The Politics of Religion in Indonesia

Syncretism, orthodoxy, and religious contention in Java and Bali

Edited by
Michel Picard and
Rémy Madinier

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Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series

The Politics of Religion in Indonesia

Indonesia is a remarkable case study for religious politics. While not a theocratic country, it is not secular either, with the Indonesian state officially defining what constitutes religion, and every citizen needing to be affiliated to one of them. This book focuses on Java and Bali, and the interesting comparison of two neighbouring societies shaped by two different religions: Islam and Hinduism.

The Politics of Religion in Indonesia examines the appropriation by the peoples of Java and Bali of the idea of religion, through a dialogic process of indigenization of universalist religions and universalization of indigenous religions. It looks at the tension that exists between proponents of local world-views and indigenous belief systems, and those who deny those local traditions as qualifying as a religion. This tension plays a leading part in the construction of an Indonesian religious identity recognized by the state. The book will be of interest to students and scholars of Southeast Asia, religious studies and the anthropology and sociology of religion.

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Preface

The politics of *agama* in Java and Bali

The present volume focuses on the appropriation by the peoples of Java and Bali of the category 'religion', through a dialogic process of localization of 'world religions' and globalization of 'local religions'. While the issues are framed in terms of the relations between the 'local' and the 'global', globalization should not be viewed as impacting the local from the outside, as it is always localized. Furthermore, it is invariably mediatized by the state and its religious politics.

In Indonesia, the category 'religion' has been appropriated in terms of '*agama*'. A Sanskrit loanword, *agama* combines a Christian view of what counts as a world religion with an Islamic understanding of what defines a proper religion – a prophet, a holy book, and a belief in the One and Only God. Accordingly, Indonesian religious politics can be labelled – to borrow Sven Cederroth's felicitous expression (Cederroth 1996) – '*agama*ization', or more generally, 'religionization', implying that adherents of indigenous religions are 'not yet religious' (*belum beragama*) and therefore are expected to be 'religionized' (*agama*ized).

In this respect, our working hypothesis is that, in Java as much as in Bali, there exists an ongoing and shifting tension between proponents of local world-views and customary ritual practices, who consider them as both self-sufficient and deserving the label *agama*, and advocates of a translocal religion of foreign origin, having a claim to universalism, who commonly deny those local traditions the qualification of *agama*. Such a tension plays a leading part in the construction of an Indonesian religious identity recognized by the state.

In Part I, the chapters on Java explore the relations between Javanism, a universalist religion such as Christianity or Islam, and the Indonesian state. Rémy Madinier and Andrée Feillard deal with the issue of the Javanization of Christianity and Islam respectively. Robert Hefner and François Raillon pursue this matter by questioning the enduring persistence of Javanism vis-à-vis the political and religious resurgence of Islam. Whereas Hefner documents the decline of the *abangan* tradition, Raillon stresses the remarkable comeback of Pancasila in the *Reformasi* era.

In Chapter 1, Rémy Madinier recounts the strategy designed in the late nineteenth century by the Jesuit missionary Franciscus van Lith to turn Catholicism into a Javanese religion. Drawing a lesson from the failure of European Protestant missionaries to impose Christianity on the Javanese by severing them from their spiritual roots, van Lith chose to include Catholicism in a syncretic process that his reformed predecessors and competitors had unsuccessfully sought to obliterate. Furthermore, by avoiding compromising the religious authority of Christianity with the colonial political dominance which he thought would not last, van Lith's educational and political action contributed to the recognition of a religion of colonial origin in independent Indonesia. His missionary work was carried on by a generation of Javanese whose conversion to Catholicism permitted social and political emancipation. By supporting the struggle for independence, these Christian elites were entitled to play a crucial role in the confrontation between the Islamic and the nationalist groups that resulted in the Pancasila ideology.

While Rémy Madinier addresses the Javanization of Christianity, in Chapter 2, Andrée Feillard assesses the accommodation of Islam to Javanism. In this respect, it is commonly held that traditionalist *ulama* are more accommodative than the reformists to local traditions. Her chapter sheds new light on this question by examining the traditionalist *ulama*'s stance on Javanese pre-Islamic traditions in the 1930s, in reports in one of Nahdlatul Ulama's official publications, *Berita Nahdlatoel Oelama* (*BNO*). It appears that Nahdlatul Ulama has a very exclusive definition of religion: only the 'religions of the Book', based on divine revelation, qualify as *agama*. This strict definition of *agama*, combined with the idea of the 'ripeness' of Islamic teachings that are never to change, makes Islam superior to all religions. Moreover, the *BNO* gives little thought to Javanese traditions – whether *adat*, Javanism, spirits cults, or pre-Islamic rituals. However, it shows a fierce intransigence against 'customary law' (*hukum adat*), which the Dutch colonial authorities were favouring to the detriment of Islamic law, arousing the ire of the *ulama*. Thus, from the analysis of the *BNO*, the Nahdlatul Ulama appears as an instrument of Islamization rather than as a proponent of accommodation to local culture.

