35) writes about a grondpriester (land-priest), Coville (2003: 95) discusses the rice-priest, and Van Vollenhoven mentions the grondvoogd (Bertling 1955: 40) and tuinpriester (garden-priest). Also found in West Java are dukun nurunan (De Bie 1901: 21–2), the ritual specialist who gets the rice-spirit to descend into the crop, and wali puhun, the guardian of the crop. The last will be discussed at greater length later. See Kruyt (1903: 373–408) for the same variation in terms used to indicate the man ritually in charge of the crops.


6. Wali, of course, also means “friend of Allah”.

7. Among the Osing this also happened, the term dhukun banyu having been changed to modin banyu, in which modin is the title of an Islamic religious functionary (De Stoppelaar 1927: 12–14). De Stoppelaar further explains the participation of a modin in agricultural activities by referring to the part previously played in agricultural activities by dhukun (1927: 14). Among the Toraja of Sulawesi the similar role of the indo’ padang (“mother” of the land) is one of guardianship as well (cf. Coville 2003: 93).

8. See wiwitan beginning, first, main. Agama Sunda Wiwitan the religion of West Java that has been least influenced by religions and culture from elsewhere (Rosidi et al. 2000: 25).

9. Among the tasks of the wali puhun is the construction of a pupuhunan or sanggar, a structure containing offerings to the rice goddess of goddess of fertility, as well as the saying of prayers at crucial stages in the growth of the rice crop (Coolsma 1911: 480; Kern 1924: 581; Pleyte 1905: 87; Wessing 1978: 117–9)).

10. In the literature these people are also known as Baduy, though they prefer the term Kanekes after the name of their main hamlet (Danasasmita & Djatisunda 1986: 1).


12. These days this government liaison is also called jaro pamarentah (Barendregt & Wessing 2008: 559). Compare the ritual position of e.g. the Karen (Thailand) hi kho vis-à-vis his administrative counterpart, the “headman […] who is the administrative leader in the Thai government hierarchy” (Hayami 2003: 146). Similarly the Akha dzöma focuses on the inner, ritual workings of
his village, in contrast with the “more externally oriented decisions of the headman” (Tooker 1996: 332-3). For Bali see Korn (1932: 151, 192).

13. This is symbolically indicated by the restricted access to him and his house at the upper edge of the hamlet (Barendregt & Wessing 2008: 559).

14. The fertility aspect of their role is further accentuated by the fact that the pu’un as well as the wali puhun must be married (Barendregt & Wessing 2008: 559); Geise (1952: 68); GAA (1990a, 1990b). During the harvest, the female protective spirit of a Kanekes hamlet is married to Batara Tunggal, the male origin spirit of the people of Kanekes (Jacobs & Meijer [1891: 37]). For elsewhere in Indonesia see Bakels (2000: 114) and Coville (2003: 89).

15. Compare the position of the Thai Chau Phau on the edge of the village (Tambiah 1970: 265). See also the location of the Toraja so’bok at the rice fields: “Seemingly, he does not have any status. Nevertheless, the entire society watches what he is doing” (Buijs 2006: 112). Beatty’s (1999: 84) conclusion that the marginal position of the tutelary spirit is due to the influence of Islam is thus probably in error.


20. Platenkamp (2007: 105) relates how a defeated people in Halmahera, the Moro, “walked backward into the forest”. We can read this to mean that they acted like spirits, e.g. had lost their humanity and were merging with the spirits, which are often characterized as having back-ward facing feet (compare Wessing [1986: 84, 88 note 8]). As such, by merging with the spirits, the adat they had been practicing became even more the adat attached to the place.

21. See the depiction in human form of Indian yaksa (Stutley & Stutley [1984: 345]).

22. In West Java, too, Islamic elders gained dominance, leading to the rise of the wali puhun and the decline of the punuh (Wessing 1978: 79).

23. See for instance the conflict between the Klakah office of the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) and the organizers of the local Maulid Hijau celebrations in the village of Tegalrandu. These latter are a form of “folk Islam” that seem to contain elements of the veneration of the local tutelary spirit, something that is considered takhayul (superstition) or sesat (deviant) by more strict Muslims. See Jawa Pos 21 January 2008, p. 31; 30 January 2008, p. 31; 31 January 2008, p. 29, 39; 2 February 2008, p. 31; 4 February 2008, p. 38; 5 February 2008, p. 31; 12 February 2008, p. 32; 23 May 2008, p. 32.

24. Rituals dealing with these spirits are primarily oriented on the ever-decreasing forest, and Muslim opposition to them can perhaps be seen as part of the ever-progressing “farmification” of these communities (cf. Eaton 1993). In some areas of West Java the forest is also the place of the ancestors, who thus become associated with fertility (Rikin 1973: 17).


26. See the novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk by Ahmad Tohari (2007).

27. This was the reason that the keboan ritual in Alasmalang was banned between 1965 and 1990. As a result people of this community started having visions while others became possessed, speaking with a spirit’s voice and threatening the welfare of the community (Siswanto & Prasetyo [2009: 96–7]).

28. See also Pemberton (1994: 240) on the cooptation of local customs into government agendas.

29. This also happened in Central Java where, as Mr. Bambang Samsu of the Universitas Jember pointed out to me, the idea of a spirit-owner of the agricultural land faded in the early 1970s, at the time of agricultural intensification (BIMAS).
Although Henninger (2004: 49) observes that such beings are not necessarily personifications but are rather references “to the trepidation inspired by whatever is mysterious and awesome”—here fertility.

Sekarang kan banyak dikuasai oleh agama.

References


DJOEWISNO, MS, 1987, Potret Kehidupan Masyarakat Baduy, Jakarta: Khas Studio.


MUS, Paul, 1975, India seen from the East. Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa. (Tr. and ed. I.W. Mabbett and D.P. Chandler), Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University [Monash Papers on Southeast Asia No. 3].


RATO, Dominikus, 1992, Buju’ dan Asta: Persepsi Masyarakat Madura Sumenep Terhadap Kuburan Keramat, Jember: Bidang Kajian Madura, Universitas Jember [Seri Kertas Kerja No. 18].


Moussons n° 22, 2013-2, 111-124


Abstract: In the past communities in East Java coordinated their agricultural activities, including fulfilling the people’s ritual obligations to the tutelary spirit charged with maintaining the fertility of the community’s lands. The person in charge of this was the community’s founder or one of his/her descendants, the member of the line that first entered into a relationship of obligations with the spirit-owner of the village’s lands. In the past fifty years political, agricultural, and religious developments have brought about changes in the way that these ritual obligations are fulfilled. Today the entity addressed, if the old ritual obligations are met at all, is often characterized as the rice goddess or God. This is facilitated by the idea that spirit-entities belong together categorically, and the aspect emphasized depends on the needs of the moment.

Le médium des esprits en milieu agricole osing


Keywords: agricultural ritual – East Java – founder’s line – Islamization – jaga tirtha – modin banyu – Osing – Southeast Asia – tutelary spirit.