

BOOK REVIEW

Indonesian Religions in Transition. Edited by Rita Smith Kipp and Susan Rodgers. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987. 304 pp.

Indonesia is a nation with a vast number of ethnolinguistic groups, and enormous religious diversity and cultural complexity. It also happens to have the largest Muslim population of any country in the world. It would be impossible in any one book to deal with all the religious traditions to be found in Indonesia and *Indonesian Religions in Transition* certainly does not pretend to do so. The considerable merit of the book, however, is that its twelve papers represent enough of a range to convey a convincing impression of this religious diversity and the interaction between minority religious traditions and a national ideology (represented by Indonesia's Pancasila) fostered by a central government seriously concerned with forging national unity. Apart from one paper, all the others in the book were first presented as papers at the tenth annual Indonesian Studies Conference held at the Indonesian Studies Summer Institute at Ohio University in 1982. Almost without exception the essays are important contributions to the ethnographies of the societies that they are concerned with. The larger significance of the papers, namely, religious transformations in the context of the state, is brought out in varying degrees of clarity in the individual papers. The excellent introductory essay by Kipp and Rodgers, however, establishes this unambiguously and it is not only a guide to the papers which follow but an important contribution in its own right.

The essays in the book have been judiciously arranged into two parts entitled "Indonesian Religions and Their Transformations" and "The Politics of *Agama*", an arrangement which helps to draw out the two major themes of the book. The first part contains essays by David Hicks on Tetum religion, Eric Crystal and Shinji Yamashita on the *ma'bugi* ritual of the Sa'dan Toraja, Joseph A. Weinstock on the rituals and belief systems of a central Kalimantan Dyak people which is now regarded as a religion and known as Kaharingan, Patricia B. Henry on

Javanese religious philosophy based on an interpretation of the *Arjuna Wiwaha*, an eleventh century Old Javanese *kakawin*, John Bowen on the transformations from Sufi doctrine to ritual practice in highland Gayo society in central Aceh, Janet Hoskins on spirit worship and Christian conversion among the Kodinese of west Sumba, and Toby Alice Volkman on mortuary rites and tourism. The second part of the book has five papers. They are by Jane Monnig Atkinson on the redefinition of religion among the Wana, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing on a new religion which has emerged among the Meratus, a Dyak people in southeastern Kalimantan, Mahadi on Islam and law in Indonesia, Basyral Harahap on Islam and *adat* among South Tapanuli migrants in three Indonesian cities, and Jessica Glicken on Islam and the notion of *hormat* among the Sundanese in West Java.

The two major themes of the essays in the book are best exemplified in the essays by Hoskins, Volkman, Atkinson, and Tsing.

The central issue which Janet Hoskins examines in her contribution, "Entering the Bitter House: Spirit Worship and Conversion in West Sumba", is "the relation between belief and practice ... as this relation is played out both in indigenous concepts concerning the domain of religion and in the conceptual shift in that domain that is implied by conversion" (p. 136). Hoskins' specific concern is with the redefinition of spirit worship among the Kodinese as a result of a "dialogue" with Christianity and, later, with the Indonesian nation state. Hoskins carefully traces the interaction between Kodinese spirit worship and Christian evangelization in its historical context, and how spirit worship came to be reformulated in the mould of religion, defined in contrast to the Christian system, essentially in terms of ritual practices. The dialogue in the post-independence era, with the Indonesian state, however, has taken Kodinese redefinitions into the area of beliefs. It is a shift which, as Hoskins emphasizes, was a movement from "a focus on ritual action and standards of correctness to one on religious dogma and belief" (p. 157). In explicating this, Hoskins also draws attention to the need for analytical clarity in the distinction between belief and practice, how the two may be differently articulated in a religious system, and how the nature of this articulation may be transformed through a "dialogue" with external "interlocutors" leading to a recursive thinking and acting out of a religion and, hence, to religious transformation.

The central concern of Volkman's paper is, in many ways, similar to that of Hoskins. Volkman describes how, when the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church began evangelical activity in the highlands of southern Sulawesi, they became embroiled in ritual politics. A major focus of missionary intervention was Toraja mortuary rites in which "an elaborate net of debts was tied and knotted, a net that was passed on to succeeding generations and ... shaped each person's social universe" (p. 162). In Toraja, as Volkman makes clear here (and in her other work), mortuary rites and death feasts bring together Toraja politics, economy, and religion. When the Dutch missionary, van de Loosdrecht, attempted to convert the Toraja and eradicate the mortuary rites, he antagonized the Toraja and met his own death. This ended direct Dutch interference in Toraja ritual practice. The Dutch developed, instead, a more cautious strategy which separated "custom" from "religion". This, according to Volkman, led to a situation where "ritual practices might flourish while the beliefs in which they were once embedded waned" (p. 164). It also ultimately had the effect of splitting what to the Toraja used to be a holistic view of religion and custom, belief and practice, which was described by the term *aluk*. Under this Dutch strategy, however, *aluk* came to be equated with religion, while custom became *adat*. Volkman's paper ends with an irony. Toraja ritual practice emerged as a problematic issue for the Toraja themselves after 1965, when new sources of wealth appeared in the form of job opportunities in Kalimantan made available by multinational corporations in the timber and oil industries. Much of this wealth acquired by Toraja migrant labour was returned to Toraja and invested in mortuary rites and feasts, or the "politics of meat", the traditional model for assertions of wealth, honour, and power. With this resurgence of ritual life, status boundaries were undermined, the rituals criticized by some among the Toraja themselves for a lack of "authenticity", and so on. It was in these circumstances that tourism, encouraged by the 1969 Five-Year Plan, came to assume an important role. Tourists (many of whom are Dutch) in search of the "authentic" or "pristine" find it in Toraja recreations of ritual, and in the interplay of tourism and recreated mortuary rites, *aluk* appears to be undergoing a process of revitalization. Amongst the Toraja, it would seem — as with many other societies in Indonesia, as Gregory Acciaioli has observed with remarkable insight (*Canberra Anthropology* 8, nos. 1

and 2) — culture has become art and ritual practice, spectacle.