In Chapter 3, Robert Hefner pursues this topic further by investigating the decline of Javanism, with the near disappearance of the *abangan*, and assesses its implications for Indonesian religious politics. Where bits and pieces of syncretic traditions of public Islam have survived, they have done so only on the condition that they be redefined as 'custom' (*adat*) or 'culture' (*budaya*). These native varieties of Islam have been displaced by an Islam organized in a more standardized and deterritorialized form as 'religion' (*agama*). In this respect, the Islamization of non-standard Islam is part and parcel of a broader process of 'religionization', that is, the reconstruction of localized spiritual traditions with reference to religious ideals and practices seen as normative, universal, and incumbent on all believers. Contrary to what might be expected, though, the shift from *abangan*ism to normative Islam has not been translated into support for Islamist political programmes.

Nor has it homogenized Indonesian Muslim religious culture, which remains surprisingly pluralistic.

Whereas Robert Hefner documents the decline of the *abangan* tradition, in Chapter 4, François Raillon stresses the remarkable comeback of Pancasila in the *Reformasi* era. As a reaction to advances made by pro-*sharia* activists, a coalition of civil society supporters, bearers of Javanese culture, and liberal-minded politicians, joined forces to restore the ideological power of Pancasila, which for a while had been rejected because of its instrumentalization by Suharto. Previously seen as a domineering system blending diversity in a Javanese mould, Javanese syncretism is tentatively refashioned as an inclusive system that fosters pluralism without trying to melt its components. This re-engineering of Javanese culture enables the dressing-up of Pancasila with the latest version of Javanism: from an authoritarian, Suharto-like, centralistic and feudal formula to a pluralist one. Yet, despite a consensus on the wording of Pancasila, there is still no common understanding of how it should be interpreted.

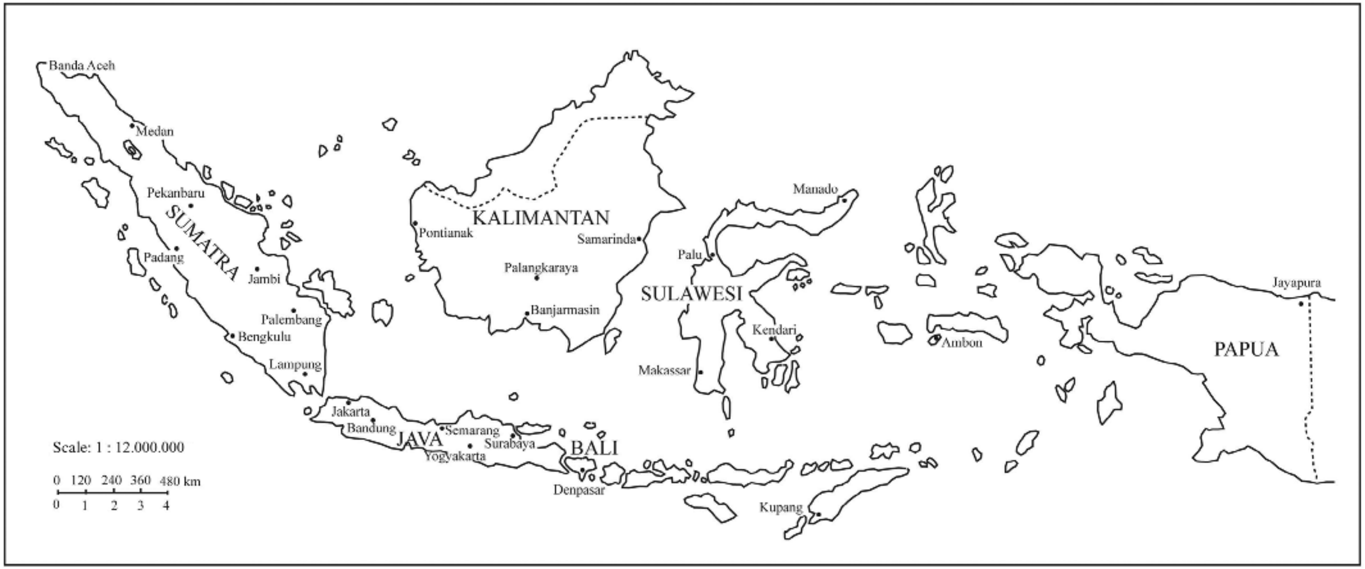
While the issues addressed by the chapters on Java revolve around the relationship between Javanism and Pancasila, on the one hand, Islam and Christianity, on the other, in Part II, the chapters on Bali weave in various fashions two recurring questions. First, what are the respective spheres of *adat* and *agama*? And, second, how is Balinese religion related to Hinduism? Michel Picard and Andrea Acri assess the degree of continuity or discontinuity between Balinese religious traditions and the official *Agama Hindu*. Although they proceed from different perspectives and defend differing opinions, their conclusions are not as irreconcilable as might appear at first blush. Annette Hornbacher documents one specific outcome of the transformation of local traditions into a universalist religious doctrine, that is, the disappearance of trance-possession from temple rituals. As for Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, she investigates the post-Suharto blurring of boundaries between *adat* and *agama*, and their increasing amalgamation with politics.

Drawing on the debates among Balinese regarding their religious identity, in Chapter 5, Michel Picard addresses the contemporary Hinduization of the Balinese religion, while retracing the shifts in the conflicts opposing the Balinese who aspire to reform their religion by conforming it to what they think ‘Hinduism’ (*Agama Hindu*) is about, to those who want to retain the specificity of their own religious traditions (*Agama Hindu Bali*). The latter are accused by their opponents of promoting an exclusivist religion, confined by the parochialism of Balinese culture, instead of truly embracing *Agama Hindu* as a universal religion. Yet, if it is indeed a way to legitimize traditional Balinese religious practices, the return to *Agama Hindu Bali* is much more than a withdrawal into Balinese parochialism on the part of diehard reactionaries. Its promoters are actually revoking the process of universalization of the Balinese religion, by relocalizing it. In this respect, the resurgence of *Agama Hindu Bali* marks a return to the original acceptation of *agama*, untainted by its Islamic and Christian accretions, when ‘religion’ (*agama*) had not yet been separated from ‘tradition’ (*adat*).

In contrast to the majority of the anthropological studies that stress the discontinuity between Balinese religious traditions and the official *Agama Hindu*, construed as a shift from ritual to text, from orthopraxy to orthodoxy, Andrea Acri maintains in Chapter 6 that the pre-modern Balinese religious discourse was already characterized by a text-based theological perspective of Indic derivation. Drawing upon the Old Javano-Balinese *Tutur* literature, regarded as the scriptural basis of Shaivism on the island, he attempts to show that some of the distinctive features of modern Balinese religious discourse can be traced back to the pre-modern past. From this perspective, the shift from polytheism or ancestor cults to the worship of an abstract, unique almighty God, originating from the efforts of the Balinese reformers, is not attributable solely to the influence of Christianity, Islam and Neo-Hinduism. Acri proposes to regard the resulting official *Agama Hindu* as a development along 'Neo-Hinduized' lines of the localized text-focused elite tradition derived from Indic Brahmanical Shaivism, which was already opposed to the daily embedded worship of the commoners.

In Chapter 7, Annette Hornbacher probes into the current disappearance of trance-possession from the public temple rituals in Bali. She argues that possession does not just disappear as a side-effect of global modernization and rationalization but has been actively marginalized and even suppressed by a new class of religious authorities. In Bali, possession is a performative self-representation of ambivalent divine beings, who enter a human body in order to communicate directly with the worshipping community. Since it makes the course of rituals unpredictable, possession opens the fixed liturgical order of static orthopraxy to creative innovation via flexible interpretation and reflexivity. The decline of ritual possession is to be understood in the context of the challenge to the traditional hierarchy by intellectual commoners advocating the transformation of local traditions (*adat*) into a universalist religious doctrine (*agama*), that can be taught and learned by everybody. As a result, both secret scriptures and ritual possession are being sidelined within the official discourse of Balinese religion that aims at the normalization of Indonesian Hinduism, because both threaten the authority of new intellectual elites, by enabling an interactive representation of religious knowledge.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin investigates how the post-Suharto conflation of *adat* and *agama*, and their increasing amalgamation with 'politics' (*dinas*) have led in Bali to what she calls 'spiritualized politics': while provincial and national leaders make conspicuous use of temples and rituals for their own political goals, influential temple organizations have developed strategies that aim to attract leading politicians. In Bali, the *Reformasi* has thus led to a re-emphasis of *adat* and *agama*, and a de-emphasis of *dinas*. People's perspective has turned towards their own region and locality and less to structures, processes and problems that bind them to Indonesia as an encompassing political and social body. And even though the national government claims *agama* as its own domain, the way the laws on regional autonomy are interpreted and implemented in Bali shows that the local understanding of *adat* includes religion as well. As a result, the socio-political processes that currently take place in Bali are characterized by the blurring of boundaries between *dinas*, *adat* and *agama*, on the one hand, and the establishment of new boundaries, along the lines of ethnicity and religion, on the other.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Map 1 Map of Indonesia (courtesy Ade Pristie Wayho, École française d’Extrême-Orient, Jakarta)

Introduction

'*Agama*', '*adat*', and Pancasila

Michel Picard

In the past few decades, consistent criticism has been levelled against the prevalent assumption of the religious studies discourse – the universality of religion as a distinct domain of human societies. Instead of being a universal and *sui generis* phenomenon, 'religion' emerged as a specifically Eurocentric category, and a contentious one at that.[1]