Atkinson's chapter (first published in *American Ethnologist* in 1983) is concerned with the formulation of ideas about religion among the Wana of central Sulawesi, in response to nationalist religious principles or "Indonesian civil religion". She argues that in the historical diffusion of the Sanskrit term *agama* in Indonesia, *agama* or "religion" was regarded as an attribute of a rich and foreign civilization. As it is used in Indonesia today, the term refers to monotheistic religions and Atkinson argues that "implicit in the concept of *agama* are notions of progress, modernization, and adherence to nationalist goals" (p. 177). Indigenous, "pagan", religious systems are thus not regarded as *agama* and, by implication, those without *agama* (or "those who do not yet have a religion", *orang yang belum beragama*) occupy a questionable status in relation to nationalist goals and aspirations. The Wana, however, have accommodated such ideas about *agama* in their view of their own religion, taking into account at the same time their experience of those who do have *agama*, namely Christian Mori and Muslim Buginese. Wana formulations or constructions of religion, Atkinson goes on to argue, exemplify "religious consciousness in the making" (p. 183). To take one example, the Wana now claim too that there is only one God, even when in their cosmology they have two "lords", one above the earth and one below, as well as a vengeful lord of thunder around which healing rites are oriented. This they are able to assert because all are subsumed under the unmarked Wana term *Pue*, meaning "Owner" or "Lord". Atkinson says, "Although *agama* Wana clearly reinforces Wana ethnic identity, the concept of God is not used to distinguish Wana as unique but rather to unite them with the rest of humanity" (p. 181). Atkinson's examination of the Wana and their religion fully substantiates her view that the significance of religion for ethnic groups on either side of a cultural boundary may not be self-evident or necessarily the same; it also demonstrates how religion is constituted in an inter-ethnic exchange, and how this is done through the use of idioms in Indonesia's "civil religion".

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's essay, "A Rhetoric of Centers in a Religion of the Periphery", is also concerned with the construction of religion. Tsing's aim is "to suggest an approach to the study of peripheral peoples in Indonesia that promotes an understanding of local conditions and

concerns while at the same time demonstrating how they are generated within a wider state and regional system” (p. 188). In doing so, she examines the personal construction of a religion by one Meratus Dyak woman, that of Uma Adang, which has come to have a large following. It is an account that is fascinating indeed. It is the only paper in the volume which reveals the place that the individual may have in the discourse between the religious systems of *suku terasing* and a national ideology or civil religion in which notions of *agama* are central — or, perhaps more accurately, the role of the individual in generating such discourse. The religion of Uma Adang is ultimately built on concepts and idioms based on her understanding of ancient kingdoms and spiritual power, “history”, a personal numerology, a Dyak counterpart of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad, and a Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (“God the Supreme One”) drawn from the Pancasila code. It is a highly eclectic syncretic system. But, as Tsing shows, if all this is idiosyncratic and even a parody in parts, it is not accidental. Uma Adang’s religion has a historical, societal, and political context and it can only be understood in these terms. Furthermore, Uma Adang’s religion may be located not only in Meratus patterns of leadership (in which esoteric knowledge bolsters personal authority) but in association with other concerns which have to do with assertions of Meratus identity. Tsing’s contribution is an outstanding one for its finely textured ethnography, insightful commentary, and scope of analysis.

Some essays, however, do not reflect quite so directly the two themes which link most of the papers in the volume and which are exemplified in these four essays. David Hicks’ paper on “Space, Motion, and Symbol in Tetum Religion”, for example, treats “transformations” in essentially structuralist terms. The paper focuses not on the transformation of Tetum religion but on transformations in the symbolic system of the Tetum and how this is revealed in two modes of religious discourse, one of which he identifies as story-telling. Hicks’ article falls well within the genre of structuralist studies of Eastern Indonesian societies. Placed next to the other essays in the volume which focus on transformations of a rather different kind, however, the paper stands out for what it does not deal with. Mahadi’s paper, “Islam and Law in Indonesia”, is another example, but its inclusion does at least help to set out the historical background to the political and constitutional concern with

religion and ensuing implications for the law in Indonesia. It looks at the principles underlying the codification of laws in Indonesia which take into account Islamic legal imperatives in large part. But, as Mahadi points out, the codification of laws ultimately rests on the Indonesian constitution which recognizes a common belief in an "all-embracing God" called Tuhan ("Lord") rather than Allah in, as Kipp and Rodgers note, "the language of compromise" (p. 17). This, of course, is one of the five principles which form the Pancasila of Indonesia, a national ideology with which — as many of the other contributors to the volume show — minority religions are held in an inescapable discourse.

On the whole, *Indonesian Religions in Transition* is a valuable contribution to the literature on the study of religious systems in Indonesia. Most of the papers in the volume are based on research conducted since 1970 by a new generation of Indonesianists and they are suggestive of the kinds of directions which are emerging in the study of religion in Indonesia. Not unexpectedly, perhaps, these directions may be traced back to Clifford Geertz's work on religion in general and in Indonesia in particular, and his approach which aimed at locating the study of religious and symbolic systems in their social and political contexts. For this reason, the book will be of interest not only to those specifically concerned with the study of religion in Indonesia but the anthropological study of religion in general.

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