Indeed, 'religion' is neither a descriptive nor an analytical term but a prescriptive and normative one. Originating in the Roman notion of *religio*, it was appropriated by early Christian theologians, who radically shifted its sense and reference by uprooting it from its 'pagan' framework (Sachot 2007). To the Romans, *religio* was what *traditio* is all about, a set of ancestral practices developed by a people and transmitted over generations.[2] As there are different peoples, so are there different traditions. As a set of practices, the predicates 'true' and 'false' are not applicable to a tradition. By claiming to be the true *religio*, Christianity counterposed its doctrines to the prevalent practices, rejected as a set of false beliefs. This distinction between true and false religions marks a semantic shift characterized by a scriptural turn, a substitution of text for ritual, of orthodoxy (allegiance to a normative doctrine) for orthopraxy (respect for ancestral rites) (Assmann 2003).

Generalized in a secular garb by post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment thinkers, the Christian conception of 'religion' became a scholarly construct with the development of the so-called 'science of religion' (*Religionswissenschaft*) (Sharpe 1986). What is at issue, as a result, is the fact that the category 'religion' is too imbued with Christian theological concepts and values, as well as with Western modernity, to have a cross-cultural or a transhistorical relevance. Consequently, 'religion' – just like other folk categories such as *din*, *mana*, *tao*, *dharma*, *bhakti* or *agama* – should not be taken for a conceptual tool, but ought to be the object of analysis (Saler 1993).

Whereas 'religion' is a category to its own participants in the Western context, in other contexts, it is a category constructed by the observer from a variety of practices which the actors do not necessarily combine into a coherent institution and for which they usually do not possess a corresponding word (Cohn 1969). However, the fact that 'religion' is 'a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture' (Smith 1998: 269) does not imply that it is 'solely the creation of the scholar's study' (Smith 1982: xi), since members of other cultures have appropriated the word 'religion' – or its local equivalent(s) – to define some of their practices as differentiated from others.

The colonial encounter with other peoples gave rise to the extension of the category 'religion' from a very specific meaning located in Christian revealed Truth to a generic concept with universal applicability (Fitzgerald 2007). For centuries, Europeans had a conventional ordering for categorizing the peoples of the world. They recognized 'Christians', 'Jews', 'Mohammedans', and 'heathens', rather than different religions. This convention declined during the nineteenth century, to be replaced by a list of 'world religions' that could be compared with one another as particular instances of the universal genus 'religion' (Masuzawa 2005). The common assumption of Western scholars was that these world religions must have essential similarities to Christianity in terms of which they were assessed: they were expected to have formal structures of fixed doctrines, resting on canonical authority, be enforced by a priestly hierarchy, and sustained by congregational worship. In that sense, world religions were considered 'advanced' religions, as opposed to more localized religions, regarded as 'primitive' or 'animist'.

The spread of world religions in the nineteenth century resulted in the formalizing of the rites and tenets of Asian traditions into something resembling the belief systems and institutional structures of Abrahamic religions, bringing forth such entities as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and so on. Reformers emphasized the rational and doctrinal elements in their religious inheritance, condemning blind superstition, mindless priestcraft, and backward customs. By substituting orthodoxy for orthopraxy, these reform movements attempted to discriminate between true 'religion' and mere 'tradition'. As they expanded their global reach, these normative forms of belief demarcated their boundaries and consolidated their corporate identity, while endeavouring to control the variegated rituals and observances which they encountered. Such a process of 'religionization' resulted in a complex evolution, marked by rationalization – the formulation of a canonical corpus, its institutionalization and its effective socialization (Hefner 1993) – as well as by secularization – desacralization of the immanent concrete in favour of an abstract and transcendent divine (Hefner 1998) – along with scripturalization and standardized practices.

Thus, if it is indeed true that 'religion' is not a native category, one has to acknowledge that it has become the case on account of the colonial encounter and the broader Western influence across the world, which induced the native interlocutors of colonial administrators, Orientalists and missionaries to invent for themselves the idea that they too had a proper 'religion'. The result being that, nowadays, religion scholars study peoples who consider themselves to 'have a religion'. What remains then to be studied is the dialogic process by which Western representations of non-Christian 'religions' are being negotiated, adopted or opposed, by members of non-Western cultures.

As a category, ‘religion’ is a classificatory device, which has to do with the construction and maintenance of boundaries. Accordingly, one should pay attention to the practical work that the use of ‘religion’ as a taxonomy accomplishes, that is, both what it includes and what it excludes (Asad 2001). Specifically, one has to be aware that what counts as ‘religion’ for the observer might not correspond to what local actors themselves consider to pertain to their ‘religion’. Furthermore, these local actors do not necessarily concur regarding what their ‘religion’ is about, as ‘religion’ is a contested matter, having to do with institutionalized values and their relation to power and its legitimation. Consequently, one should elucidate what is identified and legitimized as ‘religion’, by whom, for what purpose, in which circumstances and under which political conditions. In this perspective, the relevant question is no longer ‘What is religion?’ but ‘What gets to count as religion and why?’ (McCutcheon 2004).

In Indonesia, the category ‘religion’ has been appropriated in terms of ‘*agama*’. Many, if not most, Indonesianists appear to take for granted that *agama* is but a word-for-word translation of ‘religion’. However, things are not so straightforward, as *agama* covers a much narrower semantic field than ‘religion’ does, for which Indonesians had to borrow the Dutch loanword *religi*. In truth, *agama* is the peculiar combination in Sanskrit guise of a Christian view of what counts as a world religion with an Islamic understanding of what defines a proper religion: divine revelation recorded by a prophet in a holy book, a system of law for the community of believers, congregational worship, and a belief in the One and Only God.[3] In this respect, *agama* is a point of contention between different sets of actors. Moreover, far from being autonomous, *agama* is an integral part of a semantic field which it composes along with the categories *adat* (‘tradition’), *budaya* (‘culture’), *hukum* (‘law’), and various signifiers involving political authority.

Agama, from India to Indonesia

In his study of Sanskrit in Indonesia, Jan Gonda has this to say about the appropriation of *agama*[4] in the Archipelago:

> In Sanskrit *agama*, apart from other use, designates ‘a traditional precept, doctrine, body of precepts, collection of such doctrines’; in short, ‘anything handed down as fixed by tradition’; it is, moreover, the name of a class of works inculcating the so-called tantric worship of Shiva and Shakti. In Old Javanese it could apply to a body of customary law or a Dharma-book, and to religious or moral traditions, and the words *sang hyang* ‘the divine, holy’ often preceding it emphasize its superhuman character. The term is, moreover, used to signify the religious knowledge of a brahman … , and also that of a high Buddhist functionary. Islam, in the spread of which many compatriots of Shivaists and Buddhists who had led the way into the Archipelago took an important part, adopted

> the term, and so did, in the course of time, Christianity. Nowadays *agama* … is in Javanese, Malay etc. 'religion'.
>
> (1973: 499–500)

Surprisingly few authors appear to have wondered how a Sanskrit loanword so laden with Indic references could have come to designate an Islamic conception of what 'religion' is about. One of them is Jane Atkinson (1987: 174–8), who has attempted to trace the historical development of the term *agama* into what she called the 'Indonesian civil religion'. However, she did not specify why it is precisely the word *agama* that came to stand for 'religion' in Indonesia. That fact was attributed by Judith Becker to the paramount importance in medieval Java and Bali of the *Shaivagama*, the sacred scriptures of the Shaiva-Siddhanta order in South India (Becker 2004: 16; see also Brunner nd).[5] Yet, this still leaves many questions unanswered, since in Shaiva-Siddhanta *agama* does not signify 'religion', a notion which in any case was actually unknown to the Indian world before the nineteenth century.

We are on firmer ground if we turn to the 'legal' acceptation taken on by the word *agama* in Old Javanese. On that subject, we can refer to Javanese and Balinese textual traditions bearing the generic title *Agama*, a term 'used to refer to a range of texts dealing with moral, religious and legal sanctions and practices' (Creese 2009: 242, note 2; see also Hoadley and Hooker 1981, 1986). These texts are principally drawn from the Sanskrit *Manava Dharmashastra*, the 'Laws of Manu', interpreted and adapted to suit indigenous needs. The basic premise of Hindu law is in the idea of *dharma*, which pertains both to the natural order of the cosmos and to the duties and privileges bearing on the individual according to his status (*varna*) and stage of life (*ashrama*) – the *varnashramadharma*.

This is also how the Bengali historian Himansu Bhusan Sarkar interpreted the word *agama* in his study of *Indian Influences on the Literature of Java and Bali*, published by the Greater India Society (Sarkar 1934). His chapter on 'The Agama or Dharmashastras of Indonesia' is divided into two headings, the *Niti* literature, which expounds ethics and religious ideals, and jurisprudence. He deemed significant that the Indian term *Agama*, which refers to a *Shastra* handed down by the gods, has been retained in the Javanese and Balinese law codes, which are predicated on the fiction of a divinely ordained set of rules, with Shiva featuring prominently as the propounder of their authority.

This is precisely the taxonomy that had been adopted by Balinese literati when the Dutch colonial government opened in 1928 a foundation dedicated to the collection and study of the Balinese manuscripts – the Kirtya Liefrinck-van der Tuuk. In the catalogue of the Kirtya library, *Agama* refers to legal and political literature, corresponding to the Indian *Dharmashastra* and *Nitishastra* (Kadjeng 1929). The most important of these texts (*Adi-agama*, *Agama*, *Purwa Agama*, and *Kutara Agama*) were translated into Balinese and

Malay at the behest of the colonial government, in order to be used as legal foundation by the courts of justice established in each of the former Balinese kingdoms.

Thus, we see that in Bali the word *agama* has retained a sense equivalent to that of *dharma* until well into the twentieth century. In India itself, a shift in the meaning of the word *dharma* had taken place among the educated Bengali elites early in the nineteenth century, as a consequence of the missionary activities and the European presence. According to Wilhelm Halbfass:

> The self-definition of Hinduism as a 'religion', as a *dharma* which confronts and asserts itself against the *dharma* of the Christians, and more generally the use of *dharma* as an analogue or answer to 'religion', is largely due to the fact that the missionaries in Bengal laid claim to the concept and term *dharma*, using it to proclaim Christianity as the 'true *dharma*' (*satyadharma*). In contrast, the use of the Islamic concept of religion *din* as an Arabic-Persian analogue to *dharma* had no comparable consequences.
>
> (1988: 340)

In these trying circumstances, the Hindu *dharma* became one religion among others, and it could thereafter be compared and opposed to the Muslim *dharma* or the Christian *dharma*.

We can surmise that, in the manner of what occurred to the notion of *dharma* in India, the 'legal' and 'religious' components of *agama* became dissociated in Indonesia when, through its adoption by Islam and later on by Christianity, *agama* took on the meaning of 'religion'. By appropriating this term, proponents of both these faiths had added new acceptations to it, namely a belief in one almighty God and the requirement of conversion to a foreign doctrine whose teachings are contained in a holy book. Subsequently, a sharp distinction was drawn between 'heathens' and 'true believers'. During the later period of Dutch colonial rule, *agama* became associated further with an ideal of social progress, while 'pagan' beliefs were scorned as superstitions and viewed as a cause for shame.

By taking on the meaning of 'religion', *agama* was not only dissociated from 'law' but also from 'tradition', which was one of its original senses in Sanskrit. In contemporary Indonesia, the notion of 'tradition' is glossed as *adat*, an Arabic loanword commonly translated as 'custom'. Yet such rendering does not do justice to the importance of *adat* for Indonesian traditional societies, which is aptly conveyed by Hans Schärer regarding the Ngaju in Borneo: '[*Adat*] certainly means more than simply usage, custom, habit … the notion has a double meaning. Firstly, that of divine cosmic order and harmony, and secondly, that of life and actions in agreement with this order' (Schärer 1963: 74). In this respect, the meaning of *adat* comes close to that of *dharma*, being both a description of the world and a norm on which to base social life.

This scope, simultaneously cosmic and social, of *adat* was fragmented by being subjected to a series of reductions. First of all by Islam, followed in this respect by Christianity, which endeavoured to curtail the religious dimension of *adat* by confining its significance to the customs and traditions of a people (*adat kebiasaan*). Specifically, the word *adat* entered the language of Islamized populations in the Indonesian Archipelago to refer to indigenous 'customary law' as opposed to Islamic 'religious law' (*hukum*, *sharia*). Subsequently, Dutch administrators codified the indigenous customary law (*adatrecht*) of the various peoples on whom they had imposed their colonial empire.

This is how *adat* and *agama* have come to mutually define each other in contemporary Indonesia, each category being continually redefined through the process of their interaction.[6] Whereas formerly the semantic field of *agama* overlapped with what Indonesians have come to label *adat*, today 'religion' tends to be countered to 'tradition' – particularly so in those societies which have been Islamized or Christianized.[7] The historical emergence of the category *agama* and its interpretation as 'religion' thus amounts to its differentiation from the category *adat*. This is to say that it is only by looking at these categories in relation, rather than assuming their autonomy, that their respective fields can be adequately circumscribed and analysed.

Now, it has often been remarked that Indonesian traditional societies had no word that could be translated as 'religion'. It is then usually claimed that traditional beliefs and practices were subsumed under the word *adat* or one of its cognates. However, *adat* should not be seen as a pristine tradition originating with a distant and indigenous past, as the fact that its very name is an Arabic loanword indicates. Moreover, it is this same term which is used elsewhere in the Muslim world to refer to customs that have no explicit Islamic legitimation (Bruinessen 1999: 167). That being so, and since they mutually define each other, neither *adat* nor *agama* have had constant and independent meanings, as these categories appear to have evolved jointly.

In Indonesian traditional societies, there is no separation between religion and ethnicity, no differentiation between a religious and a secular sphere of experience. No clear-cut distinction is made between the natural and the social worlds, the human and the non-human, the transcendental and the immanent. The main purpose of the rites is to maintain the proper connections between people, the natural world, and the world of the spirits and ancestors, on which equilibrium the well-being of community and cosmos depends. Unlike the religions based on revelation, that are exclusivist, the so-called indigenous religions are not singled out as 'religions', as a bounded field that could be demarcated from other aspects of life in society. Julia Howell renders the situation in a most appropriate fashion:

> Irrespective of similarities and differences in cosmological constructs, indigenous Indonesian religious traditions display great uniformity in their perceived relationship to social life as a whole. The indigenous traditions are community religions, in the sense that participation in them

> comes as a consequence of membership in a local community, usually acquired at birth. Further, participation in the indigenous cults is seen by the communities practicing them as part of the members' obligations within the system of local customary law. It could equally well be said that customary law is established upon the foundation of indigenous cosmology and exists to maintain the proper order of the universe.
>
> (1982: 505)

This is to say that, in such indigenous traditions, there is no clear-cut demarcation between what would eventually be denoted as *adat* and *agama* respectively. This state of affairs would be challenged by three foreign religious traditions: Hindu-Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian.

Indianization

Hinduism and Buddhism[8] came in the wake of the expanding long-distance trade that linked the Indonesian Archipelago to India and China starting in the first centuries BC. The manner in which Indian religious traditions happened to inform the life of the peoples of Java and Bali is still being debated by specialists. There have been several prevalent theories of the so-called 'Indianization' of Southeast Asia, depending on which method of transmission (colonization, trade, charisma) or which mediators (*kshatriya*, *vaishya*, *brahmana*) were thought to play the leading role (Lukas 2003: 1–6).

In view of our increasing knowledge of the material culture and maritime trade relations between the societies on both sides of the Bay of Bengal during the first millennium CE, we now realize that the Indianization of Southeast Asia was concurrent with, and no different from, the Indianization of South Asia itself (Heesterman 1989; Kulke 1990). This is exemplified by the diffusion of Sanskrit, which emerged as a public language after the beginning of the common era almost simultaneously and in very similar ways in the Indian subcontinent and in Southeast Asia, creating a transcultural symbolic network which Sheldon Pollock (1996) has named the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis'.

What was transmitted, imitated and borrowed throughout the Sanskrit cosmopolis was a scriptural tradition, which carried over a new world-view wherein authority and its legitimation were no longer based on the local community and its ancestral observances. However, Sanskrit terms and concepts had to be appropriated in order to make sense locally. In this process, as Craig Reynolds reminds us:

> [Sanskrit loanwords] did not just rename existing categories, although they were often admitted into local languages precisely because they did this and thus elevated the status of existing categories. They also wedged themselves into the structure of local languages and created new spaces, new relationships.
>
> (1995: 433)

This is precisely what occurred with the 'localization' (Wolters 1999: 55) in the Indonesian Archipelago of the word *agama*, which, as we have seen, refers to revealed scriptural knowledge.

When we look at the Indianization of Java and Bali as a transcultural movement of ideas conveyed by Sanskrit texts rather than as a movement of people, the appropriation of Indic traditions by the Javanese and the Balinese comes across as a voluntary project, that is, the selective adoption by local elites of a new world-view that involved a redefinition of the relationship of the social sphere to the cosmos (Lansing 1983). These Indic traditions blended with local usages to such a degree that it is difficult to determine whether certain features are Indonesian under Indian garb or Indian transformed by Indonesian vernacularization.[9]

Islamization

It has long been customary in the academic milieu to view Islam in Java as a superficial veneer, underneath which endured a syncretic indigenous and Hindu-Buddhist heritage. This prejudice has been denounced from different quarters,[10] and a more balanced vision emerged recently with the historiographic work of Merle Ricklefs. He construes the Islamization of Java as an alternance of conflict and accommodation between competing identities, Javanese and Islamic, leading to a 'mystic synthesis', which by the turn of the nineteenth century combined a commitment to Islamic identity, observation of the five pillars of the faith, and acceptance of local spiritual powers, all within the context of Sufism (Ricklefs 2006).

The fact that the kind of Islam brought to Java was predominantly of Sufi persuasion, conveyed by Indian traders strongly imbued with Hinduism, presumably eased the transition from mystical Hindu-Buddhism to mystical Islam. Accordingly, one might surmise that, at first, the adoption of Islam might not have precipitated any significant disruption in the life and world-view of the Javanese, for whom the new faith may have been regarded as a means of tapping yet another source of mystical power (Bruinessen 1999: 162). Unlike Indic ideas, however, Islam provided an exclusive path to salvation which required the imposition of religious boundaries and the rejection of former ways, amounting to a change of ethnic status. In the words of Anthony Reid, 'the new scriptural ideas came to be seen as "religion" (*agama*) and the old pattern as "custom" (*adat*)' (1993: 164).

In this perspective, the history of the Islamization of Java – which was simultaneously the Javanization of Islam – should be understood as the outcome of a tension between the universalist vocation of Islam and the civilizing claims of 'Javanism' (*kejawen*), manifested in rites, mystical speculations, ethical norms, aesthetic standards, and a strict socio-linguistic etiquette.[11] Such a tension expressed itself through the socio-cultural polarity between two religious traditions: on the one hand, the Javanese who attempted to enforce a strict conformity to the ritual and legal prescriptions of Islam, and on the other, those for whom Islam ought to merge into the Javanese civilization and to comply with its values.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the competing ambitions of Dutch colonialism and Islamic revivalism would challenge the Javanese mystic synthesis (Ricklefs 2007). From then on, one observes a widening cleavage between syncretist and anti-syncretist versions of Islam, manifested in a conflict between on the one hand, the returned pilgrims from Mecca (*haji*), eager to foster a more zealous sense of an Islamic identity among the Javanese, and on the other hand, established religious teachers (*kiai*) and masters of Sufi orders (*tarekat*), whose teachings conveyed an eclectic or esoteric view of Islam.

As a reaction to reformist pressures, there emerged, aside from the community of firm believers – the *putihan* (literally, 'the white ones') or *santri* (graduates from the Islamic boarding schools, the *pesantren*) – a category of Javanese who were accused by the latter of not being proper Muslims, the *abangan* (literally, 'the red ones'). According to Ricklefs (2007), these nominal Muslims, who formed the majority of Javanese, began to distance themselves from their Islamic identity and were abandoning the observation of the five pillars, focusing instead on the propitiation of local spiritual powers. As for the Javanese bureaucratic elite, the *priyayi*, faced with the decline of their status and authority and confronted with the hostility of Islamic teachers, they were being detached from their own people as they became ever more incorporated into the colonial bureaucracy. Some of them started questioning their Islamic identity and embraced European modernity, all the while looking back towards their Hindu-Buddhist glorious heritage.

While Javanese society was becoming polarized, the colonial authorities were seeking to impede the propagation of Islam in the Archipelago. Despite their vigilance, though, Islam was to play a major role in the development of Indonesian nationalism. Already in the nineteenth century, Islam had served as a rallying banner to anticolonial revolts, providing a common bond among natives, based on their belonging to the community of true believers (*umat*), which opposed them to their Christian overlords. With the rise of the nationalist movement in the twentieth century, the polarization of Javanese society into *abangan* and *putihan* intensified and became politicized.

As for Bali, it has been commonly depicted since the nineteenth century as an island of Hinduism in a sea of Islam, as if Balinese identity had been formed through opposition to Islam. In truth, the existence of Islam is almost as old in Bali as it is in Java, having followed the trade route along the north coast of the island that connected Java to the eastern Spice Islands. From the sixteenth century onwards, various Muslim communities settled on the island's coastal fringe. With the incorporation of Bali into the Dutch East Indies, at the turn of the twentieth century, came the first Muslim agents of the colonial administration, which transformed both the geography and the demography of Islam on the island. However, until the end of the colonial period, the relations between Bali and Islam had more to do with politics than with religion.[12]

Christianization

The establishment of Christianity in the Archipelago began in the sixteenth century with the Catholic evangelization of the Spice Islands by Portuguese missionaries. When the Dutch supplanted the Portuguese in the region in the seventeenth century, Catholics were forcibly converted to Protestantism and all Catholic missions were banned until the turn of the nineteenth century. Yet, unlike the missionizing Portuguese, on the whole, the Governors-General of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were not concerned with propagating their religious persuasion among the native populations of the Archipelago.

In the nineteenth century, some Dutch colonial administrators nurtured optimistic expectations of eliminating the pernicious influence of Islam by Christianizing the Indonesians. By and large though, the Dutch government looked upon the presence of missions in the Indies with ambivalence. On the one hand, European mission societies were permitted to proselytize non-Muslim populations, as a means to curb the advance of Islamization. On the other hand, Christian proselytization remained forbidden in Muslim areas, for fear of arousing anticolonial reactions.

Java was eventually opened to Christian missions in the mid-nineteenth century, and even then under watchful administrative eyes (Hefner 1993). The progress of Christianization was a protracted and uneven affair. Whereas Dutch mission societies won very few converts, Indo-European and Javanese proselytizers in the rural areas were more successful as, unlike their Dutch counterparts, they did not expect the new converts to give up their Javaneseness. For quite some time, Christianity was perceived and received as a new form of esoteric knowledge (*ngelmu*). Until the second half of the nineteenth century, neither Christian nor Muslim Javanese had yet developed an orthodoxy with which to assess each other's religion, as both Christianity and Islam were intermingled with Javanism. Later on, Javanese Christianity would become closer to Dutch Christianity, while Javanese Islam was becoming closer to Middle Eastern Islam. Both religions were moving toward a normative orthodoxy, thereby defining exclusive boundaries around each community of true believers. With the increasing influence of religious orthodoxy among the believers, relations between Muslim and Christian Javanese became more apologetic and confrontational.

Although a latecomer on the scene, the Catholic Church made decisive headway, owing to its more considerate approach to Javanese sensitivities. Be that as it may, at the end of the colonial period, Christian converts formed only a tiny minority of the Javanese population, a minority, however, which on the whole was better educated for having benefited from mission schooling.

Following an aborted attempt at Christianization in the late nineteenth century, Bali remained closed to Christianity until the 1930s, when the evangelizing activities of a Protestant mission among the Balinese sparked a heated controversy. The dispute was initiated by F.D.K. Bosch, head of the Archeology Department of Batavia, and pursued by the language official